



PRESSURE ON OASIAN LANDS: A WATER AND LAND RESOURCES CHALLENGE

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For thousands of years man has explored and shaped the extreme territories to settle there. It is to the rigorous structuring of natural resources in arid zones that oases owe their existence. For centuries they have been places of social, economic and agricultural exchanges and have played an important role in the links between the African, European and Asian continents. By their very essence, oases are territories in which land and water resources are not only fundamental, but are also places where strong ingenuity has made it possible to valorize and limit pressure of these resources. Today, oases are endangered by numerous crises that threaten their survival whereas they have a key role against the existing global crisis. It is essential to recognize their true value and strengthen them !!

Oasis water and lands are under pressure: to confront, we must accompany them!

Oases are agroecosystems in which whole communities live; both places of life and production based on a rational use of water and land resources. But this simple equation is questioned by an increasing of oases pressure conditions :

- Global warming and climate-related events: oases benefit from a low and irregular rainfall with an average of less than 300 mm. Coupled with global warming and more and more frequent droughts, oases are undergoing an exacerbation of desertification: soil degradation, springs' drying up, drawdown of groundwater and competition for water supply are also causing a decrease in local agricultural production despite a large population still depending on it.

- Political factors: oases have been little considered by politicians or have been the subject of unfavorable measures so far: the implementation of privatization and land reclamation reforms, agricultural extensions, urbanization, the increasing industrial activities, the monoculture of the date palm's development: it has become quite difficult to be a farmer in oasis and to have access to water to irrigate its plot. How to protect oases if the States themselves do not give the appropriate consideration?



- **Legal factors:** oases do not benefit from appropriate and specific legislation designed for them. There is little coherence in the jurisdiction

over water and land rights, both in terms of ownership and uses. In general, we note the absence of land titles, the fragmentation of surfaces, the differentiation or sometimes the superposition of water, land and palm rights: it is necessary to stabilize and secure oases. In addition, oases face a bipolar agriculture today: a mass of small farmers with a weak financial base; and a minority of large farmers and neo-buyers.

The dismantling of some oases is close, we must act now! With this scale of complexities and changes faced by the oases, we, civil society, refuse their drying-up.

It is now necessary to obtain official and specific recognition of oases as full ecosystems, vulnerable and representing heritage worthy to be preserved.

Therefore, we ask policy makers, and all those who have the means, to act in favor of the implementation of legislation of their own with the consideration of their land rights specificities, and the limitation of competition on water.

Because oases represent today a major source of innovation and a model of adaptation!

Oasis innovations future bearer and source of inspiration

- **The establishment of thresholds of groundwater slowing in Mauritania:** the construction of temporary thresholds slowdowns which self-destruct is a technique allowing to ensure a better management of the water resource by the re-feeding of the water table at points and strategic moments, and the establishment of diversion systems to agricultural plots. Their construction is easy, requires little investment and moreover their ephemeral nature avoid possible conflicts that could arise.

This technique would be optimized by satellites data to identify the potential sites for the

installation of these thresholds, the oasis innovation would be reinforced by external support!

- **Gravity irrigation in Tunisia:** gravity irrigation makes it possible to control the distribution of water at the head of the plot and the flows delivered to the plots. Overall, the observed benefits of this practice range from minimizing water losses, increasing biodiversity and diversifying income for producers, and strengthening the territory by limiting exodus. The integration of this innovative technique was put in place by the joint action of the Agricultural Development Group (GDA), the Regional Commissariat for Agricultural Development (CRDA) and farmers. *It is therefore an example to be followed of a cooperation between oasis fields actors and state organizations which invites to renew this kind of common action!*

- **The collective and fair exploitation of the lands of Ksar Afanour in Morocco:** this project of lands collective management by their batch redistribution, creation and exploitation of a palm plantation is the result of a strong collective commitment, despite low involvement of local state actors. We can now observe small farms, the setting up of upright, organized and rigorous committee, the increase of young people employability, the knowledge of young graduates' mobilization and the plantation of high added value crops and collective water resource's exploitation. *This participatory process put in place is beneficial for local populations as well as for their territory, which is revitalized, strengthened and allows opportunities for local development.*

These initiatives are only some of a wide range of existing oasis practices. But despite their undoubted benefits, the sustainability of these actions is not assured due to a lack of support and external commitment.

We call for recognition of these grassroots initiatives and their reinforcement through coherent programs of action involving the oasis population.

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