Occupation of Last Resort? Small-Scale Fishing in Lake Victoria, Tanzania

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Abstract
Small-scale fisheries have been conceptualized as a "safety valve" – the last reliable livelihood when no other exists for fishers, who are considered poor. This perception appears to be the grounds upon which poverty alleviation and resource management policies are defined. This chapter looks at this notion and questions whether small-scale fisheries are really an "occupation of last resort." Based on an ethnographic study on a Lake Victoria fishing community in Tanzania, data indicate that regardless of their poverty status, small-scale fisheries are perceived as offering a rich way of life that fishers join by choice. By discussing what fishers consider as the underlying issues in their choices, this chapter argues that fisheries management (in technical terms) should shift to governance that supports opportunities and processes for fishers to pursue the kind of life they want, and create an environment in which they can pursue that life, respectively. Such a shift would also benefit from a set of management-relevant social variables and indicators that focus on peoples' judgments of their well-being, capabilities, and satisfaction to aim toward sustainable fisheries management and poverty reduction. The chapter therefore emphasizes that if managers and policy makers/governors do not understand the full meaning and satisfaction that small-scale fishers attach to their occupation, policies instituted to curb overfishing risk not only misfire but also backfire.