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**EMPOWERMENT THROUGH INFORMATION:**

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Day 1  
**Introduction to Organizations**

**Masifundise Development Organisation**

Western Cape, South Africa

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# **Masifundise Development Organisation**

## **Western Cape, South Africa**

### **1. Brief History and background**

**Masifundise Development Organisation** is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) based in Cape Town, in the western corner of South Africa. Masifundise was started in 1979 in Cape Town by a small group of concerned Black political activists in a township in Cape Town in response to the education crisis facing black youth. At the time the racist Apartheid government was at its height. Discriminatory laws restricted African, Coloured and Indian citizens from living freely, forcing them to live in segregated areas, and unequal allocation of resources meant that Black South Africans did not receive the same education as whites. Enormous disparity existed between Blacks and Whites in terms of unemployment, health and living conditions. It was extremely difficult for Black South Africans to get access to tertiary education. Masifundise initially began as a project that aimed to raise funds for black students to get bursaries in order to enable them to study further. Funds were accessed in particular through churches and international organisations that were supportive of the anti-apartheid movement. The organisation had very close ties with the Black Consciousness Movement leader from the Eastern Cape, Steve Biko who was subsequently murdered by the Apartheid government. As the organisation became established it subsequently began undertaking programmes aimed at promoting literacy in Black townships. In 1983 it became affiliated to a national organisation called the Trust for Community Outreach and Education (TCOE), which comprised 5 other non-governmental organisations undertaking similar work. This move was a deliberate strategy to enable the organisation to continue its work and access funding in a very difficult political climate.

During the 1980's organisations such as this faced harsh political repression and many of the staff and Board members and their families experienced periods in political detention and intimidation from the police.

During the late 1980's and early 1990's the organisation, through the TCOE, established links with organisations overseas, including in India, and was exposed to new paradigms of development. The organisation began moving towards introducing People's Participatory Planning . The organisation began to move into other areas of work and began working in the poor rural areas of the Western Cape. With the transition to democracy in South Africa and the election of the new government new challenges emerged as NGO's were called upon to assist in the Reconstruction and Development of the new South Africa. As an outcome of a prolonged process of strategic planning at grassroots level the organisation decided to change its focus and target what it believed to be some of the more vulnerable sections of the population, including the impoverished coastal areas and fishing communities. In 1999 the organisation began working with fishing communities in a more sustained manner. Currently the organisation undertaking community development work in 15 local coastal villages within one province however the organisation does also undertake some lobbying and advocacy work at a national level.

## **Mission**

Masifundise Development Organisation is part of a national collective of non-government organisations (NGO's) that are rooted in and accountable to the rural and peri-urban communities in which they work.

Our main emphasis is on working with men and women in the fisher and coastal communities of the Western Cape.

We promote the practice of an alternative vision of sustainable integrated rural development. Our programmes seek to challenge and address the apartheid legacy and rural deprivation through our focus on promoting and protecting access and rights to natural resources, democratic local governance, food security and sustainable livelihoods.

We are committed to the active participation and involvement of the poorest of the poor and values that promote self-reliance, democracy, equality and socio-political-economic justice.

## Vision

Through using integrated people-centred development approach and philosophy, we will focus on:

- *Community organising and building ‘people’s organisations and their leadership*
- *Building ‘social movements’ organises around needs and issues that unite people in action so as to create a voice in advocating and effecting fundamental change in the quality of life*

This will result in empowered communities with sustainable livelihoods, where socio-political justice will prevail and where women and men live as equals and in peace with each other

## 2. Structure of the organisation

Masifundise is an independent NGO, affiliated to the Trust For Community Outreach and Education (TCOE). It comprises a regional executive board, accountable to the National Board of Trustees of TCOE. Community members are directly involved in planning programmes and have representation on the regional structure. The organisation is in the process of becoming a TRUST and community members will have four seats on this Trust. Discussions have begun as to the most appropriate structure for the organisation and the possibility of transforming into a membership organisation has been proposed.

We have a staff component of 8 including a Director, Programme Officer, 4 field workers, an administrative assistant and a financial officer.

### 3. Programme Focus

- **Land/Marine/Agrarian Reform** – access, use and control of natural resources. This programme aims (a) to promote access and rights of communities to marine resources and land for these communities, and (b) to strengthen their capacity for sustainable natural resource utilisation and management.
- **Local Government** – democratic local government and access to basic services. This programme aims to build local coastal communities' abilities to participate fully in democratic, integrated local governance in these areas.

## Objectives

### **Marine resources/fishing and land and agrarian reform**

1. To organise, develop, strengthen and mobilise fisher and coastal communities' organisations and leadership into strong autonomous organisations able to realise and defend their rights to marine resources and land, labour and livelihood rights and food security.
2. To raise awareness and facilitate Popular Education and access to information among fisher and coastal communities to enable them to interact with the global and local context of marine and agrarian reform, sustainable natural resource utilisation and management.
3. To build the capacity of communities and support them in advocating and lobbying for the transformation of current marine and land policy, the redistribution of this wealth and for equitable and sustainable marine and agrarian policies.

4. To build the capacity of men and women living in fisher communities to develop democratic organisations and appropriate institutional arrangements in order to utilise indigenous knowledge and manage natural resources on an equitable and sustainable basis that promotes food security and eliminates poverty.
5. To raise awareness and facilitate access to information on economic rights, policies and opportunities at both local and national level and to build the capacity of fisher and coastal communities to engage in local economic development and sustainable livelihoods.
6. To support women living in fisher and coastal communities to secure their rights, ensure gender equality and to develop the leadership and the organisation of women living in these communities.
7. To support and develop youth leadership and organisation in fisher and coastal communities and enable youth in these towns to realise their rights to economic development.

#### **4. Sustainability of the organisation**

Masifundise aims to promote the sustainability of its work through building the capacity of local community leaders to organise and lead development work. IN terms of financial sustainability, Masifundise currently receives 60% of its budget from TCOE and raises 40% from its own local and international donors. Whilst there was a fair amount of funding available for anti-apartheid work in the past, the organisation is now needing to be more strategic in raising funds and ensuring the sustainability of the organisation.

Several key international donors in the fishing and marine resources sector now insist on signing bi-lateral agreements with Government institutions and this funding is



therefore not necessarily available, particularly in Masifundise's case where we have a rather adversarial relationship with the state department responsible for fishing rights.

## **5. Future orientation of the organisation**

Masifundise wished to explore the most appropriate institutional mechanisms for taking the Fisher People's Struggles forward. Towards this end the organisation has begun to explore the possibility of establishing a membership based organisation, with a view to promoting the building of a Fisher People's Social Movement. These discussions have just begun and it is hoped that this trip to India will enable the organisation to extend its understanding of the way in which fishers have organised internationally and enable us to make constructive recommendations in this regard.