

SUCCESS STORY

Programme to strengthen the resilience of vulnerable urban and rural communities in Mauritania (SAFIRE)



EU Trust Fund for Africa - Sahel & Lake Chad



EUTF PARTNER:
OXFAM, CRF, GRET



COUNTRY:
Mauritania



BUDGET:
EUR 10.0M



From **03/2019**
to **08/2023**

Objective of the project

To build resilience for urban and rural communities through integrated local action.

Key successes

- > 180% increase in self-employed individuals and 59% increase in employed individuals in targeted areas.
- > 65% of households reported at least a 15% increase in income thanks to project support.
- > 99% of trained individual achieved certification, demonstrating the effectiveness of vocational training.

The SAFIRE¹ (Sécurité Alimentaire, Formation, Insertion, Résilience, Emploi) programme aimed to strengthen urban-rural links, increase agricultural productivity to foster food security, and to create economic opportunities and socio-professional integration for the most vulnerable populations. The programme had three components, i) increasing socio-professional integration and employment; ii) enhancing resilience to food and nutritional insecurity through increased agro-sylvo-pastoral production; and iii) promoting economic and social complementarities between urban and rural areas. The project activities were implemented by three consortia, comprising a total of 14 NGOs, in different geographical areas.² The programme operated within a challenging economic environment, where 26.5% of the national population lived below the national poverty line³ as of 2022. Poverty is more pronounced in rural areas, with 40.4% of the rural population living below the poverty rate, compared to 11.7% in urban areas.⁴

How did the EUTF help?

The programme delivered very good results in professional training and job creation. A total of 2,083 people completed vocational training, with two out of three -1,405 people- securing sustainable employment afterwards. Additionally, 4,006 jobs, including self-employed positions, were created in agriculture, vegetable farming, sewing, and mechanics,

among others. Women particularly benefitted from the programme, making up 63% of vocational training or skills development participants. They also represented 90% of those who secured sustainable employment and played a critical role in the creation of livelihoods activities, developing income-generating opportunities at nearly ten times the rate of their male counterparts. This significant disparity reflects the project's deliberate focus on empowering women, by targeting them more extensively with project activities. The project had positive socio-economic impact within the targeted area, showing a 180% increase in self-employment, a 59% rise in employment, and a 56.8% reduction in unemployment.

The SAFIRE programme made considerable strides in enhancing food security and nutrition by supporting a total of 43 cooperatives. It extended the cultivation period from a single crop cycle (October to March) to two cycles, adding an off-season cycle (April to July), resulting in productivity increases of three to 10 times compared to previous seasons. This was achieved through improved training that emphasised optimal sowing densities, integrated pest management through biological pest control, and effective fertilisation. The programme also provided non-GMO seeds to targeted farms, contributing to these substantial productivity gains.



The programme successfully implemented urban-rural information frameworks, creating opportunities for employment and social integration, notably through urban-rural information kiosks set up in partnership with the national employment agency TECHGHIL. These kiosks, staffed by employment counsellors, facilitated the sharing of employment opportunities with job seekers, matching vacancies to their skills and backgrounds.

As a result, 5,233 people, including 4,911 women, gained access to employment opportunities or social services. The programme also fostered 12 sustainable partnerships between rural and urban businesses offering complementary services. Notable examples include connecting vegetable cultivators (rural) and seeds vendors (urban) in Agharghar and Tintane⁵, and linking enriched flour producers to urban/semi-urban markets, demonstrating the effectiveness of this initiative.

The integration of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), job creation and agricultural interventions led to a significant impact on household incomes, as 65% of beneficiaries reported a 15% income increase in their income.

Keys to success

Careful selection of project beneficiaries: The programme implemented a careful selection process aimed at identifying those best positioned for success. Local committees evaluated applicants based on their motivations, the feasibility of their business ideas, and their job creation potential. Beneficiaries who received financial and technical assistance through this process were motivated and had practical income-generating plans. The relevance of the selection criteria ensured that that assistance was directed toward individuals capable of successfully launching their own businesses or finding employment suited to their skills and backgrounds.

Building capacity via an endogenous farming advisory model: To sustainably establish the agricultural advisory profession in targeted regions, the programme trained over 400 young farm advisors who supported cooperatives targeted by the programme. Most of these advisors were young women, which also helped to rejuvenate agricultural cooperatives traditionally run by older women. This approach of developing and relying

on endogenous advisory resources proved effective in building the capacity of farmers and strengthening cooperatives.

Tailored approaches in an informal economy context: SAFIRE's approaches diverged from standardised methods and focused instead on providing customised activity packages to facilitate successful socio-professional integration. The programme notably designed interventions to support the integration of job seekers into the informal economy. This proved to be a successful approach in an economy dominated by the informal sector, where absorption of job seekers through formal employment or internships is limited.

Building on success

Continuing effective strategies: In Mauritania, where 80% of the jobs are in the informal sector, future programmes must account for the limited absorption capacity of the formal sector. The combination of theoretical and practical training, as demonstrated in SAFIRE, remains essential. This is well illustrated by the combination of classroom training associated with pedagogical farms, which allowed the youth to be trained in real farm conditions, developing their skills in agroecology, livestock, crop production but also in hairdressing, sewing, welding etc.

Building on lessons from SAFIRE: Launched in May 2024, the programme "Green Economy - Sustainable and Inclusive Food Systems for Improved Food and Nutrition Security" builds on SAFIRE's lessons in agriculture. With a budget of €13.7 million, this programme aims to contribute to the transformation of Mauritania's food systems. Its goal is to address the recurring challenges of food and nutrition insecurity by promoting healthy, safe, and diverse food options accessible to all Mauritians. The programme seeks to foster productive, competitive, and environmentally responsible agriculture that is resilient to climate change. It also plans a better integration of relevant national institution throughout its duration.



EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa

¹ *Programme de renforcement de la résilience des communautés urbaines et rurales vulnérables en Mauritanie.*

² Oxfam: Hodh Ech Chargui, Hodh El Gharbi, Nouakchott. FRC: Gorgol Guidimakha, Nouakchott. Gret: Brakna, Trarza, Gorgol, Nouakchott.

³ \$3,65 in 2017 constant USD.

⁴ World Bank, 'Macro Poverty Outlook for Mauritania', April 2023. Retrieved [here](#).

⁵ Both localities are located in the Hodh El Gharbi region.

Disclaimer

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