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Traditional Smoking of Freshwater Fish in the Western Region, Cameroon

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Abstract

The West region of Cameroon has a high demand for innovative and healthy solutions for fresh water fish conservation. Smoking, drying and salting were the three fish conservation methods identified in the Noun Division. Of all these methods, smoking was predominantly (75 %) practiced. An evaluation of socio-economical characteristics of fish smokers was conducted. The results of this study showed that fish smoking is practised mainly by women (70 %) which is common in the Cameroonian small scale fish sector, aged from 20 to 50 years (80 %), and married (91.2 %) and taking care of a family of 1 to 10 persons (80 %). These smokers are Muslim (74 %), belonging to the Bamoun ethnic group (81 %). They were also involved in other activities: agriculture (29 %) and trade (1 %). About 67 % of the sampled population had an experience of more than 10 years. The purpose of smoking was largely sales (97 %) and subsistence (3 %). *Oreochromis niloticus*, commonly called Nile tilapia, was the most smoked species (36 %), followed by *Clarias gariepinus*, called African catfish (32 %). The average quantity of fresh fish smoked was 110 kg/day/smoker, with *Oreochromis niloticus* having a higher production level (60 ± 4.74 kg/day/smoker). With regard to the smoking techniques used, hygiene measures were poorly respected. This study revealed that freshwater' traditional fish smoking activities in Noun Division are influenced by gender, economic and cultural aspects. Also, these activities are constrained by a lack of technical support material and financial means. Any investigations on the implication on health and food safety will be suitable for fresh fish smokers and the consumers. The environmental impact of smoking efficiency and methods on forest depletion is to be monitored and assessed in further investigations.

Keywords: Cameroon, continental waters, fish conservation, processing