

AL OULFA COOPERATIVE

Naïma, an enterprising and generous President

Naïma Lasri, the proud mother of a son who admires her, is originally from the douar of **Lalla Takerkoust** in the province of Al Haouz. She completed her primary and middle school education there, then moved to high school in Agadir, where she earned a literature-focused baccalaureate. She continued her higher education in history and geography, but later retook the baccalaureate in science to pursue studies in pharmacy. That's when she returned to her hometown to work as a pharmacy assistant.

While working, Naïma noticed that many of the women who came to the pharmacy had skills and a strong desire to do something productive—especially related to cooking. This inspired the idea of creating an association or cooperative to support and bring these women together. Additionally, Naïma's father was a merchant, and she and her sister used to manage the bookkeeping. Naïma was ready to embark on this collective adventure with others.



From 2012 to 2015, the group of women rented a house and set up workshops for embroidery, pastry-making, and crafts, as well as evening English classes for children. In 2015, they had saved up a bit of money. *“We were then able to choose a project. The State helped us, and we traveled to learn from other experiences, such as in Chefchaouen. That's when the idea to create a cheese cooperative came up. Our partners and the State weren't really convinced. So we went to the International Agricultural Fair in Meknès and met many people, including the German Embassy, which was present to highlight local know-how and support projects in Morocco. They agreed to support our idea of creating a goat and cow cheese cooperative. They funded technical training for us in cheese production.”*



To this day, German seniors visit twice a year to continue supporting them with ongoing training. Naïma explains, *“The agriculture department in Marrakech financed the purchase of goats, choosing a breed that produces milk. Fourteen women each received two goats, and we buy the milk from them. The rest of the herd makes up our goat farm. So we raise goats ourselves but buy cow’s milk.”*

To join this project, **the cooperative selects women in need of work.** As of now, fourteen women work at the cooperative—twelve in cheese production. Two women and four men take care of the goat farm.

Naïma is generous. The cheese cooperative building was constructed on land donated by her and her brothers, who supported the initiative.

The cooperative also went through a rough patch. The cheese-making equipment uses a lot of energy. Naïma admits: *“We faced a difficult time when the electricity bills were so high that we considered closing the cooperative. **Caritas Maroc supported us at the right time.** They financed the purchase and installation of solar panels. We are very thankful because this allowed the cooperative to continue, with a more environmentally friendly and cost-effective energy source. Plus, since the cooperative is located at the entrance of the douar, the lighting also helps those returning home at night.”*



The cooperative has received marketing training. **It now participates in solidarity markets and also sells its products in large retail stores** like Marjane. A former security guard, who was a student at the time, occasionally comes back to help them market their products.

Naïma adds that cheese is a perishable product and therefore not easy to manage. Some women chose not to get involved in this cooperative. Instead, some created a pastry cooperative, another one for embroidery. For others, the State bought goats. These cooperatives will focus on livestock farming. In December 2025, new cooperatives will open with 400 head of livestock!

In a beautiful spirit of solidarity, each cooperative sells not only its own products but also those of the others. This remarkable mutual support continues every day. If you ever pass through Lalla Takerkoust, take a break—the cheeses, as varied as they are delicious, are waiting for you, and Naïma will be happy to explain everything about how they are made.

