THE INFLUENCE OF PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS ON INFORMATION AVAILABILITY AMONG FISHER FOLK IN MAKURDI, BENUE STATE, NIGERIA.

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Abstract
The influence of personal characteristics on information availability among fisher folk in Makurdi was examined in this paper. A list of 269 registered fisher folk in two landing sites – Wadata and North Bank in lower River Benue Makurdi was obtained from Benue State Agricultural Development Programme (BESADP). Random sampling technique was used to select eighty percent of the fisher folks (215) while structured questionnaire was administered to the respondents. The data collected were analyzed using frequency counts, percentages and correlation ($p < 0.05$). The results showed that majority of the fishers folk were married (73.0%), between 30-39 years (35.8%), had no formal education (59.1%), 93.0% fund their business through personal savings and 57.2% belong to fishermen association. There are significant relationship between the personal characteristics and information availability on age ($\beta = 0.159$), house hold size ($\beta = 0.159$) secondary occupation ($\beta = 0.208$) and business funding ($\beta = 0.152$). The study therefore recommends that while formulating policy on information availability to fisher folks their age, household size and secondary occupation should be considered for it to be available to the fisher folk and its eventual utilization.
Keyword: Association, fisher folks, fishing, fund, respondent

Introduction

Information is a vital tool in artisanal sub sector of agriculture which if handled very well has the potential of improving on the production of aquatic resources especially fish in order to increase the protein intake of the Nigerian populace. Hoffmann *et al*, 2009 opined that information is a processed data that reduce uncertainty at the user level. Information means many things to many people, depending on the context of usage. Scientifically information is processed data (Omogor, 2013). Quality information should be credible, relevant, accurate and timely to add value to knowledge in decision process (Ifejika, 2016). Fisher folk that derive their livelihood in artisanal fishery are among those in need of high quality information to take informed decision to work smarter and intelligently (Ifejika, 2016). Information is accorded weight as one of the factors of production, especially in decision making, marketing and production conceded.

Information in an enterprise is important for the production process, the economy of products, technical quality, production capacity, research and product development, and the market and market-related needs, such as competitive intelligence (Ikoja-Odongo and Ocholla 2003).

Conroy (2003) asserted that the quantum of agricultural technology information available in the Nigerian systems developed by research institutes, and faculties of agriculture in universities is quite enormous. The problem therefore, lies with effective dissemination of information about these innovations by the dissemination agencies.

Research institutes must disseminate their findings to the target group – the farmers, while receiving feed back to indicate that communication was successful. The feedback is expected to expose areas requiring modification or further enquiry (Daudu *et al.*, 2009).

Information availability among fisher folks is expected to boost their welfare and reduce the level of poverty predominant among them.

However, it was observed that most of the fisher folks still complain at various times of their inability to get needed information readily. The study therefore examines the influence of personal characteristics on information availability among fisher folk in Makurdi, Benue State, Nigeria.

The specific objectives of the study are to: (i) Identify the personal characteristics of the fisher folks (ii) Determine the information availability among the fisher folk (iii) Identify different association memberships among the respondents.

Test of hypothesis: There was no significant relationship between the personal characteristics of fisher folks and information availability.

Materials and Methods

The study was carried out in Makurdi, Benue State which has a landmass of about 32,518 km^2. It lies between longitudes 7º47' and 10º East and latitudes 6º25' and 8º North (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2007) and shares boundaries with Nassarawa State to the North, Taraba to the East, Cross River to the South, Enugu to the South West and Kogi to the West. It also shares a common boundary with the Republic of Cameroon on the South Eastern stretch. The list and addresses of 269 registered artisanal fishers in

two landing sites – Wadata and North Bank in Makurdi was obtained from Benue State Agricultural Development Programme (BESADP). Simple random sampling technique was used to select 80% (215) of the artisanal fishers from the list. A structured questionnaire and interview scheduled were used to obtain information from the fisher folk (Ogunremi *et al.*,2017). Data from the study were analyzed using the descriptive analysis such as frequency counts and percentages and correlation analysis between the variables at $p < 0.05$ significance level.

Results

Table 1 showed the age range of the respondents, 24.7% between 20-29 years, 35.8% between 30-39 years, 20.9% between 40-49 years and 5.6% above 60 years respectively Majority (73.0%) of the respondents are married while (14.9%) are single. Information on family size, (44.7%) had 1-4 persons, 27.9% had 5-9 persons and 1.9% had 15-19 persons respectively. Many of the respondents 59.1% had no formal Education, 20.0% had Primary Education and 2.8% had Post-Secondary Education. Apart from fishing, 25.6% are farmers, 12.1% are into businesses while 1.9% are Civil Servants. Majority (57.2%) of the respondents belong to fishermen association while 53.5% of the respondents belong to different Co-operative societies.

Table 2 showed that 93.0% of the respondents fund their businesses through personal savings less than 1% were able to access Bank Loan, 4.7% got fund through Cooperative while 1.4% fund their business through borrowing from individuals. Table 3 indicated that 79.1% had information availability on endangered species of fishes, 73.5% on weed encroachment, 69.3 on weathers' influence and 66.6% on fishing safety. Results from the statistical analysis (table 4) shows that there was significant relationship between information availability and age $\beta = 0.159$, household size $\beta = 0.090$, secondary occupation $\beta = 0.208$ and source of funding business $\beta = 0.152$. However, there was no significant relationship between information availability and educational background of respondents $\beta = 0.130$, fishermen association $\beta = 0 .123$ and cooperative society membership $\beta = 0.072$.

Table 1: Personal Characteristics of the Respondents

Characteristic	*Frequency*	*Percentage*
Age (years)		
20-29	53	24.7
30-39	77	35.8
40-49	45	20.9
50-59	28	13.0
Above 60	12	5.6
Total	215	100
Marital Status		
Married	157	73.0
Single	32	14.9
Divorced	20	9.3
Widowed	6	2.8
Total	215	100
Household size		
No response	30	14.0
1 – 4	96	44.7
5 - 9	60	27.9
10-14	25	11.6
15-19	4	1.9
Total	215	100.0
Education		
No formal education	127	59.1
Primary	43	20.0
Secondary	39	18.1
Post secondary	6	2.8
Total	215	100.0
Secondary Occupation		
No response	130	60.5
Farming	55	25.6
Business	26	12.1
Civil Service	4	1.9
Total	215	100.0

Association Membership		
Fishermen	123	57.2
Co-operative	115	53.5
Total	215	100

Source: Field survey 2016

Table 2. Distribution of the respondents on business funding

Business funding	Frequency	Percentage
Personal Savings	200	93.0
Bank Loan	2	0.9
Cooperative Loan	10	4.7
Borrow	3	1.4
Total	215	100.0

Source: Field survey 2016

Table 3. Information availability among fisher folks

S/NO	**INFORMATION**	**AVAILABILITY**			
		YES	%	NO	%
1.	Fishing methods	87	40.5	128	59.5
2.	Fishing input	123	57.2	92	42.8
3.	Fishing License	103	47.9	112	52.1
4.	Fishing safety	141	66.6	74	34.4
5.	Post-harvest / Fish preservation	113	52.6	102	47.4
6.	Fishing regulation	102	47.4	113	52.6
7.	Pollution of water body	156	72.6	59	27.4
8.	Weathers' influence	149	69.3	96	30.7
9.	Personal hygiene	115	53.5	100	46.5
10.	Weed encroachment	158	73.5	57	26.5
11.	Endangered species	170	79.1	45	20.9

Source: Field survey 2016

Table 4. Zero Order Correlation (Matrix Table) showing the significant relationships between the personal characteristics of respondents and information availability.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Mean	S.D
1	1											
2	.159*	1										
3	.035	-.059	1									
4	.090	.611*	-.181*	1								
5	.130	-.314*	.054	-.246*	1							
6	-011	.115	.067	-.071	-.032	1						
7	.208**	.112	.095	.141*	.131	-.011	1					
8	.123	.331*	-.055	.161*	-.114	.083	-.049	1				
9	.072	.234*	-.050	.084	-.111	-.090	-.056	.833*	1			
10	.152*	-.009	.055	.101	-.010	-.027	.284*	-.013	.041	1		

Keys: (1) Information Availability; (2) Age; (3) Marital Status; (4) Household Size; (5) Educational Background; (6) Monthly Income; (7) Secondary Occupation; (8) Fishermen Association membership; (9) Cooperative society membership; (10) business funding

Discussion

The indication is that 60.5% of the fisher folks were less than 40 years of age is good for fisheries sector of the economy as mostly youths are involved in the profession, thereby enhancing tendency of having long years of active productivity. Ogunremi, (2016) in a similar study reported high number of youths below 40 years of age among the artisanal fishers while Olubanjo *et al.,* (2012) reported 46.8% for age range of < 30 to 40years. Since majority of the fisher folks had no formal education it shows that there is the need for various information sources to be communicated to fisher folks in their local languages. This however requires extra effort and limits the fisher folks on the extent of adequate information. By all indications, low level of education among fisher folks is a problem in the sense that it will hinder them from participating effectively in competitive entrepreneurship since technological application cannot be dissociated from perfect understanding of information sources of which majority are not in local languages.

The fact most fisher folks combined fishing with other economic activities suggests their need to augment income from artisanal fishery with income from other sources. This probably was an indication of their dissatisfaction with income derived from their fishing activity (Onemolease and Oriakhi, 2011). Involvement of the fisher folks in fishermen co-operative society was a good development as it creates better opportunity for them to pool their resources together for expansion of business through loan application, sharing of information and collective bargaining of fishing inputs.Samian *et al,* (2017) reported in a similar study some positive effects fishers cooperatives have in rural areas to include the following: employment creation, increase rural incomes, participation in cooperative management process, access to credit and loans, development of training courses, prevent migration to cities, improve consumption patterns, development of literacy in the rural areas the coverage area, poverty reduction, sense of cooperation among users and empowerment of individuals livelihoods. Kogieashvili (2016) opined that for the purpose of increasing the incomes of every member of this type of economic system of cooperation, it is interested in producing more and higher quality products. Artisanal fisher folks should properly organize themselves into cooperative societies so that they can pool resources together (common voice) and Government can channel various aids, loans and other fishing facilities through cooperative bodies Olaoye *et al.,* (2012). Funding of business through personal savings despite other available sources could be because of high interest rate on loan especially with banks and the demand for collateral security. Ben-Yami, and Anderson (1985) reported that cooperative may be essential where the individual fishermen-members are unable to provide the bank (or another financing institution) with the required collaterals and guaranties.

The implication of information on endangered species of fish is important it will serve as a check for the fisher folk on the right mesh size to be used and also assist the government when formulating fisheries policy. Information on weed encroachment sends a signal of impending danger to fisher folks in terms of motorized canoe and difficulty of using different fishing gear on water. Asmare (2017) indicated that water hyacinth entangles the fishing nets and boats' propeller, making it difficult to fish and resulting in reduced fish catches. Hence, a reduced fish catch would have an adverse effect on the quality of life of the fishing communities. Climate change will have impact on aquatic ecosystems through many direct and indirect ways. Capture fisheries which is the base of artisanal fisheries is tightly linked with aquatic ecosystem processes and thus any change in the ecosystem processes will certainly pose serious negative impacts on artisanal fisheries of sub-Saharan Africa with great danger to sustainable livelihood of the people, socio-economic characteristics of the fisher folks (Mustapha 2013). Information on weather assists the fisher folks to predict abundance of catches while information on fishing safety would prevent unnecessary danger while on water bodies.

There was significant relationship between information availability and age, household size, secondary occupation, source of funding. The implication is that the older the fisher folk the higher the tendency to source for information on fishing profession. Household size which is a function of number of people in the family also contributed positively to information availability because larger household size of fisher folks is an indication that there are more people within the family who have the tendency of making contact with the people to gather more information needed for the fishing business. The implication that fisher folks with secondary occupation and those seeking for source of fund is that the more they go about it the better the information on fishing available to them. The level of education, membership of fishermen association or cooperative society does not determine the extent of information availability among the fisher folks mean that extension agents are well able to interpret needed information to fisher folks and that radio programmes on fisher folks information are aired in local dialects for easy understanding. Ibrahim *et al.,* (2016) reported that extension services had spread to most rural parts of the country through ADPs which operates the Training and Visit (T&V) system. He added that extension agents

and radio are other sources of information on fishing technologies among the fishers.

Conclusion

Majority of the fisher folks are married and are less than 40years of age. The age, household size source of fund for the business contributed significantly to information availability among them.

The study therefore recommends that while formulating policy on information availability to fisher folks their age, household size, secondary occupation and source of funding should be considered for it to be available to the fisher folk and its eventual utilization. Information on fishing license and fishing regulations should be made available to fisher folks also, awareness should be created by the government through effective information on the benefits of fisher folks association.

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