



Face of Climate Change Earth Day 2013

Every year on April 22, more than one billion people take part in Earth Day. Across the globe, individuals, communities, organizations, and governments acknowledge the amazing planet that we call home and take action to protect it.

The Sahara- Roots Foundation was honoured to once again be part of the Earth Day activities in Ouarzazate, Morocco, as we had done the year before. We were invited by Halim Sbaï of L'Association Zaila. We were happy to hear that Hicham Lahyani of HICYCLE (www.hicycle.wix.com/hicycle) would also be joining us once again. Representatives from the Italian AL-VERDE (www.al-verde.org) would also be joining us during the 2 days of activities. My friend Ilham Bakal of NOOR TRANSLATIONS and I would be representing Sahara Roots (www.sahara-roots.org)

21st of April: Fighting seas of sand.

We arrived in Ouarzazate on the 21st of April after having been to M'hamid to check on the progress of the trees that had been planted 6 months before. Even though there had been unexpected major sandstorms, that had covered part of our trees, they had been able to "free" the small sprouts from the mountains of sand with the help of a small tractor and shovels. It really is fighting against seas of sand!!

As it was palm tree planting season in April, we were also able, with the help of Ibrahim Sbaï and our tree caretakers Abdelrazak and Aii, to plant several new palm trees within the area of Bivouac Le Petit Prince using the traditional way. Luckily we have our caretakers to take care of our newly planted treasures during the long hot summer months.



In the late afternoon of the 21st we arrived in Ouarzazate and we were pleased to hear that Halim Sbaï, the organiser of Earth Day in Ouarzazate, had been able to finish the preparations of the activities with all those joining us. Next to the children and teachers of the Elkhansa Primary School and Lycée Aboubakr Sadik, we would also be joined by many different local organisations and ministries as well as HICYCLE (Human Interactive cycle) and AL VERDE both from Italy. An ecological exhibition was to be held at Place Elmouhidine in the center of Ouarzazate.

22nd of April: 1st day of Earth Day activities



Visit to El Khansa Primary School.

As we arrived at the El Khansa primary school we were greeted by the school children who sang words of praise to make us feel welcome. As we would be planting five *Groasis waterboxx's* (www.groasis.com) in which to plant trees, at the school, our first activity was to explain to the head of the school, the teachers and the older pupils as well as other volunteers, how this "magic waterboxx" works. We all then proceeded to the planting area of the school where they had already been preparing the holes in which the waterboxx's would be placed. It was fantastic to see how enthusiastic the children were as we once again started to demonstrate how the waterboxx works. Actually, we were also amazed to notice that this wasn't really necessary as many of the teachers also work in the agriculture areas around Ouarzazate and they were very quick in understanding the principle of the waterboxx. Before long all five Groasis waterboxx's were filled with young trees, their leaves glistening in the sunshine. Hopefully they will remain this way throughout the long hot summer.

Although there was no time left to read from our booklet "Me and My Sahara", we were able to donate thirty copies to the school. This booklet is an educational tool to help inspire the importance of taking care of our environment and we hope that they will enjoy the story!

Exhibition at Place Elmouhidine

As we entered the large building on Place Elmouhidine in which the exhibition was to be held, we were really impressed by the paintings and work that had been done by Lycée Aboubakr Sadik in Ouarzazate. This school was really proud to be a "Pilot Green School", the first of it's kind in Morocco and during the next 2 days we would come to understand their passion to fight for a sustainable ecology in their own area.

Hicham of HICYCLE was busy setting up his "electricity producing" bicycle so that visitor would be able to experience the feeling of making their own "energy" by cycling.



The young people of AL VERDE had been busy collecting "rubbish" close to the school as well as in different areas of Ouarzazate, with which they would illustrate how you can work with recycled materials during the exhibition. After having watched the demonstrations on the Groasis Waterboxx they even presented a "mini waterbox made from plastic water bottles. Amazing!

A Moroccan artist had been making miniature buildings, vases, etc. from anything that had been discarded and he showed perfect examples of recycling, redirecting and redesigning the "Moroccan way". Very inspirational.

There were also many natural products such as woven baskets, made the women living in the Draa Valley Oasis between Agdz and Zagora in the South of Morocco. Much better than using the disastrous "plastic bags"!

Many presentations

By the time we had set up the Sahara- Roots exhibition, many people had started to arrive and we were prepared for our presentation.

Global warming is effecting the whole world. Ice is melting, droughts happen more often even for example in New Zealand where they had the worst drought in almost 100 years! Flooding is becoming more frequent in "new" areas such as in the South of Morocco in February 2010 and sands are taking over fertile land in the oasis of the south. We hope that with our presentation we would also reach the local people and help create awareness that their beautiful but fragile environment needs to be taken care of and that by planting trees, we can all work towards stopping desertification.

Francesca Cipro of Al Verde gave a presentation about the wonderful work that is done by their foundation which promotes recycling, redesigning, eco-architecture, in order to become more sustainable. There is so much we can do by recycling the products that we already have!!

It was great to see Hicham's presentation video with people in Italy cycling, making light bulbs light up and generating electricity for their music to be heard. Of course the opportunity for those wishing to try this themselves would be on the 2nd day of the activities.

Teachers and students of Lycée Aboubakr Sadik gave a great presentation to show how they worked together to become the "Green Pilot school" of Morocco. Their enthusiasm for "life", and "ecology" in general is a great sign for the future of the youth in Morocco!



Photos: Wanda Hebly

23rd of April: 2nd day of Earth Day activities

Nettoyage

By the time we arrived at the Lycée Aboubakr Sadik everyone was preparing for the "Nettoyage" (clean-up) to be held on the morning of the 23rd of April. Hats, gloves and tee-shirts for those participating had been provided by L" Association Zaila and Al Verde. Around 10.00am we all walked over to the main touristic road between Ouarzazate and Zagora. This road leads to one of the most beautiful area's of the south, the Draa Valley. But unfortunately just outside of Ouarzazate there is the main open-air Municipal rubbish dump which presents a significant problem; because of the wind thousands of plastic bags fly through the air as if they were strange kinds of birds! Many bags end up scattered alongside the main road, others fly to other destinations such as the Sahara or the oasis and are carried a long way by the ever prevailing wind.

After 2 hours of cleaning with more than 200 people, the designated area was as it should be: CLEAN! A number of trucks were present to carry of the garbage gathered. Not only teachers and students of the Lycée were present during this annual clean up, there were also many volunteers who joined us. They had heard about this activity the day before during the presentations. Some of these volunteers came from the Amnouer Centre for people with a handicap. We were so happy to have them join in and we were cordially invited to visit their centre the next day.

After having seen the presentations on the Groasis Waterboxx Mr. Elhoucine Dahbi and Mr. Mohamed Zalzouli and the students of Lycée Aboubakr Sadik were very pleased to receive four Groasis Waterboxx's after we gave a presentation about how they work. They assured us that they were really looking forward to working with our "magical box's"! We also provided the school with 30 booklets "Me and my Sahara" as a tool to help not only to learn about the importance of taking care of your own environment but also to help the students with reading English!

Lycée Aboubakr Sadik





Photos: Al Amaouja.com

Afternoon workshops

The afternoon was filled with many people participating in the different workshops given by Al Verde as well as cycling for energy on the bicycle provided by Hicham of HICYCLE. We also explained our Groasis Waterboxx project to many people who wanted to know how it works. The fact that it does not need the continuing use of a lot of water, makes it so useful for people living in areas where water is so scarce. In the evening as different musicians played, participants of the Earth Day 2013 activities were thanked and received a nice certificate!

24th of April: visits to Ministère du Tourisme Institut Technologie Hotellère et Touristique and the Amnougger Center



Checking trees we planted on Earth Day 2012

In the morning of the 24th of April we accepted the invitation from Mr Mohamed Khattouch of the Ministère du Tourisme Institut Technologie Hotellère et Touristique in Ouarzazate to see the trees that we had planted in Groasis Waterboxx's the previous year during the Earth Day activities in April 2012. As we came closer to the area where they had been planted, we could not believe our eyes. But Mohammed assured us that the trees now standing at least 1 ½ meters high were the trees we had planted the year before! He was so thrilled with these results as we were!! These waterboxx's have now been reused and

young trees have once again been planted. To help protect endangered species of trees and plants in this area, we would really like to help Mohammed to continue this project in the future. Thank you Mr Mohamed Khattouch of the Ministère du Tourisme Institut Technologie Hotellère et Touristique for working together with us on this wonderful project.

Amnougger Center

In the afternoon we visited the Amnougger Center for Vocational Training and (<http://www.amnougger.it/inglese/home.htm>) which lies on the way to the Fint Oasis amidst the mountains and rocky areas. We never expected it to be so green! After visiting the workshop where the students learn a trade, we walked over to the large garden and farm area. They produce most of their own solar energy and food and this is the first project of it's kind in Morocco. We were so very impressed. We presented them with our last Groasis Waterboxx as well as twenty our " Me and my Sahara" booklets for their students to read.

For us this Earth day was a great success. We feel that we were able to reach a lot of people, young and old, in the hope that it will increase awareness about our wonderful but fragile and endangered planet.

Thank you

We would like to thank the following partners without whom the Earth Day activities in Ouarzazate would not have been possible:

- High Commission for Water and Forests
- The Province of Ouarzazate
- Delegation of the Ministry of Tourism
- Delegation of the Ministry of National Education
- Delegation of the Ministry of Youth and Sport

We are grateful to have been able to work with Hicham of HICYCLE and all the people of Al VERDE from Italy and France. They are a great inspiration!

We would like to thank the *El Khansa Primary School, the Lycée Aboubakr Sadik*, and all the volunteers who participated in making this a **memorable Earth Day 2013!**

We also would like to thank Almaouja Magazine of the South East of Morocco for making beautiful photo's and a great documentary which can be seen on internet: Journee de la Terre - Ouarzazate, Maroc @ almaouja.com <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z3teYtYFTFk> (www.almaouja.com)

We would like to thank L' Association Zaila " for Development and the Environment awareness" for inviting us to participate and in particular, we want to thank Mr. Halim Sbaï of L' Association Zaila, for his endless energy in helping with the organisation of this great event. He made it possible for all participants to come together to work on this International Earth day 2013!

Finally I thank you, my dearest friend Iham Bakal, for joining me. Your involvement and enthusiasm are so very much appreciated!!

Wanda Hebly
Sahara-Roots Foundation
22nd of May 2013

Photos:
Abdellah Aziz, Al Maouja
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