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Fish Trading: A Tool for Socio-economic Enhancement and Poverty Alleviation

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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted in Abeokuta, the Ogun state capital with the objective to investigate if fish trading could be a tool of poverty alleviation and socio-economic enhancement of the status of women in the household. A total of 120 correctly completed, structured and pre-tested questionnaires, out of the 150 administered to respondents, were retrieved for data analyses. Demographic data of the traders showed that all the respondents were women whose ages ranged from 15 to above 45 years. The ages of 33-45 years constituted 33.3% of the respondents while the age bracket of between 27-32 years constituted 23.3%. Majority (73.3%) were married while 25% were single-headed households (divorced or widowed). The study revealed that most of the respondents (approximately 61%) were able to meet their family expenditure jointly with their spouses while 28.3% of the respondents met the financial responsibilities of their families solely from the profit. Access to credit was found to be a major limitation. The study further revealed that 86.7% of the respondents would like to continue with the business because they were satisfied with the profit accruable to them from the trade.

Key words: Fishery, Abeokuta, financial status, household, livelihood

INTRODUCTION

Fish harvesting, handling, processing, storage and distribution provide livelihood for millions of people in many countries (Opara and Al-Jufaili, 2006; Offem *et al.*, 2008). Capture fisheries and aquaculture supplied the world with about 110 million tonnes of food fish in 2006, providing an apparent per capita supply of 16.7 kg, which is among the highest on record. Fishery occupies a very significant position in the primary sector providing employment for over a million people and contributing about 50% of animal protein intake of the Nigerian population, particularly the resource poor. Overall, fish provided more than 2.9 billion people with at least 15% of their average per capita animal protein intake. The share of fish proteins in total world animal protein supplies grew from 14.9% in 1992 to a peak of 16.0% in 1996 but later declined to about 15.3% in 2005 (FAO, 2009). It has been reported that both pre-harvest and post-harvest activities in fisheries can generate significant profits, prove resilient to shocks and crises and make meaningful contributions to poverty alleviation and food security (Agbon *et al.*, 2000; Opara and Al-Jufaili, 2006; Offem *et al.*, 2008; Davies *et al.*, 2009).

Marketing is considered successful, when customer satisfaction is accompanied by profit to all those involved in the production and distribution of the goods. Hanson *et al.* (1994) reported that

marketing creates satisfaction or utilities for the consumers and provides employment opportunities for the people in the developing countries. In Nigeria, fishing is an income generating activity and its marketing by women contribute substantially to raising the living standard of families (Engberg, 1988). FAO (2007) described poverty reduction in fisheries communities as a situation where people become measurably better off over time owing to their involvement and/or investment in fisheries or fisheries-related activities. In NEEDS (2004), it was reported that poverty reduction was the most difficult challenge facing Nigeria and her citizens and also a major hurdle that must be overcome in the pursuit of sustainable socio-economic growth.

In Nigeria, available statistics indicates that poverty is deep and pervasive. The poverty rate of the population increased from 27% in 1980 to about 70% by 1996. By 1999, it was estimated that more than 70% of Nigerians lived in poverty (NEEDS, 2004). Qualitatively, poverty in Nigeria has many manifestations and dimensions, including joblessness, over-indebtedness, economic dependence at adult age, lack of freedom and inability to provide the basic needs of life for self and family. The broad objective of this study was to determine the extent to which fish trading contributed to the socio-economic enhancement of families while the specific objective was to investigate how fish marketing by women in a locality of low economic activity has affected the socio-economic status of women vis-à-vis helping to alleviate poverty.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study area: This survey was conducted in Abeokuta Township the capital of Ogun State, located within Latitude 7°9'02"N and Longitude 3°2'0"E. The study covered only fish sellers that have stalls in the markets and those that retail their fish within the vicinity of fish depot (known as "cold rooms"). Respondents were randomly selected from all major markets and cold rooms within the study area in locations at Adatan, Adigbe, Iberekodo, Isabo, Itoku, Kuto, Olomore, Omida and Osiele.

Experimental design: Purposive, structured questionnaires were developed and administered to 10% of the total population of fish traders in each location. A total of 120 respondents correctly completed the structured questionnaire, out of them 150 were administered. This 120 questionnaire were used for data analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data generated from the questionnaires.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Abuja declaration in 2005, recognized promotion of trade in fish and fishery products as a tool of alleviation of poverty, promotion of household food security, empowerment of stakeholders for equitable allocation of resources and harnessing the entrepreneurship potential of women who have been in the forefront leading the development of fish processing and trade (NEPAD, 2005; Bene and Heck, 2005b). The demographic investigation of the study population (Table 1) revealed that all the respondents were women who were in their active reproductive age (72.4%) and also married (73.3%) with majority of them (73.4%) having more than three children. Socio-economic characteristics of respondents (Table 2) showed that 28.3% of respondents were able to meet their family responsibilities based solely on income from fish trading while most (60.8%) met family responsibility co-jointly with their spouses. This agree with FAO (2009) report which emphasized that in addition to contributing to economic activity, employment and in generating foreign exchange, trade in fish and fishery products plays an important role in improving food security and

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of respondents

Characteristics	No.	Percentage
Age (years)		
<15	-	-
15-21	9	7.50
22-26	19	15.80
27-32	28	23.30
33-45	40	33.30
45 and above	24	20.00
Total	120	10.00
Marital status		
Single	2	1.70
Married	88	73.30
Divorced	18	15.00
Widow	12	10.00
Total	120	10.00
Family type		
Monogamous	34	28.33
Polygamous	54	45.00
Others	32	26.67
Total	120	10.00
No. of children		
0 (No child)	5	4.20
1-2	27	22.50
3-4	32	26.70
5 and above	56	46.70
Total	120	10.00

Table 2: Socio-economic characteristics of respondents

Characteristics	No.	Percentage
Occupation of spouse		
Civil servant	24	20.0
Company worker/employee	12	10.0
Artisan	56	46.7
Fisherman	12	10.0
Unemployed	16	13.3
Total	120	10.0
Family up-keep		
Self	34	28.3
Joint	73	60.9
Total	120	10.0
Educational level of children (institution)		
Nil	25	20.8
Primary	35	29.2
Secondary	45	37.5
Tertiary	15	12.5
Total	120	10.0

contributing to fish products meeting nutritional needs. Almost, half ($\approx 47\%$) of the respondents have five children and above. In addition to meeting household needs (food, clothing, housing, healthcare and also catering for an un-employed husband), over three quarter of the children of

the respondents were found to be in school. World Bank (2004) reported that over 40% of children in sub-Saharan African countries do not finish their primary education. However, this study has shown that while 50% of the children of respondents are in post-primary institutions, more than 29% have their children in primary institutions, thus indicating that profit from fish trading has helped in socio-economic enhancement of the families.

This study further revealed (Table 3) that 12.5% of the respondents in Abeokuta had access to credit. In an attempt to overcome the challenge of fund limitation, FAO (2003) prescribed microfinance programmes with the aim to promote and protect income and empower these population segments. Because women constitute a significant proportion of poor fishing households, microfinance can also serve as an effective tool to assist and empower women in fishing communities. The profit margin has made the business attractive to new entrants which represented half of the sample population. In view of this interest and the employment opportunity it provides for both young and middle aged ($\approx 80\%$), there is an urgent need of public and private investment to support this small-scale marketing initiatives so that they can grow their businesses. Such initiatives could improve food and nutritional security dramatically while fostering economic empowerment of the women traders (Bene and Heck, 2005a).

A respectable percentage of the respondents were also able to meet up with other family responsibilities such as the education of their children. The results of this study showed that majority of respondents' children were in school: 37.5% in secondary schools, 29.2% in primary schools and 12.5% in tertiary institutions. Access to education is seen as a yardstick for measuring the standard of living of individuals. Thus, this findings agree with Engberg (1988) who reported enhanced standard of living as a result of fish trading. Half of the populations of respondents were new entrants into the business thus corroborating (FAO, 2007) which reported that poverty can

Table 3: Marketing characteristics of the respondents

Characteristics	No.	Percentage
Years in business		
<2	60	50.0
3-4	45	37.5
5 and above	15	12.5
Total	120	10.0
Capital source		
Personal savings	61	50.8
Loan	15	12.5
From spouse	34	28.3
From extended family	10	8.3
Total	120	10.0
Interest in trade		
Satisfactory	106	83.4
Not satisfied	4	3.3
Indifferent	10	8.3
Total	120	10.0
Willingness to continue		
Positive	104	83.4
Negative	7	5.8
Indifferent	9	7.5
Total	120	10.0

be alleviated by engaging in fisheries related activities as buttressed by the majority (86.7%) of the respondents affirmed willingness to continue with the trade (Table 3). In millions of households in developing countries, fisheries play an important role in their livelihood in terms of food and nutritional security, cash income, alternative livelihoods and as a safety net for the poor (FAO, 2010).

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that women engaged in fish trading can generate wealth for their families and the nation, distribute benefits, make unique and vital contributions to human development and provide leverage to address strategic questions of resource governance. In view of this interest and the employment opportunity it provides there is an urgent need of public and private investment to support the women with innovative marketing initiatives so that they can grow their businesses through provision of access to credit like microfinance which can serve as an effective tool to assist and empower women engaged in fish trading in both rural and urban communities. Since the major policy thrust of NEEDS in respect of women is to fully integrate them through enhancing their capacity to participate in the economic, social, political and cultural life of the country, concerted effort should be made to the realization of this government policy.

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