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In Morocco, intercultural solidarity secures agricultural opportunity

The policy context of Morocco has created the opportunity for organisations like the High Atlas Foundation and cooperatives like Achbarou to learn and pursue local hopes.

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A view of the Akrich tree nursery in Morocco's Al Haouz province. (HAF).



an olive fig (nappes) to be adjacent to a 703-year-old

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cemetery. In this case, the nursery now generates over 70,000 trees (olive, fig, and pomegranate) each year, and it has been an ongoing project for about ten years. The USAID Farmer-to-Farmer Programme was very important in this pilot in building local people's technical skills in nursery management.

As the nursery began to take hold, the High Atlas Foundation (HAF) engaged not just with those immediately surrounding it but with communities in the region. Similarly, a four-day empowerment experience began with women's groups in the nearest villages, supported by the the US Department of States Alumni Engagement Innovation Fund.

These communities identified, based on their tradition and the skills that they have gained from previous generations, the desire to make carpets and clothing drawn from their cultural history and as symbols of their past. They dye wool from their sheep using medicinal plants that grow endemically in the area.

Now, in the interim, the engagement with communities has continued and expanded. The nursery serves a broader region, and the community dialogue around new priorities and implementation of their dreams is ongoing.

Of course, a pervasive issue that we have in rural Morocco is clean drinking water. We have municipalities where many girls fetch water instead of



in rural places. We have high infant mortality

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To address the widespread priority of clean drinking water with partners, in this case Yves Saint Laurent Fashion, we carried out clean drinking water initiatives and the integration of irrigation infrastructure using clean energy, including a solar water pump system for the nursery financed by the Moroccan company, FENELEC. From these projects, the community is in a position to enable even greater tree planting.

The other investment that we secured was connecting the 700-year-old cemetery with a road, about a kilometre in length, to the women's co-op so that visitors of the cemetery can also visit the cooperative. Again, there are layers to this process. It began with an intercultural partnership for community planning and then moved towards cooperative building driven by women making carpets of local materials and designs based on their heritage.

This empowerment then allowed for developments in clean drinking water, irrigation and fruit tree planting. HAF with Reforest is now in the process of supporting the community's planting of 23,000 olive trees.

The High Atlas Foundation, with a full-time staff of nearly 100, is currently supporting nine nurseries in Morocco that house over 3.2 million trees. Just this season, we have transplanted 800,000 and we have monitored about 820,000, including trees from past



operative from selling (carpets and other goods to

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visitors keeps their families financially afloat. The European Union funded Achbarou's family literacy programme and other essential skills-building activities. In some cases, the women's supplementary earnings have more than doubled the overall household income for the families. With some further investment by the Moroccan government's National Initiative for Human Development (NIHD) and Planeterra, the cooperative has been able to reinvest revenue from their entrepreneurial efforts into the purchase of land to build a new workplace and store front facility. Without the scores of visitors from universities and tourism, this would not have been possible.

The Moroccan government, which for generations has prioritised Moroccan multiculturalism, saw this opportunity. Now, every time we replicate, we are currently building the fourth of such intercultural tree nurseries, the Moroccan government, through the NIHD, puts \$50,000 into that nursery. In short, the government funds a tree nursery on Moroccan Jewish community land for the wider public of that region.

The regions and areas described are not those that are typically visited by outside groups. Through this process, it brings people to places where visitors are not going.

There may be pilgrims to the Jewish cemeteries, but they will not typically go into the surrounding villages and meet the members of cooperatives or initiatives.



at certain times of the year such as the anniversary of the passing of some of the recognised saints in Moroccan Jewish-Muslim-Amazigh culture. These are also very rare visits, and so what we have to do is expand the desired travel destinations of those coming to Morocco.

The policy context of Morocco has created the opportunity for organisations such as the High Atlas Foundation and cooperatives like Achbarou to learn and pursue local hopes, with the support of all sectors and tiers, and in pursuit of scale. Even still, the actual achievement comes with an enormous expenditure of energy and time, withstanding trials such as the 2023 earthquake, and with the loving heart of the Moroccan people to unite across their diversity of identities as they have done for centuries.



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