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Local Narratives on the Blue Economy: An Analysis of Livelihood Mobility in Coastal Communities in Bagamoyo, Tanzania

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Abstract

This study examined how women and men in coastal Bagamoyo of Tanzania experience and conceive the ocean and how, through such understanding, they seek to further its conceptualization to include their attachment to the ocean space, interactions and relationships they enter through the ocean, and their livelihoods in the context of the blue economy discourse. Borrowing from the cultural-ecological conceptual framework, the study investigated how women and men perceive grand approaches on ocean governance such as the 'blue economy' and its effect on their livelihoods. Although Mainland Tanzania has not been explicit on its 'blue economy agenda', the study interrogated how local people perceived the blue economy's key assumption on sustainable governance of ocean resources, and how they resonated with their livelihood mobility. The conceptualization of livelihood mobility is used to depict the dynamic production and reproduction potentials of human life realisable through people's interaction with resources. The findings illustrate that such interactions are often not well-captured by resource management strategies because of their multi-faceted and, sometimes, subtle nature. Thus, we conclude that efforts or policies seeking to promote the blue economy discourse need to, first, investigate the understanding of the coastal people, which is based on their lived experiences; and second, their cultural understandings of the ocean.

Keywords: *blue economy, coastal communities, livelihoods and livelihood mobility.*

1. Introduction

Coastal communities, with their diverse social and cultural backgrounds and varying living and economic conditions, have been known to have certain understandings of the ocean. The ocean is primarily associated with their conception of existence as a whole and its various inter-related aspects. These aspects include the ocean as the source of life (*mama bahari*),[1] the economy, communications, relationships and interaction; and most importantly, the ocean as the signifier of the fishers' identity: who they are, and become (Jentoft, 2020; Balkenhol & Swinkels, 2015; Acheson, 1981). Expressions that describe the sea as nurturing diverse relationships with human beings (Allison et al., 2020; Urquhart & Acott, 2013) have remained central to people's lives throughout the evolving history of their use of the sea, irrespective of ocean governance systems: be it at the local level or with global inventions such as those advanced by the blue economy discourse.

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[1] *mama bahari* (lit: mother ocean)

Commitments to managing and harnessing ocean resources sustainably for local livelihoods and national economic development have been an integral part of global and national agenda for a long time (URT, 2015). One of these commitments is the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14, whose focus is on 'life below water' and emphasises sustainable exploitation and conservation of ocean resources; and which commits governments to promote the conservation and sustainable utilisation of oceans, seas, and marine resources for sustainable development (Andriamahefazafy et al., 2022). Supporting small-scale fishers is one of the three sub-targets of SDG 14. However, measuring the implementation level of this target has been challenging for several reasons: one being the inapplicability of some indicators across countries with different contexts and experiences with the ocean, but also because of inequitable mechanisms and rights in the utilization of the ocean (Haas, 2023; Belhabib et al., 2015). At the country level, benefits from decades of focus on coastal livelihood enhancement have also not been fully realized, and some studies indicate that primary stakeholders in marine fisheries are often exposed to considerable vulnerabilities due to livelihood insecurities from factors such as tenure rights, poor work conditions, ecological changes, declining fisheries, and low incomes (Le Gouvello et al., 2022; Onyango & Yahya, 2022; Mwaipopo, 2017). The blue economy discourse seeks to address development from an economic growth perspective on the assumption that people's livelihoods would benefit from a comprehensive approach that focusses in enhancing the explotation of the major economic activities on the ocean.

Nevertheless, locating the current realities of coastal and fisheries dependent-communities within this blue economy discourse demands examining how this discourse addresses ocean-led economic development in light of the concerns of the local people and coastal livelihoods (Gerhardinger et al., 2023). In fact, the manner in which the blue economy discourse integrates local understandings of the sea-human interaction is not so explicit since the overriding concern on the economy raises questions on whether the intended benefits could appreciatively reach them in their diverse socio-cultural locations (Gerhardinger et al., 2023). This article, therefore, interrogates the 'blue economy' discourse in relation to the lived lives and experiences of men and women in coastal Bagamoyo on Mainland Tanzania, who largely depend on coastal and marine resources; and considers possibilities for an inclusive governance of the sea that is responsive to their needs for livelihood mobility. Such livelihood mobility refers to the dynamic production and reproduction potentials of human societies with livelihood advancements constituting the fulcrum of human life. This mobility is realisable through the constant interaction between people and ocean-based resources, which occurs within a given cultural-ecological context.

Tanzania's 1,242km stretch of coastline supports the lives and livelihoods of fishing communities along the littoral. In 2017, about 53.035 fishers engaged in fisheries exploitation to eke out their livelihoods on Mainland Tanzania (URT, 2022). Fisheries and/or coastal marine-based aquaculture are the key livelihood sectors

for these communities (Le Gouvello et al., 2022). Moreover, the sector contributes 1.7 percent of the country's GDP. Currently, the per capita fish consumption is 8.5kg, which accounts for 30 percent of daily animal protein intake (URT, 2022). Decline in catches and other marine products due to increased fishing pressure, destructive fishing practices, destruction of the coastal vegetation—including harvesting of mangroves, illegal extraction of other resources, environmental degradation, and the overall effect of climate change—are increasingly impacting coastal fisheries (URT, 2022). Yanda et al. (2023) attribute variable production of coastal resources to climate and non-climatic factors, which in turn impact on household livelihood levels, and thus render coastal communities vulnerable to the erosion of their livelihood standards. Aquaculture, an expanding sector comprising seaweed farming and sea cucumber farming, has been the refuge of many communities, particularly women who cannot engage fully in capture fishing (URT, 2015; Onyango & Yahya, 2022). However, community-based endeavours like octopus collection, coral mining, salt manufacturing, and local coastal tourism—all of which are dependable sources of income—get less attention. The survival of these communities and all those within the related value chains in the diverse coastal communities depends on their access to the territorial marine water area (of about 64,000km^2) with 30,000 tonnes estimated marine resource potential, and less in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of 223,000km^2 (URT, 2022).

The 'blue economy'—or 'oceans economy'—discourse, which has in the last decade become the focal point of policy interventions towards sustainable use of marine resources for economic development, is one of the global environmental governance systems directed to the ocean. This discourse has its roots in the Rio+20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development of 2012. Consequently, it has been promoted as an alternative development approach to the 'green economy' agenda of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly to realise SDG 14 (Okafor-Yarwood, 2020; FAO et al., 2023). The blue economy discourse, which focusses on sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth and improved livelihoods, while preserving the health of ocean ecosystem, has attracted varying definitions (Louey, 2022; Wenhai et al., 2019; Okafor-Yarwood, 2020); although a shared meaning may be evident.

UNECA (2019: 2) discusses the 'blue economy' as encompassing *all activities developing or deriving from marine and aquatic ecosystems including oceans, coasts, seas, rivers, lakes and groundwater, and associated resources*. The African blue economy strategy treats 'blue economy' as a component of various programmes and policies intended to preserve aquatic systems through an inclusive and sustainable approach, besides enabling the sustainable economic use of the abundant resources found in water bodies (AU-IBAR, 2019). Along similar lines, Wenhai et al. (2019: 3) define blue economy as "… a sustainable productive, service and all other related activities using and protecting coastal and marine resources." Ocean governance and management of resources are key aspects in the whole discourse (Silver et al., 2015). Although each country may have its own focus, blue economy mostly

comprises the following areas: shipping and ports, oil and gas, tourism, renewable energy, aquaculture and fisheries, and related industrial sectors (UNECA, 2019; RGZ, 2022; Honey & Krantz, 2007). However, some economic aspects tend to predominate the efforts aimed to advance the blue economy, and there is an inclination towards macro-economic investments in the extraction or enhanced exploitation of living and non-living resources of the coastal environment for economic growth (Okafor-Yarwood, 2020; Jentoft, 2022). Even though socio-economic transformation has emerged as one of the goals for the strategies of blue economy, the social dimension remains rather vague; hence, the full essence and related needs of the lives of coastal marine-dependent people have yet to be captured for effective addressing. Likewise, Karakara and Dasmani (2022) contend that the social resilience of marine communities to endure, and thus facilitate the success of marine policies, such as the blue economy, has yet to be well-articulated.

One of the strategic objectives of Africa's blue economy is to ensure the achievement of sustainable, social, economic, and environmental outcomes and human rights (AU-IBAR, 2019). At the global level, the Rio 20+ initiative treats the blue economy discourse not only as a viable strategy for spurring economic growth and poverty reduction, but also as a conduit for enhancing human well-being and social equity (Louey, 2022; UNEP, 2013). Much as these ambitious articulations and pronouncements look good on paper, the long-term tangible benefits for fishing communities raise many unanswered questions. Louey (2022), for example, contends that the blue economy debate shifted its concern on social equity as originally conceived, to place more emphasis on economic growth without a clear description on its redistributive aspect. Similarly, Bennett et al. (2022:1) have argued:

> This [blue] growth might provide economic and livelihood benefits for the coastal communities and resource-dependent populations. However, just as is the case on land, ocean-based economic development can generate few local economic benefits, widen existing inequalities, displace local communities and livelihoods, produce harmful pollution, threaten environmental sustainability, undermine human rights, and lead to substantial social and cultural harms.

Okafor-Yarwood et al. (2020) further caution against the danger of the blue economy agenda in African countries, which focus more on economic gains than on traditional livelihoods, and the plight that may face small-scale operators, whose lives are ocean-dependent. They also contend that large-scale blue economy initiatives tend to prioritise grandiose economic gains at the expense of environmental degradation and to the exclusion of local communities, which is counter-beneficial to sustainability and social justice (Okafor-Yarwood et al. (2020).

It is thus argued that meaningful social benefits for those who depend on the ocean for their livelihood would be realisable if considerations on their socio-cultural contexts are meaningfully integrated in management interventions. As a result, Crosman et al. (2022), Ayilu (2021), Bennetts (2022), and Thoya et al. (2022) have

called for a clearer understanding of the complexities of equity and social justice in the blue economy, especially in the face of present global economic inequalities and human rights. Yet, as Febrica and Morgera (2022) further proffer, economic development in this sector is normally oriented towards the exploitation of ocean spaces and resources; and usually less sensitive to the day-to-day needs of ocean-dependent local communities, and how they make a living. In this regard, Haas (2023) faults the implementation of SDG 14, with his criticism finding ready support in Niner et al.'s (2022) illustrations of how small-scale fishing communities are pushed out of prime spaces along the coast to give way to expanding urbanisation and economic investments. These experiences constitute a grey area to the policies of blue economy and their modus operandi. The social organisation of small-scale fisheries and aquaculture in this process is a related concern that may arise from strategies adopting the blue economy idea. Thus, it is vital to capture the diversity of local stakeholders of the ocean and their equally diverse locations or situations, such as, by technologies, age, gender and other specific needs. As Le Gouvello et al. (2022) have further illustrated, there are many different value-chain participants at this level, and there is a strong chance that broad narratives may mask local realities.

Situating the blue economy agenda within the contexts of Tanzania's coastal regions makes sense because of the country's heavy reliance on ocean-related economic sectors. These sectors include commerce and trade through ports and harbours, tourism, manufacturing industry, energy and power from oil and gas industry, and the marine fisheries sector (Mwaijande, 2021; URT, 2021). For example, on the one hand, it is imperative to safeguard the riches associated with gas deposits, which include over 41.7 trillion cubic feet of reserves at Songosongo, Mnazi Bay and Mkuranga in Coast region along the Indian Ocean coast (URT, 2022). On the other hand, it is equally important to see how these concerns also translate into the protection of the livelihood securities of the people in the area. Mainland Tanzania has, however, not been explicit enough in its commitment to the blue economy discourse (Le Guevello et al., 2022), unlike the Revolutionary Government of Zanzibar, which has fully endorsed and domesticated the blue economy through its Zanzibar Blue Economy Policy: the Zanzibar National Adaptation Strategy, and the newly-created *Wizara ya Uvuvi na Uchumi wa Buluu*/Ministry of Fisheries and the Blue Economy (RGZ, 2022). Because of independent jurisdictions over the key sectors under the blue economy initiative, what Zanzibar decrees does not necessarily and automatically apply to Mainland Tanzania.

However, the blue economy discourse's management recommendations essentially carry forward the nation's long-standing efforts at coastal and marine management, albeit at a new level. Mainland Tanzania has seen the implementation of several institutions and management frameworks for a sustainable use and governance of marine resources. Some examples of these include creating area-based conservation systems such as marine management parks that address livelihood issues, environmental concerns and commercial considerations; as well as marine reserves, which serve as area-based protection mechanisms against marine

exploitation (URT, 2015; URT, 1994; URT, 1989; URT, 2003). Furthermore, the country has introduced beach management units (BMUs), which are essentially community-based fisheries resource management institutions mandated to oversee the sustainable use and access to coastal and marine resources within a defined administrative jurisdiction (URT, 2015; URT, 2009).

Even if the people were the main beneficiaries of these efforts, and some milestones were achieved, it is still challenging to identify significant transformative economic achievements in the coastal communities (Le Gouvello et al., 2022). There are a few modest areas in which community-based management systems and institutions assert some influence over resource governance (Kweka et al., 2019, Gustavsson et al., 2021). The question is, therefore, how such grand agendas—with presumed transformative intentions on the economic front—would meaningfully generate benefits to the people. An idea borrowed from the ILO's (2016) report on 'Fishers First' is the emphasis on how important it is to protect fishers from exploitative labour practices in the context of economic development. We see the same concern on how the blue economy agenda should proceed and reach the small-scale fishing (SSF) communities in their wide diversity (Cohen et al., 2019). Also, important is the question regarding how culturally appropriate its interventions would be pursued based on country-specific contexts (Febrica & Morgera, 2022).

In 2021, Mainland Tanzania developed the National Plan of Action (NPoA) for the implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries (VG-SSF (FAO, 2015)), with its Kiswahili version coming out in February 2023. The widely publicised VG-SSF is people-oriented, and may serve as a relevant entry point if integrated in the blue economy discourse. Still, it is imperative to determine how the NPoA-VG/SSF (2021) protects the well-being and rights of communities dependent on fisheries and other coastal resources, and maintains their livelihoods and cultural assets in substantive terms.

2. Livelihood Mobility within the Cultural-ecological Framework

The cultural-ecological framework addresses livelihood mobility as the outcome of various cultural interactions and adaptations to the environment (Lapka et al., 2012). Through daily interactions with their environment and among themselves, people learn about and experience these 'spaces' through sharing and transacting with the meanings they give to resources (Acheson, 1995; Jentoft, 2020). People adapt to these environments and spaces in a dynamic fashion, mediated as they are by available natural resources and technologies. Through such interactions people establish the legitimacy of these environments. Livelihood mobility in this article refers to an evolving and changing process of small-scale fisheries (SSF) situations, which expose fishing communities to several situations, both challenging and sometimes beneficial.

Studies on the cultural perceptions of the ocean show that individuals living along the coast acknowledge the ocean in different ways (Allison et al., 2020). The ocean in some contexts is seen as a legitimate access environment that has

historically enabled coastal communities to support themselves, while also preserving their sense of self as coastal people (Huffer, 2017). The ocean also provides significant non-material benefits central to people's livelihoods, including fostering social interactions and relationships between island and coastal communities in the littoral, bringing people together through trade, and connecting people and families through marriage. These benefits may not be measurable or recognizable in conventional research; but meaningful to their livelihoods as a whole (Allison et al., 2020). However, for coastal small-scale fishing communities, the maintenance of sources for their livelihoods is of primary importance: technologies change, people encounter new seascapes, but maintaining their lives is at the core of their cultural adaptations. Given that patterns of people's interactions with the sea are constantly evolving, it is also expected that such understandings about the sea will be evolving and changing as new experiences and actors are encountered (Smith & Basurto,2019; Lapka et al., 2012).

We use the understanding of livelihood mobility within the cultural-ecological framework to examine how the blue economy discourse can accommodate or allow for the advancement of local livelihoods amidst the claims and contestations about ownership, access, and benefits from the sea. The advancement of every livelihood comprises vertical and horizontal mobility. Whereas vertical mobility reflects the functioning of inter-actor interactions, horizontal mobility in the lives of small-scale coastal fishing communities has to do with how they interact with other ocean users within and beyond the SSF value-chain. Horizontal livelihood mobility facilitates the analysis of how fishers and other actors along the different SSF value-chains encounter one another as they engage with the sea; whereas vertical mobility refers to the manner in which fishers, fish workers and SSF communities encounter and engage with multiple hierarchies. The vertical aspect of livelihood mobility reflects the way hierarchical power structures across different levels of resource governance influence how local SSF communities realise benefits from the sea, and can influence policy-related management interventions.

Indubitably, the ocean has always been a political field: an arena where people with power undermine the rights and capabilities of less endowed people in controlling the sea (Bavinck et al., 2018). We see that the blue economy discourse advances similar contestations around coastal and marine resources, but at other levels. In this case, the rights or opportunities of coastal communities to influence decisions about the ocean are not made manifest presumably because of inadequate understanding of the cultural values and benefits people may want to maintain with the ocean (Ahtiainen et al., 2019). The same contestations are also evident between the traditional powers of access by coastal women and other more powerful users of the spaces; contestations which are associated with how people assume control over certain spaces of the coastal environment (Frocklin et al., 2013). Within these contestations, the cultural-ecological approach makes it possible to examine and expose issues coastal communities experience that impact on livelihood mobility generated as they are by policy issues, or economic and social/cultural concerns as well.

3. Methodology

This study aimed to understand how communities in coastal areas of Bagamoyo district, Tanzania, perceive, live, and relate with the sea through their narratives about ocean resource management. Using a qualitative approach, the study used observations, interviews, and focus group discussions (FGDs) to explore the lived experiences and interpretations of coastal communities. These methods were selected because of their better capacity to elicit, communicate and share perceptions about ocean management processes from the cultural and social contexts, and the changes over these experiences over time (Mason, 2002). Seven sub-wards (*mitaa*) of the Bagamoyo coastal district -- Kaole, Dunda, Kisutu, Magomeni, Mlingotini, Kondo and Pande -- participated in the study. The study used purposive sampling to select 30 participants composed of 20 fishing community members (i.e., 13 male and 7 female fishers and fish workers), 3 fisheries officials, 1 district community development official (DCDO), 1 district administrative officer (DAO), 1 NGO worker, and 4 researchers. The ages of participants from the fishing communities ranged from 18 to 80 years. Each of these local community participants had some experience with the sea. They were all ready to express what they thought about the sea; how they appreciated the blue economy discourse; how, through such appreciation, they related to it; and how they have experienced similar interventions aimed to bolster benefits accruing from the sea, such as management or economic-oriented interventions. Individuals also shared their stories on what ocean governance meant, how their interactions with the water have shaped their experiences with various governance structures, and how these systems connect to the rhetoric around the blue economy.

4. Meanings and Livelihood Mobility in Coastal Bagamoyo

To understand how people experience the ocean, we examined what meanings they attach to the ocean, and how such meanings resonate with the blue economy discourse. We also explored how such meanings are derived or constructed. More significantly, we also sought to understand how men and women communicate about opportunities, changes and challenges related to their livelihoods, and how such processes indicated livelihood mobility.

Generally, the study participants varyingly expressed their understanding of the blue economy (Kiswahili: '*uchumi wa buluu*'). Firstly, *uchumi wa buluu* was expressed as a popular version of coastal and marine management, spread through word-of-mouth by fishers coming from Zanzibar. A local *mtaa* (sub-ward or street) leader explained that " … *uchumi wa buluu* is a contemporary agenda (Kisw: *mpango wa kisasa*) for managing ocean resources that the government is pushing in their vision about the ocean's future" (Dunda, 8/8/2022). Given its focus on improved governance of the ocean, the second expression was on the management of the ocean, and how it reflects the situation of local fishers. Referring to *uchumi wa buluu*, fishers explained how their experience with several government-led interventions were also related to similar ocean governance intentions and fishers' livelihoods, albeit sometimes with negative effects.

4.1 Livelihoods Within and Beyond the Coast

An initial expression by the local people was to establish how the sea was not only a dependable source of livelihood, but also an important media for fostering human movements and social interactions. From the conversations, it emerged that they treated the sea as supportive of the lives of innumerable people beyond the coastal communities in the immediate littoral, and has engendered a wide mixing of traditions and cultures. The movement of people from the islands of Unguja and Pemba to and from Bagamoyo, for example, was explained as a common seasonal tendency that had existed for a long time. This form of fishers' (especially male fishers) livelihood mobility was connected to the land for realising their totality of life. Any intervention that severed this connection with the wider scope of life that the sea has provided for ages was not positively perceived. An elderly fisherman who had relocated from Pemba said: *"The ocean has given me a 'home' in Bagamoyo, I got married and have settled here"* (Fisherman, Mlingotini, 2/09/2022).

The tendency of settling permanently along the coastal area because of fishing was part of the land-sea symbiotic relationship that people always cherished and upheld: the adjacent land to the sea signified connections to place. This relationship is, however, not always acknowledged at other levels; and could account for why it was disregarded when fishers' rights to land were at stake; especially when land-based investments were pursued. Such thinking was widely contested because of a limited understanding that coastal people's rights to the ocean was integral to their rights to the land from which they accessed the ocean. In relation to the envisaged investments on the ocean being presumed to be part of the blue economy, one of the local fishers exclaimed: *"Hii bahari yetu, tunaijua wenyewe*" (lit: 'this sea of ours, we know it ourselves').[2] This expression was made in response to how they would like to situate themselves within the efforts advanced to improve coastal livelihoods. But they contested even the idea of economic investments on the ocean. A local fisher at Kondo said:

> *If the blue economy agenda seeks to expand economic development, such as this idea of having a large fishing port in Bagamoyo, and increase production from the ocean resources, then it is no different from our current situation of the EPZA [Export Processing Zone Authority] here…. this situation when we are being sent out of our villages because of investment and plans to construct a port at Mbegani. So, what can we, as small-scale fishers, say about such ideas?* (Fisherman, Kondo, 3/09/2022).

Although there are scanty research-based sources on the human impact following the plan to develop an EPZA in the coastal area of Bagamoyo, the plight of residents of Kondo village in this study was openly shared. Kondo residents were among those compelled to relocate to other areas following the government's zoning of the area, which covered the entire village, although during this study, many households were observed still to reside within the village as they contemplated where they could relocate to (FGD, Kondo, 3/9/2022). The proposed Bagamoyo EPZA covers an

[2] Long-time fisherman, Magomeni, 3/8/2022

area with rich ecological biodiversity, the Mbegani Bay area, that is endowed with rich natural resources and ecological services that sustain the livelihoods of multiple coastal communities and artisanal fisheries local to the area (Tobey et al., 2013).

Such experiences suggested that despite the fisheries sector policies proclaiming the rights of small-scale fishers to ocean-based resources, this experience served as an example that these rights were easily overridden by larger national economic interests, hence leaving these fishers in limbo, prompting one of them to question:

> *What kind of economic development are we talking about when we speak about the blue economy? Economy at what level*? *Our economy is at the market … we need access to the market … to buyers... each one of us, a fisher, a trader, a fish monger, small trader of shrimp … we all see the market only* [for our products]. *This is what we want to be improved* (Male Fisher, Magomeni, 10/08/2022).

Besides making claims to ownership, rights to the ocean were also related to the ability of people to sustain their usufruct rights in the context of multiple users, as the seaweed farmers at Kisutu location (named in relation to the ward where the seaweed plots lie adjacent to) further pointed out. During this study, it was established that the Bagamoyo Local Council had demarcated about 10kms^2 of the Kisutu 'sea' area for the production of seaweed by the local people. A number of farmers' groups had already begun their operations to that effect.[3] Although none of the members of these groups lived within the vicinity of the adjacent prime coastal land of Bagamoyo, yet their daily shuttling to and from their residential locations (about 3kms away) to tend to their seaweed plots was in itself an appreciation of the ocean. Also, an interesting aspect was the location of the plots, which were adjacent to a mangrove forest lot that was under the custodianship of individual local environmental entrepreneurs, whose interest was claimed to be the protection of the mangrove lot from uncontrolled cutting of trees. The Kisutu Beach Management Unit (BMU), however, did not acknowledge the rights of these environmentalists to operate in the area. Nevertheless, both the seaweed farmers and the individual environmental entrepreneurs made claims to have the right to occupying the sea space, citing the local government as the source of their respective rights.

The nature of fishing practice and the daily production of marine products also fostered interactions with many other people from and beyond the coastal settlements, hence extending the value of the ocean geographically. A study participant explained:

> *Our relationships with the sea are not limited to the people living in Bagamoyo, but also extend to the wider general population… because people from Dar es Salaam, Morogoro, and Dodoma come to Bagamoyo to buy fish. You have people residing in Kibaha* [about 30km away]*, but their livelihoods depend on this ocean.* (Interview with Government Official in Bagamoyo, August 2022).

[3] KII with NN, Bagamoyo Fisheries Office, August 2022.

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Jentoft's (2020) seminal discussion, 'Life above Water', is a manifestation of similar thinking about appreciating the holistic understanding of the coastal people's livelihood experiences. He elaborates that what makes a fishing community 'live' include *"… their social relations, interactions, and traditions, including their governance"* (Jentoft, 2020: 390), aspects that are crucial in understanding the rights of these communities holistically. We use the same understanding to underscore the importance of going deeper to firmly grasp the needs and aspirations of coastal communities within the blue economy discourse.

4.2 Positioning of Women Within the Ocean

Gender and women's issues in the coastal communities are also important considerations when investigating the blue economy discourse (URT, 2021). Women and men often occupy different but interrelated engagements related to the sea, each responding to the embedded notions of cultural positioning that they have been socialised in, to earn a living. Nevertheless, their understanding of the ocean is one of a shared ownership, but with culturally-demarcated sex-specific spaces (FAO, 2015). These spaces are sometimes the causes of contestations between women and men fishers. Women, in particular, demonstrated how their encounters with men in ocean-based activities sometimes brought them victories; but also difficulties and competitiveness. Numerous studies have demonstrated that women have consistently participated in a variety of small-scale fishing-related activities alongside men, albeit to differing degrees, from harvesting to processing and trade (FAO et al., 2023; Solano et al., 2021). Through these encounters, women's frustrations sometimes resulted from constraining gender norms that limited their effective engagement in fisheries-related activities. Some constraints include, on one hand, discrimination from inheritance or ownership of valuable production tools, or from participating equally in decisions pertaining to fisheries (Bradford & Katikiro, 2019; du Preez, 2018).

Women also claimed to suffer from unfavourable resource management policies, on the other hand, that indirectly affected them as members of the coastal communities. An example given in this study was related to the enforcement of prohibitions that revolved around the use of fishing nets with mesh sizes that were smaller than 10mm for sardines, or less than 45mm for fishing prawns in marine waters: all based on the Fisheries Regulations of 2009 (URT, 2009). Coastal women have traditionally caught small shrimp or sardines (*dagaa*) along the intertidal zone using small-sized mesh nets, and have benefitted from petty mongering of prawns from fishermen's catches. Thus, the regulations denied them the enjoyment of these ocean products. For example, a small-shrimp petty trader at Kondo complained about what she termed as 'government interference' in traditional fishing practices, which were part of their livelihood sustenance:

> *All these years we have been reliant on our sons to fish along the inter-tidal area and rivers and to bringing small prawns or shrimp, which we dry and sell on retail, or to buyers who come from Dar es Salaam. They have been using these small-mesh sized fishing nets for a long time because of the targeted species. But currently, the government has been apprehending and imposing fines on these*

> *fishers, claiming that they are using fishing nets that are destructive to the marine environment … but they have been using the same nets since time immemorial… so our sons do not go to fish, and we cannot get any shrimp to sell to make a living* (Female Petty Trader, Pande, 10/8/2022).

Altogether, the women communicated that these prohibitions interfered with a range of interpretations about ocean resource governance, especially the downgrading of traditional values of the ocean, which to them remained of prime importance despite the many changes happening around them.

In addition, unlike the popular discourse on women's disadvantages or discrimination they faced in participating and benefitting from the sea (Solano et al, 2021), women in this study reflected on the ocean in terms of how it blurs the distinction between the public and the private sphere on which the gendered disadvantage narrative has so much focused on. Their own resilience, agency and empowerment have allowed them to challenge much of the traditional constraints that they have usually encountered in ocean-based activities (Galappaththi et al., 2022). More recent production activities such as seaweed and sea-cucumber farming were reported to avail women with not only a reliable income, but it has also have allowed them to confidently enter and dominate such water-based activities at a level that is more than men (URT, 2015).

Even activities that do not feature prominently in engendering economic advantages, such as gleaning, play a vital role in how women identified with the sea. These women activities cut across age-groups, and can accommodate from the young up to elderly women, who glean for small shrimp or collect (*kuchokoa*) molluscs and other marine products. The area where gleaning occurred was culturally understood as women's space vis-a-vis deeper waters that men have culturally dominated. This demarcation is reportedly linked to culturally-embedded ideas about women's spaces, but has been the subject of contestations between women who glean around the area, and seaweed and sea-cucumber farmers whose plots were also in the intertidal areas visited by male beach seiners (*kokoro* fishers). Some beach seiners allegedly dragged their seine nets around these spaces and ended up destroying seaweed farms, or the seabed that nurtured the growth of small shrimp. These contestations even involved the Bagamoyo local government authorities, who had to prohibit fishermen who worked in shallow waters from using *kokoro* (beach seine) on the claim that not only were they destroying the seabed, but they were also bullying women out of their reliable fisheries production area. A middle-aged woman, who had eked out a living from gleaning along the intertidal area for all her adult life, said:

> *For us women, we do not go to fish, but some of us glean for* matondo (sea snails) *almost every morning after high tides. I work for my children, and I get something for consumption in my home, but I usually sell most of the* matondo *I collect, selling it from my home. Men go to fish, but the sea is unpredictable; they sometimes come back empty-handed, and my* matondo *sustains our home* (Middle-aged woman gleaner, *Kastam*, Bagamoyo 10/10/2022).

At the household level, this form of complementarity on livelihood activities between women and men was supposed to be maintained, as opposed to the contestations in the form of access to, and using the sea. Fish mongering was another major activity that made women understand that they have a claim to the sea, and the manner in which it was managed. According to one of the Bagamoyo Fisheries Officers, women accounted for 70 percent of the small-scale fish-mongers buying small-sized fish and prawns at the fish market at Kastam.[4] Fish mongering had become an easy entry activity since a fish-monger needed to have the daily TZS1000 (approx. USD0.40) that tax collectors demanded at landing sites; and then proceed to haggle for the fish in the daily auctions; or one can acquire fish directly from fishers when they land and sell directly from one's home.

Selling small-sized fish was women's lot since, as one of them claimed, "… *they are cheaper to purchase, easier to process, and can be sold practically anywhere"* than large pelagic fish such as tuna. Altogether, how the women negotiated between what was their right to the sea and their rights to ocean products was also crucial to the whole debate on the blue economy.

Governing the Oceans

Ocean governance as a collective responsibility is another aspect of the blue economy discourse that was a subject of debate. Local community members associated declining fisheries and declining livelihoods with non-inclusive policy measures that fishers claimed were handed down to them with *less regard on their own capacities to improve the marine environment*. The establishment of the local fisheries management structure, the beach management unit (BMU), was appreciated in some ways as part of government efforts aimed to ensure that community members were also mandated to ensure a sustainable extraction of resources, and oversee the overall management of coastal and marine resources. Yet, there were many among the participants who were sceptical about the BMUs capacities, particularly when discussing whether these local structures could stand for, and safeguard, local people's rights within the blue economy agenda. In an interview, a male community member at Mlingotini said:

> *"Now it depends … if this blue economy will be focusing on economic issues, won't it be like what Kondo experienced? … and neither the BMU nor the village government could do anything, and then* unahama mbali ya mavuvi yenyewe [lit: '*you shift far from the same fisheries*']" (Male Fisher, Mlingotini, Bagamoyo, 2/08/2022).

In another FGD, local fishers of Dunda and Magomeni claimed that new narratives on ocean management could not always improve local livelihoods better than how the local peoples could, by themselves. In this regard, a long-time fisher further explained:

> *"To say that there should be improved management of the sea is okay … this is because we also experience a declining fishery. You know… in the past people used to fish using a hook and line*

[4] Interview with NN, Bagamoyo, 22/07/2022

> *…. you just throw your line from wherever you are and catch fish… but now, I wonder how line fishing is feasible … perhaps if you go to deep waters where there are many fish. Therefore, this may be why people continue using destructive fishing gear. And we have witnessed some destruction of the coral reefs, which are fish breeding sites … and perhaps this is why the government is trying to improve the marine environment so that we have abundant fish*" (Fisherman, Magomeni, Bagamoyo, 9/08/2022).

On the other hand, the local people also admitted that they had also contributed to the destruction of the marine environment. An elderly seaweed farmer and manufacturer of products from seaweed said:

> *"We are sometimes our own [environment] destroyers].* Kuna baruti zenye silensa, watu wanasema … lakini zipo… analipua tu hapo *[*lit: *there is dynamite with silencers, people say so… but they are ignited there) near Kastam"* (Mlingotini Male, 3/08/2022).

They mentioned Kastam here because it was the main landing site for the Bagamoyo fisheries, which was assumed to be central in keeping check on illegal fishing. Such destructive practices were reported to have been going unabated for some time because of largely unsuccessful attempts to curb them. Similarly, the participants reported beach seining in shallow waters as destructive to both the environment and marine life. During the study, local fishing communities and fisheries authorities traded blame for such destruction. In response to the comments by the local people, a fisheries officer lamented:

> *"… some of the local people are irresponsible when it comes to protecting their own environment. Why should other people come from outside your area to manage your environment? … I am from the north … should I [be the one to] guard your own farm… your sea? Those who should be concerned should be the local community themselves! … What will the blue economy achieve where our own management strategies have not been able to?"* (Fisheries Officer, Bagamoyo, 16/9/2022).

These expressions were given in the context of claiming rights and responsibilities over ocean management. To prove that they also worked to improve their sea, a group of local fishers in this study mentioned the improvised mechanism of the fish aggregating devices (FADs) that they employ in nearby waters. One of them claimed:

> "Sisi tumeweza kuboresha mavuvi yetu kwa matumizi ya *FADs* [lit: '*we have been able to improve our fisheries ourselves, through the use of* FADs'] …. *we have devised our own ways to improve the fisheries in the near waters [intertidal area] by the use of FADs. We used to throw old vehicles and scrap metals … this began more than ten years ago, after noting that the fish we desire aggregated in sunken objects in the sea … but we then thought that we might be causing destruction on the fisheries, so we began throwing large branches of trees, and since then we have been getting enough fish from these areas"* (Fisherman, Magomeni, Bagamoyo, 19/9/2022).

Although such innovation has yet to be documented in official records on fisheries, it signals how the fishers do not only claim usufruct rights, but also developmental rights in how they understood their sea. These improvised and innovative FADs have proven successful in their attempt to reduce uncertainty in fishing.

Another area of contestation was an inter-generational one. During an FGD, young male fishers blamed their older counterparts for destroying the nearby sea. One young fisher said:

> *"The older people are the ones who are destructive to the marine environment… they do not have the energy …. so, they remain fishing on the low waters by dragging nets … hence they destroy fish breeding sites"* (Male Youth, Mlingotini, Bagamoyo, 8/8/2022).

Conversely, older male fishers blamed younger males by claiming that they were the ones who resorted to destructive fishing because of impatience. One of them said:

> "… vijana wana haraka, hawataki kutumia mshipi … eti unawacheleweshe, kumbe uvuvi wa mshipi ndio uliotulea na ukalea bahari hii (lit: *the youth are hasty, they do not want to use the line and hook … saying it delays them; yet it was line fishing that has cared for us and cared for this ocean')*" (Fisherman, Kastam, September 2022).

The other factor mentioned was the lure of money. It emerged that fishers with big capital who come from the islands enticed young fishers of Bagamoyo into fishing using beach seines (*kokoro)* for large catches:

> "*However, they forget that when the shares are distributed between the crew, the captain and the owner of the fishing vessel, they simply end up getting token amounts!"* (Fisherman, Kastam, Bagamoyo, 8/8/2022).

Wide discrepancy in incomes from SSF actors across its value chain is also noted by Le Gouvello et al. (2022). A fairer distribution of benefits was, however, notable in other activities such as seaweed or sea-cucumber farming, which were mostly organised at the group level. These production groups, however, faced similar issues that had to do with tenure security, work conditions, and better incomes just as they were experienced by other local fishers.

5. Conclusions

This study has explored the perceptions of the blue economy discourse among fisheries-dependent coastal communities and has revealed the complexities they face due to their dependence on the ocean, complexities which are a call for concern amidst the ongoing blue economy agenda. The ocean is contested both within local fisheries and, at the vertical level, between local fisheries and other power levels. Socially induced contestations, such as between women and men fishers using different gear or production activities, exacerbate constraints to horizontal livelihood mobilities. On the other hand, vertical livelihood mobilities face contestations through policy-induced resource management interventions, such as large-scale economic development policies. These disputes interfere with opportunities for men and women to transform their lives in the current environment. Women often have comparatively limited capabilities to realise livelihood mobility due to gender-related contestations in their utilisation and management of ocean resources; however, they also take advantage of other livelihood activities in which they can fully participate, as men do.

It also emerged that the coastal communities are concerned about the general lack of understanding of their competing interests regarding the sea vis-à-vis the need for more humane, social, and cultural considerations in ocean management. The success and sustainability of resource governance strategies, as promoted by the 'blue economy' discourse, therefore, would depend on sustaining their dual claims to the ocean and land. Against this backdrop, the study suggests that coastal communities may be ready to embrace changes aimed to enhance ocean productivity, and a sustainable marine resource use, as long as their understanding of community rights to, and benefits from, the sea is maintained.

Meanwhile, coastal communities also revealed inequalities in benefiting from the marine environment, which they feared could be magnified through the implementation of blue economy. In fact, inclusion and exclusion are also evident in coastal fishing communities, which contest policy silences on their rights and governance limitations. Their narratives further highlight the impact of development interventions on vulnerable communities, making it crucial for the blue economy discourse to capture and integrate these aspects into action for it to be acceptable and become meaningful to coastal people's everyday lives.

Ethics statement

This study was reviewed and approved by the University of Dar es Salaam. The main proposal also was reviewed and approved by COSTECH. All the participants in this study provided their informed consent. Participation was voluntary.

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Conflict of interest
The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could constitute a potential conflict of interest.

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