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Food Security in Cambodia: Fishing in the Mekong in the Light of Declining Fish Stocks

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Abstract

With its fertile soil, low population density and abundance of fish in the Mekong river, the province of Stung Treng in Cambodia's north offers its people rich resources for food production during much of the year. This is reflected in measures of dietary diversity such as the Food Consumption- and Household Dietary Diversity scores indicating widespread Food Security. Looking at the details reveals that fishing in the Mekong as source of protein is of utmost importance for large parts of the population. At the same time, incidences of food insecurity during parts of the year coupled with signs of overfishing and expected further reduction of fish stocks due to the construction of hydroelectric power stations along the Mekong speak a different language: In the absence of alternative sources of income and the presence of degradation of environmental resources, especially fish, the future of Food Security in Stung Treng is not secured. The aim of this paper is to assess the current situation of food security in Stung Treng, to identify the groups which are most dependent on fishing and to project the possible impact of declining fish stocks on these households. We use data on 600 rural households in 30 villages collected in the province of Stung Treng, Cambodia, in 2014, analysing household characteristics in relation to the importance of fish in their daily diet and fishing as part of their income generating activities. Different scenarios of declining fish stocks are used to project the future of food security for the households in the province, deriving implications for the need to adjust income generating activities.

Keywords: Cambodia, Fishing, food Security