



CONCEPT PAPER

Women's Cooperative to Serve Twenty Villages in the Tifnoute Valley Rural Commune of Toubkal, Province of Taroudant, Morocco

Organizational Overview

The High Atlas Foundation (HAF) was founded in 2000 by former Peace Corps Volunteers who served in Morocco as a way to build upon professional relationships and knowledge gained during their years of service for the continued benefit of the Moroccan people. The organization works to establish development projects in rural Morocco that local communities design and manage, and that are in partnership with government and non-government agencies. HAF is a US 501(c)3 nonprofit organization and a registered Moroccan association, with headquarters in New York City and Mohammedia, Morocco.

HAF has organized and facilitated community meetings with approximately 100 villages in different areas of Morocco. At these meetings local men and women take charge of their development process and create an action plan based on their self-determined needs. These meetings have consistently shown that fruit trees, clean drinking water, irrigation, women's cooperatives, and projects involving youth are top development priorities. As a result of these participatory community discussions, HAF partners with the Ministry of Agriculture, High Commission of Waters and Forests, rural communes, and others to help achieve the multiple goals of communities. Since 2009, HAF also trains university students, local politicians, government technicians, civil society personnel, and citizens in facilitation skills of participatory planning methods at its Center at Hassan II University in Mohammedia.

To date, HAF has planted more than 200,000 fruit trees, benefitting over 25,000 people, in four provinces of Morocco, and has set a goal to plant one million trees. HAF has also established nine clean water systems with villages of the Tifnoute Valley in the Rural Commune of Toubkal (benefitting 2,000 people). "With only 58% of rural dwellers having safe potable water sources within one kilometer of their dwellings, and with the burden of water carrying being born mainly by females, one can thus begin to understand how difficult life is for rural Moroccan women" (Maddy-Weitzman, 2005:4).¹ HAF supported the construction of three women's cooperatives and one irrigation basin; implemented numerous projects in partnership with current Peace Corps Volunteers; and conducted three experiential trainings funded by the National Endowment for Democracy and the Netherlands Embassy.

The Need

Rural Moroccans make up approximately 45 percent of their country's population, often living in remote areas that do not have access to electricity, clean drinking water, or the infrastructure to support their health and educational needs. Creating alternative incomes and educational opportunities are important first step in addressing the diminishing quality of life for many rural Moroccans. Addressing the root causes of poverty through multiple development projects that meet their self-described needs has the potential to transform communities for generations.

Among the total population declared poor in the country, women are disproportionately over-represented. "The alarming rate of illiteracy among the Moroccan female population demonstrates that investment in human capacities tends toward favoring men over women. Half of the female population aged 8 to 13 goes to school (51.5 percent); the rate is remarkably lower for rural girls since only 25 percent from the same age group are educated. Yet, it one girl out of two goes to primary school at the national level, only

¹ Maddy-Weitzman, B. (2005) "Women, Islam, and the Moroccan State: The Struggle Over the Personal Status Law, *The Middle East Journal*, Vol. 59, No. 3, pp. 1-17.

one out of eight girls aged 17 to 19 goes to high school. The urban/rural divide remains alarming since 87 percent of female illiteracy is rural against 43.7 percent in the urban centers.

Many reasons are behind the exclusion of girls from education. These range from limited financial resources within the household to the burden of household chores assigned to young girls, particularly in rural areas, the absence of adequate educational, communication and transportation infrastructure, and the patriarchal ideology that prioritizes the education of the male child" (Maddy-Weitzman, 2005:77).²

Writing in the mid-1980s, Halim Barakat³ enumerated a list of four factors that reflected women's subordinate status:

1. Women are secluded and segregated, with the majority continuing to occupy the private domain of the household, and with public space reserved for males, and veiling (a sign of separation) still being widespread.
2. The roles most available to women are those of daughter, sister, wife, mother, mother-in-law, etc. –with few professional careers available. Women are relegated to marginality by the prevailing social, political and economic organization.
3. Personal status codes discriminate against women, particularly in such areas as marriage, divorce and inheritance. Among certain classes, ownership of property is almost exclusively confined to men.
4. Prevailing religious ideology considers women to be a source of evil, anarchy (fitna) and trickery or deception (kayd). The prevailing standard of morality stresses those values and norms associated with traditional ideas of femininity, motherhood, wifehood and sexuality.

Determined to promote an alternative vision to that of radical Islam, Morocco's King Mohammed V decided to complete the long-delayed process of altering the moudawwana, choosing the far-reaching version of the recommendations tendered by the Boucetta committee. On 10 October 2003, the king formally presented the Moroccan parliament with his plan to replace the moudawwana with a new "modern Family Law" that was, he declared, "meant to free women from the injustices they endure, in addition to protecting children's rights and safeguarding men's dignity."

Explaining his rationale, the king anchored the plan firmly within "the tolerant aims of Islam, which advocates human dignity, equality and harmonious relations," as well as "the cohesiveness of the Malikite rite and on ijthad, thanks to which Islam is a suitable religion for all times and places." In presenting the main points of the new law, he referred frequently to Qur'anic verses and interpretations of the shari'a, which were commensurate with the proposed changes. The law included the following points:

Project Description

Based on participatory community meetings held with villages in the Tifnoute Valley in 2008-2009, community leaders identified land for the construction of a women's cooperative. This land was chosen due to its central location and access to the high number of tourists who pass through the area (land is on the mountainside above the village of Amsouzerte). This project will have multiple components and include the construction of a cooperative, as well as irrigation, training (i.e., in carpet weaving), and the planting of fruit trees (on cooperative land). Further, the facilitation of the meetings was assisted by a local woman trained in applying participatory methods at HAF's training center at Hassan II University.

During the meetings, women had highly significant levels of enthusiasm for dressmaking, carpet, and knitting projects. In addition, the participants voice their hopes for literacy courses and a child care center, which was suggested by other men during their meetings. Child care will be supported by the delegation of national education by hiring one of the primary school teachers who they will pay. HAF facilitated this agreement with the president of the commune and national delegation of education.

² Ibid.:77

³ Barakat, H. (1993) *The Arab World: Society, Culture and State*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
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Project Timeline

During community-wide meetings, details of the action plan for the implementation of this project were determined, including the construction of the cooperative, specific responsibilities of the cooperative members and the communities, and complete the analysis of the market viability of carpets. The results of these meetings are a project implementation timeline that includes: a) cooperative construction; b) irrigation basin construction and pressure/drip system installation; c) training program schedule for dressmaking, fruit tree agriculture and cooperative management; and d) monitoring and evaluation.

Project Goals & Objectives

Following are the goals and objectives for a cooperative to serve twenty villages (500 women and girls) in the Tifnoute Valley:

Goal 1: Socio-economic development

- *Objective 1:* Increase household incomes by at least 25% through cooperative activities (i.e., carpet weaving)
- *Objective 2:* Increase household incomes by at least 25% from the sale of fruit at local markets.
- *Objective 3:* Create value-added opportunities from the fruit trees, i.e. honey and jam production.

Goal 2: New training opportunities

- *Objective 1:* Provide training in carpet weaving and/or other income generating activities identified by cooperative members
- *Objective 2:* Provide capacity-building in cooperative formation and related skills, i.e. literacy, business development, marketing, and bookkeeping
- *Objective 3:* Provide training in fruit tree agriculture practices

Goal 3: Bring water to arable land

- *Objective 1:* Provide clean drinking water to women's cooperative
- *Objective 2:* Provide irrigation for cooperative fruit tree orchard

Goal 4: Strengthen the environment

- *Objective 1:* Plant 1,500 fruit trees (i.e., walnut trees) on cooperative land
- *Objective 2:* Stabilize soil through creation of new terraces

Budget

The following budget includes total project costs. The community will contribute in-kind room and board for project facilitator and trainers, and transportation of supplies within the Commune. HAF is currently seeking partners to help fund this project.

Expenditure	Description	Cost (MAD)
Construction of Cooperative	cement, rebar, tools, & labor	70000 MAD
Walnut Trees	1,500 walnut trees to plant on cooperative land	21000 MAD
Irrigation	Construction of basin/pressure-drip system/drinking water for cooperative	35000 MAD
Trainers	120 days/two trainers a day @ 100 MAD each /day	24000 MAD
Project Coordinator	Three months full-time (7000 MAD/month)	21000 MAD
Country Director	Oversight of project for three months @ 20% of time	13500 MAD
General & Administrative	Office supplies, phone calls, faxes, etc. (15% of above costs)	27675 MAD
	TOTAL PROJECT COST =	212175 MAD