

# **PROJECT R.E.D.E.E.M.**

Repatriation and Demilitarization Established in Morocco

## Executive Summary

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Project R.E.D.E.E.M., or Repatriation and Demilitarization Established in Morocco, is a track II, inclusive, and locally-based project with an initial 5-year timeframe and the possibility of renewal. The project will endeavour to improve the stability of Western Sahara through mediation sessions and youth economic empowerment initiatives with both short-term outcomes and long-term impacts. The initial mediation session will attempt to secure an agreement between various primary stakeholders that would allow for the successful repatriation of Sahrawi refugees from Algeria into Western Sahara over 10 years and a renewed commitment to upholding the ceasefire, specifically around the road near Guerguerat. Empowering the youth in Western Sahara will not only allow repatriated refugees to gain the skills needed to begin sustaining themselves but allow the region to develop economically as a whole and lead to improved indicators regarding the economic, demographic, and conflict-related conditions of the region.

## Objectives

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Below are the objectives for Project R.E.D.E.E.M. in terms of outcomes and impacts, divided according to the mediation and youth empowerment aspects of the project.

### *Phase I–Mediation*

Within the first year of the project, a mediation session will be facilitated by Oxfam International which will seek to invite representatives from the Moroccan government, the Algerian government, the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) and Polisario Front (PF), the International Labor Organization (ILO), and the African Union (AU)—in an observatory capacity. This session will have the goal of receiving the input and cooperation of all parties regarding how, logistically and financially, Oxfam International will be able to manage the repatriation of Sahrawi refugees from Algeria into Western Sahara within the estimated timeframe of 10 years. The planning and funding of this repatriation effort will require cooperation between all of the attending parties, leading to the projected impact of full or partial repatriation of Sahrawi refugees and renewed peace at the road near Guerguerat. In addition, a significant outcome of such cooperative dialogue will be improved communication and higher levels of trust between the primary stakeholders in the region. The initial mediation session will then transition into an annual meeting between the different parties as the project is implemented and reports of its progress can be reviewed with adjustments made accordingly. Subsequent mediation sessions also have the possibility of providing a platform for constructively discussing the Western Sahara referendum, although this is not a primary goal.

For Canada, the greatest benefits arising from this phase will be a more stable trading partner with increased access to natural resources found in Western Sahara, as Morocco is currently Canada's fifth-largest trading partner in Africa and a renewed international recognition of Canada's peacebuilding capacity.

### *Phase II–Youth Empowerment*

After the successful conclusion of the initial mediation session, the ILO will work to support and improve the employability of the youth in Western Sahara, particularly in the areas receiving repatriated refugees. The impact here will be to provide job skills to a quantifiable target of young people each year, including young women and girls, while the outcomes will be a more economically stable Western Sahara and a populace less inclined to unrest.

For Canada, the greatest benefits arising from this phase will be a more economically developed and empowered region in Morocco, expanding trade possibilities, in addition to the government fulfilling its goal to pursue a Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP) that meaningfully improves the skills and opportunities available to young women in Western Sahara.

### *Partner Stakeholders*

Global Affairs Canada (GAC) will spearhead the project, providing both funding and institutional capacity to the two contracted partners. On the ground, the project will be delivered by Oxfam International and the ILO.

Oxfam is an NGO focused on poverty alleviation grounded in its commitment to human rights. The organization benefits from deep expertise in answering both humanitarian and refugee crises, an existential aspect of R.E.D.E.E.M.<sup>i</sup> The NGO already has significant traction in the region with its Quebec branch ongoing contract with GAC focused on women empowerment and, thus, has a good understanding of the underlying tensions and sources of conflict.<sup>ii</sup> As such, Oxfam proves to be an excellent candidate, compared to other alternatives, to fulfill the role elaborated in Phase I.

The ILO is a UN agency whose mandate focuses on advancing social and economic justice through the implementation of internationally recognized human and labour rights essential to lasting peace.<sup>iii</sup> Since 2012, the ILO has been employed by GAC to conduct an \$8 Million economic empowerment program for Moroccan youth.<sup>iv</sup> Given the ILO's overlapping mandate with the objectives of the project, the organization is an excellent partner to conduct the activities of Phase II.

## **Pre-Project Risk Assessment**

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### *Pre-Conditions*

Despite Morocco maintaining a stable government, the restrictions on civil, political rights, and freedom of the press are extremely high, particularly around dissent to Moroccan territorial claims over Western Sahara.<sup>v</sup> There are claims of increased aggression and violence against Sahrawi activists by the Moroccan government, which could further escalate the conflict and encourage violence from the PF. The Moroccan claim over Western Sahara has been strengthened by the recent United States (US)'s recognition of their sovereignty over the territory, which has undermined the United Nations (UN) peacekeeping mission, MINURSO.<sup>vi</sup> Ensuring the Moroccan government sees benefit in mediation and repatriation beyond what they currently have through de-facto control of the territory will be fundamental to ensure Project R.E.D.E.E.M.'s success. De-escalating tension between activists and the Moroccan government will also be necessary to ensure productive dialogue at mediation sessions. This is possible by championing the representation of Sahrawi activist groups and facilitating dialogue between them and the Moroccan government to build trust between the sides.

The risk of increased low-intensity violence along the border remains and would be detrimental to the outcome of this project. The Moroccan government has maintained its commitment to the ceasefire since its entry into force in 1991.<sup>vii</sup> Ensuring the Moroccan government continues its commitment to the ceasefire is absolutely essential for the success of this project. The PF broke the ceasefire following clashes born from the blocking of the road in Guerguerat, an essential trade route from Morocco to the rest of Africa.<sup>viii</sup> Although there is a risk of increased violence from the PF that could jeopardize the project, the mediation will directly address the grievances of the PF and include them in the peace process, hence mitigating the risk of further violence.<sup>ix</sup>

It is also imperative to ensure that Algeria is involved in Phase I of this project, not only as the country housing the majority of Sahrawi refugees but also as the main foreign backer of the PF.<sup>x</sup> Algeria has been aggravated by the normalization of relations between Morocco and Israel, leading them to escalate their backing of the PF and a potential conflict with Morocco.<sup>xi</sup> This situation must be closely monitored, but Algeria will make significant diplomatic and reputational gains in the region as a party to mediation and leader in the repatriation project, which are their two main concerns in this conflict and will likely minimize the risk of them resorting to further violence.<sup>xii</sup> As the main goal of Phase I is to re-establish the ceasefire and the demilitarization of the road in Guerguerat, a devolution into violence must be avoided in order for this project to have any success. The causes of the low-intensity violence are expressions of frustrations with the status quo, which will be addressed through mediation, making it likely that this can be avoided.

Natural resources and infrastructure development must also be carefully monitored as a potential complicating factor to our project. The project will be located primarily in Western Sahara, which has a strong resource sector focused on fishing and phosphate mining with current revenues from these sectors being claimed by the Moroccan government.<sup>xiii</sup> The tension between the Sahrawis and the Moroccan government arising from

this continued practice constitutes a risk to this project, which is beyond the mandate of R.E.D.E.E.M. In the short term, R.E.D.E.E.M. will look to the work of MINURSO on organizing a referendum and continued preferential tariffs on exports from Western Sahara from the European Union as sufficient to avoid an escalation of grievances.<sup>xiv</sup> In the long term, the impact of Phase II's economic empowerment will work to mitigate these grievances and lay the groundwork for future discussion on the issue. Finally, accessing adequate infrastructure through which to deploy Phase II of our project is vital. Due to the unresolved legal status of Western Sahara, development in infrastructure has been minimal.<sup>xv</sup> The region is dependent on the Moroccan government for administering the economy, infrastructure development, social spending, and they are a significant employer.<sup>xvi</sup> Investment in the region has increased recently, and further investment in infrastructure can be discussed during Phase I mediation to ensure the successful delivery of Phase II.

### *COVID-19*

Given the ongoing nature of the COVID-19 pandemic Project R.E.D.E.E.M will be working within the context of COVID. This will depend on the outlook of the pandemic in Morocco and specifically Western Sahara, and both ILO and Oxfam will need to be prepared to adjust their approaches as advised by GAC should the situation change or deteriorate rapidly. Should the COVID pandemic continue on its current trajectory in Morocco with high levels of vaccination, Phase II of our project will work to better the economic outlook of youth in Morocco and allow them to actively engage with the government to provide input as to what policies will give them the best chance to succeed in the future.<sup>xvii</sup> Phase I mediation will likely need to occur in person in order to appropriately engage with the subject matter. This will require a COVID contingency plan, with expectations from all parties on safety, testing, and vaccination status laid out before the session can be planned. With both cases and vaccinations increasing in Morocco, careful monitoring of the situation throughout the project will be necessary, particularly with regard to the treatment of Sahrawis in Western Sahara during the rollout of vaccines and access to healthcare and economic assistance.<sup>xviii</sup> This will provide insight as to the commitment of the Moroccan government to bettering the livelihoods of the Sahrawi people and long-term peace.

### *Impact Outlook*

With the appropriate management of the aforementioned risks, successful mediation in Phase I, and successful implementation of the economic empowerment programs in Phase II this project can see a reinstated peace for all parties, relative stability, and a context ripe for a return to the referendum question. By integrating the above risk factors in the operational planning of the project there will be a higher chance of success, as spoilers and sudden degradations in relationships can be prepared for. By working to ensure each party in the conflict stands to make gains through their participation in R.E.D.E.E.M. that go beyond what they could gain from the status quo, escalated violence, or abandoning the project, the sustainability and efficacy of the project are ensured.

## **Operational Decisions & Monitoring**

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### *Operational limits*

One of the biggest operational limitations is the lack of budget to contribute to the actual repatriation efforts. With a \$20 million budget, resources are already spread thin into both phases of the project. While R.E.D.E.E.M. aims to secure an agreement between the parties for the repatriation of refugees to Western Sahara, our in-depth analysis leads us to believe that mediation would encourage parties to recognize the repatriation project as an investment in the stability of the region and the economic future of Morocco and Western Sahara. This should open discussions for economic contributions to Oxfam-led repatriation efforts from external stakeholders, namely Algeria and the AU.

The COVID-19 situation in Western Sahara is difficult to assess due to the poor quality of data reporting in the territory. Western Sahara only has 766 reported cases compared to 499,000 and 117,000 cases for Morocco and Algeria respectively. Project R.E.D.E.E.M. will need to work within the COVID-19 environment given the nature of our efforts, effectively putting in place appropriate procedures in order to reduce transmission risks in both mediation and economic empowerment efforts. As for the repatriation of refugees, Oxfam and ILO should

encourage the involved stakeholders to implement a COVID-19 mitigation strategy to limit the spread of the infectious disease.

Other factors will need to be taken into consideration during the operationalization of the project. With most Sahrawi refugees currently residing in Algeria, close coordination with Algeria is quintessential, hence the need to include Algerian officials in the mediation and repatriation efforts. Moreover, instances of armed conflict have been significantly reduced since the establishment of MINURSO and Guerguerat has been the theatre of tensions. The additional implication of the AU as a monitor of the demilitarized trade route would significantly lessen the opportunity for armed conflict.

### *Operational Timeline*

#### Phase I–Mediation

Duration: 1 year

Funding: 20% of operational budget (\$4,000,000)

Project R.E.D.E.E.M.'s first year will be dedicated to facilitating mediation between the parties to establish a repatriation agreement for Sahrawi refugees currently living in Algerian refugee camps. Oxfam International will be charged with the coordination and mediation of round table talks between the main stakeholders. Oxfam's mission will be to foster productive deliberations, in a track II setting free of media attention, with the aim to re-establish the previously agreed ceasefire and secure the demilitarization of the road in Guerguerat.

Through mediation, the project will hope to build trust and incentives across parties as conditions for the repatriation of Sahrawi refugees to Western Sahara while simultaneously encouraging parties to recognize the repatriation project as an investment in the stability of the region and the economic future of Morocco and Western Sahara. These discussions will create opportunities for economic contributions to repatriation efforts where Oxfam would serve in a coordinating role given their expertise. Oxfam will also set aside part of the \$4 million funding for annual reporting on the state of repatriation to be presented to all stakeholders in subsequent round table talks.

#### Phase II–Economic Empowerment

Duration: 4 years

Funding: 80% of operational budget (\$16,000,000)

Following and conditional upon the success of Phase I, the subsequent 4 years of Project R.E.D.E.E.M. will be undertaking the economic empowerment of Western Sahara youth as a focal point. Building upon the ILO's existing programs in Morocco, the project will dedicate 80% of its operational budget to provide technical assistance for entrepreneurial training and opportunities for youth in Morocco and Western Sahara; involve young women and men in policy dialogue to inform national youth employment policies; and strengthen secondary and post-secondary education opportunities. The ILO will also be charged with the provision of annual reports on the situation on the ground to GAC, effectively informing on the various aspects of evaluation and performance (see below).

### *Logic Model*

Operational decisions and monitoring of Project R.E.D.E.E.M. are perhaps best illustrated through the use of a logic model. Appendix A illustrates the chain of causes and effects between the various elements of the initiative, beginning with the desired target audience all the way to the coveted impacts.

## **Evaluation & Performance**

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### *Phase I–During mediation*

To ensure the mediation process on refugee repatriation remains on track, Phase I of the project will require close collaboration between Oxfam on the ground and relevant stakeholders, including GAC. Oxfam will utilize track II mediation to foster an unofficial agreement that can be expanded into negotiations at the official state level. Local mediation results and breakthroughs will have to be communicated to GAC for program oversight and to ensure progress at all stages of the mediation, including the final timeline for refugee repatriation. At the same time, mediation organizers will have to remain vigilant of the COVID-19 case trends in Morocco and Western Sahara as well as vaccination levels.

### *Phase I–After negotiated agreement*

After an agreement on refugee repatriation is officially achieved at the state level, Oxfam will regularly monitor the repatriation of refugees based on the negotiated ten-year timeline. Oxfam will also ensure that the repatriation of refugees will remain on track by meeting repatriation targets that are agreed on by all stakeholders. For communication, Oxfam will provide quarterly reports to update all stakeholders as well as annual reports that review the repatriation process and provide recommendations to improve the repatriation process.

Oxfam will monitor the political and civil freedoms of the refugees after resettlement to ensure that the population is not repressed and have equal access to state programs and services. The AU will also be tasked with monitoring the maintenance of the ceasefire between Morocco and the PF as well as the demilitarization of the road in Guerguerat. This will ensure the freedom of movement of trade with the rest of Africa.

### *Phase II–Youth Empowerment*

In Phase II, the ILO will provide economic empowerment programs that primarily target the refugee youth in Western Sahara. These programs will be monitored by the ILO which will provide reports to the Moroccan government, the SADR representatives, as well as GAC. ILO will solicit feedback from local program and service delivery workers as well as beneficiaries of the programs. These reports will provide the stakeholders with developments on the ground and will also rely on economic activity indicators in the Western Sahara region. These indicators that will measure the success of the economic empowerment program will include the GDP of the region, foreign direct investment, youth employment rate, unemployment rate, education levels, literacy rates, as well as tracking instances of armed violence.

### *Pilot Project Evaluation for Future Deployment*

After 4 years of implementation, Project REDEEM will be evaluated by all stakeholders and primarily GAC. As a pilot, the International Humanitarian Assistance Bureau–Africa and the Middle East Division will review Project REDEEM, and if it has achieved its objectives as well as the satisfaction and economic well-being of the local population, GAC will consider extending the project as well as adopting it into a project model for future deployment in other parts of the world with similar issues.

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## Appendix A

### Project R.E.D.E.E.M. Logic Model

TARGET AUDIENCE	INPUTS	ACTIVITIES	OUTPUTS	OUTCOMES	IMPACTS
Sahrawi Refugees	<p><u>Partners</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Oxfam Canada</li> <li>● International Labour Organization</li> <li>● Global Affairs Canada</li> </ul> <p><u>Funding</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● \$20 million (GAC)</li> </ul> <p><u>Stakeholders</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Morocco</li> <li>● Algeria</li> <li>● SADR/PF</li> <li>● Sahrawi Refugees</li> <li>● Canada</li> <li>● African Union</li> </ul> <p><u>Institutional Resources</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Existing GAC-funded programs in Morocco with Oxfam Canada and ILO focused on economic empowerment of</li> </ul>	<p><u>Phase I:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 1-year duration</li> <li>● Mediation</li> </ul> <p><u>Phase II:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 4-year duration</li> <li>● Economic empowerment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Return of 1991 ceasefire</li> <li>● Demilitarization of the road in Guerguerat</li> <li>● Repatriation agreement</li> <li>● Provide technical assistance for entrepreneurial training and opportunities for youth in Morocco and Western Sahara</li> <li>● Involve young women and men in policy dialogue to inform national youth employment policies</li> <li>● Strengthen secondary and post-secondary</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Lower the opportunity for violence</li> <li>● Stabilize the region</li> <li>● Safe return of Sahrawi refugees</li> <li>● Bolster economic activity in the face of the ongoing recession</li> <li>● Provide further economic opportunity for the regional youth</li> <li>● Stabilize tensions born out of economic frustrations</li> </ul> <p><u>To Canada:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Economically developed and empowered region</li> </ul>	<p>A reinstated period of relative peace and stability, addressing underlying destabilizing factors, ripe for a return to the referendum issue</p>



ASSUMPTIONS	OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Economic incentives will alter the positions of the main belligerents.</li> <li>● Repatriation of refugees is essential for PF.</li> <li>● Demilitarization of the road in Guerguerat is essential for Morocco.</li> <li>● African Union and Algeria are committed to stability in the region.</li> <li>● New US administration will not accelerate the policy position of President Trump.</li> <li>● Stakeholders will recognize benefit of repatriation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Effects of COVID-19 can be mitigated during the duration of the project.</li> <li>● Presence of MINURSO reduces the possibility of armed conflict.</li> </ul>

<sup>i</sup> Oxfam International, "About Us," What we do, Oxfam International, April 7, 2021, <https://www.oxfam.org/en/what-we-do/about>

<sup>ii</sup> Government of Canada, "Project profile–Women’s Voice and Leadership–Morocco," Project Browser, Global Affairs Canada, April 7, 2021, <https://w05.international.gc.ca/projectbrowser-banqueprojets/project-projet/details/D004522001>

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<sup>iv</sup> Government of Canada, "Project profile–Youth@Work: Employment for Young Women and Men," Project Browser, Global Affairs Canada, April 7, 2021, <https://w05.international.gc.ca/projectbrowser-banqueprojets/project-projet/details/Z021025001>

<sup>v</sup> Human Rights Watch, "Morocco/Western Sahara: Events of 2020," Human Rights Watch, N.D., <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/morocco/western-sahara>

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