

## SHORT COMMUNICATION

**The challenges of Ilaje youth in combining education with artisanal fishing in Ondo State, Nigeria**

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FOO, conceived idea, designed study, collected data, statistical analysis and preparation of manuscript

**ABSTRACT**

The study examined how Ilajes in-school youth entrepreneurs combined their education with fishing activities in Ondo State. It examined their personal characteristics, period of involvement and educational activities. Simple random sampling was used to gather data from 63 youth fishers. Data revealed that the respondents were all males and were mostly between the ages of 15 and 18 years (66.7%). Majority (80.5%) were enrolled in formal education. Fishing was done 4 - 6 times weekly (69.8%), in the mornings (87.3%) and in the evenings (100%). All respondents fished after 3pm in the afternoons while 79.4% did so between 6 and 8 am in the mornings. Studiousness was high (70.5%) on a daily basis. Within a month, 72.1% were never late to school while 75.4% were never absent from school. Respondents combined their fishing entrepreneurship activities in a sustainable manner that did not conflict with their educational activities. Capacity building is recommended to enhance efficiency of the respondents in their entrepreneurship activities. Furthermore, respondents should be offered investment opportunities in which they could put some portion of their earnings to avoid reckless spending. Another possible opportunity is to encourage them to also form cooperatives to enhance accessibility to improved fishing facilities and credit.

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**INTRODUCTION**

Entrepreneurship is a global language and is fast gaining ground in Nigeria. The concept, however, is not new to our traditional setting as children are socialized into family trades and professions and begin to learn earning income during their youth. It must be noted that thousands of students drop out of school due to inability of their parents or guardians to bear the expenses of their education, particularly in the developing countries and this is also true for Nigeria (UNICEF, 2011). When these children are denied education, they are equally deprived of access to credible and quality employment. Children that find themselves in this circumstance have become social miscreants and a threat to societal law and order. Education could therefore be seen as a vehicle to productive and responsible living.

Given this scenario, some children on the other hand have become more resilient and have taken it upon themselves to earn a living to augment whatever their parents could afford, to enable them pursue their education (UNICEF, 2011). It is unfortunate to know also, that many children actually carry the burden of sponsoring themselves through school. Many of what these children resort to in their quest for an education is determined by the ecological and economic resources they are subjected to by circumstances they are in. Those who are domiciled

around forests engage in farming, gathering of non-forest timber products (Tinde van Andel, 2006), and making of fuel wood while those who live along the coastal areas or by the rivers side get engaged in fishing and other related activities.

Proponents of child labour are however quick to caution on the involvement of children below 18 years of age in economic activities (Admassie, 2002). They view working and schooling as incompatible and as an exploitation of children, which interferes with their health, mental, spiritual, moral or social development. Poverty is acknowledged one of the most important reasons for the high incidence of child labour in Africa (UNICEF, 2011). Nigeria is now considered as one of the 20 poorest countries in the world, with over 70 per cent of the population classified as poor, and 35 per cent living in absolute poverty. Majority of these poor live in the rural areas (Akande, 2003; Global Action on Aging, 2008). Based on the present realities, it would be illegal to use children's labour without pay, to under-pay them or to coerce them into work. However, when children decide on their own volition, either as a matter of interest or necessity to engage in legal entrepreneurship activities without exploitation, then it becomes an issue which should be examined to ascertain their coping strategies. The thinking is that if such activities are well monitored by caregivers it will not mortgage the future of the children,

rather, it will broaden and enhance their present and future income earning capacities and life-long skills. In these days of unprecedented unemployment in Nigeria and global economic recession, children entrepreneurs are often found to augment their parents' financial support to further their education (IEARN, 2012).

It is in this light that the challenge of the Ilaje children in their involvement in artisanal fisheries, which has more or less become a part of the culture of the Ilajes, was examined to ascertain how the children combined their fishing activities with their education. Therefore the general objective of this study was to examine how children combined fishing activities with their educational activities among the Ilajes of Ondo State, Nigeria.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### *Study Site*

The study was carried out in the coastal wetland area of Ondo state, Nigeria, which is largely a concentration of mangrove and freshwater swamps. The state lies between latitudes 5°45' and 7°52'N and longitudes 4°20' and 6°5'E. Its land area is about 15,500 square kilometers. Edo and Delta States border Ondo State on the east, on the west it is bordered by Ogun and Osun States, on the north by Ekiti and Kogi States and to the south by the Bight of Benin and the Atlantic Ocean. Ondo State has the longest coastline in Nigeria with great potentials for the fishing industry. The creeks and coastlands of the state are also noted for their richness in prawns and lobsters, coupled with the recent discoveries of stock fish reserve (Ondo State Government, 2004). Ilaje Local Government Area (LGA), one of the three coastal LGA's among the eighteen local government areas in the state, was selected by design because of its larger volume of fishing activities. The main occupations of the residents include artisanal fishing, farming and hunting. The number of active fisher folks in the study area is estimated at 450,000 and are producing over 90% of the fish consumed in the state. The estimated amount of fish produced in the area stands at over 12.5 metric tonnes per year with an annual revenue of about 945 million naira (USD 7.26 million) (Akegbejo-Samsons, 1995).

### *Sampling and data analysis*

Three major fishing communities namely, Igbokoda, Ayetoro, and Mahin were selected because of their accessibility. Twenty five children involved in artisanal fishing were randomly selected at the riverside from each of the communities. Data was obtained using a well structured interview schedule from 63 respondents and the results are presented using descriptive statistics such as frequency tables and percentages. Twelve of the schedules were dropped from the analysis during data cleaning due to incoherent responses from respondents. Respondents were selected at the river side to ensure accurate capture of the target population for the study. Parents consent was not sought before Interview as the

children were at the riverside without their parents. The children however responded willingly to the interviews. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 10, 1983) was used for data analysis.

## **RESULTS**

### *Personal Characteristics of Respondents*

The results of the personal characteristics of the respondents are shown in Table 1. Majority (66.7%) of the respondents were older children between the ages of 15 and 18 years of age. Those in the 9 -14 years category were 33.3%. Mean age for the study was  $15 \pm 2$  years. All the respondents as shown on Table 1 were males. In this study, majority (90.5%) of the youth were still in school. The majority (57.2%) of in school respondents were in secondary school and 33.3% in primary school. Those who had completed their secondary school education were 6.3% while only 3.2% of the respondent did not have any formal education (see Table 1).

Fishing experience for 47.6% of the youth was over 7 years while those who had been fishing for less than 7 years were 52.4%. The times when the respondents are engaged in fishing activities are shown on Table 2. These revealed that all the respondents (100%) fished in the evenings while 87.3% were fishing early in the mornings. Those engaged in fishing in the mornings did so, mostly between the hours of 04:00hrs and 06:00hrs (79.4%) and in the afternoon these activities takes place after 15.00hrs (100%). Only a few engage in fishing between the hours of 06:00hrs and 15.00hrs (15.9%) and these include those youth who were out of school.

Frequency of involvement in fishing for the majority (69.8%) was between 4-6 times weekly followed by 1-3 times weekly (19.1%) and those who fish on a daily basis constitute 11.1%.

### *Educational Activities Studiosness*

Data concerning children involvement in education activities is shown in Table 3 and it revealed that all respondents had time to study at home with majority (70.5%) doing so on a daily basis. Those who had time to study between 4 and 6 times weekly were 23% while only few studied between 1 and 3 times in the week

### *Punctuality*

The present findings showed that majority (72.1%) of the subjects responded as never been late to school. For those who were late, the highest frequency was 4 times monthly (13.1%) which translates to at least once in a week, followed by 4-5 times weekly (8.2%) which is likely to mean every day, 5-8 times monthly (3.3%) and 1-3 times weekly (3.3%).

**Table 1: Personal Characteristics of Respondents**

| Variable                  | Frequency | Percentage |
|---------------------------|-----------|------------|
| <b>Age</b>                |           |            |
| 9- 14years                | 21        | 33.3       |
| 15-18years                | 42        | 66.7       |
| Total                     | 63        | 100.0      |
| <b>Sex</b>                |           |            |
| Male                      | 63        | 100.0      |
| <b>Educational Level</b>  |           |            |
| No Formal                 | 2         | 3.2        |
| Primary school            | 21        | 33.3       |
| Secondary school          | 36        | 57.2       |
| Finished Secondary school | 4         | 6.3        |
| Total                     | 63        | 100.0      |
| <b>Fishing experience</b> |           |            |
| < 7 years                 | 33        | 52.4       |
| >7 years                  | 30        | 47.6       |
| Total                     | 63        |            |

**Table 2: Period of Respondents Involvement in Fishing Activities**

| Variable   | Frequency | Percentage |
|--|-----------|------------|
| <b>Period of the Day involved in Fishing Activities*</b> |           |            |
| Morning  | 55        | 87.3       |
| Evening  | 63        | 100.0      |
| <b>Time of the Day involved in Fishing Activities *</b>  |           |            |
| 4 – 6am  | 50        | 79.4       |
| 6 – 8am  | 3         | 4.8        |
| 8am- 3am   | 10        | 15.9       |
| 3pm – Above  | 63        | 100.0      |
| <b>Frequency of Involvement</b>                          |           |            |
| Daily  | 7         | 11.1       |
| 4 – 6 times / week                                       | 44        | 69.8       |
| 1 – 3 times/ week  | 12        | 19.1       |
| Total  | 63        | 100.0      |

\* Multiple responses

### Truancy

The study found that majority (75.4%) of the respondents had never been absent from school while 11.4% (highest percentage of truancy) assented to having been absent from school four times during the month. Those who had been absent between 5-8 times monthly were 6.6% while absenteeism for 4-5 times weekly and 1-3 times weekly were both 3.3% of the respondents respectively.

## DISCUSSION

### Personal Characteristics of Respondents

This age bracket of respondents in the study is youthful and likely to be enthusiastic to carry out fishing i.e. casting and drawing in nets vis - vis rowing of the boat. The mean age of 15 years is indicative to this, thus encouraging

adventurous tendencies to face hazardous nature of fishing as observed by Nieuwenhuys (1994). All the respondents were males and this may also be a portrayal of gender stereotype in the fishing industry. This is in line with Iversen (2006) who reported a range of 86.0% - 91.3% involvement of boys among child labourers in the fishing industry in some selected countries. Ghana in West African had 87.2% of children in the fishing industry as boys (Iversen, 2006).

School enrolment in this study as shown on Table 1 (90.5%) is higher than the UNICEF figure (60%) for primary school in the whole country (Nigeria) for the period 2000-2005 UNICEF (2006). The fact that respondents were enrolled in formal education reveals the priority placed on education in the study area. Therefore, fishing business is not and should not be regarded as a hindrance to their educational activities. This high incidence of enrolment may also be due to the general enlightenment in the south

**Table 3: Educational Activities of Respondents**

| Variable                  | Frequency n = 61 | Percentage |
|---------------------------|------------------|------------|
| <b>Stidiousness</b>       |                  |            |
| Every day                 | 43               | 70.5       |
| 4 – 6 time / week         | 14               | 23.0       |
| 1 – 3 time / week         | 4                | 6.5        |
| Never                     | -                | -          |
| <b>Lateness to school</b> |                  |            |
| Never                     | 44               | 72.1       |
| 4 times monthly           | 8                | 13.1       |
| 5 – 8 time monthly        | 2                | 3.3        |
| 4 – 5 time weekly         | 5                | 8.2        |
| 1 – 3 weekly              | 2                | 3.3        |
| <b>Truancy</b>            |                  |            |
| Never                     | 46               | 75.4       |
| 4 times monthly           | 7                | 11.4       |
| 5 – 8 times monthly       | 4                | 6.6        |
| 4 – 5 times weekly        | 2                | 3.3        |
| 1-3 times weekly          | 2                | 3.3        |

west of Nigeria to the importance of education.

Fishing experience for the majority was over 7 years, indicating that, some of them became involved as early as 6 years, when calculated from the sample mean age of 15 ± 2 years. This corroborates Kronen (2004)'s revelation that school children as young as 7-9 years were involved in the sector.

*Period of Respondents Involvement in Fishing Activities*

Fishing in the very early mornings could only be practicable for older children as the conditions could be risky as it would still be dark. This assertion is corroborated by the mean age of respondents (15 ± 2 years). Arising early to fish could therefore be a major coping strategy such that their educational activities are not affected. It can thus, be deduced that majority spent two hours or less in the morning for their fishing activities and three hours or less in the evening, giving room for their arrival from school, having meals and time to rest. Thus, children could choose to play or get involved in some other pastime which could generate income for themselves and families.

The frequency of involvement in fishing also reveals the coping strategy displayed by the respondents in that the majority do not fish on a daily basis. This would likely help them to relax and to regain strength as well as have time for other activities which could be academic or social. A different study however, documented the involvement of school children in fishing activities between one and three times weekly (Kronen, 2002). It could that, children involved in Kronen (2002)'s study were merely fishing to supplement their food and not for business, or were catching enough to earn a good income. However, in view of the present circumstances of poverty and the need to adapt to current challenges, capacity building for respondents is recommended to enhance their fishing skills, such that, the little time spent in the mornings and

evenings would be efficiently utilized, thus increasing their income.

*Educational Activities  
Stidiousness*

Involvement in education activities revealed that most respondents had time to study at home with majority doing so on a daily basis. Home study could likely to be in the night time, as fishing activities are usually concluded between 18 – 19.000 hours depending on the onset of the night time. Commitment to studies has therefore been demonstrated by the children's ability to take time off for home study after fishing activities. Whether there will be electricity power for lighting at night is however a different issue for discussion because many rural areas in Nigeria do not have the luxury of power supply (Olayiwola and Adeleye, 2005). Majority therefore make do with kerosene or rechargeable battery lamps.

*Punctuality*

The present findings showed that majority of the respondents responded as never been late to school. This is corroborated by the fact that, majority of them indicated that they carried out fishing activities between 04.00 – 06.00 hours in the morning, which allows them ample time to prepare for their schools. This further shows the cooperation of the parents/guardians to ensure their children are punctual in school, by not allowing their fishing activities to become an excuse for such an act.

*Truancy*

The incidence of truancy was very low in the study. The highest percentage of truancy was by those who had been absent from school for four times during the month (11.4%)

Absence from school however, may not likely to be completely due to fishing activities since other factors such as long distance to school from home, sickness etc may be involved, however these factors were not investigated in this study. This further shows seriousness about education among children involved in the fishing business.

Whichever way we look at it, child labour is a complex problem, which calls for comprehensive and multi-faceted interventions. There is a need to promote the adoption of poverty reduction strategies, introducing labour-saving technologies for agricultural production and to embark on aggressive provision of primary education for all, which will make it impossible for any child to be out of school due to educational expenses. Communities also need to be mobilized for the creation of awareness on implications of child labour and parents responsibility in encouraging their children to complete schooling, no matter what gains they get from fishing business

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study found out that the majority of the children were enrolled in formal education and this was found not to conflict in any way with their fishing activities. This non-conflict was because majority fished early in the mornings before school and later in the evenings after school. Children placed greater attention on their educational activities which is synergic with their income generating adventure. Their industriousness and commitment to the fishing business is demonstrated by their early rising to fish before school hours without having to be late to or absent from school.

Time management and studying skills should also be taught to the children fishers to assist them in the utilization of the available time for educational development. Provision of better boats and fishing implements should also be made available to the respondents to further encourage their entrepreneurship drive. Furthermore, children fishers should be offered investment opportunities (stock market, bonds etc) where they could invest a portion of their earnings in order to avoid reckless spending. They could also be mobilized to form cooperatives to enhance their accessibility to information, improved their fishing facilities and access credit both for actual fishing and value addition like processing. In view of the need to develop quality manpower and as a way of motivation and reward, scholarship scheme could be offered for outstanding children fishers to help them pursue higher degrees in fishery related disciplines.

**Conflict of interest** None

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