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“Resilience of agricultural systems against crises”

Common Use and Collapse of a Natural Resource in West Africa: The Fishery in Benin

ANOUMOU ADJOAVI CHRISTELLE NADIA¹, JOACHIM VOGT²

¹*Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main, Institute of Physical Geography, Working Group Geoecology and Physical Geography, Germany*

²*Karlsruhe University, Institute of Regional Sciences, Germany*

Abstract

The common use of natural resources is a general practice in developing countries. They include rangelands, forests and water bodies. The livelihood of many fishermen worldwide depends essentially on the availability and accessibility of fish in a lagoon. A clear agreement of usage rules and an efficient regulation are necessary to avoid overusing these resources. Only an efficient regulation assure the sustainability of the resource.

The regulation of commons in sub-Saharan-Africa was the task of traditional authorities, but at present more and more of the modern administration. In this transformation phase, the concurrence between two categories of stakeholders with different rationalities decreases their engagement and causes crisis, which endanger the value of the resource. This problem was analysed using the example of Lake Ahémé in Benin, where the fishery collapsed, due to an increasing erosion of regulation and rising anthropological pressure.

The study is based upon literature and empirical research in 2011. With an ethnological approach as basis, primary data were collected in five villages of the municipalities Kpomassé and Comé (South Benin) on the causes of the decline of fish stocks in Ahémé lake. In addition, secondary data from available literature and official statistics were analyzed. The adaptation processes of fishermen from Lake Ahémé were analysed and some scenarios were tested based on the current situation.

The study should provide the Administration of Fishery in Benin with a decision aid for a possible sustainable management of fisheries in Benin, in order to mitigate the problems and to increase the resilience of the lagoon fishery system in Ahémé lake.

Keywords: Benin, commons, lagoon fishery