

EXPLORING INEQUITY IN INCOME AND LIVELIHOOD OPPORTUNITIES IN TAM GIANG LAGOON, VIETNAM

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Diversity of livelihood activities

Households in Thuy Dien village are involved in a range of multiple livelihoods, in which fishing and aquaculture are the main activities. Some activities are fisheries related, including boat repairing, net mending, fish buying, and wage labour in earth ponds. Non-fishing activities include small trading, livestock raising, and other services (clothes making, hair dressing, and etc.) to enhance household livelihoods.

Although there are multiple livelihood activities that a household can engage in, not all households have access to these opportunities. For some activities, skills are needed; for others, capital is needed (Marschke 2005). For example, small trading requires a significant capital investment, as well as for hire-purchasing (deferred payment) of local fishers. In fact, the diversity of livelihood activities depends on the livelihood assets available to the households, especially their access to lagoon resources.

Household classification

To understand the current complex livelihood systems, the village was classified into four groups: (1) Earth pond aquaculture households (16.8%) include any households who have earth pond aquaculture regardless their involvement in net-enclosure and mobile fishing activities; (2) Net-enclosure households (59.4%) include households who get involved in net-enclosure aquaculture but do not involve in earth-pond aquaculture; (3) Mobile fishing households (16.1%) are fishing households who do not get involved in any kinds of aquaculture; and (4) Non-fishing households (7.7%) are households who used to be fishing households but has stopped fishing. The classification is based on lagoon resources access and fishery related livelihood activities. Figure 1 represents the proportion of lagoon user groups among fishing households, as well as the overlap of the different groups.

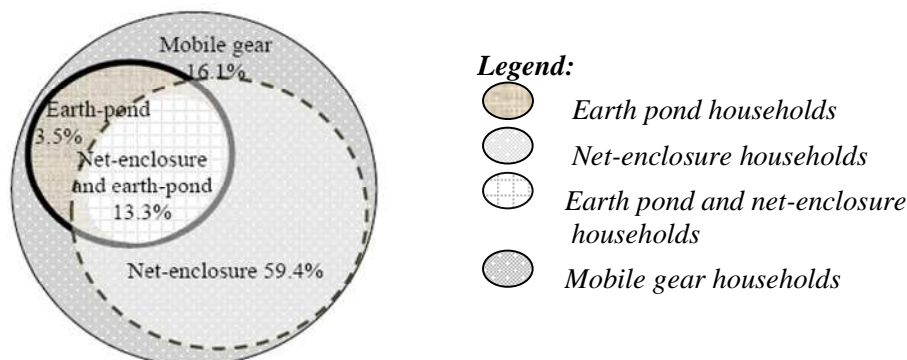


Figure 1: Lagoon user groups among fishing households

Livelihood strategies

Livelihood strategies are plans and activities for achieving an end that, in turn, require certain assets, entitlements and capabilities. They are the product of the interaction between choices and constraints. In the village, six main livelihood strategies were identified: mobility, diversification, specialization, commercialization, intensification, and out-migration. Almost none of households pursue a single livelihood strategy. They may be involved in multiple strategies which sometimes seem to conflict with each other, such as diversification and specialization. In fact, these strategies are only incompatible at the individual level; they can co-exist within a household livelihood strategy (Ellis 2000). A household can diversify their livelihood as each individual specializes in a single occupation

Local households may pursue different livelihood strategies, depending on the seasons, their access to livelihood assets (especially fishing grounds and education), their skill base and risk preference (Leach et al. 1997, Pomeroy et al. 2006). Household livelihood strategies may also be shaped by traditional and government institutions (local customs, government regulations...), social relations (gender, kinship...), and economic opportunities (Ellis 2000). Some strategies are pursued more strongly than others. For instance, more than 90% of households diversified their livelihood activities (livelihood survey 2007).

In the village, fishing grounds are not simply resources for local community to build their livelihoods, but provide them “capabilities to be and act” (Bebbington 1999: 2022). Access to resources is also the opportunity for households to involve in different livelihood activities and strategies. Table 2 presents the differences in livelihood strategies in different groups.

Table 2: Livelihood strategies in different groups

Livelihood strategies	Earth pond	Net-enclosure	Mobile fishing	Non-fishing
Diversification	+++	+++	+++	+++
Specialization	+++	++	-	-
Commercialization	++	++	+	+
Intensification	+++	++	+++	+
Out-migration	+	+	++	+++
Mobility	+	+	+++	-

Notes: Relative strength of variables (+++) (++) (+) (-)
 (+++) *very strong strategy* (+) *neutral strategy*
 (++) *strong strategy* (-) *weak strategy*

Circulation of livelihood incomes

To understand the feedback and investment of livelihood outcomes, income circulation was emphasized. Income portfolios of net-enclosure households and mobile fishing households were analyzed. Table 3 represents the differences in income portfolios of two representative households of the two groups.

Table 3: Income portfolios of two households

	A net-enclosure household		A mobile fishing household	
	%	VND	%	VND
Aquaculture	46	18,000,000		
Fishing	28	11,000,000	62	8,400,000
Wage labour	6	2,500,000	29	4,000,000
Trading	17	6,500,000		
Animal raising	3	1,200,000	8	1,100,000
	100	39,200,000	100	13,500,000

Note: CAD\$1 = VND 14,500 (June 2006)

According to table 3, the net-enclosure household has more opportunities to diversify their activities as a means to supplement fishing incomes. Capture fishing remained an important livelihood activity in both households. In the mobile fishing household, it was the primary income source, which was equal to two-thirds of the total household income. Income from capture fishing of the net-enclosure household was higher than that of the mobile fishing household because of the advantage fish corrals provide. Aquaculture, in fact, has made a significant difference in household incomes between the two households and generally between net-enclosure and mobile gear groups.

Non-fishing activities provided one-quarter to one-third of the incomes for both households. Mobile fishing household has limited financial capital; consequently, wage labour was the main alternative livelihood option. Animal raising was mostly for household consumption; a small amount was for the local market. In the net-enclosure household, small trading was the most important non-fishing activity. Although most of the purchasing was deferred payment, their small shop provided considerable income for the household.

Conclusions

The research draws on an analytical livelihood framework to examine the livelihood systems in Thuy Dien village in response to aquaculture development and changes in resource access. Natural resources are the most important livelihood asset in rural Vietnam. Access to fishing grounds may provide opportunities for households to enhance their access to other livelihood assets (physical, financial, human, and social capitals) and to pursue various livelihood activities. Each household negotiates their activities, based upon seasonality, division of household labour and available resource assets (Marschke 2005). Diversification into fishing and non-fishing activities can be seen as a coping strategy or an adaptive strategy, or may be a blend of both. This livelihood strategy reduces the risk of livelihood failure by developing multiple income sources. Livelihood diversification has become a key livelihood strategy for most village households.

Although there are multiple livelihood activities that a household can engage in, not all households have access to these opportunities. While many of the households with access to aquaculture became rich quickly, mobile gear households were excluded from the fishing grounds previously held as commons and were dispossessed. The development of aquaculture, in fact, results in the inequity in the distribution of income and livelihood opportunities in Tam Giang Lagoon.

References

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