

Q & A

Interview with Solene Smith, chairperson of the South African network, Coastal Links, and also a fisherwoman from Langebaan, a traditional fishing village on the west coast of South Africa located on the country's only true lagoon, the Langebaan Lagoon.

By **Jackie Sunde** (jsunde@telkomsa.net), Member ICSF, and Researcher at the Environmental Evaluation Unit, University of Cape Town, South Africa

Solene, do you have rights to the sea in Langebaan?

No, not anymore but before the permit system was put in place, we all had rights and, as fisherwomen, we used to work alongside our male partners.

Do you have rights to the marine resources?

No.

Do you have rights to the land upon which you live?

Yes, I do have rights to my own house. Once we all lived next to the beautiful lagoon but we were forced out by the apartheid laws. But now I have my own house.

Please tell us about the rights you have now as against the system that used to exist previously.

In the past we didn't have a permit system. As fishers, we made our own laws. We looked after the lagoon and the species in it, and we caught fish wherever we wanted to. There was no one watching over us and there were no laws. We looked after the resources ourselves. We brought our children up to do the same because our forefathers and our parents taught us to respect the sea and its resources.

And the new system?

In the 1970s and 1980s, the government brought in new laws and the permit system, and only certain people could get permits under the system. This forced many of our fishers to go and look for other work. The permit system also meant that certain other laws and institutions came in, such as the MPA and the Parks Board, and each one made their own laws. This beautiful lagoon that we so loved was divided into different parts and our fishers could now only fish in certain sections. Where we previously could play on the beach, anchor our boats, do everything on the beach, clean our fish, now we had lost all that. We were forced out and we had to find another place to stay. All of us used to live along this beautiful lagoon but all of us were forced out during the apartheid years and different developments came along this lagoon. At the time our people were not informed about what they could do to claim their land back.

What is your vision for tenure here in the lagoon?

My work as chairperson of Coastal Links means that I will fight with the fishers for a peaceful system, as I want to have a peaceful time like we had before, for our children as well, so that we can fish where we did before with the same respect we had before. 🇺🇲