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During the month of February 33,000 fruit trees were planted with twenty villages in the Imenane and Azzadene Valleys of Morocco's High Atlas Mountains. This project is a partnership among the High Atlas Foundation, the Global Diversity Foundation, the Association des Amis du CHU, the Province d' Al Haouz, the Marrakech Department of Waters and Forests, the Department of Agriculture for the High Atlas, the Marrakech21 Foundation, Dar Tassa, Kasbah Tamadot, and Kasbah Toubkal.

Between February 16th and February 25th thirty-three thousand trees were planted (cherry, apple, peach, plum, and quince) with villages in the Imenane and Azzadene Valleys in Morocco's High Atlas Mountains in the Province of Marrakech. Twenty villages, including 3,000 people, will benefit from this project. This project is a partnership among the High Atlas Foundation, the Global Diversity Foundation, the Association des Amis du CHU, the Province d' Al Haouz, the Marrakech Department of Waters and Forests, the Department of Agriculture for the High Atlas, the Marrakech21 Foundation, Dar Tassa, Kasbah Tamadot, and Kasbah Toubkal. Participants identified the types of trees they wished to receive and this partnership funded the purchase and distribution of them, as well as provided technical training in fruit tree agriculture.

The benefits of fruit tree agriculture are deep and enduring. Household incomes nearly double once trees reach maturity and the fruit is sold at local markets. Cherry trees that are just six years old produce an average of 500 MAD (\$65 USD) of fruit per season, forty-two times the initial investment of 12 MAD (\$1.55 USD) for the two year old sapling. Beyond the tangible economic benefits, fruit tree planting projects further democratic processes and create diverse partnerships, strengthen the environment, diversify rural economies and help to mitigate urban migration, among other things.

This ongoing partnership provided 17,000 fruit trees last year and 3,400 in 2006 for villages in these valleys, allowing the planting of 53,400 fruit trees during the past three years. In addition, this partnership supports other socio-economic activities in the region including projects in public health, education, and women's development.

The High Atlas Foundation is a nonprofit organization that works to establish development projects in rural communities of Morocco that local people design and manage, and that are in partnership with government and non-government agencies. It was founded by former Peace Corps Volunteers as a way to use their experience and knowledge gained for the continued benefit of the Moroccan people. Since 2003 the organization has planted approximately 150,000 fruit trees and supports projects in the areas of potable water, irrigation, women's cooperatives, and youth development.

For more information and to view photos of the project please visit: www.highatlasfoundation.org.

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