

Title of project: Tackling Rural Poverty and Climate Change through Muslim-Jewish Partnership  
Country of project implementation: Morocco  
Sponsoring College: IH-London  
Designated Project Leader: Tasnim Elboute (Morocco, SOAS University of London)

### **Summary of project goals**

The goal of this Davis project was to support rural Mountain communities' economic development by planting high-value trees. This project funded the planting and exchange of trees for a High Atlas community cooperative Tarwan n Tmazirt and equipment for a solar-powered well pump to ensure sustainable and long-term irrigation capacity. Through this tree planting initiative, the project addresses social, environmental, and economic concerns in an environmentally sound way and will support existing livelihoods with plants that offer higher market value and contribute to local biodiversity.

### **Did other fund-raising efforts contribute to your project? What were they?**

Because I chose to embed the project within a newly formed and community-run cooperative, there was already a certain amount of funding raised to contribute to purchase of trees and other high-value plants to start the nursery. The equipment installation for a solar-powered irrigation equipment was a central contribution of the project. During a vision workshop, cooperative members and I determined it would lay the groundwork for all future planting seasons and would make the greatest difference for the future of the cooperative.

### **How did you come up with the idea for your project?**

I was really interested in contributing to efforts around environment and community development in the High Atlas region. After working in a mountain region and understanding the effects of out-migration, lack of economic opportunity, lack of resources for small-scale producers and marginalization of rural areas, I was really interested in supporting community access to high-value plants that are in demand marketwise and can be integrated into existing local livelihood activities. Getting to work with cooperative Tarwan n Tmazirt was a great experience, laying the foundation for economic activity that directly contributes to village communities.

### **Why do you think the issue your project is responding to exists?**

The issues this project responds to are numerous – a major issue around lack of economic opportunity in rural areas can be explained by the amount of out-migration to urban areas and abroad, devalorization of traditional livelihoods, marginalization of rural communities' resources in education, among other factors. What I found most beautiful about supporting a community cooperative was their vision for local economic development and the tree nursery's ability to contribute to a multitude of social and environmental issues, including impacts of climate change and economic development as explained.

### **Why did you choose your host site to work in?**

The host site was the land managed by cooperative Tarwan n Tmazirt. It has ideal water access and sun exposure can be well managed by cooperative members.

### **What was it like to work in your host site?**

There weren't any issues caused by the site location. I was familiar with the region from past fieldwork.

### **Did you feel at any point that the project was not going to work? In what ways?**

I never felt that the project was not going to work. I was worried about completing the project by the end of summer due to various timing issues and challenges related to the pandemic. By the time I was able to access project funds in Morocco, it was really close to Eid-al-Adha. Many community members I worked with through the cooperative depend on sale of livestock during this period so their preparation for the holiday is significant for their livelihoods. And after Eid-al-Adha is when many people living in cities return to their communities in rural regions to celebrate the holiday for weeks at a time. Getting the equipment installation done before the holiday was super important. Another timing issue faced immediately after Eid

was the election season. There was active campaigning and it made it a little more difficult to gather for planting.

**What were the challenges you encountered in communicating with people?**

Working with a community embedded project really helped with communication because the motivation of the cooperative was understood. I also had the support of cooperative members to explain the Davis project and my interest in working with them.

**How do you define peace?**

I define peace as a lack of strain and burden, a freedom to pursue opportunity, a calm, ability to vision a future.

**How does or will your project contribute to peace? Short-term? Long-term?**

Planting trees and installing irrigation equipment for a community-based cooperative contributes directly to rural livelihoods in an environmentally sound way. Rural livelihoods based on agriculture and wild plants are threatened by many factors including impacts of climate change, disproportionate rates of poverty, and persistent out-migration. A rural economic project that is managed in a horizontal manner consistent with cultural principles can address all of these issues. My project has short-term and long-term impacts – in the short term, it was able to get a cooperative nursery started with the water infrastructure it needs to endure. Embedding this planting project within an ongoing initiative allows the impacts of the project to be felt long term since the nursery will continue to grow and develop through the cooperative.

**Please describe changes created by the project during the summer?**

The most direct change is access to solar powered water pumping for the nursery – contributing funding towards this equipment was really impactful since its cost was out of reach for a newly established organization. In the coming weeks, the cooperative will continue the installation of hoop houses to safeguard all plants.

**Please describe anticipated changes that will continue in the future as a result of the project.**

I was really inspired by the motivation and degree of community investment by cooperative Tarwan n Tmazirt. I think getting a major project established this summer did a lot for the continued motivation of cooperative members. While the cooperative had pooled some funds together, equipment to make their nursery viable was out of reach financially. Being able to contribute to that project ensures long-term capacity for future planting seasons and reinvigorated cooperative and community members hopefulness about what the cooperative can do for the community economically and environmentally.

**Has your project changed the way you think about the world? How has it changed you?**

The project pushed me to further confront the realities of rural life and the lived impacts of climate change. Regardless of the will and motivation of a community, it is difficult to make a better rural future a reality without resources. I hope that the cooperative's future success can support similar community initiatives as is envisioned by current members. It was particularly impactful to listen to community members' past and ongoing experience of the pandemic and its social and economic toll.

**Was your project impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic?**

Yes, my project was definitely impacted by the pandemic. The delta variant really impacted the High Atlas and specifically Ouirgane province where the project was based. It was already planned for all group meetings and activities to be done outdoors. I always had a pack of masks and sanitizer with me for any meeting or activity. However, the impact of the delta variant was brutal in the region. Government restrictions on gatherings also became stricter. The project persisted with planting sessions of 2-4 people maximum. Above all, I had to respect the pandemic conditions and did the best I could with cooperative leaders to complete the second phase of the project.

In terms of future advice for grantees dealing with the pandemic, it would be great to have a remote implementation plan alongside the ideal in-person proposal if possible. It really depends on each project proposal but being able to do activities in spaces where participants can be socially distanced and

providing necessary PPE is a must.

**Personal statement – Tasnim Elboute (Project Leader)**

I am grateful to the Davis Peace Prize for the opportunity to do this project and I am especially grateful to have done it in collaboration with a cooperative dedicated to the economic development of their community. The challenges around COVID highlighted further the importance of investing in rural livelihoods, through projects that incorporate a response to climate change, economic inequality, and the cooperative model which inherently breaks with typical employment relations.

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Section II: Photographs

