
An Assessment of the Socio-Economic Impact of Wukari Yam Market in Wukari Local Government Area, Taraba State, Nigeria

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Abstract: Market in Nigeria have been topical issues and have been identified by many as crucial components for economic development of the country. In light of the above, the paper seeks to assess the socio-economic impact of Wukari Yam Market in Wukari Local Government Area, Taraba State, Nigeria with the aim of assessing the contributions of the market to the socio-economic development of Wukari Local Government area and challenges to the market operation. The objectives of the study were achieved through the collection and analysis of primary and secondary data. The primary data were collected through the use of questionnaire, oral interview and personal observation. The result obtained showed that the market is an important component of Wukari economy as it provides employment to many people in the area and bridges the disparities in productive capacity between communities. Although incomes of most yam traders are often not very high, they make a living out of it. The major challenges faced by the traders are high cost of transportation and inadequate capital. The study therefore recommends the provision of special credit scheme that will not demand high collateral or interest from traders. Other recommendations include the maintenance of the market especially in the evacuation of waste, the restructuring of the market in order to create provision for the infrastructural facilities which are lacking in the market and expansion and general development of the Local Government Area.

Keywords: Wukari Yam Market, Socio-Economic, Impact, Wukari Local Government Area, Taraba State, Nigeria

1. Introduction

The centrality of market to the development of developing economies is now beyond dispute. Market has always been an important component of Nigerian economy. A society is made up of parts, which work together as a system. A major part of the system is the 'market', whose functionality provides employment to many people in Nigeria and bridged the disparities in productive capacity between communities. It is also a vital developmental tool and has features that make it a unique instrument for development. A market is an institution which is designed to facilitate the exchange of goods and services among people. The essence of market as an institution is that the terms on which exchanges are made are accepted voluntarily by those who buy and sell. Buyers and sellers compete with each other to maximize the price at which things are sold on the one hand, and to minimize the

price at which things are bought on the other. From the above definitions, it is clear that a market is an authorized public concourse of buyers and sellers of commodities meeting at a place more or less strictly limited or defined at an appointed time [1-3]. It is a social organization or institution where the activities of buying and selling or of exchange of goods and services between people or countries. It connotes an actual or nominal place where forces of demand and supply operate, and where buyers and sellers interact (directly or through intermediaries) to trade goods, services or instruments, for money or barter [1, 3-5]. It is fundamental to economic, social, cultural, religious and political life of people [1, 3, 5-9] as it provides opportunity to meet one's friends and kinsmen for the exchange of news and gossip and serve as avenue for political competition in search of power as well as afford a physical regrouping of social entity that has formally dispersed [1, 5-7, 10]. This paper deals with the socio-

economic impact of Wukari Yam Market in Wukari Local Government Area, Taraba State, Nigeria with the aim of assessing the contributions of the market to the socio-economic development of Wukari Local Government area and challenges to the market operation.

Indeed, the significance of the market becomes obvious from the following facts. Each week, Monday through Saturday during the peak period from November to June, Jukun and Tiv traders of Taraba and Benue States, Nigeria's central region, sell an average of about 15 lorries of yams at the market to buyers from various part of the country and outside the country. The volume and regularity of the exchange in the market agitate the mind, as the following questions beg for answers: When and how did this market develop in the area? Why are yams the main trade items in this market? What are the sources of the yam? How is the market organized? What is the volume of the trade in yam at the market and what are some of the challenges and impact of the market? In the sections following, attempts are made to answer these and other related questions.

2. An Overview of the Study Area

Wukari Local Government Area was created in 1976 and is divided into 15 traditional administrative districts namely: Wukari, Avyi, Matar-Fada, Gidan-Idi, Tsokundi, Nwokyo, Rafin-Kada, Chonku, Kente, Chinka, Jibu, Assa, Bantaje, Arufu and Akwana. Its headquarters is in the town of Wukari on the A4 highway. The Donga River flows through the area and the Benue River forms a boundary with Nasarawa State to the northwest. The town is the base of the Wukari Federation, a traditional state. The Local Government has a total land area of 4,308 km² and the National Population Figure of 2006 put the population at 241,546. The Local Government experiences a tropical climate while the local vegetation is the guinea savannah type. It is marked by dry and rain seasons. The rain season commences in April, and lasts till October. While the dry season lasts from November to March. The average rainfall is 1,350mm. The harmattan; dry, cold and dusty wind is the driest period and occurs from the months of December to February with humidity put at 13 per cent [11]. The people of Wukari are predominantly farmers who grow crops like yam, cassava, corn, rice, soya beans and millets. They also involved in other vocations; as in white-collar jobs, art and crafts.

3. Origin and Development of Wukari Yam Market

It is not certain when the Wukari Yam Market began. Dantsoho argues that the market started in the 1980s as an offshoot of the Wukari main market, adding that in those days the market was smaller and yam came from within southern Taraba and neighboring Benue communities of Logo and Ukum Local Government areas. Yam traders who bought yams from producers sold them out in the market, as

yam was popular among the Wukari people and their neighbours. Sale of yam in Wukari started in Wukari main market located close to the Aku-Uka palace, where other items were also sold [12]. Tersoo who also claim that the market originally started along Ibi road in Wukari, supports this internal trade theory. He added that since the inception of the Yam market, yams were not given out to the traders for free, rather, traders paid for them in various ways including cash, hoes, knives, axes, baskets, and their labour [13]. Informants interviewed claimed different dates for the establishment of the Wukari Yam market. According to Bako, the market started in 1986 [14]. Angyu, however, claimed it started in 1982 [15, 16]. Tersoo asserted that it started in 1982 as a sprout from the main market and was sited around Ibi road about [13]. Akoga, is however of the opinion that until the late 1980s, the market was part and parcel of the Wukari main market located in the heart of the town [17]. Although it is not possible to point with certainty to the exact date of the commencement of the market, the century of the establishment and development of the market is not in doubt; that is the 20th century.

As to the reason for the development of the market, informants explain it from the point of view of complementarities of advantage. According to Dantsoho, the market was stimulated by complementarities of advantage. Wukari and its environs are blessed with fertile arable land suitable for large yam production for both subsistence and commercial scale. In his words, there was "large arable land for the cultivation of the crop and high patronage of buyers from within and outside Taraba State" [12]. Angyo and Dooshima support this view. They asserted that the point that agriculture is the main pre-occupation of the people and there are large hectares of fertile land that support this in Wukari and its environs gives the area comparative advantage over other regions of the country. It is not however clear why the market was relocated to its present location along Jalingo road, but the fact that the market is easily accessible, large and attract high patronage and serve as a bulking and bulk-breaking centre for yams gives it a comparative advantage over its previous locations. As a yam hub, the market attracted farmers from far and wide who bring their produce for better bargains and traders come from across the country and neighbouring Cameroun, Niger and Ghana to make purchases [18-25]. Although yam is the principal items sold in the market, other products are also traded. Thus, apart from yams, the people also sell grains such as corn, guinea corn and millet to buyers/traders from within and outside Taraba State [26]. Argo-chemicals, palm oil, fish, garri are also sold in the market, but these are all later introductions. Other neighboring yam markets where yams are sold include among others Dan Anacha (Taraba State), Zaki-Biam (Benue State), Kastina-Ala (Benue State) and Ugbah (Benue State). When the sale of yam started, men mainly carried it out, now both men and women are involved [13, 25]. The main items purchased by consumers and traders who come from far and near in motorcycles, tricycles, cars lorries/trucks and pick-up vans are yams, garri, corn, guinea corn and millet [26].

4. The Organization and Challenges of the Market

We may at this juncture outline the basic organizational features and challenges of the market Centre. Some of the features and challenges have been mentioned in passing or obliquely in the course of our discussion above. However, it is appropriate now to accord the issues the specific attention they deserve.

The market is a highly organized commercial centre and is organized in a way that enhanced the efficiency of the distributive system. Except on Sundays, every day is a market day. However, Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays are the busiest. Farmers start bringing in the yams from Sundays while actual purchase begins Mondays through Saturdays. The market is opened to all and sundry. This implies that any merchant or vendor may sell or trade goods and services, although individual traders had to belong to trade guilds which regulate the operation of members in the market [19, 16]. In the early days of its existence, the market had no tradition of modern stall system; yams were sold and traded under shades of trees, thatched roofs, tents or stalls supported with stakes or other wooden materials. The modern stall system was latter introduction by the Local Government Council when the Council realized that a lot of money could be generated from stall rents, stalls were built in the market [14, 16].

The market is under the watchful eye of appointed authorities or officials, especially the market chief and crops of assistants who levied taxes, and maintained law and order to attract customers. They are appointed by the Council and the traditional rulers with the duties of ensuring peace and order, enforcing regulations, preventing dishonest dealing and maintaining the cleanliness and repair of the market and market paths. They are market administrators and their position within the market, is therefore, strategic and pivotal. The orderliness and tranquility that prevailed in the market is achieved through the agency of market officials, trade guilds and customary laws guiding the establishment and operations of the market [16]. Moreover, the market is treated as a neutral and sacred place where violence is strictly forbidden.

Yams are bought and sold in bulk of up to 100 tubers and in pieces. Angyo, estimates that no fewer than 50 articulated vehicles of various sizes loaded with yams leave the market daily during its peak period for markets within and outside the State and export outside the country. This translates to between 7 to 15 lorries or 350 - 750 tons of yams [18]. The typical system of bargaining/haggling is use, as there are often not fixed prices for yams. A number of factors influenced and determined prices. They include availability of yams, concession given to relatives and friends, quality of yam(s) as well as the quantity of yams bought and sold. Transactions are by cash. A medium - sized yam sells for between ₦150 - ₦200. Large size yams may attract as much as 300 naira or 400 naira [27, 19]. It is not clear whether cash transactions have been the tradition since the establishment of the market. It would not be surprising if that is the case

since the area had been well adjusted to cash transactions since the colonial era, during which indigenous currencies were abolished and British currencies imposed. In 1973 Nigeria adopted the naira and kobo as its national currencies with nationwide circulation. English but mainly pidgin English, and Hausa are the main language of communication. Where one party does not understand any of the two, such a party uses an interpreter.

However, a variety of factors conspired to ravage the market efficiency and effective organization of the market. Poor road and communication networks in Wukari militate against market efficiency in the area as many of the communities are isolated from the market towns due to deplorable condition and spatial extent of coverage of roads in the area [16, 25, 28, 29]. Roads that lead from production centres to the market in the area are often bad that vehicles conveying farm produce found it difficult to enter the market, and thus, sometimes off-load such goods at the entrance of the market. In the process, movements, in and out of such markets are disturbed. And when checked or confronted by the market authorities, it resulted in abusive remarks, such as, 'are you blind' to see the deplorable condition of the entrance into the market. These structures have remained dilapidated resulting in the failings of the conditions germane to the market efficiency. Though, the market operators attributed this to financial constrain, well, this could be said to be a problem of priorities. Agreed there must have been scarcity of fund; however, the distribution of the little amount available reveals in clear term the preference of the Local Government administrators [13]. This challenge did not only affect the market, but the entire economic and social activities of the area. The implication of the bad road networks on the market is difficulty in the flow of people and goods in and out of the market and low patronage in the market.

Additionally, the relatively low income of farmers and traders is associated with the problem of inadequate capital. Inadequate capital is a problem of both the yam traders and farmers as it affects the quantity of yam they can produce and purchase. The non-yam traders in the market also have the same problem because this can limit the size of their business. Inadequate capital limits the infrastructural development as the aim to put in place new structures to replace the ageing ones scattered across the market as well as provide the basic infrastructure to enhance smooth market activities had always been a challenge to the market. Under this situation, a lot of infrastructure such as good market stalls, potable water and toilet facilities, which would have enhanced smooth marketing activities, are lacking [16]. For example, some yam traders do not have the capital to purchase their own goods; they work for people whom they give fixed returns daily. Getting loans from the banks is not an easy exercise, as majority of these people do not have collateral for the banks. The various informal credit facilities and association which tend to provide loans have limited capital to meet the people's financial demands [16]. For traders to really have a smooth market operation, adequate financing is imperative.

In addition to the above, corrupt practice such as police extortion of traders on our high ways and revenue collectors having personal receipts which they issued to the market users instead of official receipts militate against the smooth running of the market. Inexperienced people and persons of doubtful characters are sometimes charged with the task of revenue collection for the Local Government and this, at times, resulted in the loss of the much-needed funds for effective running of the market. Road marauders and bandits also constantly pillaged traders, especially during periods of communal clashes and political instability in the area [30].

Furthermore, ethno-religious crises with their resultant splitting of market in the communities posed a challenge to the smooth running of the market. For instance, the various feud between the Christians and Muslims from 2013 – 2015, affected the market. There were ill-feelings and apathy between the Christians and Muslims and this really had adverse impact on the market in the area and retarded the socio-economic development of the Local Government. Market could not hold for fear of insecurity any time a dispute occurred. The implication of these challenges on the Wukari communities is that traders from other areas shifted to peaceful, well administered and well-maintained markets in other states and neighbouring communities [16, 25, 28, 29]. This adversely affected the means of livelihood and socio-economic status of Wukari people whose source of commodities supply are from outside Wukari while others experienced low sales and patronage due to reduced population.

5. The Socio-Economic Impact of the Wukari Yam Market on the Community

The market contributes immensely to the socio-economic development of the area in diverse ways through revenue mobilization, attraction of additional functions due to concentration of activities, support in the sustainability of the society and livelihood within and outside the area. It stimulates the improvement in agriculture and mass production of yams, the influx of yam traders into the area and provided ready market for the producers of yams from within and outside Wukari. Thus, a paradigm shift, in orientation of the peoples' economy from inward looking one that produced for internal consumption to an outward looking one that produced for both local consumption and external markets as well as the positive deployment and commercialization of two factors of production – land and labour. This implies that large expenses of land are annually tilled for production while many people found employment in many diverse activities connected with production and trade [16, 25]. These encourage specialization in production and the growth of the market as well as enhanced local and long-distance trade in yam and thereby transformed the erstwhile domestic economy into part subsistence and part commercial economy.

The improvement in production capacity and expansion of

the domestic economy encouraged the acquisition of capital. The capital accumulated is either in form of material property or liquid cash. These contributed substantially to the economic transformation of the area with remarkable changes. Among the changes are specializations in productive activities, population increase, expansion in the market, and increase in professional traders and middlemen activities. For some of the traders, the trade in yams is their main business. These traders live on the profits they get from the business [12]. The expansion and increase of activities in and around the market also contributed to local prosperity and increase tax revenues for community development. Traders pay tolls in the form of tax. The revenue was used to develop and upgrade the market and the communities [16].

The sale of yams led to the development of auxiliary crafts like the production of ropes, (to tie yams), and weaved grass to (cover the yams for protection from excess heat). It is not clear when these auxiliary crafts developed in the business, but the significance of such a development is that it creates jobs for grass weavers, and rope makers; it also shows innovative capacity of Nigerians craft producers as those who respond to changing circumstances [25, 28, 29]. It also boosts transportation. Each week several lorries, cars, motorcycle and buses transport traders from within and outside Wukari to the market and back to their various destination [26].

Furthermore, it led to the development of loading and marking businesses. Traders buy yams; Jukun and Tiv youth and men do their marking and subsequent loading into the lorries for fees. The marking specialists use dye diluted in water and brush. They inscribe initials or trademark of owners on already-bought yams. The inscription is done at the rate of ₦70 to ₦120 per 100 yams [31-36]. After marking the yams, they are loaded into cars and lorries also by mainly Jukun and Tiv youth. Depending on the size of the vehicle, the yams of various traders are loaded by placing them on top of one another but individual trader's yams are separated from the other by weaved grass. After the loading of an individual trader's yams, weaved grass is placed to demarcate it from the next trader's yams and subsequent traders' yams. This is done for easy identification and off-loading. The loading process continues in this way until the lorry is fill from bottom up. The loading is done at the rate of ₦135 to ₦150 per 100 yams and ₦10,000 or ₦15,000 per lorry, depending on the capacity of the lorry [32, 34-38]. Apart from loading vehicles conveying yams out of the market, the loaders and their counterpart, wheelbarrow and cart-pushers play very important role in the off-loading vehicles bringing yams to the market for sale and for movement of yams within the market.

6. Conclusion

This paper has sought to show that the Wukari Yam Market is central to the growth and development of the economy of the area. The market satisfies the cultural matrix of some groups and provide vital prop to the overall performance of their economies. Yams from within Wukari

and neighbouring communities sustained the vibrant market patronize by traders from across the country and neighbouring Cameroun, Niger and Ghana. The market demonstrates the success of economic co-operation and cultural understanding, and provides a range of entrepreneurial opportunities for Nigerians from traders to loaders. However, some issues such as bad road network, low income, corrupt practice and crises militate against its smooth operation and progress. It is important, therefore, that the government of Taraba State set up a task force to ascertain the challenges confronting the market and how to solve them through capital investment and rural development. The centripetal forces that attract many traders to the market is the strategic position it occupied within the trade network of Nigeria. All point considered, the market is pivotal to the growth and development of area.

Recommendations

In view of the various challenges highlighted above which hamper the market activities, the study therefore suggests the following:

- a) Traders and farmers should have access to viable credit facilities that would enhance their business in order to improve their income. The banks can create a special credit scheme that will not demand high collateral or interest rate from them.
- b) Development of good transport network to make movement of people and commodities to and from the market easy and at low cost.
- c) The State and Local Governments should collaborate with the local people to provide market facilities and services such as security, stall, packing spaces, power supply and effective market administration.
- d) The market should be restructured in order to create provision for infrastructural facilities which are lacking in the market.
- e) The law enforcement agency and market administrators should put more effort in preventing corrupt officers from extorting traders. This will increase participation in the market, enhance yam trade and create employment for the masses.
- f) The Government has to develop more efficient crisis management mechanism to be able to nip future crisis in the area at the bud.

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