

Concept Note

Project Title: **Improving school access for children in isolated villages affected by the Morocco Earthquake**



- Intervention zone : Aghbar Commune, Al Haouz Province, Morocco
- Implementing period : January 2025 – May 2025

1. Background

The Aghbar commune in Al Haouz province, with a population of 3,447, is among the most underserved and vulnerable areas in Morocco. Located in the rugged terrain of the High Atlas Mountains, this rural community faces extreme challenges in accessing essential services. Roads are narrow, unpaved, and often dangerous, particularly following the devastating earthquake of September 2023. The earthquake destroyed homes, further isolated already remote villages, and worsened living conditions for the population, the majority of whom are subsistence farmers.

Access to education is one of the most critical challenges faced by the people of Aghbar. For children in this region, attending school often involves long and perilous walks on mountainous paths. This has led to alarmingly high dropout rates, particularly among girls, who are more vulnerable to safety concerns and the physical toll of these daily journeys. Despite the community's resilience, the lack of basic infrastructure, compounded by the earthquake's destruction, has deepened educational inequalities in the region.

In Morocco, the management of school transportation falls under the jurisdiction of provincial councils. These councils delegate operational responsibilities to local associations, providing vehicles and annual subsidies. However, the subsidies provided are often insufficient to cover the full operational costs, leaving many associations unable to meet the demands of their communities. In Aghbar, nine villages remain entirely inaccessible to current school transportation services due to the difficult terrain and unsuitability of existing vehicles. A primary needs assessment identified that six of these villages could be served if the local association were equipped with vehicles adapted for narrow and rugged mountain roads.

The current situation is a significant barrier to children's right to education, undermining efforts to reduce poverty and promote equitable development in this earthquake-affected area. Without urgent intervention, these challenges will persist, further marginalizing the already vulnerable population of Aghbar.

2. Caritas Maroc's current engagement in Aghbar commune

Through its emergency response project, Caritas Maroc has established a strong presence and deep roots in the Aghbar commune, working closely with the local population to improve

their living conditions. Following the devastating earthquake of 2023, Caritas Maroc has been actively involved in the reconstruction of homes, helping to rebuild the shattered shelter infrastructure. This effort has been crucial in providing families with safe, dignified living conditions amidst the destruction.

Additionally, Caritas Maroc has been working to improve access to water in the region, a critical issue given the commune's geographical isolation and the lack of adequate infrastructure. Caritas Maroc has supported the installation of wells and the distribution of water pipes, ensuring that local residents have a reliable source of water for their daily needs. These efforts have fostered strong bonds with the local community, as well as a deep understanding of the needs and challenges they face on a daily basis. This local knowledge and the established trust with community members position Caritas Maroc as a key partner in addressing the educational challenges faced by the children of Aghbar.

3. Project objective

To improve access to education for children in six remote villages¹ in the Aghbar commune by equipping the local association with suitable vehicles and supporting their operational needs.

4. Specific objectives:

- Provide two vehicles adapted for narrow and rugged mountain roads to the local association.
- Facilitate the operational capacity of the association through an annual subvention for fuel, driver fees, and maintenance costs.
- Advocate for the Al Haouz Provincial Council to assume long-term responsibility for operational costs, ensuring project sustainability.

5. Project partners :

The local association:

¹ To be defined

Association of Parents and Guardians of Students, was created by the parents of the children in the commune. This association plays a crucial role in the community, particularly in managing the transportation of children to and from school in the commune's villages. As is often the case in many rural areas of Morocco, where access to education is hindered by geographical challenges, the association has stepped in to ensure that children in remote villages can attend school. They organize and oversee the logistics of school transportation, ensuring that children, particularly from more isolated areas, can access education despite the difficult terrain and limited infrastructure.

The Provincial Council of Al Haouz :

The provincial council is responsible for local governance and development initiatives within the province. It oversees various sectors, including education, infrastructure, and community development, aiming to improve the quality of life for residents. In rural areas, such as those within Al Haouz, the council often delegates the responsibility of managing school transportation to local associations like this one. They provide the necessary vehicles and annual subsidies to cover the operational costs, allowing the associations to manage the transportation services for the children in rural areas.

6. Activities:

- I. **Vehicle Procurement:** Purchase two off-road vehicles capable of navigating the tight and treacherous mountain roads, ensuring they are suitable for the specific terrain of Aghbar.
- II. **Operational support:** Provide one annual subvention to the local association to cover essential operational costs, including fuel, driver salaries, and vehicle maintenance.
- III. **Stakeholder engagement:** Collaborate with the Al Haouz Provincial Council to advocate for the integration of this initiative into their school transportation program, ensuring they assume responsibility for operational costs in the future.
- IV. **Monitoring and evaluation:** Implement a robust monitoring system to track the project's impact on school attendance, dropout rates, and the association's capacity to manage transportation services effectively.

7. Justification

Education is a fundamental right and a critical driver of social and economic development. However, in Aghbar, geographic isolation and inadequate infrastructure have made access to education a daily struggle for children. The lack of reliable school transportation disproportionately affects girls, who are more likely to abandon their education due to safety concerns and the physical demands of long commutes.

The devastating earthquake of September 2023 has further exacerbated these challenges, making immediate intervention necessary. By providing adapted vehicles and supporting the operational needs of the local association, this project will address the urgent transportation gap, enabling children to access education safely and regularly. Furthermore, by engaging the Al Haouz Provincial Council, the project aims to ensure the sustainability of this intervention, aligning with the national strategy for rural development and education.

Picture: example of school transportation vehicles



In this project, we aim to provide an annual subsidy for the 2025/2026 school year to support the جمعية آباء وأولياء التلاميذ (Association of Parents and Guardians of Students), encouraging their continued efforts in managing school transportation for children in the commune's villages. This subsidy will help sustain the transportation service, ensuring that children in remote areas have access to education.

8. Expected Outcomes:

- Regular school transportation services for six remote villages, benefiting up to 40² children between the ages of 12 and 15 years old.
- Increased school attendance and reduced dropout rates, particularly among girls.
- Improved capacity of the local association to manage and sustain transportation services.
- Strengthened engagement with the Al Haouz Provincial Council, leading to long-term sustainability through provincial funding.

9. Estimated budget:

Item	Estimated cost per unit (Eur)	Unit quantity	Total estimated Cost (Eur)
Vehicle procurement	40.000,00	2 vehicles	80.000,00
Annual operational subvention (fuel, driver fees, maintenance)	4.000,00	2 vehicles	8.000,00
Total estimated budget			88.000,00

10. Sustainability plan:

The involvement of the Al Haouz provincial council is key to ensuring the long-term sustainability of this initiative. The goal is for the provincial council to support the transportation fees in the future. To facilitate this transition and ensure continued support, the plan is to transfer ownership of the two vehicles to the association, with the donation being coordinated through the local council. This arrangement will formalize the association's ownership and responsibility for managing the transportation service, while also ensuring the provincial council's continued involvement in supporting and sustaining the initiative in the coming years.

Additionally, the project includes capacity-building activities to ensure that the local association is equipped to manage the vehicles and maintain services effectively. The association will also explore supplementary funding opportunities, such as partnerships with local businesses or international donors, to bridge any gaps in funding.

² To be confirmed