



Tropentag, October 6-8, 2009, Hamburg

“Biophysical and Socio-economic Frame Conditions
for the Sustainable Management
of Natural Resources”

Livelihood Choices, Diversification and Poverty in Fisheries Dependent Communities in Cameroon and Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper assesses the relationship between livelihood choices, diversification and poverty in fishery-dependent communities in Cameroon and Nigeria using cross-section data that was collected in April and May 2007. Data was collected from stratified samples of 282 households in Cameroon and 277 households in Nigeria.

The impact of livelihood choices and the degree of income diversification are expected to have an impact on welfare indicators such as the poverty incidence and the poverty gap.

The study identifies farming as a major livelihood activity for both Cameroon and Nigeria. Apart from farming, more households obtain most of their income from fishing and livestock sales in Cameroon than in Nigeria and more households depend on other off-farm activities in Nigeria than in Cameroon. The differences in the focus of livelihood activity portfolios in the two samples are mainly explained by constraints to access to resources and market opportunities.

The results show significant differences between sub-populations, depending on their choice of the primary livelihood activity and income diversification. We find that fishing households generate the highest income per capita, which results in low poverty incidence as compared to other livelihood groups. Income diversification is highly elastic to income changes for poor households, while the increase in diversification becomes less sensitive to income changes for better-off households. This shows that for poor households diversification is driven by low income, while risk mitigation plays a more dominant role for households above the poverty line.

It is therefore necessary to consider initial levels of poverty and livelihood choices of fisheries communities to design effective development interventions.

Keywords: Livelihood choices, poverty, small-scale fisheries, Sub-Saharan Africa