

# Voices of Small-scale Fisheries

The recent Zanzibar Workshop on coastal and fisheries management in eastern and southern Africa sought to define the contours of a 'rights-based' fishery for traditional, small-scale and artisanal fishing communities

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word 'right' has four meanings: the standard of permitted and forbidden action within a certain sphere; one's duty; that which is consonant with equity or the light of nature; and that which is morally just or due.

The Zanzibar Workshop, "Asserting Rights, Defining Responsibilities: Perspectives from Small-scale Fishing Communities on Coastal and Fisheries Management in Eastern and Southern Africa" (see page 4), had participants from both coastal and land-locked countries coming from a backdrop of diversity, ranging from open-access fisheries to quota-based fisheries; from commercialized fisheries to fisheries that act as social-safety nets; from indigenous communities in remote lakes to urban settlements; and from areas where fishing communities are marginalized by the tourism industry and the creation of marine protected areas (MPAs), to fishing spaces where they are threatened by destructive bottom trawling or distant-water fishing operations.

The Zanzibar Workshop participants also came from lakes where women are forced to barter sex for fish and from fishing communities where fishing assets are forcefully taken away from them when their husbands die. Some of them came from communities where livelihood and food-security interests take precedence over fishery conservation.

The Zanzibar Workshop had participants who complained of total exclusion from decision-making processes; of fisheries in which they had responsibilities but no rights; of coastal areas where they had no ownership rights to land; of poor working conditions; of gender inequalities; and of lack of awareness about their existing rights.

The participants asked for a definition of fishers to include those who are employed in harvesting and

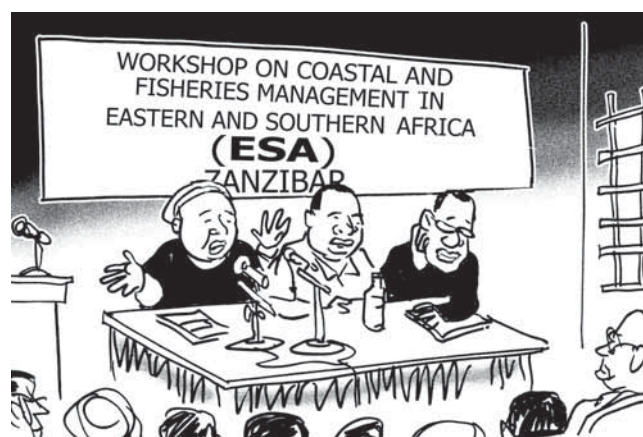
pre- and post-harvest activities. They said women's rights to participate in decisionmaking should be recognized along with that of men. A rights-based approach to fisheries should be a community-based approach, they asserted.

Without recognizing their rights, it was futile talking about their responsibility to protect and conserve fisheries resources, some participants

observed. They wanted their values and traditions to be recognized. There were cautioning remarks about too much pressure on fishing communities to be responsible towards conservation and management. It was equally important to discuss the responsibilities of others towards fishing communities, they argued.

A responsible 'rights-based' approach to fisheries, they held, should ensure participation of fishing communities in decision-making processes; recognize preferential access of traditional, indigenous, and small-scale, artisanal fisher people to inland and marine fishery resources; support equitable, labour-intensive fisheries; be against privatization of fishery resources; integrate traditional ecological knowledge systems into decision-making processes; offer safe working and living conditions; seek a balance between livelihood rights and conservation goals; and recognize the rights of women to make a decent living from fisheries, for themselves and their children, irrespective of whether they actually fish or not.

The full range of the dictionary meaning of 'right' was implicit in the articulation of a rights-based approach to fisheries made at the Zanzibar Workshop. It is high time to pay heed to this rich understanding of rights and to transform the meaning of a rights-based approach to fisheries from only property rights and territorial use rights, to a broad, rights-based approach for sustainable, equitable and just fisheries.



## 50th ISSUE OF SAMUDRA Report

This is the 50th issue of *SAMUDRA Report*, which began publication in March 1988. Over the 20 years of its existence, *SAMUDRA Report* has managed to carve out a unique niche in the world of fisheries, both as a source of information and perspectives on small-scale and artisanal fisheries and coastal communities as well as a forum for discussion and exchange of views on issues relating to fisheries, communities and livelihoods. On this occasion, we would like to thank our readers, contributors, supporters and well-wishers for their long-standing backing and encouragement. We hope that this support will continue in the years to come. For a cross-section of readers' views and opinions on *SAMUDRA Report*, please turn to page 26.