

Africa / Uganda**Hopes amidst the nightmare**

During a recent tour of France, Margaret Nakato, leader of the Katosi Women Fishing and Development Association (KWFDA) in Uganda, met consumers, Breton fishermen and NGOs as well as Herbert Sauper, who wrote and directed Darwin's Nightmare, the vivid and controversial documentary film on the Nile Perch fisheries in Kenya. In this interview, conducted on 18 October 2005, Margaret discusses the film and the importance of networking among the fishworkers' organizations of the South.

By Alain le Sann of the *Collectif Pêche et Développement*, and a member of ICSF

You have viewed *Darwin's Nightmare* with the members of your co-operative. Would you say it's a true picture of current conditions over there?

Generally, yes. It shows clearly that the wealth generated by the Nile Perch fisheries has not percolated to the local communities. It remains largely in the hands of Europeans, plant owners and the government. In Uganda, the fishing sector is a major contributor to the gross domestic product—accounting for nearly 20 per cent. In Katosi, we catch Nile Perch too, but there is a difference between Katosi and Mwanza in Kenya: here you will not find abandoned children roaming the streets. The incidence of AIDS among fishermen is double the national average. It seems the anti-HIV campaigns have been less successful here.

The film shows that women are particularly marginalized in the development of Nile Perch exports. What do you think?

That's quite true. Before the Nile Perch boom and exports to Europe, women processors would smoke the fish and sell it on the local market and in neighbouring countries like the Congo. That provided food and livelihoods. Today many smoking ovens are idle and more find it difficult to include fish in their



diets. Fishermen prefer to sell to exporters. The spread of the Nile Perch has also reduced the number of species traditionally consumed locally. Women processors have to resort to juvenile species for their trade, and consequently, face penalties from the authorities. That is why we pressed the women to refrain from using undersized fish and turn instead to alternatives activities.

Some European countries are suggesting a boycott of the Nile Perch. What is your view?

That's an important demand, which needs thorough debate. Personally, I'm rather guarded about the move. The Nile Perch remains a major resource for the countries that border Lake Victoria. It would be difficult to suddenly do without it. One should instead aim at a more fair trade that would bring decent returns to the fishermen and allow them to have a bigger say in management matters. If, after proper consideration and debate, the fishermen and their communities decide to call for a boycott, why not?! As long as they ponder over all aspects and options... It's for them to decide their course of action.

As for us, we try to make families less dependent on fishing by encouraging the women to venture into new areas such as handicrafts, agriculture and trading. The level of pollution in the lake is already high and its

resources may well decline further. To diversify occupations, we need adequate funding and support. The European Union is providing some help to upgrade the processing plants to EU standards. Why not also help the fishermen and their families to improve their lot?

Tell us about the actions undertaken by your organization.

We have established credit schemes to start revenue-generating activities. We currently have a membership of 198 women. We were operating several boats, but because of low returns from fishing, we now have only two. We now promote cattle rearing and vanilla cultivation. We would like to expand aquaculture and we have constructed tanks to distribute clean water, for which people pay a small fee.

You are the vice-president of the World Forum of Fishworkers. Does that serve you in the field?

Yes, of course. To organize our people to compete with processors, we have to be informed about fish prices and distribution networks, about WTO and EU regulations. We have to exchange notes with fisherfolk from other countries. We have to be active stakeholders in resource management, and in the programmes set up by the government, for example, the beach management units.

Today the threat of privatization of the resource is looming. Fisherfolk all over the world face such problems. Thanks to our international network, we were able to view *Darwin's Nightmare* and show it to members of our group. There are questions asked about the Nile Perch chain, here in Europe and at home in Africa. It is important that fishworkers around Lake Victoria can react and express their views. They have done that in the video we made after together viewing *Darwin's Nightmare*.

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