

**Outline: Initiative to Reform the Local Awareness of Environmental Dependence in Mauritania and Reforming the Approach, to, and the Language the Law.**

1. General Outline of the Mauritanian Government, (RIM), German Gesellschaft fuer technische Zusammenarbeit (GtZ) and World Bank (WB) Initiative (the Initiative).
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1. General Outline of the Mauritanian Government’, (RIM), German Gesellschaft fuer technische Zusammenarbeit’ (GtZ) and World Bank’ (WB) Initiative (the Initiative).

The objective of the initiative is to create an awareness among Mauritanians that the future of their country depends on a reasonable and sustainable approach towards their environment. This would be achieved through: (a) the sensibilization of the population at large in order to create an active lobby, (b) the definition of basic policy guidelines to be incorporated into a “*loi cadre*”, (c) the rewriting of all environmental laws in clear, concise and understandable terms covering only topics directly relevant to the current country context, and (d) the interactive development of rural environmental- and land use regulations by the concerned population, assisted by experts.

2. Summary of Agreed RIM / GtZ Agenda for 2000/2004 to Operationalize the Biodiversity and Desertification Conventions.

The Mauritanian Government has signed the three Environmental Conventions [ ..... ] in [ ..... ] respectively. (*Footnote with details, notably mise en vigueur* )

The Biodiversity and the Desertification Conventions contain obligations which require that the signatory state undertake certain preservation and information activities. While not exactly identical, these obligations are similar and might well be satisfied in a concerted fashion. RIM has concluded a technical assistance and financing agreement with GtZ (the Agreement) to undertake this operationalization over the next four years.

GtZ has set up an office in Nouakchott for this purpose (Project Synergy BDC/DCC).

### 3. The Need to Expand and to Extend the Activities to Encompass the Entire Realm of Mauritanian Activities.

Mauritania, a Sahelian country on the Atlantic Ocean is characterized by its desert. The desert is interrupted by Oasis used for agriculture, grass-covered rangelands for herding interspersed by wetlands, and bordered by the Senegal River Basin, the Senegal River Delta and the coastal shorelines on the Atlantic. Due to inadequate treatment the natural environment has deteriorated drastically during the last century, with increased negative consequences over the last generation. Total desertification and inadequate and insufficient drinking water resources to sustain the current population are predictable during the lifetime of this generation unless decisive corrective action is undertaken by the population to reverse the environmental degradation.

In order to bring about such behavioral change, the agenda of the current GtZ Project Synergy would need to be expanded.

The majority of the Mauritanian population (about 2.8 million) is among the world's poorest, governed by a number of rich trading families. The country has substantial natural resources (fish, pasture, potential for irrigated agriculture and minerals, possibly oil). In order to reduce the poverty of the majority, responsible use of the natural resource base, notably the fish stock and the rangelands would be required. Safeguarding the environment should thus be the priority governing all other government action, since the government has made poverty reduction its goal. The principal donors assisting the Government, the European Union (EU), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and WB also pursue this objective through the jointly developed so called poverty reduction strategy plans (PRSP) which therefore need to center on the preservation of the environment.

Should the desert encompass the entire territory down south to the Senegal River shore, there would be no survival prospect for the majority of Mauritians.

Environmental considerations must therefore be at the center of urban planning, export promotion, industrial expansion and all other government activities, and not only figure as an afterthought in agricultural programs. It is also important that environment protection be understood as a value by itself, and not only considered under the aspects of immediate health or economic hazards. The further development of the Senegal River Valley, for instance, in coordination with the Organization for the Development of Senegal River (OMVS), will have to consider the river biotope as an asset in its own right – and not only as a means for growing food, or moving cargo.

The protection of the backcountry through safeguarding the biological cover is also an objective the administrators, traders, and urbanites have to espouse. Without grasslands, brushes and trees will the desert not only invade the capital city and other municipalities like it does Oualata, but also cause health and economic damage through intensified sand storms and wind blown sand dust in the entire region – as China is already experiencing.

The most important aspect of required new environmental awareness, however, pertains to the land use of the rural population. The people who have remained in the countryside and not yet migrated to the capital city have to externalize their traditional behavior in order to assess whether it is still adequate to enable survival. Most importantly they will need to understand that their survival depends only on their own actions. They have to be empowered to regain their lost autonomy over their lives. Without reverting to the traditional eternal wars and blood feuds they need to reassert their values and rely on their own insights to manage their natural resources – instead of relying on the central government's initiatives.

#### 4. Consequences for Action – in General: Overhaul of Existing Legislation and Environmental Action Plan Drafts – in Approach and in Text

Making the survival in the desert, and therefore sustaining the environment, the political priority in RIM entails a number of consequences, the most central being the recognition of the realities of the country. These comprise:

(a) natural elements, the climate and its dry and wet cycles, (b) governance elements: (i) a weak and unreliable administration without enforcement capacity and hitherto no consideration for environmental preservation, (ii) the absence of a functioning or credible judiciary, and (c) disrespect of normal human behavior: (i) the ineffectiveness of any regulation which is not backed by interest groups among the population, and (ii) consideration of existing traditional values and behavior patterns.

It therefore does not appear surprising that existing or newly enacted legislation and regulation has no effects in reality – as it is missing all ingredients required for application – which are the reverse of the above shortcomings: