

Stakeholder Perceptions of the Fish and Vegetable Value Chains in Nigeria Validation Exercise, 28 September 2022

The RSM2SNF validation exercise brought stakeholder together to discuss the results of the project stakeholder perception survey conducted between May and July 2022. The hybrid event had 21 participants in Zaria, 21 in Ibadan and 33 online.

General Feedback on the report

- a. The report needs to discuss the reasons for the study sample composition. (e.g., more respondents from the north versus south, more educated respondents compared to those who are unreachable and illiterate). *This will be reflected in the final report.*
- b. The report was based on an impressive method of data collection including online responses, paper questionnaires, and questionnaires completed via phone calls.
- c. Consumers are an important stakeholder group but are not highlighted in the analysis and report. *The project recognizes the importance of consumers as stakeholders and really appreciates this comment. Understanding consumers is key to the success of any enterprise. The RSM2SNF project focuses on supporting micro, small, and medium scale enterprises (MSMEs) to supply affordable, safe, and nutritious foods. Thus, the stakeholder perceptions data analysis focused more on stakeholder activities related to food supply while acknowledging that all respondents are consumers.*
- d. The survey results are disaggregated by gender which improves understanding of gender roles along value chains. This is outstanding, as many studies do not disaggregate by gender, leaving the roles of women unrecognized.
- e. The presented results largely reflect realities perceived by participants in terms of:
 - ii. The high cost of inputs being a major factor affecting the affordability of fish;
 - iii. Various practices such as the use of harmful chemicals in food production (both crops and livestock/fish);
 - iv. Food affordability being prioritized over food safety;
 - v. The dominance of the male gender in the production and input supply nodes of the priority value chains, while the female gender is more prevalent in retailing and processing activities;
 - vi. Stakeholders being far removed from government decisions.

Suggestions for RSM2SNF

- a. The results of the stakeholder perceptions survey should be disseminated to all stakeholders, especially government (at all levels) and development partners. This will draw attention to the challenges that impede the growth of MSMEs—the backbone of Nigeria’s food supply.
- b. The project should support efforts to sensitize Nigerians on the importance of food safety and hygiene to influence consumers’ behavior—as long as this takes place alongside actions to improve the purchasing power of households. Knowledge of food safety and hygiene are also important for MSMEs if they are to deliver food that is affordable, safe, and nutritious.
- c. Dissemination efforts should be in local languages where possible and relevant and in formats used by targeted stakeholders.
- d. More research is needed to understand and fully tackle the drivers of food costs and bottlenecks in the registration of processed products for export by bodies like NAFDAC.
- e. There is need for more research to understand how education affects the formation of perceptions about food systems.

Feedback from Discussions

Question 1.

In the survey results, we see a dominant perception that high costs of inputs and equipment are major challenges in Nigeria’s food system, and there is less of a focus on challenges to reduce post-production food losses. This is seen across all stakeholder groups (not only among farmers). **Why do we see this pattern? What is driving the high costs of inputs? What is your experience with post-production losses?**

- The high cost of inputs for food production is largely driven by increasingly high prices and the low value of the naira relative to international currencies such as the US dollar. This has an impact on the cost of equipment that is imported from outside the country.
 - The price of diesel has risen worldwide, and this affects transportation costs and the cost of running generators to power feed mills.
- Insecurity leads to a higher cost of transporting goods, as transporters must now bribe security personnel on the highway. Survey respondents (stakeholders) are likely regarding this as a production cost.
 - Note that grain used in fish feed is largely produced in the north.
- There are pecuniary expenditures made while producing fish and vegetables that respondents are likely noticing. These are costs that need to be consistently paid out (digging into one’s pocket and handing over cash again and again. People may be less prone to noticing and accounting for costs that occur in other ways (e.g., food losses) simply because these aren’t pecuniary expenditures.

- Some participants noted that government sees agriculture as a business and, thus, input subsidies are regarded as a thing of the past. This could also explain the perception of high production costs.
- Some participants felt that there are often limited marketable surplus by farmers reducing what is available to store.
- In contrast to the perception stated in this question, some participants felt that post-harvest losses are high in Nigeria and often due to glut.

Question 2.

The results revealed that perceptions of federal government representatives often differed from those of other stakeholder groups. **Does this surprise you? What (if anything) should be done to address this?**

- Some participants felt that the government approaches are not in consonance with other stakeholder groups and hence, there are no synergies. This occurs alongside unfulfilled promises made by government. *To address this, there is a need to improve the communication between government and other stakeholder groups.*
- One group noted that most of the relevant policies and implementation occurs at the state level (some also at the local level), so it is really the state-level government representatives who know what is going on, i.e., whose perspectives can be trusted. *Participants noted the importance of engaging with state-level government representatives in the RSM2SNF project*
 - At the state level, governments can craft their own policies/guidelines/standards related to food safety (as long as the policies are in line with federal level legislation), and it seems they alone are responsible for whether the policies are enforced.
- Some participants didn't feel surprised that federal government representatives were less aware of the reality on the ground. They felt that since federal government are often further away from implementation, this is a straightforward reflection of stakeholders' priorities given their circumstances.

Question 3.

Security is noted as a key challenge to Nigeria's food system. However, government interventions/actions to address security concerns ranked low among the priorities of respondents for both fish and vegetables. **Is this surprising to you? Why do you think addressing security was ranked low among priorities for government intervention/action?**

- In the north, farmland has been affected due to the activities of bandits, and this has affected farmers significantly. People sell their assets to pay ransoms and some abandon farming altogether.
- However, there is a lack of trust in government to handle the issue of security.

- There are more obvious connections between something like subsidies and the cost of food, while any connection between security and food prices is less direct/less obvious.
- Some participants noted that most vegetables don't travel long distances (the exceptions being tomato and peppers). These vegetables mainly come from the middle belt and northwest (Kaduna, Kano), though insecurity is concentrated elsewhere in the north.
- Finally, some participants noted that the priority given to addressing security may have been based on the location of respondents.

Other Key Points Raised in Discussion

- Participants noted that the format of the questionnaire required respondents to prioritize among food affordability and safety. The results don't imply that people do not value food safety, only that they value food affordability *more*.
- It would be worthwhile to consider the education levels of the respondents to understand who is most interested in safety.
- Currently, value chain actors are cutting corners in ways that can be avoided, e.g., processing vegetables using equipment with mild steel on surfaces, which creates a food safety risk. They do this instead of investing once in stainless steel surfaces with a higher initial cost but a greater durability. From both a cost-saving *and* safety perspective, there is a need to sensitize people on these issues.
- The poor put basic needs first. It's not that people don't care about food safety, but people put affordability first.
 - Efforts to address food hygiene/food safety should ideally not raise the price of food. The RSM2SNF project should look for win-win (or neutral-win) opportunities when thinking about how food safety can be improved.
 - If RSM2SNF will pursue any interventions to improve food safety, then these must be very affordable, as the poor will not likely be willing or able to spend money on safety.

Thank you for participating in the validation exercise.

The stakeholder perception report will be finalized after incorporating the feedback received during this event. We will also take account of the comments and suggestions related to future project research and engagement activities.