FOOD SECURITY

Recently the concept of Food Security evolved to “Food and Nutrition Security” to emphasize the importance of nutritional aspects of food security whereas in the past the focus for food security had been on the level of calories provided to populations. This has a noticeable importance for the fishery and aquaculture sector that provides substantial nutritional benefits (omega 3 fatty acids, high quality protein and essential amino acids, micronutrients important to human health – zinc, iodine, vitamins, etc.).

Creating better consumer awareness of the benefits of eating fish, how to choose good quality fish, prepare it well and cook it properly is an important driver for improved practices throughout the value-chain as well as promoting the contribution of fish to food security and the consumption of fish, particularly by vulnerable or food insecure groups in society. Helping consumers look after the fish they buy better is also an important contributor to reduced post-harvest losses. Furthermore, fish is of specific health benefit to particular types of consumer such as pregnant women, elders, children, people who are suffering from illnesses, and people affected with HIV. Here we describe what SmartFish has done to reach and educate consumers through its “Clean Fish Better Life” initiative.

SMARTFISH EDUCATING FISH CONSUMERS IN LAKE VICTORIA

One of the key features of any consumer awareness campaign is deciding the best way to get your message across to your target audience. Experience from work by FAO and others in the region had shown that fish consumers, or potential consumers, are most likely to be receptive to information presented using visual media formats and in local languages. SmartFish engaged on translating messages about hygiene, fish quality and nutrition into appropriate awareness raising tools and techniques. The main tools and techniques that were developed by the project are:

- Cook booklet of fish recipes, basic information on the nutritional value of fish and basic food safety tips in English, French, Kiswahili and Luganda aimed at low literacy women;
- Cooking demonstrations for women based on recipes in the booklet;
- Traditional “kanga” women’s wrap around printed with the campaign logo and slogan;
- Bill boards in local languages for markets on how to buy a good quality fresh fish;
- Flyers for consumers with key messages on how to ensure safe fish consumption;
- Table mats on “why is good to eat fish” for local restaurants;
- Song “Usafi ni pesa” (hygiene brings money) written ad sung appositely for the campaign by Kenyan pop star Nazizi;
- Local media and radio coverage.
Consumer education for improved Food Security

How to choose a good quality fish?

- **SMELL IT**
  - It should not have a bad smell

- **OPEN THE GILLS**
  - The gills should be red and clean with almost no slime

- **SCRATCH THE SCALE**
  - The scales should not be easy to remove from the skin

- **CHECK THE EYES**
  - The eyes should be firm, clear and sticking out

- **CHECK THE SKIN**
  - The skin should always be glossy and moist

- **PRESS THE FLESH WITH A FINGER**
  - The flesh should not be soft and should not leave the mark of your finger where you pressed

- **CHECK HOW THE SELLER IS KEEPING THE FISH**
  - The fish should always be kept under the shade and chilled with clean ice in a clean container

- **OBSERVE THE STOMACH**
  - It should not have a sunken, soft and mushy or burst stomach

- **SMELL IT**
  - It should not have a bad smell

- **PRESS THE FLESH WITH A FINGER**
  - The flesh should not be soft and should not leave the mark of your finger where you pressed

- **SCRATCH THE SCALE**
  - The scales should not be easy to remove from the skin

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SmartFish is a regional fisheries project managed by the Indian Ocean Commission, funded by the European Union and complemented by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, SmartFish, which operates in twenty countries throughout the Indian Ocean Region, Southern and Eastern Africa, focuses on fisheries governance, management, monitoring control and surveillance, trade, and food security. Under the framework of the project activities FAO in partnership with Government of Kenya has organized the “Clean Fish Better Life” campaign to improve fish quality and consumption in rural Africa.

For more information, please contact: smartfish@fao.org

Consumer education for Malawi, Rwanda and Zambia

These various tools have been packaged together to create the basis of the “Clean Fish Better Life” campaign which has so far targeted communities and markets in the Lake Victoria basin, in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda.

As well as an educative cinema show, the campaign is giving fish cooking demonstrations for several thousand low literacy women. These demonstrations are accompanied by the distribution of over 3,000 copies of the cook booklet. Other achievements are 32 billboards installed in key markets, 2,000 table-mats distributed in local restaurants and 4,000 fliers handed out to consumers.

The preliminary results of the post campaign impact assessment showed that the beneficiaries of the messages disseminated with an increase on the level of awareness in terms of basic knowledge on how to buy, safely consume and cook properly fish and fish products.

**WAY FORWARD**

Building on the success of the consumer education activities and the results of the consumer surveys, future work will aim to increase the level of fish consumption in selected areas by at least 10% in three years. Efforts will be made to continue the consumer awareness process using the existing tools as well as innovative use of different media such as radio, TV fish cooking contests and adverts using testimonials. All this will be accompanied by support for fish producers and suppliers to help them apply better practices, as well as monitoring and evaluation of the impact of the activities through post campaign fish consumption surveys.

**Consumer education in Malawi, Rwanda and Zambia**

In **Malawi**, the availability of fish is a key barrier to greater consumption and people love listening to the radio, so the focus is on national radio using a drama promoting the benefits of eating fish, of making and owning your own fish pond. The overall goal will be to enable consumers to create their own fish ponds in order.

In **Zambia**, there is limited awareness about the nutritional benefits of eating fish and there are high rates of malnutrition in the children under the age of five. The first 1,000 days of a child’s life are seen as crucial and the focus is developing and using educative materials to sensitize pregnant and lactating women about the benefits of eating fish not only for the health of their babies but also for their own health.

In **Rwanda**, people have good access to fish and fish products, yet there is not an established fish eating culture. The awareness events focus on cooking demonstrations to introduce potential consumers to new and flavouresome ways of eating fish. Materials to encourage the simple and hygienic preparation of fish for eating are also used.