

Socio-Economic Analysis and Fishing Practices of the Fisherfolks of Abinsi Settlement, Benue State, Nigeria

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Abstract:

The Socio-economic characteristics of Abinsi fishing settlement were studied for a period of five months (November 2016 – March 2017). A total of 98 questionnaires were administered to the fisherfolks who lived and fished in the settlement. The age bracket 26-30 years was most in number, 66.30% (65) and were 84.30% (83) predominated by male. By educational status, secondary education, 45.90% (45) were most populous among the respondents. Those in the value chain made monthly earning between ₦21,000 – 30,000. The source of labour for the fishing operation was the fisherman and family (45%) and used set nets longer periods of the year. The modal catch was in the range 10-15Kg. It was noted that although the Abinsi settlement was initiated as a colonial convergence, fishing is the mainstay of the people at the moment. Necessary actions should be taken by stakeholders to improve on the fishing practices, and revenue generated thereof so improve on the artisanal fisheries of the settlement.

Keywords

Socio-economic; fisherfolks; Respondents; Abinsi settlement; River Benue

1.0 Introduction

Abinsi was used as the headquarters of the Benue Province in 1967 perhaps due to its serenity and closeness to the River which served as a viable trading point for the colonialists. Inadvertently, fishing became the source of livelihood and business of the inhabitants of Abinsi settlement even before this period when Lord Lugard established the Royal Niger Company's Grain Centre. Hitherto, Jukun who are the major inhabitants of Abinsi migrated to the settlement essentially for fishing. Archival history has it that they migrated from the Kwararafa

kingdom in Wukari in Taraba State to do fishing in Abinsi. This fishing settlement later hosted the administrative headquarters of the colonials. The activities in this settlement therefore became a beehive of socio-economic activities in the north-central Nigeria. Precedent on this, the livelihood of the inhabitants of Abinsi is currently resident on the fishing. Fishing settlements represent one of the oldest forms of community living known to mankind. In these settlements, fisher-folks including children, men and women have evolved over time, different crafts, skills and technologies for fishing and for day to day survival [5].

The artisanal fisheries sector is important in Nigerian fisheries industry being the major contributor to the domestic supply of fish [1]. Nigeria is the largest fish consumer in Africa and among the largest fish consumers in the world with over 1.5 millions tons of fish consumed annually [7]. With a national fish demand of about 2.1 million metric tonnes per annum and a domestic production estimated at about 800,000 metric tonnes, Nigeria has a shortfall of about 1.3 million metric tonnes. This situation has left Nigeria with the option of importing an estimated 1.9 million metric tonnes of fish valued at over N125 billion per annum.

The Abinsi settlement has served first as a fishing settlement, then a colonial commercial and administrative town and currently a fishing community once again. This has spanned for more than ten decades. It can be however argued that the socioeconomic conditions of the inhabitants are quite below the expectations of such a valuable settlement. Most of the inhabitants have taken to other endeavours leaving fishing to dwindle. It may be best explained that fishing has no attractive incentive like other livelihood endeavours, hence the need for this study.

This research presents information on the socioeconomic status of the inhabitants of Abinsi

settlement with the view to ascertaining the likely causes of the low output in the artisanal catch from the fishing settlement. Information obtained in this research would also provide facts in policy formulations that favour fishing business and management, conservation of fish stocks and improved standard of living of the fisherfolks.

2.0 Materials and Methods

2.1 Study Area

Abinsi is located in Guma local government area of Benue and about 24 kilometers along the Makurdi-Gboko highway. It is an antiquated town lying on the eastern bank of the River Benue is predominantly a fishing community inhabited largely by Jukun fishermen, since it lost its status as the headquarters of the then Benue Province.

Guma local government area was created out of the then Makurdi local government area in 1989. It is located in the Northeastern part of Benue State with the landmass of 240,000 sqm sharing common boundaries with Tarka and Logo local government areas in the East, Makurdi local government area in the South while Doma local government area of Nasarawa State lies in the West. Gbajimba town, headquarters of the local government area has a strategic location as it is situated at the confluence of two big rivers of the state.

The socio-economic activities in the settlement comprise of a wide range of human endeavours which anchor on farming, mining, fishing and trading. The vast fertile land supports grains and tubers while the waterlogged fadama is used for rice production. River sand and gravel is dug from the river basin and sold as building material in the environs. Over 40% of the inhabitants are engaged in fishing. There is perceived higher catch at the settlement purportedly due to the less fishing pressure and ecological degradation. The Abinsi market located by the road sales a host of agricultural products and predominantly fish in smoked and fresh forms.

2.2 Data Collection and Analysis

A semi-structured questionnaire was used for data collection. This was used to solicit information from the inhabitants of Abinsi settlements as regards their living vis-a-viz their fishing activities. A total of 98 respondents were asked questions at five visits during a five-month period (November, 2016 – March, 2017). Three sets of respondents were identified namely: the elderly men (who may have probably retired from fishing), the youths (who were considered to be in active fishing) and the women (who were into fish processing and marketing). Data were collected fortnightly from August to October 2015 from a total of 70 respondents. SPSS 20.0 was used in analyzing data collected from the field.

3.0 Results

The demographic attributes of the respondents is presented in table 1. The age bracket 26-30 years was most in number, 65 (66.30%) while the age groups <25 years and >36 years were the least respondents, 7(7.10%). The male sex, 83 (84.70%) were higher than the females, 15 (15.30%) while 77 (78.80%) were married and 21 (21.40%) single. Only 18 (18.40%) of these respondents had no formal education while 77 respondents had formal education ranging from primary to the tertiary education. The secondary school education, 45 (45.90%) was however recorded the highest number of respondents interviewed. The modal monthly earnings 26 (26.50%) of the respondents ranged ₦21,000 – 30,000 while the least number of respondents, 1 (1.00%) earned in the range of ₦71,000 – 80,000.

Table 1: Demographic Attributes of Fisherfolks in Abinsi Settlement, Benue State Nigeria

Attributes	Number	Frequency
Age (yrs)		
<25	7	7.10
26-30	65	66.30
31-35	19	19.40
>36	7	7.10
	98	100.00
Sex		
Female	15	15.30
Male	83	84.70
	98	100.00
Marital Status		
Single	21	21.40
Married	77	78.80
	98	100.00
Education Status		
Non formal	18	18.40
Primary School	22	22.40
Secondary School	45	45.90
A-Level/Tertiary	13	13.30
	98	100.00
Monthly Income from Fishing (₦)		
<20,000	11	11.20
21,000-30,000	26	26.50
31,000-40,000	15	15.30
41,000-50,000	11	11.20
51,000-60,000	14	14.30
61,000-70,000	07	7.10
71,000-80,000	01	1.00
>81,000	13	13.30
	98	100.00

The source of labour used for the fishing practice is presented in figure 1. A combination of the fishermen and his family members (47%) was the source of labour most used by in the fishing practice

in Abinsi while hired labour (16%) was the least source of labour used.

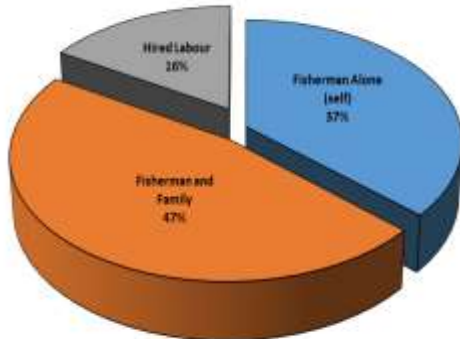


Figure 1: Source of Fishing Labour in Abinsi Settlement, Benue State Nigeria

The types of gears and their season of usage is presented in figure 2. The lift net was mostly used in fishing (58.2%) and in the dry season while its usage in the wet season was very low (1.2%). Set nets were however the most used gear in the wet season (45.6%). On the whole, cast nets appeared to be used most times of the year. The dry season usage recorded 20.1% while the rainy season was 31.7%. Hooks/line and other gears like traps, calabashes etc were used at some times.

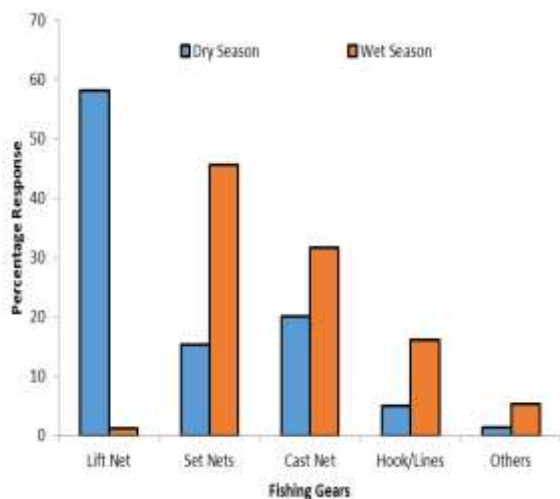


Figure 2: Fishing Gear used for Fishing in Abinsi Settlement, Benue State Nigeria

Figure 3 presents results of the catch volumes in the two seasons. The modal catch (42.90%) was ranged 10-15 Kg and this was in the wet season. The Dry season catch for this range of catch was 34.7%. Low catch (<5 Kg) was however recorded on the dry season by some respondents.

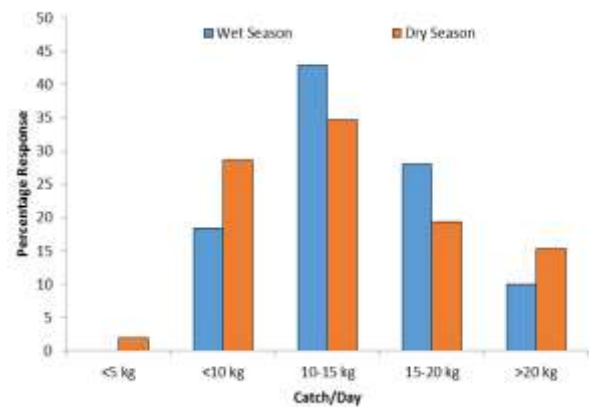


Figure 2: Catch Variations in Abinsi Settlement, Benue State Nigeria

The economic indices of fishing in Abinsi settlement is presented in table 2. It was recorded that the mean monthly income of the Abinsi fisherfolks was ₦40,479.59 (standard deviation, ₦28,944.74). While fishing took a time ranging 1-20 hours/day, on the average, fishermen spent 11.84 hours.

Table 2: Economic Indices of Fisherfolks in Abinsi Settlement, Benue State Nigeria

Variable	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std Deviation
Age of Fishermen	98	20.00	45.00	27.69	6.51
Years in School	98	4.00	15.00	10.29	3.14
Period of Fishing (Hours)	98	1.00	30.00	11.84	8.21
Years of Fishing	98	4.00	24.00	14.88	7.52
Sale Price/Unit (₦)	98	1,000.00	20,000	8,443.87	5,435.60
Monthly Income (₦)	98	3,000.00	100,000.00	40,479.59	28,944.74

4.0 DISCUSSIONS

The age group mostly engaged in fishing as reported by this research confirms that the active labour age (26-30 years) were engaged in fishing in Abinsi settlement. This could be inferred to mean that fishing constituted a major economic activity in the settlement. It would have been noted that this active age would go into other more lucrative economic ventures if there were. The male were also noted to be the majority in fishing practices among the fisherfolks. Catch, gear construction and other active practices were undertaken by the men while women were concerned with processing and marketing which was comparatively passive. This agrees with the findings of [5], [10] and [6] who reported explained that the predominance of men

could be as their role as harvester of wild fish from the natural waters.

It is also reported that the fishermen and their families provided the labour during the catch. Artisanal fisheries generally is microenterprising in nature and therefore deploys free labour from family members. This is as reported by [2] and [5]. Contrary to [4] and [9] who reported that a majority of the fisherfolks were illiterates, this work discovered that only 18% of the respondents had non-formal education. Abinsi settlement first existed as a colonial convergence and therefore had adequate schools to afford the inhabitant receive formal education.

The revenue earnings from fishing varied among fishermen. The mean (N40,479.59) was below the total revenue reported by [5] in Ogun State who reported revenue in the range of N70,000-150,000. It may be argued that revenue in Ogun state from fishing was more profitable as it took advantage of the commercial town Lagos and Otta whose residents have higher purchasing power and could afford buying fish products at that prices.

While set nets were generally the most used fishing gear in Abinsi, [5] reported hook/lines and traps as the predominant gears used. [1] also reported cast net as the commonest gear used in Egbin Waterside fishing settlement in Lagos state. The morphometry of the river Benue and these water bodies vary significantly. The River Benue is shallow in especially in the dry season and could have set nets reliably operated on it.

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