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By Caleb Tisdale*

Attracting young people to radical, extremist ideas is not hard. Just ask the ISIS recruiters behind one of the most effective propaganda presences in the world. Extremist groups are so effective at recruitment because the target audience is easily identified and appealed to: those who are at the margins of society. Radical ideologies offer an alternative to social and economic conditions – high unemployment, lack of purpose, social

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risk that these young men feel detained, delinquent, and sequestered away from society. They can be left idle, isolated, and frustrated.

Without opportunities to find relevance in society, reintegration into society is not an easy task. A [High Atlas Foundation](#) assessment found that a recurring theme among Moroccan youth is an unfulfilled need to define themselves. They are seeking a purpose in life. Lack of education, employment, and therefore social value are some of the main drivers towards subscribing to radical ideologies. Instead of taking the path leading to becoming productive members of society, youth may find a home within extremist groups.

Cultural and social displacement within Morocco pose a threat to both national and international security. Morocco's High Commission of Planning reported that the youth unemployment rate in Morocco is 39 percent, when adjusted with the disguised unemployment rate that impacts over one million young adults.

This is consistent with the Middle East and North Africa region where youth account for 51 percent of all unemployed, according to the [UNDP Arab Human Development Report](#). Further, one out of four unemployed Moroccans has a high level college degree. [Brookings](#) published a report in 2017 with evidence supporting that those with unmet expectations for economic and social improvement are at a higher propensity to radicalization. Morocco is also seeing a continued shift towards urbanization, which has in turn created a strain on job creation.

All these factors contribute to a cultural displacement for unemployed youth who are increasingly vulnerable to radical ideologies. Youth with unproductive time miss out on opportunities to develop skills that will allow them to successfully reintegrate with society. These extremist groups seek to offer a sense of purpose and belonging that is otherwise lacking among disenfranchised youth.

There is a clear solution: human development.

The High Atlas Foundation believes that human development is a means to alleviate the stress of these alienations. The purpose of the [Oummat Salaam Initiative](#) is to enable youth inmates and unemployed youth to receive skills-building, mentorship, and integration exercises necessary to become effective volunteers and promote development within their communities.

The goal of detainment, especially with youth, should not be to punish. It should prepare them for reintegration with society by teaching important and employable skills. This can come in the form of education opportunities, such as classes, metalworking and painting workshops, and organic agricultural training.

One focus of the Oummat Salaam Initiative is to provide chances to develop agricultural skills to such youth. Young men will gain knowledge and skills associated with: "organic agriculture, securing organic certifications, installing water efficiency systems, monitoring and documenting carbon offsets, organic processing of certified product, association and cooperative creation and management, and facilitating participatory planning" (HAF). The purpose of this project is to create opportunities and provide young men with skills that will allow them to reintegrate as productive members of society.

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I had the opportunity to meet many of the boys who already benefit from this project. When asked about their futures, they shared dreams of travelling and starting businesses. As we walked and talked, the boys happily showed off their metalworking projects, the shop that they had painted, and the trees they had planted. They made sure to point out all the grapes, pomegranates, and olives we passed.

We could tell they were proud of themselves. The nursery allows them to practically learn about the importance of agriculture. They learn how necessary trees are, watch them grow in the nursery, and pick the fruit themselves. By learning practically, the boys quickly become experts. They are encouraged because they know they are gaining valuable skill sets for their future.

A marginalized section of the population has an opportunity to become productive members of society. When given these types of experiences, these young men will create a path for themselves that will increase the likelihood of rehabilitation, reintegration, and contributions to communities. While these children may not have the brightest past, they have hopeful futures.

**Caleb Tisdale is a student at the University of Virginia studying Foreign Affairs and Public Policy. This summer, he is interning at the High Atlas Foundation in Morocco.*

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