

WHY THE COAST MATTERS: REFLECTIONS ON GLOBALISATION AND GENDER IN TANZANIAN COASTAL COMMUNITIES

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This paper is directed towards the issue of engendering research and policy advocacy. It draws largely on a project carried out in Somanga and Songo Songo Islands located on the southern coast of Tanzania. The project and the studies associated with them, aimed to understand women's role in the fishery, how women participated in the economic sustenance of their families and how patriarchal social relations impacted on their lives and affected their capacity to create meaningful and sustainable lives for themselves and their children. These studies revealed deeply structural ways in which policies and practices in the legal and customary system, in government policies and in fisheries policies and cultural restrictions impacted women negatively. We looked particularly at how women's efforts to maintain and nourish their families were being undermined by both formal and informal sexist and patriarchal practices.

In this paper we discuss women's fishing practices and how they interrelate with men's fishing practices; we look at how fishing activities combine with other kinds of income generating and subsistence work to enable the household to survive. We also look at ways in which cultural and religious practices work against women's efforts to improve their livelihoods, but how women's cooperative activities, both within family and friendship groups and in cooperative savings groups can sometimes be effective in supporting women's efforts. While there are considerable NGOs and multilateral projects active in the area, we argue that they are not as effective as they could be, partly because they, too, work within the local cultural frameworks and partly because the formal government structures and legislation are not yet positive forces for women.