



Strengthening Fish Marketing Through a Thriving Fish Eatery in Tharaka Nithi County

County:	Tharaka Nithi County		
Sector/s:	Agriculture and Rural Development	Sub-sector/Theme:	Aquaculture, market access, value addition
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Target Audience:	County Government officials, aquaculture stakeholders, development partners, fish farmers, policy makers		
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Introduction

The fish market in Kenya is inherently competitive, volatile, and frequently marked by supply shortages (KMFRI, 2021). Tharaka Nithi County, like many other Counties, faces significant challenges due to underdeveloped fish market infrastructure. Historically, the County has not been a traditional consumer of fish, resulting in low initial demand for fish and fish products. However, targeted interventions such as fish fairs and social behavior change communication (SBCC) campaigns have gradually stimulated local interest and increased consumption.

Despite this progress, many fish farmers have delayed harvesting, citing unstructured market systems and exploitative practices. These conditions have discouraged timely sales, leading farmers to retain fish in ponds beyond optimal harvest periods. Consequently, maintenance costs have risen, eroding potential profits and undermining the sustainability of fish farming enterprises in the region.

A baseline survey carried out by the Aquaculture Business Development Program (ABDP) in Tharaka



Nithi County noted the challenges of prolonged droughts, porous soils, predators, unavailable and costly feeds, scarcity of quality fingerlings and an unstructured fish market as the major hindrances to fish farming in the County.

Implementation of the practice

Tharaka Nithi County, under the second cohort of Aquaculture Business Development Program (ABDP) that begun in the FY 2020-21 benefitted 1,195 fish farmers. 795 males, 420 females, 154 youths, and 9 PWDs. ABDP provided 1,109 pond liners to reduce seepage of water, 25 predator control kits (nets), 839,000 quality f9 tilapia fingerlings with each beneficiary receiving 1000 fingerlings, and 172,300 kg of quality fish feeds. Capacity building of farmers by County technical staff with mobility support from the program is a key implementation practice with 8 motorcycles having been issued to extension staff to support extension outreach to farmers.



Picture 1: A section of the fish eatery set up by the ABDP program where value added fish is sold.

Like most other Counties, many beneficiaries from the County faced marketing obstacles as well as post-harvest losses. To address the challenge of farmers continuing to feed table-sized fish due to limited market access, Tharaka Nithi County Government Department of Agriculture and Fisheries with support from ABDP County Office established a fresh fish market at Chuka Town. The initiative offers ready market for fish produced by farmers at around the County. Fresh catfish and tilapia fish is value added at the facility and served with kachumbari and ugali, offering a ready market for the local fish producers. Marketing of the eatery is done through social media and through strategically placed posters across government offices and key locations in Chuka town.

Since its launch, the initiative has significantly boosted demand for both fresh and cooked fish, often exceeding daily supply capacity. In response, the County Government now schedules two farmers per week to harvest and supply fish to the eatery. Beneficiary testimonials indicate that this model has enabled farmers to earn higher profits compared to selling through brokers or without value addition, thereby enhancing the viability of fish farming in the County. Scheduled farmers deliver the fish to the facility packed in iced cool boxes that were supplied to all Smallholder



Aquaculture Groups across the County by the County Government of Tharaka nithi.

The County also supported establishment of fish eateries in every sub county. ABDP has also supported 5 other fish eateries mainly operated by Aquaculture Support Enterprise (ASE) youth groups across the County through the matching grants window which has greatly eased the pressure on the main fresh fish market in Chuka town.



A section of the fresh fish market set up by Tharaka Nithi County Government with the help of ABDP program

Farmers who cannot sell their fish at farm gate or the sub county level fish eateries are taken care of by being scheduled to value add and sell their fish at the fresh fish market. The market has offered great opportunity to farmers to maximize profits as the price of a kg of fresh fish at the market is Ksh. 600 while that of value-added fish is Ksh.700 per kg. This is much higher than the price offered by majority of brokers at Ksh. 350 per kg. The facility boasts of 3 half tone capacity freezers supported by the ABDP program that fully operates on solar energy cutting the running costs of power

Results of the practice

- ✓ **Increased demand and more production of fish in the County :** The eatery quickly gained popularity, with demand for fresh and cooked fish surpassing daily supply capacity. The County experienced an increase in the number of farmers practising fish farming from the previous 616 active farmers to a whooping over 2,500 farmers from ABDP program support and replications by farmers encouraged to venture into the lucrative fish farming venture. farmers. The consistent growth of the sector has seen the County placed as one of the best performing among the ABDP implementing Counties scooping awards every year during the National stakeholders' workshops organized by the program. At end of May 2025, the County had registered over 100 tons of harvested fish and a cumulative total of over 500 tons over the last 5 years of the implementation of the program
- ✓ **Improved Farmer Incomes:** Farmers reported higher profits compared to selling through brokers, thanks to value addition and direct sales. The fresh fish market has offered great opportunity to farmers to maximize profits as the price of a kg of fresh fish at the market is



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- ✓ **Market Confidence:** The initiative restored confidence among fish farmers, encouraging them to expand production.
- ✓ **Planned Expansion:** With demand at the temporary eatery now surpassing supply, plans are underway to establish a fully operational eatery that will run throughout the weekdays. This expansion is expected to significantly increase the number of farmers able to market their fish weekly. The fresh fish market is currently operated by smallholder Aquaculture Groups in the County with the support of assigned technical staff from the County Fisheries department. Plans are underway to lease the facility to a private vendor through an organized PPP model to ensure sustainability and further profitability for fish farmers in the County.

Tharaka Nithi County Government has effectively addressed key marketing barriers for fish farmers by guaranteeing a consistent outlet for two producers each week. Moreover, the integration of value addition through preparation and direct sale of cooked fish has enhanced profitability for participating farmers. This success has not only sustained current producers but also inspired others to scale up their operations, confident in the County's continued support for structured and reliable market access.

Lessons learnt

- ✓ Creating a localized, structured market can significantly boost demand and profitability for smallholder farmers.
- ✓ Value addition is a powerful incentive for farmers to remain engaged in production.
- ✓ Strategic communication and visibility are essential in shifting consumer behavior in non-traditional markets.

Recommendations

- ✓ A scale up the eatery model to other sub-counties to replicate success and broaden market access is highly recommended.
- ✓ The integration of cold chain and storage facilities to support increased supply and reduce post-harvest losses is vital.
- ✓ It is important to strengthen farmer cooperatives to coordinate supply of fish and negotiate

better terms collectively.

Further reading

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3. Tharaka Nithi County Government Website - www.tharakanithi.go.ke
4. Aquaculture Business Development Program Website - <https://www.abdpcu.org/case-studies/>
5. - Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute (KMFRI), 2021 – Status of Fish Markets in Kenya

Pictorial



Figure 3: weighing scales and coolers at the eatery provided by Tharaka Nithi County government



Figure 4: Mary Munene, a fish farmer shows freshly harvested catfish from her farm



Figure 5: catfish ready for serving at the eatery