



# Learning from EUTF-funded projects and programmes supporting youth across West Africa

## CASE STUDY – SAFIRE OXFAM

Altai Consulting for the European Union – 2025



Funded by  
the European Union



© 2025 Altai Consulting. All rights reserved.

Licensed to the European Union under conditions.

Unless specified otherwise, all pictures in this report are credited to Altai Consulting.

This publication was produced with the financial support of the European Union through the European Union Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF). Its contents are the sole responsibility of Altai Consulting and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.

## ALTAI CONSULTING

Altai Consulting provides strategy consulting and research services to governments, public institutions and private companies in developing countries.

Our teams operate in more than 50 countries in Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia. Since its inception 20 years ago, Altai Consulting has developed a strong focus on migration, governance and sustainable development related research and programme evaluations. [www.altaiconsulting.com](http://www.altaiconsulting.com)

## EUTF MONITORING AND LEARNING SYSTEM (MLS)

The EU Trust Fund (EUTF) Monitoring and Learning System (MLS) was initiated in July 2017 and is being implemented by Altai Consulting. The overall objective of the MLS is to strengthen EUTF interventions through the creation of a monitoring and learning system, which should provide an evidence-based approach for programming and implementing interventions.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was written by Manon Buttaró, under the supervision of Estelle Briot.

The authors of this report are grateful to all informants who agreed to speak with them and contributed to the reflections contained in this report.

## CONTACT

Estelle Briot (West Africa Regional Director): [ebriot@altaiconsulting.com](mailto:ebriot@altaiconsulting.com)

Justine Rubira (MLS Deputy Team Leader): [jrubira@altaiconsulting.com](mailto:jrubira@altaiconsulting.com)

Eric Davin (Altai Partner): [edavin@altaiconsulting.com](mailto:edavin@altaiconsulting.com)

# CONTENTS

<b>1. INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>4</b>
1.1. Context and scope of the study .....	4
1.2. Objectives and methodology .....	4
1.3. Overview of the project .....	5
<b>2. ANALYSIS .....</b>	<b>6</b>
2.1. Approach and design.....	6
2.1.1. Relevance.....	6
2.1.2. Reach .....	9
2.1.3. Coherence .....	9
2.1.4. Sustainability .....	11
2.2. Project results .....	12
2.2.1. Introduction.....	12
2.2.2. Engage .....	12
<b>2.2.2.1. Engagement within the community.....</b>	<b>12</b>
2.2.3. Empower .....	13
2.2.4. Connect .....	15
<b>3. CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>4. LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>5. ANNEXES.....</b>	<b>18</b>
5.1. List of key informants interviewed .....	18
5.2. List of project documents reviewed .....	18

# INDEX

Figure 1: Data collection in Néma, Hodh Ech Chargui, February 2025 (Altai Consulting) .....	4
Figure 2: Sewing training at a training and orientation centre in the south of Nouakchott, February 2025 (Altai Consulting).....	11
Figure 3: Djikké microfinance institute, Nouakchott, February 2025 (Altai Consulting).....	14

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. CONTEXT AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The European Union Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF) was established to address the root causes of irregular migration and displacement across Africa, with a particular focus on fostering stability, economic opportunities, and resilience in vulnerable communities. Within this framework, youth have been identified as a critical demographic, given their disproportionate vulnerability to unemployment, social exclusion, and migration pressures. Recognising the transformative potential of youth empowerment, the EUTF has funded numerous projects across West Africa aimed at improving youth livelihoods, enhancing skills development, and promoting social inclusion.

This case study is part of a broader learning initiative commissioned by the European Union (EU) to learn from EUTF-funded programmes supporting youth. The first phase involved a comprehensive mapping of youth-focused interventions within the EUTF portfolio, followed by a more in-depth analysis of 30 selected projects/programmes. This phase aimed to map the diversity of approaches, geographical coverage, and thematic areas, while identifying trends, successes, and challenges across projects. The second phase consisted of case studies of selected initiatives. These case studies aimed to provide a deeper understanding of how specific interventions addressed the needs of youth, adapted to local contexts, and contributed to sustainable development outcomes.

## 1.2. OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The objective of the case studies conducted by Altai was to **identify good practices and lessons learned from selected EUTF-funded projects/programmes, to feed into future EU programming supporting youth in West Africa**. Among the four selected projects/programmes was SAFIRE Oxfam, implemented by a consortium led by Oxfam in Mauritania between February 2019 and February 2023.

Altai collected, analysed and triangulated data from several sources: an in-depth **document review** and **28 key informant interviews** with diverse stakeholders (implementing partner/s, national and local authorities, EU Delegation, civil society, beneficiaries) met during a field visit to Nouakchott and Néma, Mauritania between 24–28 February 2025.



Figure 1: Data collection in Néma, Hodh Ech Chargui, February 2025 (Altai Consulting)

The analysis is structured into two phases: (1) **analysis of project design** (relevance, coherence, reach, and sustainability, focusing on the project's adaptation to local contexts, and its alignment with EU and national strategies); and (2) **analysis of project results** (using the EU Youth Action Plan 2022–2027 as a framework, revolving around three pillars – Engage, Empower, and Connect – described

further below). **Lessons learned** and **good practices** are identified and presented throughout the different sections.

### 1.3. OVERVIEW OF THE PROJECT

The project, **Community and Institutional Resilience for the Economic and Social Integration of Youth and Women in Nouakchott, Hodh Ech Chargui and Hodh El Garbi<sup>1</sup> (SAFIRE Oxfam)**, was implemented in Mauritania between February 2019 and 2023, by a consortium led by Oxfam Intermón, with co-applicants including *Action Contre la Faim* (ACF), *Terre des Hommes* (TdH) and four national non-governmental organisations (NGOs): *l'Association pour la Recherche et le Développement en Mauritanie* (ARDM); *l'Association des Femmes chefs de Familles* (AFCF); *l'Association Mauritanienne pour l'Auto Développement* (AMAD); et *l'Organisation pour le Développement des zones arides et semi arides en Mauritanie* (ODZASAM). This project was part of the *Programme to strengthen the resilience of vulnerable urban and rural communities in Mauritania<sup>2</sup> (SAFIRE)*, covering three projects implemented by different consortia in different regions of the country.

The main objective of the SAFIRE Oxfam project was to sustainably improve the socio-professional integration and resilience to food insecurity of the most vulnerable populations in the *wilayas*<sup>3</sup> of intervention. **The main action targeting youth under this project entailed support to employment and entrepreneurship, including technical and vocational training, entrepreneurship training, skills development and access to finance for microprojects or income-generating activities (IGAs).** The project also provided broader support for resilience to food insecurity, which did not specifically target youth.

A final evaluation of the SAFIRE programme (covering the three projects) was conducted in early 2024. Following the DAC criteria,<sup>4</sup> this evaluation assessed the relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability of the programme as a whole, while also providing insights into the achievements of each of its components. This evaluation did not specifically focus on activities implemented by the Oxfam-led consortium.

#### **Limitations of the SAFIRE Oxfam case study conducted by Altai**

While SAFIRE Oxfam was implemented between 2019 and early 2023, this case study was conducted two years after the end of the project. While Altai was still able to meet and engage with individuals who had been involved in the project's implementation, some key stakeholders could not be reached. Oxfam Intermón, consortium lead and host of the inter-consortia platform for the wider SAFIRE programme, terminated its operations in Mauritania when the project ended, and no Oxfam staff involved in the project could be interviewed by Altai because they had since left the organisation.

While these limitations may have hindered the availability of information, they also presented an interesting opportunity to observe and understand what was left from the project, both in terms of institutional memory and impact, two years after its conclusion.

<sup>1</sup> *Résilience Communautaire et Institutionnelle pour l'Insertion Economique et Sociale des Jeunes et des Femmes à Nouakchott, au Hodh Ech Chargui et Hodh El Garbi.*

<sup>2</sup> *Programme de renforcement de la résilience des communautés urbaines et rurales vulnérables en Mauritanie.*

<sup>3</sup> Wilaya is the term used to represent an administrative division in Mauritania, which could be translated as 'provinces'.

<sup>4</sup> The Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has developed a set of six criteria – relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability – which are commonly used as a normative framework to determine the merit or worth of a development intervention.



## 2. ANALYSIS

### 2.1. APPROACH AND DESIGN

#### 2.1.1. RELEVANCE

##### 2.1.1.1. Contextual analysis and intervention design

**As most African and West-African countries, Mauritania has a predominantly young population, which is particularly affected by poverty and unemployment.** More than 60% of the population is under the age of 25 years<sup>i</sup> and most young people are considered NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training): 73% of 18–35 years olds are unemployed, and 30% have no formal education.<sup>ii</sup> The country is also experiencing a significant rural exodus, mostly for economic reasons, leading young people to migrate, whether seasonally, long-term, internally or cross-border. Rural regions are particularly subject to poverty, with a poverty incidence rate of 59.4% in rural areas, compared to 20.8% in urban areas.<sup>iii</sup> SAFIRE Oxfam was implemented in three regions: the capital, Nouakchott, and two rural regions, Hodh El Garbi and Hodh Ech Chargui. The latter two are located over 700 kilometres from the capital and at the border with Mali. For a long time, this geographical position left them rather disconnected from projects, aid and opportunities, while also making them highly vulnerable to the repercussions of the ongoing conflicts in neighbouring Mali. In this context and, as confirmed by all stakeholders interviewed by Altai, the project effectively identified a key issue and sought to address it by supporting youth access to training, employment and economic opportunities in remote and vulnerable regions, as well as in Nouakchott's underprivileged suburban areas.

**Some interviewees highlighted the contrast between the humanitarian focus of the implementing partners and the long-term development aims of the project, which may have led to challenges in aligning the operational approaches of the implementing partners with the intervention's primary objectives.** The main actors of the consortium are grounded in a humanitarian tradition (ACF, Oxfam), primarily focused on emergency response and urgent action, which often involve short-term, reactive interventions. In contrast, the project had a long-term development focus, aiming to build sustainable solutions and foster economic opportunities for vulnerable youth. For some of the individuals interviewed, this difference in approach may explain some of the project shortcomings, including in its targeting of beneficiaries (see below).

##### 2.1.1.2. Needs analysis and youth engagement

**Most interviewed stakeholders who participated in the implementation of the SAFIRE Oxfam project regretted not being included in the project's design.** State technical services, in particular (Techghil<sup>5</sup>, Directorate of Employment within the Minister of Public Service, Labour and Modernisation of Administration), as well as private sector actors (Djikké microfinance institute) described limited implication in the project design. Beneficiaries met by Altai mentioned not having been consulted as part of the project design process either; however, this was a small sample, and the project team indicated that focus group discussions with youth had taken place during SAFIRE Oxfam's inception phase. While the project documents mention that project design was based on a participatory and inclusive process involving implementing partners, local authorities, and beneficiaries, to gather their interests, commitments, and needs, Altai was unable to verify the existence or methodology used to lead these consultations, or any document resulting from it that summarised related key findings.

---

<sup>5</sup> Techghil is the national agency for youth employment in Mauritania, formerly known as ANAPEJ (*Agence Nationale de Promotion de l'Emploi des Jeunes*).

**The project seems to have relied on several studies<sup>6</sup> during its inception phase to refine the details of the activities and areas of intervention.** For example, a study of promising sectors was conducted in 2020 (year 2 of the project) by the consortium members to complement a preliminary study that had been deemed insufficient. This study appears robust, analysing the strengths, weaknesses, risks, and opportunities of the sectors identified within each intervention area, as well as the target groups involved. It differentiated between men and women, youth and adults, to analyse the key groups involved in each activity, and provided a list of the main sectors of interest for youth specifically, in each department within the intervention regions.

### 2.1.1.3. Relevance of activities and targeting

**The selected intervention areas were highly relevant with respect to the challenges the project sought to address.** Nouakchott, the capital city of the country, is a primary destination for internal and economic migrations, particularly for those from rural areas seeking economic opportunities. According to available information and interviews, the southern regions of Hodh El Garbi and Hodh Ech Chargui, are characterised by high poverty, food insecurity, and unemployment, and have historically received limited attention from aid and development projects, making them a source of rural exodus and migration. In addition to difficult living conditions in these areas, the significant rural exodus in Mauritania also carries a high risk of disrupting social bonds and creating divisions within families, communities and generations, between those who leave and those who stay. As such, these vulnerable regions should be considered priority areas for resilience-building interventions.

**SAFIRE Oxfam developed a guide, detailing the criteria and steps for the beneficiary selection process.** To ensure a standardised and comprehensive understanding and consideration of the varied situations youth encounter, the methodology included several steps, from the socio-economic analysis of an individual's situation to an evaluation of their motivation, mobilisation and ownership of the planned activity. The selection was conducted through a selection committee composed of project stakeholders (consortium members, decentralised technical services of the state, elected officials and civil society organisations (CSOs) in target areas). This methodology, coupled with the involvement of local structures (local vocational training centres and CSOs) experienced in working with vulnerable populations in the implementation phase, enabled the project to successfully reach vulnerable youth. Some stakeholders mentioned attempts by certain authorities to include specific youth among the beneficiaries. This was reportedly mitigated by asking for formal demands, which reportedly limited political interference.

**While the project seems to have reached vulnerable beneficiaries, according to interviews led by Altai, some interviewees raised concerns that the beneficiaries may have been 'too vulnerable' to effectively capitalise on the support they received and transform it into sustainable, lasting change.** According to several stakeholders, most vulnerable youth targeted by the project must first meet basic needs, before being able to build upon support received in terms of skills training or entrepreneurship. Partners, such as the Djikké microfinance institute, suggested the project may have been more impactful and sustainable had it targeted individuals in more stable circumstances. This raises questions about the relevance of the initial selection criteria, as well as the adaptability of the activities to the type and primary needs of the targeted population. The final evaluation somewhat mitigates these affirmations, stating that some beneficiaries were not the most vulnerable in terms of precarity, as they were supported by their families, but were considered vulnerable due to their socio-economic dependency and lack of opportunities for empowerment.

---

<sup>6</sup> The project documents mention several studies on which the project reportedly relied, including: prior studies to support the consideration of gender (and youth in general); a feasibility study of the infrastructure planned in the Hodh El Gharbi region; a study on community practices among young herders in the three regions of intervention; and field operations aimed at gathering information to support further efforts to link urban and rural areas for economic and social complementarity.

**While SAFIRE Oxfam adopted an integrated approach that combined activities in order to provide comprehensive support tailored to the needs of beneficiaries, some highlighted limitations in the activity design, which limited their success.** Some beneficiaries mentioned that the three-month (including the month of Ramadan) training they received and their lack of practical experience beyond theoretical learning, were insufficient to reach an adequate level of qualification. Further, the project provided all beneficiaries with the same financial subsidy of MRU<sup>7</sup> 26,000 (deemed insufficient by all beneficiaries interviewed), without considering that different types of activities require different resources. However, the project demonstrated flexibility by revising the subsidy amount during implementation after recognising that the initial allocation was inadequate, which can be considered a good practice.

#### 2.1.1.4. Lessons learned

Several lessons emerge from the SAFIRE Oxfam case study.

**Targeting the most vulnerable beneficiaries may not be the most effective approach to achieving project objectives.** The interviews highlighted the importance of aligning objectives, activities and targeted beneficiaries to ensure the success of the action. ‘Too vulnerable’ beneficiaries showed difficulties in achieving the expected results from the activities, not only because their primary needs – which are closer to urgent and humanitarian needs – did not correspond with the project’s objectives, but also because they lacked sufficient resources to capitalise on the project’s support and effectively stabilise their situation. Thus, either beneficiaries for economic empowerment activities need to be targeted more strategically, or activities need to be adapted to better suit the needs of very vulnerable populations.

**Local actors and partners must be engaged in meaningful ways early in the project design.** Most actors interviewed stated that they were not sufficiently involved in the project design and implementation. State actors were mostly informed of the action or consulted when formal authorisations were needed. Some expressed ideas or suggested adjustments to activities that could have improved the project’s effectiveness. Although the action aligned with national policies and interests regarding employment, the lack of involvement of national and local actors from the design stage of the project, hindered their appropriation of the action. Similarly, local NGOs/CSOs and microfinance institutions can be valuable assets in ensuring a relevant project design, as they possess expertise and a deep understanding of the activities and beneficiaries involved. Those that could be met by Altai in Nouakchott regretted having been onboarded after the project was designed.

**The local context and socio-cultural sensibilities should be considered throughout the implementing process, from the design phase through implementation of the activities.** In the case of SAFIRE Oxfam, social perceptions and traditional gender roles may have hindered the benefits of the project activities for some beneficiaries. In the Hodh Ech Chargui region, some women were directed towards training in fields traditionally considered masculine (e.g. carpentry or welding) against their preferences, due to a lack of available spots in other fields. In an environment where women’s work is not unanimously accepted, and gender roles persist, these women faced cultural resistance, criticism and difficulty finding job opportunities. However, the correlation of these activities/sectors with male work was highlighted in the initial study on promising employment sectors. This highlights the need to prioritise cultural sensitivity and local adaptation throughout the process, for the intervention to be effective. While the project seems to have anticipated numerous potentially limiting factors during its design phase, its implementation appears to have occasionally strayed from these considerations.

---

<sup>7</sup> MRU stands for Mauritanian Ouguiya, the official currency of Mauritania. Over the course of the project (2019–2023), MRU 26,000 was equivalent to EUR 550–700, depending on fluctuations in the exchange rate. As of 01 April 2025, it was EUR 602.



## 2.1.2. REACH

### 2.1.2.1. Outreach strategies

**In its inception phase, SAFIRE Oxfam appears to have reached a wide audience of potential beneficiaries with information about its objectives and opportunities.** Before launch, the consortium conducted a communication campaign to inform communities about the project's activities and services, reach the largest possible audience and encourage broad registration, to facilitate the inclusive selection of beneficiaries. It included materials, such as leaflets and flyers in local languages, door-to-door sensitisations, as well as communication on social networks (e.g. WhatsApp). The project also collaborated with existing structures, such as local Techghil agencies, and youth inspection offices in Sebkhia and Toujounine (Nouakchott wilaya). Mobile counters were established to reach vulnerable youth and potential beneficiaries in the project's intervention municipalities. This facilitated the effective circulation of information among youth, and helped reach the most vulnerable neighbourhoods, especially in the Hodh Ech Chargui region. Beneficiaries interviewed by Altai reported hearing about SAFIRE Oxfam from friends and neighbours in the market, at the corner shop and through public announcements, attesting to a wide dissemination of the message within the communities.

### 2.1.2.2. Lessons learned

**Relying on local and community networks enhances projects reaching capacity and enables engagement with potential beneficiaries.** This approach allows potential beneficiaries to be effectively informed, maximising outreach to vulnerable groups, especially in underserved neighbourhoods, and it ensures a more inclusive selection process.

## 2.1.3. COHERENCE

### 2.1.3.1. External coherence: Alignment with youth policies

**SAFIRE Oxfam was aligned with Mauritania's National Employment Strategy (2018–2030),** especially two of its main axes: developing human capital (through education and training); and supporting employment public services. SAFIRE Oxfam contributed to developing human capital by providing technical and vocational training in a variety of professional fields, previously identified by a study on promising sectors. The project also actively supported the deployment of Techghil antennas in the regions of intervention, whose launch coincided with the project's implementation. For instance, the project facilitated the relocation and professionalisation of the Techghil antenna in the Arafat neighbourhood (Nouakchott), enhancing its visibility and reputation. According to an implementing partner, this antenna became a key employment actor and served as an example for other antennas.

**However, state actors noted the absence of collaboration and synergies between the project and their own interventions.** While SAFIRE Oxfam actively contributed to the National Employment Strategy orientations, it reportedly was not directly aligned with the ministry's programmes and projects. The project's intermediate report mentions an aim for greater synergy with a programme launched by the Ministry of Employment, Youth and Sport (*'Mon projet, mon avenir'*), based on the shared objective of creating small and medium enterprises, but does not provide detail on the modalities of this intended synergy. Neither project documents nor the final evaluation provided more details on this possible synergy. The lack of coordinated action might have represented a missed opportunity to achieve longer-lasting impact, with the coinciding risk of the duplication of efforts. The ambition highlighted in the project documents to emphasise consultation at all levels and with the various stakeholders present in the intervention areas, reportedly did not materialise as expected. At the end of the project, SAFIRE Oxfam beneficiaries were not registered as such in the Techghil database, which also represents a lost opportunity in terms of institutional memory and learning. While the Techghil database was used to

identify beneficiaries and, in turn, was enriched with profiles registrations as a result of the project's sensitisation campaign, the actual beneficiaries of the project were reportedly not communicated to Techghil at the end of the intervention, preventing their identification in the database as project beneficiaries and thus hindering the availability of relevant information to avoid potential duplication of support, for example.

### 2.1.3.2. Internal coherence: Complementarity and synergies

**SAFIRE Oxfam was part of a larger programme consisting of three projects implemented in Mauritania by three different consortia, each in different intervention regions.** Each project had its own thematic and geographical areas of focus and implementing partners. According to the final evaluation, this division of labour between projects and implementing partners was based on geographical presence and expertise with the aim of avoiding overlap and contributing to more targeted and efficient approaches in the intervention areas. This approach had the potential for wider coverage and interventions tailored to local needs, while also avoiding the duplication of efforts.

**The programme made efforts to ensure coordination among implementing partners by establishing an inter-consortia unit within Oxfam.** Inter- and intra-consortium governance was one of the four key SAFIRE Oxfam components. The inter-consortia unit was intended to enhance coherence, complementarity, and allow economies of scale and learning. Several tools and approaches were harmonised across the three consortia under the leadership of the inter-consortia unit, including the beneficiary targeting methodology guide, the inter-consortia monitoring, evaluation, learning, and accountability framework, the common programme performance indicators tracking table, the tracking table for beneficiaries reached by programme activities, and the baseline, mid-term, and endline programme studies. However, despite these efforts, the complexity of managing numerous stakeholders, each implementing different activities and in different intervention areas, made coordination difficult and cumbersome. The lack of a common dashboard, for example, complicated tracking progress across the three consortia.

### 2.1.3.3. Lessons learned

**Involving national authorities is crucial to ensure appropriation of project results and coherence with projects and programmes deriving from national policies.** According to the final evaluation, although they acknowledged the legitimacy of the intervention, some national institutional leaders (particularly within the Ministry of Employment and Vocational Training and Techghil) felt 'left out' by the EU's approach, which involved contracting directly with NGOs – who, in turn, did not sufficiently involve state actors in the project's design. The lack of strong engagement at the national level, leaving ministries feeling 'sidelined'<sup>8</sup>, hindered the integration of the intervention into a broader, more comprehensive national effort and the long-term coherence and sustainability of its outcomes. This underscores the importance of not only aligning project implementation with national strategies but ensuring the active involvement of government bodies from the outset. It should be noted, however, that the project came at a time when Techghil was being restructured and ministries were being reshuffled, which may have made it difficult to establish and maintain working relationships.

**Coordinating a large and diverse group of implementing partners across multiple intervention areas can be challenging and may not be the most effective approach, despite efforts to create a structured system.** While the intention behind the coordination mechanisms established by the project was to improve efficiency, the overall structure remained heavy to manage, making it difficult to ensure coherent and coordinated implementation and monitoring. Some interviewees also mentioned

---

<sup>8</sup> This sentiment shared during the evaluation was later confirmed by the Employment Directorate of the Minister of Public Service, Labour and Modernisation of Administration (which was formed following a redesign of the ministries in 2024), when Altai staff met with them as a part of this case study.

that the multiplicity of stakeholders and actions involved in SAFIRE Oxfam blurred the vision of the initiative. A lighter structure involving fewer actors and a more focused area of intervention might have helped overcome these challenges and ensure smoother, more effective implementation – while freeing up more financial resources for activities.

#### 2.1.4. SUSTAINABILITY

**A key lesson learned from the project in terms of sustainability is the importance of sustained engagement with local actors and partners.** Anchoring development activities in the local institutional landscape is a good practice applicable to all development interventions, even more so when a significant part of the project's sustainability explicitly relies on its appropriation by local stakeholders and technical services. In the SAFIRE Oxfam project, these actors mentioned not being involved in the project design or implementation. Although the action aligned with national policies and interests regarding employment, the potential for a deeper, more strategic alignment with Techghil at the national level was not fully realised, limiting the potential for long-term impact and integration within the national employment strategy.

**SAFIRE Oxfam also illustrates how leveraging and strengthening local human capacities can foster self-sustaining systems that promote long-term community development.** For example, one of the project beneficiaries received sewing training at a vocational training centre in Nouakchott. After completing her training, she became a teacher at the same centre, which provided her with an employment opportunity. This not only helped sustain the training programme but also ensured that future youth would benefit from it. (see section 2.2.2.1). This approach helps anchor the activity locally and create self-sustainable cycles of support, knowledge transfer and community development, strengthening the project's long-term impact, beyond individual empowerment.



Figure 2: Sewing training at a training and orientation centre in the south of Nouakchott, February 2025 (Altai Consulting)

**The establishment of Savings and Internal Lending Communities (SILC) through the project also proved to be a valuable mechanism for fostering community-based financial resilience and promoting continued and sustainable access to finance.** These savings groups brought together community members to regularly contribute small amounts to a common fund, from which they can then take out loans to support IGAs. According to the final evaluation, these SILC were largely appropriated and experienced real engagement, thus proving successful in encouraging savings and providing local access to finance for developing IGAs. They continued to function even after the project ended and

even served as an example for subsequent projects. While these SILC mostly benefited women in the context of SAFIRE Oxfam, they represent an interesting tool to foster community engagement and provide access to local financial solutions.

## 2.2. PROJECT RESULTS

### 2.2.1. INTRODUCTION

**The purpose of this section is to assess and learn from project results against the framework of the three pillars of the EU's Youth Action Plan (YAP) for 2022–2027, which guides the EU's work for and with the youth in external action:**

- **Engage:** Youth participation in community, policy, and institutional landscapes
- **Empower:** Access to education, employment, livelihoods, and basic rights
- **Connect:** Collaboration and cooperation among youth at local, national, and international levels

As the project's design was finalised before the adoption of this action plan, this section offers a backward-looking examination to identify how project activities align with these three pillars, and it aims to offer points for reflection on the design and execution of future projects targeting youth.

**The main objective pursued by SAFIRE Oxfam was to empower young people, through economic opportunities.** Some activities also contributed to engaging and connecting young people.

### 2.2.2. ENGAGE

#### 2.2.2.1. Engagement within the community

**Fostering youth engagement within the community was not a specific objective of SAFIRE Oxfam, but was indirectly promoted** through its various initiatives. For instance, the project supported several micro- and small-sized enterprises through access to financing tools, on the condition that these enterprises employed one to three other youth. Some youth became trainers within the centres where they were trained themselves (see 2.1.4). Others were included in the listening, guidance, and orientation support units established within training centres to support and encourage youth trainees. Similarly, the project had planned to select 'dynamic young individuals' to join the *Espaces-Espoir* and co-host these spaces alongside professional facilitators. These spaces, initially designed as platforms for information, awareness, support, and social assistance, ultimately evolved into *Espaces Jeunes*, integrated within the existing Techghil agencies. However, the project documents do not explicitly mention whether young people ultimately participated as team facilitators in these spaces.

Nonetheless, these examples show how SAFIRE Oxfam supported and encouraged youth to help their peers develop new skills and access economic opportunities. While some factors indicate that sustainability may be challenging—such as youth participation in support units not being designed to continue beyond the project's end, the financing tools lacking long-term viability, and uncertainties about the sustainability of youth employment within the supported micro- and small-sized enterprises—there are also positive indicators regarding the empowerment of youth. Engaging youth as trainers and in support roles highlights their potential to create a sense of community, fostering collaboration beyond individual empowerment.

**SILC, although not specifically designed to support youth in the context of SAFIRE Oxfam, provide an interesting example of a financing tool that addresses two key issues: offering local access to finance and strengthening community cohesion and engagement.** Beyond providing direct access to financial opportunities, SILC demonstrate how investing in community engagement and networks can foster sustainable development by providing local support and resources. This

approach – relying on community ties and involvement – ensures that initiatives are more relevant, impactful, locally anchored and aligned with community needs, ultimately supporting lasting change.

## 2.2.3. EMPOWER

### 2.2.3.1. Education, training, and skills development

**The project mostly empowered youth by providing professional trainings.** This included access to technical trainings in various fields. These trainings were provided within vocational training centres, in remote areas and neighbourhoods, reaching the most vulnerable youth. The technical trainings were often complemented with modules on financial education and entrepreneurship, including the development and use of financial management tools, budgeting, savings, debt management and accounting. For project holder beneficiaries with the lowest level of education, these modules were adapted and took the form of on-the-ground formative supervision focused on, for example, the development and practical use of financial management tools (cash management, purchase price calculation, and profit calculation). These additional trainings, provided by a variety of stakeholders (vocational training centres, microfinance institutions, etc.) to vulnerable youth as well as to unemployed graduates and project leaders, were deemed very useful and built skills in a comprehensive way.

### 2.2.3.2. Access to employment and entrepreneurship

**One of SAFIRE Oxfam's main objectives was to improve access to employment and entrepreneurship for youth.** This was pursued through diverse activities, such as the provision of trainings and skills development sessions oriented towards increased employability (see above), financial support to IGAs or micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises, and technical support to Techghil (see 2.1.3.1) – even though available information does not allow for an assessment of the real impact of this support.

**SAFIRE Oxfam provided financial opportunities to support the development of micro-projects and the launch of economic activities.** SAFIRE Oxfam supported micro-projects through a mixed financial tool, including 50% grants from the project and 50% loans from a microfinance institution. This modality proved effective, as microfinance institutes indicated that all project holders were able to repay their loans successfully. The project also provided kits – either in the form of material equipment or grants – to trained youth to support them in launching their activities. Some beneficiaries had accounts opened at microfinance institutions to receive their subsidy. While these offers had limitations – such as the limited amounts offered and the one-time nature of the subsidy – they still enabled some beneficiaries to launch their activities or establish connections with financial institutions they could use in the future. The project strived to offer diverse financing opportunities, addressing a key barrier to entrepreneurship. Some interviewed stakeholders pointed out the missed opportunity to go further by developing more engaged and sustainable financing opportunities, including components of savings or investment.

**While the grants and trainings allowed for the development of IGAs or access to employment for some beneficiaries, the results might not have been as systematic and broad as expected.** Some beneficiaries noted that their participation in the project did not produce the expected results or changes in their lives. After taking part in vocational training, beneficiaries hoped to develop successful and sustainable economic activities. Beyond structural limitations due to the local economic landscape, the project documents and interviews do not allow the identification of key factors that led to the success of activities for some beneficiaries and not for others. Some beneficiaries reported receiving other forms of support from family and friends, which helped stabilise their activities.





Figure 3: Djikké microfinance institute, Nouakchott, February 2025 (Altai Consulting)

### 2.2.3.3. Improved livelihoods and living conditions

**Data collected by Altai suggests that the project had a positive psycho-social effect on some beneficiaries.** Some beneficiaries reported that SAFIRE Oxfam led to an increase in their income<sup>9</sup> and an improvement in their overall situation. For the most vulnerable individuals, particularly those from isolated neighbourhoods, the project played a key role in reconnecting them with society by introducing them to key actors and available opportunities. Many beneficiaries – among the small sample interviewed in Hodh Ech Chargui – reported increased self-confidence and motivation, feeling more equipped to face opportunities. Several also highlighted the shift in how both society and their families perceived them after participating in the project's activities. Lastly, for some young women who had never considered working but rather aimed for marriage, the project offered new perspectives, showing them that they can pursue training or jobs, and work toward independence. The project thus contributed to significant personal development among beneficiaries, as well as community engagement, even in cases where financial success was limited.

### 2.2.3.4. Lessons learned

**Developing and offering sustainable financial tools is essential for supporting access to entrepreneurship and economic independence.** SAFIRE Oxfam's approach, which provided access to various financing tools, combining grants and loans, helped beneficiaries connect with financial institutions, thus contributing to addressing the key issue of access to finance for youth – particularly vulnerable youth.

**Providing comprehensive and long-term support is essential for ensuring that beneficiaries not only acquire the necessary skills but also gain sustainable autonomy.** Beyond skill acquisition, long-term support also addresses the critical phases of adaptation and stabilisation. While SAFIRE Oxfam aimed to provide comprehensive support with a package of activities adapted to the beneficiaries' needs, some beneficiaries deemed that the duration of the support, particularly their training, was too brief. The project documents and key informant interviews did not provide further information on potential follow-up activities after the granting of subsidies or kits, in the establishment of the beneficiaries' IGAs.

<sup>9</sup> The final report mentions an average increase in beneficiaries' annual income from MRU 29,851 (EUR 692) at baseline to MRU 118,206 (EUR 2,739) at endline.

**Empowering youth through economic prospects fosters personal development and social integration.** By participating in new activities and pursuing economic development, beneficiaries gained confidence, ambition and awareness of opportunities. By reaching youth in remote areas the project also addressed issues of social disconnection and isolation, which are key vulnerability factors. This empowerment, beyond its emotional or psychological benefits, can lead to improved economic situations as individuals become more aware and prepared to engage with available opportunities, ultimately strengthening their resilience and capacity for sustainable development.

## 2.2.4. CONNECT

### 2.2.4.1. Cooperation and collaboration among youth

**During its implementation, SAFIRE Oxfam organised several socio-economic and cultural events such as festivals and fora to bring together project stakeholders (including consortium members, local authorities, beneficiaries) and foster exchange.** Some of these events provided opportunities for young beneficiaries to connect. Several events, such as the *'festival international de la musique des bergers à Tintane'*, the *'festival socio-économique et culturel de Nouakchott'* and the *'forum sur la migration, la citoyenneté et le développement économique des territoires à Aioun'* served as platforms for youth to interact, share experiences and expertise, and discuss opportunities for collaboration. The *'festival socio-économique et culturel de Nouakchott'*, for example, organised an exhibition of local products produced by SAFIRE Oxfam project holders, exchanges between young entrepreneurs and the mayors of Nouakchott and the two Hodh regions, as well as football tournaments between the youth of Nouakchott, Hodh El Gharbi and Hodh Ech Chargui. These events created bridges between urban and rural youth – which was also one of the project objectives.

**Beyond these formal opportunities to connect, interviews conducted with beneficiaries also highlighted examples of connections among youth that were indirectly fostered by SAFIRE Oxfam's intervention.** In targeted areas, young people gathered around project activities and became acquainted with other beneficiaries. Some project beneficiaries spontaneously decided to collaborate by pooling the grants provided by SAFIRE Oxfam to launch collective IGAs. While this initiative was not necessarily a success due to the structural limitations of the economic environment, and does not provide lessons in terms of effectiveness, it remains an interesting example of grassroots connection that occurs when youth beneficiaries are gathered. Youth interviewed by Altai in Néma (Hodh Ech Chargui) also mentioned keeping in touch even after the programme ended. With improved knowledge and understanding of each other's skills and knowledge, youth gained new resources they can call on within their community. By targeting and bringing together youth under shared projects, SAFIRE Oxfam created connections and thereby strengthened the local social network. These interactions can also provide valuable individual psychological benefits, by creating emotional support and a sense of belonging, contributing to greater social cohesion overall, which also helps prevent social rupture and conflict within the community.

### 3. CONCLUSION

**The SAFIRE Oxfam project offers valuable lessons on the importance of faithfully translating project design into practice throughout all stages of implementation, as well as ensuring alignment between targeting strategies, beneficiary needs and capacities, and the overall objectives of the intervention.**

**This case study highlighted the potential gaps that can arise between project design and actual implementation.** While SAFIRE Oxfam was well-aligned with national priorities (see 2.1.3.1) and its design incorporated various approaches to ensure the relevance of activities (see 2.1.1.2) and stakeholder engagement, interviews revealed certain limitations. Among these was the lack of ownership among national actors, who were reportedly insufficiently involved in the project's design and implementation (see 2.1.1.4 and 2.1.3.3), in contrast to what had initially been foreseen. This disconnect contributed to limiting opportunities for synergies, the overall sense of appropriation among key national stakeholders, and thus, sustainability.

**Another valuable lesson provided by the project relates to targeting strategies and the importance of aligning project activities with the needs and capacities of targeted beneficiaries.** SAFIRE Oxfam implementation highlighted the fact that focusing exclusively on the most vulnerable populations may not always be the most effective approach (see 2.1.1.3). This strategy, shaped in part by the humanitarian working culture of most implementing partners, did not appear to be the most appropriate or well-aligned with the project's long-term development objectives. Some beneficiaries, due to their extreme vulnerability, were not in a position to make the most of the support provided. However, while some beneficiaries may have lacked the capacity to leverage assistance into lasting outcomes, this targeting approach did ensure that support reached those most in need and in remote areas, resulting in unexpected positive impacts (see 2.2.3.3).

## 4. LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Description
ACF	<i>Action Contre la Faim</i>
AFCF	<i>Association des Femmes chefs de Familles</i>
AMAD	<i>Association Mauritanienne pour l'Auto Développement</i>
ARDM	<i>Association pour la Recherche et le Développement en Mauritanie</i>
CSO	civil society organisation
EU	European Union
EUTF	European Union Emergency Trust Fund for Africa
IGA	income-generating activities
MLS	Monitoring and Learning System
NEET	Not in Education, Employment, or Training
NGO	non-governmental organisations
ODZASAM	<i>Organisation pour le Développement des zones arides et semi arides en Mauritanie</i>
SAFIRE	<i>Programme to strengthen the resilience of vulnerable urban and rural communities in Mauritania</i>
SILC	Savings and Internal Lending Communities
TdH	<i>Terre des Hommes</i>
YAP	Youth Action Plan

## 5. ANNEXES

### 5.1. LIST OF KEY INFORMANTS INTERVIEWED

Organisation	Position
European Union Delegation	Education, employment and vocational training programme manager
<i>Terre des Hommes</i>	Protection coordinator
<i>Action contre la faim</i>	Deputy country director – Operations manager
<i>Groupe de recherche et de réalisations pour le développement rural (Grdr)</i>	Mauritania Coordinator
<i>Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)</i>	Project director UE REM Pro emploi DSP – FTP specialist EU REM Pro emploi DSP project director – FTP specialist
<i>Ministère de l'Autonomisation des Jeunes, de l'Emploi, des Sports et du Service Civique</i>	Regional Director for Youth Empowerment, Employment, Sport and Civic Service
Talaba cultural club	President
European Union Delegation	Economy and private sector programme manager
<i>Centre de formation et d'orientation</i>	Executive director
IMF Djikké (microfinance institution)	Djikké Network Director
<i>Terre des Hommes</i>	Former SAFIRE Project Manager for TdH
<i>Ministère de la Fonction Publique, du Travail, de l'Emploi et de la Modernisation de l'Administration</i>	Deputy Director
<i>Association des Femmes Chefs de Familles</i>	AFCF founder and director
<i>Terre des Hommes</i>	MEAL officer
Techghill	Techghil network director – last SAFIRE focal point within Techghil
Techghill	Former SAFIRE focal point within Techghil

Beneficiary	Type of support	Location
Woman, single, 27 y.o	Subsidy beneficiary - carpentry	Néma
Man, single, 22 y.o	Subsidy beneficiary - carpentry	Néma
Woman, married, 27 y.o	Subsidy beneficiary - Sewing and dyeing	Néma
Woman, single 25 y.o	Subsidy beneficiary - carpentry	Néma
Woman, married, 34 y.o	Subsidy beneficiary - hairdressing salon	Néma
Woman, single, 27 y.o	Subsidy beneficiary - carpentry	Néma
Woman, single, 31 y.o	Subsidy beneficiary - carpentry	Néma
Woman, single, 29 y.o	Subsidy beneficiary - carpentry	Néma
Man, single, 26 y.o	Subsidy beneficiary - market gardening	Néma
Man, married, 34 y.o	Subsidy beneficiary - carpentry	Néma
Woman, married, 27 y.o	Member of a local dairy unit supported by the project	Amourj
Woman, married, 24 y.o	Member of a local dairy unit supported by the project	Amourj

### 5.2. LIST OF PROJECT DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

Author	Date	Name of Document
Oxfam Intermón	2018	Description of action



Project consortium	2021	Intermediate narrative report – Year 2
Project consortium	2023	Project final report
DT GLOBAL IDEV Europe SL	2024	SAFIRE programme final evaluation
Project consortium	2020	<i>Rapport diagnostic complémentaire sur les secteurs porteurs</i>
Project consortium	2018	<i>Guide de ciblage des bénéficiaires du projet</i>

---

<sup>i</sup> Afrobarometer, 'Mauritanian youth see government as failing on their priority concerns, including education and jobs', 07 October 2024. Retrieved [here](#).

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>iii</sup> WFP, '*Evaluation genre des secteurs de l'agriculture et du développement rural – Mauritanie*', 2021. Retrieved [here](#).