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# Stichting Sahara Roots



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## April 2015 - Earth Day's 45th anniversary!



*The future of our planet and the survival of life on earth is at stake. This **Earth Day** we need to take a stand together and show the world a new direction so our world leaders can follow by example. **It's our turn to lead!!***

And so it was that Ilham Bakal and I left the Netherlands once again for Morocco to participate in activities that had been organized by various local foundations and schools in Zagora, M'hamid and Ouarzazate between 19 – 25 April 2015. As Ilham speaks fluent Arabic, we are able to reach many children as well as teachers and locals willing to listen to our explanation during the many activities.

Our first stop was to purchase trees in Ouarzazate together with Sharif who would not only be driving us but who would also prove to be a great help during our planting activities! Sharif grew up in one of the small oasis villages in the Draa valley and gained a lot of knowledge about trees in his younger years.



In the afternoon we met with Mr. Mohamed Khattouch of the the Institut Technologie Hotellère et Touristique, to make arrangements for the tree planting activities, together with students, planned on the 25th of April. Mr. Khattouch informed us that the orange and fig trees that he had planted, as an experiment, in a small village in the Dades Valley in 2013, were doing very well now and that he had also re-planted using the Groasis Waterboxx once again.

See [www.groasis.com](http://www.groasis.com)

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# Earth Day activities in Zagora

20th of April 2015



It was a beautiful drive alongside the Draa River to Zagora. During the winter months the South of Morocco had been blessed with a lot of rain and the farmers had put the precious water to good use, there was food growing in abundance this year. After more than 30 years of drought this is so welcome!!

On the morning of the 20th we had been asked to attend a Round-table conference hosted by the assistant governor of La Province de Zagora. Representatives of the Ministry of Forestry and Water and Ministry of Tourism, local foundations, different high-schools and primary schools as well as the Caïd of M'hamid, were also present to discuss the activities planned for Earth Day, as well as how everyone can help to create a sustainable environment in this area.

The assistant Governor closed the meeting by saying that M'hamid is indeed a very special area, also for tourists seeking a magical desert experience and that he would really like to help create a sustainable environment here.



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# Earth Day activities in Zagora

20th of April 2015



The afternoon was spent planting the first trees of this year's Earth Day! Together with students of high school Sidi Ahmed Benaceur, teachers Adil and Mohammed, Halim Sbaï of L'Association Zaila we planted nine olive trees and one mandarin-tree in five Groasis waterboxx's which were donated to the school by Sahara-Roots.

Teacher Adil Mounane has been very active in spreading the word on how to be more sustainable in your own environment and so it was a great pleasure to now start this new project in Zagora together with his students as well as the Environmental Club of his school.





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# Earth Day activities in M'hamid

21<sup>st</sup> of April 2015



The morning of April 21st was spent counting trees that already had been planted during the last four years in Bivouac le Petit Prince so that we could make a comparison with the last years, as well as making preparations for the activities that would be taking place during the next couple of days. And so it was that we discovered that our tree care-taker Abdurazak was no longer working at Le Petit Prince and would therefore not be taking care of the trees anymore.

This was a huge disappointment for us as he had been involved with our project for the last 3 ½ years and knew exactly how the Groasis waterboxx works. Of course this raised questions concerning the planned activities as Abdurazak always prepared the grounds where the planting activities would take place.

How happy we were to see him once we arrived in “town” and were able to make arrangements with him anyway. He would help us during all the activities as well as instruct the new caretaker Habib, who would be responsible for the trees during the summer months. Teachers Adil and Mohamed from Zagora had also arrived as well as Carlos Perez Marin, an architect who is at the moment researching architectural heritage of the province of Zagora and the desertification of the Draa valley. All would be helping during the different workshops that were planned with two schools in M'hamid. Meetings were held and starting times were planned for the next day.



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# Earth Day activities in M'hamid

22th of April 2015



As we drove through the desert back to the village of M'hamid we were amazed to see the plant life come alive because of the amount of rainfall during the winter months. The desert was flowering!! The small plots were green, and hopefully the groundwater levels had now risen enough to give the farmers a good crop this year. In this dry and fragile environment it is all too clear how important WATER is to help sustain this way of life and therefore help to prevent the desertification of these villages along the edge of the last oasis of the Draa valley. All the more reason to continue our work with the young generation now in the schools.



Our activities started with a presentation on how the Groasis Waterboxx works to the teachers and children of the M'hamid Central primary school. Nine waterboxx's would be planted at the school with small olive trees from us and baby palm trees from the school. But first we set out to clean the school grounds. Abdurazak prepared the holes needed for planting as the children sang songs while cleaning. Of course everyone helped!!





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# Earth Day activities in M'hamid

22th of April 2015



We then planted the trees in the Groasis waterboxx's carefully explaining step by step. Teachers and pupils were amazed and quick to understand the principle of how it works and an important fact is that once the waterboxx is filled with water, the water will re-cycle it self by condensation. The waterboxx also collects dew during the night but needs to be checked especially during the hot summer months to make sure there is always a small layer of water inside.

Many of the older girls and boys were eager to join in the planting activity thus helping them to “connect” to their tree. They would now be responsible in helping the tree to grow, with the guidance of their teachers. To help the teachers in creating awareness about the environment we donated 80 “Me and my Sahara” booklets to be used in class, as well as pens for all students that participated. The children were so happy to see a booklet that was based on their environment: life in the Sahara!!



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# Earth Day activities in M'hamid

23th of April 2015



Tree planting activities had already taken place at girls and boys dormitories the year before and during our short visit in the morning, we could see that the trees were doing very well. Now it was time to plant at the High School M'hamid Center together with teacher Mohamed Chebaibi and his college Ibrahim. Mohamed was very active with the school's Environmental Club and had already been experimenting with the Groasis waterboxx with which he was very impressed. It was now time to share his enthusiasm with the rest of the school.



The director of the school Mr. Fatahala was present together with representatives of the Ministries of Forestry and Water, Tourism, representatives of L'Association Zaila, Adil and Mohamed Moumane from Zagora, and different environmental clubs and other visitors.

Groasis Waterboxx's and baby trees were fetched from the car, holes were dug and students worked hard at planting the trees in the 10 waterboxx's that we donated to the school. As we tied labels with names to the trees we explained that these labels represent the people that have made it possible to donate trees and waterboxx's. A big thank you to all of you for making this possible!



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# Earth Day activities in M'hamid

23th of April 2015



After the tree planting activities discussions were held about awareness of the problem of desertification, the problems of handling waste in the area, the importance of tourism, and last but not least the water problems.

Mr. Mohamed, a representative of the Ministry of Forestry and Water, Zagora Region was very impressed with what we have accomplished together with the local people of M'hamid. After explaining once more how the waterboxx works, we gave him a boxx to take back to the office. Who knows, in sowing seeds like this, we may one day embark on a bigger scale Groasis Waterboxx project!!





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# Earth Day activities in Ouarzazate

24th of April 2015



In the late afternoon of the 23rd we traveled back to Ouarzazate, a five hour journey through the majestic scenery of the Draa Valley. Although I have traveled this road many times in the past 12 years, I still find it magical. Having spoken with Carlos Perez Marin on the desertification problem of the Draa valley, I realize even more how important our work is if we want to stop the depopulation of the villages along the Draa.

With this in mind we went to visit the Al Khansaa Primary school on the morning of the 24<sup>th</sup>, without giving them any notice. Life in this area depends on the younger generation and how they will deal with the difficult problems that lie ahead. As we walked into the school grounds we realized that this school is a great pilot project for Green Schools in Morocco!!



In April 2013 we had started planting with the children and teachers of this school. It was incredible to see how they had developed. They now had two herb gardens and trees were growing everywhere. They had even planned a tree planting activity that very afternoon and we were invited!! So we joined, bringing our last six waterboxx's with us as a gift to the school. It was then that we met with Mr. Mohamed Belraam, the coordinator for Protection of the Environment and of the Ministry of Education for the whole district of Ouarzazate. Together with him we hope to reach many more schools in the future!

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# Earth Day activities in Ouarzazate

25th of April 2015



On the morning of the 25th we met Mr. Mohamed Khattouch of the the Institut Technologie Hotellère et Touristique, for the last tree planting activities for this year's Earth Day ('week'). This had been planned during our last visit but unfortunately it had not taken place due to the heavy rains in November 2014.

How happy we were to see Mr. Khattouch together with the students and other teachers digging holes, bring water to the planting area, organizing the 20 waterboxx's and wheel barrowing the trees.

Many hands make light work and so it was that all 20 waterboxx's and trees were in the ground just two hours later. It was fantastic to see everyone worked together to make this a great success. And now the real work starts, keeping the trees alive during the long hot summer!!



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# Earth Day activities in M'hamid

25th of April 2015



This **Earth Day** 'week' we stood together with many others and showed the south of Morocco a new direction. We hope that many will follow our example. We embrace the 'grass-roots' approach: small projects like these can have a big impact if many others follow by beginning small tree planting projects in their own back yard (for example). We hope that our work will also inspire you to do so!!

We would like to thank all those who helped during this "Earth Day celebration 2015" week of activities!

Also a big thank you to those who have donated to the Sahara-Roots Foundation and thereby making these activities possible.

A special thanks to Ilham Bakal for joining me on this endeavor!! Your language and presentation skills are amazing and I could never do it without you!!

Also many thanks to Halim Sbaï of Cherg Expeditions and L'Association Zaila for arranging all the activities during the Earth day celebrations. And Mr. Pieter Hoff of Groasis for inventing the Groasis Waterboxx.

Last but not least a big thank you to Sharif for driving us safely through the beautiful South of Morocco.



Wanda Hebly, Hilversum, NL. 9 May 2015

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