

# Mauritania: Irrigating lands for greater food security

The Africa Development Impact Awards recognise excellence, innovation, results and quality of operations in each of the High 5s. The Awards go to operations supported by the African Development Bank which have demonstrated unique development impact and improved peoples' lives in Africa.

Mauritania improved food security in West Brakna, one of its poorest regions through, among other things, investments in irrigation. Rice production increased by 420%, and the project particularly helped women by incentivising them to increase agricultural yields. This led to higher income for farmers, which reversed the rural exodus with 1500 households returning to the project area.

## Challenge

With an average rainfall of just 100 millimeters a year, nearly 80% of Mauritania is covered in desert. In the Brakna region, 71.4% of individuals live below the poverty line and the rate of malnutrition among under-5-year-olds is close to 18%. The West Brakna region sits along the right bank of the Senegal river, with a population of 32 000 people spread across 48 villages. Women, who make up 57% of the inhabitants, suffer most from rural poverty because they lack opportunities to generate income. This region faced highly uneven distribution of water resources and high dependence on rainfall, degradation of natural resources and desertification, and low performance of irrigated agriculture because of weak technological standards.

## Approach

This project was designed with a participatory approach that made it possible to address the following challenges: the isolation of West Brakna, limited access to safe drinking water,

weak sanitation and the vulnerability of women and girls. It put to good use 1500 hectares of rice fields, seeking to develop truck farming for women on 110 hectares of land. It also put in place structures that would open up this region, making its agricultural products more marketable and profitable, thereby mitigating the effects of drought and climate change.

## Impact

- The rice yield increased from 3.5 tonnes per hectare in 2004 to 5.8 tonnes at project close — a total annual increase of 420%, or over 4000 tonnes of rice produced.
- Annual sorghum production grew from 200 tonnes to over 3400 tonnes over four harvest seasons.
- The amount of irrigated cropland grew from 220 hectares a year to over 900 hectares a year.

5000 women took charge of reviving farming, organising themselves into cooperatives. The following results were



also achieved:

- 26.5 km of irrigated lines rehabilitated,
- 68 km of dirt roads established,
- 5600 new hectares of land cultivated,
- 104 hectares cultivated only by women for income diversification,
- 113 farmers' groups set up,
- 11 000 people trained in the use of new agriculture technology.

Project co-financiers are the African Development Fund, Nigeria Trust Fund and Islamic Development Bank.



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