
SAHARA ROOTS FOUNDATION

Sharing passions & combining traditional music of the past with tree-planting for the future!



Sharing passions

Without my love of this desert environment, Sahara-Roots would never have existed. Sharing this passion with others is as fulfilling for me as is planting trees in Southern Morocco. Once every so often I am able to share my passions with people that journey to the Sahara with me. In June 2018 I was asked to help organize a desert tour for a group of teachers, a mindful journey to the Sahara. Dieuwke Hovinga, of Hogeschool Leiden, had travelled with me a few years before during a tour that I helped organize for Essence College in Bodegraven, an institute for mindful training.

“A crown upon your work”

I was delighted to once again embark on a magical journey with Dieuwke. This time she would be the organiser & teacher. After nine months of intensive preparations we left Holland to travel to Morocco on the 21st of February 2019, together with 11 teachers from the Hogeschool Leiden in the Netherlands.



A magical journey in the desert

This “*Crown upon your Work*” journey meant making a caravan journey without internet connections and telephones, without social networks, without clocks, without hot showers, without comfortable Dutch lives and without your own habits and customs. A real challenge for the 11 teachers in these modern times!

Tree-planting had also been incorporated in the program, so before we travelled to the desert, we stopped at a nursery in Ouarzazate where everyone was able to choose a tree, shrub or plant.

After this magical 6-day journey in the desert, sleeping under the stars, learning about the traditional way of life of the nomads, their camels carrying our bags or us when needed, we returned to the small village of Zaouia, one of the last villages in the palm oasis of M’hamid. In Zaouia, Sahara-Roots had started the “Green Gateway to the Sahara” planting project 2 ½ years ago together with Halim Sbai, our partner in Morocco. He also arranged and guided our desert journey. Together with Halim and Habib, our tree-caretaker, we carefully planted our trees in the re-used Groasis waterboxx’s to ensure their survival rate would have a good chance.

IYoga's planting session in Zaoui, Mhamid El Ghizlane (1st of March)

At the same time Sahara-Roots also arranged another planting session with Halim and Habib. Karin Sluis from IYoga in The Netherlands had donated a substantial amount of money to Sahara-Roots. Karin organized yoga workshops to provide funding for planting trees in the Groasis waterboxx. The workshops were a great success.

Karin was now travelling to Morocco with her Yoga students and they were arriving in M'hamid a day after our departure. She planted a large number of waterboxx's with trees together with her group. Once back in The Netherlands we heard from Karin that their planting activity had been a great success!

We were very pleased that Halim Sbai and Habib, our tree-caretaker, took good care of this planting event for IYoga. We thank Karin and all those who had donated to IYoga, for making it possible to plant in total 66 waterboxx's.

Helpen de wereld groener te maken

Bomen planten in de woestijn tijdens yogareis

Irina Hoffer

VENHUIZEN "De wens van mensen om de wereld ook groener te maken, was voor mij overonderend." Karin Sluis uit Venhuizen verzorgde workshops vanuit haar IYogaschool, waarvan de opbrengst volledig naar het goede doel ging. Ze plantte onlangs, samen met andere deelnemers aan haar meditatie-reis, honderdtweëndertig bomen in de Sahara.

"Het begon allemaal met de reis van mijn man en kinderen naar Marokko", vertelt Karin levendig. "We waren vlakbij de woestijn en ik wilde op avontuur, dus besloten we de woestijn in te gaan. Daar wandelden we drie dagen mee in een karavaan, onder begeleiding van een gids. Het was fascinerend en het viel me op dat de kinderen daar heel rustig werden. De woestijn werkt verstillend." Het was zo'n mooie reis dat ze besloot dit nogmaals te doen, maar dan in combinatie met yoga en meditatie. Zo'n reis was er nog niet, dus ze besloot dit zelf te organiseren. Dit jaar was het de derde keer.

OPRUKKEND ZAND "Bij de vorige keren vertelden de nomaden steeds over de droogte. Ze hebben last van het oprukkende zand, de verwuisting. De woestijn wordt door de klimaatverandering steeds droger en groter en het is moeilijk voor hen om daar nog iets te verbouwen." Dit gegeven bleef in haar hoofd rondwalen en terug in Nederland zag ze een programma over hoop-



Karin (rechts) plant een boom in de Waterboxx

volle projecten die de wereld een beetje beter en mooier maken. Een van die projecten was de Waterboxx.

Dit is een box van papier of herbruikbaar plastic, die het mogelijk maakt bomen in hele droge gebieden te laten groeien. De box vangt regenwater en condens op uit de lucht. Dit houdt in dat een boom na planting negentig procent meer overlevingskans heeft en negentig procent minder water gebruikt dan bomen zonder box. Het water waarmee de mensen bomen water geven zonder box verdampst meteen.

OASES "Ik dacht 'Die nomaden moeten die boxen hebben, die kunnen ze goed gebruiken'", knikt Karin. "Ik las er artikelen over en besloot 'Ik ga zorgen dat die boxen daar terecht komen.' Na een zoektocht via google bleek dat het bedrijf dat de Waterboxen leverde Groasis heette. "En wat schetste mijn verbazing? Ze leverden al boxen aan Marokko, ook in het gebied waar mijn yogareis vertrekt. De Stichting Sahara Roots is daar al vijftien jaar bezig met de lokale bevolking groen aan te planten en oases te maken. Het wiel was al uitgevonden, de infrastructuur

lag er, ik hoefde alleen nog geld in te zamelen." Het bleek zelfs dat de bedenker van de boxen Pieter Hoff uit Hem was. "Het was echt absurd, hij bleek opgegroeid in De Hout en heeft zelfs gedate met mijn tante."

Tijdens de reis plantten de deelnemers de bomen. Er hangen labels aan van de donateurs en een boomenspecialist verzorgt ze daar. "Het brengt ze eten, ze kunnen de oogst verhandelen, de jeugd blijft, het is een basis voor een andere toekomst. Volgend jaar wil ik er weer heen, en ja: ik wil weer bomen planten."

“Traditional music of the past combined with tree-planting for the future”

International Earth Day 2019

For this year’s Earth Day activities we were happy to have my husband Adriaan join us. It had been 8 years since he visited our projects and he was of course looking forward to seeing how everything had developed. We left the Netherlands with 30 Groasis waterboxx’s that were donated by [Groasis](#) and it was now our job to plant these in the desert.

Our first stop in Morocco was at the [Technologie Hoteliere et Touristique \(ISTAHT\)](#) in Ouarzazate to meet with Mr Mohamed Khatouch, the managing director. In April 2012 we had planted the first trees at this institute and Adriaan was really surprised to see these trees now standing at 7 meters high! This institute is well on its way in becoming the first Eco-school in Morocco as they continue to plant trees, shrubs, succulents, as well as having the first group of students studying ecology at this school. We were happy to be able to donate 10 Groasis Waterboxx’s once again, supporting the wonderful work that is done at this school. Big thank you to Mohamed, the students and staff for the great effort in helping the school becoming so green!



Starting a Green Wall

In M'hamid we met with [Thomas Duncan](#) from the US Foundation [“Playing for Change”](#) who supervises the students of the [Joudour Sahara Music School](#) in M'hamid. He explained that the students who would be joining us at the tree-planting event, had been busy creating songs about environmental issues especially for these Earth Day events. What a wonderful surprise and opportunity to combine their music with our planting!

These Earth Day events have been held on the site of *“the Green Gateway to the Sahara”* in the village of Zaouia. Nomad tents had been set up, water-tanks had been filled, and holes were dug by hand for the 100 waterboxx's that were planted. Not the easiest work as the ground was very hard and covered with sand. The idea for this planting activity was to experiment with building a “Green Wall” to help stop the desertification of agriculture land which was slowly being taken over by sand. It could also become an example for farmers from the area. We placed the Groasis waterboxx's in 3 rows with approximately 1 ½ meters in-between, in front of the sand dunes.



First planting day

The 21st of April was the first planting day and as we arrived on the site we were joined by traditional music groups from M'hamid, Tagounite and Zagora, as well as tourists visiting the area. We were also joined by Mr Aziz El Bakasi (and family) of [Eco Smart Farming](#), the agent for Groasis in Morocco. We had met Aziz in The Netherlands and he is importing the Groasis waterboxx's (recycled plastic version) & Growboxx's (biodegradable version) into Morocco. We purchased the first 60 biodegradable boxxes to try out, many thanks to Aziz for delivering these on the spot, at the right time!!

We planted 50 waterboxx's on the first planting day, explaining to everyone present how the waterboxx actually works. Aziz taught us how to plant the biodegradable version which works slightly different. It was inspirational listening to the musicians playing while we planted. A wonderful job done by all!!

A big thank you to Halim Sbaï and all the teachers & students of the Joudour Sahara Music School and the different bands from the surrounding area. Traditional music and planting trees make a great combination for all to enjoy!



Second planting day

On the 22nd of April we returned to the location to plant the remaining trees in the boxxes. We were really lucky to have also been able to collect trees from the Ministry of Forest & Water in Zagora. These trees are especially grown for desert environments and with these we actually hope to build this “Green Wall”. We had decided to plant tamarisk trees on the “outside” of the semicircle in the biodegradable growboxx’s. They are fast growing and will be able to give shade to other trees such as the olive trees.

Arriving at the site we discovered that the water-tanks had not been refilled. Water needed for the initial planting had to be pumped from a nearby water-well and we first needed to find the farmer holding the key to this precious liquid. It was market day and of course all the farmers from the village were away on this weekly outing so it was not until the early afternoon that we finally had water. An incredible “all hands on deck” job was done to make sure that all the trees were planted as the sun started to set.

We had managed to plant 150 trees and shrubs in 100 boxxes in 2 days! A great achievement considering the very difficult environment in which we work. Everything is done by hand and shovels, we don’t have the luxury of modern equipment! Luckily we were able to buy some new shovels, wheelbarrows and jerry-cans for water to help make the working conditions a little easier. The hot summer is ahead of us and we hope that Habib will continue to take such good care of all these trees as he has done for us in the past.



Our dream: help build a water-catchment system

One of the most important aspects of this trip was clearly the awareness of our use of water. We prefer to use the Groasis Water& Growboxx's rather than the use of a drip system, so that we do not have to extract too much groundwater. As we all know, water is very scarce here and farmers are allocated a limited amount of irrigation water through water channels. These are strictly controlled. At the moment the site we are working on does not have a water-catchment system in place so we are dependent on water from the wells nearby. If we wish to continue planting in the future, especially in larger numbers, we will need to find a solution for the water.

If too much water is used from the ground water the mature palm-trees will die as they will no longer be able to reach the deep groundwater levels with their root system, leaving the sand to take over. During the winter months it rains every now and then, but because we do not have a water catchment system in place on the site, the rains runs off. It is our dream to help build a water-catchment system, preferably a reservoir to hold rain & irrigation water.



Entwining traditional culture with environmental issues.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who have recently donated to our foundation making it possible for us to continue greening this little part of the Sahara. Thank you, Halim Sbai for organizing these wonderful Earth Day Activities 2019! And thank you Ilham and Anouk for being my travel-companions and helping to GREEN this beautiful part of the Sahara for so many years already! Without you we would never have come so far.



We believe that every tree that survives helps to give the local community hope that their villages will not disappear under the ever encroaching Sahara sands. With a combination of their music & dance and our planting, we have entwined their traditional culture with environmental issues. Our hope is that ultimately the local villagers will take over our efforts and defend their land with our new water conservation techniques in combination with their traditional knowledge of the land.



21st May 2019

The Sahara-Roots Foundation team

Wanda & Adriaan Hebly, Ilham Bakal, Anouk Schaedtler

