

NEAR EAST FOUNDATION & MOROCCAN EDUCATIONAL REFORM

Background

The mountains of the High Atlas east of Ouarzazate are breathtakingly beautiful - cool and relaxing in summer, rugged and isolated in winter. In summer, fruits and nuts are plentiful. Shepherds traverse the hills with sheep and goats. These provide villagers with cash crops for sale in distant urban markets. Where water is available, villagers cultivate small plots of grain, some few vegetables, and crops for animal fodder. In a good year, there may be a surplus for sale in local markets. In winter, snow covered mountains, narrow unpaved roads, over flowing rivers, and periodic landslides, block access for weeks at a time. Small isolated villages are cut off from one another and from the surrounding area – relying on the rewards of a summer harvest to survive the harsh winter. Electricity, water, and sanitation facilities are absent.

For the vast majority of people in the High Atlas education is a luxury they can ill afford. In many villages virtually all adults - men and women, are illiterate. Where schools have been introduced, attendance is limited and largely restricted to boys. In some areas women and girls are not even allowed to pass by the school. Longstanding culture and traditions work against the education of girls and prevent the full integration of women in society. There is a total absence of programs for adult literacy. In one village the local school had to be constructed alongside the village cemetery, reflecting its lack of social acceptance in or within proximity to the village.

Village schools, with classes through the 6th grade, are characterized by a lack of space, leaky roofs, broken windows, missing doors, insufficient and often broken furniture, no heating, and inadequate or often absent supplies of water and sanitation facilities. School books and supplies are extremely limited and beyond the cost of a majority of families. Many schools consist of a single or perhaps two classrooms. Students, age 6 and up, must walk many miles through rugged country in the cold of winter to attend class. Those beyond the 6th grade have to travel 50 miles or more across the mountains to reach the nearest school. Here they must board with relatives or in unfamiliar hostels, and at a cost they can ill afford. These conditions discourage school enrollment and encourage frequent absenteeism.

In Morocco, the Near East Foundation is working in partnership with the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) and the Moroccan Ministry of Education on a project of educational reform designed to bring increased learning to the High Atlas mountains, promote the education of girls, provide continuing education, and encourage the involvement of local parents and teachers in activities that promote education and encourage community development.

While initially difficult to gain community acceptance, the project has in a short time of intense activity produced a virtual revolution in the perception of education in participating communities. Villagers who initially refused project involvement are fast becoming models of educational reform. Virtually empty classrooms are full. Those

who enroll now tend to remain for the term. During the first year of the project over three-hundred adults, more than 60% of them women, were enrolled in adult literacy classes. Their numbers are increasing.

Newly formed Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs), joined by local women leaders, are working together and with the project to encourage “education for all” and to mobilize resources needed to improve primary schools and allow graduates to continue their secondary education in nearby towns and cities.

Phase two of the project will consolidate first year achievements, expand the project area to encompass two entire rural communes, encourage financial sustainability, and promote policy reforms.

1. Basic Renovations for Schools

Problem. Village primary schools, with classes through the 6th grade, are characterized by a lack of space (generally one or two rooms), leaky roofs, broken windows, missing doors, insufficient and often broken furniture, no heating, and inadequate or often absent supplies of water and sanitation facilities. Schoolbooks and supplies are extremely limited and beyond the cost of a majority of families. Many schools consist of a single or perhaps two classrooms. Students, age 6 and up, must walk many miles through rugged country in the cold of winter to attend classes. A majority of schools lack access to clean potable water and sanitary facilities (latrines). The latter is a major obstacle facing increasing enrollment for young girls.

Solution. Working with local authorities and participating communities, the project seeks to make basic repairs and renovations of school facilities. This includes primarily repairs to/replacement of doors and windows, repair of leaking roofs, painting, improved lighting, additional of simple playgrounds, and the introduction of drinking water and simple toilet facilities. Decisions as to needs and priorities are taken by local Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) established by the project. PTAs, residents, government, and local NGO partners contribute matching funds or complimentary projects. Project funds are used as seed money to encourage community action and local support.

Previous Experience. During the first phase of the project for “Community Involvement in Reforming Primary Education in the High Atlas Mountains of Morocco,” the Near East Foundation has shown that improving school facilities and furnishings significantly encourages enrollment and retention of pupils over the extremely cold winter months where in some areas temperatures remain below freezing throughout the season.

Despite the fact that, due to the timing of project startup, school renovations/repairs were delayed during phase one and occurred late in the school year or over the summer, they have had a significant impact on enrollment and retention rates in the following year. While in one sense the delays were unfortunate - in the sense that children are only now benefiting from these actions, the late introduction of repairs/renovations allowed the project to focus first on the development of local PTAs and women leader groups. As a result, this meant that local communities were better prepared to participate in determining priority repairs and were in a better position to mobilize local resources to match project contributions. Some communities contributed more than 50% of the costs of renovations while in others local government and NGOs added further resources.

The retention rate in these communities is now significantly higher than for previous years while attendance for girls has continued to grow from 0% on project start-up to almost 50% or more of pupils in participating schools. Schools are also being used for parent-teacher meetings, adult literacy classes, and extra-curricula activities. For the first time, women are entering local schools and participating in community meetings.

Over the upcoming summer months, the project intends to continue this work in participating schools, working with local authorities and participating communities in the

rural communes of Ghessate and Iminoulaoune) to . Of a total of 17 participating villages, 7 are continuing while ten are new to the program. Of the ten new villages, 7 have mother schools and three are satellite villages whose children attend the mother schools.

While often extremely poor, the families of primary school age children have shown themselves willing and able to participate in various ways in improving school conditions. Provided that the project can participate in major repairs and renovations, the fact that local communities are prepared to and can raise money for continuing maintenance and repair makes the process sustainable.

Proposed Intervention. The Foundation is requesting support to provide matching funds for participating PTAs to continue primary school repairs/renovations, basic furnishings and equipment, water and heating. This will support from 6-8 projects. The majority of these funds will be used to support the seven new schools participating in the project. Local communities will provide a similar amount in matching funds either in-cash or in-kind.

Monitoring and Reporting. Near East Foundation staff will work with PTAs and others to define needs and priorities and to assure that project funds are well spent and that local contributions are made. The project maintains and verifies school enrollment and attendance registers to track the impact of project interventions on school attendance, particularly for girls.

The project makes quarterly reports on progress and can provide before and after photos relating to local communities, pupils, and renovations/repairs along with human interest stories documenting major life changes for women, children, and local residents.

In addition, the project seeks to bring about changes in the thinking and behavior of local authorities responsible for primary school education. Project reports focus on project learning and attempts to integrate findings into on-going practice and policy reform.

The project also documents and records all local and community contributions and provides semi-annual or quarterly financial reports as requested by donors.

Required Funding: US\$ 20,000 against US\$ 20,000 in local and community matching funds. The Foundation will cover local staff costs, monitoring and reporting on project investments.

Photo Documentation: Illustrative examples are available of existing school conditions and renovations previously made.

2. Small Businesses and Income-generating Activities for Local PTAs

Problem. At present, the only source of income for supporting PTAs and their activities comes from an annual fee paid by parents. This amounts to on average to US\$ 50 or less per PTA. Additional contributions are sometimes received from local donors and community members but these cannot be depended on nor can they support on-going activities. Now that PTAs have been trained in administrative and financial management and are more active in promoting primary education and related educational initiatives, the problem is how to finance these activities on an on-going basis.

Solution. One solution is to assist PTAs in developing small projects which generate revenues that can be used to support PTAs and their activities. Working to design and manage such projects will not only increase funds available for education in local communities but also communicate valuable knowledge and skills that will have a powerful “spill-over” affect on local economies and make education more affordable for all. The inclusion of economic activities within PTAs will encourage greater interest from community members.

Objectives

- Assure a reliable and expandable source of revenue for PTAs and PTA-sponsored educational initiatives
- Demonstrate how communities can effectively organize and manage local resources for support of educational initiatives
- Expand community participation in PTA activities

Inputs

Available funds include US\$ 15,000 for support of PTA sponsored small business and income-generating activities. Local communities are required to contribute 50% of total project value (25% in-cash and 25% in-kind). This amount is expected to fund 3-5 projects, a majority from PTAs participating in Phase 1. NEF is seeking funds from other donors, both local and international, to fund additional projects with PTAs in the project area.

Outputs

- Increased local funding for PTA-owned and operated SMEs/IGAs
- Expanded community participation in PTA activities
- Better understanding of SME/IGA operations among community members

Previous Experience. The Near East Foundation is a major provider of training and assistance, including funding, for business development and income-generating projects owned and operated by local NGOs. NEF's most recent venture in this area is in conjunction with the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation in Jordan, where the Foundation is working with approximately 35 local NGOs to improve performance and develop income-generating enterprises valued at between \$40,000 and \$200,000. For additional information see the Jordan project website www.qudoratnef.org. In Morocco

the Foundation has long been involved with local councils and community-based organizations in the development and funding of very small-scale SMEs and IGAs.

Proposed Intervention. Participating PTAs have become valuable, strong, and functional community organizations. To support their activities, the project is working in phase two with PTAs to finance and establish small/micro-enterprises (SMEs) and income-generating activities (IGAs). Activities to be financed can be anything from crafts production and sales, to salt production, animal husbandry, appropriate technology, and trade. Profits from community-owned SMEs/IGAs will be used to sustain PTAs (including women leaders) and to provide support for PTA-sponsored educational initiatives. Particular attention is being given to encouraging the on-going involvement of women as well as to assuring that a substantial portion of income earned is directed at supporting girls' education.

Project Selection Criteria

Internal Organizational Issues

- Lawful PTAs
- Strong PTA leadership
- Sound PTA administrative and financial management
- PTA Representatives/women leaders elected in a transparent, democratic manner
- Strong participation of women in PTA activities

Project Related Criteria

- Project Management Plan with clearly defined PTA roles and responsibilities
- Clear objectives and sound business planning
- PTA contributions of at least 50% (25 in nature and 25% money)
- Local project financing from multiple partners vs. a single individual or family
- Clearly defined market for project goods and services
- Potential for growth and sustainability
- Capable local leadership

Project Related Issues

- Clear objectives and investment planning for project revenues
- Adequate attention to girls' education and women's literacy issues
- Priority given to projects that directly relate to educational needs
- Employment generating or other benefits for local communities a plus

Composition of Project Selection Committee

A project selection committee will be from among project stakeholders. The committee will consist of the following members:

- 2 NEF/MEPI project staff
- 1 PTA member representing all PTAs (Asseghmou PTA President)

- 1 Director (Principal) (Iguernane School), representing all 7 school directors
- 1 MOE educational inspector from the project intervention area
- 1 Rural commune technician
- 1 representative of a local NGO with knowledge and know-how in the field of SME/IGA project design and proposal writing

The NEF Project Manager chairs the committee.

Format for Project Proposals

The format for project proposals is now being finalized and will include basic business information and other issues related to the criteria listed in #6 above.

Grant Size

Financial awards can be made up to US\$ 5,000 assuming a similar contribution is available from the local community. There is no minimal amount although projects funded should be sufficient in size to provide for support of PTA activities from revenues generated. Project funds may also be made available in one or more payments depending on project requirements and performance. (The single exception to the US\$ 5,000 ceiling is for a special project for energy efficient cook stoves which is defined later in this document.)

Provided funds are available, NEF may chose to make add-on contributions for successful projects from its own resources or locally mobilized funds.

As project develop, attempts will be made to link PTA projects with available SME/IGA loan funds for project expansion.

Assuring Appropriate Distribution of Profits

Contacts developed with participating PTAs prior to project funding will specifically define revenues as understood by the project, specify the types of activities that can be funded from revenues, and establish a financial mechanism for monitoring the flow of revenues to specific activities. The selection of projects to be funded is expected to be a participatory process within PTAs and documented in the minutes of meetings.

Monitoring and Reporting. Project staff will regularly follow-up on all projects funded. Follow-up will include a systematic review of project progress and contract compliance with regard to the use of project resources (including matching funds and others contributed by NEF). Specific attention will be given to project financial reporting, revenues generated, and the use of project revenues for PTA support and educational activities.

A follow-up committee will be formed to oversee this process. The committee will include members of the original project selection committee or be newly constituted to reflect the actual needs of funded projects.

Project staff will plan for and conduct an evaluation of sub-grant activities. The evaluation will be participatory and involve members of the selection committee, the follow-up team, local PTAs, Ministry of Education, and local government staff. The evaluation will address progress, problem and issues with individual projects, the flow of revenues to educational initiatives in local communities, lessons learned by participating PTAs, and the potential for expansion of this type of project activity.

Timeframe

<i>Timeframe</i>	<i>Task</i>
February 06	Orientation - Introduce PTA Members/Women Leaders to Possibilities for Developing and Financing SME/IGAs for supporting educational initiatives
February 06	Orientation for Local Communities and PTA members to the idea of revenue generating activities and how they might participate
March 06	Training - "Design and Management of PTA SMEs/IGAs." The project will provide training for selected PTA representatives and women leaders, helping them to define, refine, and develop ideas for PTA SMEs/IGAs.
March 06	Proposals – PTAs, with project assistance, develop proposals/business plans for SMEs/IGAs.
March 31, 06	Deadline for Submission of Proposals
April 06	Establish Selection Committee – Selection Committee with 7 members to be established by NEF. (for membership, see below)
April 06	Project Selection – the Selection Committee will select three-four projects from among those submitted, and according to criteria established by the project (see criteria below) for project financial participation.
May 06	Development of sub-Project Contracts with selected PTAs, including provisions for use of revenues
May 06	Funding of Selected Projects – Verification of PTA matching funds (50%) plus plan for provision of project support Cash Flow Planning with PTA project managers
June -October 06	Follow-up of Project Funded Projects Provision of training, consultation, and technical assistance. Fundraising for additional projects as funds are available.
October 06	Plan for and conduct SME/IGA project evaluations
November 06	Sharing of Results with PTAs and Ministry of Education
December 06	Project Ends

Required Funding. The Foundation has currently available \$ 15,000 for the funding of PTA support projects or PTA sponsored SME/IGAs. Participating PTAs and local partners will provide matching funds (cash and in-kind contributions) totaling an additional \$ 15,000 or more. This will cover three projects. The Near East Foundation is seeking an additional \$20,000 to allow for three additional projects, including a special cook stoves project for \$ 10,000 in project funds.

Project ideas submitted to date by participating PTAs include: beekeeping, milling, rental housing for school teachers assigned to the area, livestock (small animals), salt extraction, cook stoves, and school transport. Additional ideas continue to be received while all ideas are under study by project staff, consultants, and local communities.

Photo Documentation. Illustrative examples are available of existing school conditions and renovations previously made.

Special Project – Cook Stoves

The idea of fuel efficient cook stoves is not new to NEF and has been part of NEF's Morocco program for many years. It was introduced into the Primary Education project for several reasons. One, to give more meaning to the role of rural women leaders participating in the program; two, to decrease the time required for gathering firewood – a task undertaken exclusively by girls and women. This allows them to spend more time in school and in adult literacy classes. Environmental issues, generally paramount in such programs, were secondary to this particular application although by no means insignificant. Health benefits are also important both in themselves as well as in terms of encouraging school attendance by women and girls often absent due to health problems associated with traditional stoves. These ideas are explained in more detail in "*Fuel Efficient Cook Stoves for Moroccan Villagers – And exactly How Does that Make Education Possible.*"

NEF proposes here is to establish the production and/or distribution of cook stoves as a small business/income-generating project for one or more of the local PTAs participating in the project. This will make stoves more readily available throughout the project areas, reduce costs, and generate revenues for related local education initiatives. Women leaders will play a major role in this project which will in turn significantly benefit women and girls. This will also assure the sustainability of this activity once NEF has withdrawn from the area.

This project is more expensive than the average SME/IGA in that it will require much more training and initial project support than the majority of other activities proposed for funding. The latter are more familiar to local villagers. Detailed plans and costs are still being worked out. Local residents would also be expected to provide matching funds.

3. Community Water Management

Problem. The Foundation is now working with community residents and local government authorities on the development of complimentary activities that help communities to identify and benefit from previously underutilized or neglected local resources. These include expansion and diversification of crops, introduction of quality seeds and plant materials, rebuilding and improving local herds devastated by recent droughts, quality control and marketing of rural crafts, improving processing and packaging of goods, developing local markets and transport facilities.

Much of this depends on putting in place simple, cost efficient forms of water harvesting, reforestation, alternative sources of fuel, and greater fuel efficiency. Required too is a greater degree of community participation and encouragement of individual entrepreneurs of all ages, male and female. Developing local economies provides incentives for continuing education and feeds the process of continuing and sustainable development for all.

Some of these issues will be addressed under Project #2 above. Local communities will learn how to think more effectively about business development and how to plan and manage their own business affairs more efficiently. Key to reducing risks and increasing the sustainability of these enterprises in many villages is that local people are better positioned to manage available water resources. At present, the majority of these communities have more than sufficient water during the winter months but due to the lack of a means for storing and channeling water they often face summer months where water is in short supply or simply in the wrong place. This applies both to drinking water as well as to water for agriculture and livestock.

Solution. NEF has been working with a number of villages in the project area to develop simple costs effective solutions for water management. These include simple water harvest methods and the channeling of water into homes and schools as well as into areas where it can be used to support continuing agricultural activities and livestock raising.

Previous Experience. The Foundation has significant experience in water resources management and has just received \$ 2,000,000 from USAID for a multi-million dollar Fish Garden in Jordan developed around the concept of water use efficiency and bio-saline agriculture. In Morocco, NEF's project director was previously employed as Coordinator of Water and Development Projects for Oxfam-Quebec.

Proposed Intervention. The Foundation is seeking funds to implement two water projects as pilots to demonstrate how simple low-cost investments in water can form the basis for stimulating local economic development and improving living conditions in isolated mountain areas. Once these interventions are in place, the Foundation will work with local micro-finance institutions to explore how micro-credit can be employed to allow local residents to take maximum advantage of the new conditions.

Required Funding. Villagers are prepared to provide land and labor for these projects but require equipment and supplies along with some transportation costs. Government departments have been contacted and have already begun efforts to certify individual projects as technically and environmentally sound. Time and labor for these efforts are contributed by local engineers. It is anticipated that once pilot projects are in place that additional funds will be forthcoming from local as well as international donors.

The Near East Foundation is seeking \$20,000 to allow for two pilot projects. Given that projects vary in costs, specific projects will be selected based on funds available.

Monitoring and Reporting. Project staff will regularly follow-up on all projects funded. Follow-up will include a systematic review of project progress and contract compliance with regard to the use of project resources (including matching funds and others contributed by NEF). Technical reports will be compiled by local authorities and made available to donors.

Photo Documentation. Illustrative examples are available of existing conditions and project additions.

REQUIRED PROJECT FUNDING

<i>Description</i>	<i>School Repairs/ Renovations</i>	<i>Revenue Generating SMEs/IGAs*</i>	<i>Small-scale Water Project</i>
	US\$	US\$	US\$
Grants to PTAs**		35,000	
Equipment/Supplies	20,000		20,000
Supervision/Labor	20,000	35,000	25,000
Overheads (16%)*	3,200	5,600	3,200
Total Required	43,200	75,600	48,200
Requested (Geneva)	23,200	25,600	23,200
NEF/Local Match	20,000	50,000	25,000

* Including US\$ 10,000 in Geneva Funds for Cook Stoves Project

** SME/IGA proposals will include detailed budget breakdowns

***Calculation Excludes Supervision and Labor Costs contributed by NEF/Locals

PLAN FOR NEXT 14 MONTHS

Given the success of the initial year to increase the enrollment and persistence of Moroccan village children in elementary school, the Near East Foundation proposes to extend the time frame for the current project an additional 14 months. During this extension period the Foundation will:

I. Consolidate Gains

Work to consolidate significant gains made during the first year of project implementation in the rural communes of Ghesate and Imminoulaoune (Region of Soussa-Massa-Draa, Ouarzazate). These include significant increases in both overall retention rates in primary schools as well as, and even more significant, the attendance and retention of girls in eight mother schools in the High Atlas Mountains. More specifically the project will:

1. Work to assure that attendance and retention rates for both girls and boys continue to increase within the schools targeted during the first year of the project.
2. Help to expand community involvement in promoting and supporting education in these isolated rural communities.
3. Encourage and support closer cooperation between local communities, school administrators, principals, and teachers in promoting and improving education in these communities. To date, this has taken the form primarily of initiating and helping to support the growth of local PTAs.
4. Promote the development of extracurricular activities that encourage continuing interest in education
5. Experiment with pilot summer school activities that help to maintain interest, improve skills and encourage continuing school attendance
6. Incorporate into participating school programs small libraries that encourage continuous reading and learning. We are aware that in other awards MEPI has supported the translation of educational books into Arabic, and we would hope to make use of these materials as possible.
7. Expand adult literacy classes that encourage both men and women to read and write, and in turn further support the expanding role of women in the community and in education.

II. Expand the Program to Encompass Two Entire Rural Communes

With no additional administrative structure or funding, NEF could expand the work within these two communes to include an additional 7 Mother schools and a total of 20 satellite schools (associated with either the 8 original or 7 new mother schools). This will cover virtually the entire primary educational system of the two rural communes and promote a closer working relationship between the project and local authorities, offering a significant example of how education can be reformed in these remote rural areas. The expansion will follow the same process as in the initial 8 mother schools with the following exceptions:

1. Local groups and PTAs established during phase one will be involved in helping new communities to understand the importance of education (particularly for girls) and how they as a community can become more involved in supporting education within their own communities. This will both facilitate the process within the new villages as well as help to strengthen the confidence and leadership abilities within the original 8 mother schools. This will be particularly important and significant in terms of involving satellite schools surrounding the original mother schools.
2. New MEPI #2 activities such as libraries, extracurricular activities, and summer school activities, not available under MEPI #1 will be introduced in these new villages during the first year of participation – although on a more limited basis than in those communities that participated in MEPI #1, and not in all participating schools.

III. Provide for Financial Sustainability for Local Educational Initiatives

The project will work with newly created Parent Teacher Associations from MEPI #1, helping them to establish and fund income-generating projects whose profits go for the continuing support of local educational initiatives promoted by the PTA. A list of such projects has already been compiled with participating community PTAs. Particular attention will be given to assure that participating PTAs significantly involve women from local communities as well as direct a substantial portion of their support to girls education.

Clearly this component goes beyond the educational pillar aspects of the initial proposal into the area of economics. This broadening would be, we believe, a very wise move. Because the PTAs built in MEPI #1 have become valuable, strong and functional community organizations in areas that have lacked them previously, it is good practice to use them to build the community in areas beyond education. NEF's integrated approach to development has demonstrated repeatedly that expanding aspects of a development project into areas of need identified by the community works to strengthen and multiply gains in other areas. Not only will economic activities support the families of students but they will demonstrate the value of becoming educated, the possibility of expanding the acceptable definition of "women's work," and the value of investing effort into civil society structures like community based organizations.

These activities would provide a base from which to move into a broader program of local economic development that would further underpin initial educational activities, reinforce citizen participation in community decision-making, and reinforce policy reform initiatives at the level of the governorate and commune. Based on previous discussions and planning with local communities, the Foundation is now working on the further development of these ideas and on funding for their support. Activities that will help to financial support PTA activities, educational reform, and women's involvement are a precursor to this larger program.

IV. Form Linkages and Support Groups

To encourage the institutional sustainability of PTAs that have formed under MEPI #1 as well as those to be created under MEPI #2, the project will promote networking and linkages between PTAs, encourage sharing of information, and assistance to one another in community education and problem-solving. There will also be activities to involve local government with community organizations and to generate a greater sense among villagers of how they can work more effectively with local government providing relevant inputs and feedback that in fact impact on local government initiatives. This will provide them with a better sense of how government can be responsive to their needs,

As with the item noted above, this part of the projected expansion moves the project beyond purely an educational effort to include civil society/democracy building. Again, this seems an opportunity too ripe to pass up. A benefit of the educational work of year one with its positive connections with local government and local government's growing involvement with and responsiveness to the people has been the enhancement of the people's sense of how they can affect government and how it can serve them. This represents an almost entirely new perception and reality, which, we believe, should be built upon. Not only will it benefit the villages with which we work, but will also serve as a model for other communes throughout Morocco. The first year has certainly shown that word spreads between and among villages of how civil society activity can reap benefits.

V. Policy Reform

The project will intensify efforts and initiate formal discussions with the Ministry of Education to encourage the further application of new approaches to teaching, administration, and educational supervision arising from the project. These will aim to influence educational policy and practice at both state and local levels. As noted above, here too the way the project has developed indicates an area for broadening its impact.