

Livelihood Change and Resource Use in Agro-silvo-fishery Settlements around Lake Victoria, Western Kenya

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This study aims at illuminating the extent of environmental change driven by livelihood diversification and resource use, and identifying factors that influence livelihood security of households in agro-silvo-fishery settlements around Lake Victoria, Western Kenya, in the context of a new resource co-management regime introduced in the 2000s that may impact on resource access and livelihood strategies of the people. The following is a discussion based on a preliminary field research in Sindu and its environs, the former Suba District, Nyanza Province. A sample of 59 households was obtained from different zones to examine how resource use is different according to the distance from the lake shore. Contrary to some expectations set by the existing literature, farming households located in the interior zones were increasingly separated from fishing, possibly due to overfishing and the general shift from inshore to offshore fisheries, and to the increasing fishing cost: only those with sufficient capital can go offshore to fish. The livelihood options for the people may become less than before, with the consequence of their increasing vulnerability to various economic shocks. In contrast to the case of fishing, resources in the forest reserve adjacent to their settlements were widely used for firewood and fodder regardless of the zones from the lake shore. This was with no communal nor co-management except occasional community policing, facing environmental degradation. Natural resource use and livelihood diversification/security in the research area are also to be examined taking into account the co-management system since, once operational on a greater scale, it may restrict the resource access of the interior people when the aquatic resources are restored and firewood are used again for local processing of fish.

Keywords: Resource use, Livelihood diversification, Lake Victoria, Kenya