

Rainbow Development in Africa

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In April this year I was in a remote part of southern Mauritania where our local development partner, ADMAPE, had dug a rain-catchment barrier for a community of near destitute Harratin villagers. Knowing how last year these people had lost their entire millet crop to locusts, I asked, perhaps somewhat naively, how they were surviving. In between fits of laughter, they replied: 'Why, we go hungry, of course.'

This story encapsulates perhaps better than anything the extraordinary resilience and sense of acceptance that marks the people of the arid, drought-prone lands of southern Mauritania amongst whom Rainbow works: Inch Allah, it's the will of God.



Building Blocks: From this resource centre, due to be completed in Oct '05, local partner ADMAPE will be able to provide a range of services from the small town of Leqceiba in the heart of the mid-Gorgol agricultural community. With workshops and income-generating activities on the ground floor, and a local language reference library, an office and training room upstairs, this building represents a major step in building the foundations for a strong and organised agricultural sector.

The Futa Initiative Project: an update

Stimulating Agricultural Development

With the establishment and training of local development partner ADMAPE, and the provision of a tractor, a Toyota pick-up, a 7-ton truck, a rice de-husker and the nearly completed resource centre, the project has in this final start-up year seen ADMAPE:

- Commence their farmer training program with three two day courses for 52 members of 22 cooperatives.
- Land manage 600 hectares of farm land (tractor).
- Transport 500 tons of agricultural produce to distant markets.
- Provide logistical assistance to the community in combating locust and bird infestations.
- Assist the establishment of civil society groups such as local farmer and pastoralists unions.
- Give farmers at all levels of agricultural practice many other forms of logistical and moral support.
- Network with local institutions, consult with regenerative farming groups and conduct needs assessments in developing further programs of work.

Increasingly it becomes clearer to me what Rainbow's role is and should be in the south of Mauritania: simply to help local people develop solutions to the many problems they face. Since agriculture is the primary activity of the region, this means tackling problems caused not only by adverse climatic and natural conditions, but also, in our increasingly global world, those caused by both national and international politics and policies as well. Examples of these are the crippling markets that result from first-world subsidised food imports, unfair international trade regulations and misused aid: areas that currently impoverish not only farmers, but local people across Africa.

More and more now it is recognised that the way to break the status quo in Africa is not the 'top-down' approach, but empowerment at the grassroots level. This means helping people build the low-level community-based organisations such as cooperatives and unions that are the backbone to a strong and vociferous civil society; and this means helping people develop the vibrant, economically viable communities that are the breeding ground of such organisations.

Working in even a small area in Africa, as Rainbow does, is a slow and often difficult process, but I truly believe that with our Futa Initiative project now fully funded and under way, and a whole new program of activities in the pipeline, we can and will promote this agenda and make a real difference to many people's lives.

Peter Hudson, Director.

