

Rebuilding Hope: Stories of Resilience and Renewal in Aghbar

By Mariam Ait Hfid



In response to the devastating earthquake, the High Atlas Foundation has launched vital initiatives to provide psychosocial support and empower affected communities. Among these efforts is a transformative three- to four-day workshop, inspired by the Foundation’s signature IMAGINE program, which lies at the heart of its mission.

This workshop is specifically designed to address the profound disruption caused by the earthquake, which has severely destabilized countless lives. As individuals face the loss of their homes, loved ones, and sense of security, there is an urgent need to mitigate the resulting physical, social, economic, and psychological damage. The program focuses on helping individuals and communities begin to rebuild their lives with an emphasis on mental health and empowerment.

By delivering post-disaster support, practical empowerment tools, and safe referral mechanisms, this workshop plays a critical role in guiding participants toward establishing a “new normal” and restoring hope in the aftermath of this catastrophic event.

The workshops took place in a village within the commune of Aghbar, located in the Al Haouz province, approximately 170 kilometers from Marrakech. This commune, one of the areas directly impacted by the earthquake, lies in a remote and difficult-to-access region. Over a year after the disaster, residents still endure harsh climatic conditions while living in plastic tents.

After coordinating with local associations and notifying the authorities, the workshops were conducted from January 7–9, 2025. A total of 35 women actively participated in the sessions.

In total, 100 workshops have been held as part of this initiative, reaching thousands of individuals and empowering them to rebuild their lives.

The workshop provided a safe space and supportive environment for women to share their emotions and fears following the earthquake, learn techniques to process grief and stress, recognize their personal growth despite the trauma, explore opportunities for new initiatives, and harness their resilience to begin emotionally rebuilding their lives.

Participants engaged in transformative discussions and activities that prioritized their own needs – a much needed respite from their demanding daily routines, which are typically filled with chores, caregiving for elders and children, cooking, laundry, agriculture, and animal husbandry.

As part of these workshops, I returned to Aghbar, this time during its harsh winter season. The biting cold gripped the region, with temperatures dropping to just 1 degree. As we made our way to the village early in the morning for the workshop, we saw children and elderly people gathered in the first light of day, seeking warmth in the gentle rays of the rising sun.

Men were hard at work, and thin trails of smoke curled slowly from the tents, rising into the crisp sky – a quiet testament to life persisting amid adversity. Nearby, women were busy at their tasks, their hands skillfully shaping Tanourt bread, a cherished regional specialty. The comforting aroma of baking bread mingled with the rich, familiar scent of coffee, traditionally brewed every afternoon.

In this fragile yet resilient scene, the spirit of the Aghbar commune shone through- a poignant reminder of the strength and unity of its people.

During my first visit to the Aghbar area, I met Zayna—a woman whose ever-present smile radiates strength and warmth, and who is always eager to share her thoughts. A mother and pregnant at the time, when I asked her about the future of the village, she said, "We want to establish a sustainable future for the Igg community, especially for women who drop out of school at a young age."

When I returned to Aghbar, I learned that Zayna had given birth to a baby girl, whom she had named Houria. Curious about the name, I asked her its significance. She explained, "I want her to be inspired by her name and become free—in her thoughts, decisions, and actions." The name Houria is derived from the word "freedom."

Zayna, Fadma, Lalla Aicha, and baby Houria—these names represent more than individuals; they are the embodiment of resilience, strength, and hope in the village of Igg. Each woman tells a unique story that reflects the struggles and aspirations of their community.

Zayna, always smiling despite adversity, carries the vision of a brighter, more sustainable future for her village. Fadma, with hands worn from years of labor, symbolizes the silent strength that upholds families in challenging times. Lalla Aicha, wise and nurturing, serves as a living archive of traditions and culture, connecting generations by passing down invaluable knowledge that root the community in its identity. And then there is baby Houria, a name that means "freedom," a symbol of innocence and the unwavering hope that tomorrow holds the promise of something better.

Together, these women represent the heartbeat of the village. Their stories are intertwined with the village's journey to rebuild after devastation, their determination to create opportunities for their children, and their unwavering belief in a future where women and girls have the chance to thrive.

The women of the Aghbar commune remind us that even in the face of devastation, there is strength, unity, and hope. Their resilience calls on us to stand with communities like theirs, supporting their journey toward a brighter future.

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