

From Africa/ Benin

I will pay you one day...

Women fish processors are hesitant to supply fish on credit to wholesalers, as discussions during a meeting with women fish processors in Benin revealed.

By the Union of Professionals in the Artisanal Fishery of Benin (UNIPPA-BENIN, translated by Lucien Dehy, General Secretary of ID Pêche

In a meeting organized in January by ID Pêche with the support of UNIPPA-BENIN, delegates from women's groups and fishermen groups met at Nicoué-Condji in the sub-prefecture of Grand-Popo, about 100 kms from Cotonou. Also participating in this meeting were representative of the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) and of the Centre de Recherches pour le Développement des Technologies Intermediaires de Peche (CREDETIP), Senegal.

One of the issues discussed with the women fish processors present there was the Processed Fish Fair to be held in Dakar, Senegal, in June 2001. In this connection, there was a discussion on various aspects of fish trade in the region.

Women processors were asked about whether they supply fish on credit to wholesale traders. Sale on credit is rare they said. According to them, it was common for traders to visit fishing camps, to get supplies of smoked and fermented, salted and dried fish. Often the traders may only pay for a part of their purchases. In the camps, processing women are used to that and they may not hesitate to provide credit for up to 15 days.

Unfortunately, some fish traders then do not honour their commitments. When this happens they avoid the camps and generally disappear from the markets frequented by the processors. This devious behaviour puts the processing women, with little capital at their disposal, in a precarious position. When the processing women catch up with the traders, it is with great passion that the debt is reclaimed.

Even as the women were describing this scene, one of them burst into a song, and the others joined her. The song, it seems, is one which fish traders sing when confronted by women processors demanding their payment:

Through a mutual and private arrangement,
you agreed to sell to me on credit
There was no witness
Through a mutual and private arrangement,
You provided me a loan
There were no indiscreet ears
Today in the centre of the market
You yell in a high and loud voice
That I'm an insolvent debtor
You yell high and loud
That Chérie is in debt
But debt is not theft
I will pay you
Owing you is not stealing from you
I will pay you
I will pay you one day



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