



Mauritania

Pilot Project: After the Mahadra, What Comes Next?

Traditional Islamic schools, known as mahadras, play a central role in the education system in the Islamic Republic of Mauritania. They are focal points for students from all over West Africa and the Sahel. The mahadras' purely religious approach often does not prepare graduates for the requirements of the job market. That creates a dangerous situation, as students may be more susceptible to the recruitment tactics of different jihadi groups in the Sahel.

The GIZ pilot project "Support to UNHCR in the operationalization of the Global Compact on Refugees in the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus" (ProNexus) was implemented in cooperation with religious actors, government institutions, and partners from civil society. Its aim was to promote the social and economic integration of young graduates of mahadras in order to better their career chances and strengthen social cohesion. In so doing, the inclusion of young refugees and other vulnerable groups should also be specifically promoted.

Results

One hundred young graduates of mahadras were provided with vocational training as part of the pilot project. Half of the participants were refugees; a third were women. The courses included practical areas like plumbing, renewable energy, electrical engineering, auto mechanics, sewing and knitting as well as physical therapy. In addition to the training, graduates received certificates and the chance to take part in an internship or practical training.

Support for women was one area of especial success, as women are often at a disadvantage on the job market. As one participant said: "I didn't even know what a needle was. Now I can sew new clothing for my daughter."

Duration:	02/2022 – 11/2022
Implementation:	GIZ Project "Support to UNHCR in the operationalization of the Global Compact on Refugees in the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus" (ProNexus)
Partners:	Mahadras (Islamic schools) in various regions of Mauritania as well as within the M'bera refugee camp, Association of Ulemas (religious experts) in Mauritania, Association of Quranic masters of M'bera refugee camp (AMCCM), Institute for vocational education of the Ministry for Islamic Affairs and Employment Ministry (IGRAA), Training Center for Mahadras in Nouakchott (CFPM), local officials, Mauritanian Worker's Union, UNHCR

Together with other women, I founded a tailoring group so that we can earn our own living."

On top of the training projects for youth, 54 religious dignitaries, of whom four were women, were trained in subjects like social cohesion, citizenship, and sustainable development. The information was integrated into the teaching plans at mahadras and was disseminated further through sermons and other religious formats. The continued education helped to broaden the graduates' perspectives and support their integration into the job

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The Problem

Regardless of their nationality or place of origin, students – especially women – have a very high need for technical and vocational education, as the mahadras do not provide sufficient education to meet the needs of the job market.

The Role of Religious Actors

Imams or Sheikhs are responsible for the administration, operations, and educational work in the mahadras. These leaders are key to social cohesion amongst pupils from different origins. On top of that, they can enhance career perspectives on the job market by expanding the curriculum at the mahadras.

market. The modules developed will continue to be used by the CFPM and IGRAA training centres and serve as a foundation for future offerings in the area of sustainable development. Material support such as the acquisition of sewing machines enhanced the quality of the trainings.

Challenges and Learnings

The cooperation with the religious actors required close coordination in order to best align the content of the training courses with the religious foundation of the mahadras. These actors played a key role in bringing the project to the community in a sustainable manner and build a consensus on the content.

Geographic distances and language barriers made the coordination difficult. While the official language in Mauritania is Arabic and the language of education is French, further languages are spoken in Mauritania, including Soninke, Fula, or Wolof. GIZ's working language

in Mauritania is French. That slowed administrative processes and demanded additional resources.

Cultural and logistical hurdles also stood in the way of several young women from the M'bera refugee camp being able to participate in the trainings. There is still a need for action in order to develop more customised solutions for this target group.

The project also showed that the integration of vocational training into religious education has an effect of strengthening the position of young people in the job market. The close cooperation with the mahadras and their training centres offered a solid foundation for expanding the approach. When young people from different places of origin were able to learn together, not only were their competencies strengthened, but social cohesion was also enhanced.

The GIZ project plans to continue its dialogues with religious actors and carry on with the integration of sustainable development into the curricula. As a CFPM representative noted: "We will continue the regular conversational exchanges and learn more about the subject of sustainable development and religion together with the imams."

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Sector Project Religion for Sustainable Development

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