

## 5. Participatory approach

In fighting desertification and sand encroachment, the use of a participatory approach has been demonstrated to be key for achieving and securing long-term and sustainable results and positive impacts. The participatory approach methodology entails the following stages:

- the choice of sites to be treated, taking into consideration the seriousness of sand encroachment, the willingness of the local inhabitants to carry out work following appropriate techniques, the local authorities' approval of these sites and the priorities set;
- the establishment of village committees in the target zones in order to ensure the social organization of the work and supervise management and monitoring of the established timetable;
- the signature of agreements regarding the nature of the operations to be carried out, the prescribed time frames, the necessary participation, the roles of the committee established by the beneficiaries and the technical training to be provided;
- the training of local inhabitants by field staff (national experts and technicians, project leaders and NGO officers) in the production of seedlings, installation of wattling, planting, monitoring and posting of guards;
- implementation of the various activities and operations on a contractual basis with the rural population in order to ensure the local people's effective ongoing participation and assumption of responsibility for the planned work.

Implementing the participatory approach as described above has provided the following benefits:

- a shift in the local population's attitude from fatalistic to positive;
- consideration for the understanding and views of the village communities in regard to sustainable land management;
- commitment of the local inhabitants and their participation as stakeholders in combating sand encroachment;
- greater awareness and strengthened capacity of local communities;
- adoption of simple and reliable techniques;
- relief from difficult economic conditions, provided by incentives in foodstuffs supplied to the local inhabitants;
- reduction in encroachment and environmental pressure from harvesting, thanks to appropriate, reliable techniques that are easy for the rural population to adapt and reproduce.

The activities carried out contributed to the immediate well-being of rural inhabitants by protecting their socio-economic infrastructure, improving their standard of living and slowing the exodus toward urban centres.

### IN URBAN AND PERIURBAN AREAS

In the case of the Nouakchott green belt, the particular features of the urban and periurban environment required an appropriate approach. Various factors were taken into account:

- the inhabitants of these zones are often relatively impoverished people who support themselves with small jobs and casual labour;
- some inhabitants, often tenants (officials and traders), may not be directly concerned or may show no interest in sustainable activities to preserve the environment;

- the installations are State-owned and offer few opportunities for the use of forest products or by-products.

The approach envisaged may thus be participatory, but not basically community-focused, inasmuch as the latter is less appropriate in the urban context. The project therefore designed an approach based on execution of activities under State supervision with workers receiving monthly salaries, rather than counting on the disinterested collective participation of communities living in these zones – who have neither the motivation nor the time, since most of their time is taken up with various other activities in order to meet their subsistence needs.

With a view to ensuring the sustainability of existing and future schemes, the project selected a participatory approach that linked the administrative and municipal authorities concerned, the technical services and the communities directly affected by sand encroachment in the target zones. In this context, it adopted the methodology tested on a small scale during the first planting season on green belt intervention sites:

- establishment of contacts in order to identify socio-professional organizations (cooperatives, cooperative unions, national NGOs, etc.) directly concerned in the conservation and management of forest stands;
- organization of regular meetings with the administrative and municipal authorities of these *moughataas* (prefectures) and also with the leaders of the cooperatives and NGOs selected; these meetings mainly focused on:
  - the transmission of information and explanation of the various project objectives, particularly regarding optimization and consolidation of benefits with the support of periurban organizations, with a view to ensuring the sustainable management and permanence of forest interventions;
  - the search for guarantees from administrative and municipal authorities regarding the protection of schemes and the execution of harvesting felling, with the various partners respecting the clauses in the letters of agreement;
  - the readiness of the socioprofessional organizations involved to undertake the activities defined, their organization and the resources to be put in place;
  - the commitment of technical services to ensuring specific training for field staff, and ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the work carried out;
- organization of visits to the various plantation areas with the leaders of the identified cooperatives and NGOs so that they can evaluate the real nature and



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*Meeting of the management committee concerned with combating desertification*

volume of the activities to be undertaken (nursery, wattling, planting, harvesting, posting of guards, use and sale of forest products and by-products, etc.);

- establishment of firm commitments among the parties concerned through the drafting and signing of letters of agreement with the definitive approval of the administrative authorities;
- monitoring and evaluation by the project and the relevant technical services of sound execution and observance of the calendar of work fixed at the start of each planting season.

### **IN RURAL AREAS**

In rural areas, at the request of local communities supported by local authorities, letters of agreement were drawn up and signed among all partners in order to define their effective roles and responsibilities for carrying out the work and continuing the activities after the project on a sustainable basis. These agreements laid out the nature of the operations to be undertaken by the parties concerned and the participation needed in order to achieve the designated objectives within the time frames laid down, as well as in the longer term.