



*The incredible women of the Zarbiat Achbarou Cooperative and visiting guests, a celebration of connection, culture, and community empowerment (HAF photo, 2025).*

# A Journey Through Roots And Rugs: Experiencing The Soul Of Akrich And Achbarou – OpEd

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By [Mariam Ait Hfid](#)

I have had the incredible opportunity to welcome tourists, students, and researchers from around the world to two very special places: the Akrich Nursery and the Achbarou Cooperative. These visits were made possible

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through a wonderful collaboration between the High Atlas Foundation (HAF), dedicated travel agencies and universities that believe in sustainable tourism, experiential learning, and authentic cultural exchange.

In the heart of High Atlas mountains, where communities face both challenges and opportunities, HAF has been transforming lives through initiatives that empower local people. By supporting projects that foster environmental stewardship, women’s leadership, and economic independence, HAF ensures that communities not only survive but also thrive. This is reflected in the work at both the Akrich Tree Nursery and Achbarou Cooperative, where sustainable practices and community-driven solutions are creating change. These projects are in line with Morocco’s commitment to the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 13 (Climate Action) and Goal 5 (Gender Equality), which aim to empower communities while ensuring environmental sustainability.

At Akrich Nursery, visitors experience more than just the beauty of more than one hundred thousand thriving plants and trees. They learn about the High Atlas Foundation’s mission and strategy to support local community empowerment and planning, and taking environmental action; planting trees that provide food security, income, and opportunity for generations to come.



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Akrich nursery tours with Dr. Yossef Ben-Meir, President of the High Atlas Foundation.  
(HAF photo, 2025)

The nursery is adjacent to a sacred 700 year-old Jewish cemetery, adding a deeply spiritual element to the journey. This land was generously lent in-kind by the Moroccan Jewish community, symbolizing a powerful act of **interfaith solidarity** and shared purpose. This collaboration is a reflection of Morocco's longstanding tradition and commitment of intercultural unity, where diverse religious communities coexist peacefully. The country has a strong national strategy focused on fostering dialogue, mutual respect, and understanding between faiths as outlined in the 2011 Constitution.

The program that lends land without cost for community tree nurseries is aptly named "**House of Life**", reflecting its role in fostering livelihood and growth today through sustainable agriculture. This initiative exemplifies how heritage, faith, and sustainability can come together to create meaningful, lasting impact.

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Guests are warmly welcomed by Abderrahim, the dedicated nursery caretaker. His family has lovingly tended to this land for three generations, preserving not only the plants and trees but also the deep history and sacredness of this special place. Meeting Abderrahim creates a heartfelt, human connection that stays with visitors long after they leave. His stories breathe life into the land, offering a unique perspective on the intertwining of faith, tradition, and sustainable development.

During the visit, guests embark on a guided tour of the nursery that produces one-hundred thousand saplings annually, exploring the vibrant greenhouses and learning about the diverse range of plants from carob pomegranate and olive trees to other native species. Abderrahim shares his deep knowledge of sustainable farming practices, offering insight into how these plants are cultivated and their positive impact on the local economy and environment.

As you walk through the nursery, you might even spot some of the local residents; turtles that call this peaceful sanctuary home, adding an extra layer of charm to this natural oasis. For those seeking a more hands-on experience, guests can participate in a **tree-planting activity**, where they plant their own trees, contributing to the ongoing sustainability efforts and leaving a lasting, personal connection with the land.



Visitors planting trees with Achbarou community members (HAF photo, 2025).

In Morocco, rural communities are increasingly adopting tree planting as a strategy to mitigate the effects of environmental challenges, including soil erosion, water scarcity, and the broader impacts of climate change. These initiatives align with Morocco's national environmental strategy, which emphasizes sustainable land management and the conservation of natural resources. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization, tree planting is a critical tool in combating soil erosion and improving water retention in arid regions.

Trees provide critical benefits, such as improving soil quality, preventing erosion, and creating microclimates that can help conserve water resources. On the economic side, planting trees offers a source of income, as certain species like olive, almond, and pomegranate are not only vital for food security but also offer commercial value. Additionally, the social importance of tree planting cannot be overlooked, communities see it as a way to strengthen local economies, create jobs, and promote a sense of collective responsibility toward the environment. With increasing awareness of these benefits, planting

trees has become a way for rural communities to build resilience, safeguard their future, and promote sustainable development.

At Achbarou Women's Carpet Cooperative, the story continues with warmth, strength, and empowerment. Guests are welcomed by Samira, a kind-hearted mother and inspiring community leader. Alongside the women of her village, Samira has helped create a space where tradition and hope merge, giving new life to the ancient craft of carpet weaving.

Once you set foot in the Cooperative, you are welcomed with milk and dates , a gesture that holds deep cultural meaning in both Moroccan and Amazigh traditions. This warm welcome is more than hospitality; it is a sacred symbol of peace, purity, and respect. Offering milk represents openness and a pure heart, while dates signify generosity and abundance. Together, they form a timeless ritual that invites guests into the home and soul of the community. This meaningful reception sets the tone for what's to come, a journey into the heart of women's resilience, creativity, and solidarity.

Inside the cooperative, visitors discover beautifully handmade carpets, each one woven with rich cultural heritage and deep love. The wool is dyed using natural pigments such as hibiscus, onion peels, pomegranate rinds, and henna, reflecting a deep respect for nature. Through their artistry, these talented women have transformed their passion into a sustainable source of income, supporting their families and weaving a brighter future for their children.



The natural pigments. (HAF photo, 2024)

This initiative is a reflection of Morocco's national commitment to women's empowerment, as outlined in the National Strategy for Gender Equality (2015–2030) and the Government Plan for Equality. These strategies focus on promoting women's economic independence, increasing their access to leadership opportunities, and ensuring their active participation in development efforts, particularly in rural communities and marginalized areas like Achbarou, where the cooperative empowers women through skill development and economic engagement.

One of the most unforgettable experiences here is the opportunity to meet the women behind the carpets, the skilled artisans who bring these intricate pieces of art to life. Visitors can hear their personal stories and learn about the dedication, skill, and creativity that goes into every woven thread. Many are even invited to take a picture with the women, preserving a powerful moment that symbolizes not just the beauty of the craft, but the strength and resilience of the women who create it.

But the cooperative is more than just a place of work; it's a hub of empowerment. Through training and solidarity, the women have built leadership skills, confidence, and a stronger voice within their community. As highlighted recently in [Forbes](#), women involved in community-led initiatives like Achbaro's speak proudly of the power they have gained, a quiet revolution changing lives across rural Morocco.

Women welcomed the guests with milk and dates. (HAF photo, 2024)

Innovation thrives here, too. HAF with its partners has been instrumental in helping women affected by the recent earthquake. Through the project, they've produced degradable cloth sacks as a way to replace harmful plastic bags and provide economic opportunities for women rebuilding their lives. This initiative has also opened doors for young women who had dropped out of school, offering them a second chance to learn new skills, earn an income, and reintegrate into their communities.

Every visitor who steps into Achbaro leaves not only with beautiful, authentic crafts but also with a deeper connection to the resilience,



spirit, and dreams of Moroccan women who are weaving a better future, one thread at a time.

Guests are invited to sit down for a cup of traditional Moroccan tea and homemade sweets, often prepared by the women themselves. For those looking to dive deeper into the experience, The women offer a delicious home-cooked lunch, prepared with love using local ingredients. Some travelers even join a hands-on cooking class, learning to make tajine and traditional bread alongside the women, further immersing themselves in the vibrant culture of the community.

It's more than just a visit, it's an invitation into the heart of the community where you come as a visitor, leave as a friend.

Throughout these tours, visitors don't just see Morocco; they connect with it. They share tea with women, hear personal stories, and witness how grassroots projects are creating lasting change.

If you are planning a trip to Morocco and want a truly meaningful experience, I invite you to visit the Akrich Nursery and Achbarou Cooperative. Your journey will not only leave you with unforgettable memories, but it will also contribute directly to the communities you meet so come and be part of something beautiful.

These experiences are more than just visits; they are exchanges of stories, cultures, and dreams. They offer travelers an authentic glimpse into the lives of Moroccan communities striving for sustainable growth and cultural preservation.

If you’re seeking a journey that transcends typical tourism; a journey that allows you to plant a tree, weave a story, and become part of a community’s narrative; I invite you to explore the Akrich Nursery and Achbarou Cooperative. Your presence supports a cycle of empowerment, environmental care, and cultural celebration.

Let’s walk together through the orchards of heritage and the looms of dreams.

Mariam Ait Hfid

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