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F. Mialhe, E. Morales, S. Dubuisson-Quellier, I. Vagneron, L. Dabbadie, D.C. Little



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Global standardization and local complexity. A case study of an aquaculture system in Pampanga delta, Philippines.

Mialhe, F.^a, Morales, E.^b, Dubuisson-Quellier, S.^c, Vagneron, I.^d, Dabbadie, L.^{e*}, Little, D.C.^f

^a Department of Geography, University of Lyon, Lumière Lyon 2, UMR CNRS EVS, Lyon, France. Phone: +334 78 77 43 44 email: Francois.Mialhe@univ-lyon2.fr

^b SFP, 4348 Waialae Ave. #692, Honolulu, HI 96816 USA, email: jack.morales@sustainablefish.org

^c Centre de Sociologie des Organisations (Sciences Po/CNRS), 27 rue Saint-Guillaume 75337 Paris cedex 07 France. Phone: +33 1 45 49 76 93 email: sophie.dubuissonquellier@sciencespo.fr

^d CIRAD, UMR MOISA, F-34398 Montpellier, France. Phone: +856 (021) 313 554 email: isabelle.vagneron@cirad.fr

^e CIRAD, UMR 116, F-34398 Montpellier, France. Phone: +39 06 570 56259 email: lionel.dabbadie@cirad.fr

^f Institute of Aquaculture, University of Stirling, Stirling, Stirlingshire, FK9 4LA, UK. Phone: +44 1786 467923 email: dcl1@stir.ac.uk

Abstract

International standards result from global policies formulated primarily to address issues on food safety, traceability, environmental impact as well as social accountability. As in other agro-food industries, these rules increasingly regulate aquaculture, especially since it has started to be the object of many criticisms. The standards are generally designed in a top-down way and do not always consider the local specificities of production systems. Such implementation favors the emergence of similar patterns of production and trade across different locations. Based on a case study, this paper aims to highlight the gap between the vision conveyed by expert-based, simple and replicable policies of standardization, *versus* the real complexity and uniqueness of local aquaculture systems. The assumption is that the lack of recognition of this complexity leads *de facto* to the reproduction of dominant modes of production based on standards, ignoring some local actors with a capacity for innovation, while favoring a few larger stakeholders. To reveal the gap, the study looks at some agents of an extensive aquaculture system in the Philippines and at their interaction, focusing on gleaning and trading activities. It then reveals the changes that followed the local implementation of an International food safety standard. It finally discusses (i) the links between the global and normative point of view, and the local and unique dynamics and (ii) some bridges able to reconcile both.

Keywords

Aquaculture; International Food Standards; Pampanga (Philippines); social-ecological system; commodity chain; livelihoods; gleaning.

* Corresponding author

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