Abstract
Cameroon is an incredibly diverse country and is home to heavily forested tropical, savannah, and sahelian ecosystems. The extraordinary range of the cultural and ecological diversity in the country leads to a corresponding plethora of development issues. While the country has a large portion of its population living at a subsistence level, the constraints on these villages vary vastly based on the geographic and environmental locations of the villages. This paper highlights two villages in an attempt to shed light on applicable development interventions and how geography affects development interventions.

The two case studies presented in this paper outline how varied natural and economic resource constraints can be in Cameroon. The purpose of this paper is to explore and identify resource constraints in very different communities in Cameroon, to determine how the communities are constrained by resources, and provide some recommendations and insights for development organizations.

Using an exploratory case study method, I identified secondary research objectives that were site specific. Each site had very different resource constraints, Bechati was much more market driven while Piwa experienced severe natural resource constraints. Therefore, the theoretical framework and literature review for each site is dependent on the identified resource constraints which in turn informs differently the main research objective.

The first case, Bechati, is located in the lush rainforests of southwestern Cameroon and poverty in generally driven by geographic isolation and limited market access, rather than natural resources. The deplorable road conditions and lack of cell service keep the community in a bare minimum subsistence level, and keep per capita incomes low.

Strategies and recommendations for this community included utilizing existing social and economic structures, such as community groups and co-operatives, to create marketing plans in order to get their products out of Bechati and to the larger market, rather than relying on local traders to travel to the village to purchase their goods.
The second case study, Piwa, is located in the dry Sahelian climate of northwestern Cameroon and is most limited by natural resource constraints, such as limited water availability and poor soil fertility, than by any other factor. The very short growing season coupled with a long, dry, hot season encourage the community members of Piwa to diversify their income generating activities and subsistence farming, as well as to rely on the bush as a source of supplemental food and fuel wood. Recommendations and strategies to help cope better with natural resource constraints in Piwa included entering new agricultural markets, like soy, and to increase food transformation as a source of secondary income.

For both sites, the study indicated that increasing women’s business skills and economic opportunities would help strengthen coping mechanisms to resource constraints. Secondly, it was clear that in general, capacity building and basic business skills and knowledge would also benefit the communities, both individuals and group cooperatives. Overall, the main management recommendations derived from this project indicate that it is very important to be site specific when implementing development interventions. While located in the same political country, these two communities are examples of just how diverse Cameroon, as well as many other countries in West Africa, is and how development issues can vary based on geographic, economic, and social aspects of the area. There is no one single strategy that will alleviate poverty in Cameroon and its important to take into account the local environments when developing interventions.