

Empowering Women in Earthquake-Affected Communities

I. Executive Summary:

This concept note outlines a project aimed at empowering women who have been affected by recent earthquakes in Al Haouz, Azilal, Chichaoua, Marrakech, Ouarzazate, and Taroudant. The project seeks to address the unique challenges faced by women post-disaster and promote their socio-economic empowerment, resilience, and leadership in the recovery process.

Following the recent earthquake that struck our country, it has become clear that women, who are frequently disproportionately affected by such disasters, require specific support and empowerment to reconstruct their lives and communities. This proposal provides a comprehensive program for women's Empowerment Workshops meant to uplift and empower women in the five earthquake-affected provinces. This effort aims to encourage resilience, restore dignity, and promote long-term recovery among women in these afflicted communities through education, skills development, and community involvement.

The Empowerment Workshop focuses specifically on addressing the trauma caused by earthquakes; a unique and devastating event that can profoundly impact individuals and communities. This trauma is deeply intertwined with one's sense of identity, the things they once considered certainties in life, and the disruption of their daily routines that can no longer be taken for granted. Earthquake experiences often give rise to a profound uncertainty about the future, stemming not only from physical and emotional losses but also from a profound loss of control over one's environment.

The Empowerment Workshop recognizes and acknowledges these core beliefs and the challenges they present. It aims to empower participants by fostering resilience and providing them with a sense of hope as they navigate their lives moving forward. Through various therapeutic and supportive techniques, the workshops will help individuals rebuild their sense of self and their confidence in their ability to shape their future despite the adversity they've faced.

Moreover, the workshop provides a unique opportunity for bonding and community building. Participants share the common experience of surviving an earthquake, which can create strong connections and a sense of solidarity among them. This sense of community can be a powerful source of support as individuals continue their journey toward healing and recovery. In essence, the Empowerment Workshop not only helps individuals heal but also strengthens the fabric of the community in the recovery period.

II. Background:

On September 8, 2023, a devastating magnitude 6.8 earthquake hit Morocco just after 11 p.m. local time. The earthquake's depth was 11.5 miles, and the epicenter was 44 miles southwest of Marrakesh in the High Atlas Mountains, Al Haouz province. This powerful seismic event sent shockwaves throughout the region, causing significant damage to critical infrastructures and homes, leaving communities in the affected areas struggling with the aftermath of this natural disaster.

The earthquake left more than 2,946 people dead and 5,674 injured, most of them in the provinces of Al Haouz, Taroudant, and Chichaoua. Many buildings and historical monuments were also damaged in Marrakesh, Taroudant, Agadir, and Ouarzazate. The earthquake was felt by residents of dozens of Moroccan cities including Agadir, Casablanca, Rabat, Mohammedia, and their surrounding areas.

III. Objectives:

The purpose of the Empowerment Workshops is to focus on the particular trauma caused by the earthquake. Such trauma is linked to identity, the certainties of life, and the fears surrounding the disruption of one's daily routine. Experiencing an earthquake often brings up feelings of uncertainty about the future, not only due to physical and emotional loss but also because it causes people to feel a loss of control.

The Empowerment workshop addresses these feelings and fosters resilience and hope among participants as they begin moving forward. The workshops also allow for community building as the women bond over their shared experiences.

The Empowerment Workshops will specifically address:

- Psychoeducation on stress and stress responses
- Exploration and validation of common and individual experiences
- Establishment of support systems (SADEEQA) and exploring vulnerability
- Acknowledgement and thoughtful identification of emotions
- A focus on dealing with grief and coping strategies
- Development of skills for emotional regulation
- Resilience and community bonds
- Future planning and supporting rebuilding

Below are the objectives of the workshop:

- To provide psychological education and a path to emotional healing.
- To create a network of women who can continue to provide emotional and practical support to one another beyond the workshop.
- To strengthen the capacity of women in disaster risk reduction and management.
- To promote women's leadership and participation in community decision-making processes.

IV. Sample of Workshop Activities:

Activity 1: Group Storytelling Circle for Healing

Goal: This activity will create a safe space to allow participants to sit together and openly share their experiences during & after the earthquake. This sharing promotes empathy between the participants as they share their own trauma and feelings with their group and process them as they respond to others as well.

The facilitators introduce the exercise by explaining the value of storytelling and expressing oneself to heal from traumatic experiences. They also encourage the participants to actively listen to others' experiences and respond empathetically.

Participants are divided into smaller groups to facilitate a more comfortable environment for discussion.

Each participant can share a personal experience related to the recent earthquake and the situation after (i.e. what was their experience like and how it has affected their life). Individuals are gently encouraged to reflect inwards and identify how this experience evoked trauma or fear.

Group members may offer support and often offer words of comfort and advice demonstrating to participants that they are not alone and that they have a support system that they can rely on and share their experiences with.

The facilitators can also share some coping mechanisms, such as the ones listed here: <https://www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/mental-wellbeing/fears-and-phobias/10-ways-to-fight-your-fears>

Activity 2: Guided Meditation & Breathwork for Dealing with Difficult Emotions

Goal: This activity helps the participants manage their fear and trauma through mindfulness which can promote calmness and reduce anxiety.

The facilitators introduce the concept of mindfulness and its benefits for reducing anxiety and fear. The participants are encouraged to focus on their feelings and thoughts during the meditation.

The participants are initially led through a short guided breathwork session to encourage calm and in preparation for a short meditation. Box breathing technique is demonstrated as a tool for participants to use in daily life.

Activity 3: Exercise to Face Fear, Embrace Courage and Visualize a Path Forward

Goal: This activity helps participants acknowledge their fear and use a visualization methodology to create a positive affirmation for the future.

The facilitators invite participants to reflect on fears they currently have. Individuals are asked to visualize those fears and describe them in writing or drawing. They are encouraged to reflect on how the fear has impacted their lives and what other emotions the fear creates.

The participants are asked to imagine an ideal circumstance without fear. Again, they are coached to record words or images that capture that vision. These are then used as a guide to create a personal affirmation for the participant.

Finally, facilitators lead the group through identifying any resistance the participants may hold within towards believing their newly crafted affirmations. Participants are helped to navigate through those challenging thoughts to a final, clear affirmation that participants can take forward in their daily life.

V. Conclusion:

This concept note represents a compassionate and thoughtful response to the urgent needs of earthquake-affected women in Morocco. By offering a holistic program that addresses emotional, psychological, and spiritual well-being, it strives to empower women, promote resilience, and contribute to the long-term recovery of these communities. The success of this project will not only be measured in terms of individual healing but also in the strengthened bonds and sense of community that will endure long after the workshops have concluded.