

Going Organic in Western Sahara

“It always seems impossible until it’s done” - Nelson Mandela

Westminster College, Fulton, MO

Mula Ihfid Ahmed '15 (Western Sahara), Sandra Nivyabandi '15 (Barundi), Brianna Mormann '14 (USA), Martin Roa '15 (Paraguay)

Introduction and Statement of Need

Approximately 160,000 Saharawi people have been living in refugee camps spread across the harsh desert near Tindouf, Algeria, since 1975 as a result of their ongoing struggle for independence with Morocco. Historically, they were nomadic herders, who moved about the desert with their livestock. Their refugee status has altered their way of life. Traditionally the Saharawi people have lived off the land; but today many families depend on humanitarian aid and foreign assistance for their survival. Currently, there are five Saharawi refugee camps, we will be working with the Smara refugee camp.

Being the largest refugee camp in the Western Sahara, the Smara camp conditions are devastating. Humanitarian food donations currently provide the majority of Saharawi food supply. Food insecurity, nutritional food scarcity and financial resources leave most refugees unable to purchase nutritional, healthy, and quality food such as, fresh fruits and vegetables. Without a sufficient supply of fresh fruits and vegetables, the Saharawi people are lacking a nutritionally balanced diet. The Smara refugee camp needs our help.

Purposes and Goals

Main Goal: Our goal is to provide five Smara families with an organic garden which will produce access to a nutritious diet. In the tight knit community of the camp each garden will feed seven additional families. We hope to improve quality of life by providing an opportunity for hope through independence and self-sufficient living.

Specific goals/objectives: Our aim is to build sustainable organic gardens for the Saharawi people to produce a highly nutritious diet, disseminate healthy living and sustainability education and continued entrepreneurship throughout the camp. Combined we hope these efforts will help improve socio-economic conditions in the community.

Preparation and Implementation

United States based NGO, *Not Forgotten International*, has instituted sixty-plus organic gardens throughout refugee camps near Tindouf, Algeria. The organic gardens use a drip irrigation system, protective netting, and small greenhouses to successfully produce a variety of fruits and vegetables throughout the year. Built more than a year ago, these family-maintained organic gardens are an illustration that vegetative life can survive through the harsh weather conditions of Western Sahara. The organic gardening instituted by *Not Forgotten International* has excited an entrepreneurial spirit throughout the camps and we hope to continue the positive trend. As the Saharawi people are able to sell some of what they produce they are becoming interested in developing future gardens and looking towards further sustainable projects. The development of organic gardens in the region is met with anticipation and encouragement by the community.

Project Schedule

Overview of project timeline below:

November 2013:

- Established a relationship with Dan Lacy Managing Director of *Not Forgotten International*.
- Created a Crowd-funding website to collect donations and support for this project.
<https://rally.org/GoingOrganicWS>
- In discussion of presenting at the What If...Conference in a segment entitled **What If We Can Change Lives in Western Sahara?**

End of May 2014: Mulay departs for Western Sahara, he meets with Taleb the Project Agriculturist before traveling to Eastern Algeria to purchase the greenhouse plastics. Upon his return he will help purchase water bladders and frames for the new greenhouses from local suppliers.

Mid-June 2014: Elected officials within Smara will communicate with Mulay the families selected to host the organic garden supplies. These families then will be trained by Taleb and Mulay the logistics of planting the gardens. 100 Moringa seedlings will be given to the garden technicians for distribution to families as they are ready. These seeds full of vitamins and minerals and are widely used in traditional foods.

July 10th-July 13th: Westminster team joins Mulay in Algeria, meet with families, and Taleb to discuss the project.

July 14th - July 29th: Begin installing Organic Gardens: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 dedicating three days for each.

August 1st: Wrapping up the project and gathering feedback from the Saharawi families and the Smara camp.

Project Sustainability

Existing infrastructure and continuous project management and supervision provided by *Not Forgotten International* and the *Saharawi Youth* will ensure this project is sustainable. Talib Brahim, a member of the community, is paid monthly by *Not Forgotten International* to constantly monitor the successes and failures of the project in order to give an immediate assistance if needed. In addition, Dan Lacey, Managing Director, organizes a yearly trip to the camps to further monitor project sustainability. Additionally, a member of the Westminster team College team will be in close contact with Aluat Hamoudi, a Westminster Alumni, to contribute close supervision. Our partnerships with Saharawi Ministries of Economic Development and Water, the governor of Smara, and the chief of each Daira (neighborhood) will ensure support for the continuation of the project.

Additional Fundraising and Raising Awareness

We aim to hold additional fundraising for the continuation of this project through presentations with a Missouri Education start-up, *What If ... ?*. This educational conference was developed by Westminster English professor, Matt Murrie and 2013 Westminster alum Andrew McCue. Our discussion will speak to the topic "What If We Can Change Lives in Western Sahara?" *The What If...? Conference* has a large following on Westminster's campus creating a perfect atmosphere to raise awareness within the community. Additionally, we will have a themed Western Sahara Night where we will display pictures of the Smara camp and surrounding areas, introduce traditional music, food and drinks with an entrance fee of \$5.00. Westminster College's International Club, Amnesty International Club, and African Union Organization have agreed to panel student discussions and country presentations on Western Sahara. We hope our discussions will help our campus begin to understand the health issues the Saharawi people are facing but also portray the power of community, reliance and hope.