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Challenges and opportunities to sustainable livelihoods of youth involved in small-scale aquaculture fish production in Zambia

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Abstract

Zambia, like many countries in Africa, faces the challenge of employment creation for its growing number of youth. One sector that could provide the solution is the aquaculture sector. Although the aquaculture sector has the potential to improve incomes among the rural youth, their participation is not as expected. This raises an important question: “What are the challenges and opportunities that influence youth participation in fish farming as a means of livelihood?”

A study was carried out in December 2020 in Chongwe District that aimed to identify the opportunities and challenges that constrain youth engagement in the aquaculture value chain. The study used a framework based on the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA) and the concept of livelihood assets. The specific objectives of the study were to: (1) identify how youth are involved in the aquaculture value chain; (2) determine the challenges they face and successes they have made; (3) identify the livelihood assets that youth involved in aquaculture possess; and (4) determine how fish farming projects empower youth to achieve livelihood security. A qualitative questionnaire was used for data collection with 26 youths along with field observations. Notes taken during interviews and field observations were transcribed and organised in Excel for analysis using content analysis.

The study showed that the major constraints that young people face in fish farming are high cost of feeds and dam liners, predation by birds and other animals, lack of capital (finance), non-availability of fingerlings, climate change, inconsistent supply of water, lack of access to markets, lack of management and technical skills, and limited access to extension services. The asset profile of young farmers was also reviewed and the results showed that the youth lacked proper access to a variety of livelihood assets such as financial capital, natural capital, human capital, social capital, and physical capital, which repressed their participation and success in fish farming. The results further showed that some donor-driven interventions contributed to the poor sustainability of livelihoods that resulted in the majority of youth farmers abandoning fish production.

Keywords: Aquaculture, livelihoods, value chains, youth employment