

# Voodoo and fishing in a changing world: The role of traditional religion and modern institutions in managing the inland fisheries of Benin

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This paper investigates the role of traditional and modern community-level institutions in managing the inland fishery stock of southern Benin. More specifically, we investigate the functioning of two rules designed to regulate the use of fine mesh fishing nets. The rules stem from two distinct institutions: (i) a modern institution embodied in fishing committees, and (ii) a traditional institution embedded in Voodoo, an animistic religion that originated in Benin. We examine whether these rules are respected, relying on individual-level data on the use of fishing gear, fishing revenue and religious affiliation. We find that the traditional and the modern rule co-exist: both rules have a statistically significant effect on fishing activities. However, their quantitative effect is small and, unless reinforced, the existing rules may not be sufficient to prevent a collapse of the ecosystem.

