The employment, food supply and economic impact of small-scale fisheries and aquaculture have been appraised, with confirmation that they contribute very strongly to rural and urban food supply, employment, trade, and export potential of Cameroon, like most African economies. The unprecedented and sudden impacts of COVID-19 have caused significant economic disruptions in Cameroon, including within the fisheries and aquaculture sector which has been particularly hard-hit by market disruptions.

Whether the cause is direct (due to sickness) or indirect (as a result of restricted activity or travel bans), profitability of individual fisheries and aquaculture businesses have and will continue to dwindle as long as the COVID-19 pandemic is not eradicated, with its related prevention and/or containing measures still in place.

The sanitation and lock-down measures instituted by the government of Cameroon to contain the COVID-19 pandemic, have made fishing difficult and caused a reduction or total halt in fishing activities nationwide. Limited supplies of baits and gears because suppliers are closed or unable to provide inputs on credit have further constrained fishing activities.

Labor shortage is another problem given that some crew members who are foreigners from Nigeria currently cannot cross national borders. Restaurants, hotels, universities, and associated canteens have equally shut down, causing a drop in activity for most wholesalers. Panic-buying has fostered the sale of frozen and canned fish and fish products but this will hardly continue if the source of raw material is not available.
Due to the current market disruptions, fish farmers particularly face difficulties selling their harvest and are obliged to keep large quantities of live fish that need to be fed for an indeterminate period. Unsold produce results in higher costs, expenditures, and risks. Due to restrictions on transportation and travel of personnel, small scale aquaculture has benefited from limited competition from exports but faces the challenge of sourcing inputs like seeds and feed and finding labor.

Since, it is neither clear when the pandemic will end nor whether the sector will experience a quick or slow post-pandemic recovery, different actors are adopting various strategies at a local level to cope with these market disruptions. Fishermen and fish workers are changing their fishing gears, targeting different species, or selling their products to the domestic markets. Due to the loss of wholesaler markets, some fishermen, fish farmers, and fish workers are selling directly to final consumers, sometimes delivering orders to customer’s homes.

Before delivering to homes, they take pre-orders, communicate with customers via telephone to limit the level of physical interaction during the delivery, and wear facial masks throughout. At open market spaces, vendors ensure that there is the frequent use of hand sanitizers (pumps) and tables are set up to ensure physical distancing. Most payments are made through mobile money transfer services.

Measures to counteract impact are being intensified by various stakeholders at individual, community and governmental levels. While the measures adopted thus far support fishing communities - especially women operating in the post-harvest sector, domestic markets are still limited both in terms of demand and price. There is, therefore, need for more innovative, coordinated, collective, unremitting, and progressive actions to fully salvage the situation.