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Gambia: Fishing Businesses in Gambia

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BANJUL, Gambia, June 30, 2015 (The Daily Observer) -- The fisheries sector, apart from providing a valuable source of sustenance and protein for the Gambian people, is also a major employer as well as a vital source of foreign exchange for the government and businesses involved in the export of fish.

The artisanal sector is the major producer of cured fish as about 40% is marketed and consumed smoked and/or dried. Fish is the cheapest source of animal protein in the country, and traditional processing of fish in The Gambia is an important means of making fish available to consumers, especially those living in rural Gambia.

Requirements for fishing business

The rules governing the establishment of fish export and processing businesses in The Gambia are governed by the 1995 fisheries regulations, thus it would be prudent to familiarize yourself with these regulations in order to avoid the risk of closure or the refusal of the issuance of a permit.

The said fisheries regulations stated that all fish processing export businesses in The Gambia should provide detailed feasibility studies that cover all aspects of their operations, including sources of supplies, construction, quality control measures, management & financial analysis.

Fisheries sector contributes 12% to GDP

The fisheries sector contributes approximately 12% to the Gambia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) thus the sector has huge scope for growth in the future as most of the fishing done within

the country's waters are 'artistically' - done by local fishermen using local equipment.

Anyone looking to invest in or start up a business within the fishing industry should have long term viability and the zeal to bring in steady, if not spectacular returns, should seriously consider the fish export business.

How to start fishing industry

Before starting up fishing industry you need to put in place all the logistics needed. This involves getting in contact with fishermen, fishing companies and middlemen who will act as your suppliers.

You will also need to know about issues like the availability of storage and processing facilities and how much it will cost you to procure and run these facilities. Getting office space for running of the administrative side of the business and the hiring of staff are also important for getting started.

Where to do your marketing

Fish, of course, is consumed all over the world but when trying to pinpoint where to export your product to, the entrepreneur has to consider a number of factors like proximity, accessibility, size, income level and economies of scale.

Meeting requirements of export market

However, for many years now under the flexibility of the GATT agreement, The Gambia and other African Caribbean and Pacific nations (ACP) have had preferential non-reciprocal trading agreements with the EU under the Cotonou Agreement.

This allows The Gambia and other Africa Caribbean and Pacific countries to export fish and other commodities to the EU without having tariffs & import duties imposed on them. The creation of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) has however changed things as tariffs are being slashed across the board, eroding whatever advantages Africa Caribbean Pacific (ACP) countries had.

Market for smoke fish

The market for smoked fish is expanding, although inadequate market information and low level of organisation among producers and traders limit the efficiency of the trade. To do so the market for smoked fish and status of the cured fish industry in The Gambia is analysed thus the existing methods of fish processing in The Gambia are reviewed.

Fish handling

Methods of fish handling and processing are generally inadequate and result in major fish losses and therefore this handling and processing techniques need to be improved.

This will improve the quality of cured products, increasing availability and nutritional values of the fish to consumers and profitability for the producers. For the cured fish industry to experience growth and gain better access to lucrative markets, there is a need for an organised and structured cured fish industry with a reliable information network.

Fisheries in The Gambia, comprised of the artisanal and industrial sub-sectors, which contribute about 5% to the GDP and in 1999, total fish landings were estimated at about 40,000 tones out of which, industrial landings were estimated at about 10,000 tones, which were mainly exported as frozen products.

Export of fish yield 10%

Catches of all foreign industrial fishing vessels licensed to fish in Gambian waters are landed outside the country, processed and labeled as products of foreign countries for exports.

Therefore, the value of trade within the fish industry emanating from The Gambia is underestimated. The artisanal fisheries sub-sector in The Gambia provides about 90% of the domestic fish supply and employs the majority of Gambians in the fishing industry.

The climate in The Gambia is warm (up to 40°C) and sometimes, a large part of the artisanal catch that cannot be marketed immediately is smoked or dried for preservation.

This sector is the major producer of cured fish, as about 40% of the annual artisanal catch is marketed and consumed smoked and/or dried. Smoked products are hot- smoked or smoked-dry depending on market requirements.

Gambians involve from production to marketing

As Gambians we become more involved in fisheries activities, from production to marketing, there is evidence that the cured fish trade has been growing while in the past the sector was dominated by foreign nationals.

Fish production has increased and consequently the market for cured fish has expanded with products distributed not only to remote parts of the country but also to the sub-regional markets.

Since many of the fishermen in the country did not have capital to start their business to have their own nets and canoes, they usually needed as loan to get started their business.

During the dry season, shrimp sizes were large, but the number of tons caught declined and during that season, knowing that they could make a handsome profit reselling them to the hotels.

Fisheries sector provide employment

Fisheries sector in the country provides employment to over 20, 000 people, the vast majority of whom are in the artisanal sector while men are normally involved in large- scale fish smoking for domestic and export marketing.

The predominant fishing method is gillnet encirclement of bonga which makes up, on average, 73% of total artisanal marine landings and is the cheapest and most affordable fish for the average Gambian.

Varieties of fish

Species are also landed including croakers, jacks, mackerels, catfish, and barracudas, however fishing and related activities have been gradually growing and due to their strategic locations and abundant fish resources, skilled fishers from around the sub-region have migrated to Gambian coastal villages where some have settled.

The fish traders in The Gambia buys their fresh bonga fish at the foot of the canoes of fishermen at the riverside and transport them to the various market outlets within the country mainly through vehicles, bicycles or trucks.

It is only those fishermen who have access to ice can distribute better fish and get good economic gains from their sales especially those fishermen who do trek to provincial Gambia for marketing. **(END)**