

Shifting livelihoods

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Rural coastal communities in South Africa and Mozambique have, for long, harvested resources such as fish, and forest and agricultural products, to support themselves and their families. Although communities in both countries are culturally diverse, they share histories of colonialism, with manifest inequalities and vulnerabilities arising from the apartheid era in South Africa and civil war in Mozambique influencing the nature of livelihoods pursued by these communities. Research conducted by a colleague, Mayra Pereira, and me in these two countries, highlights the distinctive gendered nature of these livelihoods, and how in a dynamic coastal and fisheries context, women and men's choices, options and adaptive responses differ.

In both countries, livelihood options for women are limited. Most of their livelihood activities are at the household consumption level with little money being earned. In areas such as Josina Machel, Conguiana and Gala in Inhambane and Maputo provinces of Mozambique, fisheries and tourism are male dominated. These sectors have a strong relationship as tourism provides most of the monetary benefits to local fishers. Women engage mainly in post-harvest activities (processing, selling, marketing of marine resources) resulting in some empowerment. Agriculture, vegetable and fruit cultivation are supplementary activities that feed the household and bring in some money.

In contrast, in South Africa, where the tourism-fisheries relationship is not strong, women predominate in rural coastal areas and are deeply involved in harvesting of resources. Yet the livelihood scenario for women in communities such as Sokhulu and Mbonambi in the KwaZulu-Natal Province, on the east coast, is bleak. The women harvest brown mussels whose sale is banned in most of the region. Mussel harvesting occurs only once a month and permit holders are allowed 25 kg per harvest, which women harvesters argue is insufficient for food security. These women want alternative income opportunities like craft

markets where locally-made products such as straw mats, baskets, ornaments and jewellery can be sold. In several communities in KwaZulu-Natal, women have entered into mussel co-management arrangements with the provincial conservation authority, empowering a few who are employed to monitor the harvesting. This also creates a limited number of alternative livelihood options.

In the former Transkei region of the Eastern Cape of South Africa, in addition to harvesting brown mussels for household consumption, women harvest oysters and crayfish, which are sold to industry and the tourism market as well as contributing to household needs. The meagre money earned from such activities is used to clothe and educate their children.

Gender inequalities continue though women in both countries have varied livelihood activities. Patriarchal and patrilineal systems govern coastal resource use, living conditions, and opportunities for benefiting from the coastal sectors. For instance, land and associated natural resources are largely vested with men; few women own land.

However, a recent study by Leila Emdon suggests that in some areas of the former Transkei region, gender roles are shifting; women are adapting to changing circumstances. The establishment of the Hluleka Nature Reserve/Hluleka Marine Protected Area (MPA), and the consequent demarcation of a no-take terrestrial and marine protected area has resulted in increased food insecurity and livelihood vulnerability for the Hluleka community. Agriculture resources have dwindled outside the protected area due to increased poverty and environmental changes like rainfall vulnerability, causing greater reliance on fisheries resources. Among the Hluleka, historically men have been the breadwinner but the government's introduction of social grants (like child support and pension) to those earning below R 38,400 (USD 3,728) per annum, has meant women are the ones who qualify.

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This has changed the equation. In fact, government support grants have become the primary monthly household income source to many households. One may think that the child support grants amount to very little, but it is amazing how access to this small grant has shifted gender roles, expanding women's livelihood options to activities such as dwelling construction, craft products, trading resources with each other. The men rely solely on fishing, which is now increasingly constrained due to the no-take MPA. Some women report that they now do not feel the need to marry because the government grants makes them independent.

In Mozambique, in the absence of such government support, women's access to income is increasingly dependent on fishing and tourism. However, a 2011 study by Mayra Pereira shows that increased tourism is competing with the availability of fisheries resources to local people, causing fisheries resources to decline. As a result, inflation in the prices of local fisheries resources, is reducing the incentive for tourists to buy from local people. Tourism pressure on local fisheries resources will, in turn, impact women's abilities to pursue livelihood security.