

PERCEIVED TRAINING NEEDS OF FISHER FOLKS IN AKWA IBOM STATE, NIGERIA

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Introduction

Training is regarded as any planned and organized effort designed to help individuals develop increasing capabilities and bridge the gap between the actual and desired situations. The purpose of training is to impart knowledge and skills that are applicable to practical situations (Ojiambo, 1995). In essence, training attempts to bridge the gap between what the trainee knows and what is needed for effective job performance (Madley, 1995). Training becomes necessary when rural development objectives are not being realized. A case study is the fishery subsector which can be said to be lagging behind when viewed against the background of Edwards' (2000) and Payne's (2000) enumeration of its potential important role in human nutrition, national food security and socio-economic improvement of communities members. In Nigeria, the fishery subsector contributes only 0.5% to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), according to the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA 2002). The country is also experiencing a scarcity of fish production as the demand level of fish and its products had long outgrown its supplies, and is still growing at more than 2 percent per year (FOS, 1999). In essence Nigeria has become a fish import-dependent country. It is pertinent to note that the artisanal fishing subsector has consistently contributed more than 93% of total fish production in Nigeria, according to the Federal Department of Fisheries (FDF, 2004). The fishery component of the Nigerian economy therefrom needs to be revamped for improved efficiency.

The continental shelf is widest in Akwa Ibom State, which possesses about 129 kilometre of coastline and is reputed to have the highest concentration of fishery resources in Nigeria. The total land area of the state encompasses the entire Qua-Iboe River basin, the western part of the lower Cross River basin and the eastern part of the Imo River. According to Akpan (1987) the Cross River fisheries, particularly the section between Itu and Oron are reputed as the richest of the three major rivers in the State. The area boasts of commercial fish species like catfish (*Chrysichthys spp*) croaker (*Pseudotolithus senegalensis*) shynose (*Polydactylus spp*) Red snapper (*Lutjanus*) Bonga (*Ethmalosa fimbriatae*) and African carp. A lot of shrimps (*Panaeus spp*) crabs (*Parapenaeus*), oysters and periwinkles also abound in these waters.

Of recent, these areas, like other parts of the Niger Delta have been reported by the UNDP (2006) to be declining in its level of fish production, resulting in reduced catches and lower incomes. Owabukeruyele (2000) gave reasons for declining fish catches to include high cost of fishing inputs lack of access to funds to refinance fishing enterprises after recurrent oil spills and lack of exposure of artisanal fisherfolks to improved methods of fish catching, preservation and marketing techniques. Offiong (2001) had also asserted that people in the fishing sub-sector need to be trained in modern fishery practices, and be allowed to adapt such to their local conditions. A lot of grants, projects and programmes targeted at increased artisanal fish production have been introduced and implemented by the IFAD, UNDP, and Federal and State governments. All the above have met with limited successes as manifested in Ajana's (2000) report of a significant level of declining productivity from all sectors of Nigerian fish industry. Similarly, the Inter-Academy Council (2004) has revealed that future projections to 2020 indicate that the supply-demand gap will continue to grow. This study was therefore conceived to determine the training needs of fisherfolks in Okobo and Oron LGAs of Akwa Ibom State. This is seen as a pre-requisite that will provide significant inputs into various international organizations and governments-initiated projects targeted at improving the level of artisanal fishing production in Nigeria and Akwa Ibom State.

Materials and methods

The universe for the study comprised all the fisherfolks registered with the fishing associations located at Atabong beach (Okobo) and Oron fish market, (Oron). Random sampling procedure was utilized to select a sample of 100 respondents made up of 50 fishers from each market. Respondents were requested to respond to their perceived intensity of needs with regards to 13 identified training needs. This was done with the aid of a 3-point likert continuum of Great Need (3), Little Need (2) and No Need (1). Total and mean scores were calculated for each need item, while a Training Need (TN), and Non-Training Need (NTN) were determined with the aid of a cut-off mean score of 2.5 (3 × 2 ÷ 13 = 0.5).

Results and Discussion

Table 1- Training needs of fisherfolks in the study area

S/N	Training needs	Total score	Mean score	Remarks
A	Boat repair	197	1.97	NTN
B	Positioning of net in water	221	2.21	NTN
C	Water treatment	179	1.79	NTN
D	Loan procurement	300	3.0	TN
E	Utilization of life-saving devices (e.g. life jackets)	236	2.36	NTN
F	Prevention of insect/rodent attack	272	2.72	TN
G	Identification of areas of high fish concentration	287	2.87	TN
H	Waste management	200	2.0	NTN
I	Net repair	260	2.60	TN
J	Improved smoking devices	276	2.76	TN
K	Outboard engine maintenance	278	2.78	TN
L	Fire outbreak prevention	269	2.69	TN
M	First-Aid treatment	222	2.22	NTN

TN Training need

NTN Non-training need

Table 1 reveals that 7 of the 13 identified training need were perceived as important training needs. The three most important training need were revealed as (1) How to secure loan packages (x=3.0); (2) Identification of areas of high fish concentration (x=2.87) and (3) maintenance of outboard engines (x=2.78). Other perceived training needs included: ability to utilize improved smoking devices (x=2.76); prevention of insects/rodent attack (x=2.72); prevention of fire outbreak (x=2.69) and improved net mending procedures (x=2.60).

Artisanal fishery is a capital and labour intensive activity dominated by peasants who are constrained by the limitations of their physical and economic environment. Considering the ever increasing cost of fishing gears and accessories, the need for credit facilities cannot be over-emphasised. With regards to the necessity to access skills in the identification of areas of high fish concentration, Akpan (1987) had asserted that areas of high fish concentration are confidential to only a few fishermen and its determination is based on increased turbidity and movement of fries on water surface, etc. These forms of knowledge are fast becoming obsolete due to changing environmental conditions, exacerbated by recurrent oil spills. It therefore becomes necessary that fishers be trained and provided modern equipments like echo-sounders, warp-tension meters and other fishing aids, for improved fishing activities. For the fishers who own outboard engines, they need specialized training to become proficient. A related finding in the course of interview revealed that this was the major concern of secondary school leavers who have taken to fishing as a source of livelihood. Lovshin et al (1980) have also revealed that such a vocation could provide alternative income and act as a major sustainer of the relatively older segment of the population, who may not be able to withstand the rigour of fishing. In order to reduce post-harvest losses on Nigeria fisheries, fishers must be introduced to improved smoking devices. This will reduce the frequency of damages arising from constant fire-outbreak disasters in fishing ports while also helping to prevent insect, rodent and microbial attack on stored fish produce.

Conclusion and Recommendation

It is imperative that the fishery sub-sector be revamped in order for it to perform its ~~obligatory~~ ~~role~~ of providing employment, ensuring quality food nutrition and helping to conserve scarce foreign exchange used for importing fish products. This study has revealed the major training needs of fisherfolks to include: inability to secure loan packages for procurement of improved fishing ~~gears~~ and accessories, and to reactivate individual fishing enterprises, especially after recurrent oil spills; lack of modern equipments to help identify areas of high fish concentration, and maintenance of expensive outboard engines. Attempts should be made to incorporate these training needs and other ones as perceived by respondents ~~in any~~ proposed programme or project to revitalize the dwindling fishery sub-sector of the national economy. In other words any intended fishery development project should be designed as wholesome packages to incorporate all aspects of the fishery industry. In essence an identification of clientele training ~~needs~~ should precede any attempt to revitalize the dwindling artisanal fishing industry.

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