

# A Weighty Responsibility

**A fisheries reform process is under way in Africa, but where are the voices of the fishers?**

**T**he voices of small-scale fisherpeople in Africa must be heard in any process aimed at reforming fisheries governance in the continent. A process that does not take on board the life experiences of those who depend on oceans and lakes for their livelihoods will inevitably be a flawed one.

Too many fisher people, in Africa and elsewhere, have lost their livelihoods as a result of policies that are insensitive to the needs and

fishery policies developed by high-level decisionmakers—influenced by the powerful industrial fisheries sector, and fisheries advisers from the North—have had on livelihoods and food security in fishing communities.

In 2012, Masifundise became involved in a process of developing a policy framework and comprehensive fisheries reform strategy for Africa, as part of the think tank established by the African Union's Intergovernmental Bureau for Animal Resources (AU-IBAR). The AU-IBAR was given this task based on the recommendations of the inaugural Conference of African Ministers of Fisheries and Aquaculture (CAMFA) held in Gambia in 2010. In our view, this process has been undemocratic, not sufficiently including the voice of the millions of small-scale fishers in Africa directly dependent on the sector for their livelihoods. Secondly, despite some of the rhetoric, it is clear that maximizing economic benefits from the fishery is taking priority over ensuring the protection of livelihoods and food security at local levels.

## Think tank meeting

The first think tank meeting was held in July and besides Masifundise, only three small-scale fisher representatives attended. There was a great deal of talk about the importance of consulting with civil society, and small-scale fishers in particular, and yet somehow the failure to ensure fair representation at this opening meeting seemed to escape most delegates. Had we at Masifundise not invited ourselves there would have only been three

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opportunities in small-scale fisheries; in fact, lives have been lost. If such policies become entrenched in Africa, they will not only impact on the fishers themselves, but will have potentially disastrous consequences for more than 200 mn Africans who rely on fish as their primary source of protein and nutrients: their food security is inextricably tied to the success or decline of small-scale fisheries, which provides a ready source of affordable protein to coastal and lakeshore communities across the continent. In Sierra Leone, for example, fish accounts for 80 per cent of animal protein intake and 95 per cent of fish landed is consumed locally.

Having been a part of the struggle for the recognition of the rights of small-scale fishers in South Africa over the last 10 years, we in Masifundise have seen first-hand the impacts that

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small-scale fisher representatives, all of them from just one of the five regions in Africa.

At the meeting, five regional assessment teams were set up to assess and report on the state of fisheries and fisheries governance in north, south, east, west and central Africa, respectively. Masifundise was appointed as part of the southern Africa team, and the West African Association for the Development of Artisanal Fisheries (WADAF) as part of the team for west Africa. A handful of fisher organizations were asked to provide minor inputs to the assessment reports but no fisher representatives were appointed to the other three assessment teams, despite our protests. The only concession made was for Masifundise to consult with fisher organizations around the continent to compile a report on small-scale fisheries for Africa, although no extra resources or time were allocated for this additional task.

The assessment teams were given just five days in August to prepare their reports. Again, we argued strongly that more time was needed to consult adequately with our partner organizations and that a workshop with fisher organizations in the region would be necessary to allow them to make meaningful contributions. The time frame remained unchanged and we were, therefore, only able to gather very limited inputs from other organizations.

At our insistence, a handful of additional fisher organizations attended the follow-up validation meeting in Cameroon in November. But the meeting focused on minor amendments to the report rather than dealing with substantive inputs from the fishers. One of the seven discussion groups formed had a specific focus on small-scale fisheries. Some of the content of the pan-African report on small-scale fisheries was incorporated into a summary document on small-scale fisheries, to be reviewed and edited by this group. The summary document, however, focused only on inland

fisheries. and the discussions had to be abandoned.

An overall synthesis document will now be developed by the process facilitator and in the coming weeks members of the think tank will be given the opportunity to comment before the final version is presented to the CAMFA ministers.

The outcomes (policy recommendations for the CAMFA ministers) of the Comprehensive African Fisheries Reform Strategy (CAFRS) process will have potentially far-reaching impacts on fisheries governance in Africa. Yet, from the beginning, it has been abundantly clear that insufficient time and resources were allocated to ensuring that small-scale fishers were adequately included in this process. cursory attempts to include a handful of fisher organizations might be enough to 'tick the box', but can hardly be considered a democratic process.

So what does all this tell us besides the fact that the process has been undemocratic? The lack of inclusion of the biggest sub-sector in fisheries creates space for the complex of African neoliberal policymakers (often educated in Europe or North America), the World Bank (notorious for sidelining civil society in policy-making processes), the economically

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The day's catch being landed in Cape Town, South Africa. Many fisher people in the country have lost their livelihoods as a result of policies that are insensitive

powerful and politically connected fishing industry (mostly non-African and with no interest in civil society), and big international environmental organizations (often co-opted by corporations and neoliberal philanthropic foundations who have an interest in the privatization of fisheries) to push forward fishery policies that are, at best, insensitive to small-scale fisheries and, at worst (and far more likely), will lead to the expropriation of fisher people's rights and loss of livelihoods and lives.

Civil society can play the crucial role of watchdog, but when the small-scale fisheries subsector is left in the dark and alienated, this is impossible. In this case, by far the greatest majority of small-scale fishers and fisher organizations in the continent have no knowledge whatsoever that a policy process is under way that could dramatically affect their livelihoods.

How can they then possibly act as a watchdog or make meaningful contributions? Yes, it is not realistic to reach or include everyone, but ensuring that small-scale fishers were represented in all five regions, at both the meetings and on the regional assessment teams, and

giving enough resources to allow these organizations to consult meaningfully with other fisher organizations for the assessments is hardly a big task.

While little can be done to transform this policy process into a meaningful, consultative one at this late stage, all hope is not lost in terms of the outcomes. The Committee on Fisheries (COFI) of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has begun the process of developing International Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries.

The Guidelines, still in draft form, include inputs from numerous small-scale fisher organizations who participated in the consultative development process through national and regional workshops.

The Guidelines provide recommendations on how best to manage fisheries through ensuring the inclusion of fisher people, promoting social and economic development at local and national levels, and combating overfishing and habitat destruction.

We have yet to see how this important policy development process will conclude, and it is our hope that the decisionmakers will turn to the

## Think Tank on African Fisheries in Context

In 2005, following the Fish for All summit in Abuja, Nigeria, the World Bank-supported New Partnership for Africa's Development Agency (NEPAD) published the NEPAD Action Plan for the Development of African Fisheries and Aquaculture. Subsequently, in 2008, and aided by Swedish Co-operation, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) initiated a process to support the development and implementation of the Comprehensive African Fisheries Reform Strategy (CAFRS), promoted by the NEPAD Action Plan. This paved the way for the first Conference of African Ministers of Fisheries and Aquaculture (CAMFA) in Banjul, Gambia, in 2010, hosted by the African Union (AU) and NEPAD.

All this has given rise to a series of consultations of which the AU-IBAR 'think tank' process is a part.

The projected long-term outcome of this process is for "a significantly enhanced contribution of fisheries and aquaculture to poverty alleviation, food security through economic growth, improved sustainable management of the fishery and aquaculture sectors, and reduced vulnerability of fishing and fish farming communities to disasters and climate-change impact".

Source: FAO "Programme in support of the implementation of FAO strategy for fisheries and aquaculture in Africa" (GCP/RAF/463/MUL).




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Guidelines to incorporate the views of the fishers, ultimately ensuring the protection of their human rights. We hope also that, as some consolation, small-scale fishers will be given a fair opportunity to comment on the draft policy reform document as it becomes available.

Small-scale fishers across Africa are becoming increasingly marginalized, both economically and politically. This reform strategy development process presents us with an opportunity to put measures in place to reverse this trend, and to ensure that those most heavily dependent on fish resources are given an equal chance to help shape the way in which these resources are managed and allocated. It is a weighty responsibility indeed resting on those leading this process. 

#### For more



[masifundise.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/AU-Report\\_Africa.pdf](http://masifundise.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/AU-Report_Africa.pdf)

#### **Masifundise Development Trust Assessment Report On Small-scale Fisheries In Africa**

[www.fishnewseu.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=4299:african-fisheries-conference-opens-in-the-gambia&catid=46:world&Itemid=56](http://www.fishnewseu.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4299:african-fisheries-conference-opens-in-the-gambia&catid=46:world&Itemid=56)

#### **CAMFA Press Release**

[www.cape-cffa.org/spip.php?article180](http://www.cape-cffa.org/spip.php?article180)

#### **CFFA Press Release on CAMFA**

[www.nepad.org/foodsecurity/fisheries/about](http://www.nepad.org/foodsecurity/fisheries/about)

#### **NEPAD Press Release on PAF**