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Asia-Pacific Fishing Livelihoods

Michael Fabinyi
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ABBREVIATIONS

EBFM	Ecosystem-based fisheries management
EEZ	Exclusive economic zone
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
ITQ	Individual transferable quota
IUU	Illegal, unreported and unregulated
MPA	Marine protected area
PNG	Papua New Guinea
SLA	Sustainable livelihoods approach
SPC	Secretariat of the Pacific Community
TAC	Total allowable catch
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
US	United States

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CHAPTER 1

Fishing Livelihoods and Fisheries Governance

Abstract This book centres on an understanding of fishing livelihoods within processes of historical change, and the social and political relationships within which they are embedded. Drawing on our research experience from the Asia-Pacific region, we examine where fishing livelihoods have come from, and where they are going. This introductory chapter introduces fishing livelihoods and the governance challenge that they face, before examining social science research in greater depth. We then develop the idea of a relational approach to fishing livelihoods, describing how they are shaped by wider political and economic trajectories, by local social relationships and by institutional structures.

Keywords Fishing livelihood • Political ecology • Wellbeing • Fisheries governance

In recent years the oceans have been subject to a profusion of regulatory, academic and private sector attention, as calls for a ‘blue economy’ are envisioned and executed across the world (Jouffray et al., 2020; Voyer et al., 2018). Characterised as the ‘last frontier’, oceans are presented as a dual opportunity for new forms of economic exploitation and renewed efforts to sustain ecological systems. Fisheries, and the livelihoods that they support, sit in an uneasy relationship to these transformations. While

fishing¹ has for generations provided food and livelihoods for millions of people throughout the world, increasingly it is challenged by newer coastal and ocean-based economic activities such as tourism and energy extraction, and by progressively tightening forms of governance that seek to reduce its environmental effects. The consequences of such developments are felt in different ways across the diverse social groups involved in fishing.

This book centres on an understanding of fishing livelihoods within processes of historical change, and the social and political relationships within which they are embedded. Drawing on our research experience from the Asia-Pacific region, we examine where fishing livelihoods have come from, and where they are going. Developing a ‘relational’ view of fishing livelihoods, we examine how they are shaped by wider political and economic trajectories, by local social relationships and by institutional structures. We discuss how such an understanding of fishing livelihoods can contribute to more ecologically sustainable and socially equitable governance strategies.

FISHING LIVELIHOODS

Across the world, fisheries provide direct employment for around 38.98² million people (Food and Agriculture Organization [FAO], 2020). In many coastal regions of the world, and particularly in many low-income contexts, fishing livelihoods remain the primary economic activity. Globally, they make significant contributions towards food and nutrition security, and are particularly important as a source of micronutrients, including vitamin A, omega-3, zinc, iron, calcium and selenium (Hicks et al., 2019).

Fishing livelihoods are characterised by their diversity, flexibility and dynamism, responding to changing environmental, climatic and economic conditions. It is common to differentiate between small-scale and large-scale fisheries, yet there are no universally accepted criteria that distinguish between these sectors. Large-scale fisheries tend to involve larger-sized vessels that use advanced or capital-intensive technologies (e.g., trawls, purse seines), wage labour and larger firms. The livelihoods in large-scale fisheries are as employed crew, or crew who are paid a portion of the value of the catch. In contrast, small-scale fisheries tend to be more labour

¹ By ‘fish’ we mean all seafood (e.g., including crustaceans, shellfish, etc.) in addition to fish. We do not include discussion of inland fishing or fishing livelihoods in this book.

² This includes part-time, seasonal and permanent work.