

Resilience and Self-Reliance: When Communities Become Their Own Heroes

By Kaitlyn Waring



Community members gathered to attend a fire and earthquake safety workshop, September 2024.

13 September 2024 - Marrakech, Morocco: This article was written to reflect on the High Atlas Foundation Relief and Rebuilding Program following the September 2023 earthquake and their IMAGINE Empowerment Program for Moroccan women's social and economic empowerment.

As I return from three days of field visits with the High Atlas Foundation to two rural Moroccan villages, my eyes have been opened to the most sincere form of resilience and self-reliance that the people in these communities hold within themselves.

My journey to the first community, Widraren in the Al Haouz province, accompanied by members of the nearest fire department, was made in order to facilitate a fire safety information session. This same village had experienced a very large and terrifying fire just the week before, prompting an urgency to spread awareness about what to do in case of a fire. Important information was also relayed regarding what to do in case of an earthquake, as this village was deeply affected by the September 2023 [earthquake](#).

The nearest fire station to this village is over two hours away, and the larger fire trucks used by the fire department cannot even access all the way into the village. As someone whose dad was a firefighter and who grew up just five minutes away from my local fire station that had large, well-equipped trucks, it is easy to take

for granted the immediacy of help that I could have in an emergency. The same can be said for access to police, hospital, or other critical emergency services.

What I realized during my visit to Widraren is that these people, in an emergency, have to be their own firefighters, police officers, doctors, and more in order to address urgent situations. I can only imagine the pressure there is on every individual not only in cases of emergency, but also the everyday fear of a tragedy happening.

I spent the next two days in a different community called Tinguine, also in Al Haouz, observing HAF's [empowerment workshop](#). Across all of the workshops I have attended so far, I've seen and felt a common theme. Even though I cannot understand the words being said, I can always feel the meaning behind them from the emotions and atmosphere of the room.

I am also always touched by the welcoming nature that these women have to welcome me into their community and allow me to be a part of their empowerment process, as it is a truly incredible experience to witness. In the two days that I attended the workshop, I could see the women become more open to participating in the workshop activities and expressing their inner emotions.

Because I was able to be a part of such an emotional and transformative experience for these women, leaving on the second day was bittersweet for me. It is particularly hard every time because I cannot fully express to them in my own words how much I appreciate being present for their empowerment experience.

These days also reflected an inner resilience and self-reliance of the Moroccan people where women are not only willing but enthusiastic to expand their thinking on identity, self-love, relationships, career goals, and more difficult topics to discuss.

Both of my experiences show the power that simply providing resources can have to people who already hold such high levels of self-motivation and strength. Looking in the future, this applies both to immediate physical dangers such as fires and larger systemic social barriers.

I believe that [HAF's approach](#) to community development, being born from within communities based on their top priorities and sincerest desires, is the pathway to true community empowerment that builds off of already-existing capacities and mindsets.

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