

# INVOLVEMENT OF FISHERMEN CHILDREN IN FISHING ACTIVITIES IN LAKE CHAD REGION

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## ABSTRACT

Five fishing villages in Lake Chad Basin region of Borno State were assessed for the roles of children in fishing activities in the area. The villages surveyed include: Bundaram, Yobe, Daba masara, Dumba and Doro.

The result shows that the children were largely between 12-18 years of age in the villages.

Generally, the younger children (less than 12years) participate in activities that requires no technicality and little physical strength, while the older children (12years and above) engage in doing skillful fabrication of gear and fishing.

Though, some activities in the surveyed villages were gender specific. Such activities include fish processing (smoking) which was exclusive to the female folks and few male children who carry out preliminary cleaning of fish before any processing method is applied. 80% of the children in the five fishing villages claimed proper understanding of the techniques and procedure involved in most fishing activities.

About 65% of the children sampled showed willingness to become full time fishermen while 22% were uncertain and claimed that they do not know what the future holds for them. 15% of them resolved to migrate to town so that they leave a city life.

## INTRODUCTION

The importance of Lake Chad region as a source of fish protein required in the human diet cannot be over-emphasised. So also is the potential contribution of the region to overall development of the National Economy. Sagua (1982) noted that Lake Chad Region contributes about 13% of all fish produced by the Inland and Coastal States of the Nation and supports a large population of fishermen.

The current level of production from Lake Chad is about

30-50,000m.t/year (Neiland, et al 1996). The fisheries which are exclusively artisanal in nature, employ thousands of full-time and part-time fishermen (Neiland et al., 1994). At least 70% of the catch is sold for cash and fishing provides 30-50% annual household income for household on the average. Neiland et al (1996) stated that the fishermen household consume at least 20% of their total catch. The 80% of traded fish, supply the large urban markets of southern Nigeria, mainly Onitsha, Enugu

and Lagos. The exploitation of this important resources cannot be carried out without the participatory role of fishermen children in the fisheries activities of the Lake Chad Region.

Children's contribution to fisheries development in the region should be seen beyond the immediate into the future. This means that there must be ways and means of involving Children in fisheries activities to such an extent that a considerable proportion will grow up retaining substantial interest in this area of endeavour so as to decide to earn their livelihood through it. The children will then grow up into adult with such a high degree of interest in fisheries activities (in comparison with other activities) that they would decide to remain in it for the rest of their lives.

It is obligatory on a child to assist his parents in both their domestic and occupational activities particularly in rural areas (Galeski, 1972). Such participation impacts informal fishing skills and experience which can be used at adulthood if younger generations decide to continue with the vocation of their parents.

Fishermen children are the rural children involved in fish production in Lake Chad region. The children acquire fishing knowledge and experience through socialization process right from childhood in the family. Fishing families impact the knowledge of fishing, processing and marketing to their children and this in particular has a strong influence on the children even when they are mature.

This study is therefore carefully designed to investigate the level of involvement of fishermen children in fisheries activities so as to assess their contribution to the development of fishing industry in Lake Chad regions.

## METHODOLOGY

Five fishing villages in the Chad Basin region were surveyed. These include:- Bundaram, Yobe, Daba Masara, Dumba and Doro. (Fig. 1) The selection of these villages was based on stratified random sampling.

Semi structured interview in a pre-designed questionnaires was used on 30 children in each village. The children were randomly selected from 5 house holds in a village. A total of 150 children were interviewed (Plate 1).

The questionnaire contained questions on the socio-demographic characteristic, fisheries activities that the

children engage in, Skills, educational level and their willingness to become full-time fishermen when they become adults.

Data were also collected from the parents on marital status, number of children and age structure.

Frequency counts and percentages were used in the data analysis.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Characteristics of respondent children

Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the sampled children. The result shows that the children were largely between 12-18 years of age in the five villages. The common trend in all the settlements is that the males outnumbered the female children. 33% of the children in Bundaran which is a village that is about 20km from Baga town were still in school. This may be due to proximity of the village to Baga.

There is also one Functional Primary School that was found in the village. 26.7% of the children interviewed at Yobe were also in school at the Chad Basin Development Authority Primary School at Baga while 43.3% of the interviewed children at Doro also claimed to be in school. This is expected because there are more than two functional primary school at Baga and Doro. No single functional Primary School was at Daban Masara and Dumba. These two villages are far from Baga and they are not easily accessible. 100% of the children in the village have never been to school and none of them is presently in school.

### Participation of Children in Fishing Activities

Table 2 shows the age distribution of the respondent children with respect to the activities in which they participate. Generally, the younger children (Less than 12 years) participate in activities that required no technicality and little physical strength. The older children (12 years and above) engage in doing skillful fabrication of gear and fishing.

This age group are able to use the various fishing gears that are commonly used in Lake Chad for catching fish. Such gears include: Gillnet, Drawnet, Hook and line and Malian traps. The females were observed to be fully involved in marketing fresh fish at the landing sites.

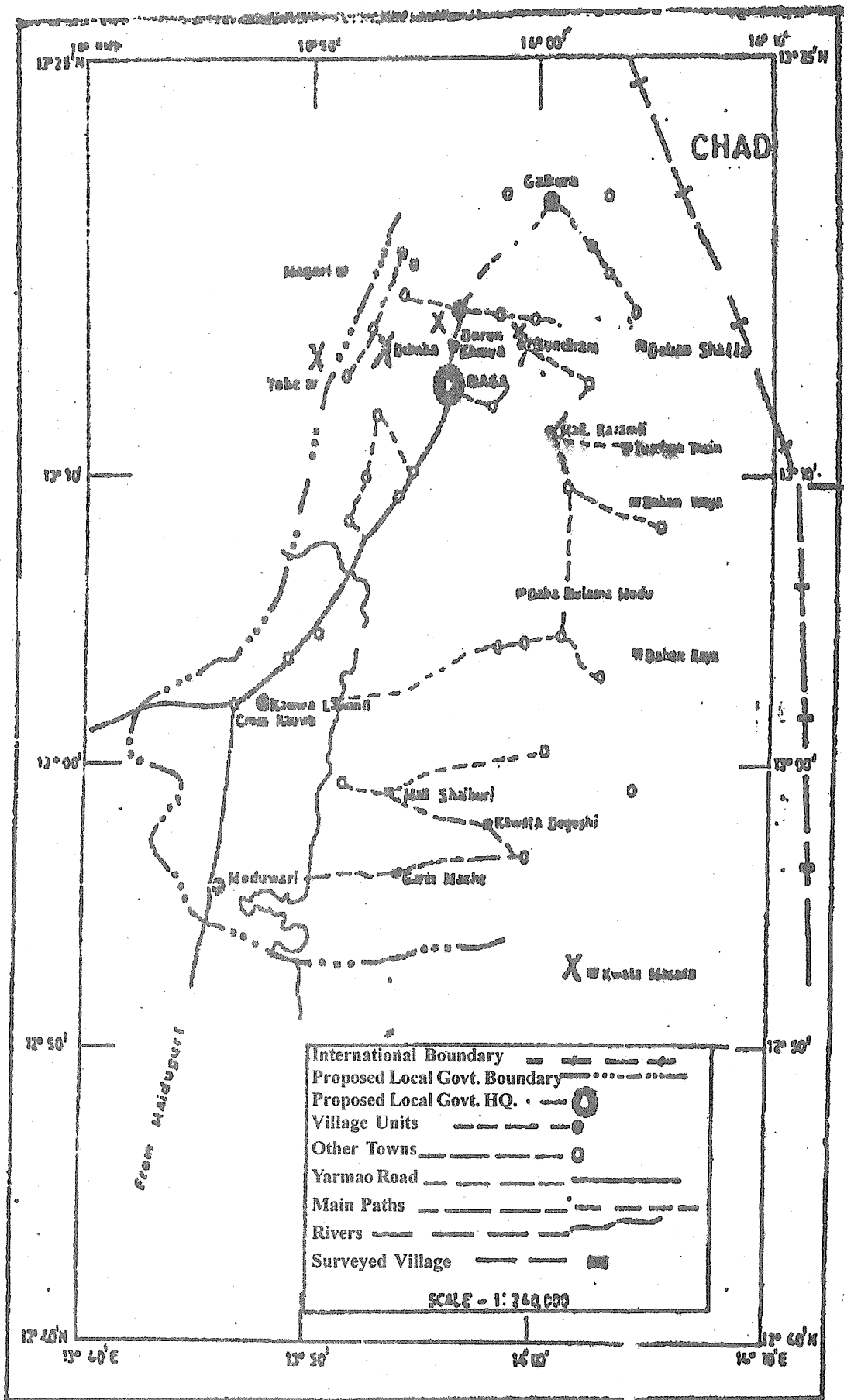


Fig. 1: Map Showing Surveyed Villaged  
Source: Kukawa Local Government

KEY  
X = Fishing Villages



**Plate 1: Administration of Questionnaire in a fishing Village around Lake Chad**



**Plate 2: Cleaning of Fish by Children before Processing (Smoking)**

TABLE 1: SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENT CHILDREN IN SURVEYED VILLAGED

DEMOGRAPHIC	VARIABLES	BUNDARAM		YOBE		DABAN MASARA		DUMBA		DORO	
		No.	%	No.	%	No	%	No.	%	No.	%
Age	6 - 8 years	4	10.0	2	6.7	5	16.6	6	20	8	26.7
	9 - 11 years	8	16.7	5	16.7	7	23.3	9	30	4	13.3
	12 - 14 years	6	30.0	9	30.0	7	23.3	4	13.3	7	23.3
	15 - 18 years	12	43.3	14	46.7	11	36.7	11	36.7	11	36.7
Gender	Male	19	63.3	17	56.7	23	76.7	20	66.7	18	60.6
	Female	11	36.7	13	43.3	7	23.3	10	33.3	12	40.0
Educational Status	Out of School	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	7	23.3
	Still School	10	33.3	8	26.7	-	-	-	-	13	43.3
	Never been to school	20	66.6	22	73.3	30	100	30	100	10	33.3
		N	= 30	N	= 30	N	= 30	N	= 30	N	= 30

### **Fish Processing**

Two age groups were involved in one fish processing activity or the other. These age groups of children were 12-14 years and 15-18 yrs.

The 12-14 years age group were mostly involved in preliminary cleaning of fish before any processing is applied. (Plate 2) This same age group were also involved in turning the fish laid on racks of fish smoking klin so as to avoid burning of the fish. (Plate 3) The 15-18 years age group were actively engaged in cutting fish into small sizes for smoking (Mangala). (Plate 4).

Table 3 shows the gender participation in fishing activities in the surveyed villages. Though some activities were gender specific while some indicated overlap between the two sexes. Fish processing (smoking) was exclusive to the female folks and few male children in the villages. Female children were however not involved in fish catching but younger male children (12 years and above) were involved in hauling of canoe during fishing (Plate 5). This situation was as a result of the proximity to the Lake. It was observed during this study that the fishermen settlements around Lake Chad were not permanent. They move along with the Lake as it recedes. Some fishing families were therefore very close to the Lake. The younger male children who were not in primary school because there was none available took joy in going with their parents for fishing. These children are ambitious to remain in the fisheries so as to ensure continuity in fishing as a profession, and in line with the occupational inheritance pattern in rural villages.

Younger male children were found to carry out small scale marketing of fresh fish at the landing site. Female children involved in gear and craft fabrication and hauling of canoe during fishing were very few.

### **Fishing From Seasonal Pools**

Lake Chad recedes annually after the flooding season. As it recedes, it leaves out pools of water in depressed areas. These left out pools are usually fished by children of 12 years and above. Small children go in groups to evacuate this stagnant pools of water so that they can fish out the fish. This is called "Ganima" in Hausa Language. The gears that were normally used include scoop net and clap nets. The common fish species caught include:

*Clarias, Tilapia and Heterotis*. This method of fishing by children takes place in August to September. This period coincides with the recession period of Lake Chad.

### **Fish Marketing**

Doro fish market is the only market that service the five surveyed fishing villages. Table 3 shows that fish marketing is an exclusive business of males. 80-95% male children were involved in various activities that were connected to fish marketing. Such activities include sales of ropes and empty cartons used for fish packaging. They also actively participate in fish packaging (Plate 6).

Though, adults load lorries that transport fish from Doro to different southern Nigerian fish markets, but male children also participate in loading fish in lorries. Hawking of fish were also observed to be done mainly by male children in the market. Hawking of broken pieces of smoked fish of assorted species which include *Tilapia, Heterotis and Clarias* was done by male children

### **Level of involvement**

Level of involvement of children in various activities was determined using the period of time the fishing activities were carried out relative to any other activities. It was discovered from this study that majority (80%) of the children at Doro village assisted their parents in the occupational activities outside the school hours. About 90% of the children in other fishing settlements at the Lake Shores were available all the time for fishing activities. This may be due to lack of functional primary schools in the villages. This is suggestive of the children's high level participation in fishing activities which indirectly contribute to fish supply in the region.

### **Depth of Fishing Knowledge**

About 80% of the children in the fishing villages claimed proper understanding of the technicalities and procedures involved in most fishing activities. This might be due to the fact that the children started watching and learning from their parent at a very young age. They had a clear knowledge of Lake Chad flooding cycle. About 65% of them showed willingness to become full time fishermen while 22% were uncertain and claimed that they do not know what the future will be like. 15% resolved to migrate

TABLE 2: DISTRIBUTION OF AGE GROUPS OF RESPONDENTS ACCORDING TO FISHING ACTIVITIES BY VILLAGES.

FISHING SETTLEMENTS	AGE GROUP CATEGORY YEARS	CATCHING OF FISH		FISH PROCESSING		FISH MARKETING		PADDLING OF CANOE		GEAR AND CRAFT FABRICATION	
		No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Bundaram	6-8	3	10.0	2	6.7	-	-	4	13.3	-	-
	9-11	5	16.7	4	13.3	-	-	4	13.3	3	10
	12-14	9	30.0	12	40.0	10	33.3	8	26.7	5	16.7
	15-18	13	43.3	12	40.0	20	66.7	15	46.7	22	73.3
Yobe	6-8	-	-	1	3.30	2	6.7	-	-	-	-
	9-11	4	13.3	3	10.0	5	16.7	3	10.0	4	13.3
	12-14	8	26.7	14	46.7	10	33.3	9	30.0	7	23.3
	15-18	18	60.0	12	40.0	13	43.3	18	60.0	19	63.3
Daban Masara	6-8	4	13.3	-	-	-	-	2	6.7	-	-
	9-11	6	20.0	6	20.0	-	-	8	26.7	9	30.0
	12-14	10	33.3	12	40.0	-	-	10	33.3	11	36.7
	15-18	10	33.3	12	40.0	15	50.0	10	33.3	10	33.3
Dumba	6-8	3	10.0	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	9-11	5	16.7	5	16.7	-	-	5	16.7	8	26.7
	12-14	9	30.0	7	-	-	-	8	26.7	10	33.3
	15-18	13	43.3	16	-	14	46.7	17	56.7	12	40.0
Doro	6-8	2	6.7	3	10.0	-	-	1	3.3	1	3.3
				10.0							

TABLE 3: DISTRIBUTION OF GENDER ACCORDING TO FISHING ACTIVITIES BY VILLAGES

DEMOGRAPHIC	BUNDARAM		YOBE		DABAN		DUMBA		DORO	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Fishing	74.2%	25.8%	77.5%	22.5%	100		98.5%	-	100	-
Fish Processing	30%	70%	40%	60%	22%	78%	17%	83%	32%	68%
Fish Marketing	92%	8%	88%	12%	78%	22%	86%	14%	75%	25%
Gear and Craft Fabrication	80%	20%	83%	17%	89%	11%	100	-	95%	5%

to town so that they can leave a city life.

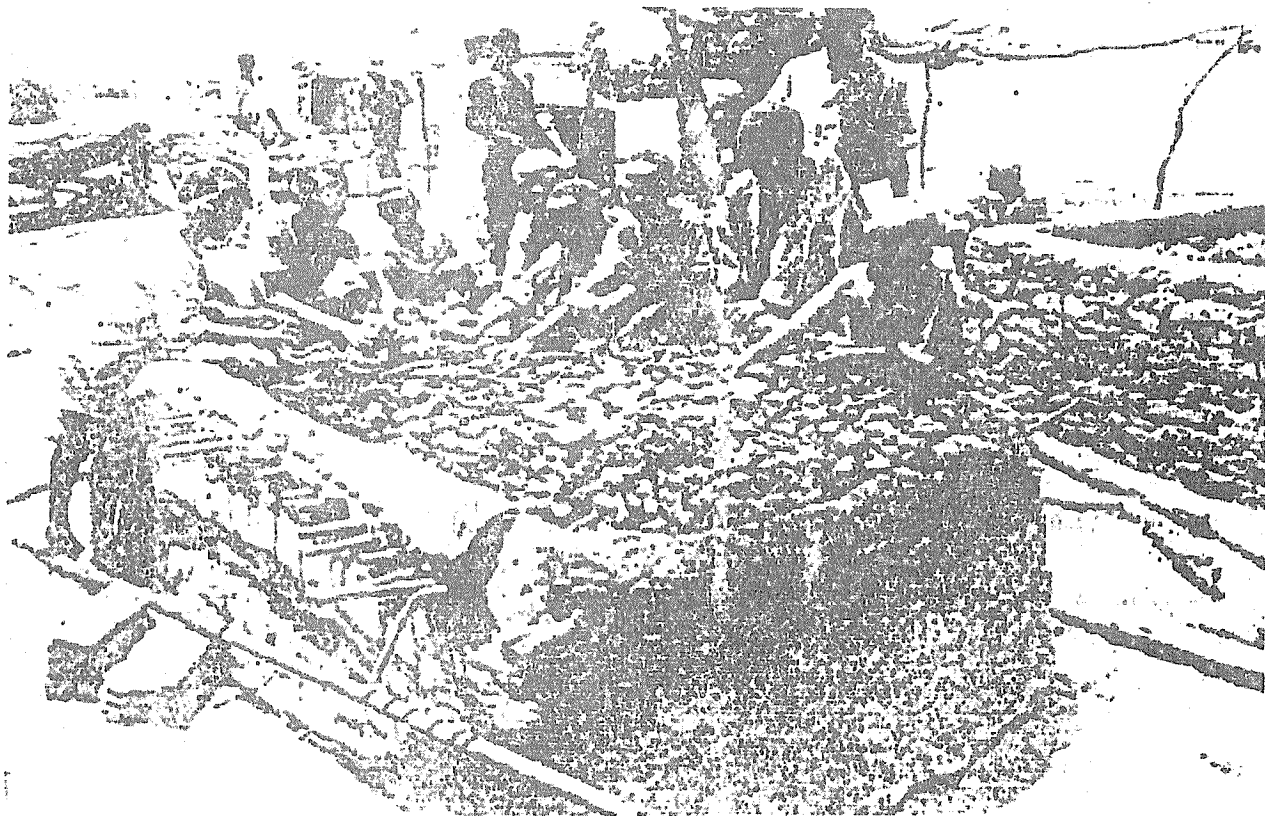
#### Conclusion

The children on the shores of Lake Chad participate in some fishing activities. They contribute immensely in various ways to the development of fishing industry in the Lake Chad region. Male children were involved in fishing while fish processing was exclusive to female sex. The educational background of the children need special attention by government. The children's potential could be fully exploited for sustainability in fish production only when they are educated and enlightened. The high level of their involvement at tender ages 6-10years should however be discouraged because it signifies child labour.

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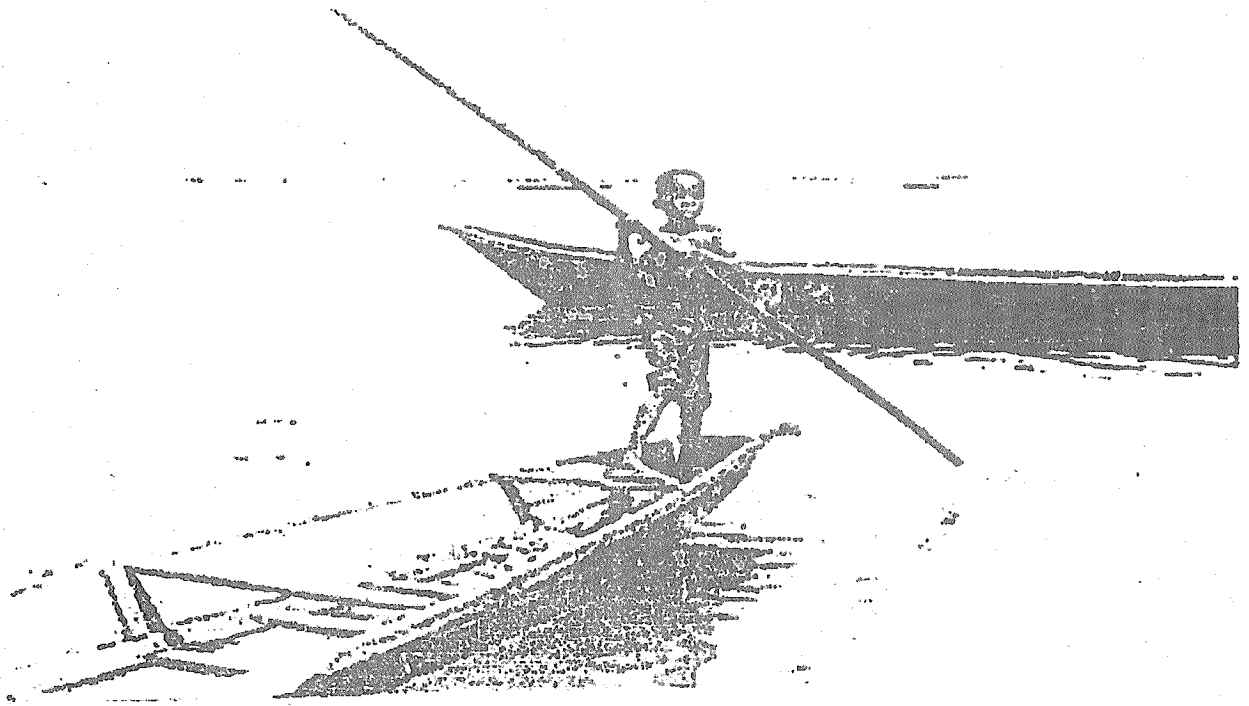




**Plate 3: Turning of Fish by Children on Smoking Kiln  
Rack so as to avoid Fish Burning.**



**Plate 4: Cutting of Fish into Smaller Pieces  
for Processing (Smoking)**



**Plate 5: Hauling of canoe in Lake Chad by a Child**



**Plate 6: Packaging of Fish by Children for Distance Destination.**