



Clean Fish Better Life campaign excites Busia fishermen

As the sun sets on Majanji Fish Landing Site in Busia district in Uganda, George Barasa; a fisherman, docks his boat and heads out to where the music is filling the warm evening of Majanji trading centre. He has plied this trade for 20 years. When he arrives, he joins the furrow of people asking for smart fish t-shirt which seem to be on high demand.

The SmartFish, Cultural Video Foundation, and FAO team are in Majanji to educate the population about the importance of clean fish if the fishing communities are to live a better life.

George says that in Majanji when the fishermen caught fish, they would put it in the baskets for the fish mongers.

When Iglo Foods, a fish factory in Majanji started operations in 2000, the fishermen were forced to put their fish in ice coolers if they were to supply to the factory.

“When we catch fish we put in the containers with the ice to keep it fresh. We can even keep the fish fresh for about two days when it is iced,” George says.

He says the Clean Fish Better Life video aired in his community has taught him and his community so much more.

“The video has taught me better handling of fish so that it does not go bad. I have learnt that when I catch fish I put in an ice cooler and transport it in a clean box to the market. Fish that is transported in ice coolers fetches a higher price. I have also learnt how to prepare fish for consumption. I have learnt that fish should first be washed well, cleaned and kept away from flies. I have learnt that deep frying fish takes the nutrients out so it is better to boil it or grill in over fire”.

George goes on to add that fishers have been drying their silver fish, which is commonly known as ‘Mukene’ in Uganda, on nets placed alongside the sand beach. But from today’s video he has learnt that drying Mukene on drying racks produces a better product for sale even in supermarkets for human

consumption.

“This campaign is very welcome. Our wives have learnt the different ways they can prepare fish. They have learnt how to tell good fish from bad fish. They have learnt that when you just live fish open it can get germs which cause diseases to the family. It has been very useful to the whole community because the people in the video look like the people in our community,” George says.

Eugene Egesu the District Fisheries Officer says the campaign will help government to improve on the demand and supply of fish if people learn to handle fish better and minimise losses.

Busia is a fishing community where fish is not only a staple food; it is also the highest economic activity. The demand for fish is high and fishers supply to Uganda, Kenya, Congo, South Sudan and Rwanda, Europe and Asia. In fact the supply to local communities has been affected in that the cost of fish has gone up. Fish supply has also gone down. For example Iglo Foods fish factory was processing 40,000 tonnes every day in early 2000s from Monday to Monday because there was plenty of fish.

Today, on a weekly basis, they process 10 tonnes. They now work two days in a week. This is because of the overfishing which had depleted the lake.

“What remains for local consumption is low premium fish which is undersized young fish. There is overwhelming fishing effort on the lake because we are neighbouring Kenya whose purchasing power is higher. On our fish landing sites, you see the boats, the fishermen are there but there is no fish. They catch the fish, land on the Kenyan side and sell the fish and come back with empty boats,” Eugene says.

He says that post-harvest losses of fish are low in Busia because fish sells fast because of the high demand. “In the past when there was a lot of fish, post-harvest losses took place during the smoking and sun drying. Very little fish is now processed for sell because there is ready market for fresh fish. We still have post-harvest losses for ‘Mukene’ because it has to be dried. During the rainy season when the sun is not much it goes bad, loses the natural colour and becomes bitter. When you see smoked fish in Busia, you know it is bad because when it goes bad, they smoke and sell it. I cannot buy smoked fish here’.

He says government is promoting rack drying because people now process ‘Mukene’ for human consumption.

“This campaign will help us to teach fisher how to better process ‘Mukene’ to attract a better price,” Eugene says. “While the fishers know these things, using the video message shows the fishers, fish mongers and consumers the mistakes they have been doing and what they should do when they go back to the lake and at home,”

Government has provided ice plants near the fish landing sites for fishermen and fish mongers to transport their catch on foot, bicycles, motorbikes and vehicles.

He says that The Clean Fish Better Life campaign has combined the message of the health aspect, consumption and price. Fishers are being taught that if you do not handle fish well, it will be spoilt and the price will go down.



Women are the principle buyers of food for their family; Clean Fish better life aims to help them choose healthier, quality fish.



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For access to: Clean Fish better Life videos <http://www.youtube.com/user/SmartFishCOI>

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