

## High Atlas Foundation Earthquake Relief and Recovery Program Update

February 2025

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### I- Introduction

In response to the devastating earthquake that hit the Moroccan provinces of Al Haouz, Taroudant, Chichaoua, Marrakech, Ouarzazate and Azilal on September 8, 2023, the High Atlas Foundation (HAF), with the support of its partners, launched a multidimensional [relief and recovery program](#) to address the needs of the affected communities. The earthquake resulted in the loss of over 2,900 lives and caused significant damage to buildings and infrastructure. Communities grieved the tragic loss of life and destruction of years of work.

Within the ten days following the earthquake, HAF was able to procure, transport, and distribute aid to 69 villages, supplying over 3,800 households with food, tents, blankets, mattresses, and personal and household items. This increased to more than 685 tonnes of aid to 363 villages. All items helped to address the immediate physical needs of the affected communities, with the understanding that the road to recovery began by ensuring an individual's safety, comfort and health.

Once immediate aid needs were met, HAF, building on more than 20 years of sustainable development experience, transitioned from aid distribution to strategic, self-sustaining projects, including, the rehabilitation of water infrastructure, reconstruction of agricultural terracing and tree planting, installation of intermediate shelters and group-based psychosocial empowerment workshops. The earthquake provided the opportunity to "build back better", and in many cases, to realize projects that for years, if not decades, have been priorities for these communities.

To date, HAF has proudly:

- Delivered over **685 tonnes of essential aid** to families in need.
- Built **12 irrigation basins and 9 potable water tanks** to support daily life and agriculture.
- Constructed **37.5 km of traditional irrigation canals** (Sequia) that nourish the land.
- Installed **54.3 km of potable water pipes** ensuring access to clean drinking water.
- Powered **5 wells with 124 solar panels** creating renewable water sources.
- Rehabilitated **307 terraces (some 17 hectares)** to support agricultural production.
- Provided **183 temporary homes** to families.
- Conducted **219 empowerment workshops** (totaling 7,008 hours) with 7,597 people.
- Organized a **dental caravan** that brightened the smiles of 720 children.

These efforts have **benefited some 91,347 people (or 15,387 families)**. Beneficiaries have shared heartwarming stories of strength and resilience in the aftermath of the earthquake. By providing food, water, and shelter, supporting agriculture, creating employment opportunities, empowering and healing communities, the program is having a transformative impact on the villages' recovery.

## II- Activities

### Immediate Aid Response

Like many local and international organizations, in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake HAF mobilized to deliver essential aid to affected communities. Within the ten days following the earthquake, HAF was able to **procure, transport, and distribute supplies to 69 villages, supplying over 3,800 households with tents, blankets, mattresses, and food items**. The distribution focused on addressing the immediate survival needs of the communities. This was no easy-feat and required the collective efforts of all HAF personnel, including volunteers.



*Distribution of food in Toubkal municipality, September 2023 (in partnership with Intrepid Foundation).*

### Ongoing Aid Response

The initial distribution work provided the opportunity for real-time assessments of village needs. HAF continued to deliver more than **685 tonnes of essential aid**, including food and non-food items, such as food packages (comprising milk, flour, tomato paste, chickpeas, oil, lentils, sugar), school supplies, solar panels and lamps, mattresses, blankets, sleeping bags (in partnership with Amazon), clothing, Water-Survival Boxes (in partnership with Rotary International and Water Survival Box Limited), LifeStraw water filters, hygiene kits (in partnership with Project HOPE), and stoves for cooking and heating (in partnership with Polish Humanitarian Aid).





*Installation of a LifeStraw water filter in the Widrarne village temporary mosque, February 2024 (in partnership with LifeStraw).*



*Distribution of the Water-Survival boxes in Alla N'Mzagheni village, June 2024 (Rotary International and Water Survival Box Limited).*



*Distribution of Ramadan food packages, March 2024 (in partnership with Wilderness Travel).*

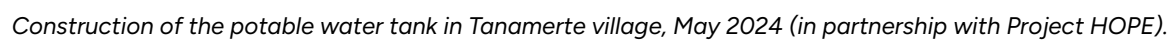
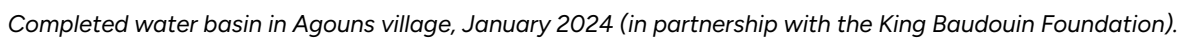
### Water Infrastructure

Damage to water infrastructure for drinking and irrigation, combined with low rainfall resulted in a shortage of water and deterioration of water quality. The need to rehabilitate damaged infrastructure to support individual health and well-being, the reestablishment of agricultural practices, and ultimately, the livelihoods of the communities was identified as the top priority by the community. The Water Infrastructure Rehabilitation Program is facilitating the rehabilitation of existing water infrastructure, as well as the construction of new water infrastructure, in 21 villages across the Al Haouz and Ouarzazate provinces. This includes **12 irrigation basins, 9 potable water tanks, 37.5km of irrigation canals, 54.3km of potable water pipes, 124 solar panels to power 5 wells.**

### Agricultural Terraces

Agricultural terracing has been practiced for generations, allowing the steep landscapes of the High Atlas Mountains of Morocco to be used to cultivate a variety of crops. Terrace cultivation limits the elimination of nutrients from fertile soil by rainwater, which results in a good, healthy harvest and higher production. It also helps reduce water loss and soil erosion. The earthquake damaged existing terraces, impacting agricultural productivity. When agricultural production decreases significantly or totally, food insecurity, rural poverty, urban migration, and land degradation increase, threatening the livelihoods of farming families. HAF has facilitated the **rehabilitation of 307 terraces, or some 17 hectares of land.** This will support future tree planting initiatives.







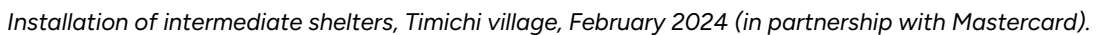


*Construction of agricultural terraces, Agouns village, July 2024 (in partnership with JDC).*

### Temporary Housing

The architecture and traditional construction of buildings within the villages of the High Atlas Mountains made them particularly susceptible to the strength of the earthquake. The earthquake caused significant damage to homes, forcing families to seek shelter in tents and makeshift structures, some made only of timber and plastic sheeting. Whilst providing temporary relief, these shelters are susceptible in challenging weather conditions, being insufficiently insulated and lacking durability. They also pose increased health and safety risks due to poor air quality and fire hazard. The Intermediate Housing Program has facilitated the installation of **183 temporary homes**.





Central to the relief efforts is the Psychosocial Empowerment Program, which delivers group-based workshops. As an adaptation of the IMAGINE workshops, the psychosocial empowerment workshops aim to provide space for processing the profound trauma caused by the earthquake and developing tools for mental, spiritual, and emotional recovery. The workshop covers key themes such as personal growth, emotional intelligence, relationship dynamics, financial literacy, sexual health, and spiritual enlightenment. HAF has successfully conducted **219 Empowerment workshops across 26 provinces, totaling 7,008 hours, reaching 5,545 women, 203 men, and 1,849 children, or 7,597 individuals in total.** These workshops have played a vital role in empowering communities and fostering personal growth and resilience across the region.



*Psychosocial and empowerment workshop with women, Adouz village, July 2024 (in partnership with Muslim Aid UK).*

### Dental Caravan

From December 23 to 29, 2024, HAF, in partnership with the Syrian American Medical Society (SAMS), HAF organized a dental caravan in the village of Tadart in the municipality of Moulay Ibrahim of the Al Haouz province. The caravan included both Moroccan and international dentists, and benefited some **720 children**. Educational workshops on proper teeth-cleaning techniques and the importance of regular check-ups aimed to raise awareness of good dental hygiene practices. The children were provided with toothbrushes and toothpaste. Physical examinations assessed the condition of the children's teeth and determined the necessary treatments. This comprehensive approach—blending education with treatment—ensured that the children left not only with healthier smiles but also with the knowledge and tools to maintain their dental health in the future.





*Dental hygiene workshop, Tadart village, December 2024 (in partnership with SAMS).*

### III- Impact

Beneficiaries have expressed gratitude to HAF and its partners, highlighting the significance of the relief and rebuilding activities in improving their quality of life and the future of their communities.

*"When the earthquake occurred, we were in our homes, and then we felt the ground moving. We did not realize what was happening. We left our homes towards safety, which was not clear in the black of the night. We all sat under the gaze of the sky and the stars. We did not have any cover. We sat in this situation until the early morning, and when everyone moved to look for something to eat and drink, we did not find anything, the situation was miserable. Until relief came..." - Fdila, Widrarane village, February 2024.*

#### Improved health and well-being

Food items were essential in meeting the nutritional requirements of the communities. Disasters disrupt existing food supply chains and operations, making it difficult for communities to source food, risking hunger and malnutrition. This was particularly critical for young children and babies, who received formula products. Distribution of food items allowed communities to focus on their recovery and rebuilding their lives rather than worrying about where they will get their next meal. The dental caravan focused on dental hygiene, which contributes to overall health and well-being of the children.

#### Improved comfort, safety and security

The distribution of non-food items such as mattresses, pillows and blankets provided people with much needed warmth and comfort, critical to alleviating immediate physical suffering. The significant damage

to homes meant families were forced to sleep outside under trees or makeshift shelters of timber and plastic sheeting. Temporary tents provided necessary shelter, a sense of safety and security. Beyond the physical benefits the tents provided some resemblance of a home, offering privacy and a safe space for families to congregate, grieve, and recover as a unit. The temporary housing further increased comfort, privacy and safety.

*"After we received the shelters we felt safe and happy... we finally have a place that protects us from the harsh winter. Now we know how it feels to live in a house again. It's not like the one we had before the earthquake but at least we are able to lock our door and have a place that we can call home..." - Mohammed, Tanamerte village, March 2024.*

### **Access to potable water**

Following the earthquake, communities who largely relied on local spring water for drinking, came to understand that this water may no longer be safe. Water borne illnesses are the leading cause of disease, and water infrastructure exponentially decreases infant and child mortality rates, general illness, infection rates, and other critical metrics for public health. The distribution of bottled water, quickly followed by the distribution of water filters and repairs to water infrastructure, addressed the need for clean drinking water. The rehabilitation of potable water systems, including water tanks, benefits the entirety of each village's population. It ensures the ongoing availability of clean water for drinking, sanitation and hygiene, including the cultural practice of bathing in local hammams.

### **Increased agricultural productivity, food security, and economic development**

The rehabilitation of water infrastructure is considered critical for the reestablishment of prosperous agricultural activities, including agroforestry and livestock grazing. These activities underpin the social and economic well-being of affected communities. The construction of water basins and the rehabilitation of irrigation canals, known as Sequia, is critical for the reestablishment and growth of prosperous agricultural activities. Irrigating agricultural terraces via these canals is a longstanding practice. Communities aspire to use this infrastructure to plant more trees, to become more economically productive, not just self-sustaining, and to build resilience to a changing climate.

*"... The earthquake had destroyed our irrigation system, and without water, our crops were failing. We were struggling to feed our families and were forced to rely on expensive food aid. But now, thanks to the new irrigation canals, we can finally grow our crops again. This has not only improved our food security but has also given us a source of income..." - Hassan, Aguerd N'ourtane village, March 2024.*

### **Community solidarity and resilience**

The involvement of community members in aid distribution and construction has stimulated a sense of ownership and solidarity, which is crucial for the long-term recovery of these villages. By working together to distribute aid, communities have strengthened their bonds, laying a foundation for collective action in the face of future challenges. Earning daily remuneration for labor has provided another source of income to affected communities.



## IV- Challenges and Lessons Learned

### Allocation of resources

In the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, many individuals and organizations were quick to provide emergency aid, including food. This, however, soon resulted in duplication and oversupply of items in certain areas. At other times community members were critical of the prioritization and allocation of resources in one area over another. The importance of existing relationships between HAF and community members proved critical. Ensuring a participatory approach, HAF liaised with community leaders to distribute aid and understand the barriers to recovery. This contributed to the timely and equal distribution of aid, ensuring those benefiting were deserving recipients, avoiding aid theft and misappropriation by individuals from outside affected communities. It also helped to identify critical redevelopment projects, including the repair of irrigation systems.

### Access constraints

Access to the remote mountain villages became more challenging due to the significant damage caused to roadways during the earthquake. This, combined with varying degrees of road surfacing and the mountainous terrain, makes access to the villages by truck or car the most significant challenge. To address access challenges, materials and supplies were often distributed from a central location, and transported to the villages using smaller vehicles, mules, donkeys, or manpower.

### The importance of community-led development

A key objective of the program is to support community-led development. Empowering communities to take ownership of the program through a participatory approach - involving community members in the planning, construction and monitoring of program activities - helped to ensure the program aligned with local needs, and fostered a sense of ownership. This is considered critical in the long-term sustainability of these projects. Further, the success of the program can be attributed in part to the strong leadership, and respect given to local community leaders. Local leaders were critical in navigating the complexities of the program activities. This included providing a single point of contact, and helping to prioritize projects and the allocation of resources (either funding, materials and/or labor).

## V- Moving Forward

Whilst communities continue to grieve the loss of lives and livelihoods, there is a shared focus on rebuilding. From the overwhelming loss, has come opportunities to build back better.

Moving forward, HAF is seeking additional funding to expand the program. Communities have identified the urgent need for water systems, to increase agricultural production, and for education and training to mitigate food insecurity, water scarcity, gender inequality, and illiteracy. In addition to the provision of water infrastructure, HAF seeks to provide subsidized revenue-generating fruit trees, and delivery workshops on the impacts of climate resilience and resource management, including water. The intent is to raise awareness of the value of investing in sustainable agriculture, and meet the communities

With continued support from partners, HAF aims to reframe the earthquake, despite its destruction, as a positive driver for change and betterment within these communities. Working with communities to build resilient, self-sustaining communities that are better equipped to face future challenges. Together, we are making a significant difference, fostering hope and recovery in the High Atlas Mountains.

Additional photos of the relief and rebuilding effort can be found at <https://flic.kr/s/aHBqjBbqWC>.

**Note:** please note the photos and quotations in this report have been shared for information purposes only. They represent activities funded by HAF partners (as noted) and cannot be used in third party communications material.