

Fisheries co-operation

Welcoming and friendly

This is an account of an exchange trip of two South African community leaders from fishing villages to Mozambique

In August this year, two community leaders from fishing villages along the Western Cape coast of South Africa visited fishing villages along the coast of Mozambique. Nico Waldeck and Charles Thompson were representing Masifundise Development Trust and the fishing communities with whom Masifundise works. The trip was organized by the Trust for Community Outreach and Education (TCOE), a non-governmental network of organizations to which Masifundise is affiliated. The aim of the trip was to enable leaders from rural communities in South Africa to learn from the experiences of rural people's movements in Mozambique, to share strategies for organizing and to build alliances and networks.

This was the first time that either of the two fishers had ever visited fishers in another country, and they were both very excited and curious when they left South Africa and crossed the border into Mozambique. Although community leaders have been concerned about the poverty and problems facing small-scale fishers in South Africa, they were shocked to see the difficulties faced by fishers in Mozambique.

Nico reports on the aspects that struck him the most: "Mozambique is a land of many faces. On the one hand, it is a very green landscape, with beautiful fishing areas, a tourist's paradise. On the other, it is a land with very visible poverty, especially within the fishing communities. Mozambique has been badly affected by the war of independence with the former colonial power, Portugal. The infrastructure in the fishing villages is of very poor quality. The roads to, and in, the fishing villages are chaotic. The majority of the fishers'

houses are made of reeds. There are no facilities or factories, not even freezing facilities in the communities. As a result, fishers are forced to sell their catch for very low prices on a daily basis. Low prices mean that fishers must catch fish every day. This places heavy pressure on the fish resources. The boats and equipment are also very outdated. For the first time in my life, I saw fishers go to sea without protective clothing or safety gear.

Women are also very involved in the fishing industry. They play a big role in the harvesting as well as in the buying and selling of fish. It is also obvious that the government of Mozambique does not have the financial resources and manpower to protect and manage their fish resources effectively.

The highlight of the fishing industry in Mozambique is the fish market in Maputo. Here you can buy fish and prepare it right there. You can choose from a great variety of food fit for a king, such as crayfish, lobster, calamari, oysters and many more.

Although the fishers are very poor, they are very welcoming and friendly. The fishing industry in Mozambique urgently needs development. Development is necessary so that the resources can be protected and the fishers can derive a livelihood from the fishing industry."

Raising awareness

On his return to South Africa, Nico has been actively raising awareness about the conditions facing fishers in Mozambique. It is his dream to be able to send the fishers that he met in Mozambique a wooden boat built on the west coast of South Africa. It is hoped that this trip will be the beginning of a process of building solidarity amongst fishers within the Southern African region. In November



2004, Nico and Charles will have the opportunity to reciprocate the warm hospitality they received in Mozambique when they and other fishers working with Masifundise in South Africa will host a conference for leaders from fishing and coastal communities in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries.

This report is based on an account by Nico Waldeck (jackie@tcoe.org.za or naseegh@masifundise.org.za), a community leader from Lambert's Bay on the west coast of South Africa. He also serves as a community representative on the Masifundise Board of Trustees and is an active member of 'Coastal Links', the regional structure representing fisher and coastal communities in the Western Cape