

Friday, December 20, 2024



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Trees, Community, And Climate – OpEd

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By [Michaela Creel](#)

Monday, January 15, 2024, kicked off the community affair of tree planting. To maximize the scope of impact, High Atlas Foundation (HAF) staff and volunteers split up and traveled to locations across Morocco: Cadi Ayyad University, Azmour High School, Wlad Azzouz Wa Koba Primary School, and more.

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In each location, community members joined HAF to help with each step of planting, fostering the valuable connection between HAF and the people we work with. At Wlad Azzouz Wa Koba primary school; the planting day went beyond the community as a father joined his young daughter in tree planting. As the man planted trees, his daughter watched, inspired to follow suit. These interactions fuel the initiatives of HAF, encouraging local role models to advocate and act for environmental change.

Upon my arrival at the primary school, I could immediately feel the students' excitement as they crowded together, buzzing as we began bringing out the materials for the day's tree-planting activity. As one staff member began corralling the children with a playful call and response activity, a few students and teachers helped HAF staff fill up the water pails. As students and HAF members joined hand in hand in a circle, HAF staff Mustapha Tarhbaloute began to explain what the tree planting would look like. However, his explanation went far beyond simply the steps of tree planting and the basics of why it is important.



With the students' attention, Mustapha engaged them in a conversation about climate change, seeing who could name natural disasters, leading to a discussion about how Morocco is impacted by certain catastrophes. Listening to Tarhbaloute and watching the kids' reactions quickly became a highlight of my day. Seeing the kids get excited learning about climate change prompted enthusiasm from HAF staff and community members alike, creating the perfect environment for a fun and productive tree planting day.

Split into small groups so each student could clearly see each step, each spot was carefully dug, allowing enough room for the sapling to grow. Towards the end of our time at Wlad Azzouz Wa Koba, the girls noticed that the HAF and community members

st Masood Azhar and his organisation Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) are once again emerging



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digging these holes had all been men. After bringing this to attention, the women staff, volunteers, and locals took turns digging. From this, I was reminded how the missions of HAF are all intertwined and that without the empowerment of girls and women, success will be limited.

By the end of our time at Wlad Azzous Wa Koba, the head of school planted the final tree and gave us parting words of gratitude and hope for the future. As HAF members, students, and local community members said goodbye, I was left thinking of how an act as seemingly small can spread so far. In my group alone, there were individuals from all around Morocco, the United States, Australia, the Netherlands, and Lebanon, making this a local act with a truly international impact.

Michaela Creel

Michaela Creel is an undergraduate student studying International Affairs and Cultural Anthropology at Northeastern University and currently an intern at the High Atlas Foundation.

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