



Have the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) helped fish farmers in Zimbabwe?

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Abstract

Fish farming is fast gaining momentum among rural livelihoods because of its untapped potential to generate employment and improve food security. In Zimbabwe, fish farming is mainly spearheaded by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) aimed at assisting the vulnerable communities. The NGOs are responsible for capacity building programmes which involve staff training and development through workshops and seminars to realize efficiency in aquaculture projects. Several fish farmers in Zimbabwe have received both training and funding from NGOs and this has boosted their aquaculture production. However, despite the efforts of the NGOs to capacitate the fish farmers, several reports of underproduction in fish farming projects have been observed. More so, there has been widespread allegations of corrupt tendency in their management whereby funds meant for fish farming projects are sometimes diverted or are never used for empowering communities as they were intended to. Poor accountability mechanisms in the NGOs impacts negatively on employment creation and food security as other fish farming projects are liquidated because of a lack of transparency and accountability. The objective of this article was to review the contribution made by NGOs in promoting the fish farming sector in Zimbabwe.

Key words: Fish farming, training, Non-Governmental Organization, food security

1 Introduction

Fish farming in Zimbabwe was initiated by the colonial administration with the aim to develop trout farming that included stocking of dams and sport fishing (Moehl et al., 2005). Despite the concept being introduced seven decades ago, Zimbabwe currently does not have a strong tradition of fish farming. In fact, fish farming is an emerging primary industry in the country with a strong regional presence and a good prospect for future growth. However, according to Jamu et al., (2012) the aquaculture sector in Zimbabwe consists of subsistence (household level) and commercial aquaculture producing fish mainly for export and urban markets. Furthermore Jamu et al., (2012) assert that subsistence aquaculture in Zimbabwe is limited to a few pond-based enterprises while the commercial sector is monopolized by Lake Harvest Aquaculture (Pvt) Ltd which produces fish for domestic consumption and exports.

There has been very little input from the government to support new projects and aquaculture funding today still remains a minor priority. Consequently, fish farming is mainly spearheaded by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), as an economic mechanism for generating employment and increasing food security in vulnerable communities (FAO 2012). With the support of these NGOs, fish farming is fast gaining momentum because of its untapped potential to generate employment and improve food security as it provides highly nutritious animal protein and important micronutrients among vulnerable households (FAO 2012). Despite the roles played by the NGOs in supporting fish farming, quite a number of fish farms have either halted or suspended their operations due



to a tirade of reasons. Therefore, it is important to review the roles played by NGOs in capacitating fish farming and assess whether they have assisted the fish farming sector.

1.1 Supportive roles offered to fish farmers by NGOs

Fish farming requires knowledgeable people if it is to succeed. In light of this, various NGOs such as Aquaculture for Life, Aquaculture Zimbabwe and the Zimbabwe Agriculture Knowledge and Innovation Services (Zakis) have conducted training sessions and development through workshops and seminars to realize efficiency in aquaculture projects in different parts of the country. For sustainability purposes, they have conducted a training of trainers (TOT) programme in various districts of the country. These trainees include Agricultural Extension Workers and Community Development Officers. The objective of training these special groups has been to continue training the locals after the NGO pullout (Gambe 2015). The local people have been trained in pond construction skills since they built the ponds on their own. Hatchery ponds have been established and stocked with brood stock to enable replenishment of ponds after harvests. Consequently, the continuity of the programme is guaranteed and this satisfies one of the major determinants (continuity) of sustainability as it is defined by Johnson and Wilson (2000).

Apart from human capital, financial capital is needed in every fish farming project to purchase feed, fertilizer, fishing nets and improvement of ponds (Mankota, 2014). Non-Governmental Organizations have provided for the purchase of inputs such as fish seed, feed and various equipment such as pumps, aerators and tanks (Gono et al., 2015). Extension of technical knowledge among fish farmers and attempts to disseminate information on fish culture is currently weak in Zimbabwe. Therefore, many fish farmers do not receive any technical literature or information from extension staff on technical advisory service on fish production due to shortage of extension personnel (Gono et al., 2015). In this regard quite a number of NGOs have tried to fill this gap by disseminating technical and advisory services to fish farmers. The EU-funded programmes such as SmartFish programme and ZAKIS are some of the NGOs that developed capacity building strategies to advance fish farming in the country (Aquafeed Staff, 2016). In 2017, the government initiated a Command Fisheries Programme aimed at enhancing food and nutrition security, creation of employment opportunities, improving accessibility to fisheries resources and building the resilience of local communities against the effects of climate change. This programme was largely driven by rural communities mostly women and youths at small scale artisanal fisheries level. In support of this command programme, NGOs such as World Vision, Basilwiz Trust and Aquaculture Zimbabwe provided technical expertise on breeding and managing the fish stocks (Nyamukondiwa, 2018). This support and assistance is empirical evidence of the roles undertaken by NGOs in their quest to support fish farming in Zimbabwe.

1.3 Shortcomings of NGOs in supporting fish farmers



Despite the various initiatives undertaken by NGOs to support fish farming in Zimbabwe, questions have been asked if these initiatives have really uplifted the aquaculture sector. It is important to note that the implementation of fish farming has been incapacitated by limited funding from the donor community. Donor agencies have failed to adequately fund local NGOs. This in turn has resulted in the selective implementation of fish farming projects as some communities are left marginalized. Furthermore, there are challenges emanating from the high-level bureaucracy in the donor community which requires strong accountability to boards of directors and government ministries that release funding (Shava and Gunhidzira, 2017). Although some fish farmers have received support from NGOs such as Aquaculture Zimbabwe, quite a number of them have indicated that the level of support received was insufficient. Therefore, with this meager financial support, many operators are struggling hence they are failing to grow beyond subsistence production and access reliable markets that pay competitively. More so some NGOs do not make a follow-up after initiating these fish farming projects thus leaving the prospective fish farmer with a burden to manage the projects on their own. In many cases these projects collapse (Nkala, 2020).

Non-Governmental Organizations have been hailed for the various trainings they have offered to fish farmers. However, it has been noted that most of these trainings have been given for the sake of training without some important understanding of what the market wants. For example, big food chains such as Ok do not buy fish just because they have been delivered at their doorstep. They have certain specifications that must be met by the supplier. Therefore, with the training that most farmers have, they fail to clinch these key markets and they end up selling their fish to individuals at low prices which is discouraging since fish farming is hard work and they sometimes get little profit (Nkala, 2020). In addition, some sections of the society have accused these NGOs of harbouring their own agenda under the guise of supporting livelihoods in the form of training and provision of inputs.

The success of NGOs in Zimbabwe rests on their ability to earn legitimacy with the people and government. Unfortunately, legitimacy and political interference from government have been two major setbacks affecting fish farming in Zimbabwe. Non-Governmental Organizations indulging in fish farming projects are required to seek approval from traditional leadership (Chiefs, Village Herds) and local municipality which often derails this poverty reduction strategy (Shava and Gunhidzira, 2017). It is also important to note that NGOs have their own governance and management structures in place. However, these structures are abused by those at the helm of power. As a result, there is rampant mismanagement and resource misallocation; thus, paving the way to the collapse of various fish farming projects. There are widespread corrupt tendencies in the management whereby funds meant for fish farming projects are sometimes diverted or were never used for empowering communities as they were intended to. Furthermore, poor accountability mechanisms in the NGOs impacted negatively as quite a number of fish farming projects were liquidated because of a lack of transparency and accountability (Shava and Gunhidzira, 2017).

2 Conclusion and recommendations



Non-Governmental Organizations have and continue to support various initiatives of the fish farming sector. Some beneficiaries of NGO funding have benefitted financially and nutritionally from fish farming thereby enhancing their financial capital and partly human capital. On the other hand, some beneficiaries have indicated that the level of financial support received is insufficient to meet operational costs and some farmers have either halted or suspended operations. It can therefore be argued that NGOs are probably overwhelmed by the amount of financial support required by fish farmers, which in this regard may be beyond their capacity. However, it is important to note that at least some sectors of this industry are benefitting.

Non-Governmental Organizations have been accused of neglecting fish farmers once they assist them in initiating their projects. It is therefore recommended that they make follow-ups so as to support the new farmer. The NGOs are further recommended to increase networking with the donor community which is fundamental in attracting sustainable funding. Apart from providing financial and technical support, NGOs should negotiate on behalf of fish farmers with big supermarkets such as Pick n Pay and OK Zimbabwe so that the fish farmers enter bigger contracts with these supermarkets. Furthermore, NGOs should facilitate market-oriented training, i.e. train the farmers so that they will be able to produce what the market wants. This would build strong linkages between the farmer and the market.

In conclusion, regardless of their shortcomings and weaknesses in their endeavour to support fish farming in Zimbabwe, NGOs have done tremendous work in raising awareness, training fish farmers and also giving both technical and financial support.

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