

News/ Mauritania

A promising experience

From an article published by Matthieu Bernardon of IUCN Mauritania on the project 'Conservation and Sustainable Use of Mullet'

Women's Day, celebrated in Mauritania, like everywhere else, on 8th March, was the occasion to promote traditional fisheries products processed by Imraguen women. This was part of the IUCN project: "Conservation and Sustainable use of mullets". Presented in labelled plastic bags, the products displayed were those traditionally prepared by women processing the yellow mullet (called here *azol*), *tichtar*, oil, *lekhle* and *poutargue* (dried fish eggs). This first experience involved women from the Imraguen village of Teichott, who were chosen for the pilot project in support of traditional processing.

Micro-credit was made available to Imraguen women processors groups, through the village cooperative, allowing them to purchase the raw fish, process it and ensure its marketing. Additionally, tools for processing the fish were made available in parallel.

The credit, given for a four-month period (from October 2002 till January 2003), was fully reimbursed before the deadline! Substantial benefits were made showing the determination and dynamism of the participants. All groups decided to save 10 per cent of the benefits so that the co-operative could set up a revolving fund.

The participation of Imraguen women processors at the artisanal fair of Nouakchott, organized for the Women's Day is more than a symbol. In the past years, in a context of changes in the Imraguen fishery activity, which has changed from being a subsistence activity to a commercial one, women have progressively been marginalized. This rapid change has had harsh consequences for the Imraguen society whose tradition and culture was based on the traditional exploitation of fisheries resources, and of the yellow mullet in particular.

This experience of traditional processing was not only useful to show that traditional processing can be profitable, but also to give back Imraguen women a central role in their community organization.