

Commercial and Economic Usage of Shell Fishes within States in Coastal Region of Nigeria

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ABSTRACT This study examined the current development of Small Business Enterprise (SME) in coastal states in promoting business for their sustenance. Some important facts were presented with regard to high profit margin of the business and also the challenges of the traders involved in this business. The study revealed that toxic waste and deep dredging in the creeks and canals affect their getting to the creeks where these fishes can be bought cheaper and therefore makes the commodity to be expensive. Another challenge is due to poor sanitation around the environment where these fishes are sold in the market and consequently human health is being affected.

Keywords: SME, Shell fishes, toxic waste, canals, creeks

Definition

Shell fishes are not fishes since they have no scales, vertebrate, fins, although some can swim but not all. There are two groups of shell fishes:

- (a) Seafood called shell fish: These are and include Mollusks, clams, oysters, mussels, conch, snails and scallops.
- (b) Crustaceans: They include shrimps, crabs, lobster and crayfish; Squid and octopus are sometimes considered as shell fishes as well.

Objective of the Study

The objective of this study is to appreciate the traders that are involved in the business of buying and selling of these groups of shell fishes within the coastal region of Nigeria. It has been observed that this business has been in

progress for decades and has been used by the natives and traders to sustain their family and other challenges in life. They have also created job opportunity for themselves. Government and NGO groups should render financial assistance to empower them for continuity of the business.

Statement of the Problem

Shell fish traders are not recognized despite their contributions in the society for creating jobs for themselves. Shell fish products are becoming very expensive due to dredging of creeks and canals within the coastal region of Nigeria. However, dumping of toxic-waste is unhealthy for the shell fishes and human beings because it pollutes the water bodies. The rural areas are characterized by poverty, hunger, illiteracy, under- development and lack of social amenities. The rural women are expected to be involved in the development of the communities and societies where they belong. To this end, women are expected to participate in a number of activities such as food production, house keeping, children and other community development. In spite of these, they appear highly neglected and have little education, Amadi (2013). The places where these shell fish traders exhibit their business do not encourage customers due to poor environmental sanitation. Poor financial assistance had denied them of purchasing good quantity of shell fish for their business at any point in time.

Introduction

The level of illiteracy among women is believed to be very high in the rural areas. Women need to be educated in order to help them develop their rich potential and maximize their contribution to rural development efforts. Besides, there are evidence that mother's illiteracy level has positive effects on her child's development, Health, education, mortality rate and pre-school cognitive ability. The high level of illiteracy among rural women has also influenced maternal mortality negatively. Educated women are known to be less at risk since they are more likely to seek health care and improved living conditions. According to UNDP report on human development (1999) more than 60% of the one hundred and Thirty-five million children who do not go to school are girls. The report also has it that literacy level for women in Africa and Asia are 20% below that of men. Although the UNDP report (2000) indicated an improvement on women participation in education in the developing countries. According to UNESCO report (2004), statistics showed that women still lagged behind in education in many countries including the developed countries, especially in Nigeria. One of the serious concern today is the gross neglect of women Aqabi (2007). Agabi (2007) asserted that this

situation has kept women at the background and affected their participation in several programmes.

The non-participation of women has impeded so many area of development both Urban and Rural Communities in Nigeria. The ability of the rural women to participate effectively in development oriented programmes is constrained by illiteracy and other factors such as excessive workload, problems of health, lack of social amenities, lack of time, teenage pregnancy, organizational problems, cultural patterns, customs and male attitudes. Amadi (2010) reported that women are grossly under represented in politics, managerial position and other vital areas of socio-economic development. Education and training remains the most vital instruments for enhancing human capacity development and empowerment.

Nigeria is endowed with natural resources both on land and in creeks. This blessed position has made the inhabitants to have different occupations for the survival of their home and the society at large. Among these occupations are fishing, trading and farming.

The researcher's area of study is concentrated on the shell-fish grouped together. In the coastal region of Nigeria, people are known as fishermen and women. Women are mostly involved in the trading of shell-fishes harvested from the river, creeks, and canals within the coastal areas. Amadi (2013) supported the idea that women serve as a vehicle for transforming the rural areas. Rural development can hardly be successfully attained without the active involvement, participation and commitment of women in the development of the society. More so, for training the children, farming and trading to sustain the lives of the families. Trading on these shell-fishes can be seen in various coastal metropolitic markets where people buy and sell for the maintenance and up keep of their homes and earn income for their families.

Current trend in the marketing of shell-fishes

Shell-fishes such as periwinkles, lobsters, crayfish, crab can be picked within the marshy area of the creeks while some can be collected with net where there is low tide. People can trek and collect them and make them their daily business, although collection can be made with canoe into the deeper areas in the river. Most of the women that are in this type of business earn their living from this trade as they have been in this trade for over fifty years. Shell-fishes can also be sold in its fresh form in bags, different sizes of containers, according to the quantity the buyer wants and prices differ within the range. There are also buyers for fresh, boiled and roasted types.

Types of Shell-fishes

Periwinkles—Black colour with smooth surface

Brown—colour with hooks on the body:

- (a) Lobster—brown
- (b) Lobster—Black with white stripes

Periwinkle

- (a) Periwinkles can be boiled and the flesh removed from the shell.
- (b) It can also be roasted and removed from shell. This type is usually very expensive and tastier.

Benefits of shell-fish and its nutritional value to man

Shell fishes contain a lot of protein and calcium which are very important in the body system. Lack of these minerals can cause a lot of damage in the body. The shell fishes are delicacies in Nigeria in places like Rivers State, Calabar, Lagos and Bayelsa States. When these shell fishes are not found in the soups, it appears as if the soups are not balanced and must be added. When you mention *Edikaekom*, *Afang Okazi soup*, *Isem fulo*, *abangiri ifinia na isemi na* (Nembe in Bayelsa) which is the roasted type, must be there for the women who prepared it to say that I have arrived. “That means is a complete dish”.

In case of traditional marriage, any type of occasion that soup is involved, the rate at which the shell fish soups are consumed is faster than any other soup, it is not consumed in that locality. The researcher is only talking about the high demand of these shell fishes which are becoming very expensive due to the rate the creeks and canals are disturbed. In most of the restaurant shell fishes are served as Nkwobi after boiling (periwinkle) and spicing with local condiments as in Goat head preparation.

Usage of the empty shell

These shell fishes are like palm-fruits which all the parts are important. The shell is not wasted because those who build houses mix them with cement to floor their rooms and also use to repair roads, where there are pot-holes. The shells are very durable when mixed with cement instead of gravel and as such builders go to the houses of the traders to buy them for such uses.

Table 1: Variation in the price of various category of periwinkle sold in the Niger Delta markets

YEAR	SAMPLE/TYPES	PRICES/BAG/CUP
1990-1995 1995-2000 2000-2005 2005-2010 2010-2015	Unshelled Periwinkle	Per ½ of rice bag [N]
	“	N1,200.00
	“	1,800.00
	“	3,000.00
	”	4,500.00
	”	5,500.00
1990-1995 1995-2000 2000-2005 2005-2010 2010-2015	Boiled Periwinkle	Per cup [N]
	“	N50.00
	“	70.00
	“	120.00
	”	150.00
	”	250.00
1990-1995 1995-2000 2000-2005 2005-2010 2010-2015	Roasted Periwinkle	Per cup [N]
	“	N70.00
	“	100.00
	“	150.00
	”	200.00
	”	300.00

The trend here has shown that the prices of periwinkle be it the unshelled, boiled and roasted are always increasing as the years go by. Since this commodity is highly cherished, the price is constantly increasing.

Factors affecting the production of periwinkle

Dumping of toxic—waste and oil spillage add to water pollution and leads to the decay of the shell fishes. This is also very dangerous for consumption.

Proper Sanitation for Shell Fish Markets in the Coastal Region in Nigeria

The environment where these shell fish sellers found themselves are not conducive for selling such food items for human consumption. This is due to poor environmental sanitation. Each state or region of the country has its unique environment problems. The problems of the environmental sanitation exist in all the Nigerian cities. It is not true that Nigerians naturally cherish filthy environment regardless of the paucity of modern amenities. Today, the intractable problem of polluted environment is simply basically a disturbing phenomenon of urbanity where these shell fish traders are buying and selling.

Like several other sphere of life, it is the cities that manifest gross environmental indiscipline such as erection of illegal structures and assorted forms of atmospheric pollution and indiscriminate dumping of solid wastes in the market places. Over the period, government efforts has been put in place to make sure that sanitation in the market is supervised to ensure cleanliness of the environment where people buy and sell their food stuff for human consumption. Government had introduced monthly environmental sanitation in the market and should be followed strictly.

The most important of these shell fishes is their economic relevance in the society as a source of living for the traders and also for a healthy living. Women especially have been in this business for over 100 years (one hundred years). They have made tremendous impact in the life of people and contributed to the development of the society.

Factors militating against high production of shell fishes in the coastal regions

It has been observed that a greater percentage of people that are involved in this shell fish business are mostly school-drop out from secondary schools. However, a greater proportion of these school drop-outs are youth who must find something to occupy themselves. There are advantages and disadvantages in the development of the society which Coastal areas are not exempted from. The rivers, creeks and Canals are constantly dredged for expansion so that other types of business will be free for ship or big canoes to explore; this in turn affects the traders.

The quantity of these shell fish are reducing, although the traders always complain that the creeks and canals are so deep that they find it difficult to get the shell fish, making it very expensive to buy and re-sell. Involvement of private contractors in collection and disposal of household waste have also affected the prices, quantity and quality of shell fishes harvested.

Education and mobilization by environmental health officers to inspect the shell fishes that are sold for human consumption should be carried out. Establishment of the Ministry of Environment at both Federal and State will help to keep market environment clean. The foregoing notwithstanding, shell fish traders are buying and selling in dirty environment in the market, thereby endangering the health of people.

Empowerment for shell fish traders

Amadi (2010) emphasized on women empowerment considering the tremendous task they are facing in the family and rearing of children, supporting their education and buying and selling for the up keep of the homes. Empowerment means inculcating in the individuals the ability to understand both the social and natural environment. If women become functional and self-reliant then, they would be empowered. This empowerment is not only the economic aspect, but should also be in the socio-political and cultural endeavours. Oyekan (2000) argued that our education should aim at the practical reasoning, critical dialogue, creative production of things and preventive diplomacy in National resolution of environmental health and human problems.

As stated by the first lady of Rivers State Judith Amaechi (2010) women and youth should be trained in fish farming, snail rearing and others considering the nutritional values of these foods and the importance of trading as an occupation for sustenance of life instead of stealing and other criminal activities in the society sustenance.

Though the coastal region of Nigeria is richly endowed with several streams, crabs, ponds lobsters, periwinkles and others, which can not be cultivated in an artificial environment that provides all the conditions required for their growth. The aspect of trading with these shell fish and for one to make life very meaningful is a welcomed idea. The researcher is of the opinion that if these groups of traders (Shell fish) should be empowered and kept in clean environment where these food items are sold, it will support and encourage both the buyers and sellers bearing in mind the economic importance of this trade in the life of human beings.

Conclusion

Commercial and Economic usage of shell fishes within the coastal region of Nigeria can not be overemphasized as people have used this trade to sustain their families over the years. This business should be encouraged by empowering the shell fish traders financially, providing enabling environment and identifying areas where toxic-waste are not dumped for the safety of people's life and food consumption. Considering the high nutritional value of these shell fishes, its consumption should be encouraged by assisting the rural

women who harvest them in small quantity to form co-operative. The government should also assist the rural women with loans to purchase all the gadgets needed for the collection of these shell fishes.

Recommendation

The following recommendations will empower the shell fish traders:

1. Shell fish traders should form co-operative association in each of the coastal region; like the butchers Association and should be registered.
2. The shell fish association should be registered with Co-operate Affairs Commission.
3. They should comply with the country tax law so that they can benefit from loan scheme and any other empowerment programme by the state government and NGOs.
4. They should also agree with the state environmental sanitation to help and keep the market clean where shell fish traders are selling their goods to avoid microbial contamination and eventual health hazards.
5. Toxic-waste should not be dumped near the creeks or canals that will affect the shell fishes and human beings.

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