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Overcoming Barriers to Youth Economic Inclusion in Rural Morocco: A Case Study of Daït Aoua

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Abstract: In rural areas like the Daït Aoua territory, young people often face economic marginalization due to limited access to land, financial resources, and socio-cultural constraints. This study examines the economic inclusion of youth in this region and identifies key factors influencing their participation in local economies. Using a participatory territorial approach, we combined quantitative and qualitative data through surveys, interviews, and statistical analyses. The findings highlight significant spatial inequalities restricting youth to low-income, precarious roles in agricultural labor or unpaid family work, primarily due to delayed intergenerational land transfers. Despite some efforts toward income diversification through entrepreneurship and seasonal migration, these strategies are often hindered by a lack of capital and market limitations. The research underscores the need for targeted policies to address these structural barriers, promote equitable access to resources, and foster sustainable economic development. Understanding these dynamics is essential for creating opportunities that empower rural youth, enabling them to contribute meaningfully to their communities' growth.



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Keywords: territorial analysis; rural youth; land; economic inclusion; economic integration; Daït Aoua

1. Introduction

Morocco's rural regions face significant challenges in achieving economic inclusion, particularly for youth [1]. In many areas like Daït Aoua, the situation has become increasingly dire due to the impacts of climate change and water scarcity [2]. The combination of environmental stressors and limited socio-economic opportunities has intensified the struggle for inclusion, making it difficult for rural youth to secure a stable livelihood [3]. As the income sources in Daït Aoua, much like other rural areas in Morocco, are predominantly agricultural, the recurrent droughts and declining water availability have severely impacted agricultural productivity, leading to a reduction in job opportunities and raising further concerns about the conditions faced by both youths and elders [4]. The region of Daït Aoua serves as a specific case, among others, exemplifying the daily challenges faced by young people—challenges that have increasingly become a focus of concern for both national policies and international advocacy frameworks.

Fostering sustainable economic development for socially marginalized rural communities is a key priority for governments in most developing countries [5,6]. Many programs

have been launched in Morocco, especially during the last 15 years, to cover all fields of social inclusion [4]. International frameworks, such as the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, emphasize the importance of inclusive growth that leaves no one behind. The International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) have also highlighted the need for policies that promote equitable access to resources, decent work, and social protection, particularly in marginalized regions [7,8].

The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) emphasizes that investing in people is an investment in a country's future and in building a more just, balanced, and prosperous society [9]. By improving quality of life and ensuring equitable access to essential resources, economic inclusion directly contributes to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030, which advocate for inclusive growth to 'leave no one behind'. The first SDG—'end poverty in all its forms everywhere by 2030'—highlights the importance of inclusive, sustainable growth, particularly through access to decent work.

To frame the global issue, ref. [10] highlighted that youth access to resources in developing countries is significantly hindered by their limited financial capacity to acquire capital, as well as by restrictions related to land ownership and usufruct rights, as we will point out in this paper. This scarcity of work opportunities is further compounded by the lack of access to quality education and vocational training, which limits their ability to diversify their sources of income beyond agricultural labor [3]. Traditional norms often govern access to land, favoring male elders with ownership and control, which limits youths' ability to engage in agricultural production independently [4]. The lack of formal employment opportunities in other sectors leaves rural youth particularly vulnerable to economic exclusion, trapping them in cycles of poverty [11] and perpetual mobility. Youth bring creativity and innovation and can reshape the local economy [3].

The concept of economic inclusion is particularly relevant in this context, as it involves ensuring that all population segments, regardless of their socio-economic background or gender or age, have equal access to economic resources, services, opportunities, and societal benefits, enabling everyone to participate in economic activities and share in its rewards [12]. As a process to implement, it is a gradual integration into broader economic and community development processes, addressing multiple, often inseparable constraints faced by the poor, including household-level barriers, community norms, access to local markets and services, and formal institutions [13].

Economic inclusion can primarily be analyzed through two perspectives, although they are often treated together: the first one, focusing on growth, aims at poverty reduction by creating conditions for full economic participation and benefiting from growth, particularly by improving access to financial services and supporting small- and medium-sized enterprises [14]. The second one, aiming to reduce inequality, advocates expanding access to economic opportunities, particularly for vulnerable and marginalized populations [15].

The complexity of the issue lies in the multitude of components associated with the concept of economic inclusion. It first emphasizes the importance of decent work, highlighting that precarious employment—typically characterized by job insecurity, potential multiple employers, ambiguous or disguised labor relationships, and lack of access to social protection and the benefits usually associated with stable employment—cannot be considered true economic inclusion [16]. From our perspective, in rural areas—characterized by many of these job irregularities—the concept of economic inclusion of youth is better to not be seen in the absolute as a checklist of utopic values or standards. Instead, for a concrete step forward, it can be understood relatively in comparison to the community standards within a regional and territorial reference, which perfectly aligns with the inequality perspective we mentioned above [15].

Inclusion also involves expanding access to education, vocational training, creating a favorable investment climate, supporting entrepreneurship, developing infrastructure, and providing access to financial resources [15,17]. It includes promoting entrepreneurship, which offers significant opportunities for wealth and job creation, particularly in contexts with limited access to employment. It also contributes to economic diversification by driving innovation to overcome labor market constraints [18]. Economic inclusion also comprises financial inclusion [12], which focuses on equitable access to financial services essential for economic participation, such as managing unexpected expenses and accessing credit for investments [19].

The question of migration is primarily the main response to a lack or insufficiency of social and economic inclusion [20]. It is, rather, a ‘last resort than an option’, as expressed by [20], suggesting that it aligns more with resilience than inclusion. This issue warrants examination, as it represents a widespread social dynamic in rural areas. Specifically, it is an approach that is a “last recourse” designed to reduce youth unemployment and underemployment, which fuels rural-to-urban and cross-border illegal migration, as well as a range of other socio-economic challenges [21,22].

That said, and given the multifaceted nature of the inclusion issue, a one-size-fits-all strategy would be both ineffective and inadequate, as the concept has evolved to incorporate a spatial dimension. Inclusion varies significantly across international, regional, national, and organizational contexts, highlighting the need to adapt it to each specific sociocultural fabric [23]. As well, youths remain a highly diverse group of people, with different backgrounds, drivers, and experiences, leading to varying ideas, aspirations, and challenges [24–26]. More in-depth data and knowledge on youth in specific agricultural contexts are needed—not simply to consolidate or compile additional challenges but to contextualize existing issues and develop effective, territory-oriented policies. That said, understanding the challenges and underlying perceptual and social dynamics requires a territorial analysis approach that accounts for each territory’s singularity and untangles the knots appropriately as we proceed.

To portray our case, the sustainability of the Dait Aoua region has been called into question, particularly since the complete drying up of its three lakes in 2017. This shift has cast uncertainty over the future of rural tourism, which once thrived on activities such as lake visits and pedal boating on Lake Dait Aoua. Concerns have arisen over the increasing scarcity of water resources, largely driven by the long-standing establishment of apple orchards and the impacts of climate change, which has significantly reduced winter snowfall and, consequently, the recharge of groundwater in the area.

Our research focuses on the prospects of the region’s youth, whose livelihoods are being impacted by these emerging territorial dynamics. Given the numerous components involved in economic inclusion, as mentioned above, exploring this topic requires prioritizing specific aspects to focus on in our work. We aim to approach the youth issue through the lens of economic integration by pointing out the inequalities in terms of work and access to main resources and examining the resilience strategies employed by these groups in the face of environmental and economic challenges.

The added value we expect from this article lies in its contribution to enriching the literature on rural development in Morocco, particularly by highlighting the unique case of a mountainous wetland area. We propose a territorially specific approach to development, recognizing that each region has distinct needs and vocations that must be addressed. Our findings will further contribute to the broader discourse on rural development and economic inclusion by identifying interventions that can better support marginalized groups in rural Morocco. By proposing tailored policies, we aim to address the specific

challenges faced by these regions, ultimately promoting sustainable development and greater socio-economic integration.

2. Study Area and Methodological Approach

2.1. Study Area Description

Located in Morocco's Middle Atlas, in the region of Fes-Meknes (Figure 1), Daït Aoua is a mountainous wetland with a diverse natural environment. The name Daït Aoua originates from its main natural feature, Lake Daït Aoua, which means “Seagull Lake”. The area is highly vulnerable to climate change, with rising temperatures and decreasing precipitation posing significant challenges [2]. Its natural resources, including forests and lakes, are central to the economy, particularly in agriculture and tourism (Figure 2b). However, overexploitation, such as intensive apple farming, has caused environmental degradation, which impacts local livelihoods [4].

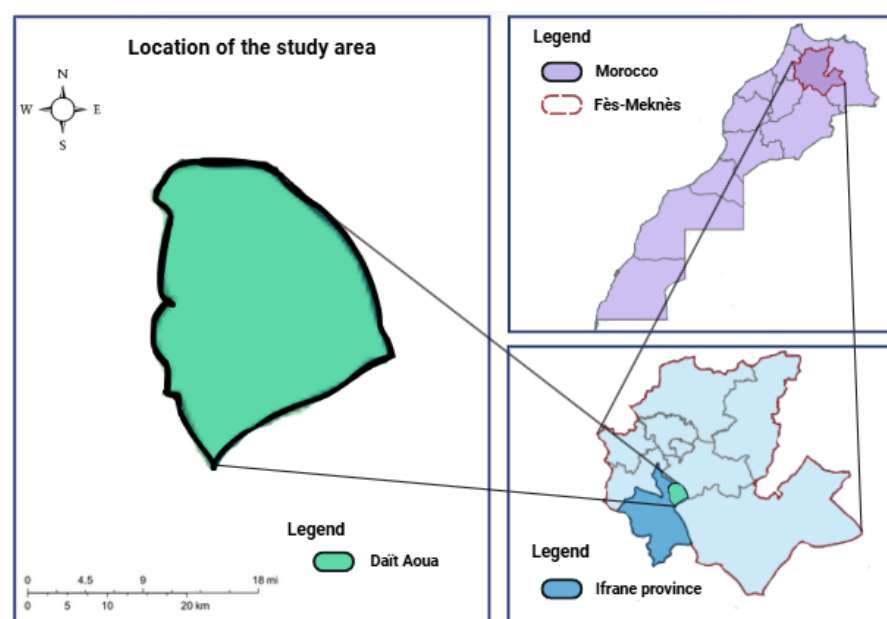


Figure 1. Geographical location of the commune of Daït Aoua [27].

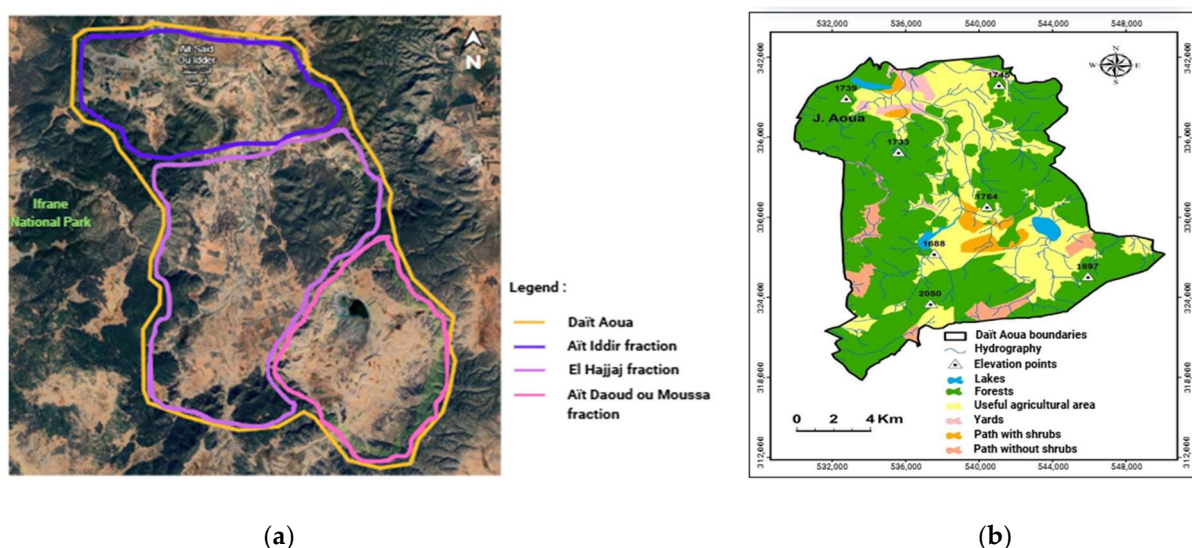


Figure 2. Map of Daït Aoua territory. (a) Delimitation of the three fractions of Daït Aoua; (b) land use map of Daït Aoua [27] (adapted).

The presence of RAMSAR sites highlights Daït Aoua's ecological importance for biodiversity. Initiatives like the "Sustain Sebou Farming" project showcase the region's potential as a living laboratory for balancing agriculture and ecosystem preservation. These efforts aim to boost agricultural resilience through climate-smart irrigation and sustainable water management, which are critical for climate adaptation.

As for the local society, the primary language spoken in the commune is Berber, specifically Tamazight, as the community belongs to the Aït Seghrouchen tribe. This Berber tribe is part of the larger Zénète ethnic group, whose roots trace back to the Tichoukt mountain in the upper Guigou valley. The commune is divided into three fractions: Aït Iddir, El Hajjaj, and Aït Daouda ou Moussa, as represented in Figure 2a [27], each one holding a particularity that shapes youth living style, opportunity, and social inclusion, as we will develop further.

Daït Aoua is characterized by a predominantly rural population with significant challenges in education, employment, and economic inclusion. As of 2014, the commune had a population of 9854, with a nearly equal gender distribution [28]. The population is relatively young, with 33% under the age of 15 and 60% within the working-age group of 15 to 59 years. However, the commune faces issues such as high unemployment rates, especially among women, and a significant poverty rate of 61.1% [28].

The agricultural sector dominates the local economy, employing approximately 78% of the active population [27]. Despite this, there are notable disparities in land ownership and access to resources, with foreign investors often holding larger, more productive plots while local families manage smaller, less productive lands. This disparity exacerbates socio-economic inequalities and limits opportunities for youth to engage in agriculture as a viable livelihood [4].

The inclusion of youth into the socio-economic framework of Daït Aoua is hindered by several factors. High illiteracy rates, particularly among women (64.2%), and limited access to educational facilities contribute to the marginalization of these groups [28]. The lack of infrastructure, such as secondary schools and vocational training centers, further limits the prospects for young people to pursue education and develop skills that could improve their employability [28].

Cultural and social norms also play a significant role in shaping the opportunities available to women and youth. The low participation rate of women in the labor market (12.3%) compared to men (82.9%) reflects deeply entrenched gender roles that restrict women's economic activities [28]. Moreover, the economic activities that vulnerable social categories do engage in are often informal or low paying, such as small-scale farming or handicrafts, which do not provide sufficient income or social security.

Despite the challenges, there are opportunities for integrating vulnerable groups into the local economy. The agricultural sector, especially apple cultivation, offers a path to economic empowerment but requires targeted support to ensure access to resources and training [4]. Tourism also holds untapped potential, with the area's natural beauty and cultural heritage offering possibilities for ecotourism and cultural tourism. Developing small businesses around traditional crafts or organizing cultural events could provide alternative livelihoods and boost local income [27].

2.2. Materials and Methods

2.2.1. A Participatory Approach Within the RSPD Method

The Rapid Systemic Participatory Diagnosis (DRPS) method [29] was used for its ability to provide a quick, comprehensive overview of local dynamics. This multidisciplinary and participatory approach allows co-construction of knowledge by actively involving local stakeholders. Tools included satellite maps, direct observations, focus groups, individual

surveys with youth and farmers (open and semi-structured questionnaires), interviews with institutional actors, and participatory mapping. The sustainable livelihoods framework was used to analyze individuals' adaptation strategies in response to territorial constraints.

2.2.2. Survey Sampling and Interviews

The questionnaires combined qualitative and quantitative questions. They covered topics such as participant identification, household characteristics, access to land and financial resources, and the challenges and conditions necessary for economic inclusion. A prior field test was conducted to refine the questions, ensuring their relevance. Individual surveys were complemented by group interviews, which allowed for the cross-validation of perspectives and enriched the analysis.

The sample aimed to represent a wide, heterogeneous population. Data on 137 respondents were collected, which were distributed across different age groups, genders, and geographical areas. The data comprise 116 youth, of which 69 are men and 47 are women, as the main focus was on youth aged 21–40. A non-probabilistic sampling method was used due to participant availability and the need for diversity and geographical coverage. The study also interviewed young people who engaged in seasonal or permanent migration. Phone interviews were conducted to explore their motivations for leaving and their aspirations for a possible return. As the analysis yields numerous results and highly specific aspects regarding women's economic inclusion, we deemed it appropriate to address the women-related aspects in a separate, specific article. Therefore, we will be focusing here on young men, and we will settle for a brief overview of the situation of women.

As for the interviews, they were conducted with many local institutions, namely the representatives of the Commune of Daït Aoua, the INDH—a governmental program addressing poverty and supporting economic projects for youth and women—the local authority (Caïdat), and the agricultural services. These interviews offered a clearer understanding of existing policies and helped identify potential interventions for youth economic inclusion.

2.2.3. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative techniques to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. Quantitative data were processed using descriptive statistics to summarize key features and reveal patterns within the dataset. A Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) [30] was undertaken to explore the socio-economic characteristics of young individuals, examining the interrelationships with variables related to economic insertion. Additionally, a contingency analysis [30] was conducted to investigate the links between socio-economic variables and pluriactivity, thereby elucidating how these factors intersect.

For qualitative data, a thematic coding approach was employed that is sensitive to geographical and social representativeness, allowing for a nuanced understanding of the lived experiences of participants. Recurrent themes were identified through content analysis, facilitating a deeper exploration of the contextual factors influencing the trends observed in the quantitative data. This mixed-methods strategy enabled the inclusion of numerical trends with rich, contextual insights, providing a holistic view of the research questions at hand.

3. Results

3.1. Socio-Economic Mapping

3.1.1. Daït Aoua Area Description

Within the territorial approach, we aimed to cover the area in the most socially and geographically sensitive, representative way. By integrating satellite observations with systematic fieldwork, the studied area was divided into six distinct zones for investigation (Figure 3a), allowing for a wider range of situations and specificities to emerge. The segmentation of the territory is grounded in several criteria, including natural resources (as gathering around lakes), infrastructure (as remoteness shapes social and economic interactions), land tenure (which depends on the tribe's history), local norms and customs, and self-claim to belonging to a social subtribe. We also used a participatory map as a crossing tool, requesting the respondents to divide this map, following many criteria and explanations. Each zone we obtain represents a homogeneous set of these factors, thereby providing suitable pools from which to investigate and sample and enabling a contextual analysis of youth economic integration.

- Zone 1

This zone features arable land surrounded by forest that is near water sources, especially Lake Daït Aoua, long known for ecotourism and supporting highly productive apple farming. Foreign investors have established large farms, encouraging locals to shift to profitable apple farming and generating jobs in agriculture, poultry, cold storage, and packaging. The land, entirely 'melk' (private property), facilitates sales to investors. As the commune's center, the zone benefits from key infrastructure, taxi services, and proximity to the Daït Aoua tourist site, which, despite recent drying, still draws visitors. Close to Imouzzar, residents access urban amenities, and a weekly market boosts local activity. Agricultural businesses coexist with a growing non-agricultural sector driven by tourism, which creates a diverse economy, as the agricultural income share accounts for only 26% (Figure 3b).

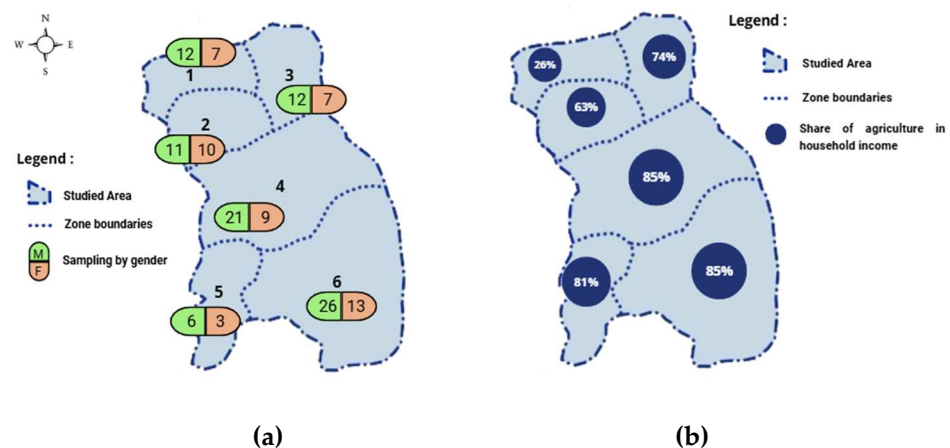


Figure 3. Division of Daït Aoua territory into six socially geographically homogeneous zones. (a) Sampling within the six zones of Daït Aoua; (b) frequency of agriculture as the primary source of income in Daït Aoua.

- Zones 2 and 3

These areas share significant agricultural potential, with arable land, water resources, and forested regions. In both zones, apple cultivation is predominant, and the land is privately owned, facilitating access to agricultural subsidies and encouraging investments. Both zones have significant agricultural investments, with strawberry cultivation in Zone 2 and poultry farming in Zone 3, which promotes the creation of diverse employment

opportunities. However, key differences emerge. Zone 2 combines agriculture with a strong pastoral sector supported by its abundant forest and pastoral resources, promoting small ruminant farming, whereas Zone 3 sees limited livestock farming and focuses more on crop production. Commercial activity also differs, as Zone 2 has minimal local commerce due to its proximity to the Daït Aoua market, whereas Zone 3 has more local businesses, including shops and services along the provincial road. Zones 2 and 3, located in the middle of the urban–rural gradient, have agriculture accounting for 63% to 74% of income (Figure 3b).

- Zones 4, 5 and 6

These zones exhibit agricultural potential and importance (around 85% of the income share), but they highly differ in land use, economic activities, and ownership structures. Zone 4 features fragmented land with superficial water resources, focusing on apple cultivation and specialized agricultural enterprises like rosaceae production and poultry farming. This zone benefits from a vibrant economy with a mix of salaried and daily wage jobs bolstered by the El Hajjaj rural market. In contrast, Zone 5 has limited arable land due to its forested landscape and emphasizes extensive livestock farming, supported by abundant pastoral resources. Crop production is restricted mainly to vegetables like potatoes and onions, and the absence of local commerce forces a reliance on external markets. As for Zone 6, it presents a unique situation where land ownership is communal among the sub-tribe, as it was registered under the names of six founding ancestors. This has led to an unbroken inheritance line, preventing land division and complicating agricultural development. The zone’s agriculture is characterized by vegetables and cereals, with significant livestock farming in its eastern regions. Unlike Zones 4 and 5, Zone 6 lacks investor involvement and water storage infrastructure due to its complex communal land status.

3.1.2. Socio-Economic Profiles and Income Stratification

To define the socio-economic profiles in the study area, we collected data on respondents’ annual income and their professional status. The zoning we conducted beforehand helped prevent mere random sampling from concentrating in customized areas, allowing us to achieve a good level of representativeness across the entire territory. As a result, we classify the respondents into five income brackets, as shown in Table 1. The first bracket represents the wage class below the SMAG, where 90% of respondents are workers. As salaries increase, the number of workers decreases, and more farmers appear, with vegetable producers and breeders mainly falling into the middle class, while orchardists tend to be in the upper-income bracket. As for entrepreneurs, they are almost evenly distributed across the income brackets (but not in the highest one), depending on the nature of their trade, which, in turn, is influenced by their financial capacity.

Table 1. Distribution of (employed) respondents by socio-economic category and income class.

Income Range (KMAD)	Frequency	Laborers	Orchardists	Poly Culturists	Vegetable Producers	Breeders	Freelancers
0–27.6	29	90%	0%	0%	3%	0%	7%
27.6–65	30	77%	7%	0%	3%	0%	13%
65–120	16	0%	31%	13%	31%	19%	6%
120–250	15	0%	60%	13%	13%	7%	7%
250–1200	15	0%	47%	53%	0%	0%	0%

It should be noted that we did not consider financial transfers from the diaspora in the income data. Some families living far from the territory (often abroad) send money

to the most vulnerable siblings on the condition that they stay on land, with the goal of maintaining territorial presence.

The preferences for different activities are the same for all farmers and almost in the same order, ranging from manual labor to apple farming, as they seek less physical commitment and more profit. This distribution is not the result of economic ‘choices’ but rather a matter of capacity and access to resources. In this territory, all aspirations are directed toward apple production, which is considered the ideal to achieve. Striving to cultivate a “supercrop” like pomiculture represents a shift from the common perception that youth covet off-farm salaried jobs, as stated by [31,32]. Those who do not possess land are relegated to the status of workers, but if they have capital, they become self-employed entrepreneurs. Those who live far from fertile plots, close to the forests, and lack sufficient access to water engage in livestock farming, while those with land and water opt for vegetable cultivation or, ideally, move to apple production if they have the requested capital.

Among apple farmers, those with enough capital can afford hail nets to protect themselves from climatic risks, while others suffer from the consequences of bad years. Additionally, apple farmers can be divided into two groups: the local natives, who are landowners or entitled to the land, typically holding small plots that are equitably distributed among inhabitants following customary or legal rules within the same village (douar); and allochthone investors, who acquire large tracts of land and exploit the region’s resources for apple farming.

3.2. Youth Integration

3.2.1. Youth Employment in Daït Aoua

The sample of 137 individuals consists of 64.2% men and 35.8% women distributed across six study areas (Table 2). Zones 6 and 4 include a large number of respondents due to their size and the effort to cover as much territory as possible. Most respondents are young adults aged 21 to 40, with 107 people—64 men and 43 women. In total, 92% of the surveyed youth are between 21 and 40, while only 8% are aged 15 to 20. This distribution is shaped by key factors, such as professional experience, job stability, and social responsibilities, which drive economic integration for this age group.

Table 2. Distribution of the sample and employment rates across the zones by gender.

Zones	Sample Distribution			Employment Rate		
	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women
1	19	12	7	84%	92%	71%
2	21	11	10	95%	100%	90%
3	19	12	7	74%	100%	29%
4	30	21	9	80%	95%	44%
5	9	6	3	67%	100%	0%
6	39	26	13	64%	96%	0%

The distribution of professional statuses by area is based on primary activity, distinguishing between temporary workers and employees in both agricultural and non-agricultural sectors. Figure 4 presents the breakdown of 79 locally employed youth, highlighting only the main employment sectors (those representing over 25%) and salaried employment.

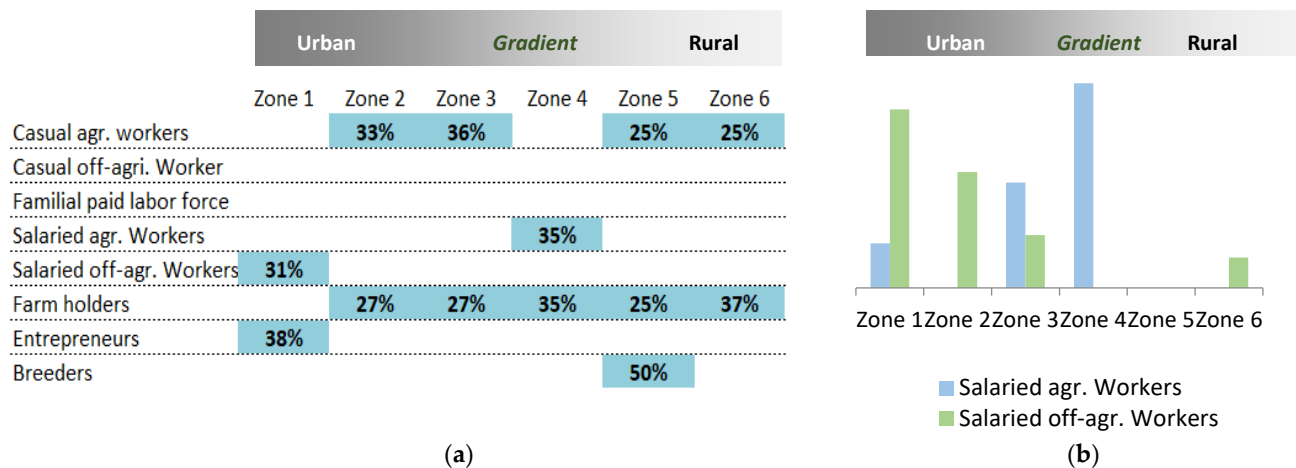


Figure 4. Geographical distribution of employment types within the six zones of Daït Aoua territory. (a) Main employment types (representation above 25%) by zone; (b) focus on salaried agricultural and non-agricultural labor, showing a decline in non-agricultural jobs and an increase in agricultural jobs moving from urban to rural areas.

Zones 1 to 6 reflect an urban–rural gradient that impacts the type of salaried work (Figure 4b) and agricultural income share (Figure 3b). The first three zones (1, 2, 3), located closer to urban and sub-urban centers, display greater diversity in employment sectors. A significant portion of youth, primarily those without land, are engaged in off-farm jobs (Figure 4b), as most rural youth perceive a future in agriculture as less appealing and prefer these roles over agricultural labor [31,32].

Zone 1, in particular, has a high proportion of entrepreneurs and non-agricultural employees, reflecting economic diversification despite the continued presence of agriculture. To a lesser extent, Zones 2 and 3 are primarily composed of temporary agricultural workers and farmers, indicating a stronger rural character. As for Zones 4 and 6, they are dominated by farmers, while Zone 5 stands out for its livestock breeders (Figure 4a).

Agricultural employees are found only in Zones 1, 3, and 4 due to the presence of large farms and poultry operations offering such jobs. These zones also attract significant seasonal labor driven by foreign investments and facilitating a strong labor flow between areas. A specific portion of Zone 6 close to Zone 5 is marked by a concentration of foreign investors in this sector. While they confiscate agricultural land, they primarily generate seasonal jobs, which, due to their temporary nature, worsen the economic insecurity of young workers (Figure 5).

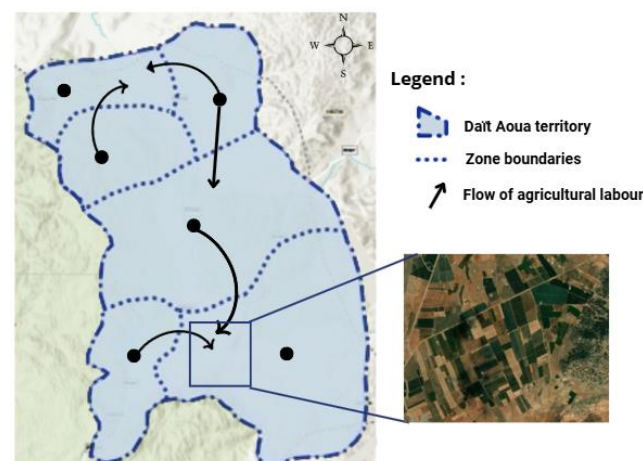


Figure 5. Flow of agricultural labor within the six zones of Daït Aoua territory.

3.2.2. Featuring Youth Insertion and Land Access

A Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) was undertaken to explore the socio-economic characteristics of young individuals and the interrelationships among these variables. The analysis encompassed a range of factors, including access to agricultural land (Y/N), employment (Y/N), annual income class (0–27,000; 27,000–65,000; 65,000–120,000; 120,000–250,000; 250,000–1,200,000), family labor (Y/N), worker status (Y/N), seasonal migration (Y/N), age class (15–20; 21–30; 31–40), and entrepreneurship (Y/N). The results revealed a Cronbach's alpha of 0.80 for the first dimension and 0.63 for the second, averaging 0.73, which reflects strong internal consistency. Together, these two dimensions account for 69% of the total inertia, underscoring their significant role in explaining the data.

The principal MCA plan highlights distinct socio-economic patterns across different age groups (Figure 6). Youths aged 15 to 20 primarily make up the family labor force, with most earning an annual income below the minimum agricultural wage (SMAG) or remaining unemployed. Those aged 21 to 30 fall into an income bracket between 27,600 and 65,000 dirhams per year, are salaried workers (in-farm or off-farm labor), do not own land, and exhibit the highest levels of seasonal migration. Individuals aged 31 to 40 belong to a higher income class, earning between 65,000 and 120,000 dirhams annually, and in many cases, have access to agricultural land. They are typically farm owners because of their land access. Some also diversify their activities through entrepreneurship, generating significant income, while others may focus solely on farming or other ventures. This group is more likely to develop projects that yield substantial revenue.

These findings are largely the result of a lifestyle shaped by the high fragmentation of very productive agricultural plots, which are scarce due to being surrounded by forests and rugged terrain and to which the native population remains deeply attached within a highly conservative tribal system. In these systems, young people, whether married or not, face significant barriers to accessing land unless they inherit it from their parents at a relatively advanced age or manage to rent rarely available plots from widowed women who hold land rights but are unable to farm it alone. As applicable in many rural areas in Africa [33], the extended life expectancy of elders, a rising youth population, and growing land scarcity in certain areas have resulted in prolonged delays and smaller land inheritances or allocations for younger generations.

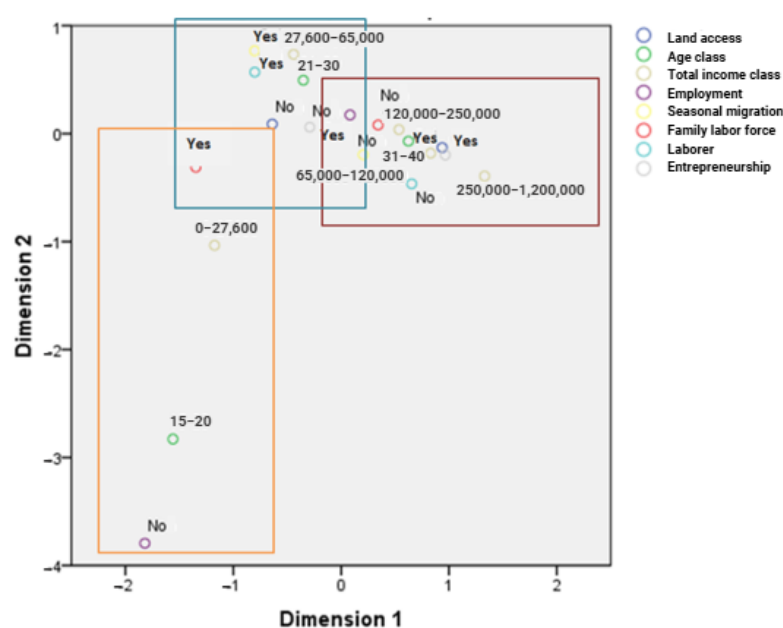


Figure 6. Principal MCA plot visualizing the modalities of youth socio-economic characteristics.

As a result, these young individuals typically remain in their parents' households, serving as the primary source of family labor, compensated either monetarily or in kind (with the household head, typically the father, providing for the entire family). In many cases, youths can benefit from a share of the farm's yearly benefits, especially when they start a union. A comparable practice is also observed in other African countries like Madagascar, where youth get the right to control and benefit from a specific portion of the land [31]. Usually, these arrangements enable parents to benefit both from the family land throughout their lives and the labor of their children (with youth fulfilling family obligations to maintain land use rights) while also ensuring that children do not sell the family property to address immediate financial needs. As highlighted by [34], as young people are more likely to work in the manufacturing and service sectors than in agriculture, which is leading to an aging agricultural workforce, this kind of arrangement may help prevent the desertion of the agricultural sector by young workers looking for a more modern lifestyle. In other cases, in Dait Aoua, 27% of the land is handed over to the children, while the elders receive a share of the benefits for their livelihood (Figure 7).

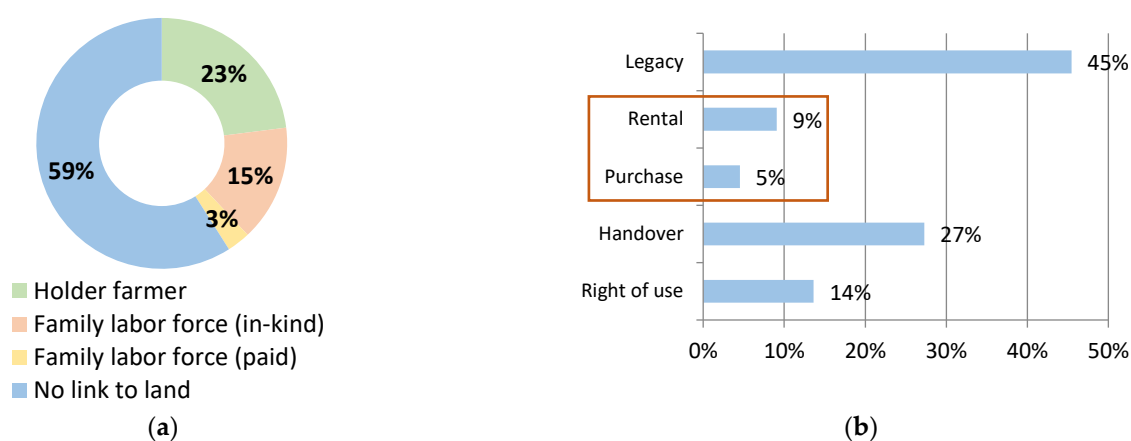


Figure 7. Youth relationship and access to land in Dait Aoua. (a) Youth relationship to land in Dait Aoua. (b) Modes of youth land access in Dait Aoua.

In other areas like Figuig (Morocco), however, youths live in their parents' households and tend to practice other jobs, like masonry, for the untold reason of earning an income instead of working for in-kind compensation. These intergenerational land transfer systems explain why land primarily benefits those in the older age group.

In many zones in Dait Aoua, as stated by [33], land use rights have been transferred by predecessors to foreign investors, which has, on one hand, reduced the availability of agricultural land for young people, while on the other hand, it has created employment opportunities, albeit precarious ones. This leads to a contrasting situation in Dait Aoua that is displayed in very small-scale capitalistic and socialistic human systems: in areas where investors are established, land is rather capitalized, leading to bigger agricultural plots, and the local population forms the labor force or seeks alternative solutions, often outside the region and uprooted from their ancestral land and territory. In more conservative areas like Zone 6, where land is not ceded to foreign investors by tribal decision, locals retain access to their lands, but agricultural plots are increasingly fragmented. This illustrates the transformation of an agricultural system that is becoming capitalized through incentivizing public policies, alongside the resilience of a part of this system that strives to maintain its conservative nature.

The 48 young people with ties to land fall into three distinct categories: 23% are classified as farm holders, 15% belong to the unpaid family labor force, and only 3% are part of the paid labor force (Figure 7a). Objectively, the unpaid family workers can be

assimilated to the “working unemployed” as described by [35] to designate youth that help parents and take various underpaid tasks, killing time and waiting for the right opportunity. Nevertheless, in Dait Aoua, these youth view their situation as a mandatory step that everyone goes through, which will change in the future as their social status evolves.

Figure 7b shows that among young people engaged in farming, most (59%) gain access to land through formal channels, either via property inheritance or usage rights inheritance in case of collective tenure, similar to other rural regions in Africa [31,33,36]. The limited incidence of land acquisition through purchase or rental (14%) reflects more the scarcity of available arable land in the region than a lack of financial resources among rural youth to undertake investment. Informal family arrangements, in which the head of the household transfers land to descendants—along with decision-making authority and a portion of the income—account for 27% of land access, indicating that intergenerational land volunteer transfer is in quite good proportions in Dait Aoua.

3.2.3. Financial Access

The analysis of youth access to financial capital reveals significant disparities at multiple levels. Notably, only individuals aged 21 to 40 appear to have successfully secured financial resources. This age range typically marks a period of increased personal and professional responsibility when individuals establish themselves more firmly in the workforce. Data further underscore the dominance of the 31–40 age group, which constitutes 85.2% of funding recipients, emphasizing the pivotal role that professional experience and maturity play in gaining access to financial support.

Access to governmental funding programs is not evenly distributed between genders. The results show that only 8.6% of youth have benefited from governmental financial support, all of whom are men, despite the presence of non-discriminatory and gender-sensitive policies.

An examination of the territorial presence of existing financial support programs reveals that only two are well known and widely disseminated in the region, having made a significant impact: the National Initiative for Human Development (INDH) and agricultural subsidies aimed at improving technical skills and modernization. However, young people (85% of our sample) remain largely unaware of these opportunities and have limited knowledge of the support programs, underscoring a lack of effective dissemination of these initiatives in the region. Knowledge of these programs in the region is mostly spread through word of mouth, often limited to circles already involved.

The INDH program, while open to funding diverse initiatives, is viewed as complex and inaccessible in Dayat Aoua. In 2023, of the 19 young applicants, only 3, i.e., 16%, secured funding. The program’s stringent requirements present a significant barrier for rural youth, compounded by limited local education. Although INDH offers training in entrepreneurship, business plans, coaching, and other vital skills, only a few participants managed to persuade the juries of their projects’ viability. Many who failed to secure funding cited difficulties in crafting convincing business plans due to a lack of knowledge.

Faced with these limitations, some (17 youth, of which 13 are men) have turned to alternative sources of financing, such as personal or family savings, with which some have chosen to partner. This strategy of pooling resources helps overcome individual capital limitations and share risks and responsibilities.

Access to microcredits, however, is nonexistent among the sample, nor even a likely opportunity. None of the young people interviewed were able to obtain microfinancing, either to start a project or develop an existing one. This lack of access to microcredit can be explained by the absence of personal or family guarantees despite the establishment of a state-backed guarantee fund, a lack of information about available schemes, and legal

barriers related to land ownership status, particularly in Zone 6, where land tenure is complex. Moreover, the inaccessibility of financial infrastructures in these rural areas contributes to the economic isolation of youth.

3.2.4. Access to Education and Training

Data reveal stark disparities in educational attainment among rural youth. In a surveyed sample, 13% of young women have no formal education, compared to 3% of young men. Furthermore, over half (51%) of women have only a primary level of education, while men are more prevalent in secondary and higher education levels. This gender gap highlights structural inequities, where women remain the most affected, as highlighted in other studies like [37,38].

The region's educational infrastructure is also a significant barrier. While seven primary schools exist, there is only one secondary school with limited capacity. Although an initiative was taken to build a girls' dormitory (Dar Taliba) to encourage female education, its capacity is capped at 60, leaving many families without adequate options. Indeed, the remote location of some communities, particularly in areas like Zone 6, discourages parents from sending their daughters to school beyond the primary level. For these families, early marriage often takes precedence over continued education [37].

The lack of higher educational institutions locally forces youth to relocate to urban areas, which is financially prohibitive for many. Consequently, this limits young people's access to advanced studies and training, confining them to low-skill jobs or informal agricultural work. In a broader context, 83% of the surveyed youth hold no diploma, with women being the most affected (94%). The cultural expectation for women to focus on domestic responsibilities further exacerbates this educational marginalization, leaving them excluded from more diverse economic sectors.

Regarding vocational training, the INDH (National Initiative for Human Development) remains the primary organization offering support. The reach and effectiveness of other programs, such as those from ANAPEC (National Agency for the Promotion of Employment and Skills), are limited. A staggering 85% of surveyed youth are unaware of ANAPEC's services, indicating a gap in communication and outreach. INDH's initiatives include training in soft skills, business planning, and entrepreneurship, yet these efforts often fail to attract participants from rural areas due to logistical barriers and a lack of alignment with the educational profiles of local youth.

3.3. Adaptation Strategies

3.3.1. Livelihood Diversification

Diversifying livelihood is a key adaptation strategy for rural youth facing economic challenges, reflecting both structural difficulties in achieving economic integration and their ingenuity in improving livelihoods. To better understand this phenomenon, it is crucial to distinguish between sequential pluriactivity, where individuals engage in different jobs throughout the year, and simultaneous pluriactivity, where they hold multiple jobs at once. Each category has distinct motivations and professional statuses.

In our sample, only 34 individuals (24.8%) are pluriactive. This relatively low rate for the Moroccan rural context can be attributed to two main factors. Many young farmers focus on high-value apple farming, which provides substantial income when productivity is moderate to high, reducing the need for additional employment.

Among the pluriactive respondents, 35.3% are sequential, and 64.7% are simultaneous. Their motivations include income diversification to mitigate economic risks, improving living conditions, addressing the seasonality of agricultural work, and compensating for insufficient agricultural income. Sequential multi-actives are mostly seasonal workers

seeking non-agricultural jobs to overcome income instability. Simultaneous pluriactives, primarily farmers, pursue entrepreneurship to hedge against climate risks and market fluctuations. Interventions supporting entrepreneurial initiatives, access to credit, and job creation could enhance their economic inclusion.

A Chi-square test was employed to better understand the socio-economic characteristics associated with employment plurality. This test considered the respondent's age group (same as above), education level (none, primary, lower secondary, upper secondary, high education), income class (same as above), residence in one of the six zones, marital status (Y/N), type of household (extended or nuclear family), "household head" status (Y/N), and access to agricultural land (Y/N).

Table 3 shows that income class, access to agricultural land, and household head status (familial responsibility) demonstrate a statistically significant association with employment plurality at a 5% error threshold. These findings indicate that socio-economic factors, such as low to moderate income levels and household head status, compel individuals to engage in diverse economic activities to enhance their income and ensure financial stability for their households. Furthermore, ownership of agricultural land also encourages pluriactivity as a strategy for diversification and resilience.

Table 3. Results of the Chi-square test conducted for employment plurality.

Factors	Value	<i>p</i> -Value
Age class	4.188	0.123
Zone	2.957	0.707
Marital status	1.138	0.768
Education level	1.702	0.79
Income class	28.614	0.000 ***
Access to agricultural land	9.806	0.002 **
Household head status	8.045	0.005 **
Type of household	0.21	0.647

** significant at 1%; *** significant at 1‰.

Even though rural conditions in the Maghreb region and Africa exhibit comparable characteristics and socio-economic behaviors, certain contrasts can still be observed. Our findings stand in contrast with the conclusions of [39,40], which state that married and landowner youth are less likely to diversify their activities. The explanation provided by [39,40] is that young, married individuals gain land access in accordance with local customs, securing them stable livelihoods and relatively higher incomes. In Dait Aoua, however, while married youth benefit similarly from better access to land, they diversify their activities due to the low labor requirements of apple farming, which affords them the flexibility to pursue additional employment opportunities. Diversification, widely recognized as a resilience practice adopted by the most vulnerable [39,40], actually turns out to be a 'growth' practice in the case of Dait Aoua. Refs. [39,40] state that education level has an effect on diversification, while it is revealed to be non-significant in our case since the coveted jobs among youth do not require a specific level of education.

3.3.2. Rural Entrepreneurship

In the Maghreb countries, many rural areas have a young population eager to embark on entrepreneurial ventures, particularly with the rise of soft businesses like cybercafés, IT service shops, and similar enterprises. We observed this trend in Dait Aoua, Figuig, and M'semrir (Morocco), and such entrepreneurial aspiration has also been reported in other studies conducted in Morocco and Tunisia [41,42].

Entrepreneurship in Dait Aoua is developing significantly in both agricultural, para-agricultural, and non-agricultural sectors. As a quick portrait, non-agricultural projects

dominate, representing 66.7% (two-thirds) of the total and concentrated in urban-like centers, while agricultural and para-agricultural projects account for one-third. Agricultural and para-agricultural entrepreneurship includes farming on acquired land, intermediary reselling of local agricultural products and livestock, agricultural equipment sales, sale of pesticides and fertilizers, a beekeeping cooperative, an informal agricultural staffing agency, and a wheat mill. Key non-agricultural ventures include clothing stores, grocery shops, payment points, cafes, a gym, a hair salon, stationery shops, and mechanical workshops.

In our sample of rural youth, 21 individuals ventured into entrepreneurship. Their projects are most prevalent in Zone 1 and Zone 2 (respectively, seven and five initiatives against zero to four for the other zones) due to the infrastructure and opportunities available, particularly in Zone 1. Projects requiring commercial premises are therefore concentrated there and in Zone 4 to a lesser extent. The proximity of an urban-like center, namely Zone 1 in this case, offered most of the entrepreneurial opportunities in various sectors.

As for the other zones, land access remains generally limited and uneven, largely due to land tenure issues, especially for land not under the private ownership regime. Faced with these limitations, some ambitious youth, especially in Zones 5 and 6, have adopted alternative solutions by converting parts of their homes or parents' homes into business premises. Others, aware of the difficulties and costs associated with building, renting, or buying commercial spaces, opted for projects that do not require physical premises.

As for institutional support, several entrepreneurship programs have been implemented in Morocco over the years. Among the most recent and relevant are the Intelaka program [4,43], Forza [44], and the National Initiative for Human Development [4,45]. While these support schemes are theoretically promising, sophisticated, and inclusive, young people report that they are highly competitive and require a solid mastery of business plans. This significantly reduces the number of beneficiaries, thereby limiting the impact of these programs on rural development.

Numerous studies on rural entrepreneurship have addressed the complexities surrounding entrepreneurial capacities, revealing critical insights into various influencing factors. The key takeaway from the literature is that gender, age, funding, land, entrepreneurial background, and risk aversion are the primary factors driving entrepreneurial initiatives [46–51]. It is worth noting from our case that, beyond these factors, the issue of physical access to land—stemming not from financial accessibility but from availability—deserves particular consideration, as mountainous areas like Dait Aoua have scarce flat agricultural plots to offer on the market.

3.3.3. Migration

Migration in a conservative area like Dait Aoua appears to be a recent phenomenon, largely limited to seasonal movements within the country thus far. As stipulated by [52], mobility is gradually affecting traditionally isolated rural areas that are historically known for their demographic sedentariness.

In our study, we consider both seasonal and permanent migration, although assessing permanent migration poses challenges due to the small sample size and limitations in data collection, pushing us to rely on family connections and phone interviews.

In many regions of Morocco and other African countries, it is well known that rural youth show limited interest in agriculture as they aspire to higher incomes and urban lifestyles, which increases their willingness to migrate [20,35,36,52]. In the case of Dait Aoua, the young people in our sample—who share similar socio-economic characteristics, particularly in terms of land access, education, and social status—have demonstrated two distinct choices regarding migration.

Youths of the first group (21 people) who migrated all reported being primarily influenced by family members and neighbors who had already left. The first migrants broke through the unknown by creating a bridge to other regions, providing a stepping stone for the new migrants to follow. They help to secure a job for them in the city or accommodate them while they search for one. This confirms, in line with our observations from other areas in Morocco, that migration is also driven by a bandwagon effect. It should be noted that most of the young migrants are those whose family land was previously sold to investors, cutting short their ambitions for land access in their area. These young people work part-time for the same investors and migrate seasonally to other regions to work as agricultural laborers.

Youths in the second group (21 people) who have stayed are mostly involved in entrepreneurial activities or have diversified their income sources. Another reason behind this choice is the territorial attachment and the “acting good” attitude by participating in the family labor to deserve the land-use right inheritance.

Age description reveals that young people dominate mobility patterns, with 91% of mobile individuals being young, highlighting the significance of mobility in their pursuit of better job opportunities and economic integration. Gender distribution shows a pronounced male dominance, with 19 men and only 1 woman participating, reflecting a gender disparity in mobility choices. Men tend to engage more frequently in both seasonal and permanent migration. Of the 20 mobile individuals, 70% are involved in seasonal mobility, while 30% have permanently relocated, suggesting an attachment to the territory and a preference for temporary movement driven by seasonal employment opportunities and the lack of permanent jobs in the area.

Seasonal mobility prevails in Zones 3, 4, and 6, corresponding to the seasonal nature of work in these areas (Figure 8). Youth prefer temporary migration to boost income while maintaining ties to their families and communities. In contrast, Zone 1 shows a more balanced distribution, while Zones 2 and 5 exhibit a higher prevalence of permanent migration, suggesting stronger economic or social incentives for long-term resettlement.

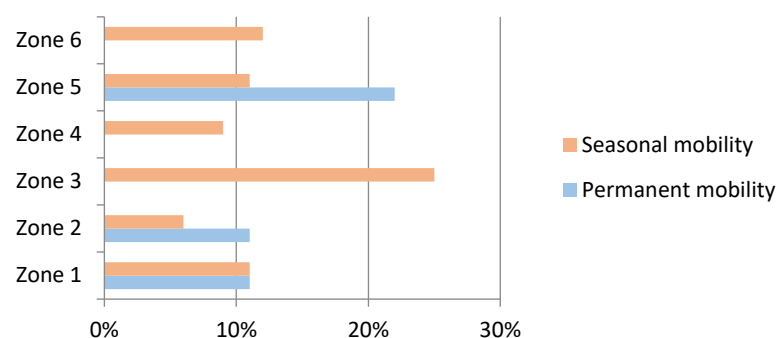


Figure 8. Mobility rates by zone (permanent vs. seasonal).

- **Permanent Mobility**

Only six young men have permanently left their home regions. Women are absent from this group, as they typically migrate only to follow their husbands. Of these six men, four are aged 21–30, and two are aged 31–40, with educational attainment ranging from secondary to high school. As expected, none have access to agricultural land, either because of family land shortages or because their parents or siblings manage it, reducing familial pressure and enabling their migration. Studies have confirmed in comparable contexts that immediate land access or even land heritage expectation reduces migration or conversion to off-farm activities [53].

All permanent migration is rural-to-urban, with Casablanca, Rabat, Marrakech, Fes, Meknes, and Errachidia as the main destinations. These cities provide better economic prospects, particularly in the industrial, commercial, and service sectors. The migrants are all employed in non-agricultural sectors, predominantly in salaried positions in factories and retail, with only one lacking a formal contract. Their motivations include finding non-agricultural jobs that align with their educational levels, securing stable employment, and benefiting from family networks in these urban centers.

- **Seasonal Mobility**

Seasonal mobility sees young individuals temporarily leaving their rural areas. The seasonal migrants, mostly over 21 years old, have varied educational backgrounds, ranging from no formal education to secondary schooling. Most are landless, with a few small-holders managing modest plots of farmland, as characterized in other studies [35]. In their home region, they typically work as farmers, laborers, or family workers. Their mobility lasts between two and several months, with destinations including cities like Fes, Meknes, Ifrane, Azrou, and other nearby locations. In these urban areas, most find employment in non-agricultural sectors such as retail, construction, and factories. Some also diversify their agricultural activities through small entrepreneurial initiatives, such as working as agricultural intermediaries after the harvest.

Key drivers of seasonal mobility include the search for off-season employment, non-agricultural job opportunities, expanding agricultural ventures, and supplementing income. Despite the temporary increase in earnings, many rural youths remain caught in informal, physically demanding jobs with tough conditions and low wages.

3.3.4. A Glimpse into Women's Conditions

In Daït Aoua, women's economic participation is deeply influenced by prevailing social norms that position men as the primary providers for the household. As long as the male breadwinner adequately meets the family's needs, it is generally deemed unnecessary for women to work, except in cases where they are widowed or their husbands earn insufficient incomes. This entrenched perception contributes to a low female employment rate, with available jobs being precarious and often misaligned with women's skills. Many women engage in crafting wool knots for artisanal decoration within their homes, though this activity is poorly remunerated and perceived more as a hobby than legitimate work, providing them with minimal financial gain. Additionally, women are marginalized by the lack of recognition for the unpaid labor they perform—such as collecting firewood and water, herding livestock, and managing poultry and cattle for domestic consumption, as reported in many studies worldwide [54,55]. Female entrepreneurship remains low, hindered by limited access to financial resources, low levels of education and training, and the underutilization of agricultural land. These combined factors severely restrict women's economic empowerment and limit their inclusion in the formal economy.

3.4. Overall Discussion

The findings of this study highlight the critical role that land access plays in determining the socio-economic inclusion of rural youth in the Daït Aoua region. Young people face significant barriers in securing land, a prerequisite for agricultural engagement and, by extension, economic stability. In this region, intergenerational land transfers remain delayed, forcing youth into precarious roles in family labor or temporary work, as raised by [33]. As highlighted by [1], young people in rural Morocco often have to negotiate with landowners or rely on informal family arrangements to access land, which constrains their autonomy and limits their economic opportunities.

Furthermore, despite their innovations and resilience capacity, youths are often trapped by a system that favors older generations in land ownership and access. As [56] noted in their analysis of rural youth in irrigated agriculture, young farmers are more likely to succeed when they have secure access to resources like land and water. However, when such resources are limited, they must adopt adaptive strategies, such as pluriactivity or entrepreneurship, in order to diversify their income.

While access to land is undoubtedly a key factor in youth emancipation, it would be misleading to limit the issue solely to land access. It is true that so far, youth inclusion in Dait Aoua has traditionally been a matter of time, as they gradually gain access to land with age, increased family responsibilities, the aging of the household head, and finally, culminating in inheritance. However, land parcels have become highly fragmented in Dait Aoua (less than one hectare per plot), raising concerns about the sustainability of this system of progression that is mainly based on land transfer in the context of permanent demographic growth. In line with this finding, ref. [57] argues that depending solely on land and agriculture is no longer sufficient to sustain rural livelihoods due to growing land scarcity, economic challenges, and environmental pressures. He highlights the importance of adopting diversified income sources beyond agriculture to ensure sustainable rural development.

A key observation from both our study and the existing literature is the need to diversify rural economies by promoting the secondary and tertiary sectors. These sectors, which are more about transforming than extracting resources, do not rely as heavily on land and water, making them more accessible to young people, particularly those without land [4]. Encouraging entrepreneurship in non-agricultural sectors could open up new economic avenues for youth. This strategy echoes the findings of [56], who emphasized that rural youth are already innovating in agriculture but face limitations without state support or access to necessary resources.

To facilitate this transition, rural development policies should prioritize empowering youth through education and vocational training. Some authors [58] have emphasized that, in addition to the return to family structures, there is a critical need to reinvigorate and increase the appeal of institutional mechanisms designed to support entrepreneurship, which remain relatively complex, difficult to navigate, and sometimes even unknown to the targeted public.

As [1] stipulates, training programs tailored to local needs, especially the establishment of peri-urban centers with accessible commercial land, could significantly enhance economic opportunities for rural youth, as shown in Zone 1. This would also allow them to engage in the non-agricultural sectors that are critical for sustainable rural development. The comparative findings from studies such as [1,4,56] further support the view that rural entrepreneurship is a vital adaptation strategy for young people. However, as our results show, access to commercial land and financial support remains a key barrier to their success. Policymakers must address these constraints by facilitating land acquisition for commercial purposes, creating financial incentives, and supporting entrepreneurial ventures.

Regarding financial resources, the primary barriers that remain are the lack of awareness about state financial support programs beyond the well-known agricultural subsidies, as well as the applicant's creditworthiness, which continues to pose challenges for lenders. Despite the introduction of a 90% state-backed guarantee fund, potential beneficiaries struggle to gain support from banks because of solvency issues, limiting their access to funding. This reflects gaps in program outreach and the persistent hesitance of financial institutions to take on perceived risks.

The case of Zone 1, as with all pseudo-urban or peri-urban centers, demonstrates that even without direct public policy intervention, the mere existence of these centers plays

a crucial role in diversifying the economy and creating jobs. They provide commercial spaces and foster the establishment of markets. A policy merely advocating for the creation of pseudo-urban hubs or market spaces would significantly contribute to rural economic development, particularly if it prioritizes youth, women, and vulnerable individuals.

The state has implemented several strategies and programs to support sectoral development, entrepreneurship, and vocational training. These initiatives also address the generational transfer of land and the revitalization of rural areas. However, due to the current ministerial structure overseeing these programs, rural development continues to be viewed primarily through an agricultural lens. The development of secondary and tertiary sectors is often perceived as being limited to urban and peri-urban areas. In our view, there is a noticeable absence of a territorial dimension in the industrial and commercial development strategies, leaving room for the agricultural institutions to shape rural territories according to their vision.

Indeed, several regions, such as Dait Aoua, Figuié, and M'semrir, are Ramsar sites or UNESCO World Heritage areas that have not benefited from a development policy aligned with their territorial vocations and commensurate with their value. Instead, they have been subject to a uniform national policy where rural development was reduced to agricultural intensification. A paradigm shift in terms of strategy and design should lead the various state institutions in different sectors to be more present in rural areas and to adapt their development actions to the specific needs of these territories.

Regarding education, despite commendable state efforts to provide school transportation, respondents identified distance to secondary schools as the primary barrier to education, especially for girls. This challenge is more pronounced in remote areas, where physical access remains a significant obstacle. However, a notable shift in attitudes among young parents has emerged, reflecting a growing emphasis on girls' education. Unlike previous generations, today's parents are more supportive and determined to ensure their daughters remain in school, demonstrating a progressive change in cultural norms regarding female education.

4. Conclusions

The pathway to visceral emancipation is complex. It requires a multifaceted approach that includes socialization, contextual awareness, educational training, community involvement, and experiential learning, as stated by [10]. Together, these elements will empower youth to contribute meaningfully to sustainable development efforts.

As many of these assets are lacking, the dynamics of youth in our case exhibited a pronounced duality: on one hand, extreme resilience expressed through migration, which can be interpreted as evidence of a failure in territorial inclusion, and on the other hand, multi-level forms of inclusion, of which some remain questionable. Although this inclusion may deviate from the standards outlined in [16], it aligns more closely with the lived realities, accomplishments, and constraints of the local population.

Structural barriers, such as delayed intergenerational land transfers and the fragmentation of agricultural plots, undermine the sustainability of traditional pathways to inclusion. Addressing these challenges requires moving away from an overreliance on land-based livelihoods and adopting diversified strategies to empower youth. Developing the secondary and tertiary sectors has become increasingly essential to providing alternative employment opportunities, as these sectors demand far fewer physical resources, with land and water no longer serving as primary constraints.

Moreover, in a context where youth economic inclusion often progresses slowly through life stages—such as age, marital status, inheritance, and experience—active inclusion policies should aim to disrupt this “social queue”, enabling rural youth to achieve

broader economic emancipation at an earlier stage. By promoting education and entrepreneurship through targeted actions, tailored support, and access to commercial spaces, policymakers can foster an enabling environment for rural youth to diversify their livelihoods.

Such support should focus, among other aspects, on a thorough upgrading of various trades, such as catering, hospitality, touristic activities, and commerce, which are often carried out in a very “subsistence-oriented” manner in many eco-touristic places in developing countries, failing to align with the real tourism potential of these areas.

Developing small urban-like hubs as a novel way to modernize rurality could help establish the physical infrastructure needed to support entrepreneurial initiatives beyond agricultural activities. Future interventions should focus on integrating these approaches to build a more resilient and inclusive rural economy.

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Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study. Written informed consent has been obtained from the patient(s) to publish this paper.

Data Availability Statement: The data used for this work are available on the following repository: https://figshare.com/articles/dataset/Public_Data_base_-_Rural_youth_inclusion_in_Dait_Aoua_Morocco_xlsx/27373107?file=50105916, accessed on 26 November 2024.

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