



# ATROUN AND DIHÉ

*“...women are fearless  
...women are strong  
...women can do  
everything!”*

[ From a popular Chadian tale ]

## INTRODUCTION

### ATROUN

HISTORY  
EXTRACTION  
SALT PRODUCTION FROM ATROUN  
COMPOSITION  
USES  
MARKETING

### DIHÉ

HISTORY  
THE ENVIRONMENT  
TRADITIONAL HARVESTING  
WOMEN'S WORK  
COMPOSITION  
USES  
FOOD SECURITY AND MARKET EXPANSION

# ATROUN AND DIHÉ

# 9

WADI TALA (BOLI), CHAD



WADIS DOT THE LANDSCAPE OF THE LAKE CHAD BASIN. SOME OF THEM ARE RICH IN TWO HIGH-VALUE NATURAL RESOURCES: *ATROUN* AND *DIHÉ*

## INTRODUCTION

The Lake Chad Basin has been blessed with two high-value natural resources that have sustained local people for centuries, both as a food source and as a means of generating income. The first, *atroun* (or natron), is a sodium carbonate complex, rich in minerals, used in large parts of Africa as salt. Generations of miners have extracted this precious substance from beneath the earth's surface and traded it through the desert to the north, south, east and west of the Lake Chad Basin. The

second, *dihé* (or *Spirulina*), is an alga that has extraordinary nutritional powers, grows naturally and is gathered from the wadis of the northeastern Lake Chad Basin, mostly by women.

Although very different from each other, *atroun* and *dihé* have much in common. For centuries, both have been harvested and processed by the poorer sectors of the community: *atroun* by the Haddad caste and *dihé* by the Kanembu Haddad or



A TROUN WADI - LWA (BOU), CHAD

CAMEL CARAVANS HAVE BEEN USED FOR CENTURIES TO TRANSPORT *ATROUN* ACROSS THE DESERT

Kanembu Kadjidi. Both play a fundamental role in the preparation of food by the people living in the region; *dihé* is chiefly used as a sauce, while *atroun* replaces salt in cooking and is a food supplement for animals. Both are natural resources, whose continued production depends heavily on the preservation of the environment in which they thrive.

Perhaps most important, both *atroun* and *dihé* hold out great hopes for the future. In

both cases, there is considerable scope for boosting production and for improving the quality of the end product in order to make it more saleable. Demand for both products is increasing and, with the right support, there is a strong potential for developing the markets, especially at national and regional level. However, any efforts to increase production and trade in *atroun* and *dihé* can only be successful if attention is also paid to solving problems such as:

- seasonality of production
- variable quality
- fluctuations of production
- fluctuation of prices on the market
- traditional trade and distribution chain

Especially for *dihé*, the real challenge is finding a way of developing technologies and regional markets while at the same time leaving the key role, and the relevant benefits, with the groups of women who produce it.