

Assessing Policies Promoting Poverty Alleviation and Marine Resource Sustainability in Impoverished Coastal Communities

Michelle Stern

Abstract:

There is a marked need to better understand the interconnectivity between poverty alleviation and environmental sustainability since impoverished communities are often dependent upon their natural habitat to meet basic needs, and strategies to improve the livelihoods of the poor must consider the role of their natural environment. While previous studies have recognized the challenges of integrating the dual goals of marine resource sustainability and poverty alleviation in coastal communities in South Africa, greater research is needed to assess the impacts of South African policies in achieving these objectives at a time when policies are being restructured because the results of such a study may impact the design of integrated policies. This research study highlights this interconnectivity on a micro scale by assessing the challenges in South Africa to reduce poverty for coastal inhabitants while simultaneously seeking sustainability of the marine resources.

Since 1994, which marked the end of apartheid in South Africa, the government has attempted to include previously disadvantaged black fishers into the fishing sector to provide them with an avenue out of poverty. However, existing environmental policies restrict such fishers' access to marine resources. As a result, many impoverished black fishers throughout the country still lack access to a sufficient amount of marine resources to achieve sustainable livelihoods. The study asks the research question: How effective have South Africa's fishing policies been in alleviating poverty in impoverished coastal communities, and what has been the rationale for implementing such policies?

The case study was conducted in a fishing village in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. A total of 20 individual interviews were conducted over a three-week period. By conducting research with both community members and policy informants, this study has analyzed the disconnect between the government's rhetoric of making impoverished fishers beneficiaries of the fishing industry and the realities on the ground.

It was discovered that community fishers have restricted access to marine resources because the sustainability of the fish stock is under threat. However, the primary contributors to the depletion are outside fishing vessels and an increasing number of poachers on foreign fishing fleets. Due to a lack of monitoring and resources, the government faces great challenges in seeking to control the illicit trade, and the easiest trade to monitor is that of small-scale fishers, who often depend on the resources for their livelihoods. Limited resources to monitor fishing vessels have been used as rationale for the government to instead control and minimize the trade for coastal inhabitants. The government's strategy of integrating historically disadvantaged blacks into the fishing industry through alleviating poverty and protecting the marine resources remains a significant challenge in South Africa. Instead of targeting marginalized fishers with

environmental policies, rather large-scale fishers should be the focus in order to strive for marine resource sustainability. This study should be extrapolated to other cases where such complex relationships between poverty alleviation and environmental sustainability exist.

Keywords: South Africa, fishing policies, sustainable coastal livelihoods, resource management, co-management