

Challenges for future EU-Mauritania fisheries partnerships

Paper prepared for the visit of the European Parliament in Mauritania, November 2010

In 2006, Mauritania and the EU signed a fisheries partnership agreement (FPA) for the period 2006-2012. The latest agreement protocol, covering the period from 2008 to 2012, provides a financial compensation of EUR 305 million in exchange for EU fleets from 12 European countries to access Mauritanian fishing zones.

Industrial fleet: high environmental and economic costs

With catches around 800,000 tons per year, mostly destined for export, the Mauritanian fishing sector contributes 20-25% of the State budget and provides 20% of the country's export earnings. Overall, the fishing sector generates nearly 40,000 jobs.

The national industrial fleet is now in a precarious situation as a result of aging vessels and their relatively high operating costs. Most of these vessels, of which 80% are of Chinese origin, are over thirty years old, and many no longer meet strict standards of security and hygiene. Another problem of industrial vessels, both national and foreign, is the use of non-selective and destructive gears (small meshed trawls, tickler chains, etc.).




Coastal and small-scale fisheries: an asset for sustainable fishing


Coastal and small scale fisheries (Pêche Artisanale et côtière - PAC), despite the growth experienced in recent years, still has a limited fishing effort, with a production around 80,000 tons per year – ie between 8 and 10% of the catches made in the Mauritanian EEZ. In contrast, the PAC contributes more than 10% of the sector's turnover.


Today, the PAC is the only viable national fleet.


Catches on a shrimp trawler, Mauritania, 2008


The PAC has numerous advantages for the sustainable exploitation of the ecosystem and the generation of a variety of benefits:


 All PAC catches are landed locally, accounting for 80% of the 100,000 tons of fish and cephalopods landed in Mauritania;

 The PAC provides 80% of the raw material for export plants and 90% of the raw material for the country's 45 fish processing plants.

 Local consumption needs for fishery products are completely catered for by the PAC.

 The PAC generates 90% of 40,000 jobs in the sector.


 Fish and cephalopods caught by the PAC are of larger size and fresher; hence the possibility of obtaining better export prices, 25% higher than the best quality of trawl caught fish products.


 The PAC uses only passive fishing gear with a limited impact on ecosystems: for example, by-catch is non-existent in artisanal octopus fisheries, while they are over 40% in the octopus trawl fishery, comprising 352 species.




In 2010, two priorities: Sustainable exploitation & Landing of catches


Mauritania has two priorities for the development of its fishing sector:

 The protection and the sustainable exploitation of stocks and ecosystems, in particular by *the strict adjustment of the fishing effort to the natural potential of the stocks;*

 The integration of the fisheries sector in the national economy, in particular via the *landing of catches in Mauritania.*

Sectoral policies adopted by Mauritania over the past decades have all placed emphasis on these two aspects, but so far, it has been difficult to implement them:

 With regard to *the strict adjustment of the fishing effort to the natural potential of the stocks*, the quest for budget revenues has resulted in this priority being ignored, and an excessive number of fishing licenses were granted to foreign vessels, including European. This accentuated the degradation of some stocks such as cephalopods. According to Scientists these stocks have lost more than two-thirds of their abundance.

 With regards to *the landing of catches in Mauritania*, today, from the 800 000 tons harvested in the Mauritanian

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EEZ, only a little more than 10% are landed in the country, and only 10% of the landed catch undergo some processing. This doesn't allow the development of profitable value-added activities. In addition, many factories face difficulties in meeting sanitary and quality standards for exporting to the European market, the main export market. Finally, the lack of infrastructure is an important limiting factor: Nouadhibou is the only fishing harbour, but with a very limited capacity.



Artisanal Fishing Harbour, Nouadhibou 2006

Role of the EU-Mauritania Fisheries Partnership Agreement

Achievement of the two priority objectives for Mauritanian fisheries sector development is therefore still 'work in progress'. The existence of a fisheries partnership agreement with the EU has played no role in this regard, although some positive developments were registered in the last protocol.

Positive aspects....

Whereas the first generation of fisheries agreements signed by the EU and the ACP countries were "*pay, fish and go*" agreements, the new fishery partnership (FPA) formula puts greater emphasis on the sustainability of the fisheries in the partner countries. One of the conditions for the signing of an FPA is to establish a *dialogue* with the partner country, - Mauritania in this case -, helping it to develop a policy of responsible fishing which meets both its wishes for economic development and resource conservation requirements.

The 2006-2012 FPA between the EU and Mauritania follows this scheme. Its implementation protocols (2006-2012, revised in 2008) include a financial contribution of 477 million EUR, of which 87 million EUR will support the sustainable fisheries development strategy.

But, most importantly, it allowed a decrease in capacity for most of the categories of EU vessels, in particular the cephalopod trawlers, whose number went down from 55 to 32 units. This constitutes a major step in the direction of the adjusting fishing effort in line with the natural potential of the stock.

This decrease of access possibilities constitutes a positive break with the former agreements, which were based on a linkage between the amount of financial contribution and the level of fishing possibilities. This system did considerable damage to Mauritania fish resources.

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The Role of China in the Mauritanian fishing sector

The European Union is not the only foreign player in Mauritanian fisheries. In the 1990s, China took advantage of the Mauritanian authorities' impatience to develop its own industrial fishing fleet to introduce its cephalopod trawlers, thus contributing much to the overexploitation of these stocks.

Today, China is investing significantly in local fish processing, and recently announced an investment of 100 million dollars in small pelagic processing activities.

Negative aspects...

European vessels *whose access is subsidized* continue to have *access to overexploited stocks*, for which there is no demonstrable surplus. Some EU coastal fleets are in competition with the PAC over resource access, as with octopus, but they are also competing on markets where the subsidized European fleets can offer their octopus at lower prices.

Concerning the use of the financial contribution, the FPA financed research, surveillance and control, etc. But these funds were used mainly to cover operating costs whilst basic infrastructure and equipment remained insufficient. This is a *bad use of financial resources* from the FPA. This is due to the need for improvisation given the uncertainties about the level financial contribution to be received, given that this is linked to level of fishing opportunities negotiated for the European fleets. Therefore, these funds accumulate and cannot be absorbed, whilst the fishing industry continues to suffer from an infrastructure deficit.

Another long standing problem is the *lack of transparency* concerning the use of

the financial contribution. This issue was raised recently by the Mauritanian artisanal fisheries sector (FNP – section artisanale), at a regional artisanal fishing organizations' workshop, held in Nouakchott, in 2009.

Fishing gears used by some European fleets are *unselective and destructive*:



The work of the Research Institute IMROP showed that cephalopod trawlers catch 350 non targeted species, shrimp trawlers 206 species, and hake trawlers 121 species, with high levels of juveniles.



Super trawlers targeting small pelagics make significant by-catch, including sharks, rays and sea turtles¹. In the EU-Morocco agreement, Moroccan scientists drew attention to the fact that the quantities of catches of demersal fish made by this fleet as by-catch are comparable to the quantities of demersal fish caught by local fisheries targeting these stocks²!



Bottom trawlers destroy sensitive ecosystems such as corals³; the use of devices like tickler chains on trawls only amplifies the destruction.

Promoting sustainable fisheries through the FPA

¹ See *By-catch and release of pelagic megafauna in industrial trawler fisheries off Northwest Africa Fisheries Research 78, 2006*

² See *Compte rendu de la Commission conjointe de l'APP UE-Maroc 2010*

³ Voir *Carbonate mounds off Mauritania, 2005*


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To promote sustainable fisheries development, the future fisheries partnership between the EU and Mauritania should be built *on a framework of good governance* between Mauritania and the European Union, allowing for the sustainable exploitation of resources, in line with the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, which both parties have signed up to.

In this context, the following conditions must be met:


 European fleets access must be strictly limited to those stocks which have a demonstrable surplus which is not exploited by local fleets. For example, octopus fishing must be reserved for the national fleet, in particular the PAC.


 Within these limits, access should be limited to European operators who use selective and non-destructive fishing techniques (prohibition of tickler chains, Nordmøre grid on trawlers, etc.), obey the rules and regulations, and land their catches in Mauritania.


 An adequate zoning should be put in place to protect ecosystems and local PAC activities. Trawlers should be excluded from the coastal zone and from other sensitive areas (coral areas, etc) and kept beyond 50 nautical miles.


 Conditions of full transparency concerning all authorized fleet operations should be established: regularly


updated lists of authorised vessels should be made accessible to the public via the internet;

 Evaluations and reports on the use of the financial contribution should be made available to the public;

 All stakeholders, including PAC and NGOs should be participating in the EU-Mauritania joint committee meetings where all details and information are discussed;

 It is essential that the EU supports a joint framework where Mauritanian and European non-governmental actors can dialogue, allowing them to develop a common vision of the sustainable development of fisheries in Mauritania;

 The amount of the financial contribution should be in relation to the needs of Mauritania to develop its fisheries sustainably, rather than linked to the level of fishing opportunities granted to EU vessels, in order to enable better planning and use of the money;

 On longer term, access costs should be borne entirely by the European shipowners


An opportunity to invest in sustainable fisheries


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The future fisheries partnership between EU and Mauritania can also be an opportunity to bring about structural change to the sector, based on an investment policy that privileges funding for:

 *Superstructures and infrastructures for landing catches:* a pelagic port and shipyard able to receive the full range of vessels operating in the EEZ. The domiciliation of catches would enable greater transparency to be achieved in the management of the sector, with more rigorous monitoring and lower control costs, more reliable statistics and considerable local benefits in terms of added value, availability of products for the local market and processing industry, without forgetting the creation of thousands of jobs. European public funding should be earmarked for supporting such European private investment in the ACP fishing industries.

 *The development of sustainable small-scale and coastal fishing* given its comparative advantages for delivering sustainable fisheries: the establishment of credit schemes or banks specialized in financing local fishing activities, insurance schemes for PAC sector, solidarity fund for PAC sailors victims of accidents at sea and their families, etc

 *The training of young people and women to acquire fishing and processing skills,* as well as the

support for the creation of a bank of projects: organizing workshops on how to prepare products with high value added, such as poutargue (processed mullet roe), etc.

 Providing support for the development of *private partnerships between PAC stakeholders* and support for encouraging exchanges between professionals.

The fight against IUU fishing and landings

A Comprehensive system of Monitoring Control and Surveillance (MCS) is in place in Mauritania, supported by the German Government (GTZ)

A priority for the future partnership will be to help the implementation of the new regulation relating to the fight against illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing (Regulation EC No. 1005/2008 on September 29, 2008), in particular through the development of traceability schemes for fish products, with particular attention to the situation of coastal artisanal fishing.

On the other hand, the fact that hundreds of European vessels are not required to land their catches in Mauritania considerably limits the effectiveness of various management measures, including port controls. In particular, the fact that they don't come into local ports makes it more difficult to gather data for commercial species retained on board, as well as for by-catch. Based on incomplete data, research, regardless of its quality, can produce only approximate results.

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