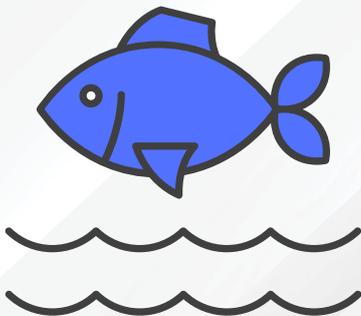


# POSITIONING YOUNG PEOPLE FOR WORK AND ENTERPRISE ACROSS AN EMERGING VALUE CHAIN:

## *AQUACULTURE IN AKWA IBOM*

Niger Delta Youth Employment Pathways (NDYEP)  
June 2019

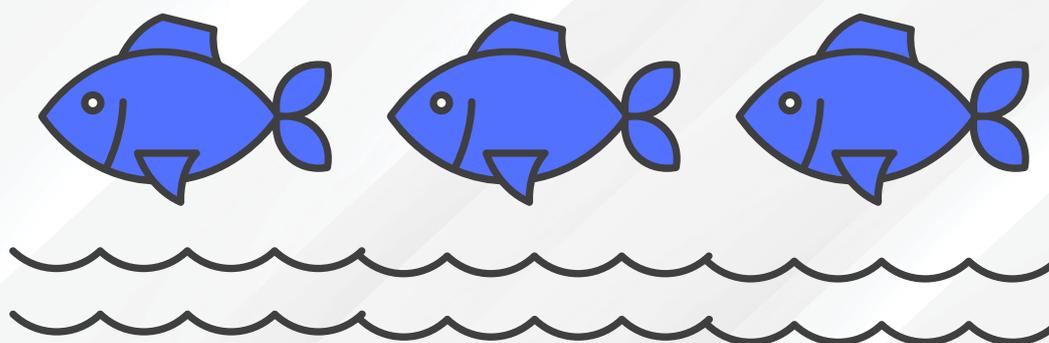


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This practice paper reflects the work of many people who: conceptualized and brought the Niger Delta Youth Employment Pathways Project (NDYEP) to life, adapting its approach to continually improve results; who provided key insights and facilitation of the evaluation; and who guided the several iterations of this paper. We wish to extend special thanks to: Emeka Nwankwo, PIND's Planning and Evaluation Manager for his wisdom, guidance and dedication to the evaluation of the project and development of related practice papers; to Emeka Ile, the Project Team Leader and Patrick Ekpe, Project Advisor for their orientation, technical insights and guidance and for organizing and accompanying the field work; John Femi Osuntokun, the Monitoring and Evaluation Coordinator for reassuring logistical support; and Chinonso Onwunali and Yvonne Jonah, Private Sector Advisor for excellent research assistance with note taking, transcriptions and contextual information.

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# Summary

Niger Delta Youth Employment Pathways (NDYEP) began in 2018 to develop models of youth training in which marginalised young people are trained in market-relevant skills and subsequently supported into sustainable jobs or enterprise. It currently works through 13 implementing partners in the aquaculture, construction and ICT sectors, in Rivers, Abia and Akwa Ibom states. This paper explores the methods applied and the mid-term results achieved in the aquaculture sector in Akwa Ibom, using the example of the project implemented by Dr Fish Agric Consult (DFAC).

While there is clear consumer demand for fresh fish in Akwa Ibom - which has the highest unemployment rates in Nigeria, at 37.7 % - the sector has been constrained by traditional cultivation methods, which do not optimize pond management nor the use of fish feed. At the same time, the high cost and low quality of available inputs, in particular fish feed and fingerlings (newly hatched fish), has served as a disincentive to small scale producers. Together these result in high fingerling mortality and thus low productivity and profit.

NDYEP set out to position young trainees to take advantage of opportunities across the aquaculture value chain in this emerging sector, in partnership with organisations which could at once contribute to strengthening the sector's eco-system. DFAC has now trained 179 young people in improved techniques for catfish farming. Of these, 68 were young women, and 20 were people with disabilities. Following the training, 14 trainees have secured employment; a further 47 have started raising fish in 'incubated' youth clusters; and a further 90 are on the point of starting rotating internships on two local fish farms. In other words, 84% of the trainees have transferred - or are about to be transferred - into onward placements after the training, and will continue to be supported by DFAC with business advisory services; linkages to markets and input supplies; and facilitated with opportunities for access to finance where possible.

Key features of the implementation model supporting these results are:

**Combining business and development sector approaches:** NDYEP identified partners through competitive tender seeking entrepreneurial, business-oriented organisations that could contribute to stimulating economic growth and demonstrate business thinking to trainees. For the aquaculture sector in Akwa Ibom, NDYEP partnered with Dr Fish Agric Consult (DFAC), an aquaculture advisory service provider (ASP), whose director acquired training through PIND's earlier aquaculture interventions.

**Working to strengths:** NDYEP's project management in PIND has been flexible concerning training content, approach, and the relationships built by grantees to support training, enabling organisations to evolve methods based on their strengths. For DFAC, this has allowed the development of a distinct approach involving an enriched, hands-on training curriculum; drawing on community embedded organisations to identify and support trainees; and building relationships with private sector entrepreneurs for onward opportunities for the trainees after completion.

**Enriching training with an integrated approach:** the training developed by DFAC has combined a) the nationally regulated enterprise training for agriculture with b) a business and personal development curriculum to build soft skills and help trainees apply business skills, and c) a technical aquaculture training. The technical aquaculture training takes a hands-on approach, using demonstration ponds to develop skills and providing each trainee

with fingerlings to raise themselves as an individual project. The training focuses on fish rearing, but also includes skills along the value chain such as fish drying and barbequing.

**Partnering with community embedded organisations:** DFAC's approach has included partnering with local development sector, church organisations and farms to identify groups of youth trainees, host demonstration pond training sites, and support groups into enterprise and employment opportunities subsequent to training.

**Creating accountability to the onward pathway:** Since partners were contractually accountable to building onward placement opportunities for trainees, DFAC has included the process of engaging farm enterprises in the project as potential employers from the outset. Through this, a large number of trainees have secured - or are about to secure - onward placements as employees, youth cooperatives, or as interns on growing farms. One group has secured employment on working fish farms, which provide opportunity to build technical experience at the same time as being able to save to establish their own enterprises later. A second group is about to start a revolving internship programme on working farms, which bolster their experience at the same time as supplying small farm enterprises with trained manpower. A third group are being supported by DFAC along with DFAC's partners to establish group-based or 'cluster' enterprises. Support has taken the form of help with securing commercially viable sized ponds; advisory services; linkages to markets and input supplies; and support in accessing business funding.

NDYEP promotes an inclusive approach for the programme, and had set a target that at least 40% of trainees benefitting from the programme should be a combination of women and people with disabilities. It also targeted marginalised young people in the age group 16-26 from the outset. These criteria for trainee selection presented a number of challenges to DFAC and other partner organisations, but ones which they have risen to with a number of strategies. In particular, DFAC has been successful in including people with disabilities (PWDs) in the project by partnering with church organisations which have experience in building services and education for people with disabilities, including the hearing impaired. Therefore they also have both a network of young, hearing impaired people, as well as understanding of specialist skills to support working with them. As a result, 20 PWDs have received training through the project and a sub-group of these have been facilitated into work and enterprise in fish rearing.

Pathways to youth employment modelled by the project therefore highlight the roles of hands-on training methodologies which integrate business knowledge and soft skills; the building of onward experience post-training to consolidate and extend skills; pathways through which trainees can accumulate savings to support enterprise; and the role of onward support in the form of advisory services, business linkages and facilitation to access finance.

Emerging recommendations for organisations moving into similar youth work readiness approaches include:

- Ensuring accountability of the project to employment / sustainable business outcomes, not simply training, and planning for the post-training activities and support that will be necessary to facilitate the onward process of strengthening skills, building experience and accessing finance.

- Initiate strong, transparent partner and trainee selection processes which identify partners embedded as businesses in the sector; and select trainees according to clearly understood criteria.

- Design a curriculum which integrates business and soft skills with technical skills, and use a methodology which give opportunity to apply and practice all these types of skills over the course of the training.

- Use strategies for inclusion of people with disabilities for contributing to gender equality, especially in sectors in which women do not normally work.

## NIGER DELTA YOUTH EMPLOYMENT PATHWAYS

The NDYEP is a two-year collaboration between Foundation for Partnership Initiatives in the Niger Delta (PIND) and Ford Foundation which aims to contribute to addressing the critical issue of youth unemployment in the Niger Delta. In its first year, the pilot programme has focused on three priority states of Abia, Akwa Ibom, and Rivers.

The overall goal of project is to develop models of youth job readiness that provide marginalized young men and women in the Niger Delta the opportunity to secure sustainable jobs through training that prepares them with market relevant skills.

To achieve this, the project articulated four strategic change objectives expressing the implementation logic of the project, to:

1. Develop an understanding of the employment and skills landscape in the Niger Delta region to inform strategic investments in skills development programming;
2. Promote a demand-driven approach to skills development in the Niger Delta through partnerships between youth employment ecosystem players, especially employers, policymakers, development partners and training institutions;
3. Develop programs that demonstrate model pathways from skills training to employment through the provision of direct vocational training in three sectors of the economy, ICT, agriculture and construction, and other sectors where opportunities are identified; and
4. Monitor and evaluate the project and document, and disseminate key learnings.

NDYEP in its first year has worked through 13 implementing partners across the three priority states. These partners have been tasked with training and supporting young people into enterprise and employment in the three sectors of aquaculture, ICT and construction.

### THE AQUACULTURE SECTOR

Analysis carried out by PIND in 2011<sup>1</sup> on the aquaculture value chain in the Niger Delta found that although there was clear consumer demand for local fresh fish, the sector was constrained by a number of key issues. These included that the high cost and low quality of available inputs, in particular fish feed and fingerlings (newly hatched fish), has served as a disincentive to small scale producers. In a vicious cycle, relatively low numbers of small-scale producers mean that a stable demand for feed and fingerlings has not been established to incentivise input producers and limited their market penetration.

In addition, existing fish farmers were mainly following traditional cultivation methods, which do not optimize pond management nor the use of fish feed. Together these result in high fingerling mortality and thus low productivity and profit.

#### *Building the sector: prior intervention by PIND*

PIND established select, strategic interventions to address these negative cycles. These included a pilot demonstration pond and training in Delta State which was monitored for effectiveness in improving the practices of the fish farmers, and resulted in an average profit margin increase of 17%. To support scale-up of the pilot to Bayelsa, Edo, Imo and Rivers states, PIND then facilitated a training of trainers for Aquaculture Service Providers (ASPs) on technical and business training and demonstration pond management, and facilitated linkages between these ASPs and fish feed companies as part of a strategy to reduce PIND's own involvement and allow market actors to take ownership and a lead role in the process based on their incentives.

<sup>1</sup> 'Intervention Justification for Scale up of Demo Pond Intervention using Aquaculture service providers' PIND 2016

This approach followed the logic of using trained and entrepreneurial ASPs with a commercial incentive to scale up the intervention, working with fish feed companies, fish farmer associations and individual farmers across the region. It drew on the logic that as ASPs build their reputation in providing quality information in training and demonstration and other aquaculture services, they would increasingly be motivated to establish partnerships with feed companies to spread the knowledge further.

As a result of this step, by early 2016 at least five trained ASPs had been employed by four feed companies to set up demonstrations and trainings, reaching over 2000 farmers. This process at once increased the demand for fish feed and fingerlings, while also increasing profitability for the small farmers.

### **Connecting to youth employment**

NDYEP began to build on this prior experience within PIND, through research conducted during the inception period of the project. This carried out a mapping of stakeholders in the three sectors in each of the three NDYEP target states, consulted with employers about needs and opportunities in the associated labour markets, and in particular sought to identify entry points for young people.

For Aquaculture, the research<sup>2</sup> confirmed the potential for growth in Akwa Ibom and that relatively low barriers for entry and short-term production/income generation cycles made the sector potentially accessible to youth. In addition, research noted a positive outlook for the fish feed value chain in the region following private investment by a major feed production company, and the establishment of an effective skills delivery mechanism through the ASP Master Trainers.

Thus the stage was set for an intervention which sought to catalyse these opportunities, positioning young people to take up roles across the value chain in aquaculture. Some of these roles are in fish production; others are potential consequences of increased fish production - opening spaces for drying, processing, barbecuing and selling the fish. Others are agro input supply services including pond making; and innovations around water supply and services in integrated farming techniques, which can allay water costs by reusing it in vegetable gardening and thus adding value. Perhaps most importantly a sufficient pool of trained fish rearers would be required to build the market with their own fish rearing enterprises, as well as for working on growing fish farms.

## **Aquaculture in Akwa Ibom**

Akwa Ibom has the highest unemployment rates in Nigeria, at 37.7%, despite being Nigeria's largest oil producing state.<sup>1</sup> Of particular concern, since more than half of Nigerians are under the age of 30, youth unemployment (between ages 15 and 24) is also very high at 36.6% in 2017.<sup>1</sup>

But aquaculture is an emerging and potential growth business. There is a good and growing market for fish, but supply is currently mostly met by a combination of using local water bodies as holding grounds for sea fish and fish brought in from Cameroon with boats to sell in the Monday market in Oron. One local catfish farmer claims that 'local' fish in the market in Oron only accounts for about 1% of fish sales – the rest is all accounted for by imported fish.

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### **CASE STUDY METHODOLOGY**

This Practice Paper presents a case study of the approach and methods used in the aquaculture sector for youth employment readiness by NDYEP. It uses the example of Dr Fish Agric Consult, a partner organisation located in Akwa Ibom state, which trained 179 trainees in aquaculture during 2018-19.

The paper forms one of three case studies developed following the first year of programme implementation. The overall purpose of the three studies is to capture learning from the programme for wider dissemination supporting a broader understanding and uptake of the project's

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<sup>2</sup> Identifying Pathways to Employment for Youth in the Niger Delta, an analysis of Abia, Akwa Ibom and Rivers States, PIND/DAI 2019.

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## KEY FEATURES OF IMPLEMENTATION THROUGH THE NDYEP-DFAC PARTNERSHIP

### 1. COMBINING BUSINESS AND DEVELOPMENT SECTOR APPROACHES

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A defining feature of NYDEP is that it has partnered, through a competitive tender process, mainly with entrepreneurial, business-oriented organisations. Through these organisations, it has deployed profit-oriented strategies with the objective of contributing to stimulating economic growth in selected sectors, and (indirectly perhaps) to demonstrate 'business thinking' to trainees. For the aquaculture sector in Akwa Ibom, NYDEP partnered with Dr Fish Agric Consult (DFAC), an aquaculture advisory service provider.

#### *The story of Dr Fish*

Israel Yusuf, aka 'Dr Fish', is a livestock and aquaculture expert running offices of his agriculture consultancy company in Delta state and now also in Uyo, Akwa Ibom. He is a Master ASP, having acquired training through PIND's earlier aquaculture interventions. His consultancy business in Akwa Ibom has four staff – two administrators and two Aquaculture Service Providers and himself, offering fish rearing training and advisory services. He first became interested in the area during his National Youth Service – a compulsory post-graduation one-year stint of community service in a state and among an ethnic group that differs from one's own. During this service he began training community members in fish rearing and spotted potential for disseminating this new livelihood option more widely and deeply across the state.

Since 2017 he expanded his reach to Akwa Ibom. But now he sees his role in two dimensions. On the one hand, he is propelled by a sense of citizenship and social transformation to make fish farming methods as widely and cheaply available as possible. On the other hand, he has enough confidence in the growth potential of this market that he plans to invest in farming himself.

### 2. WORKING TO STRENGTHS

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Aside from specifying trainee profiles and establishing some conditions for quality training, PIND project management has been flexible concerning training content, approach, and the relationships built by grantees to support training. Rather, PIND has aimed to offer tailored support to organisations as their approaches have evolved. This has allowed the organisations to work to their strengths and evolve training-to-enterprise/employment models tailored to the particular local economy in which their organisation is embedded. For DFAC in Akwa Ibom, this has allowed the development of a distinct approach involving:

- An enriched, hands-on training curriculum
- Drawing on community embedded organisations to identify and support trainees - and to fulfil trainee profile requirements
- Building relationships with private sector entrepreneurs for onward opportunities for the trainees after completion.

### 3. ENRICHING TRAINING WITH AN INTEGRATED APPROACH

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DFAC has trained 179 young people in aquaculture in the first phase of the project. The training combines three curricula dimensions: 1) a soft skills or 'business and personal development' curriculum; 2) the Nigerian Agricultural Enterprise Curriculum, a nationally recognised and regulated curriculum for applying business skills in agricultural enterprise; and 3) an aquaculture technical curriculum.

Crucially, the technical curriculum takes a strongly hands-on approach, using demonstration and functioning farm sites to illustrate skills to trainees and allow exposure to real life practice of pond management, feed and disease management, and fish handling. At the end of the theoretical part of the technical aquaculture skill training (the first 3 days), trainees were also given 10 juvenile fish each to raise at home, enhancing their practical experience of caring for the fish, as well as their business experience through opportunity later to sell the fish and reinvest in new fingerlings. They continue to raise these fish during the remaining modules of the technical training, which are integrated with the NAEC aquaculture business training (5 days) and the soft skills training (53

approach. The studies set out to identify the factors and conditions of implementation that have supported promising results.

Qualitative methods were used to collect data for the studies from different perspectives. Key informant interviews and focus group discussions were held with implementing partner staff, trainees, trainees who had graduated into internships, employment or incubated start-ups, employers of the trainees, and potential employers. Observation methods were also used during visits to training venues and employment venues.

Data collected was analysed using social science key word coding methods, and triangulated against information collected from a document review and the programme's results database. The methodology also drew on a data collection process for the programme's Mid Term Evaluation (MTE), and field visits for these two processes were synergised. The field visit took place in all three states during March 2019.

## HOW HAS THE NDYEP PROJECT BEEN TRANSLATED INTO ACTION IN AQUACULTURE?

NDYEP's intervention in aquaculture aimed to support and equip new potential entrants into the aquaculture business with the knowhow and market linkages to build new aquaculture enterprises. Like NDYEP's interventions in the other sectors, its approach builds on the recognition that most traditional skills acquisition programmes have failed to deliver sustainable results because they do not pay enough attention to what happens, post-training, to the entrepreneurs that they produce.

NDYEP seeks to avoid this pitfall by developing a robust infrastructure for post-training support, assisting the young entrepreneurs to navigate the harsh conditions of the business world that can cause business failure. This support includes building post-training opportunities into the fabric of the programme and linking it with the growing infrastructure of aquaculture advisory services and market linkages. Overall, it aims to jump-start youth aquaculture enterprise.

### NDYEP's achievements after 1 year

Since September 2018, Dr Fish Agric Consult (DFAC), based in Uyo in Akwa Ibom state, has trained 179 young people in improved techniques for catfish farming. Of these, 68 were young women, and 20 were people with disabilities.

Following the training, 14 trainees have already secured employment; a further 47 have started raising fish in 'incubated' youth co-operatives or clusters; and a further 90 are on the point of starting rotating internships on two local fish farms. In other words, 84% of the trainees have transferred – or are about to be transferred - into onward placements after the training.

DFAC's trainees were all young people between the ages of 16 and 28. They came from mixed backgrounds – some had completed secondary school; some were graduates. A few were trying to run, or help run, small businesses that were not working well; almost all were fully or partly financially dependent on their parents or other relatives.

Those who are now in co-operative start-up enterprises are on the point of making some cash with their first fish harvests, and they are looking forward to the further training in fish drying, barbequing, and marketing that will accompany this process. There will be a lot to do with the cash they make: there is new stock to buy; security problems to solve; water supply issues to try to strengthen. But what has changed is not just the technical skills they've acquired: "*I know the quality of fish*"; but also the business skills '*I have learned to save money and not waste money*' and the motivation '*I am more focused on how to make it in life*'.

What are the processes that have supported these promising results?

hours over 10 modules). In total, the practical pond demo training takes about 5 months, with the business and soft skills components integrated in.

Training was carried out in four locations across the state. At each location, training took place at a 'cluster farm' where both theoretical and the pond-demo training could be carried out. The locations included 2 church-based organisations, each of which had a small fish farming enterprise; one NGO-developed demonstration site; and one large commercial fish farm which also has training facilities. Through this model, trainees have been able to base their trainings at different sites across the states, widening the feasible recruitment areas for the project.

DFAC has also worked to include dimensions of the fish economy into the training which can add value - in this case, fish processing, including drying and barbequing. In this way, the organisation plans to have young trainees positioned to work in several functions of the value chain, from breeding to consumption. To support these dimensions - effectively, to bring this part of the value chain within reach of trainees, NDYEP has invested - via DFAC - in 'chorkor' ovens at three of the cluster sites. These are brick-built units which use an improved appropriate technology for smoking fish.<sup>3</sup> PIND uses a cost-share basis to establish these ovens at sites where they can also be used on a token hire basis by nearby fish processors.

#### 4. PARTNERING WITH COMMUNITY EMBEDDED ORGANISATIONS TO STIMULATE THE ECOSYSTEM

DFAC carried out the training by partnering with local organisations that already had a stake in the aquaculture sector, not least to contribute to strengthening them as ongoing actors in the field.

Trainee clusters have therefore been based around:

- The Antof Rural Resource Development Centre (ARRDEC) facility, Oron
- St Anthony Catholic Church, Uyo
- Daughters of Charity, Uyo
- Ibom Integrated Farms, Onna

Building the projects around these clusters enabled DFAC to draw on them, and the wider institutional networks in which they are embedded, for the identification and mobilisation of potential trainees during the selection process.

The four organisations linked to the programme through the cluster system each had different characteristics and institutional purpose.

**ARRDEC** is an NGO specialising in income generation through agriculture, healthcare and governance. It has experience in and facilities for training, farm plots in two locations, and aquaculture facilities including permanent fish ponds.<sup>4</sup> As an organisation established and working in local communities for several years, it had a good local network through which to identify potential trainees.

**Ibom Integrated Farms** is a 47-hectare farm, of which eight hectares are currently farmed, and agricultural production is rapidly expanding into the rest. The aquaculture section on the farm is large scale, and, stimulated by the NDYEP intervention, the planned addition of a hatchery was brought forward and established during 2018. The farm is owned by the traditional chief<sup>5</sup> of the area, which covers 42 villages from which a group of trainees were identified. With a basis in a Songhai farming approach, which promotes integrated farming methods as a route to human-centred, sustainable rural development<sup>6</sup>, the Chief is set to make the farm a fully viable commercial enterprise, at the same time seeing it as an important model for effective farming techniques for the benefit of the community which he leads.

**Church institutions** in Akwa Ibom - including St Anthony's Catholic Church and Daughters of Charity - have a wide outreach, and were able to assist DFAC in identifying a youth cohort, as they have

<sup>3</sup> Other smoking technologies can also be used, such as smoking kilns.

<sup>4</sup> <http://arrdec.org.ng/>; <https://mailchi.mp/07d214651679/arrdec-q3-2018-newsletter>

<sup>5</sup> The paramount ruler of Onna, HRM Edidem Raymond Inyang

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.songhai.org/index.php/en/home-en>

links with youth groups. DFAC sought out small fish rearing businesses with strong links to church institutions in order to strengthen and draw on these linkages. The church groups also provided training venues and have helped to create 'cluster farms' for groups of young people to build their fish enterprises following the training, as well as offering fund raising support for the young people as their enterprises progress.

## 5. ACCOUNTABILITY TO THE ONWARD PATHWAY: CREATING THE BUILDING BLOCKS FOR POST-TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

A key feature of the NYDEP approach which distinguishes it from other youth training initiatives, has been establishing accountability for the outcomes of training - in terms of employability of trainees - at the level of the training organisation, with support from the broader project. This has been achieved through focusing on outcomes of training from the outset, but also by writing targets for placements into grantee contracts, as well as by selecting partners who are motivated by the logic of the project.

In line with the project model, DFAC has included the process of engaging farm enterprises in the project as potential employers from the outset. Through this, a large number of trainees have secured - or are about to secure - onward placements as employees, youth cooperatives, or as interns on growing farms. As a result of the strategies below, at present 8% of the trainees (8 men and 6 women) have secured jobs following the training; 26% have initiated group-based cooperative start-up businesses, and a further 50% are soon to be engaged in a revolving internship programme on two local farms.

### *Youth cooperatives for catfish start-ups*

Following the training of 47 young people at ARRDEC, trainees were divided into five 'start up' groups for continuing to rear their own fish. Support has been given to each group in the form of an innovative 'mobile', easily constructed medium-size fish pond made of scaffold poles and tough plastic sheeting, developed by Dr Fish himself.<sup>7</sup> This pond is large enough for all group members to combine the 10 fish they were each given as part of the training - it has a stocking density capacity of 300kg and is therefore large enough for commercial scale farming - and rear them together. This means they are able to divide up responsibilities and labour to care for the fish, will share decisions on reinvestment after the first fish are sold, and will also share any profit.

They are still very much in contact with the NDYEP project, not least because when their fish are big enough, they will use some of them to learn about fish processing, including fish drying and barbecuing.

The groups are in the process of being registered as formal cooperatives. One group has already managed to generate some investment in security protection for their pond, so that the fish are safe from thieves and other predators, but agree they will need to spend more for the site to be properly secure. A second group has recently constructed a second pond for expansion. Securing good and cheap or free water supply so that they can care for the fish properly is another challenge that the groups are working on.

### *Farm internships and employment*

Fourteen of DFAC's trainees have been absorbed into employment and as trainee employees on working farms, including on the Ibom Integrated Farm. This farm, as its name implies, integrates farm production in a number of dimensions, including poultry farming; vegetable production and plantation farming alongside the aquaculture. This means employees also get opportunities to learn other skills while there - as has happened to Blessing Silas, who is now managing part of the poultry section on the farm.

For others, trainee-employee arrangements give them important opportunity to develop their skills and experience, and understand how their specialist area fits into the overall farm business. When these lead to positions with more security and responsibility, it also gives them much sought after opportunity to save some money which they can later invest in their own enterprise.

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<sup>7</sup> At the time of writing, one of the five groups was yet to receive the pond, and so had not formally begun their cooperative process.

### *Future's story*

Future Mbose is originally from Akwa Ibom and is now 23 years old. He completed his O levels at secondary school in 2013, and although he aspired to going to college, his family could not afford it. Instead, he learned the plumbing trade through a mentor and learned it well enough to take himself to Abuja, where he stayed with relatives and began to set out on his own plumbing business. In some months, he says, he made good money. But there were also months when he made nothing at all. Still, over the period he managed to save a bit, which is proving useful now.

In the summer of 2018, he returned to Uyo for a plumbing job. While he was there, friends told him of an upcoming opportunity to be trained in aquaculture at the Akwa Ibom Integrated Farm. He showed up for interview, and was accepted into the farm's hands-on training programme, which combined formal training days by a trainer with on-the-job experience of raising fish on a growing farm enterprise. Although parts of the training are not fully complete – he is looking forward to learning about fish processing and marketing – after the completion of the official training period he was accepted as a trainee -employee on the farm. His on-the-job experience building thus continued, now with the addition of a small stipend of Naira 5000 a month. He has rented a place nearby, and though it is hard to manage on the stipend, with the help of drawing on his savings occasionally, he is managing.

The training was hard work, he says. He stayed at the farm for 2-3 weeks at a time without returning home, and worked nearly every day. But he loves the fish and enjoys the work. He now responsible for a full pond of fish, raising the fish from fingerling to juvenile stages – and with the farm having just 'surprise' launched its own hatchery – well in advance of the farm owner's original expectation of moving into this stage – now has an opportunity to observe and learn from this stage too.

He is anxious to know whether his trainee-employee period will turn into full employment, and feels it would be better if he could be given an assurance of this. He would like to work at the farm and gain more experience while also being able to save. Because he dreams of having his own aquaculture business, sometime in the not too distant future. He feels that with the training, 'everything' has changed for him. Before, he did not use his time well, but now he is focused and has a life goal. His eyes shine with this thought, especially because he believes he could raise his own fish at the same time as continuing to work on the farm, if he is lucky enough to get that opportunity.

### *Links to new and growing farms for revolving internships*

DFAC has also sought out relationships with smaller and specialist fish farmers, as well as individuals preparing to invest in fish farming. One factor driving potential growth is that civil servants in Nigeria are permitted only agricultural enterprises alongside their government service; so small enterprise aquaculture is a reasonable prospect for government employees approaching retirement.

These farms may be small, but they are also ambitious, and they see great potential in the sector which clearly needs supporting with a skilled labour supply. Faced with a prospect of perhaps having to organise training at a personal level if they are to grow their farms, some have been appreciative of the investment NDYEP is making, and see the benefits of taking on DFAC's trainees as interns, both for their own farms, and for strengthening the sector more generally.

### *What do catfish farmers in Akwa Ibom want from an employee?*

*"It is difficult to get skilled staff who can be trusted",* says Noel Nduka, an entrepreneur catfish farmer located on the outskirts of Uyo in Akwa Ibom.

Mr Nduka's farm is situated on a small plot of land which also comprises his family's residence. It is an intensively used plot, with an indoor hatchery; several small and large ponds for separating fingerlings, juvenile at different sizes. He has recently added an ordinary dug-earth pond which will operate as a natural water cleaning system so that he can re-use the waste water from the fish farming process. He has also

innovated a solar powered pump system so that he can easily regulate water supply for all the ponds – this was earlier a regular difficulty threatening the health of the fish, because electricity supply in the area is very erratic. The solar pump system now works very well, generating sufficient supply for the farm even on cloudy days.

Mr Nduka has been farming catfish here for more than four years, and is very confident in the growth potential of the sector. He firmly believes that the sector can easily absorb the trainees DFAC is currently producing, especially if the sector moves into using the large number of natural waterbodies in the area for fish raising: *'200 trainees is not enough; even 2000 will not be enough. We are 180 million Nigerians needing food, so you can't go wrong with food production, the market for it is there'*. But he also realises that for the sector to grow, it needs some support, and more farms need to come up.

He has faced a number of challenges, including staff who have stolen expensive fish feed from him, and staff who make arrangements with the cartel of women fish traders to under-weigh, and therefore undercharge for the fish they buy.

So finding skilled staff who can be trusted is the challenge: he is looking for the best trained hands: *'people who know what they are doing and are committed'*. In particular he wants to *'find people who have someone to vouch for them, like a guarantor'*.

For these reasons he has been happy to partner with DFAC in hosting a group of interns 40 on his farm on a revolving basis for internships of four weeks duration on average. The interns will gain experience from the details of his farming process and his business experience, and he will gain trained young people who are part of a known network. He is also aware that in doing so, he is also supporting a process which aims overall to strengthen the aquaculture business in the state.

## CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED DURING IMPLEMENTATION

### REACHING NDYEP'S TARGETED PROFILE OF TRAINEES

NDYEP's mission was to address youth unemployment and the age range for 'youth' was specified for the project at 16-26. At the same time, the project sought to identify young people who could move away from an endemic 'entitlement' culture in the region, created by an oil-based political economy that had for years attempted to address unrest created by the high levels of inequality written into its economic process through a 'handout' culture which young people had grown up with. NDYEP sought young people who could be inspired by opportunity, who were motivated and could be self-driven; who were capable of the graft that it takes to succeed in the market-driven framework of the private sector.

PIND also promotes an inclusive approach in all its work, and had set a target for NDYEP that at least 40% of trainees benefitting from the programme should be a combination of women and people with disabilities.

DFAC was at first uncertain that these criteria for the trainee target group could be met. Dr Fish feared that real business motivation comes later in life; that young people often want the gain without the graft. He also did not know how he would draw women into the fish-rearing function of the aquaculture value chain. Aquaculture is not customarily as male dominated as some other economic sectors, such as the construction industry, and it is common to see both women and men working in the fish trade. But within the sector, specific tasks are strongly gender segregated: by tradition, men work in fish raising; women work in fish processing and marketing. Lastly, he did not know how he would reach people with disabilities, who he had never worked with before.

Partnering with local organisations through the clusters built for the project provided the solution – and partners were partially identified on this basis. The church organisations in particular had easy outreach to young people, and enabled the project to select from a wide area. Importantly, making contact with Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent De Paul enabled DFAC to reach a group of persons with disabilities as they have been specializing in building services and education for people with

disabilities, including the hearing impaired.<sup>8</sup> Therefore they also have both a network of young, hearing impaired people, as well as understanding of specialist skills to support working with them. This enabled DFAC to bring the aquaculture training to 20 people with hearing impairment at the Daughters of Charity site in Uyo - where a small business in catfish rearing had already been started.

As a result of building these relationships, DFAC has been able to include 11 men and 9 women with disabilities in the trainings (11% of all trainees); and 38% of the overall trainee pool are women. It has also successfully reached young people, although some were slightly older than the project anticipated: the male trainees ranged from 18 to 28; while female trainees were from 16 to 28. Since the training did indeed attract applications from a number of people older than the specified age range, DFAC was also able to organise a separate group of older people trainees in a training carried out beyond the umbrella of NDYEP.

#### *The story of Moses, a trainee with hearing impairments*

Moses, who has had a hearing impairment since birth, was a shoe maker near Uyo until he lost his tools in 2007, and since then has been begging for his subsistence. He has a network of hearing friends who help him from time to time. But when he heard of that Daughters of Charity had opportunities for hearing impaired participants on a training course in aquaculture they intended to host, he knew this would be a useful skill to learn.

His training course involved a group of 19 hearing impaired participants, and four hearing young volunteers connected with the Sisters through the Church, whose presence on the course was seen partially as a way of sustaining the skills to be transferred to more hearing-impaired people in subsequent rounds. They would be the ones to retain and communicate the knowledge and skills, via a sign language interpreter, to the next batches. The course organisers also employed Hope Emmason, a young aquaculture specialist who – through his own initiatives - also knew sign language and could interpret training lessons for the hearing-impaired group.

Following the training, Moses has been working at the 'demonstration' ponds at the Daughters of Charity; he loves feeding and changing the water for the fish. At the same time, like other trainees in this approach, he has also been nurturing the 11 fingerlings he was given at the beginning of the training and keeps in his home. These fish are now quite big and will be ready for sale in a few days. He plans to sell them and buy a few more fingerlings – he is not sure exactly where to get them, but thinks he will manage this. His ambition is to end up with 1000 fish, by slowly growing his stock as he replaces the fish after sales. He thinks his hearing friends will support him with it and give him help when he needs it.

Since then, DFAC has also supported Moses by providing him with his own pond, and a well-wisher donated 100 fingerlings to replenish his stock.

#### WHAT EMPLOYMENT AND ENTERPRISE PATHWAYS ARE BEING ESTABLISHED?

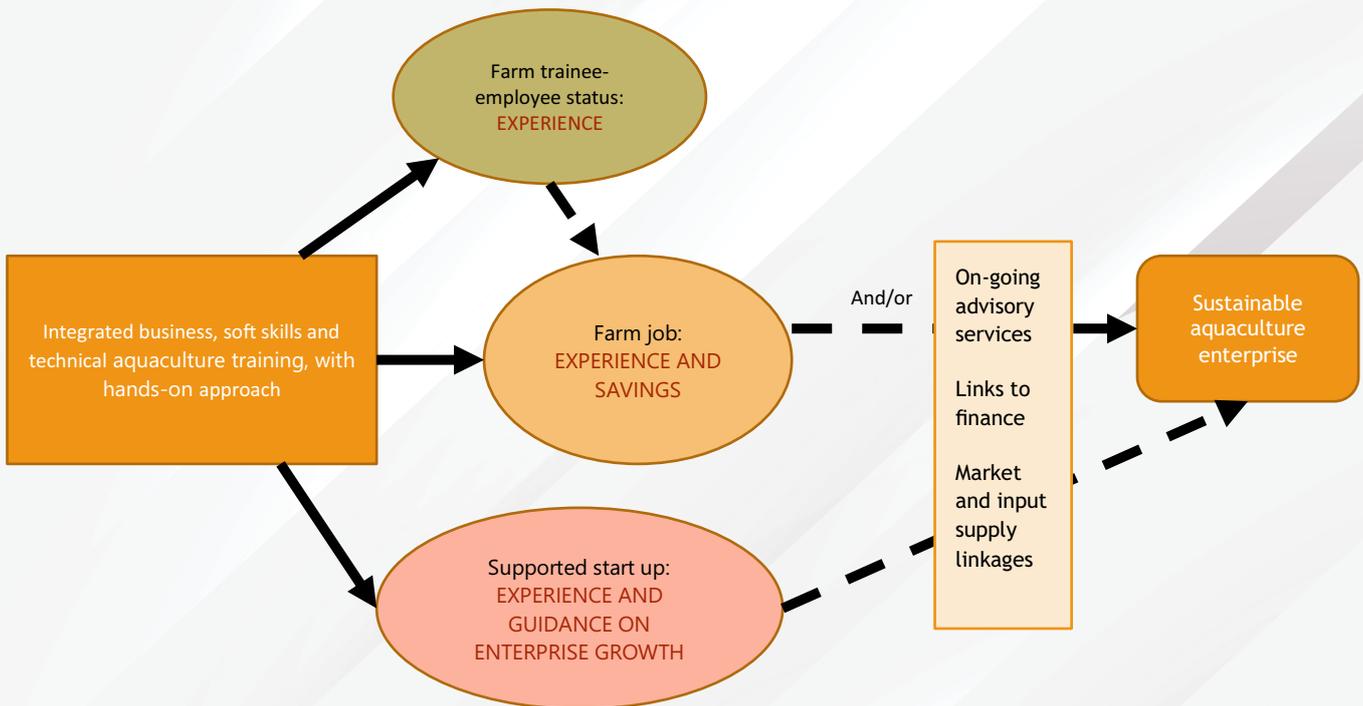
NDYEP set out to make sustainable livelihood options - either in employment or in enterprise - a real result of youth training in the three targeted sectors. It theorized that for the aquaculture sector, the central pathway to this would be via training organisations, which were specifically tasked with supporting the transition from training into enterprise. DFAC is continuing to do this by providing business advisory services, and facilitating linkages to markets and to input supplies such as fingerlings and feed. It is also seeking out opportunities for supporting the youth start-ups with finance.

Emerging pathways taken by the trainees highlights the role of acquiring additional experience and savings in this process. All pathways offer routes to accumulating technical aquaculture experience

<sup>8</sup> <http://daughtersofcharitynigeria.org/viewcontent3.php?tab=7>

beyond the training. Some pathways (farm jobs and potentially supported start-ups) also offer opportunity to generate savings or secure finance which can then build the enterprise.

Figure 1 illustrates the pathways to sustainable youth enterprise in aquaculture observable in DFAC's process.



## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ORGANISATIONS CREATING YOUTH EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMMES IN THE AQUACULTURE SECTOR

NDYEP's experience suggests the following broad lessons for creating successful approaches

### 1. Approach

Ensure that the goal of the initiative is clearly focused on employment and/or business competence outcomes, not simply training. This means at the design stage including components for post-training support to trainees into sustainable employment / business. These components should include opportunities to 1) strengthen skills and build experience in the sector and 2) access funds for business start-up / basic tools; either through employment allowing for saving, or through finance linkages. Roles to implement these components might include:

- mentor roles;
- advisory / incubation services for start-ups;
- market and input supply linkages;
- facilitation of access to finance beyond the training period.

### 2. Partner and trainee selection

Aim to work with organisations embedded in the sector as commercial actors / entrepreneurs, and engage them in a transparent, competitive selection process. Wherever possible, aim to work to the strengths of selected organisations, drawing on existing relationships, specialisations, and opportunities. In turn, engaged organisations should invest early in building relationships with other stakeholders in the sector who have an interest in seeing the field strengthened, especially in terms of skilled labour.

Similarly, trainees must be selected in an open and transparent process on the basis of clear criteria.

### 3. Curriculum

The training curriculum should be integrated in two dimensions:

- 1) Integrating **soft skills** and **business skills** into a strong technical skills training **for the sector**.

The 'business thinking' part of business skills training should be an early module, and used to orientate young people from the outset.

Soft skills should be relevant and adapted to the context, for example including peacebuilding approaches in the Niger Delta.

- 2) Integrating a strong hands-on approach and practical elements for the technical skills and the soft skills, enabling students to apply their learning in practice at each step. This means creating 'making' and 'doing' opportunities as integral to the curriculum delivery, and delivering the technical curriculum using methodologies that allow practice of soft skills: e.g. including group projects to practice team work and presentation; classroom competition and peer evaluation etc.

### 4. Inclusion

Set out to achieve an inclusive process which supports people with disabilities and contributes to gender equality. To do this:

Conduct focused outreach prior to trainee selection: liaise with specialist organisations who understand the needs of and have links to people with disabilities;

Design women-specific advertising for work sectors which do not normally include women;

Consider showcasing women trainees in non-traditional sectors from the early batches to act as role models and mentors for subsequent batches of women entering the sector.

### 5. For Aquaculture interventions specifically:

Hands-on dimensions of the training could include facilitating trainees in their own small scale fish rearing during the training; as well as liaising with demonstration sites such as NGOs and fish farming enterprises to provide a larger scale production experience.

Use the intervention to identify and address local bottlenecks in the value-chain, such as in electricity / water supply; hatcheries; and pond creation/ adaptation. Aim to position trainees to take advantage of all dimensions of the value chain, including by contributing to relieving bottlenecks.

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