

Poverty amidst plenty: institutions and the social construction of scarcity in the use and benefit from marine fisheries resources: A Case Study of Kisiju Pwani Village, Mkuranga

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This study explores how scarcity of resources is constructed by social forces. Using political ecology, it explores how institutions arising from gender, class, age and place of origin/birth reward some individuals and social groups in Kisiju Pwani village access to, control over and benefit from marine fisheries resources while denying others at the same time. The study used qualitative research methodology. In-depth interviews, Focus Group Discussions, narratives, documentary reviews and field observation were used to generate data. The study findings illustrate that different social groups in this village access, control and benefit from marine fisheries resources differently. The largest social groups in Kisiju Pwani are male and females as well as residents and non-residents. Gender relations construct scarcity of marine fisheries resources mainly by constructing and maintaining fishing as a male activity. Local taboos assist to exclude women from fishing. Therefore, men engage themselves in fishing while women engage themselves in catching small shrimp. Consequently, male fishers earn more income from selling fish than women earn from selling small shrimp. Petty commodity relations, working through competition created by the national fisheries legislation and the village By-laws also construct scarcity of marine fisheries. This form of scarcity affects residents rather than non-residents. In this regard, non-resident fishing gear owners and fish traders earn more income than resident fishers and fish traders. Scarcity of marine fisheries resources is also constructed through bribery, where non-resident fishing gear owners bribe the village leaders and the Assistant Fisheries Officer so that their employees can access more fish from the zone where fishing is prohibited. The study concludes that scarcity of resources is constructed by institutions arising from unequal social relations working from within and without Kisiju Pwani village rather than human population increase, in absolute numbers. The study recommends that poverty and scarcity of resources in the coastal communities can be overcome by adopting policies that break unequal social relations among different social actors rather than those that reinforce them.