

# PRIVATIZATION OF FISH FARMS A CASE STUDY OF ABIA STATE

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## ABSTRACT

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A study was conducted in Abia State in 2002 to determine the status of fish farming in the state. The study was carried out with the use of questionnaire distributed randomly as well as interviews with fish farmers. The study recorded a total number of ninety-one (91) fish farms. Out of this number, nineteen fish farms were Government assisted and are no more functional. The remaining seventy-two were owned privately both individually and cooperatively six were non functional. Forty ponds were earthen while nineteen were concrete. The sources of water include tap water, bore hole, streams, lakes and rain water. Sixteen of the fish farmers were full-time farmers while forty-three were part-time. The fish species cultured include Tilapia, Clarias, hybrids of *Heterobranchus* and *clarias*, *heterobranchus* and *heterotis*. The result showed that major constraints include lack of capital, skilled personnel, predators, scarcity of fingerlings and lack of inputs. Furthermore, the failure of government assisted fish farms, like other government establishments-NEPA, NNPC, NITEL etc is a clear signal that activities that can best be done by the private sector be disengaged from Government.

## INTRODUCTION

For many years, institutions like Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and World Watch have stressed that the World natural fish stocks are becoming highly depleted. Over fishing, wasteful fishing by huge trawlers, increase use of fine mesh nets are some of the reasons behind this grave situation for capture fisheries. Brown (1996) observed that 80% of total world fish consumption comes from capture fisheries while the remaining is produced through aquaculture. Aquaculture has the potential to relieve some of the overwhelming pressure on natural fish species.

Jamu and Ayinla (2003) pointed out that aquaculture production in Africa has remained low despite the huge potential that exists within the continent. In Nigeria there is little participation in fish farming from private sector which may be due to lack of enlightenment on numerous investment

opportunities in capture fisheries and aquaculture enterprises. With the role of government sectors, fish farms have not really played prominent role in supplementing the fish demand to encourage private sector.

For the potential to be realized, it is necessary to refocus the direction of aquaculture development by accelerating the disengagement of Government from activities that can best be done by the private sector. Government fish programmes in Nigeria have largely concentrated on the provision of inputs to and infrastructure for the support of artisanal sub-sector of the Nigeria fishing industry. Ufodike et al (1994) suggested that more encouragement should be given to aquaculture sub-sector to enable it increase its given to contribution towards domestic production.

The precise reasons for the poor adoption of aquaculture by small scale farmers have varied from case to case (Harrison et al 1994: Stomal and Weige 1998: Brummett and Wilson 2000 and Dugan 2003), but the fundamental cause is now widely recognized to be the failure of effectively integrating it into the farm economy due to too much emphasis on the role of Government structures both in technical report and provision of input. Furthermore, Nwanna (2002) observed that the low production is associated with unencouraging Government policies towards aquaculture development, low private and organized sector participation, shortage of skilled labour in the area of biotechnology and high quality and dedicated management personnel, inadequate fish feed and lack of credit facilities to fish farmers.

The importance of this study was to identify fish farming systems available in Abia State, the species cultured, functional and nonfunctional fish farms and the constraints with a view to suggesting areas of improvement. It also tried to identify the roles of Government and private fish farms as regards fish production in Abia State.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The study focused on the aspects of fish farming in Abia State, which had seventeen local Government areas then. It shares boundaries with Imo State, CrossRivers State, Enugu State, Ebonyi State, Rivers State and Akwa Ibom State.

The study was carried out with the use of structured questionnaire. The list of existing fish farms was obtained from the State Agricultural Development Programme (ADP) office and they also helped in the distribution of questionnaire in the three zones- Aba, Umahia and Ohafia. The questionnaires were shared randomly and later collected from the respondents.

The questionnaire was structured to help identify the

prevalent farm types, farming systems available including marketing and constraints as well as location of farms. Forty seven out of the fifty nine respondents returned completed questionnaires while the remaining twelve returned uncompleted questionnaires, in variably with the fear that they would be taxed if given all information the questionnaire demanded. Data for the objective was evaluated using descriptive statistics such as percentages, frequency distribution and graphs.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Table 1. Is the percentage distribution of the various local governments of Abia State.**

The result showed that Abia State had a total of 91 fish farms, 19 were government assisted and are no more functional while six out of the remaining are private fish farms which are nonfunctional. The failure of all government assisted fish farms is in line with what obtains in other government establishments like NEPA, NNPC, NITEL etc. which have failed to render the expected services to the people. Jamu and Ayinla (2003) pointed out that in order that the potential of aquaculture be realized; it is necessary to disengage its activities from government in preference to the private sector.

The result also revealed that 40 fish farms operate earthen ponds while 19 are concrete ponds. It is costlier to construct concrete ponds than earthen ponds, but unlike earthen ponds, concrete ponds can be constructed without serious consideration is the soil type-clay soil. More concrete and homestead ponds could be set up if credit facilities are made available to farmers. 24 fish farms are based on natural water sources such as streams, lakes and rivers while 35 are based on artificial water sources like tap water and bore holes. How ever ponds with poor drainage systems get flooded during the rainy season. This frustrating phenomenon could account for the

small number of natural water based fish farms in the state that is endowed with lots of natural waters.

Sixteen of the fish farmers were full-time farmers while forty-three were part-time. It was also found out that 3 fish farms had 15 separate ponds, 3 had 10 ponds, one had 9 ponds, one had 8, three had 6, four had 2 while the remaining had one each. (Table 2.)

Aquaculture is gradually gaining grounds in Abia State and more full-time farmers are expected to embrace the profession.

The management practices observed showed that 15 fish farms lime their ponds before stocking while all the farms fertilize and weed their farms when necessary - a credit to the fisheries extension workers. The predators include frogs, snakes, kites and other piscivorous birds. When fish are harvested they are usually sold the same day, the unsold are smoked while the rich keep theirs in fridges. More often than not, buyers are invited to the farms.

The major constraints identified include lack of capital, skilled personnel, improved and sufficient fingerlings, lack of resource inputs, predators and lack of government subsidy as well as necessary equipments. Despite these problems the prospects for aquaculture remains high. To encourage fish farmers in Abia State it is necessary to: -

- (i) Step up efforts to encourage private sector participation, since government farms have failed to perform.
- (ii) Grant credit facilities to farmers at low interest rate
- (iii) The rigorous stage of getting the loan should be reduced to the barest minimum.
- (iv) The government should organize campaigns workshops and lectures/symposia for farmers
- (v) Provision of resource inputs such as improved fingerlings and fertilizers at subsidized price.

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*Table 1. PERCENTAGE OF PONDS AND HECTARES IN ABIA STATE*

LOCAL GOVERNMENTS	POINTS	HECTARES
Abia North and South	5.82	4.61
Isiala Ngwa North	9.45	10.39
Isiala Ngwa South	2.55	3.81
Ukwa West	3.64	2.07
Ukwa East	12.73	8.02
Obingwa	5.09	2.43
<b>Total</b>	<b>39.28</b>	<b>31.33</b>

Umuahia	9.81	10.29
Ikwuano	2.18	1.55
Bende	11.27	12.31
<b>Total</b>	<b>23.26</b>	<b>24.15</b>

Ohafia	12.73	11.84
Arochukwu	14.90	9.12
Isiukwuato	9.81	23.51
<b>Total</b>	<b>37.44</b>	<b>44.47</b>

**Table 2. FRIQUENCY DISTRIBUTION OF FISH PONDS ON FISH FARMS**

<b>FISH FARMS</b>	<b>FISH PONDS</b>
3	15
3	10
1	9
1	8
3	6
4	4
3	3
15	2
58	1
91	223

