

Whose Blue Economy? Power and Coastal Livelihood Struggles in Tanzania

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Abstract

This study investigates the implications of blue economy policies on the livelihoods of coastal communities in Tanzania, with a particular focus on small-scale fishing communities. The objective was to explore how recent blue economy interventions influence access to marine resources, income generation, and overall well-being. A qualitative research approach was employed, involving 26 in-depth interviews and two focus group discussions conducted in Mbegani (Bagamoyo District) and the Ferry landing site (Kigamboni District). Data were analysed using content analysis. The findings indicate that blue economy interventions, particularly port development and the establishment of marine protected areas, have significantly disrupted local livelihoods. These interventions have restricted access to traditional fishing grounds, led to displacement, reduced fish catches, increased operational costs, and heightened conflicts between fishers and regulatory authorities. Additionally, limited community participation in decision-making processes has further exacerbated marginalisation. The study concludes that, despite their developmental promises, current blue economy policies tend to prioritise economic and conservation objectives over the livelihoods and rights of coastal communities. From a political ecology perspective, these outcomes reflect underlying power asymmetries in marine resource governance. The study calls for the adoption of more inclusive and participatory policy frameworks that recognise and protect the rights of small-scale fishers. It also calls for improved transparency in decision-making, fair compensation mechanisms, and the development of alternative livelihood strategies to ensure that blue economy initiatives contribute to equitable and sustainable development.

Keywords: Blue Economy, Coastal Communities, Livelihoods, Small-Scale Fishers, Tanzania

Introduction

The blue economy is currently a key topic of discussion around ocean sustainability and the well-being of populations (Blythe et al., 2023). According to the World Bank, the blue economy is "the sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods, and jobs while preserving the health of the ocean ecosystem" (World Bank 2017). The blue economy is believed to stimulate economic growth, support food security, protect the ocean environment, create new jobs, and improve the well-being of populations (Ninawe 2017; Sarker et al. 2019). The oceans are also considered new energy resources. Ocean energy, including aquatic biofuels and other renewable energy sources, could be an essential means of meeting the world's energy demands (Sarker et al. 2019).

In recent years, interest in ocean resources has grown drastically. Globally, companies, nations, and intergovernmental institutions have expressed enormous interest in ocean resources as an engine for global economic growth (Cisneros-Montemayor et al., 2022). Evidence indicates that ocean sectors are rapidly expanding (Jouffray et al. 2020). Different nations and institutions have adopted a "blue economy" to foster their ocean policies (Ertör and Hadjimichael, 2020).

Coastal and marine resources support the livelihoods of millions of people worldwide (Sarker et al. 2019; Das 2023). The majority of these are coastal groups that reside in coastal areas. These populations typically include low-income households, indigenous peoples, small-scale fishers, and women whose livelihoods depend on coastal resources (Das 2025). These coastal communities have a deep relationship with the ocean, shaped by intergenerational interactions with the sea. Such groups often encounter multiple structural, distributional, and positional disadvantages that lead to their exclusion from cultural and political participation in marine decision-making, particularly in the current context, where the "blue economy" attracts global attention (Blythe et al., 2023).

In Africa, the blue economy has been recognised as key to the continent's prosperity (Okafor-Yarwood 2020; Adewumi 2023). However, one key change in the implementation, management, and monitoring of the blue economy is the top-down approach, which has often resulted in further exclusion of coastal communities and undermined community well-being (Isaacs and Witbooi 2019). In Cameroon, for example, the deep-water port project displaced about 300 people who received little or no compensation for their land. People affected lost their traditional fishing grounds and had to find new fishing grounds or seek alternative livelihoods (Schenkel 2018). Another management challenge was noted in the Lamu port project in Kenya, where the port construction project was implemented. Local community members in Lamu reported not being involved in the planning and implementation of the project (Sena, 2012; Njunge, 2019; Okafor-Yarwood, 2020). Port activities displaced fishers, destroyed nearshore coastal habitats, and reduced fish catch (Thoya et al., 2022).

The blue economy is considered to threaten coastal communities (Sarker et al., 2019; Ertör and Hadjimichael, 2020; Das, 2023; Ayilu et al., 2023). This is because much emphasis on the blue economy is placed on economic gains (Okafor-Yarwood 2020). The blue economy prioritises profit-seeking for elite investors over sustainable resource use and the interests of less powerful actors, such as coastal communities (Das 2023; Ayilu et al. 2023). Evidence from investments in a blue economy in Bangladesh, for example, shows that the benefits from the use of ocean and coastal spaces flow disproportionately to

some actors, such as international investors. The project displaced 20,000 community members, impacting livelihoods and cultural identities (Selim et al. 2024). A study in Namibia demonstrated how blue economy developments affected the livelihoods of communities. (van Toor, 2023). The study underscores the fact that maritime industry development in the ocean space has left most families vulnerable to poverty. The investments have significantly reduced the use of traditional fishing grounds.

Small-scale fishers have been identified as one of the groups negatively affected by the development of the blue economy (Jentoft 2022). These small-scale fishers and their communities have been key actors in seafood production, and they continue to feed the world, accounting for about two-thirds of the catches destined for direct human consumption. However, they are subjected to significant challenges due to growing capitalist investments in the oceans (Ertör 2023). Blue economy growth, though, promises economic growth; it can achieve that, but at the cost of environmental safety and the livelihoods of marginalised fishing communities (Hossain 2020).

In Tanzania, several investments are underway in the blue economy. The key investments include fisheries and seafood, marine transport, tourism and hospitality, mining, marine parks, port development, and oil and gas exploration and extraction. (URT, 2024). In the coastal areas of Tanzania, marine resources are key drivers of livelihoods (Yanda et al., 2023). In coastal regions, key livelihood activities include artisanal fishing, fish processing and sale, seaweed farming, shell collection, mangrove harvesting, and salt making (URT, 2024). Dependency on ocean resources is generally high (Torell et al. 2017; Yanda et al. 2023).

Although the blue economy is widely promoted as a strategy for sustainable ocean use and economic growth (OECD, 2016; Ulega et al., 2022), existing studies have largely focused on policy frameworks and macro-level economic benefits, with limited attention to local livelihood experiences. In Tanzania, research has not sufficiently examined how blue economy interventions such as port development and marine protected areas affect small-scale fishers' access to resources, income, and everyday livelihoods (Zakayo & Mbilinyi, 2023; Ndesanjo, 2025). Furthermore, the role of power relations in shaping these outcomes remains underexplored in empirical studies (Ertör, 2023; Barbesgaard, 2018). This study addresses this gap by analysing how blue economy policies influence coastal livelihoods in Bagamoyo and Kigamboni using a political ecology perspective.

The objective of this study is to examine the impact of blue economy policies on the livelihoods of coastal communities in Tanzania. Specifically, the study seeks to assess how key interventions, including port development and marine protected areas, influence access to marine resources, income generation, and the overall well-being of small-scale fishers, and to analyse how power relations shape access to and control over these resources. To achieve this, we apply the political ecology perspective. Political ecologists follow a model of explanation that evaluates the influence of variables acting at several scales, each nested within another, with local decisions being influenced by regional policies, which are, in turn, directed by global politics and economics (Robbins, 2019: 11). Since political ecology is a broader perspective with many concepts, in this study we apply concept of 'power' to explain how policies such as blue economy can be analysed in relation to its implications to people's livelihoods. According to Bryant and Bailey (1997: 67), "power is primarily understood by political ecologists in relation to the ability of an actor to control its interaction with the environment and the interactions of other actors with the environment". Some powerful actors can influence (or even limit the ability of other actors to benefit from resources. Bryant and Bailey

(1997) see the role of power and the resulting inequality in human relationships in determining a pattern of human-environmental interaction. There are various ways in which one actor may seek to exert control over another actor's environment. According to Bryant and Bailey (1997), one way is the use of ideas. The blue economy has been framed as a suitable path to poverty alleviation and marine sustainability. Blue economy policies are opening the way for widespread commodification yet are being advocated as the only 'sustainable' response to the increasingly dire state of the ocean's health. However, such efforts are likely to have enormous socio-ecological consequences for communities on the ground (Barbesgaard 2018).

Material and Methods

Study Communities

This study was conducted in two communities in Bagamoyo District, Coast Region, and Kigamboni District, Dar es Salaam Region. The communities are Mbagani and Ferry landing sites, respectively. The choice of the study communities was based on significant and most recent investments. Mbagani is located in the Bagamoyo district, where a new port development project is underway. The ferry landing site is the central landing point in Dar es Salaam, where most fishers land their catch. Fishers at ferry landing sites have been influenced by several marine parks established in Dar es Salaam. Thus, the selected communities were considered the most salient locations for providing a rich and vital understanding of the impact of blue policies and interventions on local communities' livelihoods.

The study targeted boat owners, fishers, fish processors, community members, and fisheries officers as the primary informants. Community leaders and elders were also included based on the assumption that they possess critical historical information about their communities and the fisheries.

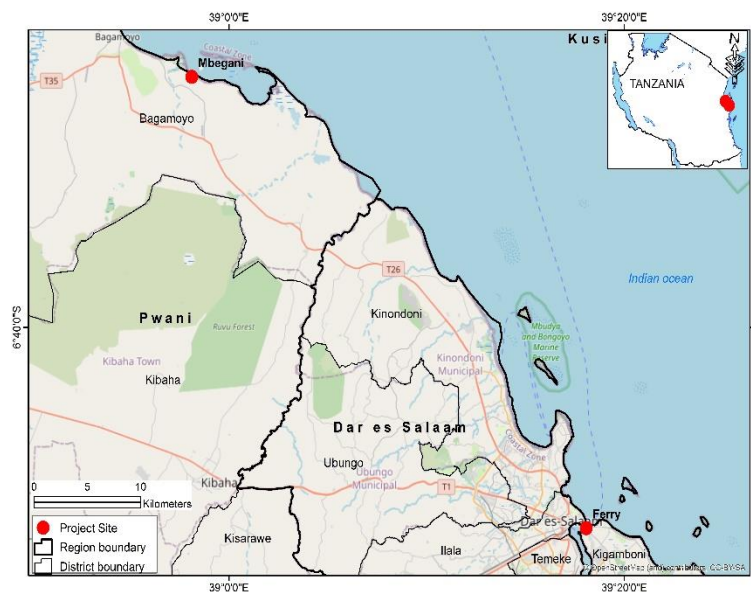


Figure 1: Map showing the study sites

Data Collection

This study employed a qualitative approach to explore the impact of blue economy policies on coastal communities. This approach enables assessment of everyday community life from participants' perspectives. (Berg 2001). Data was generated in three months, from April to June 2025. The researcher relied heavily on in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and observation for all data collection.

Table 1: Number of interviews, distribution among study sites, and categories of informants

Location	Target group	Method	Gender of respondents	
			Male	Female
Mbegani	Fish processors	Interview	2	1
	Fishers/ Boat owners	Interview	6	1
	Community members	Interview	1	1
	Community leaders	Interview	0	1
	Mixed	FGD	7	1
Ferry	Fish processors	Interview	3	0
	Fishers /Boat owners	Interview	6	1
	Community members	Interview	1	1
	Community leaders	Interview	0	1
	Mixed	FGD	6	2

The study employed purposive sampling to select participants with relevant knowledge and experience regarding coastal livelihoods and blue economy interventions. A total of 26 in-depth interviews were conducted across the two study sites, involving fishers, boat owners, fish processors, fisheries officers, community leaders, and elders. In addition, two focus group discussions (FGDs) were held, one in each study site, comprising selected participants from those who had participated in the interviews. The sample size was determined by data saturation, in which data collection continued until no new themes or insights emerged from the interviews. This approach is consistent with qualitative research practice, which prioritises depth of understanding rather than statistical representativeness. The distribution of respondents across categories and sites ensured a diverse range of perspectives on the impact of blue economy interventions.

Observation was also applied throughout the data collection process. Observation focused on major livelihood activities, how people interacted with the ocean, fish processing, boat building, mending, and other related community activities.

Data Analysis

Several steps were followed in data analysis. NVivo version 11 software helped sort and organise data generated during fieldwork, including coding and identifying themes and sub-themes. A grounded theory approach to data analysis facilitated open coding and a constant comparison methodology. The process

involved carefully reading the data to gain an in-depth understanding, then identifying key concepts and emerging themes (Hammersley and Atkinson). This process was followed by utilising the "constant comparative method" (Glaser and Strauss 1967 in Corbin and Strauss 1990), which requires identifying meanings and exploring the relations within and among data categories. Data were compared and contrasted to explore similarities and differences in how community members perceived mangrove ecosystems and their utilisation.

Ethical Considerations

Before data collection, a research permit was obtained from Mwalimu Nyerere Memorial Academy, channelled to the Pwani and Dar es Salaam regions. During data collection, the researcher ensured informed consent by providing clear explanations of the study's objectives to the informants and ensuring that each participant understood that their participation was voluntary and that the information they shared would remain confidential and would be used only for this study. To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms were used.

Results

Impact of Blue Economy Policies on the Livelihoods of the Coastal Communities

This section presents the findings on the impact of the blue economy on the livelihoods of coastal communities. As indicated in the methodology section, the focus of this study was the Bagamoyo port project and the Marine parks in Dar es Salaam. Thus, the impacts of the two blue economy interventions in the study areas are presented.

Bagamoyo Port Project

Loss of Access to Marine Resources

In Bagamoyo, where construction of the port is underway, informants were asked to share their views on the project. Informants reported that the proposed port area was an essential fishing ground. It was reported that fishers have been fishing in the area for generations. With the introduction of this project, fishers were required to move to new fishing grounds. In interactions with community members, it was revealed that people felt detached from their cultural fishing grounds. In interviews, Juma, who has been fishing in the area for over 40 years, had the following to say:

I was born in this area. My father was a fisherman. I learnt to fish when I was 12. For over 40 years now, I have been fishing in this area. The area where the port is to be constructed is a key fishing area. There are several fishing grounds around here. The proposed port will take all the key traditional fishing grounds. We are required to move to new fishing grounds. We agree that the port is essential, but we have lost our cultural fishing grounds (IDI/fishers/Mbegani/ April 2025)

This implies that fishers in the area agree that port construction is essential to the country's economy; however, for them, it means a lot. Losing their traditional fishing grounds was felt to be a serious threat. In interviews with fishers, it was reported that. The area has been an important home for many marine species. Port construction will affect their catch.

On the other hand, the port will affect the habitat, as the area is home to many fish species. Fishers also believed that moving to new fishing grounds could be seen as simple, but in reality, it is not. They mentioned that, from their experience, fish species have their space where you can find them, but not everywhere (*sio kwamba samaki wapo kila mahali*). Therefore, moving to new fishing grounds is never simple; it may mean going without fishing. In interviews, Haji, a day fisher, noted that:

Those who do not fish think that once you are in the ocean, you can fish anywhere (wanafikiri samaki wako tu kila sahamu). It is not like that. Fish have places where they like to stay, breed, and feed. So, taking us away from our traditional fishing grounds means disconnecting us from our very sources of income and food. Up now, we are not sure if we will be able to make a living as we did in this area. (IDI/Fishers/ Mbegani/ April 2025).

Displacement

In conversations with informants, it was reported that the port project was occupying a large area of land. It was estimated that 800 hectares of land were to be taken. This meant a large number of people had to be relocated. The researchers were interested in knowing how community members perceived relocation. In discussions with informants, it was noted that, though it was fine to some, others believed the project affected their lives, as Hanta noted.

This project is indeed crucial for the nation; however, it has disturbed our lives. We have been living here for years. Being moved to a new area is complicated. You are starting a new life. You are indeed paid, but that does not guarantee you will get the same land/fertility as you had. Our lives have been disrupted in various ways (FGD/ community members/ Mbegani/ May/ 2025).

It was reported that, though people received compensation, some people were dissatisfied with the compensation process. It was reported that compensation for houses, for example, was based on the materials used in construction, namely grass and mud. Informants noted that such compensation was not fair. Others mentioned that their fields were also undercompensated. Some community members told the researcher that the introduction of the port had many good promises that were never realised when the project was implemented. According to informants, the above shortcomings led most affected people to feel that displacement had negatively affected their lives.

Exclusion From Governance/Decision-Making

In discussions with informants, it was also revealed that most people were not involved in the port planning process, particularly fishers. Informants, however, acknowledged that some village meetings were conducted to discuss the plans. A consultation was also held with the Beach Management Unit (BMU). In an interview with fishers, it was revealed that although project personnel involved fishers, most of them met with BMU committee members. Thus, some fishers felt that they were less important in the consultation process. One fisherman had the following to say:

Project people had only one meeting with us, but they had several meetings with BMU leaders. We don't know what they were discussing. Sometimes, I ask myself if I am less critical in this matter. Why are they concentrating on BMU leaders? We were very uncomfortable with such a meeting. They discussed this in small meetings. The village meetings were used to announce decisions made (IDI/fishers/mbegani/May / 2025).

The above quote suggests that some villagers felt they were inadequately consulted and that their concerns were not adequately addressed. In discussions with informants, it was noted that most meetings were between village and BMU leaders. The rest of the community members were not adequately consulted. The village meetings were used to justify decisions that had already been made. Some informants added that there was also unclear communication regarding relocation and compensation. In interviews, informants mentioned, "*kulikuwa na shida ya uwazi*" (lit. there was a serious problem with transparency). Implying that the planning process lacked not only involvement but also transparency. Some informants noted that the low community involvement made some people feel betrayed by their leaders, both village and BMU leaders.

Marine Parks

This study also exposed the impact that marine parks have on the livelihoods of coastal communities. Fishers were asked to express their ideas about how marine parks influenced their lives. Informants had different opinions on the same.

Restricted Access to Traditional Fishing Grounds

In the interviews with informants, limits to access traditional fishing grounds were mentioned as the most serious impact of marine parks. Fishers mentioned that most of the protected areas were their traditional fishing grounds. According to informants, fishing is not done everywhere in the ocean; there are specific areas where you can catch fish. They mentioned that they established those fishing grounds based on their forefathers' knowledge of fish behaviour. Thus, the traditional fishing grounds they considered were based on such knowledge. Restrictions on accessing those fishing grounds affected their daily lives, as Gindu, a ring net fisher, noted:

"I have been fishing for over 30 years now. Fishing has been excellent, and it has improved our lives. However, the introduction of marine parks has affected us very much. This is because the marine parks have been established in our fishing grounds. And I don't know why the government decided to chase us away from our fishing grounds. Fishing has become tough nowadays. We are not able to catch as we used to before the establishment of the marine parks" (FGD/fishers/Magogoni/ May 2025).

The quote above implies that coastal communities have been fishing in the specified areas, or fishing grounds, were, based on their local knowledge, they could get a good catch. The introduction of marine parks to most of their traditional fishing grounds has negatively affected their ability to meet daily needs. In conversations with fishers, they mention some of their traditional fishing grounds that have been affected by marine parks, including Makatumbé Islands, Fungu Yasini, and areas surrounding Bongoyo and Sinda Islands.

Loss of Income

Informants reported that marine parks have led to a loss of income. It was reported that, before the introduction of marine parks, fishers were getting a better catch and, therefore, better income than in the period after their introduction. In interviews, different groups raised their concern about "cutting their earnings."

"As a fish processor, what I can say is that life has changed a lot since the introduction of the marine parks. In the past, I was able to process about 70 kg of sardines and earn more income, but as you can see here (pointing to the researcher), I have only 10 kg. We are experiencing hardship. Marine parks are good for the government, but we don't see any value in having them" (FGD/fish processors/ Magogoni/ May 2025).

Another added that;

"If you talk to fishers, they would tell you the same thing: our lives have changed a lot. We earn very little income from fishing. Before the introduction of the marine parks, we had huge catches. It was very normal to catch 300kg of uono (sardine). But nowadays, that's history. On my side, for example, I am getting an average of 50kg. this means that my income has gone down" (FGD/fishers/ Magogoni/ May 2025).

Increasing Fishing Costs

In discussions with fishers, it was revealed that the introduction of marine parks has resulted in increased fishing costs. This is because fishers had to travel further in search of alternative fishing grounds. As a result, it increased fuel and time costs. It was mentioned that most traditional fishing grounds were close to coastal areas. The introduced marine parks have restricted access to most of those traditional fishing grounds. Searching for alternative fishing grounds is boastful, as Jumbe points out.

"We have been forced to look for alternative fishing grounds. This is not an easy task. We have to move to more distant areas in search of a catch. We are spending a lot of fuel. On average, we used about twice as much fuel as before the establishment of marine parks. Despite such a journey, we are not certain we will catch better fish. In fact, our catch has gone down. So, getting lost is very normal nowadays" (IDI/fishers/Magogoni/May 2025)

The quote above implies that searching for alternative fishing grounds is not easy. Fishers reported spending too much time on alternative fishing grounds. During a conversation with Mzee Abdallah, an experienced fisherman, he noted that before the introduction of the marine parks, he could fish just 15 minutes from the shore. Now he is spending over an hour trying to find a fishing ground- *"kuvua imekuwa safari kweli kweli"* (lit. going to the fishing ground has become a real journey).

Limited Access to Seafood

Informants were also concerned with seafood. It was revealed that reduced access to fish was affecting their ability to obtain their traditional food, seafood. One old woman mentioned that *'sisi watu wa pwani chakula chetu ni samaki, sasa jambo hili linatunyima kupata chakula chetu cha asili'* (lit. For coastal people, fish is our cultural food; now, this process is limiting our ability to access our traditional food. Both fishers and food processors at Magogoni expressed their views on the value of seafood and on how government policies, such as marine parks, limit their access to traditional food. Zena, a fish processor, had the following to say.

"To us, fish is not only food; it is our tradition. We have grown up eating it. We feel incompetent without seafood. When I receive a guest, for example, I will feel proud to prepare seafood for my guest. Fish meal is a deep expression of hospitality to us. Without fish, we feel empty, and our way of life feels like it's disappearing" (IDI/fish processors/Magogoni/ May 2025).

Conflict Over Resource Use

Limited access to fishing grounds led to conflicts over resources. In our discussions with informants, we learned that disputes occurred between the fishing communities and the government. It was noted that conflicts emerged as fishers who were restricted and unfairly treated, as they were barred from areas they had fished for generations. In interviews, one fisherman had the following to say;

"The creation of marine parks has made us fishers criminals. The government is hunting us, especially when we are seen close to or entering the marine parks. Conflicts are many. A few days ago, the government confiscated some fishers' nets. Sadly, the way our lives were before and after the parks is quite different. We have so much friction with the government authorities" (IDI/fishers/Magogoni, May 2025).

The above quote captures the experiences of many fishers regarding conflicts arising from the need to access fish resources. In conversations with informants, it was noted that fishers were experiencing harsh enforcement of fisheries rules and regulations, including gear confiscation and arrests.

In the context of declining fish catches in the Indian Ocean, people are doing whatever they can to earn a living. In some cases, even though they know it is prohibited to fish in protected areas, they enter them and do so. This has led to a conflict with government authorities. Informants felt the marine park had no value to the fishers. Maju, who has been fishing for over 30 years now, had the following comments.

"What I see is that the marine parks benefit the government and not poor people like us fishers. We have always been pushed away from the good fishing grounds. The park officials act like the military; they are very harsh, and even if we explain that we are looking for something for our families, they don't care. They punish people but don't provide any options for us." (IDI/Fishers/Magogoni/April 2025).

The above implies the feeling that people have about marine parks. Researcher in the study areas noted that most conflicts between the fishing communities and the government stemmed from the lack of their involvement in the decision-making process regarding the establishment of marine parks. Informants noted that marine parks were established with little or no participation in some places (such as Ununio). This resulted in dissatisfaction among most fishers. Some fishers felt the government didn't consider them important. In response, some fishers violated the rules and entered the parks to fish, resulting in conflicts.

Discussion

This study aimed to understand the impact of blue economy policies and projects on the livelihoods of the coastal communities in Tanzania. Through interactions, we found that fishers have a rich history of interaction with the ocean. This interaction has been the basis of their living since they depend on it to meet their daily needs. Additionally, the blue economy policies that have introduced several projects, such as ports and marine parks, have had a wide-ranging impact on communities' livelihoods.

Fishing in the ocean has been structured around local knowledge that fishing communities have accumulated for generations (Berkes et al., 2000; Ertör, 2023). Such knowledge informed them about where to fish and the seasonalities of fishing. Thus, these communities did not fish anywhere, but they had specific fishing grounds. The findings of this study show that blue economy policies, particularly the establishment of the Bagamoyo port and the introduction of marine parks, restricted access to their traditional fishing

grounds, consequently affecting their livelihoods and their ability to benefit from fish resources. Previous studies have shown that blue economy policies have pushed coastal communities away from their traditional fishing grounds, leaving them marginalised. In her research in Namibia, Van Toor (2023) shows how port construction restricted local fishers' access to their traditional fishing grounds, leaving them unable to catch enough fish to sustain their livelihoods. Ayilu et al. (2023) have shown that the blue economy in Ghana has disrupted coastal communities, including denying them access to their traditional fishing grounds. Yet, the fishers had limited capabilities to adapt.

Informants were also concerned with displacement. As indicated in the findings, the Bagamoyo port project had displaced a large number of families. Informants noted that the project took hundreds of hectares, forcing families to move to new places. Though the victims were compensated, they had to start a new life. It was also reported that some of the affected people were not satisfied with the compensation. Available studies indicate that displacement is common in most blue economy projects (Hossain, 2020; Barbesgaard, 2018; Thoya et al., 2022; Van Toor, 2023). A study in Kenya demonstrates how the construction of Lamu Port displaced hundreds of fishers. The proposed port area was located within multiple traditional fishing grounds (Thoya et al., 2022).

Findings from this study have also demonstrated that community members in the study communities felt excluded from decision-making. From interactions with informants, it was noted that in both port projects and marine parks, local communities were not adequately involved in decision-making regarding the blue plans. In a port project, for example, informants told the researcher that most discussions about establishing the port were held between village and ward leaders, with only a few community meetings. Other studies have also noted the exclusion of local communities from the blue economy (Thoya et al., 2022; Ertör, 2023). Lack of engagement has been attributed to the failure to view local people as key stakeholders in the ocean environment (Barbesgaard 2018; Rosyida et al. 2018). Studies also show that some blue economy projects do not facilitate the active participation of local communities in discussions that have a critical impact on their lives. Thus, partial participation (or what Rosyida et al. (2018) call grey participation) characterised most blue economy projects (Isaacs and Witbooi 2019; Cohen et al. 2019; Mbatha 2022; Rosyida et al. 2018). Studies also show that, in general, major ocean users, such as fishing communities, have been marginalised from the dialogue among international environmental and economic actors that determines strategies for the future of the ocean (Cohen et al. 2019).

Loss of income was also a key impact of the blue economy in this study. Informants featured much of this in marine parks. Informants mentioned that before the introduction of marine parks, they were getting better catches and, therefore, good sales. However, the introduction of marine parks that restricted them from fishing on most traditional fishing grounds changed the situation. Fishers were forced to find new fishing grounds. New fishing grounds did not yield a good catch; hence, a low catch and, consequently, a low income. The loss of income was explained as affecting the ways they used to meet their daily needs. As a result, they could hardly meet their daily needs. Loss of income for coastal communities in blue economy projects has also been noted in other studies (Ertör 2023; Ayilu et al. 2023; Mtui 2024). For example, in her research in Mtwara, Tanzania, Mtui (2024) showed that household income declined significantly during the peak of blue economy interventions. Ayilu et al. (2023) assert that port expansion in Ghana affected fishers' incomes and their ability to meet the rising cost of living in fishing communities.

Furthermore, this study revealed that blue economy interventions increased fishing costs for fishers. Informants said that, since they have been pushed from their traditional fishing grounds, they are forced to look for new ones. To find new fishing grounds, fishers had to travel to distant places in search of catch, which was not easy since there was no guarantee of catching anything in those areas. Consequently, it increased fishing costs (time and fuel) as fishers had to move from place to place in search of a good catch. As a complement and corroboration of the increase in fishing costs, studies have revealed the potential for increased costs due to changes in fishing grounds (Suuronen et al. 2012; Stevenson et al. 2013; Hamel et al. 2018). The study by Stevenson et al.(2013) indicates that fishers sometimes incur losses due to variable costs associated with fishing sites farther from traditional fishing grounds. In the study areas, fishers were concerned about rising fishing costs, which were accompanied by low catches. The two circumstances had affected the way they used to meet their daily needs.

At the research site, it was revealed that conflict between fishers and ocean managers persisted. Conflicts were basically over access to fish resources. Blue economy projects, namely port projects in Bagamoyo and marine protected areas, have limited fishers' access to some traditional fishing grounds, most of which have been fished by community members for generations. New fishing grounds did not guarantee better catches than before. Blue economy interventions were considered to reduce fish catches and, by extension, income. Since coastal communities rely on fish resources to meet their daily needs, some fishers entered restricted areas to catch fish. Thus, conflict emerged between fishers and ocean managers. Other scholars have observed conflict over resource use in fisheries in other contexts as well. For example, Stevenson et al. (2013) noted that marine protected areas (MPAs) have been relocating fishers to less desirable areas, thereby encouraging them to aggregate near MPA boundaries and generating conflict between fishers and MPAs. Reis-Filho et al. (2024) assert that exclusion and grabbing in the blue economy have fueled conflicts over resources between coastal communities and governments. Additionally, Sumaila and Villasante (2025) observed that blue economy projects could occupy large areas of the sea, potentially reducing fishing grounds and causing conflicts over space.

The application of political ecology, specifically the concept of power, to this study has merit because of this perspective. Power is understood as the "ability of an actor to control its interaction with the environment and the interactions of other actors with the environment" (Bryant and Bailey, 1997:11). This means that some actors have the power to influence the ways other actors interact with resources. One way to do this is to introduce ideas that may influence how other actors perceive resources and what is desirable. Ideas reinforce or challenge social and economic arrangements. Thus, power is partly a matter of "winning the battle of ideas" over human use of the environment since actors typically seek to legitimate the triumph of their interests over the interests of others (Bryant and Bailey, 1997:40). This is how the blue economy was introduced- through ideas that influence people's worldview. For example, the blue economy has been painted with promises to stimulate economic growth, support food security, protect the ocean environment, create new jobs, and improve the well-being of populations (Ninawe 2017). Statements like this are likely to influence people's ideas, and the blue economy is seen as something that would completely change their lives. As indicated in the findings, coastal communities were also promised a better life with the port project; however, this was not the case during its implementation. The study applied the political ecology perspective as a framework to analyse how power influences resource use and its implications. Political ecology has enabled us to understand the impact of blue economy interventions on the livelihoods of the

coastal communities. Findings of this further support the assertions of other political ecologists, particularly that the blue economy negatively affects the livelihoods of coastal communities. For example, Barbesgaard (2018) has noted that general claims of 'pro-poor', 'benefit-sharing' and 'win-win' opportunities of the blue economy have not been realised; instead, the grabbing and marginalisation of coastal communities have dominated. In his study of fisheries in Thailand, Tan-Mullins (2007) demonstrates how unequal power relations between fishers and government officials influence control over and access to resources—showing how certain groups may determine how others can access and benefit from them.

Conclusion

This study examined the impact of blue economy policies on the livelihoods of coastal communities in Tanzania, focusing on small-scale fishers in Bagamoyo and Kigamboni. The findings show that blue economy interventions, particularly port development and marine protected areas, have significantly disrupted local livelihoods by restricting access to traditional fishing grounds, reducing fish catches, increasing costs, and contributing to displacement and conflicts.

From a political ecology perspective, these outcomes reflect unequal power relations in marine governance, where state institutions and investors exercise control over ocean spaces while small-scale fishers are marginalised. The study further reveals limited community participation in decision-making, intensifying feelings of exclusion among coastal communities. Coastal communities were treated as passive actors in decisions about how ocean resources would be utilised and managed. As opposed to the promises of blue economy policies- poverty reduction and improved ocean environments, the policies are systematically marginalising the coastal communities, undermining their well-being, and risking the sustainability of ocean resources.

The study recommends stronger community participation, recognition of customary fishing rights, fair compensation, and support for alternative livelihoods to ensure more just and sustainable coastal development.

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