

Navigating Rough Seas: A Qualitative Exploration of National Sociotechnical Imaginaries of Myanmar's Future Marine Fisheries

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Abstract : Myanmar is considered one of the largest fishing nations in the world. The country's rapid economic and political reform process since 2011 entails both challenges and opportunities for its marine fishing sector. The development pathway of the sector remains unclear. Which future will eventually materialize is shaped and determined by the various visions and actions of the stakeholders engaging in political debates and decision-making. These visions can be conceptualized through the Science and Technology Studies (STS) concept of sociotechnical imaginaries. The research of this article is guided by the question of which imaginaries are currently relevant, who is propagating these imaginaries, and how are these imaginaries produced and contested. Using qualitative documentary analysis of policy documents, reports, and media articles as well as in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, three archetypical national sociotechnical imaginaries of Myanmar's future marine fisheries were identified: The industrial scale extractivism imaginary views marine fishing sector as a driver for national economic growth and focuses on the industrial and technological development of the production chain, increasing yield and exports. Sustainable fishing management encompasses the vulnerability of marine ecosystems and views increasing efficient sustainability governance, planning, and management into existing fishing practices. In the traditional sufficiency fishing imaginary, small-scale fishing practices are viewed as an important livelihood practice for millions of coastal dwellers. The need to conserve them through strengthening the self-reliance, autonomy, and resilience of these communities is stressed. In national debates, the first two imaginaries are currently dominant. The imaginaries, as well as their contestations, are also linked to other critical political issues. The paper suggests that participatory decision-making processes are needed to create an inclusive imaginary of the future marine fishing sector.

Keywords : science and technology studies, sociotechnical imaginaries, marine fishing, knowledge coproduction, Myanmar

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