IN ORDER TO build a sustainable future for SSF communities, youth need to be centred in the fight for food sovereignty. They need to be involved in policymaking and be recognised for their contribution to fishing and their work along the value chain.

Unfortunately, there are multiple factors that inhibit SSF youth to secure their right to food in this sector.

In November 2021, Masifundise held a Youth Activist summer school for SSF youth from the communities of Eastern Cape and Kwa-Zulu Natal. Some of the issues that arose are migration. A participant from the summer school said “migration is good, some people learn more when they are away and get more job opportunities”.

The lack of implementation of the SSF policy. The criteria to become a small-scale fisher excludes youth, women and men who have worked along the value chain but did not

Continues on page 2
Voices of the community

What role can the youth play in fisher organisations?

Pholasele Qhangasha-Mendwana, Eastern Cape

The youth are innovative and have many ideas that can push fisher organisations and movements forward. With the assistance and guidance from the older generation we collectively have the power to drive social change through public awareness campaigns that educate the broader public about the challenges affecting small-scale fisheries.

Owen Sandt- Venterstad, Northern Cape

In Venterstad we need young people to be active in fishing activities and to support fishing movements and organisations. We need the youth to include themselves in fishing projects that can generate a livelihood. We are stuck in cycles of poverty because we do not realise the importance of the resources we have. We can live sustainably through fishing.

Bongani Khumalo – Mazambane, KwaZulu-Natal

Young people have lots of energy which can drive them to take social and fisher struggles forward. We have the duty to ensure that the future looks brighter for our children and future generations. We need the youth to empower other youth around these dangers so we can protect what is ours.

Sibusiso Mtshali-Mtubatuba, KwaZulu-Natal

The youth can really be instrumental in resisting the projects of Operation Phakisa and the Blue Economy. Many times, our communities are tricked that Operation Phakisa will be beneficial meanwhile our resources are being stolen right in front of us. We need the youth to empower other youth around these dangers so we can protect what is ours.

necessarily go to sea themselves.

Additionally, SSF communities are vulnerable to crime and drugs. The participants explained that drug abuse is a major issue amongst the youth in the communities. The high unemployment rate and the struggle for youth to belong to cooperatives or make enough money from fishing are some of the contributing factors.

Climate change and environmental degradation are large contributors to youth not pursuing small-scale fisheries. Fish and other species are becoming scarcer. Additionally, SSF communities are vulnerable to crime and drugs. The participants explained that drug abuse is a major issue amongst the youth in the communities. The high unemployment rate and the struggle for youth to belong to cooperatives or make enough money from fishing are some of the contributing factors.

Food sovereignty is defined as a food system where the people who produce, consume and distribute food also control the mechanisms and policies of food production and distribution. Food sovereignty applies to small-scale fishing (SSF) communities as their livelihoods are dependent on natural marine resources as a primary means of income and their social and cultural identity is integrated into the practice.

The school has helped youth address some of the issues they face and hopefully they will continue fighting for their place in the SSF sector. Awoke Gara, from Mpume Village said, "I’ve learnt so much like now I have learnt how to take action when I have a problem with something in my area and I also found out what’s the difference between Masifundise and Coastal Links so I’ve learnt a lot".

What benefit does the youth bring to small-scale fishing?

A few years back, Masifundise did an organic gardening workshop with us and since then I have a great interest in vegetable gardening, since I cannot go fishing myself anymore. Besides that, my daughter and myself also run a small fish and chips take-aways from fish that we buy from the local fishermen and potatoes from my garden.

How old were you when began fishing or taking part in fishing activities?

I was nine-years old when I started fishing with my father, using hand lines. When the four crayfish permits came out, I was about 33 years old and since then I have been actively involved in the fishing sector until 2007. I still buy my permit at the Post Office and I use it to collect Periwinkle.

What does the youth bring to small-scale fishing?

There are only three young fishers in our community. They are the ones that are most active when it comes to fishing. As soon as they have their fishing permit, you will always see them walking towards the beach with their fishing rods. They are a good example to show the community that you can make something from the department, that you must put it to good use. They usually sell the fish at good prices, which shows that you can make a living from fishing. The smaller fish get sold to the community for cheap prices. So they are definitely a benefit to the community.

Masifundise’s report titled Covid-19 left us hungry: Shortcomings of Governance Frameworks in the Inland Fisheries Sector of South Africa through a lens of the Covid-19 pandemic is an evidence-based research report, that will contribute to the gap in scholarship that exists in the inland fisheries sector in South Africa. It will inform policy and decision-making processes as well as aim to transform the inland fisheries sector to the benefit of local communities.

The inland fishing documentary titled: I Live Behind the Hill: Stories of Inland Fishers Struggling for Recognition complements the research report providing the missing voices of inland fishing communities. It highlights the insurmountable challenges faced by inland fishermen as food producers during a global pandemic laden with restrictions. We were very excited to launch the documentary and the report. These two projects have really put a human face on the unrecognised inland fishing sector that has been largely rendered invisible and its contributions to food production minimised. This documentary highlights the struggles of inland fishing communities in their fight for recognition, said Project Officer, Boyisile Mafilika.

The event was concluded with a panel discussion with Masifundise’s Director Naseegh Jaffer, inputs from the producer of the short documentary Pablo Pinedo, and inland small-scale fishers’ representatives from Vanderkloof, Ganipi and Jozi Dam.

Continued from page 1
Have you seen in the news all the developments private and foreign companies are proposing to do in our coastal communities?

Shell has made an application to explore for oil and gas mining on the Eastern Cape’s Wild Coast. Unfortunately, this is one of many mining applications continuing to happen in our traditional fishing grounds.

Yes, that’s correct. Government is aggressively implementing Operation Phakisa and soon we will not be able to find any fish in our fishing grounds due to all the mining.

This is terrible, that means the marine resources like fish that we depend on might be in danger. Our livelihoods are under threat.

We must share information with our communities on the coast about the dangers of these developments. We then must protest against them in any way we can.

We can even sign petitions and write letters to government so that they know we do not want these developments on our shores.

You’re right! We as the youth can even talk about these issues on social media to make sure that everyone knows about the threat to our livelihoods.

There is power in us speaking in one voice. Together as a community we can fight any challenges, big or small.

Yes, you’re right. We must remember that we always have tools to fight. That’s why we have documents like the South African constitution, the small-scale fishing policy and the small-scale fishing voluntary guidelines to assist in our fight.

We must empower everyone with that knowledge and information to ensure that our livelihoods and natural resources are protected from developments that want to rob local communities of their livelihoods.

How can we get involved?

But how can we take on big corporations?

Conclusion

There is power in us speaking in one voice. Together as a community we can fight any challenges, big or small.

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Facts and Figures

Issues that youth in small-scale fishing communities face on the African continent.

The Youth Unemployment rate in South Africa increased to 64.40% in the second quarter of 2021.

Youth opportunities are often found in sections of small-scale fisheries value chains that are informal and poorly paid.

Social divisions of labour can be strongly gendered. Young men tend to produce fish, where they may assume some power but at high physical or financial risk. Young women tend to process and trade fish however, they often lack influence and recognition.

The lack of fishing equipment such as boats and nets for fisheries is a major issue for youth. These constraints restrict the access of youth to financial services and technical advice.

Where youth do have rights to appropriate resources, they may have to negotiate power structures to gain access. In societies where decision-making is dominated by the affluent or most experienced, youth participation and leadership are often obstructed. These challenges contribute to the declining interest among youth in small-scale food systems.

Youth in small-scale fisheries remains a heavily understudied area. This leads to false narratives about how young women and men engage within the sector that do not accurately capture youth lived realities.

Sources: StatsSA

South African fishing policy bait is not landing a catch

World Fisheries Day is celebrated by fisherfolk across the globe each year on 21 November. The day highlights the important role small-scale fishers play in ensuring local food and nutrition security and preserving aquatic natural resources for future generations. It is also the day that the World Forum of Fisher People (WFFP) was formed.

However, if we take a look at the state of the small-scale fisheries in South Africa, from the delays and the inadequacy of policy implementation to the growing incidence of ‘ocean grabbing’ through extractive activities along the coast, there is little cause for celebration.

In 2005, small-scale fishers, with Masifundise and Coastal Links, took the government to court over being excluded from the fishing rights allocation system. They ultimately won recognition for their important cultural and socio-economic role in coastal communities. As a result, the Small-Scale Fisheries Policy was developed through a bottom-up approach and with extensive participation of fishing communities.

This policy provided for community-based fishing rights and co-management, recognition of customary rights, preferential access for small-scale fishers, the involvement of women and youth and community ownership of the fisheries value chain.

Continues on page 8
The Small-Scale Fisheries Policy was gazetted in 2012, but its implementation since then has been fraught with challenges and characterised by a top-down, highly bureaucratic process that has led to the exclusion of many bona fide fishers across the country. The application process for recognition as a small-scale fisher was full of challenges and corruption, as many fishers were either not able to apply or were unsuccessful for a range of reasons, many of them administrative. In addition, many non-fishers were wrongfully successful in the application process.

Implementation of the policy includes the formation of small-scale fishing cooperatives within communities as the legal entity to which fishing rights are allocated. However, this process was also faulty, as the cooperatives were determined by the DFFE, with pre-written constitutions and intricate processes to obtain permits and operate as a cooperative. Many cooperatives established thus far have not been provided with adequate mentorship or training and, based on recent assessments by both Masifundise and Coastal Links, the vast majority of these cooperatives are not able to work. The cooperatives are therefore set up for failure.

On World Fisheries Day, we took the opportunity to celebrate small-scale fisheries in South Africa, but we also acknowledge that the actions of those in power are pushing small-scale fisheries out of the oceans. It is time to prioritise and recognise small-scale fishers as important players in ensuring local food security and building local economies. It is time to provide the space for small-scale fishers, to ensure that they are granted sufficient access to traditional fishing grounds.

MASIFUNDISE HAS BEGUN a journey of honouring and drawing from the experiences of the veterans of the small-scale fishing industry. For almost two decades fishers from coastal communities have been fighting for recognition and respect to harvest marine species and to exercise their livelihoods in a manner that honours their tradition and culture.

They have argued, that Small-scale fishers are an integral part of our society and play an important role because they add value to the economy, strengthen communities and put food on the table for their families and neighbours. Strong leaders emerged in Coastal communities over the last few decades, mobilising communities to assert the rights of small-scale fishers. In 2004, on the West Coast of the Western Cape Province, some of these leaders and their supporters linked up with Masifundise and later organised themselves into Coastal Links.

They struggled and sacrificed, lobbied and protested, faced risks and ridicule, yet were undaunted in their quest to fight for the lives and livelihoods of all fishers.

Through their visionary efforts, they inspired coastal communities across the country to get organised. This led to the formation of Coastal Links South Africa in 2012. They were at the forefront of the sustained battle to secure a progressive small-scale fisheries policy that guaranteed rights for the fishers.

Through their efforts, they experienced moments of victory such as when the Equality Court instructed government in 2007 to amend the Marine Living Resources Act and develop a small-scale fisheries policy. And again, when the policy was finally adopted in 2012.

But with each victory came more challenges. They were compelled to lead energy-sapping campaigns to get their own government to implement the policy. And have been called to action to push back commercial players whose greed is harming the oceans and the environment.

They relentlessly press ahead in the struggle for social and environmental justice as well as for food sovereignty. Some of these leaders are today veterans who still selflessly give of themselves. Others have sadly passed on, many during the period of the COVID pandemic. We salute the veterans. Their sacrifices and vision, energy and commitment has laid a foundation for current and future generations. The leaders who are with us and those who have departed have left us with a strong and enduring legacy.

Today, we stand on your shoulders. New generations of leaders are emerging and will need your support and mentorship to continue the journey you have begun.

In November, Masifundise started a process to recognising and honour these giants who pioneered the fight for SSF over the past decades. While this process started in the Western and Northern Cape it will progress to the Eastern Cape and Kwa-Zulu Natal Provinces in 2022.

We stand on the shoulders of giants!! Aluta Continua!