

THE TURNING POINT FOR MAJORENI FISHERMEN

Another dawn and yet another momentous day for the residents of Majoreni as they woke to an auspicious moment in their lives. Historically a fishing community, the men of Majoreni have always harnessed the sea resources to feed their families. However as they acknowledge, catches have declined of late as fish populations have dwindled. It is getting harder to feed their families, a result of unsustainable fishing practice through the use of improper gear and overharvesting.

The morning of 30th of August 2008 was filled with the chirping of the flute siphoning the National anthem of Kenya as all who assembled stood to acknowledge the country's rallying call only to be reminded that the lyrics of the anthem... "And our Homeland of Kenya, Heritage of splendor, Firm may we stand to defend..." not only implied defending the territorial integrity but also protecting the natural resources the Kenyan people are blessed with.



The event was led by Sally Mullens of Charlie Claw's Restaurant, an ardent supporter of YoD, focusing on the fishermen and their introduction to sustainable practices. The Majoreni chief, Salim Nzuma gave assurance the fishermen were willing to amend their ways in harvesting the ocean's resources. With financial support of Euros 4000 from the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species (CMS), an exchange of crude fishing gear used by the fishermen for new, sustainable gear is taking place. This is a milestone in the effort since the declaration of the year 2007 as the Year of the Dolphin by UNEP/CMS and several educational undertakings by the Kenya YoD Coordinators to engage the coastal community in sustainable development and conservation of marine life.

The symbolic exchange of fishing nets was conducted by Mr. Dixon Waruinge, the Programme Officer of the Joint Secretariat for the Nairobi and Abidjan Conventions, Division of Environmental Policy Implementation, UNEP. He spoke on threats to marine life and the marine ecosystem owing to unsustainable practices and pollution.



The new nets purchased meet the recommended specifications of UNEP/CMS and the Kenya Fisheries Department and are to be distributed to the initial 24 beneficiaries among the fishermen of Majoreni. Mr. Mushin, the Kenya Fisheries Officer who has since last year been instrumental in setting up the educational programme for the fishermen and has provided guidance on the specifications of the nets described the exchange as a turning point and reiterated the department's commitment to engage the fishermen in sustainable practices and close in on the use of improper fishing gear.

It was a day of pomp and color graced by Kenya Wildlife Service Wardens and our special guests, Mila Dahle and Mike Brauner from TUI AG Environmental Management/Sustainable Development. TUI has since the launch in November 2006 been the main sponsor of the YoD Kenya events. Mila and Mike declared that the children of Kenya have been an inspiration, giving praise for their consistency and commitment to the YoD.



The Dolphin Clubs, Kenya's own youth initiative for continued involvement of future generation in conservation, led in an impressive parade. The participating schools sent choirs who presented songs on dolphin and marine conservation. To serve and enhance the purpose of Dolphin Clubs formed in the ten schools, CMS has donated Kshs. 150,000/- to be distributed to the Clubs. The schools' teachers received this money from Mila Dahle, Mike Brauner and Khalid Shapi, the Managing Director of Pollmans Tours & Safaris. The schoolchildren later received exciting Dolphin gifts from TUI, which included caps, manuals and dolphin floaters.



The gathering then moved on to a site where a parcel of community land was set aside by the Majoreni community for tree planting in recognition of the shoreline degradation attributed to the destruction of mangrove forests where the Casuarina trees planted would, on maturity, replace mangroves to meet the community's demand for building materials and firewood.



After the tree planting the group returned to where it all began, Shimoni, the home of the YoD Kenya where the Warden of Kisite, Mr. Lemargat informed the assembled boat operators and attending guests that the Kenya Wildlife Service, a key partner in the YoD campaign, was encouraged by the participation and positive response of the boat operators in adopting responsible dolphin watch practices and as an incentive was rewarding the best supportive boat operators with colorful uniforms and gifts. Mr. Gitau, the Senior Warden, Coast Region, assured the boat operators of KWS support and would acknowledge those who conformed to the Code of Conduct for dolphin watch.



As the sun set over Shimoni, attendants were left with pleasant memories and a satisfaction that one more step, a big step had been taken to limit the impacts on the sea, to give hope to the dolphins by those who truly can make the difference...the fishermen.