

International Volunteer Day 2003 - Mauritania

Tous volontaires pour un jour. Nettoyer et Assainir pour toujours !

“All volunteers for a day. Mopping up operations everyday!”

Why joining locally the celebration of the IVD?

The UNV Programme - Mauritania has joined the International Community to celebrate the International Volunteer Day (IVD) in order to recognise and valorise publicly the important contribution of volunteers all around the world to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. Given the fact that in Mauritania, Friday 5th of December was bank holiday, this year the IVD was celebrated on Thursday 4th of December. National and international NGO, UN Agencies, Peace Corps, Scouts, public authorities and bilateral cooperation agencies and Embassies came together to celebrate together this occasion.

As the slogan indicates, this year was particularly related to environmental issues which constitute one of the major strategic axes of intervention for the Mauritanian Strategic Framework for Poverty Reduction and of the Millennium Development Goals.

How did we celebrate it?..... an innovative activity outside conference rooms...

This last December the 4th, the UNV Programme – Mauritania has launched an innovative activity based on a participatory development approach allowing the involvement of the community, the development practitioners and of the volunteers: one day of rubbish collection and trees plantation in four zones of intervention of the poor neighbourhoods of Sebkhia and Riyad in Nouakchott.

The aim of the day was to render visible to the local communities and development practitioners the effective and efficient difference volunteerism can make to the lives of the local inhabitants. These activities were identified in response to a real need since these are issues that concern all of us and to which we are daily exposed in our city.

In addition, an important quantity of rubbish collection material was donated by the UNV Programme to the women cooperatives and community based associations that work with our partners.

Also, the IVD attracted successfully Mauritanian government and media allowing the enlargement of the scope of the sensitisation on volunteerism, which was reinforced through participatory theatre and musical compositions elaborated by the community as well as by professional volunteer comedians.

Achievements of the International Volunteer Day

- ü **Volunteerism and the organisation of the IVD.** Contrary to those claiming the inefficiency of volunteerism, the happening of the IVD constitutes a concrete prove of the impact it can have and the potential that should be exploited to improve efficiency. By the end of the day, 300 trees were planted and the positive impact of the rubbish collection activity was visible in both neighbourhoods: to give an idea, 6 trucks, 2 pick ups and regular trolleys of rubbish were collected.

Furthermore, the whole event was organised, conceptualised and coordinated on the basis of the voluntary participation and involvement of all partners and individuals. The modalities of participation were also adapted to the capacities of each of us, be it with material, financial participation or human resources for the organisation and planned activities.

- ü **Solidarity and networking.** The IVD has been a first step in Mauritania to consolidate partnerships with the UNV Programme and to create, in the medium term, a National Volunteer Council. This latter would aim at harmonizing and coordinating our interventions to improve the efficiency of our efforts to achieve the MDG.
- ü **Reinforcement and capacity building of the community** through sensitisation and the visibility of the local structures, the donation of rubbish collection material and the consolidation of social networks of the community ensured by the permanence of our partners on the field.
- ü **Sustainability and appropriation by the community.** On the basis of a participatory approach, the activity has been identified with the involvement of all the partners and is inspired from the traditional concept of community support to social habitat, or Twize.

This activity was inserted into rubbish collection projects already under way, whose scope has been enlarged to plantation issues. The presence on the field of our partners, before and after the IVD, is ensuring the sustainability of the concrete achievements of the Day, such as the regularity of the rubbish collection or the care of the trees.

- ü **Participation, team-working and discovering the others.** The IVD was successful not solely because of the concrete results achieved but also because of the heterogeneity of the approximately 1400 participants. This has rendered legible the solidarity and volunteering networks so often neglected by our daily practices but so crucial for the functioning of our societies.

To start with, without the voluntary and active engagement of the local communities, the IVD could not have been done. The active involvement of the women cooperatives and schools, together with other community based associations, music groups and comedians from the community has rendered visible and has reinforced the existing local structures while ensuring participation, sensitisation, the rubbish collection and plantation. In addition, the engagement of community based associations of the neighbourhood of El Mina to the efforts deployed by their neighbours testifies and reinforces the solidarity networks as well as it enlarges the scope of the sensitisation.

Finally, the IVD has allowed to break the barriers between the local communities and development practitioners as well as it has reinforced teamwork for a common and concrete objective. An active participation of the UN Staff and other agencies to collect rubbish and plant trees has been achieved successfully. To all of us who manage projects from the our computer screens, this teamwork has allowed to humanise our daily work.