

2. ETHNICITY AND SOCIAL NETWORKS IN A FISH MARKETING SYSTEM, WARRI, NIGERIA

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Introduction

Fish is an important source of protein for the middle-class and elites across Nigeria, and also for poorer people in regions close to producing areas. Additionally, the fish trade offers substantial employment opportunities in many coastal and inland areas where fish is caught.

This study considers the marketing and transportation systems for fish in one coastal settlement, Warri, with particular reference to the socio-cultural milieu.

The basic issues addressed are:

- What is the pattern of gendering in the marketing and transportation processes?
- How do ethnic networks operate to facilitate or impede the marketing and transportation processes?
- What role do ethnicity and social capital play in the assignment, control and management of market space?
- To what extent does social capital facilitate the marketing process?

The attention on these issues may throw up other critical ones fundamental in marketing re-organisation and the access of food (in this case fish) to the urban poor. For instance, in the process of analysing these issues, impediments to an effective fish marketing and transportation will be identified and examined.

Study location

This study focuses on Warri, a city located about 109 km. from the coast, and the largest urban centre in the Western Niger Delta Region. With an annual growth rate of 9.84 percent (Imoroa, 2000), its population is now (2005) estimated to be more than 800, 000 (it was 218,000 in the 1991 Census). Three aspects of its location are of particular significance:

- It is around the meeting area of three ecological zones: mangrove swamp, fresh water swamp and lowland rainforest.
- It is at the boundary area of three ethnic groups: Ijaw, Itsekiri and Urhobo.
- It is the administrative capital of the petroleum industry in the Western Niger Delta Region.

The location of Warri around the transition zone of the mangrove swamp, fresh water swamp and lowland rainforest implies that, being the largest town in the western Niger Delta region, it is strategically placed to command the exchange of commodities from these zones. Significant as these zones are, a much broader categorisation of the region into an “upland” and a “riverine” delta or an “inner” and an “outer” delta is more meaningful in the context of this study. The upland or inner delta, made up of the lowland rainforest and parts of the fresh water swamp zones, is characteristically a producer of tuber food crops such as yam and cassava and related crops such as plantain. Fishing is the main occupation of the outer delta with some cultivation of plantain and cassava. Beyond Warri, towards the coast, only water transport is possible currently since there are no road links. Warri is thus not only an agricultural production boundary but also that of transportation.

Its location at the transition zone of three ethnic groups has resulted in its being one of the most, if not the most contested, urban areas in Nigeria. Each of the ethnic groups lays claim to all or part of the city. Consequently, ethnic conflict has become endemic in the city. The ethnic factor has been complicated by the city's significance as a centre of the oil industry. Commonly referred to as *the oil city*, the contest in the city has both ethnic and economic coloration. The control of the crumbs from the oil companies has been fundamental in the ethnic conflicts in and around the city. This largely explains why the inter-ethnic conflicts in the city have been particularly violent since the 1970s when oil emerged as the mainstay of the country's economy. Of all the incidences, those of the late 1990s have been the most vicious, marked by unprecedented loss of life and property.

The marketing and transportation processes of fish in Warri reflect this socio-cultural and economic complexities that have become characteristic of the city. The processes throw up not only ethnic and gender issues but also those of exclusion/inclusion. The largest fish market in the city - Ogbe Ijoh Market - provides an ideal setting for analysis. Ogbe Ijoh Market, located at the waterfront is the first point of contact between riverine and upland traders. It was the first area to be settled in Warri and hence provided the nucleus around which the city grew (Lloyd, 1974). Until the 1990s, it was the most ethnically complex market in the city.

The inter-ethnic conflicts between the Ijaw and the Itsekiri and between the Itsekiri and Urhobo in the 1990s led to an ethnic segregation of fish marketing in the city. In particular, the Itsekiri and, to some extent, the Ilaje, generally perceived to be allies of the Itsekiri, regarded the market as unsafe, preferring Pesu and other smaller fish markets. Some Urhobos also preferred the inland Igbudu, which is generally perceived to be an Urhobo market. Although at the time of the fieldwork, Ilaje traders have started returning to the market, the population remained largely Ijaw and Urhobo, with the former predominating.

Methods

Data were collected in December 2004 and January 2005 in Warri, Delta State, the study location. A number of approaches were employed to obtain data from key actors. These are:

- Observation and reconnaissance.
- Focus group discussion.
- Semi-structured interviews.

In addition to these secondary sources were useful.

Observation and Reconnaissance were aided by the author's prior knowledge of aspects of the market, such as its location and ethnic character of key actors. The reconnaissance was used to obtain details on various aspects of the characteristics of the market, such as unions and administration of the market. This proved very useful in subsequent stages of data collection. For instance, whereas the author thought that there was only one central union of fish traders, it turned out to be two for each of Ijaw and Urhobo traders and another for Ilaje traders. Furthermore, the existence of the position of a central market chairman distinct from a Union Chairperson, was not envisaged.

Apart from observing the physical structure and arrangement of stalls in terms of the type of fish sold in given areas and the location of ethnic groups within the market, the haggling process in several instances was also observed. The latter provided information on the price-fixing process and the peculiar language/idioms of the marketing process, such as *fire-down* and *broke-manage*. *Fire-down* means quoting an exceedingly high price and hence necessitating, in many cases, a rather long haggling process while *broke-manage* refers to relatively small-sized fish which has broken into several pieces in the course of transportation and handling. Although the market meets daily, there are specified four-day interval market days. It was therefore necessary to observe the settings in both 'ordinary days' and 'market days'.

Focus Group Discussion: Six different focus group discussions (FGDs), one for each of the five market unions and for the union of porters (locally referred to as *carry-carry*) were conducted. The market unions are:

- The two Ijaw unions: Abala Ere Igbe and Better Life Indi fe zere Igbe.
- The two Urhobo Unions: Egherimo and Ufuoma Ineki Iyerin.
- The one Ilaje fish sellers Union: the Young Shall Grow.

In each case, the focus group was the executive committee together with a few others. The varied issues discussed included among others the authority structure, the functions and functioning, the basis for membership, relationship with other unions, the control of market, aspects of the marketing chain, security

and problems. All the discussions were tape-recorded with the facilitator (the author) taking notes where need be. The discussions were in pidgin English except the first two which were, in addition, conducted in the native language.

The focus group discussion involving the *carry-carry* revolved around issues of unionization, membership, the organisation of the trade, ethnic, gender and age-group composition, and relationship with fish traders and boat transport operators. Other issues included security and general problems. The discussion which was in pidgin English was also tape-recorded.

Semi-Structured Interviews: This was the most extensive survey, covering several members of each of the unions including the *carry-carry* and the boat owners/operators unions. The number covered in each union was informed by its size. For instance, among the traders unions, the largest number (fifteen) came from Abala Ere and the least (five) from the Ilaje union. In addition, the Chairman of the market was interviewed. At the time these interviews were conducted, so much rapport between the author and the respondents had been established that information was volunteered freely. Whereas some were tape-recorded, others were recorded through note taking.

The interview of the traders focused on entry into trade, capital, fish procurement process, stall acquisition, control of market space, benefits of belonging to unions and other associations, links with other traders, *carry-carry* and boat operators and problems faced, among others. In the case of *carry-carry*, the emphasis was on processes of the trade, reasons for choice and problems. The role of transport in the marketing chain relationship with other actors were the central issues in the boat operators interviews while in the case of the Market Chairman, the emphasis was on the organisation and functioning of the market.

Secondary Sources: This study relies overwhelmingly on primary sources of data. However, secondary information such as population figures from publications of the National Population Commission and on the early settlement history of Warri, mainly from colonial intelligence reports have been useful.

The commodity chain

The fish marketing chain is an amalgam of economic, geographical and socio-cultural orientations. The chain itself (which is analyzed in a subsequent section) starts with the harvesting of fish in several fishing villages/hamlets and terminates in the consumption centres of several cities. Each stage of the chain depicts varying intricacies of organisation and relationships. These organisational structures and relationships provide the building blocks of this study.

Different stages of the chain involve the participation of different age groups, different genders, various ethnic groups and people at different levels of

prosperity/poverty. The relationships in the interaction within a given stage and between one and others involve several networks of ethnicity, gendering and social capital particularly trust. It is the pattern of interaction within the fish marketing chain involving several socio-economic and geographical networks, with varying ramifications that is the focus of this study.

Gender and ethnicity in the marketing chain

Figure 1 shows the fish marketing chain from the point of production (fish catch) to that of the final consumers. The functioning of the several stages reflect clear division of labour on the basis of gender and, to an extent, age. The fish production centres are scattered over the creeks and rivers of Delta and Bayelsa States. The most significant centres (according to the traders and the transporters) are Agee, Amatu, Agoro, Ekeni, Letugbene and Frupa (in Bayelsa State). and Odimodi, Ogulagha, old Forcados, Yeye, Yokri, Ikeremo, and Oporoza (Delta State).

Although the fish harvesting process is the responsibility of both male and female, the initial marketing is the sole responsibility of women. The initial marketing is a curious one. The fish caught is usually sold to the local women of the villages normally to the wife or wives of the fisherman who caught the fish. Why is the fish which in certain cases a woman participated in catching sold to her? The explanation by the market women in Warri is that this is a way of creating an alternative source of income for the local women. It is also an attempt to replace women from outside the region, such as itinerant Itsekiri and Urhobo traders who hitherto bought the fish, smoke it and sold same in Warri and other urban centres. The replacement of these women was facilitated by the ethnic conflict in the Western Niger Delta Region which made it unsafe for them to stay in these villages. Although, some of these 'external' women still continue to perform this function, the wives' system is the predominant particularly given that some of these 'external women' sometime ultimately marry such fishermen. Such home-based commodity trade, though in a slightly different form, has been reported in other studies. For instance, in parts of northern Nigeria, women buy grains and groundnut from their husbands for resale after processing or even back to their husbands at higher prices during the pre-harvest period of relative scarcity (Hill, 1969; Jackson, 1985). In the Gambia, fishermen frequently sell fish to their women relatives, not necessarily be their wives, who then process same and sell to middlemen or in the towns (Barrett, 1988).

The fish, either fresh or smoked, is loaded into boats usually by young males. These local *carry-carry* are usually supported by the "boat boys" who play a central role in protecting the fish during transport to Warri. Although the local *carry-carry* and the boat boys are usually of Ijaw ethnic nationality, the boat ownership is much more diverse. The boats are owned by not only Ijaws but also Urhobos and Ilajes. Although, apart from the paddle-propelled canoe, there are three types of boats - in-board, out-board and speed-boat (Ikporukpo, 1985; 1987), it is only the latter two that are commonly involved in the transport of fish.

The speed boat, being faster, is characteristically employed in the movement of fresh fish while the smoked, usually in larger quantities, is transported through out-board boats.

As Figure 1 indicates, the discharge of the fish in the jetties of Warri, is the next stage in the chain and brings into contact the transporter, the *carry-carry* and the market women. The relationship among these three actors will be analyzed further in the sub-section on trust in the fish supplier-transporter-trader link. The movement of the boats is synchronized such that they arrive Warri the evening preceding the market day or early in the morning of the market day.

The *carry-carry* who provide a direct link between the transporters and the market women discharge the fish. They work in gangs of between 5 and 10 with each gang attached to specific boats. The charges of these porters depend on the size of the basket of fish. There are three types of baskets, viz: *Lagos basket*, *Onitsha basket* and *market basket*. The first type, as the name suggests is for fish commonly bought by traders from Lagos on market days and is the largest attracting the highest discharging fee. This is followed by the second, i.e. baskets commonly transported to Onitsha city and lastly the baskets terminating in the market at Warri. The boat freight rates also vary on the basis of these baskets.

The carry-carry gangs made up of young men from a diverse ethnic background, such as Ijaw, Urhobo, Ibo and Hausa do not admit young ladies. The exclusion of females was explained by the strenuous and hazardous nature of the trade. As one member of the executive retorted (when asked by the author why ladies are not among them): "Will you allow your daughter or sister to be a carry-carry"?

Virtually all *carry-carry* interviewed and the executive committee perceives the trade as a stop-gap in the search for better jobs. Many including the executive committee argue that since it is more or less a temporary engagement and given the harsh economic reality, there are no restrictions on entering the trade by any willing young man. As a member of the executive committee put it:

The economic condition in Warri is really bad. Given the fact that there has been ethnic conflict resulting in destruction of life and property, the employment opportunities have dwindled. Many individuals are suffering. There are no good jobs available. Therefore we accept any one who wants to become a carry-carry. However, that individual must be willing to work under a gang head (translated from pidgin English by author).

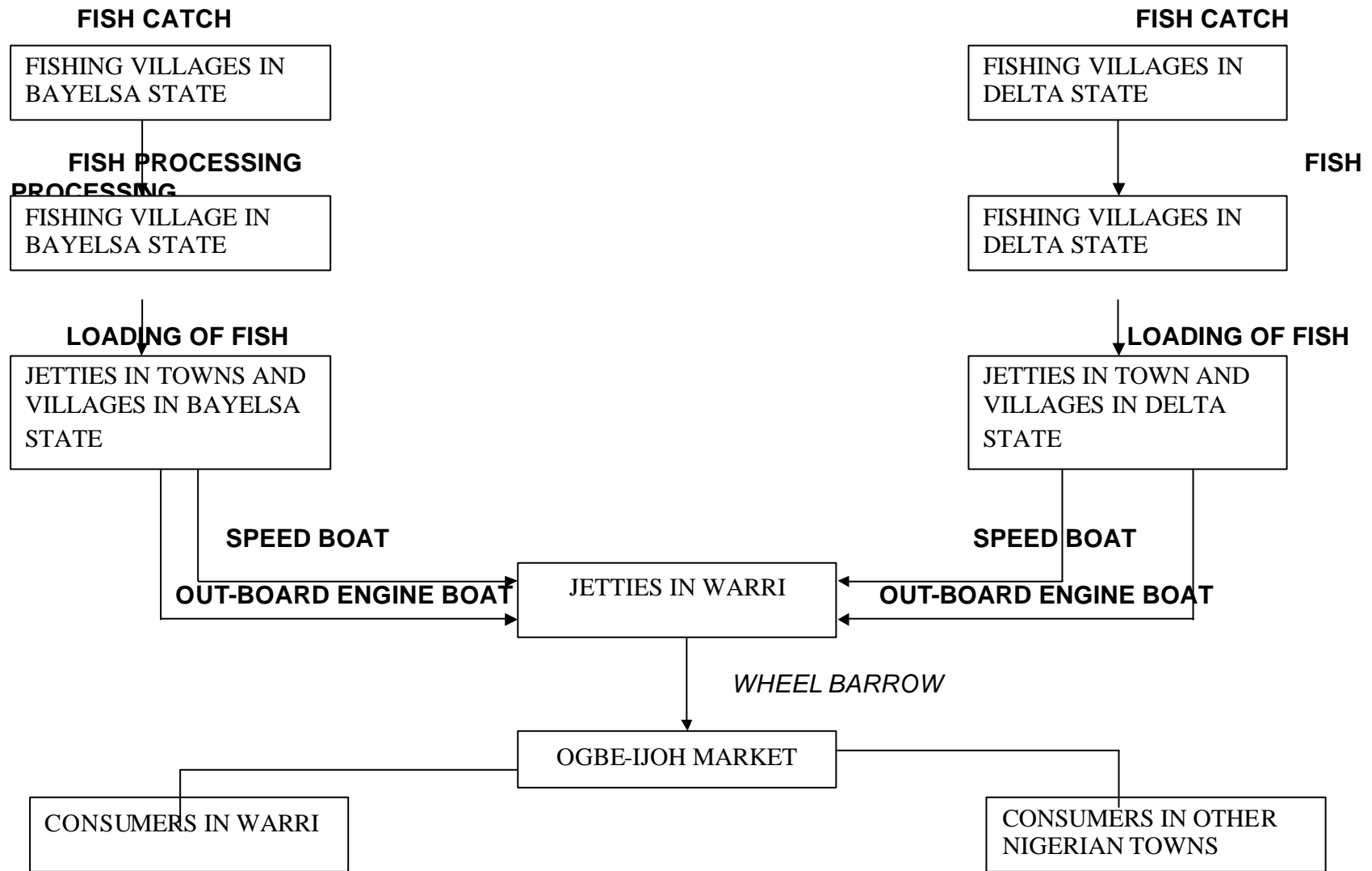


Fig. 1: Fish Market Chain

Once off-loaded the next stage is the movement of the fish to the market by the *carry-carry* using mainly wheelbarrows. From the Ogbe Ijoh market, wholesalers purchase and transport some of the fish to large cities such as Lagos and Onitsha while the *market basket* fish is either purchased by local consumers or bought and sold in other fish markets within the metropolis. It is remarkable that all those selling fish in the market are female. As one respondent put it, "it is only a shameless man that will come to the market to sell fish". The executive members of one of the unions emphasized the exclusion of men thus: "We cannot admit a man to our union. He should rather tell his wife to apply to be a member". A predominance of females in the distributive trade and in other cases their significance have been widely reported in several studies in Nigeria and other African countries (Adalemo, 1972; Chilirambo and Kanyangwa, 1984; Adekanye, 1988; Porter, 1988; Osirim, 1994; Mathabane, 1994; Horn, 1994 & 1995; Zhou, 1995; Tripp, 1997; Levin *et al*, 1999). However, such a sole female participation as observed in this study is rather unique.

Control of Market Space

The control of market space is a fundamental aspect of the functioning of a market and indeed of the market chain. It usually reflects several aspects of the relationships among the actors in a market. A central issue which shapes the nature of and the struggle for control is ethnicity and the related one of unionization given the fact that all the market unions, except the related ones of transportation and portage, are based on ethnic association. Three key aspects of control are of interest. These are:

- (i) Geographic space (stalls and related ones).
- (ii) Selling space (entry to trade and general functioning).
- (iii) Security space (law, order and safety).

For a proper appreciation of these issues, the structure of authority within the Ogbe Ijoh fish market needs be provided. Figure 2 displays the authority structure. The first hierarchy within the market is the market chairman. He is appointed not by the various unions or even the local government but by the people of the settlement of Ogbe Ijoh, the owners of the land where the market is located. Given the fact that Ogbe Ijoh is an Ijaw settlement and the fact that the Chairman must be an indigene of the settlement, the Ijaw ethnic group seems to have established a framework for dominance. It is also a basis for male control in a market where only females sell as there has and may never be a female Chairman. This is because the chairman is usually chosen from the youthful male age-grades. According to the current Market Chairman and executive members of the unions, the position is a recent one emerging only in the 1990s when there was inter-ethnic crisis in the city. The Chairman explained that the position emerged as a strategy for invigorating a market threatened by disintegration at a time it was very unsafe to buy and sell in the market. Unlike, the situation during the Yoruba wars where women traders

from different warring groups could meet rather safely in neutral grounds between them (Hodder and Ukwu, 1969) in the Warri setting not even children were safe. As the Chairman put it, the position was necessitated by the need to “hold the market together and prevent attack from the enemies”.

As Figure 2 indicates, the next hierarchy is made up of the market unions. In theory, the unions ought to have equal authority, rights and privileges. Indeed, this was so before the Warri crisis of the 1990s. In practice, the two Ijaw unions (Abala Ere and Better Life) have more authority and privileges than the others. The Chairman explained the situation thus: “this is our market. The Urhobos have Igbudu market and the Itsekiri, Pesu market. We should be in charge here”. The setting is that the ethnic crisis in the Western Niger Delta, particularly in Warri, polarized the ethnic groups with each curling into its ethnic space shell and attempting to protect its territory to the exclusion of other ethnic groups. This largely explains why the Ilaje ethnic group union (the Young Shall Grow) is particularly disadvantaged as the group has only recently returned to the market after several years of absence. The current absence of Itsekiri fish sellers is also due to the crisis. Below this hierarchy are the *carry-carry* and security guards.

There is a clear division of space in the geographic organisation of the market. The waterfront part of the market is occupied predominantly by the Ijaw with only a very few Urhobos and Ilajes. This is the most strategically located part of the market in terms of access to the fish offloading jetties. Across the road (Market Road), which divides the market into two, are the two separate areas occupied by each of Urhobo and Ilaje traders. This part of the market has uncompleted buildings and stores and according to the traders was assigned to them by the local government (i.e. Warri South local government). Traders pay rent to the local government.

The difference between this area and that occupied by the Ijaws is that the stalls in the latter were built by the traders. The basis for this difference is embedded in the ethnic relations history of the city. Although, Ogbe Ijoh is the first fish market, others notably Pesu were later provided by the local/State government.

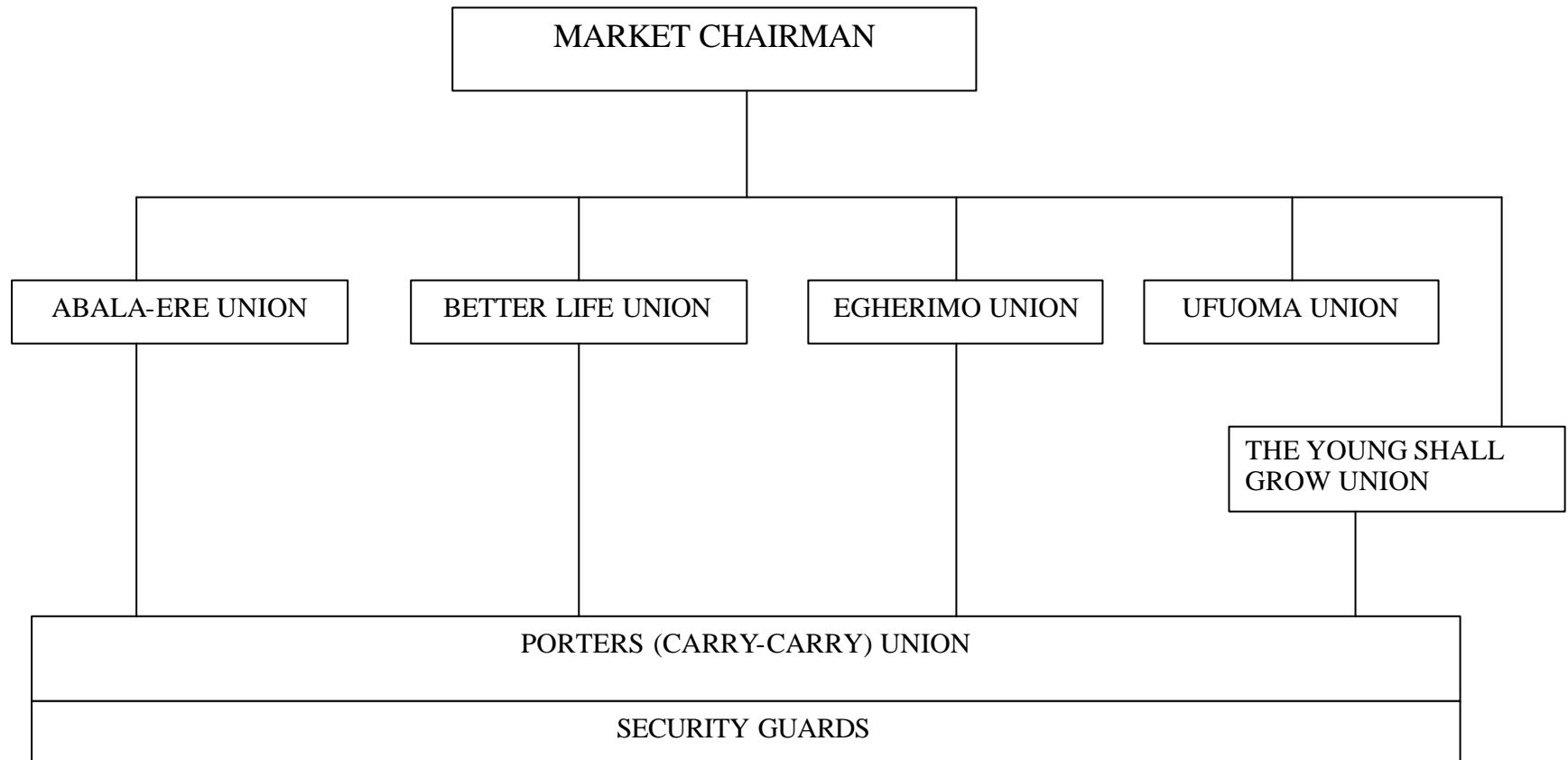


Fig. 2: Structure of Authority of Ogb-Ijoh Market

When a decision to rebuild and modernize the market was taken in the 1970s, all the traders here were relocated temporarily to Pesu. However, when the ethnic crisis got to its zenith in 1990s, Ijaw traders were forced to flee Pesu, perceived as an Itsekiri market. Meanwhile, construction in Ogbe Ijoh market had been abandoned with no building fully completed. Faced with this reality, the Ijaw traders together with a few Urhobos decided to erect stalls in that part of the market at the water front where no construction had started. The result is that the stalls constructed are under the control of the Ijaw Unions which assign them to would-be, largely Ijaw, traders. This explains the Ijaw traders' reluctance to pay dues to the local government. The basic fact is thus that whereas the Ijaws have almost absolute control over the stalls they occupy, this is not true of Urhobo and Ilaje traders. The Itsekiri who under normal circumstances would prefer to trade in this market, because of its size and strategic significance, have remained in Pesu because of safety concerns.

The increasing number of traders with a consequent shortage of stalls has complicated the issue of space control. A situation where a stall is occupied by two or three traders, particularly in the water front section, has emerged. The result is that a class differentiation of the traders based on "original stall occupant" and "new occupant" has emerged. In most cases, the "new occupant" starts off as a *table stall trader*, displaying her fish on a table just outside a stall. She typically sells *broke manage*. This type of fish is typically bought by the poor, because, apart from its being cheap, the sellers also typically do not *fire-down*, i.e. quote an exceedingly high price at the beginning of the haggling process. The urban poor cannot afford a whole fish particularly the highly priced *shine-nose* (i.e. thread-fins), the haggling for which is typically characterized by *fire-down*. The *table-stall trader* becomes a full-scale trader as her resources grow. Usually such a trader pays token dues to the stall occupant, the value of which depends on sales and relationship to the latter. For close relations, no dues are paid.

The control of selling space does not only reflect ethnicity but also unionization. The selling space is dominated by the Ijaw ethnic group who argue that since the market is theirs and the fish usually originates from their villages, all aspects of buying and selling in the market must be controlled by them. There is thus an attempt to ensure that traders from other ethnic groups do not buy fish directly from the fishing villages but from them who will in turn buy from the villagers. Although this policy is enforced from time to time, it does not apply in all cases. For instance, most traders who have a long history of trading in the market are hardly ever affected. In general, it is relatively new entrants to the trade that are subjected to such exclusionist policy. Understandably, the Ilaje traders who are returning to the trade are the most affected.

Exclusion based on unionization is a much wider practice. As the focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews indicate, all the market unions do not allow non-members to sell in the market. Indeed, non-members are even not allowed to claim their baskets of fish from boats berthing in the jetties. Rather,

this can only be done on their behalf by a member who will also arrange for the sale, usually with a commission. The control is so effective that even a *carry-carry* will not convey a non-member's basket even if discharged from a boat. Such controls by unions are characteristic of several West African markets (Smith and Luttrell, 1994; Lyon, 2000).

The control of security in the market and the maintenance of law and order are shared responsibilities of the Chairman and the executive committees of the various unions. Guards, made up of young Ijaw and Hausa men are usually employed by the Chairman who sees to their discipline. However, the funds for their remuneration are provided by the traders on the basis of a monthly due paid by each occupant of a stall. However, where there is conflict among members of a union, this is settled by the executive committee which normally imposes a fine. Where the executive committee is unable to settle the dispute, the Chairman becomes the final arbiter. It is not usual to invite the police, even in cases of theft.

The internal mechanism for settling disputes by the Chairman was emphasized by one respondent thus: "No police can come in here (i.e. the market) to arrest anyone without the permission of the Chairman. The Chairman settles all quarrels". The Chairman himself put this more succinctly thus:

Usually the police does not come here to arrest anyone without my permission. There is an agreement (gentleman's agreement) that if there is any breach of peace or any crime committed here, I am expected to resolve the issue. It is only cases I cannot resolve that are taken over by the police. Where I take over cases that have already been reported to the police, I inform them accordingly after resolving them.

Social networks

Social networks are key to understanding relationships among actors in the fish marketing chain (Portes and Landolt, 2000, 532; Perreault, 2003). This is particularly obvious in the relationship among traders, transporters and the fishing folk. The trader-fishing folk relationship is examined here. Other aspects are analyzed in a subsequent sub-section.

Each market woman has a well-defined and usually more or less secured source of fish supply, apart from subsidiary ones. The relationship is established through assistance to the fisherman/woman. The semi-structured interviews of the traders reveal that it is a wide-spread practice by the more established and richer traders. Typically, the trader buys a net or other fishing gears and in some cases a canoe (mechanically propelled or paddle propelled) for a fisherman (usually a relation or acquaintance) who in turn promises to send his catch to the

trader for sale in Warri. The trader sells the fish and sends the money to the fisherman, although some form of commission is charged. The trader gets an additional income through *shed-money* which is an extra payment on the basis of number of baskets by those who buy a large number of fish baskets.

The fisherman/woman is expected to pay over a period of time the amount spent on the fishing gear. Usually the trader does not deduct the amount, or part thereof, from the fish sold except the fisherman expressly so indicate. The traders interviewed asserted that the fisherman gains because he in the process acquires a gear he cannot afford while the trader's benefit is in terms of steady fish supply. The system is obviously based on trust given that the fisherman believes the trader can not cheat him in terms of the price of the gear and the sale of the fish while the trader is convinced that the fisherman will send him the fish caught and at the same time pay the "loan" on the gear. The traders asserted that this is an age long practice and has always worked out well. Even in cases where the fisherman's net gets lost in the sea, this is never doubted and any amount not yet paid by the fisherman is written off as a "bad debt".

Be this confidence in the system as it may, two respondents reported cases of betrayal of trust. One gave her experience thus:

I bought a powered canoe for a gentleman who promised to pay later and also send me fish for sale regularly. He sent me fish for a while and stopped. He bluntly refused to pay the amount I spent. It was the cooperative society of my home-town association that facilitated my buying the canoe. I have now lost all my contributions in the cooperative society. Unfortunately, because the man is my husband's relation, there is nothing I can do about it. I do not want to create a problem within my family (translated from a local language by author).

The second lady's experience is slightly different. She asserted, rather angrily:

A woman appealed to me to provide her a canoe and nets, promising to send the fish caught for sale by me. She really has been sending me the fish but has refused to pay the money I spent. She has promised and disappointed me several times. She is Urhobo. I cannot unilaterally deduct the money from her fish I sell. However, since it is more than two years now, I intend to get my money unilaterally. I have been patient enough. She can, if she so wish, stop sending me fish for sale (translated from pidgin/a local language by author).

The contrast in the debt-recovery orientation of the two trader-actors, seems to suggest that the significance of trust does not necessarily depend on how close relationships are. However, the reaction to a breach of trust may be determined

by factors such as closeness of relationships. It is usually more difficult to collect debts from close relatives.

Trust in the fish supplier-transporter-trader link

The issue of social networks and trust, which was analyzed in the preceding sub-section, is also apparent in the relationship among fishermen, transporters and traders. This is reflected in the approach employed in sending fish from the villages to Warri for sale.

As indicated in the previous sub-section, most traders have secured fish suppliers. The supplier usually does not take the fish to his customer in Warri. What he does is to send the fish through the transporters in clearly market baskets. Depending on the level of literacy, some baskets have the names of the customer written on them. Inside the fish basket is a letter to the trader in Warri indicating a recommended selling price. The fish-supplier is usually abreast of the market situation and therefore is likely to indicate a realistic price.

When the fish arrives the jetty in Warri, the trader negotiates with the boat operator/owner and pays the agreed freight rate. The fish is then discharged and taken to the market stall by the *carry-carry* gang. Even where the trader is not around when the fish arrives, it is taken to her stall and the necessary payments made later. After sale, the money is sent to the fish supplier through the transporter.

In spite of the efficacy of the system, failures are recorded from time to time. The typical failures indicated by traders, transporters and *carry-carry* include:

- Loss of fish in transit.
- Non-delivery of money sent to fish suppliers.
- Mix-up of the identification labels of baskets.
- Disagreement on the freight rate.

In each of these cases, attempts are made to resolve the issue amicably in order not to destroy the trust built over the years.

Constraints in the marketing chain

Some of the problems confronting an effective functioning of the marketing chain have been alluded to. However, those expressly indicated by the actors require some attention. The most fundamental of these are:

- (i) Infrastructural.
- (ii) Exclusion.
- (iii) Hidden Insecurity.

(iv) Inaccess to funds.

The basic problem of infrastructure is the lack of stalls and stores. This is a problem reported by all the traders and it is in part related to the fact that the construction of the market has been abandoned for a long time. The sections occupied by the Urhobo and Ilaje traders are such that there cannot be any meaningful buying and selling when it rains. The Ijaw unions argue that they cannot understand the situation where Igbudu (Urhobo market) and Pesu (Itsekiri market) were completed and theirs abandoned. They assert that this is injustice and a marginalisation of the ethnic group.

The issue of exclusion is one raised by the Urhobo and particularly the Ilaje respondents. They argue that their Ijaw colleagues have consistently attempted to cut-off their fish supplies in order to establish themselves as middlemen. They also argue that they have remained marginalized in the operation of the jetties along the waterfront, having to pay *ground-money* (i.e the money paid for the use of land around the jetty) in most cases.

The problem of hidden insecurity revolves around the allegation of harassment by the military. Consequent on the ethnic crisis in Warri, military personnel were engaged in the restoration of law and order. The marketing actors assert that they are forced to pay rates on the fish moving into the market. It is alleged that the money is collected through agents who harass those who are reluctant to pay. Similar problems of harassment by the police and the military were reported by transport operators.

Access to funds is a critical issue. All the unions have attempted to address this. The Young Shall Grow (Ilaje) union attempts to solve the problem through an *esusu* system while in the case of the others, the approach is through soft loans. The loan given in each case, usually between 10 and 20 thousand naira, to be paid over a period varying from 6 to 12 months is perceived as grossly inadequate. What is more, no loan is available to those starting the business with the result that personal savings or gift from relations is the common source of initial capital.

Conclusion

The operational characteristics and the constraints in the fish marketing chain throw-up a number of policy issues. Social networks and trust have proved to be a fundamental facilitator of the marketing chain. As experience has shown, this cuts across ethnic lines. What seems to have been important is the relationship built over the years through interaction in the marketing chain. This is a good basis for not only improving the marketing process but also encouraging ethnic harmony particularly in ethnically polarized cities and areas.

The exclusive female marketing system may be a basis for economically empowering women. The experience of many of the traders has been such that the fish trade has provided an opportunity for them to break the poverty and unemployment circle. Many of the women interviewed indicated that when they first came to Warri from their villages when they got married, they remained unemployed and depressed until they were introduced to the fish trade usually by their relations or acquaintances.

Whereas the fish marketing system provides a basis for some meaningful policies, there are aspects that require reform. One of the most critical is the issue of exclusion. Whereas this is a fall-out of the ethnic crisis in the city it has the potential of engendering ethnic discord. A more fundamental aspect of this problem is the categorisation of the various markets into ethnic possessions, such that one market is perceived to be an Ijaw one, another an Urhobo one and yet another an Itsekiri market. Such polarization has the potential of complicating the ethnic problem.

Another issue is the elongation of the marketing chain because of the intervention of several middle men. Perhaps, this may in certain cases provide additional income for some rural dwellers. However, this complicates the protein-deficiency problem of the urban poor, particularly children, as the prices of fish may unnecessarily become unaffordable.