

INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS

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New Trade Union World Briefing (12 pages)

Mauritania: organising women in the informal economy - a success story

Brussels, 16 September 2005 (ICFTU OnLine): The economic crisis and social change are pushing increasing numbers of women into the informal economy. Market gardeners, dyers, couscoussières, artisans, hairdressers, fishmongers... more and more women are going out to work to feed their children.

The CGTM, the Mauritanian trade union centre affiliated to the ICFTU, has achieved remarkable results within the campaign to organise women in the Maghreb launched by the ICFTU in 2004. Also backed by the Belgian confederation CGSLB, it has managed to double the CGTM's female membership, which has gone from 15 to 30%, thanks to the massive recruitment of women in the informal economy.

Whether working the fields bordering the River Senegal, the dying workshops of Nouakchott or the market gardens of Akjoujt, the protagonists of this latest briefing (<http://www.icftu.org/displaydocument.asp?Index=991222817&Language=EN>) are the women waging the day-to-day battle to scrape a living for themselves and their families and clinging to the hope that trade union solidarity will bring them a better life.

"Being able to recruit thousands of poor workers in the informal economy is an important step forward for us; it gives us credibility as a major player in the fight against poverty," insists Abdallahi Ould Mohamed, known as Nahah, General Secretary of the CGTM (*). "The aim is not only to ensure an improvement in the working conditions of these women but also in their living conditions, which will benefit their families too. Informal workers are extremely poor people, and the reason these women flooded to our union is because they were carried by the hope of an improvement - however small - in their conditions, which are extremely difficult at the moment."

"This campaign has brought new blood into the union" rejoices Mahjouba Mintsalek, executive secretary in charge of women and youth affairs at the CGTM. "We have now reached the vital stage where we have to build on this achievement," adds Mahjouba Mintsalek, insisting on the need to "pursue the implementation of concrete projects" as the CGTM is trying to do through the microprojects providing women informal workers with the tools to make a better living, such as the grain mill, the rice husker, community shops, mutual health funds, or even cold storage facilities for fish.

This latest briefing can be downloaded at:

<http://www.icftu.org/displaydocument.asp?Index=991222817&Language=EN>

(*) Read the complete version of the interview with the CGTM General Secretary at:

<http://www.icftu.org/displaydocument.asp?Index=991222100&Language=EN>

The ICFTU represents 145 million workers in 231 affiliated organisations in 154 countries and territories. ICFTU is also a member of Global Unions: <http://www.global-unions.org>

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