

Project to produce local Catfish food underway.

By Joshua Turyatema

A 2-year project that will see Uganda able to produce Catfish food is underway, as researchers try to find solutions to the problem of expensive imported packaged food for young cat fish.

Cat fish is the third highest selling fish variety in Uganda after Nile Perch and Tilapia and aqua-culturalists are fast predicting an increase in its demand, as the stock of Nile perch in Lake Victoria continues to dwindle.

With initial funding of US dollars 50,000 from NORAD, the project titled; *Utilization of live feeds for hatchery based feed production*-- under the Department of Zoology in Makerere University, is currently in its eighth month, but the researchers are already very optimistic of the positive impact the project will have on the economy.

A survey carried out in 2008 by the Kampala district fisheries department revealed that out of 28 fish farmers in Kampala, 18 are involved in tilapia and cat fish farming. With 10 farmers engaged in hatchery production.

However, the issue of breeding the catfish has been a complex one, with survival rates ranging between 45 and 50 percent. The major problem has been observed to be the high expensive cost involved in feeding young cat fish. At the moment, feed for domestic cat fish farming is at a cost 100 US dollars for a tin of 500 grams which can feed about 10,000 fish for the first six months.

Aqua-culturalists say that young fish are very sensitive to feeding and if they don't get good care in infancy, most of them never reach maturity stage. Those that survive often end up stunted. The high expense on the imported food has thus been a very discouraging factor for many farmers and other potential investors in the sector.



Picture of Artemia: The species is Being bred to feed Cat fish at Makerere University.

Dr. Gladys Bwanika, the principle researcher in the project, says once the project succeeds, it will lead to a reduction of imported fish feed by about 80 percent.

Young cat fish feed on Artemia, a living organism which is harvested from the ocean and large water bodies. It is then processed and packaged in an incubated form. Under the project, samples have been taken from Lake Victoria and are being tried with the

intention of being bred on a large scale and sold in liquid form in quantities which can be afforded by farmers.

Currently cat fish is mostly consumed locally with average exports to the DR Congo and Southern Sudan. Half a kilo of cat fish on the local market goes for about 5,000 Ugandan shillings. Apparently, similar projects have been carried with high success rates in Egypt, Israel and Thailand.