

Title of Project: Going Organic in the Smara Refugee Camp
Country for Project: Algeria (the Western Sahara)
Students (all attend(ed) Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri, USA):
Martin Roa, Paraguay, UWC Costa Rica
Brianna Mormann, USA
Sandra Nivyabandi, Burundi, UWC Swaziland
Mula Ihfid Sid Ahmed, Algeria (Western Sahara), UWC Hong Kong

Section I

Project Goal: The goal of the Going Organic in Smara refugee camp project for peace was to provide Saharawi families with the opportunity to share and benefit as a community from a sustainable effort that seeks to improve the lives and living conditions of people residing in the Smara refugee camp. This was achieved by implementing an organic garden in this specific location. The organic garden will provide a highly nutritious diet, as well as education on the importance of having and maintaining a sustainable organic garden. Moreover, the organic garden will create opportunities for improvement in the socio-economic domain of the community by fostering their independence and self-sufficiency.

Project Implementation: At first we intended to implement five organic gardens for five Saharawi families. However, we opted to shift our focus to a more effective means which reaches a larger pool of community members. We therefore decided to build one community garden in a central location of Smara refugee camp. This would give additional access to the organic garden for more community members to benefit from the outcomes of the project for peace. Therefore, we had to remove our initial project suggestion of five Saharawi families to one organic community garden. This would tackle the food shortage as seen from the statistics provided by the Saharawi government, “the UNHCR estimates that 42,000 tons of supplies are needed to cover the basic food basket in 2013 yet only 13,000 tons have been delivered so far this year. ‘This shortage, together with the 60 percent cuts in regional aid received from Spain, has provoked a rise in anemia among the population at risk: children under 5 and pregnant women,” the Minister for Cooperation explains. “We earn little but it’s enough. We don’t need to worry about food, as the state provides it,” an ambulance driver at the Hospital in Bojador, Salek Mohamed, replies when asked about needs in the camps. He reflects what many perceive to be a damaging dependency on aid among the population.”

During this process, Not Forgotten International – an international non-profit organization based in the State of Wisconsin (USA) which exists to serve refugees and other oppressed or suffering people around the world by developing strong and ongoing relationships with the people groups it serves – partnered with the Smara Going Organic team to look at existing organic gardens in other camps within the Tindouf region of Algeria and how these operate and stated their commitment to the newly established Smara community organic garden by undertaking project management and supervision on the grounds upon the team’s departure back to the USA.

Stage one of the project included establishing firm relationships with people on the grounds that included meeting all of the people that would be impacted by the project in any form or shape. This group of people consisted of mostly Saharawi governmental officials, including the Smara governor; the Head of Protocol. We also met with Not Forgotten International agriculturalists Taleb Khalil, family and friends, community leaders and members, and construction workers. Once these relationships were established, we then began the planning stages of the community organic garden.

One of the main stages of the project was to build five organic community gardens. However, during our planning stage, we transitioned into a discussion of how the community garden would be constructed in our location. This included the dimension of the garden, the foundation, the water supply that would be channeled to the drip irrigation system, where the construction material would come from, the compost that would be used and how this would tie into our project timeline. After taking all these factors into consideration and meeting with the respective representatives involved, we decided to make one larger community garden for more refugees to benefit from.

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The Final Project: In the Smara refugee camp, construction materials are limited. This is due to the organization and the structure of the camp which limits any outside interference, such as construction sites in the camp. Therefore, construction materials had to be brought from nearby camps such as Awserd, Rabuni, and nearby Algerian city, Tindouf. The materials include bricks, sand, and cement. Fortunately, we had an impeccable team of six construction workers who helped speed the delivery of these needed materials.

Once these materials arrived in the camp, we faced the challenge of getting our water supply. The water distribution is led by the UNICEF agency in the camps, who deliver water tanks once every two weeks. Given the summer season, the project was completed in temperatures ranging from 117 to 122 Fahrenheit. Consequently, the demand for water by families was too high resulting in us having to wait extra time to fill the project's 1,000 liter water bladders. After five days we were able to get the water supply, thus we began the construction of the physical infrastructure of the garden and the green house foundation. In the beginning of the second week, we focused on making the drip irrigation system inside and outside the green house. According to the Not Forgotten International agriculturist Taleb, the drip irrigation system supplies water to the garden for 30 minutes, twice a day when the drips are open. Therefore it was vital that the irrigation system be placed accordingly so that there will be no leaks in the system. The makeup of the drip irrigation system consisted of many polyethylene tubing products, such as PE hoses, PE tees, PEE1 bows, vales, reduction, and drippers.

The next stage of the project consisted of the positioning of the greenhouse within the brick layered structure of the garden. This was done by Taleb's assistants with the help of the Going Organic team. Once this was done, each Going Organic team member took up a shovel to dig holes in the ground for the implantation of thirteen trees, including the high nutritious moringa tree. Due to the heat factor, the fall season comes late in the desert, specifically late September. This resulted in the planting of the rest of seeds after our departure.

Overall, this was a very enriching experience filled with varied cultural experiences, specifically, interactions with different Saharawi people that hold rich perspectives about who they are, what drives them in life, and where they want to go in the future. The Saharawi people welcomed the Going Organic team with open arms and open hearts. From the benefit of the Project for Peace, the team was not only exposed to the building of the organic garden in the most severe heat conditions where people rely entirely on humanitarian aid, but to the life style of the people of Western Sahara, and we sincerely thank the Davis Foundation for this life changing opportunity.

Section II

Peace: the absence of hostility and the fear of violence. The existence of reconciliation, good interpersonal, cultural relationship as well as social and economic prosperity and dignity.

Our actualizing of peace within the Saharawi community is by bringing in the means for self-reliance along with means to regulate their diet and quality of life, by providing them with a means of income. This was done through the building of a sustainable community garden for the Saharawi people to uphold a highly nutritious diet. Moreover, we accomplished this through providing education and

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assistance on sustaining and maintaining greenhouse, which will improve the sociological economic condition of the community.

“Nothing feels better than giving back to your community. Such work and opportunity are always accompanied with many obstacles, however, the feeling that you get by just knowing that you have ‘learned, earned and returned’ to your community made it worthwhile.”

– Mula Ihfid

