

Fisheries as a way of life: Gendered livelihoods, identities and perspectives of artisanal fisheries in eastern Brazil

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ABSTRACT

Although women engage in small-scale fisheries around the globe, their roles, contributions and perspectives tend to be overlooked in policy making. In Brazil, although women account for almost half of the registered fishers in the country, their roles are absent from scholarship and policy-making decisions. This gap is addressed in this paper, which presents the case of artisanal fisheries in eastern Brazil where women play a major role in fisheries. Whereas, the majority of men engage in offshore fisheries, women prepare shrimp for the market, extract shellfish from near shore habitats, and preserve by-catch using traditional methods, for income and subsistence; activities enabling them to simultaneously supervise children. Fisher's activities are synergistic in maintaining household livelihoods, which are culturally embedded, and their identities are constituted from a young age when children participate in fishery activities. Both men and women choose fisheries as a way of life and they perceive change in fisheries differently based on the resources they extract. The findings are consistent with other scholarship demonstrating gendered contributions to fisheries, and how fisheries "are a way of life" constituted by deep social, cultural and ecological ties. Fishery policy makers need to better recognize the diverse roles and perspectives of men and women in fisheries in order to achieve equitable outcomes and livelihood sustainability goals.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Gendered fisheries

Artisanal fisheries have come to the fore of global coastal-marine conservation aimed at poverty reduction [1,2], yet little attention has been paid to the gendered livelihoods of fisheries, particularly in developing areas where women play a major role in fisheries. Existing gendered studies of small-scale fisheries in southern Asia and Africa have demonstrated how MPA establishment overlooks gendered roles leading to unequal access to resources [3], how fishery commercialization can worsen or cause economic marginalization of women [4], how women's access to fishery resources may be displaced by development (loss of grounds) and decline in stocks [5], and how gendered livelihood roles in fisheries should inform management and policy for equitable outcomes in general [6]. Women in fisheries contribute to household capital as they typically allocate their income to children's education and household health, and there tends to be interdependence between men and women in fishery households [7]. The existing scholarship emphasizes the role, knowledge,

material labor, and perspectives of women in fisheries, which has largely "remained invisible to researchers and policy makers" and undermines goals for fishery reform and sustainable livelihoods of small-scale fisheries [6, p.451] [7,8].

In Latin America, few studies exist that emphasize the significant contribution of women to fisheries although women account for about 20% of fishery production [9]. The scholarship and data of women's roles in fishery livelihoods is particularly scarce in Brazil. Women have engaged in fisheries and comprised 41% ($n=348,553$) of registered fishers in the country in 2010 [10], yet their role in fisheries is hardly recognized. One case focused on women's aspirations, yet actual fishery roles and livelihoods were not examined [11]. Another focused on artisanal fisheries in general and considered the perceptions of women about why they engage in fisheries and aspirations for their children [12]. This paper fills this gap in knowledge and contributes to scholarship of gendered roles in small-scale fisheries to inform coastal-marine policy in Brazil and elsewhere.

The case of artisanal fisheries in eastern Brazil is presented here, where the Cassurubá extractive reserve (RESEX) was established in 2009, highlighting the gendered roles, identities, and perspectives of fishermen and women. While extraction strategies of men and women differ to some extent because of the physical force required for some fisheries, such as manual shrimp trawling,

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and parenting duties, their roles are firmly synergistic. Women play a major role in fisheries, specifically as *marisqueiras* who clean shrimp for the market, extract shellfish, and prepare salt-cured products from fishery by-catch. Their activities are for both income and subsistence. Fisher's roles and identities have been rooted for generations and are constituted at an early age when children engage in extraction activities of their parents. Although fisheries are demanding work, both men and women choose fisheries as a way of life. Furthermore, men and women perceive change in, and threats to fisheries differently. This case demonstrates that fishery and RESEX policy makers need to better account for the roles of women in fisheries, and their perspectives, in order to achieve equitable livelihood sustainability goals. The results validate the contribution of women to small-scale fisheries that are “important for the survival of coastal communities, their identity, culture, history and way of life” [13, p.261]. A feminist political ecology lens emphasizes this by highlighting the roles, contributions, and interests of women [14].

1.2. Feminist political ecology

The subfield of political ecology broadly examines human-environment interactions and politicizes ecology. Specifically, scholars of political ecology perceive nature, ecology and natural resources as inherently political, and are concerned with unequal distribution and access to resources based on gender, age, class, ethnicity, etc. [15,16]. Political ecology embraces different knowledge systems, or “ways of knowing” ecology, and with respect to fisheries, traditional knowledge is informative to policy and management [17–19]. Simply put by Siar [5 p.569], “to be able to fish requires at least two things: knowledge about the time-space distribution of fishery resources and the capability to harvest such resources.” Men and women experience their environments differently and feminist political ecology specifically focuses on gender as a variable that influences, and is influenced by, resource access, use and control, and highlights the roles, knowledge and interests of women that tend to be overlooked [20]. The approach has been critical in conservation and development studies demonstrating how agendas can confound existing gendered inequalities disempowering women [16]. Poststructuralist feminist views, however, caution against approaches that contribute to dualist (male/female) thinking that reinforce biased social norms [20] and emphasize the importance of identity.

The notion of gender is inextricably meshed with identity, and identity is constituted by one's affective relationship with, or attachment to, a place, culture, non-human environment and social relations [21]. Haraway [22] posits that identities are multiple or constituted by multiple affinities based on past and present experiences and future desires [23]. In this sense, identities emerge as a result of historical, social, political and ecological relations. Further, environmental identities are complex as Vadjunc [21] showed with rubber tapper identities of a Brazilian RESEX; rubber tappers who no longer extracted rubber and were raising livestock still considered themselves rubber tappers. Rural producer identities are deep rooted from their socio-cultural and environmental relationships in both terrestrial and marine environments which is captured by examining “real people doing real things” [24]. Therefore, in examining the everyday lives of resource users, a feminist political ecology approach uses gender as an analytical tool and asks *how* and *why* access to resources in gendered, how gendered roles come to be, and how these identities perceive their environment. These questions are addressed in this paper which is aligned with scholarship promoting context specific understanding of gendered livelihoods, with non-aggregated data, to inform fisheries management and policy and result in more equitable outcomes [1,6].

2. Study area and methodology

2.1. Study area and context

The study site is in southeastern Bahia, Brazil where the Cassurubá RESEX was established in 2009. RESEX in Brazil are a sustainable use co-management conservation unit aimed at protecting resource user livelihoods and resources. Cassurubá is comprised of 100,687 ha of terrestrial, coastal, mangrove, estuary and marine habitats [25,26]. The RESEX overlaps with the municipalities of Caravelas and Nova Viçosa and includes a small area of the municipality of Alcobaça to the north (Fig. 1). The area is a conservation priority because of its location within the Atlantic Forest Biodiversity hotspot and the biologically diverse Abrolhos seascape [25]. However, Fibria, the world's largest eucalyptus producer, has a maritime port in Caravelas raising concerns of resource users in the area.

Resource users that depend upon coastal and marine resources

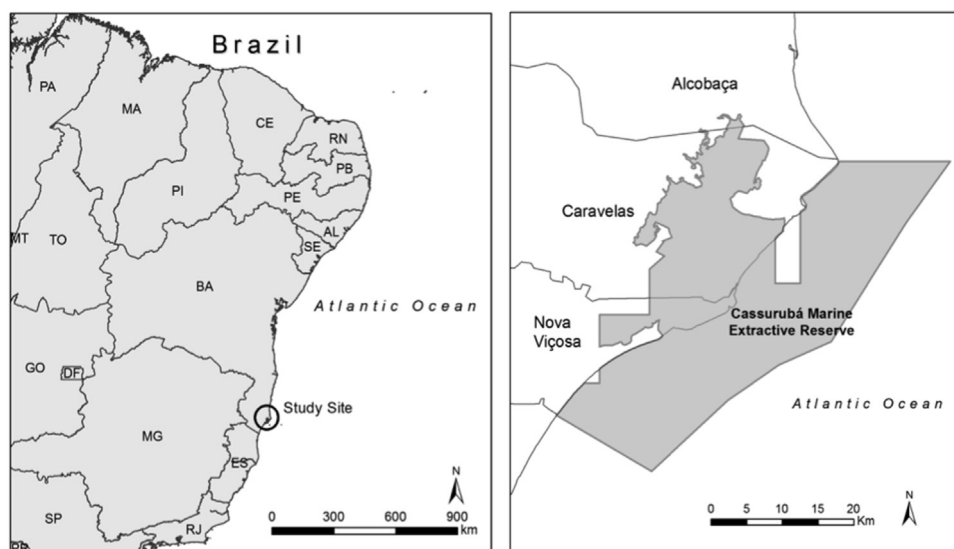


Fig. 1. Study site in southern Bahia, Brazil (left) and RESEX polygon (right).

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