

Title: Livelihood Strategies of African Floodplain Fishers Under Hydro-Climatic Changes

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Abstract: Although diversification of producing activities and migration abilities are often supposed to reduce vulnerabilities of the rural households, it should not be considered as a general rule. In the Central Delta of the Niger River in Mali, fishers are massively involved in rice farming as secondary activity and many of them are equipped with motorized canoes to carry out seasonal migrations. Nevertheless, they have difficulties to use such capacities to cope with the interannual variations of hydrology. Because the Delta area has long been occupied and has reached saturation and because of the strong seasonality affecting the floodplain ecosystem, the fishers undergo heavy constraints when handling their activities. Thus, the diversity of the observed traditional livelihoods strategies among floodplain fishers communities is the result of fine tunings in exploitation strategies and in social sharing of the natural resources, but it by no means constitutes a range of flexible options. Hence, fishers households have actually few real degrees of freedom to manage their trajectories to face the environmental stresses, namely the weakening of the seasonal flood. Therefore, distant migration to other aquatic ecosystems (such as estuaries and reservoirs) is the most frequent answer adopted by the floodplain fishers under hydro-climatic changes, in spite of the associated risks. This exile maybe accentuated in the next years with the creation of new dams and the extension of irrigation in the upstream parts of the Basin of Niger which will reduce their present natural resources.