

Rupture, Gendered Adaptation, and the Social Economy of Indian Ocean Fisheries

Overview

Small-scale fisheries are diverse and vitally important resource economies that underpin the livelihoods and nutrition security of millions of people across the Indian Ocean (IO) region. Yet, these economies and the communities they support are enmeshed in political ecologies of change that are heightening their vulnerability. Mounting, synergistic threats include climate change, pollution, overfishing, inter-sectoral competition, and changing institutional regimes of resource appropriation and control of space. Though the inherent dynamism of small-scale fish economies, particularly regarding the movements of people, fosters resilience, the intensity of change may now be crossing thresholds of fisheries' viability. As the current Covid-19 crisis shows, change in small-scale fisheries may accelerate during moments of crisis. While such situations expose vulnerabilities, they can also provide new opportunities.

The objective of this proposed planning project is to convene an international, interdisciplinary group of scholars who conduct research on fisheries across four IO countries - India, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, and Tanzania. Collectively, we plan to develop a comparative project that investigates emerging economic and environmental changes in the region and how these are mediated by intersectional social relations: gender, ethnicity/race, caste, class, and place. Our overarching research question is to understand how different regional social economies of fisheries in the IO shape possibilities for adaptation to rupture. Specific questions include the following. How do particular societal, economic, institutional, and environmental conditions generate divergent possibilities and outcomes for participants in small-scale fisheries in periods of rupture? How do different kinds of rupture (environmental, political, economic, etc.) impose divergent stresses on small-scale fisheries? Under what circumstances are fisheries-related livelihoods undermined or eliminated; when are they sustained or strengthened? How are actors in different social positions able to take advantage of, or be disadvantaged by, ruptures? How, in particular, do gendered economic relations at multiple geographic scales inform occupation and livelihood decisions within IO fisheries? How can institutional regimes be reconfigured to become more responsive to variable impacts of rupture on different groups participating in small-scale fisheries?

Description and Timeline of Activities and Need

The planning grant will provide support for work in three phases. In Phase I, pre-workshop virtual conversations will establish a preliminary base of ideas and generate a comprehensive annotated bibliography drawing on identified themes and research locations. Early in this phase, we will also recruit partners from Tanzania, tapping into our connections with researchers engaged in the *Small Fish Food Project*, two global fisheries networks: Gender in Aquaculture and Fisheries (GAF) and Too Big to Ignore (TBTI), and a Tanzanian think tank, REPOA.

The in-person workshop in Colombo, Sri Lanka, (Phase II) will refine themes and questions identified and discussed in Phase I. In the first two days participants will consider individual country scenarios and engage in team-building activities. Day 3 will be a validation and team-building field visit to a local fishing community. Days 4 and 5 will be devoted to a) a synthesis exercise in which common themes and questions will be identified and will inform a new cross-country, comparative study; b) project conceptualization and development; and c) the drafting of a grant proposal for submission to the SSRC. The in-person workshop will be followed by further virtual interactions to refine and finalize the project proposal and draft research protocols (Phase III). In the latter months of the planning period, team members will also secure necessary human subject review and/or research ethics approval from their home institutions.

Although virtual discussions can accomplish much, they are challenging across global time zones (14 in this case) and subject to frequent technology failures, interruptions, and distractions. Furthermore, although some members of this team have previously worked together or interacted with one another at international conferences, they have not all collectively undertaken a research project together. This is a new collaboration, and the formation of shared identity will be critical to overcoming the challenges posed to collaborations working across distance.¹ Thus, the in-person workshop for the team members to

¹ Bos, et. al. 2010.

engage fully with each other in a focused manner and foster relationships of trust will be critical to developing a shared framework of understanding for the co-design of a project proposal.

Planning Timeline:

Phase I: July 2020- Kick off virtual meeting and setting up shared document storage; Identification of Tanzania partners; Allocation of tasks related to annotated bibliography and workshop planning.

July-December 2020 - Literature review and annotated bibliography; Virtual/electronic interactions to exchange information and ideas; Summary document of preliminary discussions.

October/ November 2020 - SSRC Development Workshop

Phase II: January/February 2021 - Project Workshop² to synthesize country case study material, develop conceptual framework for research project and draft full proposal. Field trip to fishing village.

Phase III: February-May 2021 - Draft research protocols (surveys, interviews, etc.); Revise, finalize and submit full project proposal. **May-August 2021** - Refine research protocols; Secure human subject review and/or research ethics approval. Present synthesis document at MARE People and the Sea Conference (June 28-July 2, 2021).

Project Team and Collaborators

The lead organization for this proposal is the Centre for Poverty Analysis (CEPA), an independent think tank based in Sri Lanka that strives to promote a better understanding of poverty related development issues, through research, dialogue and policy influence, at sub-national, national and global levels. The **PI** for the project is **Gayathri Lokuge, PhD** who is a Senior Researcher at CEPA and leads the Livelihood and Employment Research Cluster. Dr. Lokuge will lead the Sri Lanka study, coordinate all phases of the project and oversee the organization of the workshop in Sri Lanka and full proposal development. **Co-PI Amalendu Jyotishi, PhD** is an institutional economist and Professor at the School of Development, Azim Premji University (Bangalore, India) who studies fish for food security, dried fish value chains, commons, and substantive economy. Dr. Jyotishi will lead the India study, contribute to project

² The timing of the project workshop may be determined by COVID-19 and related travel restrictions.

conceptualization, help organize the in-person workshop, and co-coordinate development of full project proposal. **Co-PI Holly Hapke, PhD** is a geographer with expertise in international development, gender, food systems, and human-environment interactions. In her current position at UC Irvine, Dr. Hapke facilitates the development of inter- and transdisciplinary team science research projects. She will contribute to the project conceptually, support the organization of virtual communication and the workshop in Colombo, and co-coordinate the production of a full project proposal.

Other **Team Members** who will support the project conceptually and substantively are: **Karin Fernando** (Senior Researcher, Sustainable Development, CEPA) whose research interests are in natural resource management, sustainable development and poverty. She will co-lead the Sri Lanka study and help organize the workshop. **Derek Johnson, PhD** (Professor of Socio-Cultural Anthropology, University of Manitoba) works on the political ecology of fisheries, with a focus on India. He will link the proposed research to major project on the social economy of dried fish in Asia that he leads (driedfishmatters.org). **Kyoko Kusakabe, PhD** (Asian Institute of Technology, Bangkok) is a scholar of gender and development studies. She researches women in the global economy, focusing on labor migration, informal employment and gender analysis of fish trade and fishing communities especially in Cambodia. Dr. Kusakabe will lead the Cambodia study. **Ajit Menon, PhD** (Professor, Madras Institute of Developments Studies) focuses on the political ecology of forests and fisheries in south India, particularly the politics of belonging in conservation landscapes and coastal transformation and fisher wellbeing in Tamil Nadu. Dr. Menon will assist with India study and contribute knowledge on ecology. **Joeri Scholtens, PhD** (Assistant Professor, University of Amsterdam) works on the intersection of development studies and environmental geography. He contributes expertise on transboundary fisheries governance and conflict, fisheries and food security, and the larger political ecology of Indian and Sri Lankan fisheries. Additional collaborators who will participate in the planning project include a partner from an NGO in Cambodia and two partners from Tanzania who research or work in the fisheries sector.

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