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NON TECHNICAL SUMMARY

SAÏSS III WATER CONSERVATION PROJECT-MOROCCO
European Bank of Reconstruction & Development

| Non-Technical Summary

SAISS III WATER CONSERVATION PROJECT



For: European Bank of Reconstruction & Development

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 OVERVIEW

This document is an update of the Non-Technical Summary (NTS) of the Phase III (SAISS III or the Project) of the SAISS Water Conservation Program which is intended to facilitate understanding of the Project by a non-specialist audience and members of local communities, as well as to inform on the primary environmental and social impacts – positive and negative – from the Project.

1.2 WHY DEVELOPING THE PROJECT ?

The III Project aims to conserve underground water in the SAISS plain, which is at the present time being overused by providing new water sources for farming and support purposes throughout:

- More efficient irrigation methods,
- Growing higher-value crops,
- Increased farming productivity,
- Better income for farmers.

1.3 WHO IS DEVELOPING THE PROJECT?

The SAISS III Project is being developed by the Ministry of Agriculture, Maritime Fisheries, Rural Development and Water and Forests (MOA) through its Operational Directorate for the Hydro-Agricultural Development Project for the Safeguarding of the SAISS Plain (Direction Opérationnelle du Projet – DOP). The DOP acts as the Project Proponent and is responsible for overall implementation and coordination. The technical design and supervision of works are supported by NOVEC, serving as the Technical Assistance.

The construction of SAISS III will be undertaken by specialist contractors to be selected through national public procurement procedures. Construction activities will include the installation of pipelines for bulk water transfer and irrigation distribution systems, with the construction phase to be expected to be initiated in the course of 2026, subsequent to the finalization of detailed design and financing agreements.

1.4 WHO IS FINANCING THE PROJECT?

The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) is considering providing a loan to the MOA. EBRD is owned by 77 countries, as well as the European Union and the European Investment Bank. The EBRD provides financial support for various types of projects, including but not limited to energy, agribusiness, infrastructure, and transport sectors.

1.5 WHAT IS THE PROJECT CATEGORISATION?

EBRD is considering the SAISS III Project as a Category B project under the EBRD Environmental and Social Policy 2024 (ESP 2024). This classification reflects that the potential adverse environmental and social impacts are generally site-specific, of medium magnitude, and can be readily identified and mitigated through well-defined management and monitoring measures.

1.6 IS THERE AN OPPORTUNITY TO COMMENT ON THE PROJECT?

Community members and any other stakeholders are invited to comment on the Project. Please see below contact details of the Project Proponent should you have any comments or queries associated with SAISS III Project:

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Address	Avenue des FAR, BP 74, Fez, Morocco
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1.7 STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

A Stakeholder Engagement Plan has been drafted to identify stakeholders including affected people and other interested parties, and details grievance redress mechanism. In case of any complaints or grievances related to the Sais III Project, please contact the DOP via the contact details above.

2 SAISS III PROJECT

2.1 WHAT IS THE PROJECT

The overall SAISS Water Conservation Programme aims to strengthen and secure water resources for the SAISS Plain through the collection, diversion and distribution of surface water from the M'dez Dam which is currently under construction to approximately 30,000 hectares of agricultural land for irrigation purposes. The primary objective is to reduce groundwater abstraction activities and protecting therefore the underlying aquifer of the Plain. The overall Programme is expected to deliver 90-120 million cubic meters (Mm³) of water per year and would benefit to approximately 7,300 farms.

The overall Programme is being implemented by the Project Operational Direction (DOP), which is an entity operating within the *Direction de l'Irrigation et de l'Aménagement de l'Espace Agricole*, under the direct jurisdiction of the Ministry of Agriculture and Maritime Fisheries, Rural Development, Water and Forests (MOA) of Morocco. The DOP of the project is located in the city of Fez in Morocco, and operates in the region of Fez-Meknes

The overall SAISS Water Conservation project is being implemented across three distinct phases:

- SAISS I: Corresponds to the 2nd section of the project and consisted of constructing a 45 km water pipeline linking the downstream end of the first section of the main pipeline to the upstream end of its 3rd section. This section was completed in 2024.
- SAISS II: Corresponds to the 3rd section of the project and involved the implementation of the following components:
 - The 3rd section of the main pipeline over 56 km,
 - A surge tank in 2019,
 - The construction of a distribution network covering approximately 10,000 hectares.

This Phase II, launched in 2020 with financing from the EBRD, was completed in July 2025.

SAISS III: consists of the construction of a water distribution network to irrigate an additional 20,000 hectares of agricultural land, as well as the construction and commissioning of seven pumping stations and a filtration station to support water distribution in this network. The tender dossier is currently being finalized, with the launch of the second 10,000 hectares in October 2025 and the start of construction work in February 2026.

As part of the objectives of the Saïss Irrigation Project, a participatory 'Aquifer Contract' has been implemented. This contract is a fundamental pillar for the sustainable management of water resources, engaging all stakeholders involved in water governance. The participatory nature of this agreement makes it possible to define management rules governing the use of groundwater, as well as the commitments of the various stakeholders to implement these rules. The main objective is to promote the substitution of groundwater pumping with the use of surface water, thereby helping to restore the balance of the water table. The institutional stakeholders who have signed the Aquifer Contract have committed to carrying out, in coordination with the Project, a number of specific actions, in particular:

- The Ministry of Agriculture, Marine Fisheries, Rural Development, Water and Forests (MOA);
- The Ministry of Equipment and Water (MEW);
- The Wilaya of the Fez-Meknes region;
- The Regional Council of Fez-Meknes;
- The Moroccan Confederation of Agriculture and Rural Development;
- The Regional Chamber of Agriculture of Fez-Meknes;
- The Sebou Water Basin Agency (ABHS);
- The National Office for Water and Electricity (Water sector) – Fez-Meknes region, as well as local distribution agencies.

Among the commitments made by these institutional actors, certain activities covered by the Aquifer Contract have a direct impact on the involvement of project beneficiaries.

In particular:

- The MEW and ABHS are responsible for raising awareness among beneficiaries about cooperation, information sharing and joint consultation on water resource management;
- The MOA ensures that water users are represented in the development of groundwater management rules.

2.2 WHERE IS THE PROJECT LOCATED?

The SAISS III Project is located in the Fez-Meknes region in central Morocco, as illustrated by Figure 1. The Project will, as far as possible, be established within existing rights-of-way along public roads and rural tracks to minimise land acquisition impacts. However, some agricultural land acquisition would still be necessary to allow for the installation of pipelines and irrigation canals to be connected to targeted agricultural plot of land.

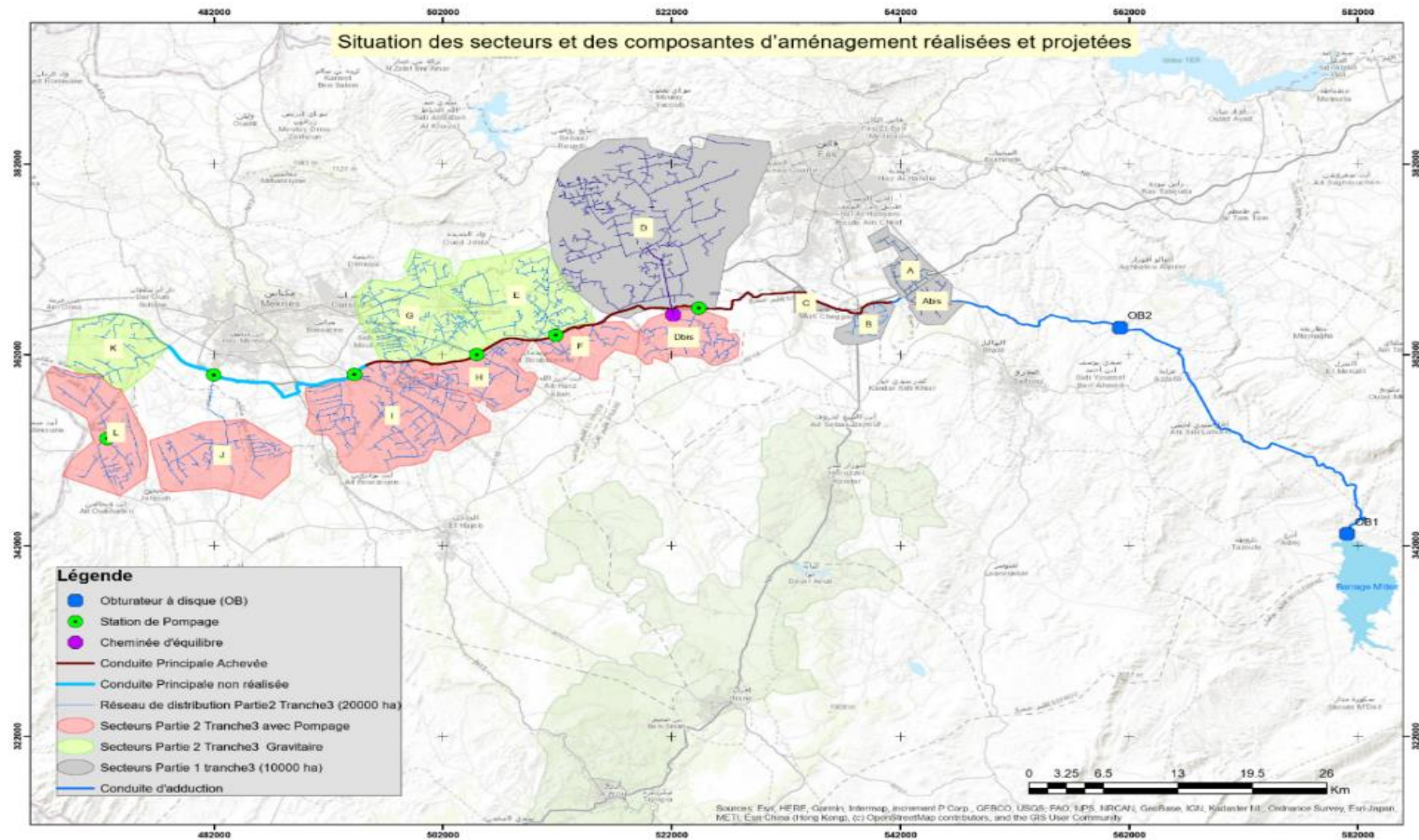


Figure 1: Map of the Overall SAISS Project components

2.3 ARE THERE ANY ALTERNATIVES OF THE PROJECT?

According to international environmental and social standards, projects of significant importance shall compare different options, including the possibility of doing nothing, before deciding on the best solution.

2.2.1 NO PROGRAMME SCENARIO:

If no robust preventative measures are implemented, the SAISS Plain aquifer would continue to run dry. Farmers would lose access to irrigation water, be forced to switch to low-value rain-fed crops like wheat, and financial incomes would drop among local communities. Rural poverty would rise.

2.2.2 AQUIFER PRESERVATION OPTIONS (2011–2012 STUDY):

A long-term water plan for the Sebou Basin (one of Morocco's most important and productive agricultural regions, which also hosts key urban centres such as Fès and Meknès) was prepared with input from government, local institutions, and communities, and is aligned with Morocco's National Water Strategy, focusing on:

- Using irrigation water more efficiently;
- Building dams and maintaining infrastructure;
- Recharging aquifers and reusing treated wastewater;
- Harvesting rainwater; and
- Protecting water quality, ecosystems, and rural drinking water access.

Two main alternatives were compared:

- Alternative 2.1 (retained option involves transferring water from the future M'Dez Dam, reinforcing Meknès' drinking water supply from Ouljet Soltane Dam, and constructing a set of additional dams: Bab Ouender (Ouergha River), Sidi Abbou (Lebene River), Sidi Mokhfi (Amzaz River), Timedrine (Sebou River), and Adarouch (Tigrigra River).
- Alternative 2.2 proposed supplying the SAISS region from the Wahda Dam, with the same complementary infrastructure.

2.2.3 CHOSEN ALTERNATIVE FOR THE SAISS AQUIFER:

The economic comparison of the two alternatives clearly favours surface water transfer from the M'Dez Dam (alternative 2.1), with investment costs being 40% lower (2,369 million MAD vs. 3,779 million MAD) and energy costs five times lower (1,143 million MAD vs. 5,365 million MAD in present value) than alternative 2.2

2.3 HOW WILL PEOPLE AND THE ENVIRONMENT BE AFFECTED?

A collated summary of the principal environmental & social risks, together with the proposed mitigation measures are introduced below:

2.3.1 EMPLOYMENT AND COMMERCIAL OPPORTUNITIES

The SAISS III Project is expected to generate significant positive socio-economic impacts, both during the construction and operational phases. In the short term, the Project will create employment opportunities, particularly for unskilled and semi-skilled workers from surrounding communities. In addition to direct labour, the Project will benefit local businesses through service contracts with engineering firms, specialised laboratories, and construction companies, thereby stimulating trade and commercial activities in the Project area and at regional / national levels. Small local businesses will also benefit from the increased demand for goods and services generated by the workforce. In the long term, the project will support the conservation and intensification of agricultural activities in the SAISS Plain, thereby contributing to the preservation of rural employment and enhancing livelihoods dependent on irrigation agriculture.

2.3.2 LAND USE

The construction of the pipeline and irrigation infrastructure will require the temporary and permanent acquisition of agricultural land, potentially disrupting farming activities and access. A Land Acquisition and Compensation Plan (LACP) will be implemented to ensure fair compensation at full replacement cost, consultation with Project-Affected People (PAPs), and livelihood restoration measures, particularly for vulnerable households and women-headed farms.

2.3.3 WATER RESOURCES

The SAISS III Project is expected to yield significant long-term benefits for water resource sustainability in the Fez-Meknes region. Unlike traditional irrigation development projects that aim to expand cultivated areas, SAISS III has been explicitly designed to preserve existing irrigated perimeters while alleviating critical pressure on the overexploited SAISS aquifer.

The Project will introduce up to 120 million m³ per year of regulated surface water transferred from the M'dez Dam to the SAISS Plain, of which 80 million m³ is earmarked for SAISS III. This will allow for a dual-source irrigation system, where the annual crop water demand (approximately 8,000 m³/ha) will be shared equally between surface water and groundwater, thereby significantly reducing abstraction levels and enabling aquifer recovery over time.

In parallel, the Ministry of Agriculture is implementing a subsidy programme to promote efficient irrigation techniques. Under this scheme, smallholder farms (under 5 hectares) receive full financing to transition to drip irrigation systems, while larger farms are eligible for up to 80% support. This modernisation is expected to reduce water use per hectare and enhance agricultural resilience to climate variability.

2.3.4 GREENHOUSE EMISSIONS

The SAISS III Project may contribute to greenhouse gas emissions during construction, notably from machinery and vehicle use. Conversely, the switch from groundwater extraction to surface water irrigation and the promotion of drip irrigation systems would reduce long-term energy use and carbon emissions. However, it is expected that the SAISS III Project, during both construction and operation phases, would increase GHG emissions by more than 20 000tCO₂e/year.

2.3.5 TRANSPORT

Construction activities will lead to increased heavy vehicle movement through rural and residential areas, raising risks of road accidents, noise, and dust. The Project will deploy a dedicated Traffic Management Plan, including mapping of sensitive receptors, installation of speed limit signage, use of traffic marshals nearby villages, and awareness campaigns targeting both drivers and local populations to reduce risk of collision.

2.3.6 VIBRATIONS AND NOISE

Excavation, trenching, and heavy machinery operations may cause vibrations and generate elevated noise levels during the construction phase. Contractors will schedule high-noise activities during less sensitive hours, implement vibration-dampening methods and maintain a complaint register for noise-related grievances for ensuring responsive mitigation measures.

2.3.7 AMBIENT AIR QUALITY

Dust emissions from excavation activities and unpaved roads may affect ambient air quality and damage agricultural crops in neighbouring areas (dust). To mitigate this, regular watering of construction sites and access roads will be scheduled, with particular attention during dry and windy conditions. Covering of transported materials and vehicle speed controls will also be enforced.

2.3.8 BIODIVERSITY

The Project crosses two Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) and a small portion of the Atlas Cedar Biosphere Reserve. Although these areas are largely anthropized, they may host endangered species such as dragonflies, snails, and a vulnerable fish species. The development of a Biodiversity Management and Action Plan (BMAP) is necessary, including wadi-crossing methods which will avoid any conduction activities nearby or with water streams, which may

support those identified endangered species, and , consultations with biodiversity authorities, and strict monitoring of ecosystem-sensitive areas during the construction phase of the project.

2.3.9 LIQUID EFFLUENT MANAGEMENT

There is limited generation of liquid effluents during construction; however, the potential for fuel spills, equipment washing, and accidental discharges still exists. Contractors will implement a wastewater management protocol covering designated washing areas with impermeable flooring, proper containment systems, and emergency spill kits available on-site.

2.3.10 SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT

The Project is likely to produce construction debris, packaging materials, and hazardous waste such as used oil and filters. All contractors will ensure the segregation, storage, and regular collection of waste in line with good international industry practice. Dedicated areas with impermeable floors and secondary containment systems will be established for hazardous waste streams, with labelling and traceability documentation in place.

2.3.11 CULTURAL HERITAGE

No archaeological artefacts or cultural heritage sites have been reported during the construction phase of the SAISS I and SAISS II including along the water distribution network. As such, the SAISS III is not considered to pose a risk to archaeological, heritage, or cultural assets. However, A Chance Find Procedure will be established by the contractors during the construction phase of SAISS III, ensuring that all workers are trained to recognise and report potential finds.

2.4 HOW WILL LOCAL COMMUNITIES BE INFORMED AND CONSULTED?

With regards to public consultation, a Public Consultation Plan (PCP) has been prepared to provide information on time and to engage in meaningful dialogue with Project Affected People and other stakeholders. The plan identifies stakeholders and sets out a programme for information sharing and consultation, with special attention to vulnerable groups. In areas of the Middle Atlas (Phases I and II of the pipeline), where Tamazight is spoken, consultation will be carried out in the local dialect to ensure accessibility and cultural appropriateness.

The PCP also includes:

- A formal grievance mechanism for stakeholders (both internal and external) to raise complaints, concerns, or questions. This mechanism will be regularly updated.
- Coordination with the EBRD-funded Technical Cooperation Project on Supporting Women's Economic Inclusion in the SAISS Region, to address social issues in water management and reduce barriers faced by groups such as women in adopting irrigation technologies.

Finally, the PCP will feed into a broader Stakeholder Participation Programme (SPP) for the SAISS plain. The SPP will promote efficient and sustainable irrigation practices, raise awareness of legal rights and obligations, and clearly communicate the institutional changes taking place to support a smooth transition for water users.

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