

CREATING BETTER MARKET AVENUES FOR AQUATIC PRODUCTS IN SUB SAHARAN AFRICA AT THE WAKE OF GLOBALIZATION: THE CASE OF CAMEROON

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Key words: marketing aquatic products globalization

ABSTRACT

The exploitation of aquatic food products has been very fundamental as a source of livelihood in the Sub Saharan Africa in particular and the world in general. Global production of aquatic food products totaled approximately 93.2 million metric tons in 1997 and sub Saharan Africa contributed 3.7 per cent. For the past two decades aquaculture has steadily risen in sub Sahara Africa. Given the predominant role of aquaculture in the livelihood of most Africans, farmers have moved from subsistence to income generation. At this level, farmers are faced with tough competition in the commercialization of these products for income generation, especially at the dawn of globalization.

This research paper is aimed at looking at the possibilities of how African farmers may be linked to market opportunities, improve their poorly functioning markets, weak domestic demand and meet up with competition at local, regional and international levels. The paper will also seek ways in which African aquatic products will be involved in the globalization arena and will be treated with a human face.

The research paper also examines market access for these aquatic products in the context of international trade and related domestic policies.

Looking for the way forward, the paper will propose ways in which aquatic farmers in sub Saharan Africa can widen and improve their market outlets for sustainable development.

INTRODUCTION

Fishing activities in Cameroon started from time immemorial. It is from this activities that Cameroon derived its name from the numerous prawns that were seen swarming in the mouth of the River Wouri and the Portuguese, at the time called the river "Rio dos Cameros", meaning "River of prawns". Thus in itself explains the position of fish and shrimp in Cameroon. These activities were intensified about half a century ago.

The role of fish is important not only to the diet of the citizens but also to the economy of the country. It is estimated that over 20.000 subsistent fishermen depend on fishing along the coast while the organized fishing industry provide jobs for over 5000 people. Cameroon produces above 100.000 tons of fish a year from its coast and inland water. Cameroon is blessed with numerous perennial rivers with an extensive maritime coastal line in the Gulf of Guinea. The

total water area amounts to about 2% of the country, nearly 40.000 million m³ and one million hectares divided as follows (Aubray 1976).

Type	Area (ha)	% Total
Flood Plains	550.000	55.0
Lakes	300.000	30.0
Rivers	150.000	15.0

(To this should be added the coast mangrove)

Looking at the situation of the subsistence maritime fishing, we realize that left on its own, the prospects for development is low, despite the significant position it occupies in Cameroon's fishing industry and household use. It is for this reason that the government with the assistance of some countries (Canada, USA) created in 1977 "The Mission for the Development of Subsistence Coastal Fisheries" is at improving the fisheries and well being of fishermen and fish farmers. It is presently undertaking a project in the East west and NW Provinces geared at modernizing fish culture. While the Arab Bank for Reconstruction has also given a substantial amount of assistance to develop and modernize this sector in Cameroon to increase production and guarantee food security.

AQUATIC FOOD PRODUCTS CONSUMED IN CAMEROON

Cameroon as many countries in sub Saharan Africa that practice aquaculture has many drainage systems, which are fertile in the production of these food items. This ranges from the Atlantic coast to lakes, rivers and flood plains. A number of varieties of aquatic food products are harvested from these drainage systems such as: Shrimps locally called crayfish, fishes of all types, crustaceans, mollusk, etc. of all these, fish and fish products are highly consumed because of its abundant nature. Since they are highly perishable, they are preserved in many forms before exported to other places especially into the hinterlands for consumption. These products are preserved in the following ways: by smoking, drying and in a frozen form. These methods of preservation have helped facilitated the distribution of these food products in Cameroon for consumption.

THE DEMAND AND SUPPLY:

Hunger and malnutrition remain amongst the most devastating factors facing the world's poor and needy, and continue to dominate the insecurity and the health of the world's poorest nations. With all this, Cameroon is not left behind the scene with its population doubling in size from four million to sixteen million from 1960 – 2004 and currently growing at 3.1% per year and expected to reach twenty five millions, by 2050. There are growing doubts as to the long-term sustainability of many traditional agricultural require to meet its food security.

Of the different global food productions system, agriculture is widely perceived as an important weapon in the global fight against malnutrition and poverty, particularly within developing countries. Aquaculture is regarded as an important domestic provider of much needed high quality animal protein and other essential nutrients (generally at affordable prices to the poorer

people of the community). This sector for the past two decade has been the fastest growing food production section in Cameroon.

Of all the protein and other essential nutrients needed, aquatic food products supply the greater part of it to the poorer folk in Cameroon. . Aquaculture is regarded as an important domestic provider of much needed high quality animal protein and other essential nutrients (generally at affordable prices to the poorer people of the community The reason is that this food item can be affordable by any poorest of the poor in Cameroon 98% of Cameroonian consumed these products on daily basis in one way or the other. In every meal that is prepared, either with vegetable or meat, there is at least some fish in it; be it fresh, dried or smoked.

In terms of per capita availability to (food fish) from aquaculture (i.e. The production of farmed aquatic fin fish and shell fish on a whole live weight basis, and excluding farmed aquatic plants, there is little or data or statistic available for this sector. This is because sector is strange and or new in Cameroon. Though it is estimated that 21% of food fish supplied in Cameroon is from this culture. This is mostly practiced in the hinterland where marine and aquatic food products from the coast cannot reach. By contrast, per capita available of food fish from capture fisheries is high in supply and highly consumed.

Globally, more food fish is consumed on a per capita basis than any other type of meat or animal protein (16.0kg per capita supply in 1998, up from 12.5kg in 1984) followed by pig meat (14.9kg, in 1998), poultry meat (10.1kg in 1998), beef and veal (9.8kg in 1998), (FAOSTAT, 2000). Although developing countries produced over 2/3 of the total food fish supply in 1998, per capita supply was highest in developed countries (13.6kg up from 6.9kg) (FAOSTAT 2000).

In general, people living within Asia and Africa (including LIFDCS) are much more depended on fish as part of their dishes than people living within most developed countries and other regions of the world.

In Cameroon fish is highly consumed in poorer homes in most rural and urban areas than in richer homes. This is because of differences in their income levels, and differences in prices of meat or animal protein. The prices range as thus

Products	Min. P/Kg (FCFA)	Max. P/Kg (FCFA)	Observations
Fish (imported)	700	1000	
Fish (local)	200	600	
Birds	1000	1500	Occasionally consumed
Beef	1400	200	“
Pork	1200	1700	“
Mutton/goat	1200	1500	“

MEETING UP THE DEMAND

Generally speaking, the intensification of aquaculture as the producing more outputs from the same level of the limiting factors of production will increase the supply of these products in the

country. Aquaculture intensification is taken here to mean increases in the quality and quantity of inputs or factors of productions, be it land, labor or embedded capital. Aquaculture has been practiced in traditional, extensive form for thousands of years in some areas. In the previous two decades aquaculture has gradually been practiced in Cameroon but in a low profile.

If this method of fish farming is highly and strongly encouraged, it will continue to comprise and broad structures of users, system, practices and species operating along a continuum from backyard operation to large scale industrial systems.

This will therefore increase food security and boost the economy of the country. It is likely that economic pressure will induce the progressive intensification of aquaculture around the world.

MARKET CONSTRAINTS

For many years African farmers though producing in a low scale, have not been able to push their products in the market. Thus giving way for competitors to dominate the market both at the local and international levels. For example frozen fish imported from Europe, can fish imported from America and North Africa. The reasons why these farms suffer these setbacks are as follows:

Poor preservation methods: Most farmers lack the means of preserving their products due to the high rate of their perishable nature. Consequently the fish usually harvested cannot be preserving so they get bad.

Low quality products: It is considered that most of the fish preserved by these farmers are done with rudimentary methods there are of extremely low quality. That is be it smoked, salted, dried, etc. therefore does not face competition in the world market. Even local consumers tend to prefer imported products. The tendency being that anything imported has a higher value and quality.

Poor sanitary conditions: The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) era under the guise of Uruguay rounds of trade negotiations that led in the late 1994 launching of WTO also spelt out the importance of sanitary conditions of the products to be sent to the market. Today, it is considered that products from African countries have fallen short of that.

Bans: The enforcements of SPS measures is naturally a problems for African countries exporters. The European Union imposed a ban on imports of fish from Tanzania and Uganda in 1999. These bans which typically ranged from several months to years had huge effects in terms of foreign exchange revenues, disruption of investment and losses of employment.

Poorly developed research centers: Most governments of the African countries south of the Sahara do not bother to encourage research in the development of the aquatic products. That has drastically hampered the economic development of this sector. Visiting these onetime research centers, as the case in Cameroon, the structures that stand now almost empty were one time edifices of research centers.

THE WAY FORWARD IN AQUACULTURE DEVELOPMENT

Africans have still of today not realized that fish farming in particular and integrated fish farming in general could be the backbone of their economy. This is if it is well managed as it is

done in Asia. The potentials of this agricultural option can be realized in the African economy in that:

Availability of market: The prices of many animal-origin foods have declined steeply over the past several decades because of increased production and stagnating demand in the traditional markets of the world. Real red meat prices, for instance, have declined by a stunning 50% since 1980, Today with the prevalence of many diseases in animal-origin food such as mad cow disease, the bird flu, etc, that are dangerous to human health; have scared many people from consuming these items. Consequently, fish demand is very high in the market. Fishing products are heavily traded commodity of recent and the direction of trade is changing. Roughly 40% of global fish output by value in 1998 was traded across international borders (Christopher L. Delgado 2003). The high share of trade in fish is astounding for such a highly perishable commodity group. It reflects major changes in human diets around the world. The enormous rise in fish production in Developing Countries especially in Asia has caused an about-face in the direction of trade in fish products since the early 1970s. By the late 1990s, more than 50% of fish exports came from Developing Countries (FAOSTAT 2002). If such initiatives could be invested in Africa like in Asia and Latin America, Africa will be one of the highest exporters of fish products. Most of the African countries will not only export these products, they will also consume it in their internal markets. Thus fish would become the greatest income earner for African countries

It can be a good means of poverty alleviation: Despite the development efforts of the last half-century, the global dimension of poverty continues to present a grim picture (IFAD 1999 Annual Report) 1999. In fact, the World Bank estimates that 1.3 billion people – more than 1/5 of the world's population live in abject poverty. The impact on sustainable economic development in Africa is devastating. With the low agricultural production, inland fish farming poses now as the only alternative for the revitalization of the African economy. The expansion and intensification of aquaculture production in Africa will expand the economy of African countries thus help to eradicate poverty which is the order of the day in Africa.

Hunger Eradication: Fish are an important source of protein, especially in the Developing World. Fish account 25% of animal-derived protein in low-income food deficit countries, compared with 13% in the industrialized world. (Christopher L Delgado et al) 2003.

But aquatic products are rarely included in food supply calculations and are frequently overlooked in food security discussions at the national and global level (James 1994). Cereals dominate most calculations of per capita supply and food security, all foods and economic activities, including productions of aquatic products, will be needed (Maryl William 1996).

In the first half of the 1990s, people in the developed countries directly consumed 18kg of meat and 22kg of fish per capita as food. The corresponding figures in Sub-Saharan African were 9kg of meat and 8kg of fish per capita (FAOSTAT 1997). Thus much still has to be done to raise the production of aquatic production.

The propagation and the cultivation of integrated inland fish farming are going to increase the consumption of food products of animal's origin. Therefore, hands have to be put on deck for the intensive and extensive production of this product. It is going to eradicate hunger and increase the macro base of the continent; thus instill sustainable development.

Creating productive employment opportunities: Poverty is multidimensional; therefore, poverty reduction efforts have to be multi-targeted and are expected to show wide and diverse dimension. The underlying fact that rural poverty reduction generally benefits from labor-intensive approaches.

Inland fish farming has very little labor intensive approach unlike other agricultural production (food crop and cash crop). It will thus employ many farmers who have been sensitized to carry out this production either in a large or small scale. For rural households, fish will be small units of cash or food, which can be harvested more or less at will without loss of weight or condition. While these systems are labor-intensive, they do save labor from fetching water, gathering wood and forage and fishing in nearby rivers and streams.

Good climate and abundant resources: Poor water quality can result from feed wastage, lack of oxygen circulation and exchange of polluted water with neighboring ponds. Minimizing water exchange through re-circulation has the dual benefit of reducing water demand and minimizing the affluent problems for both environment and surrounding farms. (Boyd and Gross 2000). African has a very conducive environment, abundant land and very good sources of water supply that can lead to the perfect production of these products. The relatively inexpensive exploitation of existing water resources could augment income, help increase fish availability to domestic markets, and increase the affordability of low-value food (fish) in Developing Countries (Li 1999).

CONCLUSION

If people could eat international resolutions and agreements, Africans would be among the best-fed people in the world. With regard to aquaculture, we will wage a modernization crusade through the transfer of aqua cultural technology and other related inputs as well as a demand-driven extension service delivery system. We shall work towards the diversification of our agriculture and determined to increase our national income, food production to cater for our own needs and to export surplus to food deficit countries.

My greatest plea today is to put our contribution into concrete action and let them not remain on the lips of those who say them. Making the market situations of this vital economic activity friendly both at the local and at the international level, Africans will the need of revitalizing this economic potential.

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