



SAHARA-ROOTS FOUNDATION

DECEMBER 2024: Newsletter

"Seeds of Gratitude & Friendship"



Joudour Sahara Culture Center grounds



Joudour Sahara Culture Center Amphitheatre

Our first tree-planting activities held in 2008 were about giving back to Mother Earth: gratitude for all she has given us. An inspirational feeling of reciprocity, planting in such a fragile environment. It's not about the number of trees that survive but about those that do through the care given to them. We know that around M'hamid, it is difficult for the roots of the newly planted trees to find their way to the underground water which lies deep in the ground. And with water scarcity in this desert environment every drop counts! With the help of our tree caretakers Habib, who has been working with us for many years and Abdelqadir who has just joined our greening project at the Joudour Sahara Culture Center (JSCC), those that do survive will become strong, helping the younger generations of trees, shrubs and plants. Grateful that our new gardener Abdelqadir, together with a team, has made a beautiful start to the botanical garden. Last April it was still a construction site!! The pouring rains of September & October, unheard of in this area, is a blessing and so needed but on a construction site a challenge!

Trees are also symbolic for different “seeds”



The trees are also symbolic for different “seeds” that have been sown in the last nine years allowing Joudour Sahara to slowly grow into the Culture Center it is today. The “seeds”: traditional music, local architecture and a sustainable environment have become one within this project, thanks to the hard work of many who have joined in to help develop it. In 2015 we met with Halim Sbai, now director of JSCC, Thomas Duncan, now director of Program Development with Playing for Change (PFC), Francios Vigui (also of PFC), Aziza Chaouni, architect (Aziza Chaouni Projects) and the Sahara-Roots team to discuss the possibilities of building a music school and culture center. In 2016 the music school, supported by Playing for Change, started giving music lessons to boys & girls of all ages.

Now more than 120 students and more than 130 musicians across the Southern Draa Valley region are engaged in following lessons, recording traditional music and learning new types of music. So very grateful are we that through the hard work of Halim & Thomas, the school has now been running for eight years with many more girls attending lessons! It was incredible to see all the effort that was made to bring so many musicians from different corners of the world, to come together during the 3rd edition of the Zamane Festival!.

Perseverance, trust, friendship and positive energy



Outside amphitheater & toilet block



Classroom on top of Waterreservoir

We were able to experience the profound feeling of gratitude during the 3rd Zamane Festival this year. Perseverance, trust, friendship and positive energy have allowed us to experience the opening of the first two phases of the buildings constructed on the Joudour Sahara grounds, as well as the start of the beautiful botanical gardens with paths set out to the various locations on site. We experienced the first concert to be given in the amphitheatre by Omara "Bombino" Moctar, a Tuareg singer-songwriter, Emmy nominated and guitarist from Niger and his band. Grateful that such a renowned band came all the way to the small town of M'hamid!

A culture center cannot be without buildings and Aziza Chaouni Projects helped to design the first two phases: the innovative water reservoir with classroom and the amphitheater with an attached eco-toilet-block. Although they are not yet finished, we are now able to use the first classroom on site, as well as the amphitheater. Of course, the construction could not have been done without the work of Bousalleh & Lahsan of CERKAS and Saïd and his men of Rock Foundation. A great effort was made to have the buildings ready for the opening on the 29th of November, but the challenge was met, and we are grateful to you all!!

The growth of the Joudour Sahara Culture Center



The growth of the Joudour Sahara Culture Center could not have been done without Jean Botman of Stichting de Hoorn (SDH), our “Angel Sponsor”! Even though we had fantastic ideas, dreams and plans, the finances to build were not available to us until we started receiving donations from SDH in 2019 which enabled us to start the construction of the first building: a water reservoir with a classroom on top, plus the amphitheater designed by ACP. It was an honour to have Jean travel to Morocco with us this time for what would be the inauguration of the first two buildings. We are truly grateful to Jean for her continuous support in helping to realize this amazing project and with it the hope of bringing a better future for the younger generation in M’hamid.

What a surprise it was to enter the classroom on top of the water reservoir on the 1st day of the festival, together with Jean and the SSR team (Adriaan, Ilham & Anouk), where a beautiful painting of yours truly was revealed! Emotions ran as we entered the gardens which had been carefully planted, on our way to the amphitheater where a traditional band was playing. The next days were filled with music from many traditional bands as well as an amazing acoustic concert by Bombino in the amphitheater! We even managed a carpetmaking workshop, to see the camel races and continue tree planting on site.

Groasis waterboxx, together with old techniques



Palmleaves protecting newly planted trees



Next to music there was of course also tree-planting which took place on top of the sand dunes where Halim had also set up “palm tree wind breakers”, a traditional method used to fight desertification. By planting trees in the Groasis waterboxx, together with this technique, he hopes to stop the sand dunes from encroaching onto the Joudour Sahara site. For us, the Groasis waterboxx is a symbol of connection between cultures as we plant together with adults and children from all over, explaining the importance of planting, how this invention works with the use of as little water as possible, and the challenge of perseverance in taking care of these trees in the hope that they will survive.

Our tree planting project in Bounou was also on our agenda and after counting we found that quite a good number of the trees that we planted in Dec 23 have survived after the harsh summer months in their Groasis waterboxx's. With no running water available, we hope that the village will continue to support this project by taking care of these trees.

Visit with Mr Mohamed Khattouch, director of ISTAHT



Hotel & Guide school ISTAHT in Ouarzazate



Bougainvillea planted in 2012

On the way back to Ouarzazate we visited Mr Mohamed Khattouch, who has been working with the Groasis waterboxx since 2012. The environment of Ouarzazate is a little more “friendly” than in M’hamid and Mohamed is creating a park within the walls of this educational institute. We are grateful for the fact that Mohamed continues to re-use the waterboxx’s involving students with the planting of trees and we were happy to see the two beautiful flowering bougainvillea that we had planted together in honour of his twin daughters, all those years ago!

Grateful for our Sahara-Roots team!

And of course I am truly grateful for our Sahara-Roots team! The work and the journeys throughout the many years have led to so much growth, not only concerning the trees and shrubs planted but also the friendships with people we have met along the way, with warm welcomes that we received on arriving once again.

So thankful to have had Ilham Attar with us throughout the years, with her knowledge of languages she has managed to reach old & young, inspiring those who listened as she explained how the Groasis waterboxx works, or translating during the different presentations that have been given throughout the years.

Many thanks to our musical photographer Anouk who not only shares her wonderful photos with us, making it much easier for me, but also her musical choices and her enthusiastic conversations as we drove the long hours through the Moroccan countryside, so happy that Anouk joined our team since 2015!

And although he was “just the driver”, Adriaan managed to drive the team safely through Morocco, once again, as well as providing us every early morning with lovely warm baguettes, fresh from a little bakery in M’hamid, so much appreciated!



Support & friendship throughout the years!

The one person who continues to work “behind the scenes” and who has missed most of the Zamane Festival activities is Marika Barthelemy and we are grateful for her years of support to help organize all the arrivals, departures, badges, food, and lots more during the three festivals, thank you so much Marika!

All of this could not have happened without the support, organization and hard work done by Halim Sbaï. An inspirator with a passion for a sustainable future not only in his hometown but also beyond. Halim faced many challenges to be able to be ready for the 3rd Zamane Festival and the inauguration of the first two phases of JSCC. What an achievement! We hope that the buildings will now be put to good use as we continue with the construction of the 3rd phase: the Riad Joudour Sahara, a place that in the near future will be used for accommodation, for recording music, and as classrooms while enjoying these magical surroundings.

We are so grateful for your friendship throughout the many years, thank you Halim!! You are family!!!

And finally, we could not have come so far, for so many years, without our sponsors, for this we are truly grateful!!

Wishing you all a **GREEN**
and **HEALTHY** 2025!

Wanda (& Adriaan) Hebly
16 DECEMBER 2024

