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ANALYSIS OF POVERTY STATUS OF FISHERFOLKS IN ITU LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, AKWA IBOM STATE

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ABSTRACT

The study analyzed the poverty status of fisherfolks in Itu Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State. Data for the study were obtained from 120 fisherfolks using a multi-stage sampling procedure and were analysed using descriptive statistics and the Foster, Greer and Thorbecke (FGT) weighed poverty index. Results show that 50.0% of the respondents were within the age range of 21-40 years; 64.2% earned "less than N50,000.00" monthly and 37.5% had 11-20 years of fishing experience. Majority of the fisherfolks had no access to extension services. This is where the intervention of Government through the Ministry of agriculture and Rural Development is necessary and relevant. Findings also show that the respondents were highly engaged in fishing activities such as netting, clamming while they were lowly engaged in activities such as fish drying and fish canning. The Foster, Greer and Thorbecke (FGT) weighted poverty index reveals that 75.8% of the respondents were poor while 24.2% were non-poor. The index also shows that the poverty depth and severity were 38% and 19% for moderate poverty. Reducing this high level of poverty is a task which government alone cannot handle. The co-operation of development agencies, non-governmental organizations and the private sector is imperative.

Keywords: Poverty, status, fisherfolks, Itu Local Government Area.

INTRODUCTION

Fish is one of the most diverse groups of animals known to man with more than 20,500 species (Ali *et al*, 2008). It is a major source of protein for millions of people in the world (Ali-Jufaili and Opara, 2006). Out of the major animal protein sources in Nigeria (cattle, goats, sheep, poultry and fish) (Ugwumba and Chukwuji, 2010), fish and fish products provide more than 60% of the total protein intakes in adults, especially in rural areas (Adekoya and Miller, 2004). Fish contributes to food security in Nigeria in being cheap and available all-year-round (Etim, 2010). Fisheries occupy a unique position in the agricultural sector of the Nigerian economy (Kudi *et al,* 2008). Its contribution to the economic development of Nigeria is indicated in its 12% share of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) from the agricultural sector between 2000 and 2004 (Food and Agriculture Organization, FAO, 2007). The fishery sub-sector has recorded the fastest growth rate in agriculture to the GDP of the country. The export of fish produce from developing countries like Nigeria comprises 20% of agriculture and food processing exports (Roheim and Sutinem, 2006). Appropriate processing of fish enables maximum use of raw materials and production of value-added products (Davies and Davies, 2009). The fishery sub-sector in Africa has contributed to food and nutritional security of 200 million Africans in 2004 alone, and has also provided employment for about 10 million people engaged in fish production, processing and trade (Neil *et al,* 2005). Fish also provides employment opportunities to many rural dwellers in Africa (Ali *et al*, 2008). About 68% of the total population in Itu Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State is engaged in fishing or fish-related activities (Ekpenyong, 2012). The fisherfolks in Itu Local Government Area reside in the rural areas, and rural coastal

communities depend on fisherfolks for at least 50% of their annual protein intake (Uwem *et al*, 2010). Poverty in rural areas, however, accounts for 63% of poverty worldwide (Khan, 2001).

The effects of poverty are evident in inability to feed well, poor health and high susceptibility to health problems, infant mortality, low-life expectancy, poor housing or lack of shelter (Ekong, 2003). Others include: single-parent families, street children due to parental neglect or abuse, inability to send children to school, high school drop-out rates, mental derangement, prostitution, development of slum settlement in cities, increased male out-migration from rural to urban areas in search of menial jobs, restiveness of unemployed youths, increase in drug abuse (particularly alcohol consumption) and violent crimes, loss of self-esteem, powerlessness or inability to participate meaningfully in social and political life. Poverty, according to Obike *et al* (2007), is one of the most difficult challenges facing countries in the developing world like Nigeria. A reliable knowledge of the poverty status of a target audience is essential to effective programme planning and execution aimed at the target audience (Asa *et al*, 2007). This study therefore aimed at ascertaining the poverty status of fisherfolks in Itu Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State. The specific objectives of the study were to:

(i) Examine the socio-economic characteristics of fisherfolks in Itu Local Government Area.
(ii) Ascertain the fishing activities engaged in by the respondents.
(iii) Ascertain the poverty status of the respondents.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Itu Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State. The Local Government Area lies within latitude 6°40″ and 6°20″ North and longitude 9°30″ and 5°47″ East; occupies a total land area of 606,099km^2; and has an estimated population of 127,856 (National Population Commission, NPC, 2006). Primary data used in the study were obtained using a multi-stage sampling procedure. The first stage involved the purposive selection of the fishing communities in Itu Local Government Area which comprised of 25 villages. The second stage involved the simple random selection of four (4) villages out of the 25 villages that constituted the fishing communities. The selected villages were: Ayadeghe, Oku Iboko, Esuk Itu and Obot Etim. The third stage involved the simple random selection of 30 respondents from each of the selected villages. This resulted in a total sample size of 120. Frequency counts, percentages, means and ranks were used to analyze the socio-economic characteristics of the fisherfolks. To ascertain the fishing activities the respondents were engaged in, nominal values were assigned to a three-point scale as follows: Highly Engaged In = 2, Lowly Engaged In =1 and Never Engaged In =0. The mean cut-off point for each of the statements was obtained by summing up the ratings 2, 1 and O and dividing by the number of the ratings (2+1+0/3 = 1.00). Any response/statement with a mean score of 1.00 and above was regarded as high engagement in fishing activities while anyone with a mean score of less than 1.00 was regarded as low engagement. The Foster, Greer and Thorbecke (FGT) weighted poverty index was used to ascertain the poverty status of the fisherfolks. The Foster, Greer and Thorbecke (1984), FGT Pα index is estimated as:

$$P\alpha = \frac{1}{N}\sum\left(\frac{z - yi}{z}\right)\propto$$

Where z is the poverty line; N is the total number of individuals in the reference population, yi is the per capita expenditure of fisherfolks; α is the degree of aversion and takes on the values 0,1,2 and $P\alpha$ is the weighted poverty index. Note that P_0 (Head Count Index) measures prevalence of

poverty; P_1 (Poverty Gap Index) measures depth of poverty; and P_2 (Squared Poverty Gap Index) measures poverty severity. The poverty line used in this study is based on expenditure of fisherfolks. Two-third of the mean per capita expenditure (MPCHE) was used as the moderate poverty line while one-third of the mean was used as the line for extreme poverty (Asa *et al* 2007). Specifically, those that spend < 1/3 of MPCHE and < 2/3 of MPCHE are considered to be extremely poor and moderately poor respectively while those spending >2/3 of MPCHE are considered to be non-poor fisherfolks.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-economic characteristics

Table 1 showed the socio-economic characteristics of fisherfolks in the study area. The result revealed that 44.2% of the respondents were within the age range of 41-60 years; 90.0% of the respondents were males while only 10.0% were females; and 84.2% of the respondents were married while 15.8% were single. The findings confirmed Ekpenyong (2012)'s findings that fishing activities in Akwa Ibom State are dominated by males. The mean age of the respondents was 40 years. The high percentage of marriage among the respondents could be attributed to the fact that marriage is a highly cherished value in the rural areas of Nigeria (Ekong, 2003). About 86% of the respondents (85.8%) were literate to some extent while 14.2% had no formal education. The high level of literacy is congruent with Foundation for Economic Research and Training (FERT) Report which stated that Akwa Ibom State is an educationally advantaged State, with numerous available educational institutions/opportunities (FERT, 2001). About 64% of the respondents earned "less than N50,000.00" monthly while 8.3% earned between N100,001 and N150,000.00 monthly. The average monthly income of the respondents was N55,654.17. Over thirty seven percent (37.5%) of the respondents lived in household sizes of 4-6 persons per household while 9.2% of them lived in household sizes of 10-12 persons per household. The average household size of the fisherfolks consisted of 5 persons per household. About 38% of the respondents had 11-20 years of fishing experience while 9.2% had 31-40 years of fishing experience. The average years of fishing experience of the respondents was 16 years. About 96% of the respondents used traditional fishing methods for their fishing. This is due to the fact that fisherfolks in rural areas rarely have access to modern fishing gears for their fishing. About 98% of the respondents had no access to extension services related to their fishing activities while 2.5% had access to relevant extension services.

Table 1: Distribution of respondents according to socio-economic characteristics of the respondents (N = 120)

Socio-economic characteristics	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Age	Less than 21 years	6	5.0
	21 - 40 years	60	50.0
	41 - 60 years	53	44.2
	61 – 80 years	1	0.8
Sex	Male	108	90.0
	Female	12	10.0
Marital status	Single	19	15.8
	Married	101	84.2
Educational status	No formal education	17	14.2
	Primary education	57	47.5
	Secondary education	45	37.5
	Tertiary education	1	0.8
Monthly income	Less than N50,000	77	64.2
	N50,001- N100,000	33	27.5
	N100,001 - N150,000	10	8.3
Household size	1 – 3 person(s)	39	32.5
	4 – 6 persons	45	37.5
	7 – 9 persons	25	20.8
	10 – 12 persons	11	9.2
Years of fishing	1 – 10 year(s)	43	35.8
experience	11 – 20 years	45	37.5
	21 – 30 years	21	17.5
	31 – 40 years	11	9.2
Fishing method	Traditional	117	97.5
	Modern	3	2.5
Access to extension	Yes	3	2.5
services	No	117	97.5

Source: Field survey data, 2011

Fishing activities of fisherfolks in the study area

Table 2 revealed the fishing activities the respondents were engaged in the study area. A critical mean of 1.00 served as a cut-off point between low and high levels of engagement in fishing activities. A mean score of less than 1.00 depicted low level of engagement in fishing activities while a score of 1.00 and above indicated high level of engagement. The Table showed that the respondents were highly engaged in the following fishing activities arranged in descending order: netting (mean = 1.97), clamming (mean = 1.70) and the use of baskets to preserve fishes (mean = 1.57). This could be due to the fact that these activities are traditional fishing activities in the study area. On the other hand, the respondents were lowly engaged in fish drying (mean = 0.33) and fish canning (mean = 0.17). These are fish processing activities which were not the priority of fisherfolks in the study area.

Table 2: Fishing activities of fisherfolks in Itu local Government Area

Fishing activities	Mean	Rank*
Line fishing	1.43	4
Netting	1.97	1
Trap fishing	0.94	6
Clamming	1.70	2
Fish smoking	1.40	5
Fish salting	0.91	8
Fish drying	0.33	10
Fish curing	0.48	9
Fish fermentation	0.92	7
Fish canning	0.17	11
Use of baskets to preserve fish	1.57	3

** = Rank 1 is the activity the respondents are mostly engaged in while rank 11 is the activity the respondents are least engaged in*

Poverty status of fisherfolks in Itu Local Government Area

The first step in ascertaining the poverty status of the fisherfolks was the estimation of the poverty line. This involved estimating the mean per capita expenditure of the fisherfolks on basic consumption needs. Tables 3 shows the average monthly amount spent on these basic needs of the fisherfolks' households in the study area. Food and drinks constituted 47.06% of the total mean per capita expenditure. Education constituted 16.35% followed by clothing (10.75%). The average monthly amount spent on housing, health/medication and ceremonies constituted 8.37%, 6.97% and 2.36% respectively. The findings corroborate Asa *et al* (2007) who reported that food and drinks constituted the highest mean per capita expenditure of rural dwellers in Akwa Ibom State followed by education.

Table 3: Mean per capita expenditure on basic needs

Basic needs	Amount per month (N) MPCHE	% of Total expenditure
Food and drinks	2616.67	47.06
Housing	465.62	8.37
Clothing	597.73	10.75
Health/medication	387.46	6.97
Education	908.90	16.35
Transportation	180.50	3.25
Ceremonies	131.36	2.36
Fishing-related consumption	271.64	4.89
Expenditure		
Total MPCHE	5559.88	100
2/3 MPCHE	3706.59	
1/3 MPCHE	1853.29	

Source: Field survey data, 2011

The moderate poverty line was defined as N3706.59 per month while the extreme poverty threshold was put at N1853.29 per month. Based on these estimated poverty thresholds, fisherfolks in Itu Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State were classified into mutually exclusive groups presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Fisherfolks' poverty classification

Group	MPCHE Amount (N)	Frequency	Percentage
Extreme poverty	< 1853.29	36	30.0
Moderate poverty	1853.29 ≤ z < 3706.59	55	45.8
Non-poor	≥ 3706.59	29	24.2

Source: Field survey data, 2011

Table 4 revealed that 75.8% of the fisherfolks fell below the estimated poverty line while 24.2% were non-poor. Out of the poor fisherfolks, 45.8% were moderately poor while 30.0% were core poor. The result agreed with Khan (2001) who noted that majority of rural dwellers in developing countries like Nigeria are poor. The incidence, depth and severity of poverty among the respondents are as shown in Table 5. The incidence, depth and severity of poverty were computed for core poor and moderately poor fisherfolks.

Table 5: Incidence, depth and severity of poverty among the poor fisherfolks in Itu Local Government Area

Group	P_o	P_1	P_2
1/3 MPCHE (Extreme poor)	0.30	0.22	0.16
2/3 MPCHE (Moderate poor)	0.76	0.38	0.19

Source: Field survey, 2011

Table 5 revealed that the incidence of poverty among the core poor respondents were 30.0%, and 76.0% for the moderately poor respondents. The depth of poverty showed the percentage of expenditure/income required to bring each individual below the poverty line up to the poverty line. It also showed how much below the poverty line the average poor person was. This measure for the core poor is 22.0% and 38.0% for moderate poverty. The implication is that if the average fisherfolk is to be made non-poor, the per capita expenditure must increase by at least 22.0% for the core poor and 38.0% for the moderate poor. The severity of poverty among fisherfolks in the study area is put at 16.0% for the core poor and 19.0% for the moderate poor respondents.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study concentrated on income poverty with the aim of ascertaining the poverty status of fisherfolks in Itu Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State. Findings from the study show that a high level of poverty (75.8%) exists among the respondents and that majority of the fisherfolks had no access to extension services. Adequate access to extension services can affect the level of productivity in their fishing activities as well as their income levels/poverty status. This is where the intervention of the Government through the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development is necessary and relevant. The extension unit of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development should ensure that extension services relevant to the needs of the fisherfolks be made available to the respondents in order to help improve their productivity levels. It must be pointed out that poverty cannot be successfully reduced by government alone. Therefore, development agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and even the private sector have equally very important roles to play in reducing the high incidence of poverty among the fisherfolks.

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