

Title: **Impact of Fisheries Co-Management on Livelihoods and Conservation in Southern Africa**

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Abstract: The last fifteen years have seen increased reference to and adoption of co-management in fisheries in Southern Africa, usually as a conditionality for (national or international) development aid in the sector. Co-management is supposed to improve the proficiency and efficiency of fisheries management through decentralization and democratization of decision-making, which would increase user accountability for management decisions. In the end this should result in a win-win situation sustainable fisheries and sustainable fisheries based livelihoods. What has, however, been the real impact of co-management on sustainable exploitation practices and on livelihoods of fishing communities in Southern Africa? This paper attempts to answer this question using empirical cases of both inland and marine fisheries co-management in southern Africa. The analysis revealed that, contrary to the initial hopes, the current outcomes of these co-management reforms appear rather mixed, both for the resources and their end-users. Differences in perceptions of what the issues were among the three main players - fishers, government and donors - resulted in varying and sometimes disappointing results. Through specific examples from Malawi, South Africa and other parts of the region, we discuss the potential reasons for these outcomes and suggest ways to improve policies on fisheries co-management.