



A policymaker's guide to increasing youth engagement in aquaculture in Nigeria



Supporting young people to enter food value chains can help reduce high levels of youth unemployment across sub-Saharan Africa. The International Water Management Institute (IWMI) and WorldFish conducted a study to understand the drivers of, and hindrances to, youth entry into aquaculture value chains in Nigeria to support development of youth-inclusive policy for rural areas.

Understanding why and how youth invest in aquaculture

“Value chain for development” (VCD) is a favored approach to increase economic opportunities for youth in sub-Saharan Africa. However, there is limited understanding of what constitutes successful youth-inclusive VCD. Using an integrated framework, the IWMI and WorldFish investigated the livelihood assets available to youth from diverse groups in Nigeria and their ability to use assets to invest in aquaculture value chains. This revealed two main strategies: “investment” and “risk management.” Youth adopting either strategy consider aquaculture to be sustainable, profitable, fast growing and supported by high demand for fish. The Nigerian government and its development partners support youth engagement in the sector, but limited resources and a lack of youth input at the design phase hamper the efficacy of these interventions.

Investment strategy

Youth using this strategy leverage livelihood assets (e.g. social, human and natural capital) and financial assets for technical and capital-intensive roles, such as production. Young men and women use social networks and communications technologies to gain expertise, expand networks and access markets. Youth in wealthier households often invest directly in land and inputs, drawing on their social networks, savings, financial institutions and aquaculture projects.

However, the high cost of inputs, lack of youth-oriented financial services and often poor quality of inputs increase risk and constrain investments. Young people tend not to participate in farmer associations that could offer support because they do not understand the benefits or older members have too little confidence in youth to engage them. Meanwhile, the assumption that aquaculture production is stressful and tedious for women, as well as other structural barriers, like tenure systems that deny women rights to land, further hinder the engagement of young women.

Risk management strategy

Youth following this strategy leverage their livelihood assets (e.g. physical and social capital) and marketing skills (human capital) to engage in input supply, processing and distribution roles. Youth from poor households mainly invest in these functions, using finances from social networks and savings. Youth may also invest in communications technologies to improve market access and overcome misinformation with value chain actors (e.g. suppliers, buyers) as well as capitalize on training opportunities from aquaculture projects to mitigate losses caused by poor roads and storage facilities. The common perception that women are naturally suited for processing and marketing encourages young women to engage in these activities.

Recommendations for strengthening youth engagement in aquaculture

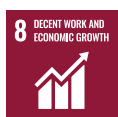
- Widen understanding of diversity among youth and include youth in the design of interventions.
- Develop youth-oriented financial services and capacity development initiatives to improve opportunities for youth from poor households.
- Introduce incentives that encourage the private sector to support youth access to quality inputs and technologies at reasonable prices.
- Encourage private and public sector investment in logistics services, such as better roads and storage facilities, to reduce losses.

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This brief is one in a series of synthesis products prepared in 2021 to share key learning, outcomes and impacts from the FISH program. It is intended to stimulate actions and investments into fish and aquatic foods to realize their role in the transformation of food, land and water systems in a climate crisis. We extend thanks to all the contributors of this research and the reviewers of this brief.

This is a contribution to the following:



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