Socioeconomic profiles of octopus fisherwomen and the relationship to the fishery: Ibo Island, Mozambique

A.C. Wosu
University of Edinburgh, United Kingdom
adaoma_wosu@yahoo.com

When working with fishing communities researchers and practitioners most often group fishers according to their target species or gear used. From an ecological perspective this is a pragmatic approach, however when addressing the human dimension of fisheries, the question remains, do these categories accurately reflect the social and economic reality of fishers? Understanding who uses marine resources from a socioeconomic perspective and the manner in which they do so will help tailor interventions that address the root causes of resource exploitation. In order to address this question, questionnaires and catch survey data were combined with ethnographic methods to explore socioeconomic diversity among octopus fisherwomen and to explore whether any variations in their socioeconomic profiles are linked to fishing effort. Cluster analysis revealed three discernible profiles: the young, poor, educated; the older female-headed household fisher farmers; and the mature, male-headed household of medium house size. Each profile constitutes a combination of socioeconomic factors. However it was the interplay of socioeconomic characteristics within each profile groups that revealed important differences in the functional grouping 'octopus fisherwomen'. In addition, these profiles had significantly different levels of fishing effort. The two groups linked to higher fishing effort are characterised by indicators often associated with vulnerability, such as being a female-headed household, having a poorer relative wealth status, and a lack of other income sources. Although the fishers linked to these characteristics of vulnerability do not account for the majority of octopus fishers, their effort accounts for the majority of octopus catch. These findings illustrate that social differences exist within fishers grouped by their gear type, gender and target species. Hence, the research cautions against an over-reliance on using functional groupings without proper consideration of inherent social differences that co-constitute such groupings.