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# Stichting Sahara Roots



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## Newsletter December 2015:

### Following up on our projects and discussing new challenges!

With suitcases full of pens, pencils and booklets as well as two large boxes filled with Groasis Waterboxx's, Ima Bakal and I - once again - left Holland for Morocco on the 17th of November. We believe that it is important to show our commitment to the local people, so we come to Morocco on a regular basis. This time we were also joined by Anouk Schaedtler, a Dutch artist, who's love for the desert environment became apparent during her journey to Oman. Happy to have someone along in charge of photography, we were looking forward to visiting old friends and meeting new, as well as dropping by different schools and areas where we had already been involved in planting and educational activities.

On arrival at Ouarzazate Airport (at midnight) we were happy to see the Custom Officers recognizing us and this time we did not have to open our boxes containing the waterboxx which is usually the case. After too short a sleep we were once again on our way, this time by car, as a meeting with the Governor of Zagora (5 hr drive) was planned for 11am to discuss a new project under the name: Joudour Sahara. Sahara Roots had been asked to participate in this project by Halim Sbai of Association Zaila and Taragalte Concpet ([www.taragalte.org](http://www.taragalte.org)), by Aziza Chaouni of Aziza Chaouni Projects (See: [www.azizachaouniprojects.com](http://www.azizachaouniprojects.com)), and by Stacie Fraeser of "Playing for Change" Foundation,(see: <http://playingforchange.org>).



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### **Joudour Sahara: an “eco” music school in M’hamid Al Ghizlane**

“Joudour Sahara” will focus on empowering youth with music and arts education programming in a safe and welcoming space. In addition to classroom instruction, the school will offer a visiting artist exchange, indoor and outdoor performance spaces for local and travelling acts, an on-site workshop for musical instrument creation and repair, and accommodations to tourists who are interested in supporting the school while on holiday. The project is music-centric but has a heavy environmental awareness and conservation component, because it is a learning institution, and creating awareness about the environment issues is also very important.

#### **Partners involved:**

**Local NGO Zaila:** has been pioneering environmental and cultural projects since 2005 and created the Taragalte Festival in 2009. Through music, art, workshops, exhibitions, and conferences the festival promotes and provides a platform for the sustainable development of the region.

**Aziza Chaouni Projects:** Aziza's Ghaouni's expertise in the integration of architecture, landscape and green technologies in arid climates. She will be responsible for the construction and layout of the school site and structures.

**Playing for Change Foundation:** mission is to create positive change through music and arts education. Their guiding principles are:

- using music to transform lives and communities;
- connecting people and communities (locally and globally);
- economic empowerment (use of local materials and labour, teachers, earned income through instrument creation, performances, administration of the school);
- local leadership.

**Sahara-Roots Foundation** will be responsible for planting trees on the premises of the school and helping to educate about the fragile desert environment”



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### **Arrival in bivouac *Le Petit Prince* and tree-counting**

In the past years, we have become aware how important it is to meet with the local officials regarding our goals and work in this area and we were pleased to see that the Governor liked the concept of this new “pilot project” in his region. After Aziza explained the project, we also realised that this would be a fantastic project for the community of M’Hamid and we want to be a part of it. There after we were on our way again for the last leg of the journey to M’hamid. The weather was beautiful and we arrived in Bivouac *Le Petit Prince* just before sunset.

It was great to see that our tree caretaker Abdurazak had been taking good care of the trees over the hot summer months. Of course we were very happy that he was once again working together with us on this project, knowing that we were 3 months without him! The trees suffered during his absence. His knowledge of the trees and plants, as well as that he has been working for 4 years with our Groasis Waterboxx’s, are very valuable to us. (See: [www.groasis.com](http://www.groasis.com))

The trees around *Le Petit Prince* looked so much better than in April. Even though we have less tamarisk surviving than 6 months before we were still impressed by the results:

#### **Trees in total per April 2015**

Tamarisk = 168

Palm trees = 37

Acacia = 4

Olive trees = 4

Groasis waterboxx’s now in use: 35

#### **Trees in total per November 2015**

Tamarisk = 150

Palm trees = 38

Acacia = 4

Olive trees = 2

Groasis waterboxx’s now in use: 50



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## Joudour Sahara Workshops, visiting schools and a “mini festival”

During the next 2 days we participated in workshops led by Aziza.

See: <https://www.daniels.utoronto.ca/news/2015-12-10/aziza-chaouni-volunteers-design-music-school-2000-children-and-youth-morocco>

We were joined by the Sbaï brothers of Zaila and Taragalte Concept, by Stacy Freasier and Francois Vigué of Playing for Change, and by Thomas Duncan, a Peace Corp youth development volunteer and our dear friend Marika Barthelemy. It was wonderful to join the discussions, to be able to give our views, having worked in this area for over 10 years now and to see the first architectural plans that had already been made.

Walking over the grounds where the school is to be built, made us all aware that building the school would be a real challenge, especially regarding to problem of desertification. But we are all confident that it can be done, especially with the knowledge and expertise of all the partners as well as the knowledge and help of the local people that have been living here for centuries.

As traditional music from this area is an important aspect of this new project, Halim had organized a “mini festival” each evening with various groups playing different styles of music. The young members of “Generation Taragalte” had been inspired by the fact that the internationally reknowned band from Mali “Tinariwen, had performed right here in M'haimd, during the 1<sup>st</sup> Taragalte Festival, organized by the two brothers: Halim and Ibrahim Sbaï in 2009.



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### Following up on projects:

We also found the time to visit two schools with whom we had planted trees in April 2015 during our Earth Day activities. At the M'hamid Central Primary School they were surprised to see us, because we never announced beforehand that we were coming. We had planted 10 Groasis Waterboxx's together with teachers and pupils and we were happy to see that 8 of the 10 were doing well even though some of these were covered with earth. The other two had been planted in the wrong spot, under large trees. Once again we explained how to re-plant the waterboxx's and made sure that they understood that the top of the waterboxx's should be kept clean so that the little water present in the form of dew, can pass through to the box' reservoir.

At the High School M'hamid Center the director, Mr. Fatahala, was very welcoming and proudly showed us their wonderful work! All the 10 waterboxx's were doing very well and many of the trees had really grown! Unfortunately the responsible teacher, Mohamed Chebaibi, had just left for the day, which is one of the drawbacks of arriving unannounced. I am sure that we will see him next time, because we will announce ourselves in advance!

During our stay in M'hamid we also called in at the girls dormitory. Our "Home Away From Home" project had been started 1 ½ years before and we were anxious to see how everything was going. What a wonderful surprise it was to see that the girls were happy and most of the trees in their eight waterboxx's had really grown. The bougainvillea was flowering. We really believe that having given the girls flowering trees and fruit trees, that they were so much more connected to the trees. They were also happy to show that they had received small palm trees to replace the trees that now had been in the waterboxx for a year. We made arrangements that our tree caretaker, Abdurazak would help them with this job!



### Tree planting with the participants of the Joudour Sahara Workshop

Sahara-Roots organised a workshop to explain the planting of trees in the Groasis Waterboxx. Aziza had been in Le Petit Prince 5 years before and at that time we were planting trees in the traditional way. A small percentage of those trees are still surviving today and it is because of this that we had searched for better ways to plant trees in the desert. Azzia was impressed with the improved results from the introduction of the waterboxx system.

After showing the tamarisk trees in different stages of development: from newly planted “grafts” or “sticks” up to trees 1 – 5 years old, everyone was amazed that they can survive in the desert sands. We first plant tamarisk as these help build a wall against the wandering sand dunes. We also showed the palm trees which take a lot longer in developing their green leaves. The acacia are now standing 4 meters high and had just finished flowering. Our 2 olive trees, now 1 year, are still going strong. We will keep these longer in the waterboxx.

It was a very spiritual moment when the participants planted ‘their stick’ in the sand together with Abdurazak. Thomas and Francois will be coming to this area on a regular basis for the new project so hopefully they will be able to keep a eye on our newly planted trees!



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### **Back to Ouarzazate:**

Once again it was time to leave and we had hoped to pay a visit to The Sidi Ahmed Benaceur high school in Zagora on our way back to Ouarzazate. Unfortunately this was not the case as we left too late. However, I am sure that teacher Adil Mounane will make sure that the trees that we planted in April would all be doing very well. We will definitely pass by next time, Adil!

We still had two more schools to visit in Ouarzazate before leaving Morocco so early in the morning we met with Mr. Mohamed Khattouch of the the Institut Technologie Hotellère et Touristique. On entering the school we could see the beautiful bougainvillea that we had planted in April 2015. They had done very well!! As we entered the terrain where we had planted 15 Groasis waterboxx's in April, we could now see students busy clearing the site. Most of the trees had survived the first 6 months and a decision had been made to make this area into a "park" area for the students. Needless to say, water is scarce in this region but with careful use of the waterboxx, the root systems of the newly planted trees can find their way to the aquifer and after 1 year will be strong enough to survive on their own. Mr Khattouch had now been working with the Groasis waterboxx's since April 2012, and the first trees planted at the school now stood 5 meters tall!!

Planting at the Al Khansaa Primary School had started in April 2013. And the teachers and children of this school had really worked hard in helping to portray the importance of environmental issues. Some of the trees planted in 2013 had already produced their first fruit and the teachers happily informed us that they had already eaten the first 5 sweet pomegranate apples! The herb garden was growing well and they supplied us with seeds for our own herbs in Holland! The school grounds looked CLEAN and GREEN!! Such a great example of a dedicated headmaster and his teacher!



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**Without you there would be no projects!!**

Throughout the hot Moroccan summers it is a very hard job to keep the newly planted trees alive. There are the numerous sandstorms and the heat to contend with, especially in or near the Sahara. We are so thankful that our tree caretaker; Abdurazak, was present to clear away the sand and to check on the waterboxx's around Bivouac Le Petit Prince and to give a little water if necessary. During the summer months there is very little precipitation. Not all trees survived but the ones that did are healthy and strong. We have now been working with the Groasis Waterboxx since 2011 in this area and all are happy with the results. Visitors cannot believe that we are creating a small oasis between the dunes.



Halim and Ibrahim, thank you for hosting us all during the workshops!  
Aziza, thank you so much for taking the lead in the Joudour Sahara project.  
Stacie and Francois, thank you for bringing PFC to M'hamid. Thomas, thanks for your sharing your enthusiasm and good plans to make this project concrete.  
Ilham, Marika and Anouk, so great travelling with you to the Sahara, thank you so much for joining me and supporting this 'good cause'!

It is a real gift to us that we can reach so many teachers, students and children with our projects and to inspire others to take care of this beautiful environment. We hope this "grass-roots" approach will continue to spread, providing a better life for all those living here. Shukran Jazilan to all the teachers, students and schoolchildren participating in our projects.



A very big thank you to all our supporters and sponsors whom have donated to the Sahara-Roots Foundation. Without you there would be no projects!!

**Wanda Hebly and Ilham Bakal, Hilversum, NL. 22nd December 2015**

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