Assessment Of Quality of Life of the Fishing Settlements in Ibaka and James Town Communities in Nigeria

Augustine J. Udoh[1]

1. Department of Agricultural Economics and Extension, University of Uyo, Uyo 520003, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to assess the quality of life of the fishing settlements in Ibaka and James Town Communities of Akwa Ibom State in Nigeria. The fishing settlements were subdivided into three zones with a population of 16,981 per zone. Fourty Six settlements were randomly selected from a total of 138. Finally, 87 heads of households were randomly selected from the first two zones and 86 from the third zone making a sample population of 260. Both primary and secondary sources were used for collection of data. Over 60 percent of the respondents depended mainly on fishing while 38.5 percent were engaged in fishing, sales of fuel wood, boat making and engine repairs. A significant proportion of the household heads (55.3%) lived in thatched roof with mud walls while 25.6 percent lived in thatched roof with thatched walls. The study reveals that the only sources of drinkable water in the study area are rain water, which is seasonal and streams, which are polluted. Lack of electricity in the area affect acquisition of luxury goods. However, study shows that there is a significant difference between the infrastructural facilities available in the settlement within the past 20 years and now. A regression analysis shows an insignificant relationship between the socio-economic characteristics and quality of life in the fishing settlements. The study suggests building blocks to adopt in improving the quality of life in the settlements.
Key words: *Quality of life ; Fishing settlements; Boat making; Engine repairs; Thatched roof*

*I*baka and James Town are two fishing communities among several others in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria. The fishing communities have similar features but unlike other traditional settlements in the state, there is a strong nucleation among the homes which are clustered together. A greater number of buildings are made up of mud walls with low thatch roofs, which are vulnerable to fire outbreaks. Baulch (2000) observed that the poverty level in fishing ports of the developing countries is very alarming thus youths move to where there are basic social facilities available. The fishing communities constitute the home of the fishers and the entire people of Ibaka and James Town communities depend on fish and fishery products food and income. But inspite of the huge number, and the occupation, they represent an under privileged and politically weak group in the state. The fishers tend to remain at the lower level of the socio-economic stratum even several years after political independence. The fishes in their peasant economy depend on traditional tools like hand-dug canoes and simple fishing gears.

It became pertinent to assess the quality of life of the fishers in these fishing communities. It also became necessary to raise some issue questions such as: what are the infrastructural facilities available in the communities; what efforts have the government made towards improving the quality of life of the fisher folks in the fishing communities; what kind of fishing tools do the fishers use in their trade; what are the income levels of the fishers; and what are the factors that may hinder the quality of life in the area? Besides, null hypotheses that: (i) there is no significant relationship between the socioeconomic characteristics of heads of households and the quality of life status of the artisanal fishing households in Ibaka and James Town communities and that (ii) there is no significant difference between the infrastructural facilities available in the communities for the past 20 years and now were raised.

METHODOLOGY

Ibaka and James Town fishing communities are in Akwa Ibom State, situated in the southeastern zone of Nigeria. There are 138 fishing villages which are subdivided into three zones with a population of 16,981 per zone. Fourty six settlements were randomly selected from a total of 138. Finally 87 heads of households were randomly selected from the first two zones and 86 from the third making a sample population of 260. The community leaders of each of the 46 fishing villages were contacted to explain the purpose of our presence in their settlements. Twenty copies of the questionnaire designed for the study were administered to twenty fishers, who did not take part in the actual study. At two weeks interval,

the questionnaire was administered to the same sample with a reliability coefficient (r) of 0.860, indicating a high level of reliability of the instrument. The validated instrument was administered to 260 fishers that were randomly selected for the study. Inferential statistics were used to test the hypotheses of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The fact that concerted effort should be made to stimulate economic progress in the rural areas in general and in the fishing settlements in particular through the provision of basic infrastructural facilities is generally accepted. However, about 92% of the respondents in the Ibaka and James Town communities do not have electricity as source of light. About 8% of them depend on generators and mostly for their business. Lack of electricity in the area affects the respondents' acquisition of luxury goods, thereby affecting the quality of life in the area. The lack of electricity in the area further causes the youth to migrate to the urban areas. Electricity should be supplied to the area and apart from smoking of fish, provision of cold room for storage will enhance the availability of fishing products round the year and therefore provision of jobs round the year also. According to Udoh (1999), availability of source of power in the rural area could stem the migration of young adults into the urban centres; could keep artisans in the communities to provide services; and could enhance the sating of agro-based and other industries in the rural areas.

Table 1. Distribution of respondents according to ccupation, income and presence of infrastructural facilities.

Occupation:	No	%
Fishing only	160	61.5
Fishing and others	100	38.5
Source of Power:		
Generator	21	8.0
No electricity	239	92.0
Source of water :		
Rain water	228	88.0
Stream	249	96.0
Both rain water and stream	254	98.0
Housing:		
Mud-well, thatch-roof	169	65.0
Thatch-wall, thatch-roof	73	28.0
Block-wall, thatch-roof	9	3.4
Medical Facilities:		
Presence of Clinics	74	28.5
No medical facilities	186	71.5
Fishing gears:		
Ownership of hand-dug causes and paddles	130	50.0
Income:		
Income of 25/minut	191	73.5
Income of <&25/minut	69	26.5

Source: Field Data, 2006

The study reveals that 88% of the respondents depend on rainwater while 96% depend on streams; however, 98% depend on both rainwater and streams. But the rainwater is mostly acid rainwater while the stream water has been polluted. Consequently, water scarcity is bound to prevail during the dry season. Recently, few private boreholes have been sunk in the area and the respondents indicated that they did not treat water from any of the sources before consumption. Therefore, to depend on untreated water may result in the intake of pathogenic organisms, which may endanger human health. The situation calls for immediate attention for good quality sources of water in the communities, for instance, pipe borne water.

After food and clothing, housing is one of the components of physiological need. A greater percentage of the respondents live in mud-wall, thatch-roof buildings. For example, while 65% live in mud-walls and thatch-roofs, 28% live in thatch-walls and thatch-roofs while about 3.6 and 3.4% live in mud walls and zinc roofs and block walls and thatch-roofs respectively. The mode of housing actually depicts the level of quality of life of the respondents. The nature of housing in the study area is also vulnerable to fire outbreak, which is a prominent feature in the fishing communities. But surprisingly there is no fire fighting service by the government in the area.

The presence of clinics in the area was indicated by 28.5% of the respondents. This means that about 71.5% had no medical facilities located in their communities. However, the health facilities indicated by 28.5% of the respondents were located between 5 to 10 kilometres. The poor number and long distances between clinics in the area is a clear indicated of the inadequacy of medical facilities. The inadequacy of health facilities at a close proximity to the fishers would tend to force the people to seek alternative routes to health care, which could make them vulnerable to improper health care and inappropriate medication. This invariably could result in poor health and declining physical vigour needed for effective fishing and other social activities. According to Cartel and Wiebe (1990), health is a very important basic aspect of human life; first as food, shelter and even other basic amenities, well equipped hospital is really lack in rural fishing communities. Therefore, the need to step up the provision of health facilities and training of more medical and paramedical personnel will alleviate the poor health conditions of the fishing households.

About 30% of the respondents owned and operated radio sets with dry cell batteries; 2.8% had television sets operated with 12 volts car batteries. Ownership of refrigerators and deep freezers was not reported by any respondent. This means that the quality of life is related

to lack of valued items in the system. However, ownership of hand-dug canoes and paddles were indicated by over 50% of the respondents. Their fishing gears were mainly traditional gears viz.: gillnets, pot traps and hooks.

The main sources of income for the respondents were fishing and fishing related activities. Of course, Readon (1997) asserts that artisanal fisheries contribute over 50% of domestic fish production in Nigeria. However, 73.5% of the respondents had income of less than N10,000 per month, i.e. about ($25/month) while 26.5% had just N10,000 and above per month. This indicates that the income level of the fishing households in Ibaka and James Town communities is very low. This may be due to unnecessary wastage and spoilage because of poor preservation methods of their products.

The respondents indicated numerous constraints to fishing and related activities in the area, the most prominent ones which include: lack of electricity, lack of good drinking water, lack of hospitals and clinics, lack of storage facilities and incessant fire outbreak.

Testing of Hypotheses : (i) The null hypothesis states that there is no significant relationship between the socioeconomic characteristics of household heads and the quality of life status of the artisanal fishing household in Ibaka and James Town communities. The result shows that calculated R-value (coefficient) of 0.136 is less than the critical R-value of 0.195 at 0.05 levels with 259 degrees of freedom. The R-value of 0.136 predicts 13.6% of the relationship between the two variables (socioeconomic characteristics and quality of life) of the artesian fishing household in Ibaka and James Town communities. This rate (13.6%) is low and therefore signifies an unremarkable but positive relationship between the variables.

(ii) The other hypothesis that there is no significant difference between the infrastructural facilities available in the communities for the past 20 years and now was tested with a chi-square statistics. The obtained X_2 value was 35.96. This value was tested for significance by comparing it with the critical X_2 value of 9.488 at 0.05 levels with 4 degrees of freedom. The result therefore means that there is a significant difference between the

infrastructural facilities available within the communities for the past 20 years and now. This can be attributed to the provision of a public toilet at the landing areas of the fishing port, availability of private boreholes, the presence of one community secondary school and availability of a filling station for fuel, diesel and lubricants.

CONCLUSION

A study to assess the quality of life in Ibaka and James Town communities in Akwa Ibom State was conducted. Ibaka and James town communities are lacking in infrastructural amenities such as electricity, medical facilities, potable water and storage facilities. Their fishing gears are mainly traditional gears which require modification or replacement. Fishing is the main occupation and a major source of income although their income is generally low.

Provision of infrastructural facilities by government, loans to fishing household by financial institutions, and storage facilities and other basic social amenities to the inhabitants will improve the quality of life of the respondents. Well constructed market and improved housing structures to reduce fire incidents are eminent. Formation of cooperative societies and the provision for resident extension personnel will help in training of the fisher folks with new methods of fishing and creating of marketing avenues to improve on their income and therefore quality of life. Acquisition of improved fishing gears and provision of processing and storage facilities (dryers and cold stores will reduce post harvest losses suffered by the fishers. Establishing boatyards in Ibaka and James Town as a matter of priority will enhance producing of fishing vessels with standardized engines and auxiliary equipment. Seminars and workshops should be organized for the fishers in the fishing communities on marketing of fishery products, disposal of waste and treatment of drinking water. Awards in the form of relevant fishing tools with certificates should be given to the best fisher and runners up in the fishing communities in order to encourage transformation of the area in general and the people in particular.

REFERENCES

1.   Baulch, B. and John, H. (2000). Economic mobility and poverty dynamics in developing countries. *Journal of Development Studies* **36**(6): 1 – 24.

2.   Cartel, M. and Wiebe, K. D. (1990). Fishing tools and their roles in fishing in Kenya. University of Wisconsin – Madison, Agric. Economics Staff Paper.

3.   Reardon, T. (1997). Using evidence of household income diversification to inform study of the rural non-farm labour market in Africa. *World Development, 25*(5): 110 – 125.

4.   Udoh, A. J. (1999). Personnel, Socioeconomic and infrastructural indices for poverty alleviation in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria. *South-South Journal of Cultural and Development* **1**(2): 110 – 125.

❏ ❏ ❏ ●