

A Sense of Home

Svein Jentoft's essays on the experiences of small-scale fisheries focus on the human aspects of the communities in which they are embedded, common to both the North and the South

The Gift of Community – More Essays on Human Experiences of Small-scale Fisheries by Svein Jentoft. TBTI Global. 2023. 364 pages

The well-known sociologist Svein Jentoft has spent many years of his life studying and writing about fisheries, both in the global South (such as in Nicaragua, where he has spent much time) and in the North (such as his own country of Norway). Having taken part in the negotiations that led to the SSF Guidelines in Rome in 2014 and being immersed by the subject, he has already edited four academic volumes on small-scale fisheries (SSF), with one more on the way. In addition, he has given many presentations on the topic. Now he has followed up on an earlier collection of 2019 titled *Life above Water – Essays of Human Experiences of Small-scale Fisheries*, gathering 35 essays under the provocative title 'The Gift of Community'. The book can be downloaded for free from the Too-Big-To-Ignore website.

There are many publications and policy directives on SSF in the world, often highlighting the hardships and the difficulties experienced by those employed in the sector. Svein Jentoft is, however, unique in highlighting the human side of the relationship between these fisheries and their communities. After all, Jentoft argues, fishers—men and women—are part of communities, and there are things “that communities offer that small-scale fisheries cannot do without”. He continues: “They depend on each other and must both be viable.”

This book makes a passionate plea for taking care of SSF communities as much as of the fisheries themselves. After Much in line with, for example, the Community Conservation Research Network, he argues that “healthy

resources need healthy communities”. Needless to say, the reverse is also true.

What are ‘communities’? Jentoft does not provide a clear definition but the book suggests that he has in mind the settlements and neighbourhoods in which SSF families normally congregate. He acknowledges that these communities, frequently going back several generations, are rarely trouble-free. Still, they are crucial to the lives of their inhabitants.

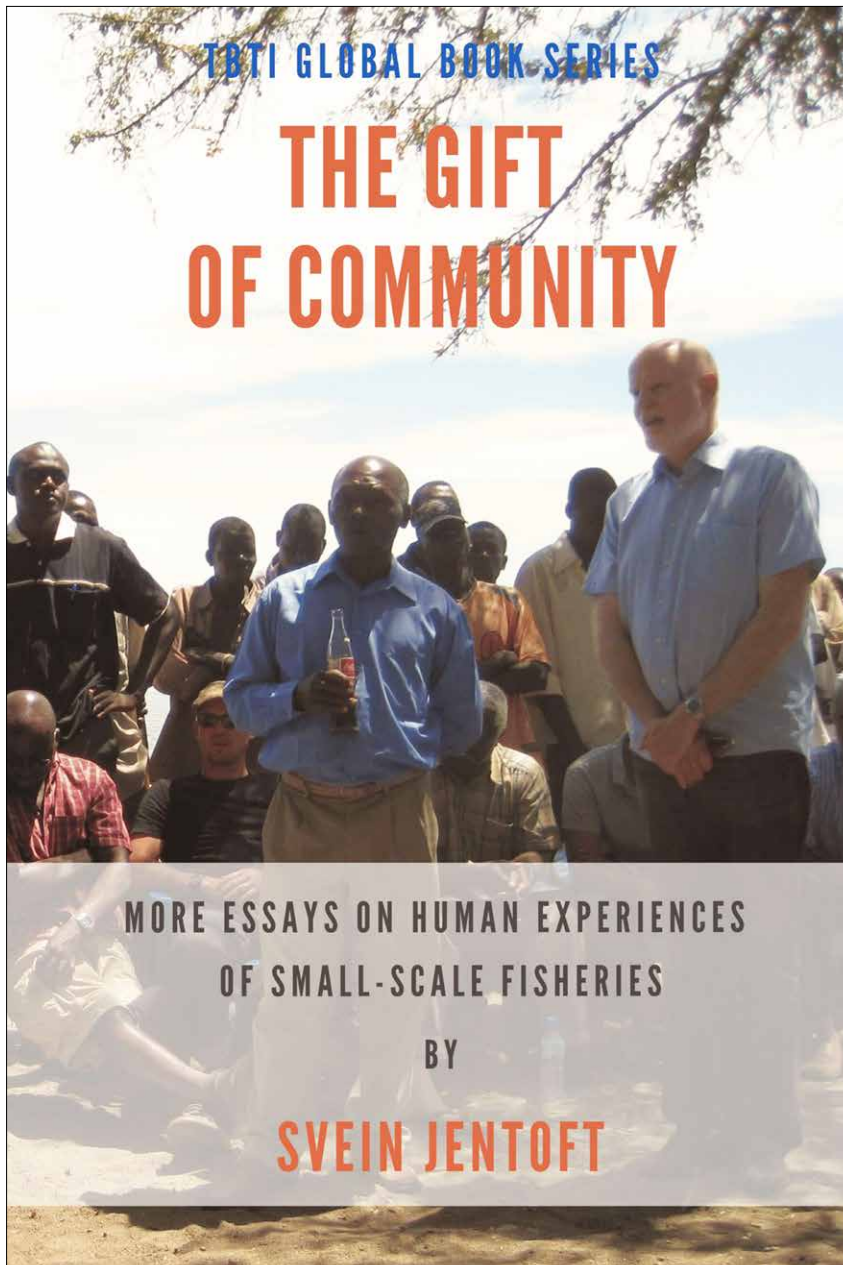
To illustrate his point, Jentoft refers to his former student, Paul Onyango, who shared the lives of a community of poor, small-scale fishers along Lake Victoria. He had noticed that “despite their lack of material wealth, people had each other and their community and their sense of self – their dignity”. Jentoft points out that people living in such communities supply others with all kinds of material goods and services. They also provide each other lasting social relationships and a basic sense of home. No person can do without that.

Shape and form

The book groups the essays under nine headings. The starting point or ‘the watershed’, as Jentoft calls Part 1, is the year in which the SSF Guidelines were ratified. He suggests that one must distinguish a time before the ratification of the Guidelines, in which SSF communities enjoyed little protection from international law, from the time that followed their endorsement, in which a comprehensive, protective umbrella has, in principle, been established. The remainder of the book speaks to the conditions that are relevant for putting the Guidelines to work. This is Jentoft's long-time ambition.

The section titles are worth noticing. ‘Why we need communities?’ (Part 2);

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‘Small-Scale fisheries as a governance challenge’ (Part 5); ‘The small-scale fisheries employment system’ (Part 6); and ‘Learning the small-scale fisheries life’ (Part 8). Many chapters build on Jentoft’s interest in the fields of philosophy and social sciences; they are peppered with interesting anecdotes and quotes from the likes of Aristotle and Plato. The language he uses, however, is simple and easily accessible. This corresponds to the breadth of his target audience that includes those employed in fisheries, in governments, in academics and in the civil society. Jentoft tickles their imagination and

feeds their thoughts, building upon the experience gained during many years in the field. For those with an inquisitive mind, the book is a delight, with countless insights.

It is often assumed that the SSF Guidelines are intended primarily for safeguarding small-scale fishing communities in the global South. Jentoft disagrees vehemently. Although small-scale fishers in Norway, for instance, have declined in number, he argues that they face similar problems as their counterparts in the South, “such as loss of income, tenure rights, political marginalization and the erosion of communities”. There is, therefore, no reason that the human rights principles meant to govern SSF should differ between the North and the South. Because small-scale fisheries in the North and the South are ‘different but similar’, Jentoft suggests that “there are cross-cultural lessons to draw from their comparison”. Small-scale fishers in both Tropical Majority and Temperate Minority countries can, therefore, learn from each other’s experiences.

More than anything else, this refreshing book is about people—boys and girls, men and women—living the lives of small-scale fisheries in present and in future. It is also about those involved in their governance, providing people in positions of responsibility with worthwhile suggestions. Explicitly endorsing the SSF Guidelines, it points out pathways for their more thorough implementation.

Besides providing glimpses of the remarkable academic that Svein Jentoft is, the book is a welcome addition to the literature on small-scale fisheries in the world. **3**