

COVID-19 impacts on the South African Small-Scale Fisheries Sector

Presenter Bernadette Snow on behalf of the One Ocean Hub Team
Team: Jackie Sunde, Merle Sowman, Taryn Pereira, Elisa Morgera



Introduction to SSF in South Africa

- Globally and in South Africa SSF sector is marginalised and vulnerable to high levels of poverty and extreme events such as the COVID-19 pandemic
- SSF sector is characteristically rooted in local households and communities, providing food, nutrition and livelihoods for many men, women, and children
- Fisher communities' cultures, customary rights and systems of local ecological knowledge are entwined with their interactions with the waters and coastal lands upon which they depend for their livelihoods
- Need for a transdisciplinary, inter-sectoral approach is brought into stark relief through the COVID emergency as the intersectionalities across various aspects of fisher identities and the indivisibility of their human rights is heightened

SSF Governance and Legal Landscape



- Small-scale fishers in South Africa range from very traditional, rural based fishers who fish primarily on a subsistence basis to small-scale artisanal fishers who fish from the shore and at sea in boats using a variety of gear types
- Women's work in the SSF sector is largely invisible, yet they play an active role in a range of pre- and post-harvest activities.
- The large scale commercial sector has historically dominated - and continues to dominate the sector - despite policy development that recognised SSFs as a legal sector (2012).
- The SSFs policy has been slow to implement and fishing communities remain marginalised and continue to experience exclusions and discrimination
- SSFs are thus **particularly vulnerable in the face of the current COVID-19 pandemic** .
- This pandemic has highlighted deep structural inequalities within South African society and has brought a range of new challenges and risks for these fishers.



SSF governance and legal landscape

SSF recognised as an “essential service” but there were challenges in implementation:

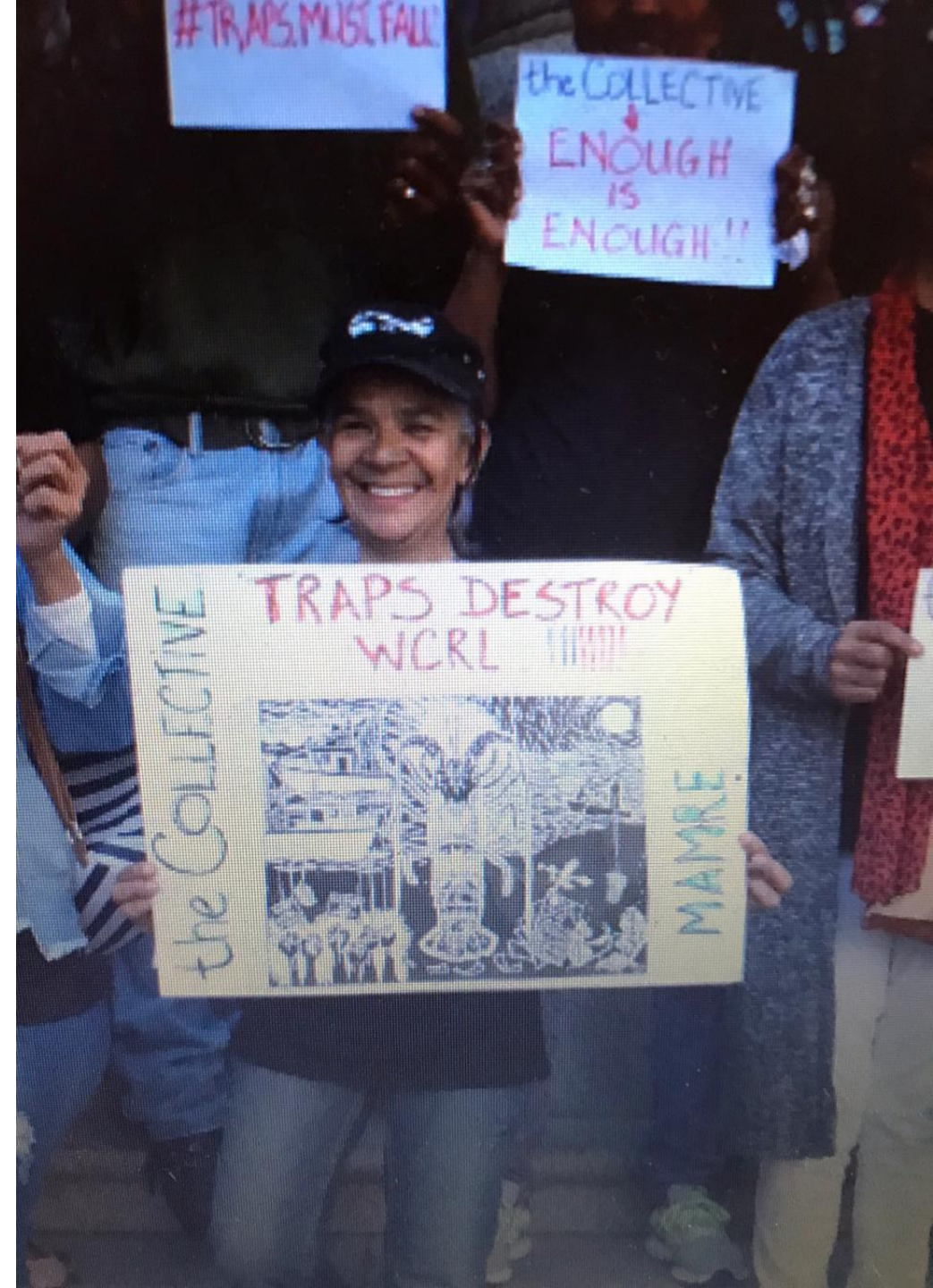
- context of limited operationalization of recognition of customary fishing rights and of community-based approach to fisheries management
- lack of coherent approach in local-level enforcement of lock-down measures among different enforcement bodies, which led to some arrests of SSF
- lock-down measures prevent SSF participation in decision-making on developments (e.g. oil and mining) affecting their livelihoods
- a pause in the ongoing processes to legally recognise SSF cooperatives



Hilda Adams, coordinator The Collective : “We were very happy to hear that fishing is classed as an essential service. But what does this mean to us?

Soon after lockdown, the snoek run was starting, which is a very important economic activity for some of the fishers. it was a whole 2 weeks of negotiations to and from with the Department, so that eventually we could have the necessary permit documents to be allowed to travel and to be at sea. So this took up a lot of our time, it took a lot of negotiations, it took a lot of being assertive.

We are not yet a registered co-operative - there has already been many delays with that and now with Covid 19 there will be even more delays in the SSF co-ops being registered...





Ntsindiso Nongcavu, Chairperson Coastal Links EC

“[The Lockdown has affected us left and right](#). There were food parcels going around the communities but only 5 people were selected in each community. Those food parcels were not enough to keep hunger away.

There are fishermen facing the challenge of [not having permits because they were not able to register on time](#), now whenever they go fishing they get arrested.

We have a challenge of lack of water to drink; as the regulations of [COVID 19 says that you must wash your hands regularly – we can't because our water is not good at all and you have to go miles to get water](#).

The government is giving out money to the businesses that were affected by COVID19 and we are not part of that because we were not ready, [we were not registered businesses or cooperatives](#). It means we are still in one place, we are not moving.”

Elroy, PE: “We here in Port Elizabeth...[We produce documents, and then we get referred to the station commander, saying that our permits are illegitimate](#) ”

Fikile Jonas, Hamburg: “I went to the station commander to show her the letter of exemption for fishers. [She never got the info and I said I would bring her proof she can follow up](#). Otherwise we are just fishing at night.”



Socio-Economic Rights

Social Development

- Inadequate access to basic socio-economic rights:
- Food and nutrition, adequate housing, water and sanitation, especially important in the context of COVID 19
- Considerable number of SSF communities still have no access to safe drinking water; impacts ability to make ice and maximise the value and quality of their fish
- Poor access to infrastructure particularly in rural areas of the country
- Low levels of access to digital technology

Social Security and Protection

- Many are dependent on State grants for elderly, disabled and children to supplement their income from fishing.
- The SA government has increased grants for the elderly and children during COVID 19, and introduced a temporary social relief grant for other persons with no income or other grants.
- These grants remain low and inadequate to feed the large number of persons who invariably depend on them.

Socio-Economic Rights

Employment and Labour

- SSF seen as informal, self-employed workers; labour rights not yet legally recognised
- SSF not registered for unemployment insurance and so are not able to claim under the present COVID- 19 Disaster management social protection mechanism
- Importantly, women who work in pre- and post-harvest are particularly vulnerable; their labour is still largely invisible

Safe and Decent Work Conditions

- SSF fishers often work in unsafe and unhygienic working conditions
- In rural areas, children often depend on harvesting of resources from intertidal zone





Socio-Economic Rights



Gender discrimination and gender-based violence

- SA is amongst highest levels in the world, increased sharply with COVID-19 Lockdown

Disaster Risks and Climate Change

- SSF vulnerable to natural and human-made risks/impacts – like COVID-19. Fishers live in coastal zones that are experiencing increasing sea-level rise, as well as many extreme weather events.
- Poor access to health services and adequate water supplies decreases their resilience in events such as COVID-19.

Life of a SSF under COVID 19





SSF Responses and Enablers under COVID 19

Revival of values of community mutuality and reciprocity

- Local fishers in some communities are distributing fish to fellow residents and to the elderly and households that are struggling economically,
- Women fisher leaders have established food kitchens, sourcing donations from more affluent residents and local municipalities and are feeding large numbers from their humble homes;
- Food parcels provided by the National Government targeting fisher rights holders specifically,
- Partnerships between Provincial government, NGOs and community-based organisations to distribute fish to families in greatest need.





- ABALOB I ICT4Fisheries is a non-profit platform with an APP co-designed with small-scale fishers.
- The APP enables small-scale fishers to capture data about their catch and then market their catch online.
- Following the COVID Lockdown, ABALOB I developed a Community-Supported Fishery that enables the public to purchase online from the fishers' 'Catch of the Day'. The fresh fish order is then delivered directly to the customer. This has protected fishers' livelihoods and contributed towards understanding of the importance of local markets in a world in which the sustainability of the current global food system is questioned.



<http://abalobi.info/>

- Supporting communication channels for SSF leaders, through sharing mobile data / airtime and coordinating a WhatsApp group with leaders throughout the country; and
- leverage expertise and social capital within the OOH to address SSF challenges.



Global Responses to SSF

Internationally, the role, internationally-protected human rights, and challenges of SSF fishers have been recognised

- SDG 14.b recognises the need to “[p]rovide access for small-scale artisanal fishers to marine resources and markets”
- 2014 FAO SSF Guidelines:
 - clarify how a human rights approach underpins small-scale fishing communities’ entitlement to participate in decision-making processes
 - recognize SSF contribution to sustainable fisheries, food security and poverty alleviation
 - guide governments, fishing communities and other stakeholders to work together towards secure and sustainable SSF for the benefit of SSF fishers and society at large.
- 2019 UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants (adopted by the UN General Assembly) further clarifies how international human rights apply to SSF fishers



Global Challenges...

- How to effectively apply these international instruments in the context of national fisheries and environmental regulation in a participatory, integrated and transformative way?
- How can organisations such as UN FAO assist in facilitating discussions across fisher groups in Africa and across the world to build fisher networks and solidarity?

Acknowledgements

Photo Credits

Slide 13 & 20: G Snow

Slide 18, 19 & 21: H Snow

All other pictures: J Sunde

Contributions

Hilda Adams

Ntsindiso Nongcavu

Solene Smith

Elroy

Fikile Jonas

SSF who sent voice notes, videos
and permission to take & use
photographs

Thank You