

## WOMEN IN FROZEN - FISH MARKETING IN LAGOS STATE: STRATEGIES AND METHODS

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### Abstract

Lagos state has a major sea port for landing of frozen fish from Mauritania, Senegal, the Scottish waters and other European countries. In the last three years, the dense population of the state has encouraged all kinds of trade to thrive. Fish as a major food in many Nigerian diets has been known to complement the high carbohydrate intake of majority of the Nigerian populace because of the unaffordable prices of beef in the market. The market for frozen fish is rich in Lagos. It has provided many women fishmongers a livelihood for over a decade. They have been able to sustain their families and improve their social status over the years. This study reports the modus operandi of the trade. The study covered a period of three months. Fish sales were monitored in Epe, Oyingbo, Ijora and Alaba markets. The cooperation of the heads of markets (iya olojas) were requested at every market. It was ensured that observations and the interviews/questionnaires do not interfere with the women's activities. Specific areas focused upon in the study included countries of fish imports, most acceptable species, packaging, purchase price, sales price and profit margins. Other important factors in the fish market that were studied included entrance into the fish marketing business, sources of finance and problems. The study also made suggestions on how to improve upon the fish marketing business of women in Lagos State.

### Introduction

Marketing has been defined as a business activity that involves the shifting of products from the production centre until it finally arrived in the hands of the consumer. The marketing of frozen fish is a complex business in terms of keeping the quality in acceptable state before selling to the buyer. This involves proper handling, refrigeration and even transportation to markets where prices are higher. Women in frozen fish marketing have developed several strategies that keep standards among the fishmongers. In a market, there are many sellers and buyers. Competition among sellers has contributed to each of the sellers developing strategies in marketing to make enough profit. When strategies and tactic are mentioned, it is possible to think of ways of shirking responsibilities and cheating the buyer through either using wrong scale measures, over-pricing the fish, selling poor quality or spoiled fish or some unfavorable terms for the customer. But in the frozen fish marketing in Lagos State the women have evolved strategies to keep the quality of the frozen fish within acceptable limits, knowing what species of fish the consumer prefers, sourcing for such species and packaging in such a way to attract higher prices. According to Eyo (2001), objective methods of keeping the quality of fish (frozen, fresh or fish products) are having a chemical test to determine chemical composition (moisture, protein, lipid, ash and mineral elements). In most cases, buyers of frozen fish do not bother about going through the rigor of doing any chemical test; all that a buyer does is just looking at the fish, whether it is frozen, look at the gills for pinkish colour and firmness of the scales. The implication of this is that the sellers make sure the fish is kept in a very efficiently cooling freezer.

The objective of the study was find out the following: (1) Strategies women use to keep frozen fish quality to acceptable level; (2) Marketed species that meet consumers needs; (3) Sources of importation of most acceptable fish species; (4) Packaging and pricing; (5) Sources of finance; (6) Entrants into the trade; and (7) challenges and way forward.

## Materials and Methods

Field observation and survey, using questionnaire were used for this study. Four markets were surveyed but one was observed for three months. Strategies, marketed species, and the methods of packaging were limited to Ijora FISH market that has all facilities for landing, preservation, processing and marketing. The data collected on other markets were to assess entrance into the fish marketing business, sources of finance, pricing and problems/challenges. The questionnaire also contained some information on the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents.

## Results

### Ijora Fish Depot

Majority (71%) of the women surveyed used deep freezers to keep the quality of fish to acceptable level. The other 29% that used cold storage system are major distributors to the fish trawling companies in Lagos. The major fish importers patronized by these women are Atlantic Shrimpers, Sea Gold Ltd, Honeywell Fishing Company, Taraba Fish Company, Ocean Fresh Ltd, Harvest World Trawlers, Barnali Fishing Company Ltd, ORC Fishing and West Coast Ltd.

### Major Fish Species Imported

Results of the study shows that the common fish species imported were Mackerel, Croaker, Catfish, Tilapia, Shiny nose, Cote', Titus (trade name). The price list of the various. Species, country imported from, wholesale and retail prices are provided in Table 1. below:

Table 1: Fish species, country of importation, wholesale and retail prices in frozen market in Ijora, Lagos.

S/N	Fish species	Country of importation	Wholesale price to distributor (carton of 20kg)	Distributors price to Retailer (carton of 20kg)	Retailers price to consumers
1	Horse mackerel	Senegal, Mauritania, some European countries and America	N5,500.00	N6,000.00	N6,500.00
2	Croakers		N7,000.00	N7,500.00	N7,800.00
3	Catfish		N8,000.00	N8,300.00	N8,500.00
4	Shiny nose		N10,000.00	N11,000.00	N12,000.00
5	Tilapia		N3,500.00	N4,000.00	N4,300.00

From Table 1 above, most common species include the Horse mackerel, Croakers, Catfish, Shiny nose and Tilapia. The prices from wholesalers in the trawling companies to distributors and then to retailers show an interesting trend. An average mark-up price of N500.00 is added at every step of the distribution.

### Pricing Strategy

The carton price is determined by the company marketing department. Prices are arrived at based on a simple cost of production of each carton of 20kg. For each trip, the Marketing Department and the production unit (trawler owner, accounts officer, Public affairs officer and other relevant officers) calculate the cost of crew members, fuel, maintenance, feeding and others, add profit, tax and other government fees before arriving at the price per kilogramme of fish. The same trend is followed by the wholesalers. They add up the cost price per carton, including rent, payments to administrators of the markets for security and other services, profit margin and then spread the cost to each carton.

### Packaging

Fish are normally packed in cartons or bags of 20kg. Companies design brand packages and labels according to colour identity of the company. Majority of the cartons have blue and green - the colours of water and sign of fertility.

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## Survey Result on Women Fish Retailers

The data collected on other markets were to assess entrance into the fish marketing business, sources of finance, pricing methods and problems/challenges. The results are as follows:

### Entrance into the fish market

There are basically three methods of entering the fish seller market in the three markets studied. Some of them enter directly by application to the Market Head. Others enter the trade by inheritance from parents, while some go through apprenticeship.

### Pricing Methods

There is a uniform price for the different species and sizes of fish. They sell in kilogrammes. But for the small retailers, some haggling takes place. Sometimes buyers are cheated depending on how well dressed the buyer looks. They use this to judge the affluence of the buyer, who might not want to go through the hassles of haggling for price.

### Sources of Finance

Available sources of finance to the women include personal savings, loans from cooperatives and loans from the bank. Since the programme on empowering small and medium scale projects, many of the women have used the opportunity in expanding their area of coverage in the trade. Some engage new hands to hawk frozen fish from place to place.

### Challenges and Problems

A summary of the major problems facing the major fish distributors/agents are;

- i) Cheating by employees. The women, most of them being absentee fishmongers, employ the services of some young men who use every little opportunity to sell without proper accountability of proceeds;
- ii) Petty jealousy/rivalry: In most trades, traders compete among themselves and this causes a lot of distrust, sharp practices and others;
- iii) Finance: Some women complained of lack of money to buy enough cartons of fish which will invariably increase their profit.
- iv) Debt: A lot of money is owed the major distributors who sell out to retailers in trust. Most times the money owed are paid in piece-meal and it is difficult to save from such methods of payment. They say, 'the money is scattered' meaning they start spending the money without proper accountability.

### Challenges Facing Small Retailers

- i) Finance: This is the major problem of small retailers. They buy on a daily basis according to available resources. This makes them to incur additional cost in transportation.
- ii) Electricity supply: Public power supply is epileptic therefore unsold fish has to be stored in freezers when there is available electricity. In the absence of electricity in the retailers' residence, they have to look for alternative freezers or cold stores to preserve the fish at additional cost.
- iii) Profit : Profit margin is very low among the small retailers. Some however, say that with high turn-over, they make more gains.
- iv) Illiteracy : High illiteracy rate is prevalent among this group of women. Most of them have just primary education and therefore are not empowered to seek out information on how to improve their livelihood and income.

### The Way Forward

The following are suggestions to move this group of women to the next level.

For the major distributors, it is suggested that:

- i. They should put on a measure to monitor sales of fish from their stock on a daily or weekly basis to avoid cheating by employees. They should also not indulge in selling on credit basis to retailers and other customers. In addition, petty jealousy can be overcome by organizing themselves into cooperatives where communal living should be taught and practiced among themselves;

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For the small retailers who are semi-literate or completely illiterate, there should be effort by NGOs or Women Affairs Ministry to organize an enlightenment and empowerment programme to boost the ego and increase the financial power of the fish sellers. This can be done through the following strategies:

1. Adult literacy classes: NGOs and Women ministry should organize literacy classes for this set of women to 'open their eyes' to ways of making profit in their chosen trade.
2. Cooperatives: Organize this group of women into cooperative society and loans can be given to the body which would ensure accountability.
3. Installation of Cold stores: There should be concerted effort at locating cold storage systems in strategic places for this group of women; and they can pay a token fee.

### **Conclusion**

Since women in frozen fish marketing contribute to fish food intake by the populace they should be empowered by institutionalizing the suggestions given in the way forward above.

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