

**Interview of Kholiswa Fosana, a dynamic young woman fisher leader from the village of Hobeni situated in rural Eastern Cape, South Africa**

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**What is the main focus of your organization?**

I am a youth leader in our organization, the Hobeni Fisher's Association. Our organization comprises men and women who have traditionally fished and harvested marine resources along the coast adjacent to our village. During the apartheid regime in South Africa our community was forced to move out of our land and the State established a nature reserve and a marine reserve along the coast. My parents and others were prevented from accessing marine resources. After democracy came to South Africa in 1994, we hoped that we would get our land back and once again be able to harvest resources. However, the State insisted that our land must remain part of the marine protected area (MPA), and we were not permitted to harvest resources. This has really impacted the well being of my community, in particular, the food security and livelihoods of fisher families. Although the State promised that we could use resources from the coastal forest and reserve on a sustainable use basis, co-manage the reserve and benefit from eco-tourism, none of these benefits have materialized.

**What are your main demands?**

Our organization has come together to unite men and women from our area to fight for our human rights. In particular, we have started to advocate for our customary rights to harvest marine resources for our food security and livelihoods. Since the reserve was declared, hundreds of men and women have been arrested, prosecuted and fined or jailed for harvesting marine resources. In 2010, one of the leaders of our organization was arrested together with two others and charged with fishing illegally in the MPA. We stood firm and requested a public interest law firm, Legal Resources Centre, to launch legal action on behalf of our organization and community. We are using the Constitution of South Africa to ask the court to recognize that the Minister of Environmental Affairs acted unconstitutionally when he declared this MPA a complete 'no-take' reserve and that our customary rights to resources have been violated. We are demanding that our customary tenure rights are recognized and that we are able to participate in the management of the area.

**What are the challenges you face?**

Poverty levels are very high in our area. We have no basic services such as electricity and running water in our homes and there is no clinic in our village. There is very high unemployment and this really impacts the youth who have no opportunities and cannot see any future in remaining in the area.

**What are your future plans?**

We want to build the capacity of the members of the organization, particularly the youth, and get political education going so that people are aware of their rights. We are waiting for the outcome of our court case but we are determined to fight for basic services such as a clinic and a community hall. We also want to ensure that we can participate in a range of eco-tourism projects and ensure that the community derives benefits from the presence of the reserve and the MPA. **■**