Global significance of seagrass fishery activity

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Fisheries are vital for the maintenance of global food security, and seagrass meadows are one of the most important coastal habitats considered as significant contributors to fisheries productivity. This is the first global scale study demonstrating the extent, importance and status of fisheries exploitation of seagrass meadows. The study used an expert opinion survey to demonstrate the widespread significance of seagrass-based fishing activity. Survey questions focused on four key areas: the purpose of fishing in seagrass habitats, the methods used, target species, and how fishers access seagrass fishing grounds. The study highlights that seagrass-based fisheries are globally important and are present virtually wherever seagrass exists supporting subsistence, commercial and recreational activity. Seagrass fisheries target any fish or invertebrate that can be eaten, sold or used as bait. A wide range of fishing methods and gear are used which is largely a consequence of the spatial distribution patterns of seagrass meadows and their depth ranges from intertidal (accessible by foot) to deep water (where commercial trawls can operate). In this presentation there will be a specific focus on East African seagrass-based fisheries in a global perspective. In East African coastal communities, as well as other developing countries, the importance of the nearshore seagrass fishery for livelihoods and wellbeing is irrefutable. While on the other hand, in developed countries, the seagrass fishery is often more recreational and/or more highly species specific. Regardless of location, this study is the first to highlight the global scale of the exploitative nature of seagrass fisheries and emphasise the need for targeted management to support their continued viability as a global ecosystem service provider.