

Building resilience and adaptive capacity of communities in the Sahel.



Mr Talibe Selmen Camara – Village Chief, Agoueinitt in the Wilaya of Guidimakha Photo credit: WFP/G. GADER

Talibe Selmen Camara and people in his village Agoueinitt in the Wilaya of Guidimakha, the southern-most region of Mauritania have been suffering in recent years due to lack of rainfall. Droughts and land degradation have destroyed crops and threatened the food security of local communities across the region. Smallholder farmers have resorted to desperate measures in order to cope such as selling vital assets or migrating. To help communities adapt to and thrive under climate change, WFP in partnership with the Mauritanian Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development is implementing the project “Enhancing Resilience of Communities to the Adverse Effects of Climate Change on Food Security in Mauritania” Under the UNFCCC Adaptation Fund.

Combating Desertification and Land Degradation

In the south of Mauritania, Guidimakha is a region with the highest population density as well as poverty and hunger. Communities in this part of the country comprise smallholder farmers with an average family plot of 1.3 hectares divided into livestock and agriculture - which is mostly rain-fed. Due to the arid climate of this region, it becomes imperative for communities to protect the existing vegetation for cultivation as well as livestock.

“We are people who love trees and we protect them because our life depends somehow on their existence,” says Talibe Selmen Camara who is the village chief of Agoueinitt in the Wilaya of Guidimakha.

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To combat desertification and soil degradation, the project introduced sand dune fixation and village plantation – to stabilise dunes and prevent them from encroaching into their cultivated lands, and protect degraded soils - through local varieties of plants. Under the project, 58 tree nurseries have been grown and planted in the field in collaboration with local communities. The project has a participatory approach: working with villages to include general aspects of natural resource management and inclusion of village adaptation plans into regional planning. “While setting up the adaptation action plan with the Adaptation Fund project, we proposed to plant trees and particularly two species that have a special value for people of the village,” says Talibe Camara, the Village Chief of Agoueinitt. Zizophus and Balanites are 2 local trees adapted to local climatic conditions and produce fruits which can either be eaten or transformed into local drinks for direct use or for sale to increase the household income.

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Women planting nurseries in Agoueinitt, Guidimakha region as part of the project. Photo credit: WFP/G. GADER

As part of the project across the country, 163,000 plants will cover about 400 hectares in 8 regions of Mauritania. Areas planted have been fenced for protection. These plantations will have two objectives based on the ecosystems where they will be implemented: dune fixation or village plantation for soil protection and domestic consumption.

Diversifying livelihoods, building resilience

In addition to dune fixation and soil protection, the project introduced planting of high value crops such as vegetables in 37 villages with the help of women's associations. The project will also introduce activities such as poultry and bee keeping for income and livelihood diversification so that incomes and food security are not so vulnerable to the changing climate. Just like the case of Guidimakha, local environment and community needs are taken

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into consideration while planning income and livelihood activities across different villages. The project aims to build livelihood resilience within the targeted communities and has brought hope amongst the people in the villages. "The project helped us to establish the nursery with the needed technical support ensured by the Regional Environment Services," says Talibe Camara. Looking ahead, he feels optimistic toward the project's impact on the communities. "We are very happy by this cooperation with the project and we are fully involved to success all the activities planned in our village," he added.

This four-year project (has just completed its first year of implementation and it is funded by the UNFCCC Adaptation Fund. The project components are designed to support technical services and the communities they serve to better understand climate risks and impacts, combating desertification and land degradation through designing and implementing concrete adaptation measures and diversifying and strengthening livelihoods of the most vulnerable population.