

THE NEED FOR BUYER / SELLER CONNECTIONS

As a result of a SmartFish value chain assessment undertaken for Dagaa in the region, together with key regional studies regarding supply /demand and trade flows in the region, it was clear that there is a dearth of appropriate fora for producers and buyers to get together in the region and network for increased trade opportunities. This is especially identified as a concern for smaller and emerging producers, who have not reached a size that would enable them to commit resources to wider and more regionally oriented marketing initiatives.

SmartFish conceptualised a fish trade event to address this gap with the first one was being held in Lusaka, Zambia in April 2012. The idea was to target small producers/ processors and provide an opportunity to connect them with buyers from the region. This intervention achieved a remarkable gathering of approximately 60 producers and traders and provided an environment that allowed participants to increase their business opportunities.

This **1st SmartFish Trade Event** was a pilot with participants from nine different countries mingling, creating opportunities, meeting potential partners and focused on making deals. The event included technical presentations, opportunities to view and taste products, as well as time for business to business discussions. Following this a 2nd SmartFish Trade Event was held, in Entebbe, Uganda in January 2014. The involvement and participation was much larger than the previous event with over 100 participants. It focused on the appropriate mix of buyers and sellers and resulted in 82% of the attendees being either buyers or sellers and the remaining 18% consisting of potential investors, food scientists and journalists. The event also targeted buyers from high demand regional countries, including DRC, Zambia and South Sudan.

PARTICIPANT SELECTION

The selection of participants was particularly important and a number of criteria were used to help the process, including;

- Producers who already had established sales at the local / national market level
- Producers who demonstrated potential to expand, and showed an interest and "vision" to expand their business beyond local markets
- Producers who had shown a passion for innovation and could bring new or interesting products to the events
- Participants who were already established and experienced traders and could therefore provide inspiration to the smaller emerging enterprises.

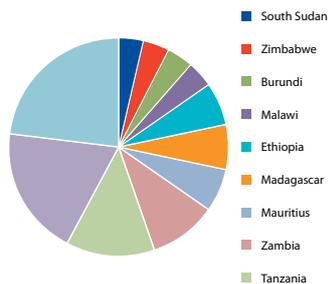


Stands at the Trade events
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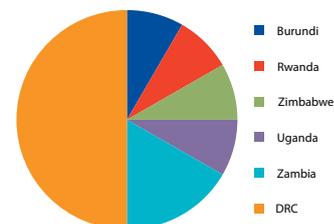
The event would give participants an opportunity to have potential business contacts from a number of regional countries together in one place, where access would be left to their basic communication abilities and the strength of their products and presentations. With the costs of the event borne primarily by SmartFish, it would be a very cost effective marketing opportunity.

The graphs next show the division of sellers and buyers which attended the 2nd SmartFish Trade Event.

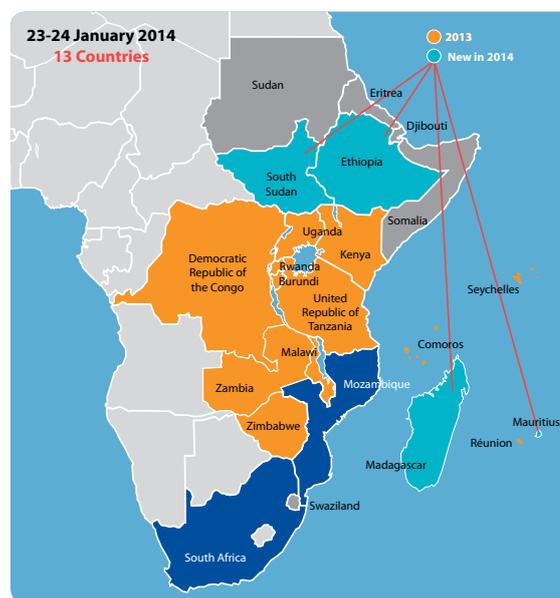
Sellers (65% of the participants)



Buyers (17% of the participants)



13 of the 20 SmartFish beneficiary countries attended the 2nd SmartFish Trade Event, which increased from the nine countries which participated at the 1st event. This map highlights participating countries in orange and shows the 4 new countries (South Sudan, Ethiopia, Madagascar and Mauritius) in blue.



The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is a huge market and accounted for about half the buyers who participated at the 2nd event. This was planned in advance, as DRC is the biggest market for fish products in the region. DRC is also a difficult market for sellers to penetrate; contacting and bringing DRC buyers to one central location where they could meet producers from neighbouring countries adds significant value for the participants.

INNOVATION AND INSPIRATION



Stands at the Trade events
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Interesting product innovations were included as a way to inspire others so that they might look at different ways to increase product exposure, experiment with value-addition and packaging that might attract a wider and more lucrative customer audience. Innovations in fish trade are important for developing the industry in the region and providing a wider acceptance of fish in the diet of the growing populations; also innovation provides competition and new business opportunities.

Fish trade events: Stimulating innovation and business deals in the region

The SmartFish Trade Events are proving that this type of intervention is successful and stimulates real trade deals. One example of this and a success story for SmartFish is Ms. Kobusingye's growing fish processing company which is located in Kampala, Uganda. She attended the 1st SmartFish Trade Event presenting a new product to the region – Fish Sausages! The exposure and visibility she gained provided Ms. Kobusingye with the connections and knowledge to improve her products, increase sales and boost her business from a small start-up to a company that now exports regionally. "If it wasn't for the SmartFish Trade Event, I would still be unknown in the region", she reminded the participants at the 2nd Trade Event, where she was invited to provide a testimonial to how the event can work for small businesses. Her success continues with production now expanded to approximately 1000 Kg a week. Her product is from farmed catfish in Uganda.



Stands at the Trade events © SmartFish database

Interestingly the fish sausages at the 1st Trade Event inspired another participant to take up the challenge of doing something similar – Ms. Mary Karega, Managing Director of Mapanki Co Ltd, from Tanzania processes by-products from the Nile perch industry on Lake Victoria (dried and smoked factory "waste" is actually a product that is sold to DRC in significant volumes). She now uses some of this by-product from the factory to produce a delicious Nile perch sausages. When she returned home after the 1st event, she contacted Ms. Kobusingye and visited her processing facilities in Uganda. She then purchased the necessary equipment and began producing her own sausages using various trimmings from Nile Perch "waste". Ms. Karega was able to attend the 2nd Trade Event and present her new product with great pride, thanking the SmartFish Trade Event for the inspiration that it gave her to develop her business. She is now commencing market development in Dar es Salaam from her base in Bukoba, Tanzania.

B2B (BUSINESS TO BUSINESS) MEETINGS

During the event opportunity for business meetings is ensured through time allocated in the meeting agenda to free circulation of participants, product viewing and tasting. B2B meetings are in most cases informal and at times deals are actually made over the display tables where buyers have the opportunity to sample the products. The event has a relaxed atmosphere which gives the participants the opportunity to talk about their products in an informal way and make those important connections.

RESULTS FROM THE EVENTS

	Participants	Countries
2012 Trade Event	63	9
2014 Trade Event	104	13
Increase	65%	44%

- Contacts made during the 2012 SmartFish Trade Event: **90% of participants established lasting contacts**
- Increase in sales after the 1st SmartFish Trade Event: **53% of participants have reported an increase in sales as a result of the 1st SmartFish Trade Event. Of these:**

31% had an increase of	0 - 25%
7.7% had an increase of	26 - 50%
7.7% had an increase of	51 - 75%
7.6% had an increase of	76 - 100%

NEXT STEPS

SmartFish intends to continue this successful model as clearly there is a need for such events in the region. For Phase II a wider coverage of future events and participation is being considered to extend opportunities for regional trade development. It is also intended to look at the possibility for regional traders to try and expand their markets beyond the region to other areas of Africa.

Each event is carefully monitored and issues are noted for improvement. Ideas and recommendations are being considered carefully in advance of further events, to ensure that the best use of the support is made. A key issue is the sustainability of the event after SmartFish or other support is no longer available. This will be a key issue to address for the future. Other ideas are;

- The event could be extended to 3 days to give more time for individual presentation of products and provide more time for success stories for instance.
- Other ideas include a more structure B2B arrangement, with focused markets and buyers being available for sellers for a period of time in a more organized fashion
- Product competitions and prizes for innovation would also be something to explore based on packaging, tasting competitions, presentation skills of owners, etc.
- SmartFish also intends to assist further with information and presentation information for each participant, including fact sheets and brochure, which highlight the products and gives specifications and other key information.
- Similarly SmartFish support will be given to design labels and branding approaches for small traders who do not have resources for such overheads in their businesses.
- Many participants have muted the requirement for setting up of a web based system where each buyer and/or seller has a webpage and products can be displayed for instance.
- Visits to key markets for selected suppliers
- The need for training and support for packaging innovation and labelling design work, as well as business planning and presentation skills for selling products to new customers

SmartFish Trade Events have proven popular and successful in that it has stimulated real trade deals and provided the opportunity for sharing of various marketing ideas from processing techniques to packaging and distribution approaches.



Stands at the Trade events © SmartFish database

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