Social-ecological Changes, Livelihoods and Resilience among Fishing Communities in Mafia Island Marine Park, Tanzania

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Abstract
Analysis of societal dimensions is increasingly receiving attention in social–ecological resilience research. This study investigates the impacts of neo-liberal marine conservation and economic policies, and environmental changes on the livelihoods of two fishing communities in Mafia Island Marine Park, Tanzania, and their response strategies towards attempting to maintain livelihood resilience. These communities are in similar geographical and administrative settings but differ in their proximity to Park headquarters, conformity to Park regulations and engagement in fish trade. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, direct observation and questionnaire surveys. Interviewees from both villages reported increasing poverty in terms of reduced capacity to meet their basic needs, and decreases in numbers of meals per day, variety of foods and fish consumption, reduced access to resources, low productivity and prices of local produce. Women experienced raised household responsibilities for food security and meeting other household needs. Their main responses to these changes included loan seeking, reduction of expenditures, skipping meals, selling assets, collective fishing, livelihoods diversification, change of fishing techniques and gears, abandoning of fishing activity and outward migration. Their responses only contributed to survival without resolving the challenges. Paying attention to these societal experiences is therefore necessary, if resilience of social–ecological systems in a marine conservation area is to be maintained or enhanced.

Keywords:
Social–ecological systems, livelihoods, response strategies, resilience, marine protected areas, Tanzania,