

INFORMATION REQUIREMENTS FOR EFFECTIVE
FISHERIES PLANNING IN NIGERIA

by

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INTRODUCTION

It is now almost a decade since concerted integrative fisheries planning at the national level was initiated. The initial planning effort can best be described as planning without facts, ideology and philosophy. All the plans were essentially allocative in nature in which projects were conceived without detailed studies and budgetary allocations made. Within those years there were more than enough resources for trial and error such that failures could be absorbed or overlooked without any serious repercussions.

While the second and third plans execution were characterized with a high degree of plan distortion (Mabawonku, 1982) it is important, however, that the efforts of the Federal Government be commended at attempting to implement their programmes despite such great odds.

But what lessons have we learnt from this trial and error method of development programming? Answers to this question and the formulation of solutions to them will be of immense benefit in the tasks ahead especially under the present and uncertain economic situation of the country. The present state of affairs in fisheries planning look very disturbing indeed. A close scrutiny of our past and present situation show clearly that a serious rethinking is imperative. For a beginning, what are we planning for and for whom? The major objective underlying agricultural planning in Nigeria (fisheries inclusive) is the provision of food and fibre. Towards this end projects regarded as capable of boosting production are conceived and executed. This single-minded pursuit of commodity production to the total exclusion of the welfare consideration of the people and the distributional impact of such programmes has now been found to fail abysmally.

That this is so, should not be a surprise to scholars of development. Development in the true meaning of it should be aimed at increasing the standard of living of the people. In other words a development programme must begin by finding answers to such vexing questions as:-

- (a) what is the present standard of living of the producers,
- (b) what is the health, medical and living conditions of the people,
- (c) what are their basic needs,
- (d) are they sufficiently well motivated and in sound physical state to perform the duty or duties which they are being called upon to perform?

Without adequate answers to these questions and programmes designed to meet these ends many production oriented programme will inevitably fail. There is a school of thought, though, which believes that an increase in output will lead to increased income, improve consumption standards and therefore, an increase in the standard of living of the people. It may be asked, which people are we talking about, are they urban dwellers who are mainly the vocal elites and basically consumers or are they those rural dwellers who have no access to health care facilities, good water supply and education? If the latter, how can such increase in income translate into improved standard of living under the conditions they work and live?

It is within this treatise that I think answers to the present situation in fisheries planning can be found. Specifically, a review of our efforts within the last ten years shows the following:-

- (1) Many projects were planned but not executed;
- (2) Infrastructure were provided which were not utilized;
- (3) Projects were started but not completed;
- (4) Inputs were procured and distributed without being monitored and so on.

While many may advance other reasons for this situation the most important factor is lack of basic information for programme identification, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

For the 80's and beyond information for fisheries development are required for the following reason. At the domestic front information are required for the design of programmes and policies and for the evaluation of the various government projects. At the international scene, much controversy surrounds the richness or otherwise of Nigeria's waters. To some, Nigeria's coastline is barren and devoid of any reasonable commercial exploitable species. To others, the little resource available is not sufficient to warrant large scale investment in fishing effort. To another group, available information about the country's fish resources are partially inadequate, misleading and scientifically false. Whatever may be the correct opinion, there is however, overwhelming evidence that total fish imports constitute only about a third of fish disappearance in the country.

What type of information are required to correct existing imbalances. In general we can group the types of information required as technical and economic. Technical information circumscribes those bio-chemical research findings that deal with its environment. It include details about the species that will help in utilizing resources most efficiently and others that will help in designing investment patterns. Purely descriptive biological information, by not being problem solving in nature has little use for investors. But data on fish growth characteristics, migration patterns can on the other hand be of immense importance.

More importantly are those economic and social information that will provide a basis for private sector investment decision making and government in formulating meaningful programmes. For classification purposes let us divide the sector into its various component.

ARTISANAL FISHERY

Nigeria is a dynamic growing society, and every component of it responds both to social pressures and economic stimulus. Artisanal Fishery in Nigeria involves millions of small scale fishermen. First, they are people ((not fishes) who have production, consumption and exchange opportunities. Available evidences (Mabawonku, 1981) show that a majority of them are illitrates; their communities lack basic amenities such as water, electricity and medical care: they are susceptible to high risks and are often indebted to fish merchants. Their production opportunities are limited by the paucity of their technical know how. Their consumption and exchange opportunities are limited by the closeness and inaccessibility of their communities and their migratory mode of living.

As at present, we are primarily concerned about how much fish they land and what to do to increase their catch per unit effort. Genuine development programme in this sub-sector requires more than that. Additional information is needed in the following areas:-

1. Goals, values and preferences of the fishermen.
2. Employment level, pattern and periodicity.
3. Productivity and income levels.
4. Rate and pattern of migrations.
5. Rate of technological transformation (i.e. rate of increase or decrease in use of outboard engines, nylon nets, rate of graduation from small paddle canoes to larger ones, etc.).

6. Capital formation and investment trends.
7. Production costs and input procurement methods.
8. Product processing and distribution methods.
9. Living conditions and level of indebtedness.

There are some of the multitude of facts that should be provided for any effective development policy.

INDUSTRIAL/COMMERCIAL

This sub-sector of the country's fisheries is the most elusive. Private entrepreneurs, governments and foreigners are the major operators. These groups often collude and provide wrong information about their operations to the detriment of the country. It must be emphasized that the resources they exploit are national resources and as such they must be subjected to close scrutiny by the people. What is more unchecked exploitation can create serious problems for the industry as well as for the generations to come.

In order to effect a comprehensive commercial fishery policy it is necessary that such information as:

- 1) Compliance with regulations and laws,
- 2) Level of landing,
- 3) Types or varieties of fish exploited,
- 4) Employment and wages,
- 5) Infrastructural needs and availability should be periodically provided.

AQUACULTURE

Virtually all the governments in the country are engaged in fish farming either as a demonstration or a commercial project. Moreover, fish farming is not a new enterprise in the country. Yet little or virtually no information is available except for a few biological research papers. Practitioners of the trade either at state or federal level have done very little to give us a clear picture of the state of affairs in the country. Various pond construction methods, various species of fish and various practices have been imported into the country. Many have failed, while others succeeded. But lack of information about these projects has often led to the duplication of failure and the rejection of success. Many private investors are scared away after discovering that what is feasible on paper became unrealistic in practice. In essence, situation in this sub-sector can best be described as a zero-datum affair.

To begin with nobody knows how many dams, lakes impounded water and ponds are there in this country. Nor is there any information about the mode of production in these waters. Even in some states where information is available about the number of ponds, it is often found that over a third or more of these ponds have long been abandoned or are no more functioning at all.

What is wrong with the sub-sector is that there is a general lack of purpose, objective and direction. No consensus exists as to the role it has to play in meeting the fishery requirements of the country. Macro goals of self-sufficiency in fish production require that special and more serious attention be paid to fish culture. For this purpose data required for macro planning and appraisal at micro level have to be treated as a matter of urgency.

Among the requirements for an effective fish culture programme include:

1. The number, size, location, and potential of all fish ponds, lakes, reservoirs and impounded water in the country.
2. Types of production, i.e. intensive, extensive, polyculture or monoculture.

3. Potential and actual production of fries.
4. Potential and actual demand for feed.
5. Production levels or yields.

Many areas such as infrastructure for the sub-sector, its special distribution, capacity etc, need to be studied. Marketing and distribution, price trends are other areas where little or no information exist.

At the present it is legitimate to ask what are the methods to be employed in information gathering, collation and dissemination, what is wrong with existing methods, and so on. The honest fact we must face is that no methods exist presently for fisheries data gathering, storage, and retrieval. Rather what exists are haphazard and inconsistent data gathering methods. The information gathered by the existing system is neither continuous accurate nor useful for planning purposes.

The only existing information source is the fisheries Production Statistics published by the Federal Department of Fisheries (FDF). At the State level while there are statistical publications on education, health, agriculture and so on, nothing relating to fisheries is ever published even in States where fishing activities are the dominant source of employment. It appears that either the fishery sub-sector is not relevant in the scheme of things or those in-charge of fisheries at the State level attach no importance to data gathering. At the Federal level, lack of direction and absence of effective co-ordination result in the collection of inaccurate and incomplete data.

It may however, be argued on the other hand that there are many factors militating against information gathering. Practitioners are likely to mention such factors as the inaccessibility of the fishing communities, lack of manpower, etc., But the truth is, all these factors can be surmounted only when it is realized that information gathering is the most important project that should be embarked on and that without a data base no project can be meaningfully and effectively executed.

For the following decade, therefore, it is absolutely necessary to regard fishery statistics as a capital project, a project more important than many of those presently slated for execution. The type of data which we have discussed above need to be gathered on a continuous basis such that by the end of the eighties the country will have generated a reasonable amount of time series data.

To do this, however, requires setting up a completely different machinery and adopting a completely different approach. First, because of the scarcity of funds and bureaucratic bottlenecks at the State level, it may be necessary for the Federal Government to be responsible for setting up and financing the gathering and dissemination of fisheries information. This means that data gathering has to be regarded as a capital project for which reasonable allocations are made annually. A precedent to this is the Rural Infrastructure study of the Federal Department of Rural Development. Second, there is no doubt that the present set-up of the F.D.F Fisheries Statistics Division is patently inadequate and unsuitable for this major task. While it may act as an agent for information dissemination, the gathering, processing and collating of data should be taken out of the Division.

For the puposes of gathering, processing and collating of fisheries statistics it will be necessary to establish a Fisheries Information System Unit outside the existing civil service structure. This unit shall work in cooperation with the State Fisheries Divisions, the commercial fisheries sub-sector and the F.D.F. in carrying out its activities. Information gathered by the unit shall be processed on a quarterly or annual basis and turned over to the Statistics Division of F.D.F. for dissemination to various users.

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