

# Jamila Bargach: Harvesting Water in Morocco

**RAMA CHAKAKI:** I never could have imagined a world in which water could be harvested from desert fog. And then I spoke to Jamila Bargach, co-founder and executive director of Dar Si Hmad, an organization in Morocco that operates the largest fog collection project in the world to help local communities relieve water shortages.

## MUSIC

**JAMILA BARGACH:** My husband and friends coming through our house in Casablanca for years talk about fog. It was an interesting topic. However, it really never touched a chord in me until I saw it.

## MUSIC

**JAMILA BARGACH:** Once I saw the fog rolling in from far from the shores of the Atlantic ocean and rolling into the mountains. It was just simply an amazing, almost a religious moment, of seeing a connection with nature. And that changed the course of my professional life. I became very much interested in fog, and then little by little, with my partner, we started building the organization of Dar Si Hmad.

**RAMA CHAKAKI:** Dar Si Hmad's fog collection project helps families in arid areas access a reliable source of water. In this episode, we'll hear about how the project has grown and fostered close partnerships with the surrounding communities.

I'm Rama Chakaki, and you're listening to Innovate with Purpose, the official podcast of Expo Live, a programme by Expo 2020 Dubai.

### **[INTRO STING]**

**RAMA CHAKAKI:** The communities that Dar Si Hmad services are located in southwest Morocco, in a rural county at the end of the Anti-Atlas mountains.

To date, the organization serves sixteen villages reaching over 150 households, plus all the schools within the region.

**JAMILA BARGACH:** Our major work is towards the beneficiaries of the mountains who drink the fog water. So that's one aspect of the work, providing water to communities who suffered from drought and non-access to water.

And then besides this, we run many educational projects in which there is environment as the core. So we work with university, high schools and even primary education students in the region where we service people with water. So for us, there is a continuum between water and education.

**RAMA CHAKAKI:** I imagine that can be quite a balancing act at time. How how do you split your time between the community work and the educational aspect?

**JAMILA BARGACH:** I do have a lot of administrative and fiduciary responsibilities that I have to work with. But I also, as an anthropologist and the reason why I joined the organization was the ability to be in the field.

I do work in the field. I go to the mountain, I go to the other projects. We go see partners. We meet with beneficiaries, myself and the staff members, of course. And then there is all the writing, the communication. So there's not really one typical day. Other than to say that I have, I wear all these hats and I have to distribute them through my week.

**RAMA CHAKAKI:** It's that kind of dedication that has helped Dar Si Hmad reach what it has set out to achieve.

**JAMILA BARGACH:** In one word, I will say that the impact in the countryside where we work has been absolutely radical.

**JAMILA BARGACH:** Radical in terms of not having any anxiety, as far as water availability and accessibility is concerned, especially for the women who used to walk to the wells. There is enough water for the livestock to drink, especially when there is a lot of heat and the animals can not go out to eat and graze if they haven't drunk, and all the little kids, the boys and girls are going to school, at least prior to the COVID, with the COVID of course everything has changed.

And then, there is an improvement in terms of health and hygiene and as the beneficiaries say themselves, there is a sense in which there is an improvement, an impact in the quality of life, one and also in the recognition of the plight of people who do not have access to water today.

## MUSIC

**RAMA:** With a project of this size, there are always hurdles to overcome. What were some of the obstacles you had to navigate as you built your project from the ground up?

**JAMILA BARGACH:** There were of course challenges in setting up the organization and there are two types of challenges.

There are some challenges that are proper to setting up an organization in the country, you know, in terms of the bylaws and the legal aspects of the work. So that was a little bit frustrating in the beginning.

And then second one, which has to do with, I think it's internal and it has to do with having people come work for the organization that absolutely share the same commitment, what I call the same fire that as a co-founder one, one has, because you are as a person, when you commit yourself to this world of NGOs and civil society, you're doing this because you believe in a mission and you believe in a vision

But, we just had our 10th anniversary. We did have a sort of introspection and a retrospective and we feel that we have really gone a long way. We still have quite some ways to go. But those challenges in some ways were also opportunities in that they made us grow

**RAMA CHAKAKI:** We've heard from other guests that growing as a start up comes with fundraising difficulties. And in Dar Si Hmad's case, fundraising came with its own set of risks, especially when the concept was foreign to many.

**JAMILA BARGACH:** Financing a project that will extract water from fog seemed as though it was impossible. So in that sense, writing grant proposals and working on convincing arguments was extremely difficult.

I'm extremely thankful to the Expo Live team. The funds we have received from them have been absolutely instrumental in expanding the fog collection projects and in connecting actually another layer of fog, which is doing permaculture and agroecology. Because it is one thing for people to drink the water and stay in their villages, but it is yet another thing to have these people actually have a valid source of livelihood.

And so we have managed with the fund to actually combine both fog and agriculture. And this has been an amazing addition to the projects of Dar Si Hmad.

## MUSIC

**RAMA CHAKAKI:** The work you've committed yourself to is noble to say the least. But it's also hard work. What is it that keeps you going?

**JAMILA BARGACH:** The work that I'm doing is anchored in my heart. I am so passionate about fog. I am so much enamoured with the phenomenon that I want people to take away this idea that once a work is steeped in a sense of attachment and respect for our environment, then it can only give back many folds in return.

I mean, every day I wake up and I think about fog and every day I wake up and I have to write a report and I have to send a funding request and so on and so forth. And despite sometimes the difficulty, the tiredness, the druggedness, the nature of

the work, I never give up because I always have the eye on the prize and this prize is not necessarily for me, but for us as a community.

**RAMA CHAKAKI:** Thank you Jamila for sharing your story with us. It's wonderful to hear how far you've come - best of luck to you.

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