Title

Mauritania is not new to food crises; in the last few years it has suffered from drought and swarms of locusts that have ravaged people's cereal harvests. It is a land where water is scarce and where people suffer from chronic poverty. Furthermore, the Sahel countries face a different kind of insecurity problem because their rural populations are higher than the urban populations.

Supporting community vegetable gardens is one of the ways that BirdLife International, through the Living on the Edge project is responding to the challenges in Mauritania. The project is supporting the introduction or extension of vegetable gardening in the Sahel through irrigation from the Senegal River.

A village at Windim now has a flourishing community vegetable garden measuring 1 ha, thanks to the efforts of residents; supported by training, tools and seeds from Nature Mauritanie, delivered through financial support from the Dutch Post Code Lottery and Vogelbescherming Nederland (VBN) - the BirdLife Partner in the Netherlands.

The aim of the garden project has been to improve the nutritional status or diversity of the diet of targeted groups like children and an adult population of 3000 upwards in the local community and to raise the income of the vegetable growers through the sale of produce.

Although a detailed Livelihood Environment Assessment is yet to be conducted at Windim to ascertain the measurable impact on nutrition and income in the project area, a close look at household income and expenditures reveals that women were able to earn some income from vegetable sales as early as March. Women earn an average of 330 US$. Harvesting of vegetables is done in two seasons per year during the months of February to March in winter and October to November in summer.

There is clear division of labor, the men plowed and the women cultivate and sell the products. The vegetables most frequently grown are: tomato, onion, cabbage, lettuce, eggplant, okra, peppers, and carrots. Good training in gardening and nutritional education are essential.

The Windim garden in Mauritania is an example of a successful project with a strong training program. The participants have been trained in financial and administrative management, provided with business training, improved technical knowledge in constructing dykes for conserving water and improved farming techniques. As the market gardening initiative intensifies, it appears essential to develop local technologies of vegetable preservation that women could operate themselves.

In the first year of the project, the production of vegetables seemed limited because of the lack of such processing techniques. Consequently, women were growing only the quantities of vegetables that they were able to sell on the market. The irrigation pump unit is of limited capacity and through the Living on the Edge Project; Nature Mauritanie has provided a pump with larger capacity as part of efforts to tackle the dry season water shortages.

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