

Business & accounting training for fishing families

FLAG: West Vlaanderen FLAG

West Flanders, Belgium

Project overview

In collaboration with the local producer organisation, the West Flanders FLAG supported a business and accounting training course for fishermen's wives managing the accounts of local fishing companies. It quickly proved as popular among fishermen as it was with their wives.



Fishermen in Belgium are facing increasingly tough conditions to ply their trade. Market prices and catching opportunities are stagnating while costs (fuel increases, etc.) seem to be constantly on the rise. In addition, rules and regulations are increasingly complex ranging from those related to business law to those related to production operations (catch limitations, gear and seasonal rules, rules linked with days at sea and human resources...). A good understanding of business accounts and associated legal requirements is therefore crucial to making operations more efficient and taking the right decisions.

Given the complexity of business and accounting laws, many fishing firms devolve most of this work to their accountant, but by doing so they both incur significant costs for these services and miss crucial information about the viability of their operations. In the long term they also risk losing track of the consequences of their operational decisions. Other fishing companies are managed by fishermen's wives but they are not always equipped with the skills and knowledge to be as effective as possible.

This project, organised by the local producer organisation, involved a designated training package for local fishing companies. The main focus of the package included:

- › General administrative requirements for SMEs
- › Basic accounting based on concrete examples (sales and purchase invoices, cash flow management, etc.) and with the help of professional accounting software
- › A basic overview and interpretation of balance sheets and profit and loss accounts.
- › Specific issues regarding administration of fishing operations, such as managing the consequences of interruption of fishing trips due to accidents or poor weather conditions and issues related to days at sea allowance or unemployment benefits for crew members.

Key lessons

- › **Relevance to FARNET themes:** society, capacity building of local actors
- › **Results:** 22 participants applied to take part in the course, of which 13 were women. By the end of the training, most participants had started handling certain administration tasks (bank transfers, invoices, etc.) by themselves. Participants also reported a deeper understanding of accounting terms and business administration.
- › **Transferability:** This project is easily transferable to other fishing communities where local fishing businesses would benefit from improved business practices. The key is to find the right resource person to carry out the training as this requires good knowledge of the realities faced by fishing firms, something that does not always come naturally to accounting or business consultants. The local Producer Organisation was instrumental here in selecting the right expertise.
- › **Final Comment:** As is the case with many fishing families, fishermen's wives play a crucial role in the administration of the fishing operations in Belgium. This training was therefore originally developed with this target group in mind. However, when registrations were opened for the training the demand came as much from men as from women.

Total cost and EFF contribution

Total project cost: €30 229

- › EFF Axis 4: € 11 034 (36.5%)
- › National co-financing: € 14 661 (48.5%)
- › Private contribution: € 4 534 (15%)

Project information

Title: Business and accounting training

Duration: Early March till beginning of April 2014 (4 x 4-hour lessons).

Case study date: May 2014

Project promoter

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