

FISHERMEN COOPERATIVES IN THE GREEN REVOLUTION PROGRAMME

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to examine areas in which fishermen cooperatives can become involved and then suggest operational guidelines in order to increase fishermen income and also to make Green Revolution Programme a success through increased production of fish.

The paper enumerated different areas in which fishermen cooperatives can participate. These include: thrift and credits, thrift and savings, consumers and building cooperative societies.

It is the belief of the author that the expansion of fishermen cooperatives into the areas mentioned in this paper can enable members to process and market their products more economically buy supplies and equipment in large quantities and obtain lower cost credit.

INTRODUCTION

In April 1980, the federal government launched the Green Revolution Programme. The primary objective of the programme is to modernize the agricultural sector of the economy - especially to achieve self sufficiency in food production. At the launching of the programme, the federal government announced the initial release of about ₦18.3 million as additional revenue to various other targeted agricultural development funds for the purpose of resuscitating the areas of food production, livestock and fish production which were believed to be financially handicapped. Under this arrangement various projects, such as land clearing schemes, farm mechanization centres, agro-service centres, river basin development schemes, national accelerated food production programme and tractor hire service would all receive increased development funds.¹

Three kinds of provisions were made, these include (a) increased supply of agricultural inputs e.g. fertilizer, which is geared towards the encouragement of small holders producers. (b) provision of loans and credit facilities, which are meant to take care of the loans and credit, financial requirements of both small holders and large capitalist farmers. The main avenue for the disbursement of these funds are the governments, agricultural credit scheme, the Nigeria Agricultural Cooperative Bank and commercial banks. (c) and provision of incentives for commercial firms going into large scale production, incentives like income tax relief for pioneer enterprises, duty free imports of farm machinery and the provision of an additional investment allowance of 10 per cent to enable losses to be carried forward. The plan envisaged an overall annual growth of about 6 percent in the food subsector.⁵

Unfortunately, in the area of fish production, not much has been done to increase production. We are still importing fish into the country so as to supplement the fish we produce in Nigeria and if this situation continues we do not expect the Green Revolution Programme to perform miracles by 1985.

There is now the need for promoting and organizing new fishermen cooperative societies. The need arises because fishermen have been constrained by funds to buy equipment needed for fishing. The small scale fishermen cannot secure boats, nets and outboard engines which are beyond their means. Also, lack of capital for processing facilities for preserving fish, transport facilities for product evacuation and establishment of a marketing network. Illiteracy among fishermen because of the belief of some fishermen that the noise of the engine would drive away fish.

The aim of this paper is to examine areas in which fishermen cooperatives can become involved and to suggest operational guidelines in order to increase their income and also to make Green Revolution Programme a success through increased production of fish.

TREND OF FISHERMEN COOPERATIVES

Regrettably, the organization of fishermen into cooperative societies failed to take off as early enough as the other types of cooperative societies in Nigeria because of the nature of the fishing occupation and the problems of getting the fishermen together. Soon it became clear that organization of fishermen into cooperative groups was the best way to meet the aspirations of the poor small scale fishermen especially as they lacked necessary resources and technical know how to improve themselves. Also, cooperatives have been used by various Nigerian governments to achieve a wide range of objectives in the development of the country. In the area of marketing, production and processing, cooperative association has been regarded as the best possible agency for change and as a result was legally and financially protected. Today, groups of fishermen in creeks, lagoon, rivers, reservoirs and lakes have been organised into fisheries and fishermen cooperatives for the purpose of fishing and marketing jointly.² As at 1979 (Table 1) there were 529 cooperative societies, out of this figures only 324 societies were registered. The total membership of all fishermen cooperatives at that time was 29015. Ogun State had the greatest number of membership followed by Cross River State.

It is sad to note that fishermen cooperatives have been having limited scope of operation both in the number of societies, membership and in the range of services offered to members which includes procurement of fish. It is therefore the belief of the author of this paper that for fishermen cooperatives to be very successful in Nigeria, their scopes have to be widened. It is when this is done that they can face the challenge of the Green Revolution Programme.

AREAS OF FISHERMEN COOPERATIVE ACTIVITIES

Thrift and Credit Societies

This is one of the most popular form of cooperatives. The main aim of fishermen thrift and credit societies is to pool together the savings of their members and provide facilities for joint smoking of fish and pond for joint preservation of live fish for future use. The societies will be responsible for giving out short-term loans to members at reasonable rate of interest. This will reduce the problem posed by lack of credit from outside sources. Such loans will be used for provident and productive purposes.

Thrift and Savings

In this case, the fishermen pool together their savings and societies serve as banks for fishermen by helping members to keep their savings. The societies invest these savings elsewhere so that these savings will yield some interests for the societies. This kind of savings will be made available to fishermen that needed that money at certain times of the year.

Consumer Societies

The objective of these societies is to bulk purchase scarce goods and commodities directly from source of supply and then distribute them to the ultimate consumer (not necessarily members), at the ongoing market price. However, the profit made at the end of accounting year are shared among members. Societies can undertake joint marketing of members catch and purchase fishing equipment and gear for retailing to fishermen at reasonable prices. This is intended to reduce the price which fishermen pay for these goods. Societies can also deal in the supply of daily necessities such as soap, salt, kerosine, lamps, matches and tobacco. This kind of societies can be operated in what is called local community oriented rather than the super market pattern. It will not be possible for fishermen cooperative society in one community to operate a medium scale consumer shop, however, membership of a consumer society can be drawn from the local fishing

cooperative societies.

Building Cooperatives

The major objective of these societies is to assist fishermen to build and own their own houses. Loans are provided to members for purchase of plots and for house building from shares, savings, interest on loans and other funds raised from outside. These kind of societies can be formed after the full establishment and operations of thrift and savings and consumer societies.

Policy Implications of Fishermen Cooperatives

The formation of fishermen into thrift and credit, savings, consumer and building cooperative societies is suggested in this paper as an effective means of achieving the aims of the Green Revolution. Through cooperatives, fishermen may obtain the benefits of the economics of large-scale operation. Members can process and market their products more economically, buy supplies and equipment in large quantities and obtain lower cost credit. In addition to sharing marketing profits, cooperation among fishermen may improve their bargaining strength, increase their product prices or lower their factor costs. Furthermore, the educational programme of a cooperative may teach its members improved fishing practices which may result in raising the income of the members. However, if the types of fishermen cooperatives mentioned in this paper are expected, to succeed, they must be carefully planned, dilligently executed and periodically evaluated. To achieve this, certain guidelines are suggested.

There is at present no consistent policy about fishermen cooperatives in Nigeria. It is loosely tagged on to cooperatives efforts as a scheme to reach local people. But it is a veritable force, which if well utilized, can have a great impact on the level of fishermen and the whole community. A policy of total commitment involving the deployment of funds and staff, the extension of inputs and the readiness of the staff to actively guide and educate the fishermen in the principles and practice of cooperative activities, is imperative. It is the usual practice to find governments developing cold feet and abandoning fishermen just at the time they have formed a society and declared their willingness to operate efficiently. A long term policy of what the government has in stock for the movement will engender confidence in fishermen, and save cooperative inspectors unnecessary embarrassment.

The government should increase its assistance to the fishermen cooperatives. Such an assistance could help step up the tempo of expansion. Such support may take the form of technical and financial assistance. For instance, government can provide processing, storage, haulage and other marketing and production facilities.

In order to attract more members to join the fishermen cooperatives there should be much more effective propaganda and publicity particularly at the village level. The content of such propaganda should include an explanation of what fishermen cooperatives are, their objectives and potentials. In view of the fact that most fishermen are illiterate, the writer is of the opinion that the use of radio and audio visual techniques should be increased. One very important avenue which neither the government nor the cooperative movement hardly makes use of for publicity purposes is agricultural shows. The various activities of the cooperative movement can be illustrated at such occasions by the use of posters, photographs and even film-shows.

The success of fishermen cooperatives and their involvement in other activities depends to a great extent on the attitude and support of members. Members should not engage in side-racking the societies, and selling their fish to outsiders, who apparently pay higher rates. For assured success, therefore cooperatives need to develop sound educational programme for their members. This should include not only the teaching of cooperative principles and practices but also an explanation of its limitations. Such a move is likely to create loyal active and understanding membership that will stand by the society in a peiod of difficulty. Members must realise that cooperatives have advantages which can be considerable, if understood and supported. It is the duty of the committee to hold members together, to inculcate the spirit of cooperation, obviate mutual suspicions and conflict of interest.

It is very obvious that internal source of financing can not be enough for fishermen cooperatives, there should be other external source of financing, in that case, the Government can act as a guarantor for loans obtained by the cooperatives from the commercial banks and other financial institutions. It should of course, be added that, in the last analysis, it will help the fishing community and government programme.

In concluding this paper, it is essential to stress the importance of research on fishermen cooperatives as an essential tool for policy decisions. Both the Government and the movement need to promote and encourage research on cooperative matters. Such a move will lead to sound policies based on knowledge of facts.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The federal government launched the Green Revolution Programme in April, 1980. The primary objective of the programme is to modernise the agricultural sector of the economy - especially to achieve self-sufficiency in food production.

The paper revealed that fishermen cooperatives have been having limited scope of operation in the area of services offered to members which includes procurement of fish.

The study then enumerated areas in which fishermen cooperative can become involved so as to increase fishermen income and to benefit from the Green Revolution Programme. These are thrift and credits, consumers, thrift and savings and building societies.

However, for assured success the author indicated that government assistance in form of technical and financial aid should be increased. There should also be sound educational programme for fishermen, this should include not only the teaching of cooperative principles and practices but also the explanation of its limitation, such a move is likely to create loyal active and understanding membership that will stand by the society in a period of difficulty.

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Table 1 - Statistics on fishermen cooperatives in Nigeria as at September 1979.

NO	NAME OF STATE	NO. OF SOCIETIES		MEMBERSHIP
		REGISTERED	UNREGISTERED	
1.	Kaduna	4	10	258
2.	Kwara	5	13	743
3.	Bendel	63	24	5072
4.	Borno	1	4	658
5.	Niger	6	4	1361
6.	Cross River	15	2	1568
7.	Rivers	19	1	621
8.	Gongola	1	11	490
9	Imo	13	20	460
10.	Plateau	1	3	342
11.	Kano	5	4	902
12.	Lagos	7	2	463
13.	Bauchi	1	1	194
14.	Sokoto	9	3	773
15.	Oyo	4	11	823
16.	Ondo	5	1	385
17.	Ogun	165	91	13902
TOTAL		324	205	29015

Source - Federal Department of Agricultural Cooperatives
Lagos.