



“BARAKA”! A BLESSING!

Rain comes to the Sahara and provides much needed water for farmers and our tree planting projects!!

The annual TARAGALTE Festival, in which we have participated now for 5 years in a row, had been postponed for 2014. However, we decided that in order to keep up the good contact that we have built up with the local people with whom we work on our projects, it would be best to travel to Morocco in November 2014. As so it was that a small SAHARA-ROOTS team set off for Ouarzazate on the 18th of November....

We had heard that rain had fallen in October and we were of course looking forward to see how this early rainfall had helped the survival rate of our different tree planting projects.

18th of November: preparing activities in Ouarzazate

Visit to Mr. Mohammed Khattouch, Professeur responsable des Ressources Humaines et de la formation des guides des espaces naturels, Ministere de Tourisme in Ouarzazate.

Around 16.00hrs we met with Mr. Khattouch with whom we had made arrangements to plant trees together with the guides graduating at the end of their 2 year program.

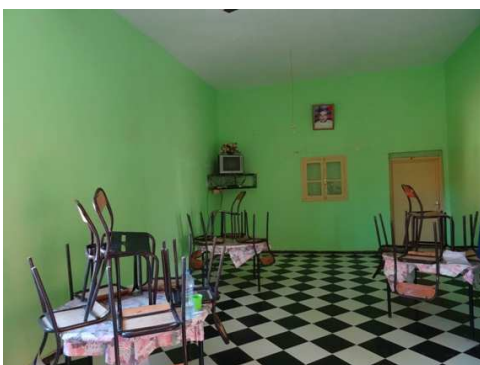


During this period they had been introduced to many different aspects of Moroccan nature such as the mountains, snow, deserts and the oasis environment in order to learn the many possibilities of “adventure tourism” that Morocco has to offer. First Aid is also now a compulsory part of their curriculum.

Sunday the 23rd November would be the official tree planting day and Mr. Khattouch had also organised that the National TV station 2M would be present to broadcast this new event. During the afternoon we made a visit to a nursery in Ouarzazate in order to buy trees. We had decided that for the tree planting activities with the girls in M’hamid, it would be a good idea to try planting different kinds of trees with a root system already growing. Up till now we had only been planting grafts.

19th of November: Painting starts at the “Home a way from Home” in M’hamid.

After travelling for five hours we arrived in M’hamid to find that the girls dormitory was closed due to a National holiday. Our foundation partner in Morocco Mr. Halim Sbaï assured us not to worry, things would be arranged, and it wasn’t long before the Caïd (regional government representative) came to sit with us to help arrange the activities for the girls dormitory. We arrived at the building to find that Mr. Abdurazak Filali, who is responsible for the dormitory, was there to welcome us and to show the work that had been done to help create a clean environment for the girls. And what a “bright” sight it was!! For this Sahara-Roots Foundation sponsored project, the girls had been allowed to chose the colours that they wanted which turned out to be lime green for their social area and violet purple for their bedroom. But what a difference a bit of paint can make!! It looked so much cleaner now and reparations had also been made to the doors. Arrangements where made to see the girls the next day.





20th of Nov: replanting the girls "Home away from Home" dormitory:

After a starry night in the desert, we went through the clothes that we had bought with us from The Netherlands. Many people had donated clothing for the girls and boys, but in order not to "spoil" them we decided to let each child pick out one item for themselves or a family member. (The girls had shyly asked for pyjama's during our visit in April 2014).

At 11 o'clock we arrived at the dormitory happy to see sixteen girls waiting for us! It was vacation so they had walked kilometres in order to be with us (!).

Together with Abdurazak (our tree-caretaker) and the girls, we checked the three Groasis Waterboxx's that we had planted with Tamarisk and Olive grafts in April 2014. Only the two Tamarisk showed signs of life. But..... around the Groasis waterboxx's the girls had planted the sunflower seeds that we had given them. These were now sprouting!!

Luckily we had new trees (which we bought earlier—see above) with us and the girls picked out bougainvillea, olive, oleander, peppertree (schinus molle), rosemary and pomegranate. Patiently we explained once more how the waterboxx works, which is so important in this desert environment. With the help of this great Dutch invention from Mr. Pieter Hoff we want to use as less water as possible in this fragile area of Morocco where it seldom rains.

Enthusiastically the girls cleared the area of debris, dug holes, placed three new waterboxx's and planted their trees. We agreed with them that if they take really good care of the trees, we would help to make their environment a "Botanical Garden" in which visitors to M'hamid can come and see how you can have flowers, trees and vegetables, growing in a desert environment, with the use of very little water by using the waterboxx!! We are now also looking for ways to build a very simple structure to enable dew collecting during the winter months.

A poster with photos of the girls themselves, taken during the last activities in April 2014, was the last surprise that we had in mind for them. We hope that they will hang it on their freshly painted walls as a reminder of the great work we are doing together to enable these girls to have a "Green and Clean home a way from Home". Drinks were then served in the freshly painted sitting room as we spoke with the girls, the Caïd, Halim and Mr. Filali, while choosing a clothing item. We explained that in April 2015 we hope to visit again and to see how the girls have worked. Thankful for all that has been accomplished so far we waved goodbye.





Replanting at the boys "Home a way from Home" dormitory

Back at the restaurant, Cherg Expeditions, where we had also planted trees, Abdurazak replanted the trees that had not survived and just as we were finishing, the director of the boys dormitory happened to pass by. The boys were all in their villages but we were invited to see how the trees were doing in the grounds of boys dormitory. It was a disappointing result. Six olive grafts had been planted but only one had survived. We could not understand what had happened as it was very clear that the caretaker had taken very good care of the rest of the plants and trees. We believe now that they thought that the waterboxx's didn't need any attention at all but of course this is not the case. They have to be checked once a month (especially in summer) to see if there is enough water. The sand has to be cleared away so that any moisture can be collected and make it's way to the water reservoir. If the small tubes are blocked, no water can enter the reservoir. So once more we proceeded to explain how to use and take care of this invention and we replanted the waterboxx's with trees. In return we received cotton tree seedlings!!

These seedlings were planted just outside Cherg Expeditions restaurant between the courgette plants and where Abdurazak will be able to take good care of them as well. Just as we were finishing, a miracle happened: it started to rain!! We quickly finished planting as the rain became heavier, wondering how it would be back in Bivouac Le Petit Prince where we were staying!! Our driver drove us safely through the now wet sand to the camp and upon arrival we saw that it was going to be difficult to stay here if we wanted a "dry" night. The Caïd had invited us for dinner in M'hamid so we decided to not take any chances and to head back to the village with our belongings and to stay overnight. It stormed all night!!

21st of November: so much rain --- a strange sight in the desert!

As we were not yet finished with our work regarding the tree project around the Bivouac le Petit Prince we drove through a now very wet desert back to the camp as it poured with rain. We first visited Sidi Khalil to see the 1st tree-planting area and were very surprised to see how **GREEN** it was. Usually I count the surviving trees but unfortunately this would not be possible. Sharif our driver, wanted us to make haste as he was not sure if we would be able to drive through the wet sand and muddy areas now forming in the desert. It was such a strange sight. We quickly took as many photos of the trees as we could before travelling to the bivouac.





Here many trees stood tall now without the protection of the Groasis Waterboxx and others were well on their way within the waterboxx. Also trees that we had planted during the Taragalte Festival in November last year, were now **GREEN** and growing well. It is good to see that Abdurazak is really taking good care of this beautiful project. Then it was time to say goodbye to our host Ibrahim Sbaï and our tree caretaker Abdurazak. Ibrahim was very much under the impression of how **GREEN** the trees were and so were we.

We were invited by Halims family for lunch in Zagora. As we chatted with cousins and nieces, one of the young ladies present mentioned that she had set up an after-school day-care for young children between the ages of 4 – 13 years, in M’hamid. Hayat explained that she does not have children of her own and is now divorced. She does not receive any support from the government and asks only a very small fee from the parents. We just happened to have our “Me and my Sahara” booklets so we donated 16 copies to this new enterprise. Next time we are in M’hamid we will visit this small school.

After the five-hour journey by car we finally reached Ouazazate again and found that the once dry riverbed of the Oued Ouarzazate was now a torrent of water rushing down to the Lake Al Mansour Addahbi. As we crossed the bridge to the city centre we noticed how dangerously high the water was. Once before I had experienced rain like this (2010) and was not able to travel due to broken bridges from the flooding. We were happy that we had decided to leave M’hamid a day earlier than originally planned and we safely reached the centre of Ouarzazate.

22 and 23 November: heavy rain and postponements.

All night it rained heavily. By morning Ouarzazate had become an island that no one could enter or leave by car as the bridges were closed. Houses near the riverbanks were damaged. Tourists were trapped in different areas such as Erfoud, Tinghir and Marrakech. We hoped that the new guides of *Ressources Humaines et de la formation des guides des espaces naturels*, were safe and had returned from their last bike adventure in the Draa Valley. We would be planting the next day at their school and we were really looking forward to the celebrations.





In this very dry environment rain is "BARAKA" (a blessing) and with it comes a lot of hard work for the farmers in the oasis areas who spend day and night making channels to lead the water to their palm trees and parched lands that they were now preparing for the planting season. I had experienced this during a heavy rainfall in February 2010. So as we walked in the rain to the *Institut Technologie Hotellère et Touristique* to meet with Mr. Khattouch and the guides, we were not really concerned about getting wet during the planting of the trees in the 20 Groasis Waterboxx's that we had donated during our last visit in April.

How disappointing it was to hear that the activity had been postponed for a week due to the extreme weather conditions that Ouarzazate and the South of Morocco was experiencing. The guides were needed elsewhere and the reporters from 2M National TV were now also working very hard to film the flooding. Many people were stranded, even casualties were reported, due to the unexpected extreme conditions of flash flooding throughout the country.

Unfortunately we would be leaving on the 24th so we would not be able to attend the ceremony. Luckily we were able to speak with a couple of the guides who promised to send us photos of this special event. We gave our "Groasis" poster, 20 booklets "Me and my Sahara" as well as tree planting certificates to Mr. Khattouch who assured us that the guides would receive these "awards" during the tree planting ceremony. It was a great honour to hear from Mr Khattouch that the tree planting project would also be a compulsory part of their environmental curriculum. These young guides will now help to "spread the word", about the importance of taking care of the environment, in the different area's in which they come from. During a meeting together with Mr. Khattouch and Halim Sbaï we agreed to continue our projects during the activities to be arranged for the EARTH DAY 2015 celebrations in April.

We would like give a special thank you to the following people for their help during the SAHARA ROOTS Activities in November 2014:

Mr. Saïd, the Caïd of M'hamid,

Mr. Mohamed Khattouch, Professor of the Institute de la Formation des Guides des Espaces Naturels et Touristique in Ouarzazate

Mr. Halim Sbaï of Cherg Expeditions and our local partner <http://www.cherg.com/>

Mr. Ibrahim Sbaï of Bivouac Le Petit Prince, <http://www.bivouaclepetitprince.com/en/>

Mr. Pieter Hoff, the inventor of the magical "Groasis Waterboxx" www.groasis.com

And my dearest friends Ilham Bakal and Marja Slot for joining me. Your involvement and enthusiasm in our projects is so very much appreciated!!

Finally we express our gratitude to all who have donated to The Sahara-Roots Foundation and thus making it possible for us to continue with our activities in the Moroccan Sahara.

Wanda Hebly, Sahara-Roots Foundation, 2nd of December 2014

Please follow our activities on our website: www.sahara-roots.org.

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