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Ilham – Inspiration

Project Leader
Theresa Schinagl

Organisation
-

Designed By
Theresa Schinagl

Project Location
The Sahel Region

Project Website
www.facebook.com/IlhamConcept

Name of nominating Icsid Member organisation
VDID

Please describe the project and the challenge it intended to address

Ilham was created to enhance the nutritional situation of families in the rural area of the Sahel; a climate and geographic transition region in Africa between the Sahara desert to the north and Sudan to the south. It stretches across North Africa between the Red Sea and the Atlantic Ocean and is the band of vegetation that delineates the beginning of the desert from the savannah. The idea is to improve their water supply and agricultural efficiency to provide a better food supply. The challenge is a background of virtually no financial support in an area of extreme climate, where a rural population struggles to survive from one day to the next.

The system consists of three components:

1. A rainwater catchment area that is more efficient than a rooftop would be and doesn't depend on a special ground-surface like existing ground-catchment systems do. The water gathered is being filtered and stored in a cistern. From here the water is brought to the second component:

2. An improved drip-irrigation-system. Unlike most western products, the concept has been reduced to its core principles - leading water directly to the plant, causing as little spill as possible. A specially designed clay funnel not only brings the water to the plant, it gets the drops of water down to the roots, where the water is taken in and causes the plant to root deeper, an essential advantage in an area of regular droughts. The self-made clay-drippers are cheaper than high-tech solutions and can be adapted to local conditions.

3. The third part is an organic seed pot that allows a better development of roots leading to stronger plants. The plants can be cultivated in these pots and then planted right onto the field without removing the pot, avoiding the risk of damaging the thin roots. This pot is made of organic fibers, so it slowly disintegrates and releases essential nutrients into the soil, besides helping to retain water.

Ilham is the Arabic word for "inspiration", therefore Ilham is an idea rather than a finished product. It aims to inspire people to build something, using materials available to them, to achieve the best possible results for their local circumstances and conditions. The simple construction is put together from scrap or even waste at almost no cost and without the use of complicated techniques or a requirement of special



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Eva-Maria Schorno · Pressesprecherin at Landratsamt Würzburg
It's great that young people are concerned and engaged in the future of the Sahel people! Thanks to Theresa.
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tools. The concept is easy to understand and allows simple repairs and maintenance. Using leftovers and garbage means recycling resources, so it helps protect the environment and (by using the organic seed pots) even improves the soil quality.

What are the objectives of the project and are the outcomes same as those originally intended?

The short term goal of my project is to raise agricultural efficiency in order to help increase the capacity of food production of the families in the Sahel and improve their living conditions while ensuring the sustainability of the natural systems. My project aims to meet the agricultural requirements in an extremely arid area like the Sahel where prolonged droughts are very common. An enhanced water supply is bound to boost the agricultural productivity and increase the self-sufficiency of the people of Sahel throughout all aspects of their lives.

My long term goal is to inspire people to develop sustainable solutions to their own problems which will help them to decrease their dependence on external sources. It will not only help them meet their present needs but will also enable them to solve their future challenges. This concept is only one piece of the puzzle and is not intended to be a cure-all solution, because progress is always an ongoing process!

How was the community engaged through the life cycle of the project?

Throughout the development process I stayed in contact with various families from several African countries, to collect their feedback and advice. I built numerous prototypes to examine and experiment in order to find the best setup. Also during research, soil scientists and professionals in rainwater-catchment were consulted, alongside experts from the Institute for Viticulture and Horticulture who gave valuable feedback based on their wealth of experience.

Include the society of interest and describe any other relevant stakeholders and partners that were involved or consulted.

My project directly targets the people in the Sahel. In cooperation with international and regional organisations the idea can be spread and reach people in need. I want to help them to help themselves.

The concept was developed as a bachelor thesis and all enquiry, experiments and prototypes have been financed by private donations. In the course of research I contacted various organisations to implement this project which could pave the way towards self-sufficiency.

During my study I have also contacted various families from different African countries and sought their opinion about my project to get a realistic assessment of their situations and problems.

The German Leprosy and Tuberculosis Relief Association (DAHW) and Ministry for Economy, Transport, Agriculture and Viticulture (LWG) were very helpful. I also received support and advice from both a tailor and a potter.

How has this project benefited the community of interest?

There is a famous proverb "Give a man a fish and he eats for a day, teach a man to fish and he eats for a lifetime", that is precisely my idea of helping people.

This project is supposed to help families in the Sahel improve their nutritional situation. But there is also a higher goal: the idea is to encourage people to help themselves, to become creative in using and recycling

materials, even garbage, so that they will gain self-confidence. They will become motivated to take things into their own hands, realizing they can actually achieve something on their own - the true idea of helping people to help themselves.

Awareness will be drawn to the protection of the environment, since that is the most important resource in the Sahel. Fighting desertification, for example by planting trees, is the only solution. Therefore systems like Agroforestry and Ecofarming are the key to creating sustainable agriculture. Nature must be understood and respected if people want to go on living in the Sahel.

I am hoping my project can be part of a movement towards a new thinking, an improved way of living with nature rather than just feeding off it.

What metrics are used to track the impact of the project?

I started a facebook page for Ilham because social media is an excellent platform to support and monitor the spread of this idea. In the future, individual projects could be presented there, since social media is used by millions of people in Africa and all around the world.

How will winning the Prize raise awareness of the project and further its impact?

Winning this prize, or even just taking part in the process, will help the project by making it known to a wider public. Ilham is an idea and ideas can only blossom in the minds of people. This idea needs supporters at all levels of participation: from a single person who wants to contribute by sharing his or her perspective on the situation, to international organisations who could help sponsor actual fieldwork, everyone is welcome, everyone is needed! So this prize could do a whole lot in furthering my project!

Briefly describe the challenges the project currently faces

The next step in the project would be field studies, to test all kinds of different materials under the circumstances given. Only by actually trying things out on the spot can weaknesses in the design be discovered and improvements can be made. Together with the locals we have to find out whether the functional principles work and can be implemented in the Sahel.

1. The rainwater-catchment area needs to be set up in different situations to find out about the most appropriate size needed to capture a certain amount of water, and to test the constructional design.
2. For the "drippers", the flow volume of water should be examined and adjusted to the requirements.
3. Also the decomposition of the seed pots in the local conditions has to be looked into more thoroughly...

The biggest challenge however will be to spread the idea in the local communities, convince people to invest time and resources and to be patient with the project, since success will not come over night - yet positive results would be so crucial for the people.

Please include any other relevant information you would like to share

Ilham has a facebook page that allows for everyone to learn about the project quickly and show their support in any way they would like.
www.facebook.com/IlhamConcept

As a private citizen I'm not trying to get profit out of this project. Living in Germany, I lack nothing, but I realize

that the majority of the world's population has to live under really harsh conditions. As an aspiring designer and a world citizen I hold myself responsible for taking action.

Instead of designing products that are produced in developing countries and emerging economies, I want to show that a design can do so much more if it respects it's social responsibility!

The World Design Impact Prize is an initiative of:



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