

World Environment Day - June 5th

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World Environment Day is held annually on June 5th under UN auspices to highlight a particular area of environmental concern. The focus this year is on the unique challenges facing the world's small islands in their battle with rising ocean levels – a far cry, it might seem, from the work of the High Atlas Foundation in Morocco.

However, two vital messages can be gleaned from our involvement in sustainable development: firstly that diverse systems – ecological and social – are interconnected and ultimately interdependent and secondly, that knowledge applied in one type of environment can - and should - be translated into other situations.

Climate change is a systemic environmental and social issue and no one measure will reverse its terribly alarming course. As in all environmental and developmental initiatives, sustainably addressing climate change requires both self-determined local actions and national and international commitments and policies that enable individuals and groups from all sectors of society to act in a way consistent with both their interests and that of the world.

Not to promote the High Atlas Foundation as possessing a model approach – although we believe it to, based on results – we are dedicated day in and day out to realizing the environmental and developmental goals of local Moroccan communities, as well as those of nations where we are invited.

Additionally we are committed to building partnerships at national and international levels in order to create the necessary awareness of policies so that local communities can both reap the benefits and undertake stewardship of their surrounding environment, which they are wholeheartedly in a position to do.

Morocco is blessed with ocean and sea and with mountain ranges that are admired the world over. Nonetheless, in far too many places its mountains are crumbling, often causing villages to be abandoned and forcing families to relocate. The Kingdom's mountainous regions are also where the greatest, most concentrated poverty is located.

Therefore it is a national imperative, on a human and environmental preservation level, that these regions are transformed into breadbaskets of prosperity, which can only be done by fortifying them environmentally for many generations to come. Practically speaking, the inescapable tasks are to terrace, terrace, terrace, mountains and hillsides and plant, plant, plant upon them. To generate prosperity it is necessary to establish cooperatives, plant nurseries, secure organic certification, process train and commercialize.

Even without climate change and what it means for ocean and sea levels – of which we are reminded on this globally important day – and even without the further pertinent issue of desertification which threatens the Moroccan environment - the call to secure the mountains against their steady decline is one that should resonate nationally because of the majesty of the people and the place, and because the mountains are the environmental fortress of the country.

For HAF this is a deep abiding calling – as it is, in broader terms, to benefit all regions of Morocco and to improve the conditions of all its inhabitants. In this spirit, we take our place in the wider scheme of things, knowing that our contribution makes a difference.

Dr. Yossef Ben-Meir is president of the High Atlas Foundation, a Moroccan-U.S. nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing sustainable human development with marginalized communities.