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Fish Farming In Nigeria

Fish farming in Nigeria

Fish farming as Solution to Unemployment

SENATOR Chris Anyanwu, one of Nigeria's best known media entrepreneurs and the senator representing Owerri, Imo State Senatorial Zone, has just made a ground breaking revelation that foreign vessels invade Nigeria's waters to cart away fishes worth several billions of naira yearly. Witty, sharp and very articulate, Anyanwu, one of the few female senators in the current political dispensation, spoke in an interview with a national daily in which she also called attention to the institutional neglect suffered by the Nigerian Navy. She went on to speak on the need to harmonise the legislative frameworks guiding the operations of multiple government agencies in the maritime territory, which she aptly described as chaotic.

Speaking specifically on the fish resources, Anyanwu who is the Senate Committee chairman on Navy, stated thus; “A lot of our fish stock is stolen in this country. Nobody talks about it. We talk about crude oil. The fish stock stolen is enough to give us the roads that we don’t have but when you look at it side by side with crude oil that is stolen, its pales so we don’t talk about that. But at some point once we get action going at sea, we have the right vessels, the right support, we have the right linkages, some of those things would cease to happen at least, gradually. It is not going to happen overnight.”

Reading the above explosive revelation by someone who should know, one thing struck me and I began to reflect on the potentials of government and other good spirited stakeholders encouraging and enthroning the enabling environment including provision of strategic working capital, grants and the fixing of rural infrastructure. This is to enable the young university graduates roaming the streets searching endlessly for the non-available white collar jobs, venture into fish farming as a viable alternative source of job opportunity and wealth creation.

From available scientific data, Nigeria is a potentially huge market for fish farming which can create millions of jobs for our youth and help reduce the national tragedy that has become youth unemployment.

Besides creating rapid youth employment opportunities, massive fish farming by youths will bridge the yawning gap in meeting Nigeria’s protein needs to improve the living condition of the populace. Grema, H. A; Geidam, Y.A.; and Egwu, G. O; distinguished animal science scholars wrote a piece titled “Fish production in Nigeria: An update”, published in the volume 32, issue 3 edition of “Nigerian veterinary Journal”, the most authoritative voice on animal science sub-sector in Nigeria.

These scholars argue, “In recent times, veterinarians and animal scientists have contributed to the development of techniques to increase the sources of animal protein in order to supplement existing sources of protein.”

Fish is an important source of protein and provides about 40 per cent of the dietary intake of animal protein. With the need for self-reliance at both national and grassroots level, fish production offers a good potential if properly adopted, so argue the animal science scholars.

Additionally, according to them, increase in small-scale aquaculture in towns and villages will create
employment and alleviate poverty. Fish production involves controlling culture environment and rearing fish in captivity; to enhance production and good husbandry management practices as well as prevent diseases and predators.

However, the main factors affecting aquaculture in Nigeria, according to the scholars, include extreme climatic conditions, flood, water pollution, ignorance and lack of adequate technology. Other factors working against the sub-sector are lack of loans and grants, fish diseases and problems of preservation.

Despite all the challenges, these scholars believe that fish production has the potential to expand the national resource base, generate foreign exchange and elevate the socio-economic status of fish farmers.

The current Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Dr. Akinwumi Adesina is a well-respected activist in Agriculture. He has on different occasions, publicly voiced his determination to encourage the Nigerian youth to embrace fish farming as a dignifying professional career which will economically empower them and transform them from serial job seekers to respectable creators of wealth and employment opportunities for themselves and millions of others in their age group. Adesina as the minister of Agriculture is expected to roll out practicable strategies on how the government and other stakeholders can contribute positively to providing the much needed working capital by way of grants to enable willing Nigerian youth to embrace fish farming.

However, the minister of Agriculture, who spoke last year at the 27th Annual general meeting of Fisheries Society of Nigeria, which took place in Yenogoa, Bayelsa State, stated that fish farming had the enormous potentials for wealth creation and sustainable jobs for millions of young university graduates seeking.

He said the current situation whereby Nigeria spends about N97 billion on the importation of 700,000 metric tonnes of fish yearly, is no longer acceptable. Describing the development as unsustainable, he said importation of fish constituted a huge drain on the national foreign exchange. He emphasised the need to harness the full potential of aquaculture, which he said, would lead to the production of 2.66 million metric tonnes of fish yearly to meet national fish protein requirement.

“Nigeria currently produces 680,000 metric tonnes of fish from local sources including 200,000 metric tonnes from aquaculture. This is less than 10 per cent of the total potential”, he said.

From the foregoing facts, it is clear that Nigeria needs to immediately set in motion mechanisms on how the Presidency can direct the ministries of Finance; Youth Affairs; Agriculture and Rural Development, and Labour and Productivity to commence the implementation of a national policy on the promotion of fish farming. This sub-sector should be seen as one pragmatic panacea to the disturbing youth unemployment, which constitutes a grave threat to our national security. It is youths who are involved in sophisticated crimes of kidnapping for ransom payment; terrorism and the kindred organised crimes.

In a well written piece published by a national newspaper on July 3, 2012, titled “Fish farming is a lucrative business”, the author gave well argued reasons why Nigerian government should empower the youth to embark on commercial fish farming.

He said, “Nigerians are large consumers of fish and it remains one of the main products consumed in terms of animal protein. Study has shown that local supplies are meeting only about 50 per cent of demand for fish. The fishery sector is estimated to contribute 3.5 per cent of Nigeria’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and provides direct and indirect employment to over six million people”. The writer went on to say that despite the popularity of farming in Nigeria, the fish farming industry could best be described as one at the infant stage when compared to the large market potential for its production and marketing. This is mainly due to unavailability of fingerlings attributable to inadequate infrastructure for hatcheries for fingerlings, so submitted the writer.

To buttress the gains derivable from locally driven fish farming, however, the minister, speaking at the ministerial platform in commemoration of Democracy Day in Abuja, revealed that Nigeria is saving N300 million yearly from the substitution of imported fish feeds, with an estimate of 25 per cent of the 45,000 metric tonnes imported into the country. He said the country spends about N117.7 billion yearly on the importation of fish feeds, but that four major investors in feeds production had been identified to increase capacity to meet local demands. One is in Plateau State; another is in
Oyo State. There is another in Kaduna State and the fourth is an Israeli company. He gave the assurance that all of them had declared interest in the massive feed production. The minister said 120 prospective investors had been trained in Tilapia production technology to improve total yield. From the look of things, it would appear the government’s approach to fish farming is at best cosmetic and elitist. The government must go to the drawing board to work out strategies to attract young Nigerians and to get financial institutions to provide them soft loans and grants to enable them embark on huge commercial fish farming.

The Federal Ministry of Works should actively collaborate with the 36 states to ensure that there is a workable national synergy for reviving rural roads infrastructure to facilitate movement of produce to the markets. Local industries and factories including hotels should be encouraged by law to patronise these fish products to dampen importation. The National Assembly and the Nigeria’s Governors’ Forum have great roles to play to actualise this objective. The Federal Government must also implement effective and efficient pro-active security measures to protect our marine resources.

A national daily on January 14, 2013 reported that Nigeria loses much of our fish resources to foreign thieves, thus confirming the revelation made by Anyanwu. The newspaper reported thus; “The incursion of foreign trawlers in the fishery segment of the maritime industry is also making Nigeria to lose about N300 billion as a result of inadequate protection of our waters. Instead, we now depend on importation. Right now, Nigeria imports between 700,000 and 900,000 metric tonnes of fish yearly to partially meet a shortfall of about 1,800.00 metric tonnes.”

The newspaper added: “Stakeholders fear that the fishing industry was at the brink of collapse, owing to the dangers of pirates and foreign trawlers. With huge maritime potential of a coastline measuring about 853 kilometers, Nigeria should be self-sufficient in fish production and be able to export aquatic foods.”

The newspaper quoted the Finance Minister, Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, as saying that the security threats in the Gulf of Guinea of which Nigeria is a major problem as these had steadily risen from 45 per cent in 2010 to 64 per cent in 2012, threatening Nigeria’s more than 600 million potential in fishing business. She added that the development had created major economic problems for the country and it should be urgently addressed.

Recently, because of the incessant attacks on fishing crew, the Nigerian Trawler Owners Association (NTOA) called its fleet of over 200 trawlers and 20,000 workers back to the shore, leading to a shortfall in fish supply.

According to NTOA, foreign trawlers from European and Asian countries come to the nation’s coasts to raid tonnes of fish. They come with better industrial trawlers that can stay in the sea for weeks and even months, equipped with ice boxes.

Specifically, the International Maritime Bureau (IMB) said piracy figures and attacks worldwide are on the rise, and cases of death are always recorded. The bureau said that this is a major challenge to the world. Nigeria should therefore check this menace so as to make the fish farming subsector beneficial to the national economy.

• Onwubiko of the Human Rights Writers’ Association of Nigeria.