

Impact of offshore petroleum extraction and “ocean grabbing” on small-scale fisheries and coastal livelihoods in Ghana

Abstract

In recent years, there has been increasing scholarly attention to the relationship between offshore oil extraction and the well-being of communities along the coast whose livelihoods directly depend on the ocean. In this paper, we show how offshore petroleum extraction activities, associated ocean space regulations, and fishery conservation discourses lead to “ocean grabbing” in Ghana. Based on interviews with fisherfolk, government officials, environmental NGOs, and officials from the petroleum industry in Ghana, we address the above issues using Harvey’s framework of “accumulation by dispossession.” The offshore petroleum industry and fisheries utilize different resources. Fishers catch fish from the waters, whereas petroleum companies extract petroleum products from the seabed. Hence, the claim of dispossession often made by fishers is largely contested by petroleum corporations and state institutions. However, due to their spatial coexistence, user rights claims, tensions, and conflicts over facts, opposing interests, and values persist. In these contestations, there exists clear power inequity between fisherfolk and oil companies, with isolated cases of violence and punishment of fishers for flouting marine regulations. This paper calls for institutional strengthening to resolve the impending tensions and address the growing imbalance in the power relations among the different marine resource users.