



# Study and Analysis of the Rural Housing Program and its Impact on the Rural Exodus in Collo Massif in Eastern Algeria: Case of the Municipality of Benizid

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## Abstract

Benizid is a rural municipality located in Collo Massif, and faces major constraints affecting both its socio-economic development and the dynamics of its complex geographical area.

Deeply affected by the terrorism of the black decade, which had an impact on spatial and social dynamics, Benizid has benefited, since the launch of the rural housing program in the early 2000s, from a rural housing program, the main objectives of which are to revitalize the rural area and help rural dwellers to return to their land in the villages and Mechtas, partly abandoned under the security constraints of the 1990s and 2000s.

The aim of our study is therefore to examine the evolution of the implementation of the rural housing program in the Municipality of Benizid and to define the contribution of the rural housing program to population retention in rural areas and secondary agglomerations.

This study has enabled us to conclude that rural housing in the Municipality of Benizid is built on an individual and scattered basis, and that rural housing has not been allocated at the same rate since the start of the housing program in the municipality. Subsidies and aid relating to this program are carried out in installments following specifications and the progress of construction operations. These are homes with 03 to 04 rooms. They constitute the most widespread form and offered by the State whatever the size of the households.

This rural housing plan has had a positive impact on the revitalization of the rural area as a whole, particularly through the intermittent or permanent return of the population to start working the land. These are mainly socio-professional categories that are mainly over 60 years old, because young people are now rooted in the cities.

## Keywords

Rural housing, Rural exodus, Family farming, Rural development, Collo Massif

## 1. Introduction

In Algeria, the rural population has experienced a constant decline since independence due to the more rapid growth experienced by urban populations (4% on average per year compared to 0.4% for the rural population). The various censuses confirm this downward trend in the rural population: 68.6% in 1966, 60% in 1977 and 50.3% in 1987 and 30% in 2014. According to FAO data, the Algerian rural population will reach 18% in 2050.

These data show that the rural population is attracted to the city which symbolically expresses the reconquest of a space of political sovereignty and the possibility of access to public and private goods and services that the rural area as a whole has difficulty with to offer since independence to the present day.

Thus, the period of the Black Decade and the emergence of terrorism are factors which forced the rural population into a massive exodus, to the point where entire territories were emptied of their habitat despite distant roots. This unprecedented exodus led to a significant drop in the rural population and the number of agricultural workers, which was not without consequences on other sectors of activity, namely crafts and small trades, the real driving force of which is undoubtedly the rural man.

*“Agriculture in Algeria constitutes an extremely important sector of the national economy. It covers a large part of the national territory and is present in more than 90% of the 1,541 existing municipalities. It provides direct or indirect employment to 13 million Algerians living in rural areas, allowing them to improve their living conditions and those of their families; it is accepted that one job in the production sphere generates at least three other jobs (transport-commerce-valorization, etc.)”* (FAO, 2021)

Therefore, to deal with this socio-economic imbalance which is worsening from one year to the next, and to maintain and revitalize the rural world, the State, since the five-year plan (2005/2009), has integrated the program of rural housing as a priority in current agricultural development policies. The said program is summarized in various programs intended for rural agricultural and non-agricultural families to fix them on their agricultural land and to bring back those who have already left under duress during the wave of the massive rural exodus that all of Northern Algeria has known during the last decade of the 21st century.

According to data provided by the Ministry of Housing in 2008, on the housing program of the 2005-2009 five-year plans, a rate exceeding 40% is reserved for rural housing. This figure is enormous, more than 500,000 units, which the government is committed to building and delivering by the end of 2009. Rural housing is part of the rural development program, its objective is the promotion of rural areas and the settlement of local populations. It consists of encouraging households to self-build decent housing in their own rural environment.

The participation of the beneficiary, in this case, results in the mobilization of a land base which generally falls under his ownership and his participation in the construction as well as the completion of the work inside the accommodation. The granting of frontal aid is subject to eligibility conditions.

*“The population of Skikda is 936,824 inhabitants, or a density of 220 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup>. The rural population represents 349,240 inhabitants or 40% of the total population”*. (DSA, 2015)

*“The total agricultural area (SAT) is estimated from recent data at 402,600 ha and the useful agricultural area (UAA) is 131,879 ha, it is divided into herbaceous crops (81,701 ha or 62%), perennial crops (22,330 ha or 17%) and fallow land and meadows (27,848 ha or 21%) and olive growing 79%”*. (DSA, 2011).

The most rural territory and which constitutes a reliable sample for our study, there is the Collo Massif and the Municipality of Benizid as an example. It is one of the largest municipalities in terms of surface area and number of inhabitants in the Collo Massif. Its total area is 138.76 km<sup>2</sup>, with a population of 20,697 inhabitants. (RGPH, 2008).

On the other hand, over the last few years, the Municipality of Benizid has experienced several socio-economic transformations, reflected in the implementation of development programs mainly intended for rural Municipalities. Among the programs in which we are interested is that of rural housing.

In the same way as the rural municipalities of Skikda, Benizid benefited from the rural housing promotion program which was initiated as part of the economic recovery during the two five-year plans (2005-2009) and (2010-2014), and of which the major objective is to provide the rural population, agricultural and non-agricultural, with rural housing in order to maintain it in its environment and return to the territorial balance which is gradually disappearing under several constraints.

According to data provided by the technical services of Benizid town hall, since 2006 (date of the start of the program), the Municipality has benefited from 863 housing units as part of the rural housing program.

The allocation of rural housing has not experienced the same pace, but has gone through variations and fluctuations since 2006, the date the program began in the Municipality. The year 2014 saw the greatest benefit in terms of rural housing, as 280 beneficiaries were identified. Faced with this situation, our observation logically leads us to question ourselves and ask our following questions: What is the impact of the rural housing program on the population affected by the rural exodus in the Municipality of Benizid?

## 2. Material and Methods

### 2.1 Choice of Study Area

The choice of the Collo Massif and the Municipality of Benizid as geographical fields is motivated by the following reasons:

- It is a territory, at the same time, rural, agricultural and mountainous hit hard by the rural exodus of the 1990s because of the phenomenon of terrorism, which makes it a valid standard area to constitute a reliable sample of rural housing research,
- There has been no evaluation study of the rural housing program in the Municipality of Benizid since its launch in 2006.

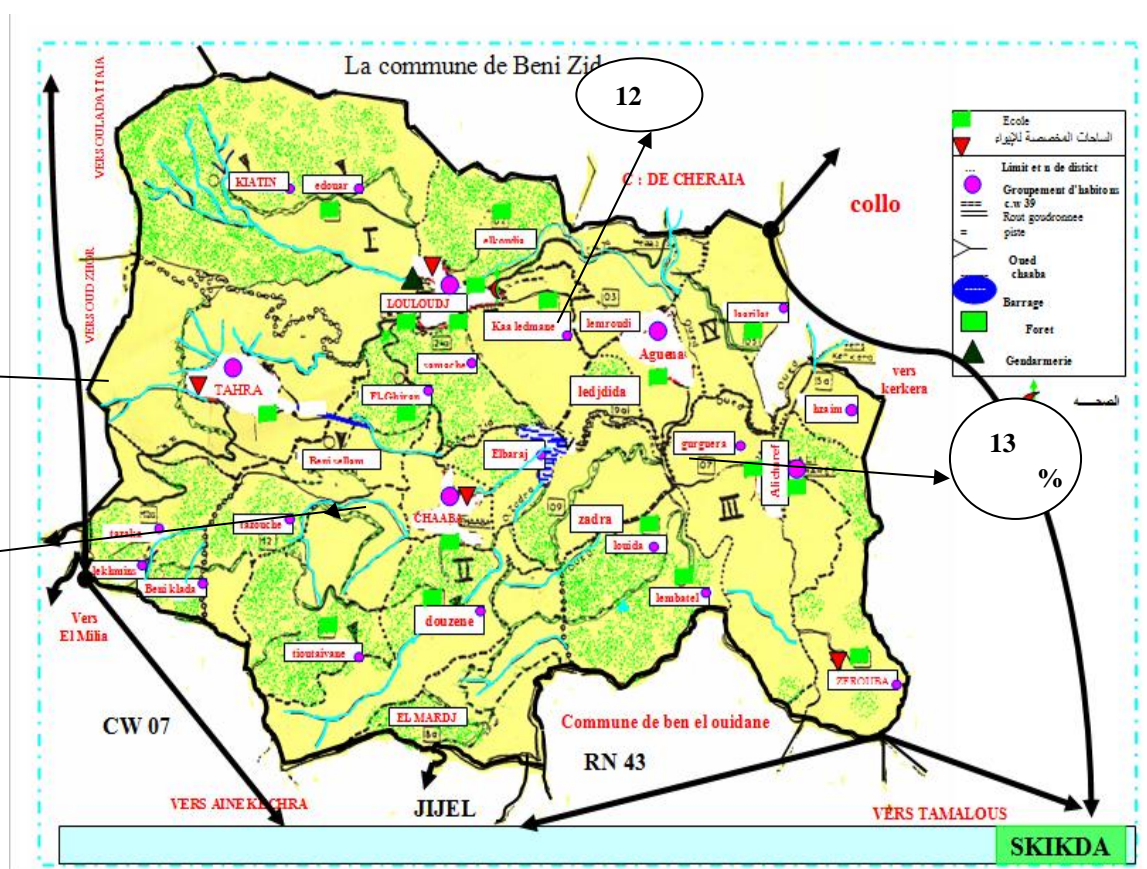
### 2.2 Sampling

To better understand our survey sample, we began fieldwork by administrative survey in the four secondary rural towns. They are made up of the following localities: Aguenta (2332 inhabitants), Ali Charef (2046 inhabitants), Tahra (1201 inhabitants) and Chaaba (1155 inhabitants).

In the four agglomerations, we used the number of beneficiaries as a criterion, because it would be inadequate to take the number of population per locality as a criterion, which could pose the problem of representativeness and unequal treatment of certain localities to the detriment others. At the same time, the capital of the Municipality was excluded from the study because its territory is classified as urban and peri-urban.

**Table 1** Sampling in relation to the number of beneficiaries

Secondary rural agglomerations	Number of inhabitants	Number of beneficiaries	Sample investigation	Report beneficiaries/surveyed
Aguena	2332	165	20	12 %
Ali Charef	2046	92	12	13%
Tahra	1201	77	10	13%
Chaaba	1155	104	18	17%



**Fig. 1** Distribution of beneficiaries in the four study sites

### 2.3 Investigation

Two interactive approaches were adopted; one administrative for a better pre-diagnosis and the other field in the form of direct survey of beneficiaries.

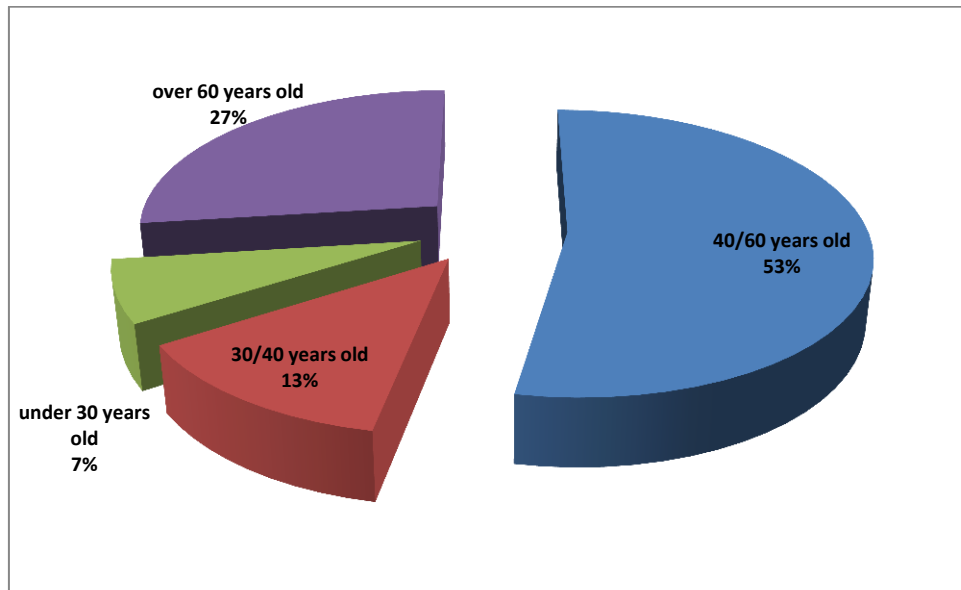
The first is administrative, which consists of obtaining meetings with the heads of state services. This survey is necessary because it mainly aims to obtain all the necessary information we need, particularly around questions relating to the implemented rural housing program in the Municipality, its evolution and its future prospects, while secondly is summarized in a main survey with the beneficiaries of rural housing using the questionnaire previously established during the pre-diagnosis stage. The investigation took place during the month of February 2020.

## 3. Results and Discussions

### 3.1 Identification of Actors and Their Socio-Economic Environment

In order to better understand the different socio-professional categories which are part of the rural housing program, the identification of the rural population of the Municipality through its four secondary agglomerations is essential. Consequently, it will be possible for us to determine the relationship of the beneficiary, as a central actor in rural housing program, with his socio-economic environment.

### 3.1.1 Ages of beneficiaries

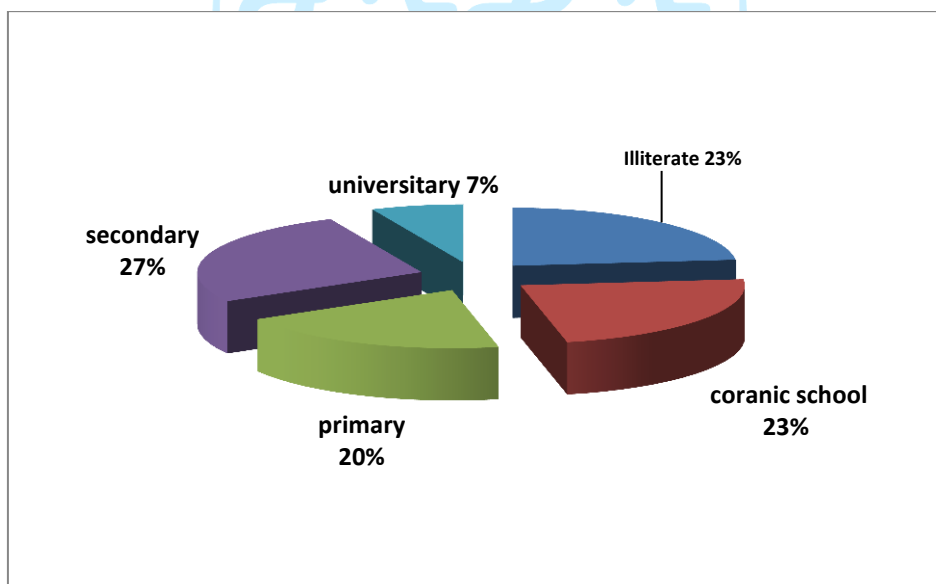


**Fig. 2** Different age groups of the beneficiary rural population

Figure 2 shows that the majority of beneficiaries surveyed are aged between 40 and 60, which represents a portion of 53%, while those over 60 represent only 27%. The age group between 30 and 40 years old represents 13%, while beneficiaries under 30 years old only make up 7% of the total surveyed.

As a result, the age group of 40 to 60 years represents the largest proportion of beneficiaries of the rural housing program in the Municipality of Benizid. This majority category (40 to 60 years old) is made up of married individuals in their entirety and have children, which explains, in part, the greater demand for rural housing for this age group which expresses a search for autonomy from the large, often large and composed family established under the same roof.

### 3.1.2 Level of education of the beneficiary rural population



**Fig. 3** Educational level of beneficiaries

Reading Figure 3 highlights the different levels of education in our survey sample. Beneficiaries with secondary education represent 27% of the total surveyed, while those who are illiterate and those who have attended Koranic school represent 23% each. On the other hand, the beneficiaries who declare having completed primary education represent 20%, while only 7% have a university level.

These data reflect the most recurring characteristics of the rural population in Algeria where the hinterland, often landlocked, has always been on the margins of development plans, which means that the illiteracy rate has always been high, including among young people today.

Indeed, the high illiteracy rate in all age groups gives us very interesting indications on the development index in the back of the Wilaya of Skikda, more particularly in the Collo Massif across the Municipality. of Benizid. This deserves further analysis in order to determine the real reasons for the decline of rural areas in deep Algeria, more particularly in the wilaya of Skikda whose territory is 73% rural.



### 3.1.3 Beneficiary’s Place of Residence

The survey work reveals that the majority of beneficiaries surveyed live in secondary rural towns, i.e. 93% of the total surveyed, while another 7% live in the capital of the Municipality or in one of the closest urban centers (Collo , Tamalous, Kerker, Skikda....).

In this regard, we note that the overwhelming majority of beneficiaries of the rural housing program in the study municipality are established in the rural area that we call “the hinterland”.

This is also one of the key objectives of this program which aims primarily to retain those who live in the countryside and to bring back those who were forced to leave their locality during the period of the black decade.

The 7% rate of the population settled in neighboring urban areas is part of the population that has returned to live on their land in the original rural areas. The rate is insignificant compared to the hemorrhage experienced by the Municipality during the years of the dark decade when we witnessed a significant drop in the population of the Municipality due to the massive and organized departure of rural people in search of security in urban areas.

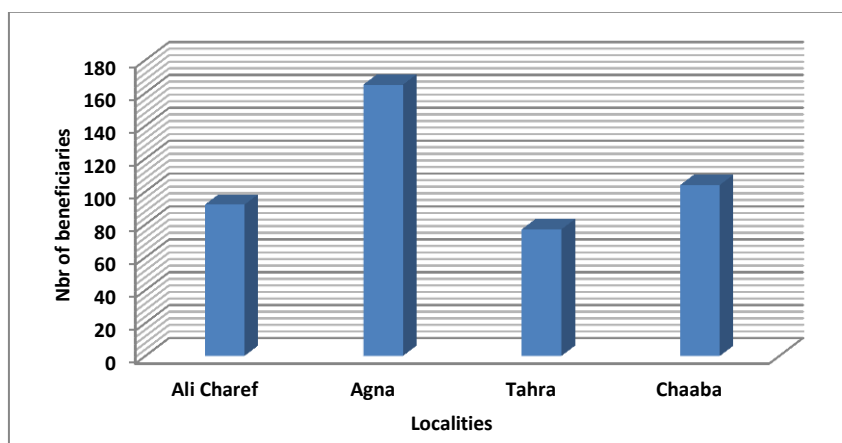


Fig. 4 Status of rural housing location from 2006 to 2014

By making the link between the number of returns and the number of beneficiaries of rural housing per locality, it appears that the direct relationship is established for the locality of Agna which benefited from a larger number (165) than the other localities despite the fact that it is not dominant in terms of number of inhabitants.

We also note that the number of returns in the locality of Ali Charef which is 58 families, or 63%, is greater compared to that of Chaaba which does not exceed 19 families, or 08%.

Last, the locality of Tahra is the lowest in terms of number of beneficiaries and returns. This is certainly not because of the rural area being unattractive, but for multiple reasons that we will discuss in the following sections.

Table 2 The relationship between the granting of rural housing and the number of returns in relation

Total/Localités	Ali Charef	Agna	Tahra	Chaaba	total
Beneficiaries	92	165	77	104	438
Returns	58	82	6	19	165
Number of returns/number of beneficiaries	34	83	71	85	273
Report (%)	63	50	08	18	37

Source: Survey data

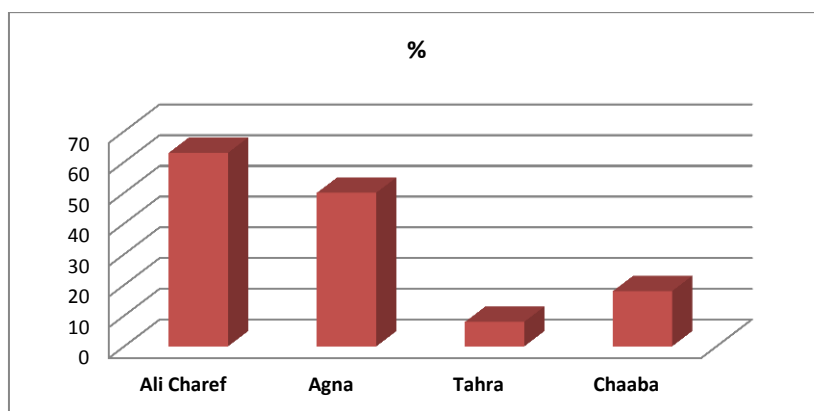
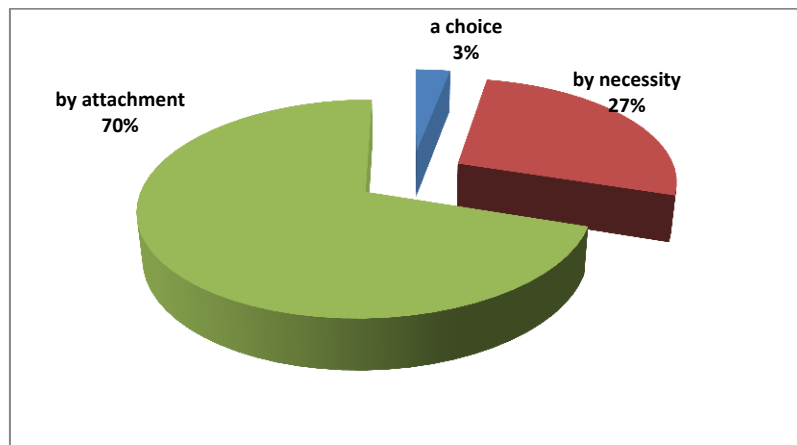


Fig. 5 Household return rate by locality (survey data)

In terms of pace and rate of return, the results of the survey show that Ali Charef, despite the low number of housing allocated compared to other neighboring localities, particularly in terms of number of inhabitants, Ali Charef experienced a return of 50 % of families affected by rural housing program.

### 3.2 Reasons for Residence in Rural Areas by the Beneficiary Rural Population



**Fig. 6** Reasons for residence in rural areas (survey data)

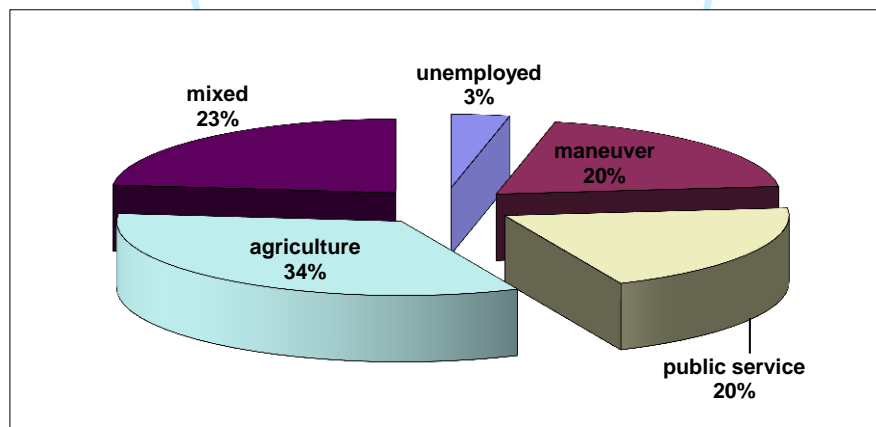
Figure 6 shows that among the 93% surveyed living in rural areas, 70% of them are rural people established in the countryside by attachment, because they come from there, while 27% are settled by necessity (difficulties of living in the cities), on the other hand, only 3% are settled by choice and who in turn constitute a small proportion of those who returned to live in the countryside and reconnect with work on the land and peasant life.

Therefore, we note the fact that the rural housing program in the study municipality has not gone beyond its local dimension, because the majority of it is intended for a resident population rooted in the territory to which it is located. very attached. The rural environment could become attractive when rural housing becomes a tool and factor bringing back or settling other inhabitants from outside in localities, whether by personal choice or by necessity.

At the same time, we emphasize that the majority of beneficiaries (93% total surveyed) have lived in the area for more than 10 years, while 7% others have recently settled there (less than 10 years).

Contrary to certain preconceived ideas, our study shows that this environment is not inert, because it remains timidly alive and attractive, even for the few individuals we met (7%). It remains to be seen what balance there might be between those who left and those who returned during the same period.

### 3.3. Professional activity of the beneficiary population



**Fig. 7** Professional activity of rural housing beneficiaries

According to this figure, the majority of rural housing beneficiaries practice agriculture as a professional activity, or 34% of the total surveyed, while those who carry out different (multi-purpose) activities represent 23%. Furthermore, those who are workers and civil servants each occupy 20%. On the other hand, only 3% are unemployed.

The rural housing program is originally intended for the rural population, which confirms the reality and the trend for our survey sample in the Municipality of Benizid. It should be noted that any return recorded towards rural areas, more particularly in villages and Mechtas, is synonymous with a return to working the land and the rebirth of small private family subsistence farms. In this regard, we are witnessing a gradual revitalization of rural areas which cannot, under any circumstances, take place without humans.

### 3.4 Types and Forms of Rural Housing Reserved for the Rural Population

The type of rural housing following the program in execution and the texts in force could take two very distinct forms. These are the types: collective and individual. In the case of the Municipality of Benizid, all the rural housing that has been allocated since the launch of this program is individual and of a scattered form.

This is in perfect harmony with the geographical specificity of the Municipality and the spatial distribution of secondary rural agglomerations. Furthermore, it should be noted that the Municipality of Benizid, as a whole, is devoid of the grouped type unlike other Municipalities in the Wilaya of Skikda which have benefited from numerous rural villages (grouped housing).

### 3.5 Evolution of the Allocation of Rural Housing in the Municipality

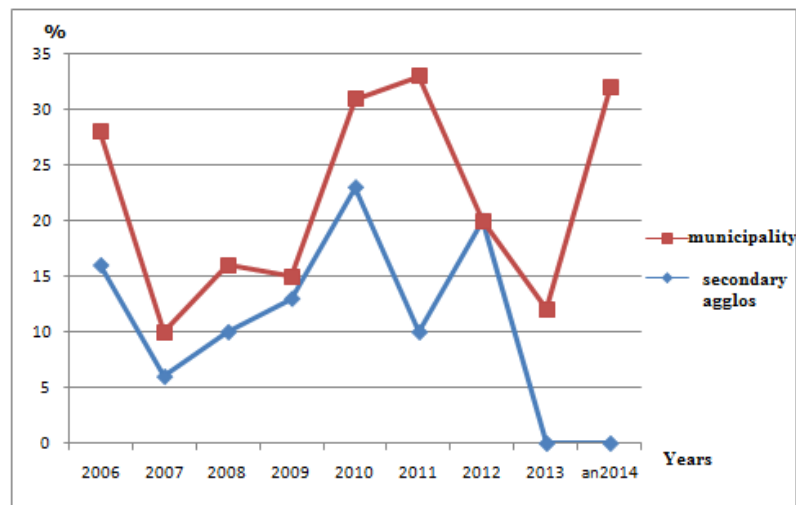


Fig. 8 Evolution of rural housing allocation

Since 2006, the Municipality of Benizid has benefited from 863 housing units. The rural housing in our study area is built according to the individual type and the scattered form, the allocation of rural housing has not experienced the same pace since the beginning of the housing program in the municipality, the year 2006, the start date of the program, recorded an allocation rate of 12%, while 2007 saw a significant drop compared to the previous year which was 4%.

From 2008, the allocation rate recorded a substantial increase compared to 2007 to reach 6%, while in 2009 the allocation rate experienced a slight drop of 2%. The allocation rate recorded a significant increase of 8 and 23% respectively in 2010 and 2011. During 2012, no allocation operation was recorded in the Municipality for reasons of administrative procedures and questions related to the budget. The year 2013 recorded a rate of 12%, while the year 2014 saw the highest award rate with 32%.

It should be noted that these figures directly concern our survey sample distributed over the four secondary rural agglomerations, and may not reflect the evolution and real progression of the allocation of rural housing in the Municipality in general and more precisely in the localities affected by our study.

These data prove, once again, that the implementation of the rural housing program in the study municipality is being carried out slowly, depending on the following elements:

- The demand of the population,
- Quotas allocated by the executive,
- The financial envelopes reserved for this program,
- The political and economic weight that the Municipality could have at the executive level.

At the same time, other municipalities in the Wilaya of Skikda, in addition to their quotas for individual housing, have managed to establish rural villages in a collective form of rural housing. The Municipality of Benizid is the red lantern in this area, which can be explained by the favoritism recorded and practiced at the level of the executive of the Wilaya, whether in terms of quotas or budget allocated to this program which is so important for any rural municipality which has experienced a massive exodus of its rural population towards towns and urban centers.

The recent history of the rural municipalities of the wilaya of Skikda shows that Benizid is one of the municipalities most devastated by terrorism, the most affected by the rural exodus, the most marginalized in terms of development programs. Paradoxically, it finds itself marginalized compared to other neighboring municipalities in terms of the allocation of rural housing. This can only be explained by governance failures in the execution of this program at the level of the decision-making centers of the Wilaya. Indeed, for certain municipalities whose impact of terrorism and the climate of insecurity of the black decade is not significant, have transformed this rural housing program, initially intended for municipalities devastated by the rural exodus, into a social housing to solve the housing problem at the local level.

### 3.6 Rural Housing Subsidy in the Municipality

The regulatory framework and texts governing this program stipulate that any subsidy or financial assistance must be subject to control and must be justified. Unlike the forms of aid that we experienced during the 1980s, the current rural housing program and its implementation insist on the fact that the construction operation must be financed progressively

according to its progress on the ground. The grant is triggered once the specifications are respected by the beneficiary. In the case of our survey sample, the subsidy operation is carried out in installments for all of the beneficiaries surveyed. The financial cost of rural housing is estimated, according to current regulations, at 700,000 DA. This amount is released in two installments. The transfer of the first tranche of 60% of the total amount is made once the building permit is issued to the beneficiary, i.e. 420,000 DA. The second tranche of 40%, or 280,000 DA, is allocated when the beneficiary completely completes the construction operation.

Since 2014, a substantial increase in this allocation has been recorded, going from 700,000 to 900,000 DA. From now on, any rural housing allocation operation falls within this framework.

### 3.7 Habitable Surface Area of Rural Housing and Its Relationship with Household Size

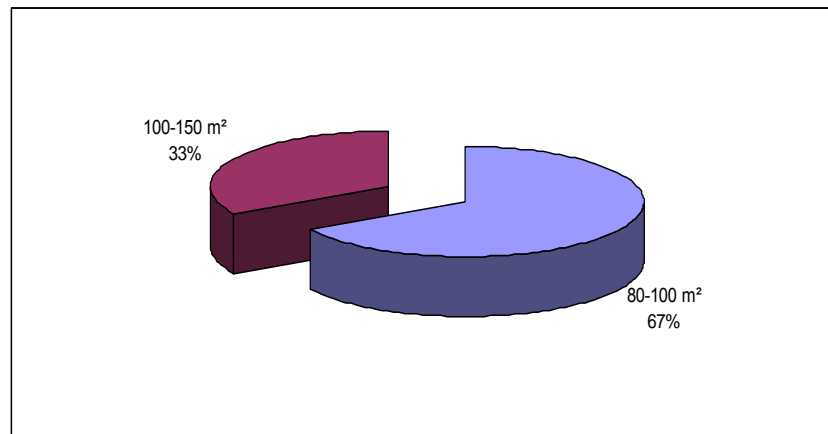


Fig. 9 Surface area of allocated housing (survey data)

It should be noted that the majority (67%) of rural dwellings visited are 80 to 100 m<sup>2</sup>, while 33% are 100 to 150 m<sup>2</sup>, which constitutes a respectable space for the life of a rural family of household size. average.

At the same time, this allocated area is often extended by the beneficiary against any regulation, whether by the construction of R1 or the creation of a courtyard around the home. All these non-regulatory modifications are carried out after final receipt of the accommodation and the remaining second tranche.

It should be noted that for the households surveyed of size 0 to 3, 58% of them have homes of 80 to 100 m<sup>2</sup>, and 42% of others are of 100 to 150 m<sup>2</sup>.

For the second category (from 3 to 5 individuals), 63% of them benefited from accommodation of 80 to 100 m<sup>2</sup>, while another 37% had accommodation of 100 to 150 m<sup>2</sup>.

On the other hand, for the third household category (5 to 8 people), all the households surveyed have housing with a surface area of 80 to 100 m<sup>2</sup> (100%).

Finally, for the category of households of 8 to 10 people, half (50%) have homes with a surface area of 80 to 100 m<sup>2</sup>, on the other hand, the other 50% have homes of 100 to 150 m<sup>2</sup>.

In this regard, we note that the allocated housing area is not strongly linked to household size, because large families could benefit from medium or small sized housing, whereas this key factor could have been taken into consideration by the services responsible for executing this program.

Knowing that allocating 3 rooms to a large family in its current form does not, in any case, resolve the housing problem in secondary rural areas and in the Municipality in general.

An alternative that we have observed in the Municipality is the fact that two to three rural dwellings could be allocated to a large family (composite family) made up mainly of grandparents and their sons who are already married and have children. Which partly explains the fact that young singles or newly married people have benefited from rural housing in the Municipality of Benizid.

At the same time, we note that half of the rural housing in our study area is made up of three rooms (50%) and another 47% are four rooms, while only 3% are two-room housing often intended for young singles.

To further explain these figures, we must return to the regulations governing rural housing in Algeria. Currently, individual housing is allocated in their surface area (64-120 m<sup>2</sup>), whereas, during our investigation, we noted that the initial form for which the beneficiary received their housing is rarely respected, which leads to a large part of them to modify the plan once the validation commission decides positively on the granting of housing. This modification is visible and essentially boils down to the addition of additional rooms, construction of courtyards or creating R+1.

### 3.8 Influence of Rural Housing on the Agricultural Profession of the Beneficiary

The essential objective of rural housing is to revitalize rural areas, bring rural people back to their land or settle those who are in this area. Based on the fact that 34% of the surveyed population is made up of farmers who all declare that they are positively impacted by the allocation of rural housing, while the remaining 46% of the 80% are farmers and at the same time practice another economic activity. The fact that 46% may not be 100% farmers but state that their lives and jobs are



positively impacted by rural housing is a strong indication that the targeted population is extremely affected by this program. In other words, there is a strong chance of seeing them return or reconnect with the farming profession and return to live permanently in the villages of origin.

As a result, our survey shows that 97% of rural housing beneficiaries own agricultural land, often inherited and ready to be worked. That said, if the rural population stabilizes there permanently, it is very likely that the subsistence or family agriculture of yesteryear will reappear again in these marginal but not inert rural areas.

#### 4. Conclusion

Rural housing in the Municipality of Benizid is built according to individual type and scattered form, the allocation of rural housing has not experienced the same pace from the start of the housing program in the Municipality. Subsidies and aid relating to this program are carried out in installments following specifications and the progress of construction operations. The size of the household has no influence on the surface area of the allocated housing, however major modifications were noted during our survey work mainly affecting the plan, the number of rooms or the extension of the initially approved surface area. As for the impact of rural housing on the profession of beneficiaries, particularly in its agricultural aspect, an overwhelming majority of them declare having a positive impact on their profession. The allocation of rural housing is subject to very rigid administrative procedures involving numerous actors through the commission made up of the Directorate of Agricultural Services, Forest Conservation and the Municipality and urbanization services.

We emphasize that this PPDR program has had a positive impact on the return of the rural population to the Municipality whose space was deserted by the population during the dark decade. It is now possible that this allocation program can be continued by increasing the allocation and the surface area in order to further encourage agricultural populations to settle permanently in their rural localities. This program has had a very positive impact whether on the number of returns or on the number of family farms which have been rehabilitated and also on the useful agricultural area in the study localities and in the Municipality in a way general.

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