

FISH PROCESSORS IN NIGERIA APPLY NEW SKILLS FROM TRAINING TO IMPROVE THEIR PRODUCTS AND BUSINESSES

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In December 2022, 75 fish processors (54 women and 21 men) from three senatorial zones in Delta State, Nigeria, gathered together with the purpose of perfecting their craft. Through a training led by the Nourishing Nations activity as part of the Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Fish, these fish processors not only learned about various ways to improve their fish processing business but also received hands-on training to further their skills to become more profitable and provide Nigerians with nutritious fish.



Here, a training facilitator is demonstrating how to make fish-frying batter. (Photos by Bright Okolo, Bright Media)

The Nourishing Nations team worked with training facilitators to develop a manual for participants, covering an extensive list of topics. The topics for the December training included entrepreneurship, access to financial space and funding for fish, fish business plan development, cooperative societies (formation and operation), fish handling techniques such as traditional and modern fish smoking and drying techniques, fish value addition (how to properly price fish based on its quality), and fish packaging techniques. Then, training sessions were held for participants to get hands-on experience with these practices.

Chukwuemeka Israel, programs manager, Mamode Ogoru, director of extension from the Delta Agriculture and Rural Development Authority, Ashoro Collins, the state coordinator of Livelihood Improvement Family Enterprise in the Niger Delta Project, and Ogochukwu Anigbere, of Cultivating New Frontiers in Agriculture's Feed the Future Ag-investment Activity, lauded the training sessions organized by the Fish Innovation Lab's Nourishing Nations team. They noted that the organization and presentation of the training sessions were apt at ensuring improved capacity among the participating fish processors and, on a wider scale, strengthening the fish processing sector in Delta State.

The training topics influenced participants' approaches to their businesses as reflected in some of the responses received after the training sessions.

Pamela Gbemudu and Isichei Elizabeth said about the training, "A business must solve problems, and any business not solving problems cannot be sustained. Additionally, one of the threats to businesses is poor record keeping and an unwillingness to learn."

Bridget Odiakose, Okwugbo Henry, and Esther Edio said that they plan to use the knowledge and practical experiences from the sessions to create a business plan to help them enhance productivity and expand their operation. Comfort Clayer and Okwuesum Pius, among other participants, expressed their excitement about the guidance they received to organize, develop, and register a cooperative society for fish processors in their respective localities.

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Bridget Odiakose and Odogwu Ijeoma recounted the difficulties they had in catfish processing and shared how the training helped them improve their fish handling and fish smoking and drying techniques. One such technique they learned was how to use salt to immobilize the fish and remove the slime from the catfish skin.

Blessing Bosin, Esther Atufe, Nduka Chidi, Awele Nwaeze, and Nwabuokei Juliet have improved their processing units and attribute their business successes to the quality of their smoke-dried fish products, resulting from improved handling techniques and the use of modern smoking kilns.

The participants joined their fellow processors in striving to acquire modern smoking kilns to improve their production and business growth. They also expressed that they now use the improved packaging methods they learned, such as using polyethylene materials, which seal under pressure using a vacuum sealing machine.

Participants were enthusiastic about the practical training sessions, which included processing fish value-added products such as fish-frying batter, fish powder, fish oil, fish eggs, and fish barbecue.

“I have used the knowledge and recipes to make fish-frying batter and fish oil for my home use,” Happy Mansan said. “Mr. Charles Ikodudu and Ossai Stanley have opened a stand in Asaba for commercial fish barbecue processing alongside their smoke-dried fish processing business, expanding their business and income.”

The Nourishing Nations team will be making the training materials available to benefit additional groups of fish processors in the future. Plans are in place with representatives from the Department of Human Nutrition and Dietetics, University of Calabar, Department of Fisheries, Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Delta State, and Delta State Agriculture and Rural Development Authority to ensure these training and capacity-building efforts continue after the Nourishing Nations activity ends.

ABOUT THE FISH INNOVATION LAB

The Fish Innovation Lab supports the United States Agency for International Development’s agricultural research and capacity building work under Feed the Future, the U.S. Government’s global hunger and food security initiative. Mississippi State University is the program’s management entity. The University of Rhode Island, Texas State University, Washington University in St. Louis, and RTI International serve as management partners.

www.feedthefuture.gov
www.fishinnovationlab.msstate.edu