

The stakes of “Faux thon” in the context of the Ivory Coast - European Union fisheries agreement

Women's Day 2020: What progress for women in the fisheries sector in Côte d'Ivoire?

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Women in fisheries in Côte d'Ivoire

Women are present at all stages of the fisheries value chain in Côte d'Ivoire, particularly in the activities of fish trading, processing (drying, salting and smoking) and marketing of fishery products. These activities enable them to support their families, ensure the education of their children, and contribute to the well-being of the population by offering good quality fishing products at affordable prices in markets throughout the country.

Supply challenges for women processors

Like most West African countries, fish is the main source of animal protein for the Ivorian population. A narrow continental shelf limits artisanal maritime fishing in its activities. Traditionally, 60% of the supply for women processors comes from artisanal fishing and 40% from imports of frozen fish from Mauritania and Senegal. But for several years now, there has been a decline in local artisanal fishing due to overexploitation and bad practices, and imported fish is becoming scarcer as well.

For women processors, this translates into a relative abundance of raw material from mid-July to mid-November, when they are supplied directly by local artisanal fisheries. During the low fishing season, there is now almost nothing left, which means that for 8 months of the year, women have almost no raw material to process. Four months of fish to process is too short to have a decent livelihood.

The problem of “Faux thon”

Abidjan is the most important port for landing tropical tuna in the Gulf of Guinea. European tuna vessels land their catches from all over the region there. Much of the tuna is sold to canneries. Tens of thousands of tonnes of “faux thon”, which are not bought by the canneries because they are too small or slightly damaged, are landed every year. This faux thon is sold unchecked by the crew to local middlemen, who then sell it to women.

In the port of Abidjan, the female processor buys one kilo of faux thon from the middlemen at 1000 CFA per kilo. During processing (drying, smoking), the faux thon loses a third of its weight: 1.5 kg of faux thon (1500 CFA) is needed for one kilo of processed product. In addition, the woman processor has to pay for transport and firewood. The woman processor sells the kilo of processed faux thon at 2800 CFA per kilo. She works hard to earn almost nothing.

In addition, often, because the middleman gives her an advance on the fish, she is forced to continue to buy it from him at a very high price in order to pay him back. In the end, she finds herself in debt and in the greatest destitution.

Progress on the fisheries agreement

There has been a tuna fishing agreement between Côte d'Ivoire and the European Union since 1990. The latest memorandum of understanding covers the period 2018 to 2024.

At a conference of the European Union Advisory Council on Long Distance Fisheries on fisheries agreements in September 2015, the representative of Ivorian women processors, Ms Dion Somplehi Micheline, drew the attention of both parties to the problem of faux thon.

During a hearing at the European Parliament on 15 June 2016, she presented to the parliamentarians and the European Commission the demands of Ivorian women for the new protocol then under discussion:

"For the period when there is no fish available, we ask for the supervised landing of 10,000 tonnes of faux thon and the direct sale to women through their national organisation, in order to have correct prices and to escape the middlemen. Through the sectoral support of the fisheries agreement, we want special attention to be paid to women processors so that they can work in better hygienic and health conditions.

These efforts have borne fruit, and as part of the latest protocol to the partnership agreement on sustainable fisheries between the European Union and Côte d'Ivoire, a fund to assist fish wholesalers has been set up for the purchase and marketing of faux thon.

The European Commission, together with the partners of the Ivorian women processors, is also paying attention to the issue, and is encouraging European shipowners to sell a certain quantity of faux thon directly to the Ivorian women processors.