

Managing reefs to benefit coastal communities

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A fisher. Coral reefs provide a range of benefits, such as food, opportunities for income and education, but not everyone has the same access to them, according to a new study conducted by the ARC Centre of Excellence for Coral Reef Studies (Coral CoE) at James Cook University. Credit: Image: Christina Hicks

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according to a new study conducted by the ARC Centre of Excellence for Coral Reef Studies (Coral CoE) at James Cook University.

The researchers examined how people from 28 fishing communities in Madagascar, Kenya, Tanzania and Seychelles benefit from the [marine environment](#).

For many years conservation in developing countries has been based on the assumption that improvements in ecosystem conditions, such as increasing [coral reef fish](#) biomass, will benefit the community as a whole.

But Dr Christina Hicks, a social scientist, says this approach is too simplistic.

"Increased supply tends to benefit the elite, not the community as a whole," Dr Hicks says.

"We need to look at the social and economic access mechanisms that would enable a wider group of people to benefit from reefs and then develop policies based on that information," she says.

Study co-author Professor Joshua Cinner from the Coral CoE says the [focus](#) on increasing the supply of benefits isn't enough.

"We need to pay more attention to how that benefit is distributed and how it is accessed by different people within a community," Professor Cinner says.

The researchers argue that policy makers need a more inclusive approach to managing [coral reefs](#), which includes a focus on improving wellbeing.

"We tend to focus on economic growth because it is easy to measure, but this should be greatly expanded to include the way people can share in the benefits that flow from reefs," Dr Hicks says.



A fishing boat is depicted. The researchers examined how people from 28 fishing communities in Madagascar, Kenya, Tanzania and Seychelles benefit from the marine environment. Credit: Christina Hicks

More information: Social, institutional, and knowledge mechanisms mediate diverse ecosystem service benefits from coral reefs, by Christina C. Hicks and Joshua E. Cinner is published in the journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*

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