

WOMEN IN FISH VALUE CHAIN IN NIGERIA.

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ABSTRACT

Women in Nigeria play a key and vital role in the Fisheries value chain in Nigeria especially when we look at their involvement in the marine, artisanal and Aquaculture sub-sector of the Fisheries Sector. The women who constitute the greater percentage of the fish mongers/ processors represent the first segment of the fish market chain; buying fresh fish directly from the fishermen. The fish is either sold fresh by the women, or processed by smoking. In the aquaculture sector the women also play key roles in buying and processing. The women in the fisheries value chain are often grouped into Cooperatives Societies though we have a very, very few that go solo. However, the women's activities in the value chain are characterized by low capital and technology input. Women's work in fish value chain has not been optimized/ linked to value chain finance in Nigeria – thus they are limited to various financial services being put up by the commercial banks for the Agricultural Sector in the Country. This lack of Corporate finance has in essence debar the women from upgrading their fisheries activities and businesses in the various steps along the fisheries value chain and they have thus not been able to build sustainable and viable fish trade especially when it comes to the export of their fish and other fishery products.

INTRODUCTION

Fish Provides high quality, easily absorbable protein and a wide variety of vitamins and minerals, even a small amount of fish is an important dietary protein supplement for poor people who cannot easily afford animal protein and who rely mainly on starch diets. “Fish is an important part of daily diet in many countries and provide nearly one quarter of world's supply of animal protein and in many countries fisheries are important sources of employments, income and foreign exchange” (FAO, 1984).

Fish Trade like any traded commodities enhances living standards and sustainable development as well as contributes to the food Security of a country. International fish trade (imports) has a positive impact on Nigeria's food security since Nigeria's fish demand cannot meet supplies; currently from the Federal Department of Fisheries 2007 statistical data collation:- Total Fish Demand for the country is 2.5 million metric tones per annum whilst Total Fish Supply (Domestic and Imports) is 1.34 metric tones per annum . overall assessment of both the export and import aspects of Nigeria's Fish Trade has shown a very positive outlook on outcomes related to national impact of fisherfolks, fish workers, fish consumers, fish sellers as well as the fisheries resources.

NIGERIAN FISHERIES SECTOR

Nigeria is located on the West Coast of Africa (West Africa); it is amongst the countries in the Gulf of Guinea and a key member of the Economic Community of West Africa (ECOWAS).

Nigeria has a continental shelf Area of 37,934 km²; a coastline length of 853 km. Aside from its marine waters the country is also endowed with large numbers of bodies of waters – lakes and lagoons, dams etc; Nigeria fisheries sector is thus made up of the following: Artisanal fisheries- consisting of Coastal and Brackish waters; Inland Rivers and lakes.

- (ii) Aquaculture (Fish Farm)
- (iii) Industrial (Commercial Trawlers) – this involves inshore fishing and shrimping i.e. fishing between 5-20 nautical miles of our territorial waters. We also have an EEZ of 200 nautical miles where fishing also takes place, and
- (iv) Distant Waters – this involves Reefer vessels bringing in fish into Nigeria from other countries; termed imports.

WOMEN IN NIGERIAN FISHERIES SECTOR/VALUE-CHAIN

Nigerian women play very important role in the various Sector of Nigerian fisheries; they are engaged in a wide range of activities (especially in processing and marketing)-like other women in fisheries all over the World; the Nigerian women in fisheries are no exception; they are the backbone of fresh and dry fish marketing from very early times by vending in rudimentary fish markets as well as carrying fish on head load sales, door to door.

FISH VALUE CHAIN PROCESSES

Women in Nigerian fisheries sector play a key and vital role in the fisheries value chain in Nigeria especially when we look at their involvement in the Marine, Artisanal and Aquaculture sub-sector of the fisheries sector. The women who constitute the greater percentage of the fish mongers/processors represent the first segment of the fish market chain; buying fresh fish directly from the producers/fishermen as they land the fish at shores.

In the case of Aquaculture production the women often buy the fish directly at the farm gate. There are also a few women in Aquaculture production in Nigeria.

The fish bought by the women are either sold in the fresh form; or as chilled; packed in ice; and as live fish as in Aquaculture production. Often the fish undergoes further processing by smoking before it is sold. In Aquaculture the women play key roles in buying, processing and marketing.

On the whole the women are involved from when the fish is landed at shore; farm gate in Aquaculture; thereafter the fish undergoes some basic or extensive processing, after which the first set of wholesaler women sell to other women/men retailers who in turn sell to consumers. The women wholesalers have more funds for the business than the retailers; however their challenges are similar but in various degrees.

Generally the women have little capital or net worth to put up as collateral for financial institutions; and the financial institutions thus sees them as too high a risk to be given loan even at high interest rates.

ORGANIZATION

Over the years the Nigerian women in the fisheries value-chain have been organized into fisheries cooperative society though we have a very, very few that do not belong to any union but operate solo (alone) with their operation.

Being members of cooperative societies has enabled the women to upgrade their status (to an extent), as members are able to get government and private sector assistance in terms of loans (though often this funds are not enough): subsidized inputs, capacity building etc.

Also, these cooperative societies are often used to protect the interest of the members as well as to facilitate equitable dealings with their fish suppliers (especially in the industrial and Aquaculture Sector); for often the members of the cooperative societies are able to argue and stick to a certain price regime with the supplier rather than the other way round (for example, if their leaders insist that no members should buy the fish at a price above a certain margin, you can be sure none of their members will) – this in essence shows their power as being part of a cooperative society.

CHALLENGES

The women's activities in the value chain are characterized by low capital and technology input. Most of their fish handling operations are without appropriate capacity to meet national and international sanitary and technical standards and hence possess low substantial benefit in fish trade.

Women's work in fish value chain has not been optimized or linked to value chain finance in Nigeria – thus they are limited to various financial services being put up by the commercial banks for the Agricultural Sector in the country. This lack of Cooperate finance has in essence debar the women from upgrading their fisheries activities and businesses in the various steps along the fisheries value chain, they have therefore not been able to build sustainable and viable fish trade especially when it comes to the export of fish and other fishery products.

RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

Considering the above challenges of the women in fish value chain in Nigeria; there is the need to assist these women to rise up and overcome their challenges in order to benefit and reap the reward of fish trade such as wealth creation, employment generation, better nutrition and education processes for their children and all household members.

It is opined that if formal financial institutions can make loans (especially at single digit interest rate) available to the women along their various involvement in the fish value chain to meet their capital requirements, the women will be able to invest in modern technologies like Cold Rooms, Smoked fish warehouses, Refrigerated trucks (transportation of fish), as well as modern smoking kilns situated in sheltered locations.

A financial organization should also be put in place to bear the various risks these women encounter along the various fish value-chains, for example most of these women transport fish and fish products using public transportation; this increases risk due to irregular services and increased expenses; which sometimes make these women to sell below cost.

The Federal Government of Nigeria's proposal through the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) to introduce the Nigeria Incentive – Based Risk sharing for Agricultural Lending (NIRSAL) to farmers should also be extended to the women in the various fish value-chain activities in Nigeria.

Provision of the requisite formal financial assistance as well as provision of modern marketing infrastructures to model markets, Cold Room, Refridgerated trucks, smoked fish warehouses etc to these women will lead to reduction in post harvest loses; it will also provide and strengthen the sale of fish and other fisheries product in their various locations; increase wealth, employment generation, as well prevention of rural –urban migration etc.

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Overall; increase in the financial status of the women will lead to the increase in the fisheries marketing activities of the women in the fisheries value chain, in Nigeria. It will also boost the growth of the fisheries subsector in Nigeria as well as make substantial impact on the Aquaculture value chain of the Federal Governments' Agricultural Transformation Agenda.

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