

WSSD

## Tracks for the future

### The Fisher People's Forum at the World Summit on Sustainable Development provided an alternative platform

On 22 August 2002, 240 participants from fisher and coastal communities in the Western Cape of South Africa boarded the 'Fisher People's Train' at Cape Town station and departed for the United Nations World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg.

There they were joined by 34 fishers and fishing activists from all over the world who had come for the Fisher People's Forum at the WSSD. This Forum was hosted by Masifundise Development Organization, with support from the Artisanal Fishers Association of South Africa and the World Forum of Fisher People (WFFP). Masifundise is a non-governmental organization (NGO) operating within the rural coastal communities of the Western Cape. It is affiliated to the Trust for Community Outreach and Education (TCOE), a national coalition of rural NGOs.

The Fisher People's Forum formed part of Masifundise's long-term campaign to support these communities in their struggle to realize their rights to marine resources and sustainable coastal development. As a result of past discrimination on grounds of race, class, gender and geography, significant disparities exist in the access and control of the sea in South Africa. Prior to the 1990s, black communities did not have equal access to marine resources through the fishing rights allocation system. The transformation of the fishing industry since the elections in 1994 has been very minimal and has failed to address the needs of subsistence and artisanal fisher people. The new fishing rights allocation policy has left many small-scale and subsistence fisher communities with no access to marine resources or, at best, with unsustainable fishing quotas. This group

has also become increasingly marginalized within the global context in which the South African fishing industry is located.

The WSSD provided an opportunity to protect and promote the rights of fisher people and coastal communities to marine resources and sustainable coastal development. The Summit, the largest conference of its kind in the world, brought together representatives from governments and NGOs to discuss and debate a wide range of issues pertaining to the global development environment. It was a unique opportunity for the coastal communities to utilize the WSSD platform to achieve the following objectives:

- raise the visibility of the fisher people;
- increase awareness about development issues facing fisher people;
- network with other regional and international fishers and extend their understanding of the issue of sustainability as it pertains to marine resources; and
- gain exposure to the range of global trade and finance policy issues that impact on local fishing industries and coastal economies.

#### Colourful banners

The Fisher People's Train was met at Johannesburg Station by the international group of fishers, led by Thomas Kocherry from India and Andy Johnston from South Africa, with colourful banners and posters. South African fishers were presented with badges from the WFFP and, for the first time, they gained a sense of the global links between fisher people around

the world. This was one of the most significant gains from the Summit.

**T**he fisher people arrived at Nasrec, south of Johannesburg, for the Global Forum the following day, carrying banners and singing, encouraging all the delegates arriving to note their presence.

After officially registering all the fisher people with the WSSD Civil Society Secretariat, the Fisher People's Forum was officially opened at 11 am in the Administration Auditorium at Nasrec on Saturday, 23 August 2002, with the local fishers singing and dancing to celebrate the event. Elize Petersen welcomed all the international fishers, in particular Thomas Kocherry. After the international delegates had introduced themselves, each local leader then introduced his or her delegation.

In his keynote address, Thomas Kocherry highlighted the problems faced by local fishers in the context of globalization. This presentation elicited considerable comment and questions, as the local fishers expressed their understanding of the similarity between their problems and those faced by others around the world.

Several of the international delegates expressed their support for the South African fishers and a sense of the strong, united nature of the bonds beginning to be

developed could be felt across the auditorium.

In the second session, Karen Sack from the Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition (ASOC) talked of global trade and fishing. Her input highlighted critical issues of the current nature of global trade in fishing, in particular, the use of subsidies and the impact of this on fishing stocks and livelihoods around the world. This input was well received and again elicited considerable discussion and questions as delegates grappled with the implications of these issues at the local level.

After a late lunch, the conference resumed with a panel discussion comprising key fishing activists from around the world. Herman Kumara from Sri Lanka and N. D. Kohli from India, together with Zoe from Madagascar, presented the key challenges facing subsistence and artisanal fishers in their regions.

#### **Plenary session**

These inputs were followed by lengthy discussions in a plenary session, as many delegates wished to question the panelists and also to comment on the similarities with their situation. Following the discussions, it was agreed that the Forum would march peacefully to the Nasrec gates to highlight the concerns that had emerged during the day's discussions. The marchers sang as they trooped towards the gates, but were stopped by



the police who informed them that they were not permitted to walk together singing and carrying banners. After expressing their determination to have their voices heard, the fishers were allowed to proceed to the gates.

**T**he highlight of Day Two of the Fisher People's Forum was an extremely informative and warm panel discussion with key women activists. Chandrika Sharma from the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) presented the implications of globalization for millions of fishworkers around the world. She emphasized the particular negative implications of the very gendered nature of the fishing industry for women workers and how this impacted at the level of the household, community, market and the State.

Maria Cristina Maneschy brought insights from Latin America, in particular, from her own country, Brazil, which echoed the concerns experienced in India, particularly about the discrimination experienced by women, both by their exclusion from certain aspects and from the unequal way in which they are included in the industry. Margaret Nakato from Uganda presented the experiences of women in her country. Her presentation too supported the previous presentations, but emphasized the way in which women's experiences of

discrimination within the fishing industry is indivisible from their experience of political, sexual and economic exploitation and oppression in all other areas of their lives.

At this point, Thomas Kocherry welcomed Pauline Tangiora from New Zealand to great applause from the audience. Tangiora is a leading indigenous people's activist and also a member of the WFFP. She encouraged the South African delegates, in particular the women, to be strong and to take up the challenges facing them, with support from the international community of fishers. A great deal of discussion followed as delegates, particularly the women, engaged the panelists on key issues facing them in the fishing industry around the world.

This discussion was followed by a lively panel discussion led with presentations from John Kearney from Canada, Harekrishna Debnath from India and Andy Johnston, focusing on critical issues of alternative policies and approaches, most notably, the use of community-based fisheries management systems.

In the second session for the day, TCOE Director Merica Andrews presented the critical challenges facing the Fisher Forum on how to take their struggles forward. This laid the foundation for the discussions in commissions that followed. Each commission was asked to consider the key issues facing fishers, the key demands and strategies that they should use, and the structure that could take these issues forward and which organizations they should form alliances with. The commissions met until late in the afternoon and, subsequently, the leaders from each commission continued working late into the night. The key demands that emerged were then presented and discussed, and a strategy developed for presenting these demands before the government officials who had been invited to the closing event.

#### **Closing event**

The Fisher People's Forum gathered at Nasrec on Monday 26 August for a press conference and the closing event. The keynote speaker was the chair of the TCOE

National Board of Trustees, Wallace Mgoqi. The fisher people had selected key representatives to tell their stories and present their demands to Monde Mayekiso, a representative of the Ministry of Environmental Affairs and Tourism. Thomas Kocherry read the outcome of the Fisher People's Forum in the form of the resolutions and demands developed by the delegates. Monde Mayekiso was requested by delegates in the audience to respond to these demands. However, he declined.

**T**he frustration of the delegates was very tangible and several expressed it directly to the Ministry's representative, pointing out that the ministry's failure to listen to the fisher people and communicate with them was cause for much concern. They requested the representative to commit himself to meeting with them at a later date in order to discuss the issues. However, Mayekiso said that he was not able to do so and excused himself from the event.

Wallace Mqogi congratulated the fisher people on the hosting of the event and their participation at the WSSD. The fisher delegates spoke out loudly and proudly about their experiences, sharing the impacts of the current policy on their livelihoods and increasing levels of poverty within their communities. They emphasized how their participation at the WSSD and their contact with the international fishers had strengthened their resolve to tackle the following issues:

- access and rights to the sea and marine resources through changes to national fishing policies;
- preferential rights for bona fide fisher people;
- challenging unfair global trade and finance policies that affect fishing;
- provision of fishworkers' rights through the extension of the Basic Conditions of Employment Act and other labour protection and benefits, including safety regulations to cover subsistence and small-scale fishers;

- access to means of sustaining families and livelihoods in the off-seasons;
- provision of subsidies to subsistence, artisanal, small-scale and limited commercial fishers, as currently only the big companies, not the small-scale fishers, get fuel subsidies and tax breaks;
- provision of infrastructure such as jetties, slipways and roads and access to finance for equipment, cold storage facilities and markets;
- participation in the management of marine resources;
- organization of fisher people for adequate representation to ensure that their issues are addressed;
- democratization of the fishing industry; and
- increasing the visibility of women in the fishing industry. 3

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