Throughout history, humans have learned to adapt to the environment in which they live. Groups of people often change their lifestyle in order to obtain basic necessities, such as food and water. The villages surrounding Lake Chad are no exception. The Geographical Journal article, “Fishing and Farming at Lake Chad: Responses to Lake-Level Fluctuations” by Birkett and Sarch (2000) describes how these communities acclimate to the constantly changing lake conditions.

Though Lake Chad has been expanding and contracting throughout the twentieth century, the lake has been receding significantly since 1973. The TOPEX/POSEIDON satellite has provided images of the lakeshore since the 1990s (previously, METEOSTAT imagery technology was used), allowing researchers to track the changing lake-level. This can be compared to village events such as droughts, good harvest years, and the establishment of temporary fishing camps in various locations.

Birkett and Sarch explain that many villages in the Lake Chad Basin have been changing location in accordance with the lake contraction. Over the last few decades, villages have gradually moved closer and closer toward the lake as it recedes. Because Lake Chad is the primary water source in the area, it is imperative for the communities to move along with it. I find this action almost nomadic. The people are following the water because it provides them with the food (fish, fertile soil for the planting of crops) they need to survive.

Household surveys were conducted in 1993 to determine the percentage of farming versus fishing based lifestyles. The results showed that, “the majority (59%) earned three-quarters of their income from farming, a significant proportion (36%) earned income from a combination of fishing and farming and few (5%) households relied entirely on fishing income.” (Birkett and Sarch 2000: 160). Although most villages were primarily settled as fishing communities, it is clear that the majority no longer maintains this lifestyle. The contraction of Lake Chad has caused most households to switch to farming or to combine both fishing and farming. As the lake-level recedes, fertile lake floor is uncovered, allowing successful farming to take place.

In addition to the overall contraction of the lake, seasonal fluctuations in the lake also affect the lifestyles of the fishing and farming communities. Beginning around July, water levels begin to rise, flooding the surrounding area. During this time, fishing is a main focus. By January, the floodwaters begin to recede, revealing the fertile soil below. I found it particularly interesting that, in addition to these communities shifting their food-acquiring habits over decades, they also change throughout the year. Seasonal changes in the availability of fish or crops such as corn or the cowpea directly affect the diets of the villagers, as much of the food is consumed locally.

This article properly explained and provided evidence showing the flexibility of the inhabitants of the Lake Chad Basin, complete with tables, diagrams, and maps. In order to provide food for their people, along with goods to provide income, groups’ lifestyles will change along with their changing environment.

Great job!