WE ARE THE ONES THAT SUFFERED THE MOST

The human rights impacts of the Fishrot corruption scandal on Namibian fisheries workers

A report by Frederico Links & Ester Mbathera
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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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This report records and details the human rights impacts of the Fishrot corruption scandal on ordinary Namibians - primarily workers in the fishing industry, their families, and the broader community at Walvis Bay. The aim of the report is to inform and energise calls for full accountability and redress for the Fishrot scandal, especially in Iceland and other countries where individuals and institutions carried out and facilitated corrupt activities. We hope the testimonies published in this report will encourage international corruption experts to explore avenues for asset recovery and victim redress.

Those interviewed for this report include affected fisheries workers, affected families, labour leaders, and political representatives. It should be noted at the outset that this is a preliminary study and that further, more extensive work is needed to establish the full human rights impact of Fishrot. The interviews summarised in this report are only a limited sample of the thousands of people negatively affected by this corruption. The IPPR is planning further work in this area as well as a study which will detail the economic harm wreaked by the Fishrot. It should also be noted that the authors of this report have worked hard to differentiate between the victims of Fishrot and those who may also have suffered and lost their jobs due to the general volatility and other issues in the fishing industry. Their plight also needs to be examined, but this is an issue for a separate study rather than this report which seeks to establish the links between corruption and harms to human rights. It is also not the intention of this report to criticise the Namibian government over their treatment of unemployed workers. Indeed, government should be commended for assisting those without jobs by providing monthly payments of N$4,000, and for their help in seeking redress. Rather we are targeting those far away from Namibia - in Reykjavik and Akureyri - and other cities and towns around the world where the wheels of corruption were lubricated. The Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) would first like to thank and acknowledge all the fishermen and former fishermen and fisheries workers who consented to being interviewed for this study. Your stories, views and reflections are what informs the credibility of this report. Acknowledgement and appreciation are also due to Godfried Kuhanga, chairperson of the Okapare Fishermen’s Association at Walvis Bay, and the various senior members of the association, as well as the former shop stewards of the different vessels, who played an instrumental role in facilitating introductions to some of the fishermen and former fishermen and fisheries workers interviewed.

Appreciation and acknowledgement are also expressed for the role played by representatives of fishermen’s groups and relevant unions who assisted in identifying fishermen and former fishermen and fisheries workers as informants for this study, as well as ensuring that the identified participants showed up.

Thanks also to Andreas Mandume Kagola, Wendy Shikukwete and Ananias Shitilu, all three of them also participants in this study, for assisting with translation during many of the interviews conducted. We also wish to thank the kind folks of the Namsov Learn in Peace Centre in Kuisebmond, Walvis Bay, who accommodated our meeting with fishermen and fisheries workers in November 2023 in their hall, and afterwards allowed the researchers to use their premises to conduct interviews with many of the identified participants. We also wish to acknowledge the inputs and insights of various local and regional politicians and former leaders, including Walvis Bay mayor Trevino Forbes and Walvis Bay Rural Constituency councillor Florian Tegako Donatus, Immanuel Wilfried, Gibson Goseb, and Knowledge Ipinge, among others.

We would like to thank the labour unionists who participated in this study especially Philip Munenguni, the acting president of the National Union of Namibian Workers (NUNW), and Daniel Imbili, president of the Namibia Fishing Industry (NFI) and Fisherman Workers Union (FWU). A very special thanks is extended to the British High Commission in Windhoek for partnering on this study and their continued support throughout the project. Lastly, thank you to all the members of the Walvis Bay community who spoke to us and wanted to contribute to this study in some way, even though their contributions did not fall within the scope of the study, but who nevertheless had valuable insights about the fisheries sector and the effects and impacts of Fishrot on the local community, especially the Kuisebmond community.

The report is available as PDF download on the IPPR website as from 7 March 2024:

www.ippr.org.na

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It is often not possible to link grand corruption directly to individuals who have been negatively impacted by such acts. In most instances of grand corruption, the consequences are seen to affect society in general or a broad community. Sometimes such crimes are even presented as ‘victimless’. It can be challenging to clearly illustrate how corrupt acts or practices impact the livelihoods and rights of individuals and their families.

However, increasingly, corruption is being seen as a human rights issue. There are growing calls for the victims of corruption to be consulted during corruption probes, represented in court proceedings, and ultimately compensated for their suffering.

At the December 2023 UN Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC) gathering in Atlanta, State Parties were urged to recognise the importance of victim participation and reparation and allow for strategic litigation as a means of holding governments and the private sector to account (Atlanta Declaration by the UNCAC (civil society) Coalition).1

Resolution 10/1 agreed at the Atlanta Conference of State Parties said states should take into account the impact of corruption offences on victims and further consider the participation and protection of victims in their domestic efforts to combat corruption.2

In the case of Fishrot, it is possible to make manifest the direct harms caused by corruption (as this report clearly does). Real individuals within a specific community are identified as having been adversely affected by the transnational corruption scheme.

This study seeks to shine a spotlight on the lives that have been damaged and disrupted. At the forefront are the many Namibian fisheries workers whose employment, livelihoods and well-being were jeopardised. These were the fisheries workers who were employed by the companies through which the corruption was orchestrated and those who worked for companies that lost quotas due to the corruption taking place. Both sets of workers, and by implication the families and communities they assisted and supported, saw their plans and prospects snatched away and their lives collapse.

This report’s authors recorded these experiences of harm, loss, and disillusionment by carrying out interviews of former fishermen and fisheries workers, local politicians and union representatives, as well as relatives and dependents of some former fishermen who have died.

The individual experiences relayed, presented and discussed in this report come mostly from the period between mid-2014 and mid-2020, which corresponds to the time period during which Fishrot was being perpetrated.

Most of those interviewed had a reasonable expectation that their employment would be relatively long-lasting and allow them to sustain their immediate families and help to support broader family and community networks. Some even thought that they would be able to retire at some future point from the job they had held. As a result of Fishrot, all of these hopes and dreams came crashing down. In many cases destitution followed.

Even though most of the interviewed fisheries workers say they are part of the Government Employment Redress Programme, which was introduced in 2020/21 to assist unemployed fisheries workers and through which they are paid a monthly stipend of about N$4 000 by fishing companies that are part of the programme, most are unable to meet their basic needs.

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1 https://uncaccoalition.org/uncac-cosp10-atlanta_civil-society-declaration/
The personal accounts that feature in this report are a moving testament to the following human rights violations and harms. These rights are set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Namibian Constitution’s Chapter 3 on Fundamental Human Rights and Freedoms, and other international documents focusing on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. In particular:

- The unexpected loss of work and remuneration, led to a range of economic, social, and psychological harms, amount to a violation of the right to dignity.
- By implication, Fishrot has undermined or denied the workers access to a dignified and decent life for themselves and their dependents.
- Furthermore, the loss of employment and livelihoods has cast many into the indignity of poverty and destitution - something which many of the interviewed former fishermen and fisheries workers have experienced.

**With regard to the specific human rights-related indignities suffered or experienced, the former fishermen and fisheries workers point to the following:**

- The unreasonable, unexpected and unexplained loss of decent employment and incomes;
- The inability to secure new employment and similar, decent incomes;
- The inability to maintain a decent standard of living, hygiene and sanitation for themselves and their families in the wake of their loss of employment;
- A diminished ability to meet basic nutritional needs for themselves and their families since losing their jobs;
- A decline in mental health and well-being following the loss of employment compounded by the experience of prolonged unemployment;
- A decline and degradation in terms of their social position and standing within their communities;
- The break-up and/or collapse of marriages, families and intimate partner relationships, as well as parent-child relations;
- Abandonment, neglect, disrespect and disregard suffered and/or experienced at the hands of various authorities and officials that are supposed to assist and support them;
- An inability to participate meaningfully in family life and activities, including extended family life;
- An inability to participate meaningfully in economic, cultural and community life and activities.

Considering the above, this study makes the following recommendations, which come from both individual former fishermen and fisheries workers and a call issued by the IPPR and its international partners in November 2023:

- That Icelandic fishing company Samherji issue a formal acknowledgement of and apology for its role in Fishrot to directly affected and impacted individuals and communities, as well as to Namibian society in general;
- Samherji make full reparation to directly affected and impacted individuals and communities for the disruption and devastation inflicted on their lives and livelihoods as a result of Fishrot.

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We are the ones that suffered the most" – the human rights impacts of the Fishrot corruption scandal on fisheries workers.

Fishermen from two Samherji vessels, Heinaste and Saga, held various meetings with labour unions and political authorities at Walvis Bay between 2020 and 2021 following the loss of their jobs after the company withdrew its vessels suddenly from Namibian waters and shut down local operations in the wake of the Fishrot revelations.
Namibia and Iceland do not often make the global headlines. Both are small societies (Namibia with a population of 2.7 million people and Iceland with 376,000 people). Aside from their spectacular natural beauty both countries are known for their peace and stability. No news is usually good news.

Yet in late 2019 the two countries became united in shock and outrage over corruption revelations centred on Namibia’s fishing industry that briefly made international news. In short, an Icelandic company was alleged to have been bribing prominent Namibians to gain access to lucrative horse mackerel quotas over a period of seven years. The full amounts involved have yet to be established and will be the subject of a follow-up study, but estimates are already in the multi-millions of US dollars. In 2020, Namibia’s Financial Intelligence Centre flagged US$ 650 million in tainted transactions linked to Fishrot.

Since early 2021, the IPPR has been working with the Icelandic chapter of Transparency International to assess human rights impacts and economic harm, with the aim of calling to account the main actors involved and investigating the possibilities for remediation and restitution.

With the support of the UK-based International Lawyers Project, the IPPR and TI-Iceland have been raising awareness about the Fishrot case for the past three years. Activities have included: organising a panel discussion on Fishrot at the UN Human Rights Council meeting in Geneva; issuing media releases calling for restorative justice in the Fishrot case; advocating for the reform of Namibia’s Marine Resources Act; and developing a website to be launched in early 2024 which will act as a repository of factual information about the scandal.

However, the publication of this report is the single most important piece of work so far undertaken by the IPPR in the cause of seeking restitution for those who have been harmed by Fishrot.

This report recognises the importance of using victim-centred approaches to campaigning against corruption and for reparations. The victims of corrupt practices are often not identified and not heard. This study seeks to bring the victims of Fishrot front and centre - so that their voices can be at the heart of the campaign for justice.

We hope that by enabling the victims to tell their stories, this report will raise the pressure on the corrupt actors involved in Fishrot to enter a process of remediation and restitution.

What Is Fishrot?

On the morning of November 13 2019, Namibians woke up to the news of the country’s biggest corruption scandal since independence - what has come to be known as Fishrot. Members of the Namibian cabinet in cahoots with local businessmen stood accused of receiving millions of dollars in bribes from a prominent Icelandic fishing company called Samherji in exchange for fishing quotas.

The fact that today we know about so many elements of the scandal is due in large part to a whistleblower, Jóhannes Stefánsson, Samherji’s former director of operations in Namibia.

In Namibia, citizens increasingly became enraged by the continuous flow of revelations - shocking details of how the corruption scheme had allegedly worked and who had benefited. But while responsibility and culpability are located in Namibia, it is also clear that the scandal was rooted nearly 15 000 kilometres away in Iceland.

With the information that was revealed in November 2019, the process of accounting for the wrongs of Fishrot started in earnest. That accountability process is still a long way from being completed, but it is underway. Fishrot is not simply a tale of two countries - Namibia and Iceland. The scandal has enveloped many jurisdictions. These include
but are not limited to Angola, South Africa, Mauritius, the Marshall Islands, the United Arab Emirates, Cyprus, the Faroe Islands, the US, the UK, Germany, and Norway.

In Namibia ten suspects have been arrested in connection with Fishrot, including two former cabinet ministers. The trial of the ten commenced in December 2023. In Iceland the District Prosecutor dealing with the case has named nine suspects including principals of Samherji but so far - four years after the revelations - no one has been charged with any crime.

In June 2021, US authorities imposed sanctions on the two former Namibian cabinet ministers for their involvement “in corrupt acts that undermined the rule of law and the Namibian public’s faith in their government’s democratic institutions and public processes”. However, no sanctions have as yet been imposed on the Icelandic suspects.

**Diverted Quotas, Lost Jobs**

One company that lost out heavily in the Fishrot scandal was Namsov Fishing Enterprises, which received either no horse mackerel quotas or heavily reduced quotas from 2014 onwards. At least 1 000 workers lost their jobs after quotas were diverted away from Namsov. Hence, a number of the workers interviewed for this report were employed by Namsov. In 2018, Namsov became a subsidiary of another fishing company, Tunacor. It is alleged that the quotas that were given to the state-owned Fishcor rather than Namsov were then passed on to Samherji in exchange for bribes.

In late 2014, Namsov and Atlantic Harvesters of Namibia Limited, both at the time wholly owned subsidiaries of Bidvest Namibia Fisheries, challenged their loss of quotas and the apparent diversion of allocations to Fishcor. In December 2014, Judge Shafimana Ueitele ruled that the allocation of horse mackerel quotas to Fishcor and two other fishing associations “was unlawful and irregular”. However, Judge Ueitele decided not to set aside the allocations to Fishcor, the Namibian Large Pelagic and Hake Longlining Association and the Small Pelagic Fishing Association of Namibia. The failure to set aside the quota allocations meant the ruling was largely a symbolic one.

After Namsov’s partially successful legal challenge, the Minister sought to amend the Marine Resources Act 2000, specifically the sections on the issuance of quotas, to give more power and discretion to the Minister.

In August 2015, the Namibia Chamber of Commerce and Industry (NCCI) criticised the proposed changes to the Marine Resources Act and warned that they gave too much power to the Minister. The NCCI called for transparency around the allocation of fishing quotas and was in favour of publicly publishing and gazetting quotas awarded by the Ministry of Fisheries. Nevertheless, the amendments were passed by parliament and were signed into law. Subsequently, more and more quotas were directed towards Fishcor.

In December 2019 further job losses ensued after the police impounded the fishing vessel, Heinaste, owned by Eiðsta Seafood Limited, a Samherji subsidiary. Samherji then ceased to operate, leading to other fisheries workers losing their jobs on vessels linked to the Icelandic company.

**Groundbreaking Research**

Fishrot has had adverse human rights, environmental and economic impacts on Namibia and its people, particularly fisheries workers, their families, and communities at Walvis Bay.

In light of the above, Samherji should pay compensation to Namibia that could be used directly to improve the lives of the people most negatively affected by the corruption. This study highlights that the damage wrought by corruption is not only about the loss of funds but also has a human aspect. Fishrot has had highly detrimental effects on individuals and communities.

The human rights impacts of the scandal have not been investigated until the publication of this report. In this sense we hope the report will be ground-breaking - not just in Namibia but also internationally.
Thomas Haimbala’s son finished Grade 11 at the end of 2023, but he can’t help his son improve his grades in order to go further because he has no money. Haimbala was a former fisherman for Namsov Fishing Enterprises until the company suddenly let him go in December 2017, because, as he puts it, “Fishrot things were happening when former [fisheries] minister [Bernhard Esau] removed our quotas”. Haimbala says he started at Namsov Fishing Enterprises in the late 2000s and was mostly stationed on the company’s MFV Sunfish trawler, but also spent time over the years on the MFV Namibian Star. Haimbala was mostly a holdman (packing fish in the hold for freezing), but also spent time as a deckhand and factory hand on the vessels he worked on. Haimbala’s name appears on a list published as a public notice by the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources in early 2020 “of former employees of Namsov who were retrenched due to non-availability of quotas” (See Annex 4).

Thomas Haimbala, from the tiny rural settlement of Engela in the far northern Ohangwena Region, says he came to Walvis Bay over 15 years ago to, as he puts it in his broken English, “search for bread [to put] on the table for my family” in the fishing sector. The family he was talking about were his own children, his mother and eight siblings, on “my father’s side” he says, and an unmarried aunt (his mother’s sister) and her seven children who were all reliant on him for everything from their monthly basic food items to clothes and school fees. He also financially helped out other members of his extended family on occasion over the years, he says. He says of the time, almost 10 years, he was a Namsov fisherman: “That time my life was so good”, “My family know that if there is something, that I can give them,” he states. Haimbala says he was on a basic monthly salary of almost N$7,000, but on average earned between N$11,000 and N$17,000 per month because of what fishermen called the “kommissie” (commission in Afrikaans). The commission that fishermen received depended on the size of the catch, and some months it was good and others not so good, or as he puts it: “The more you catch, you can get more money … if you catch less fish you get less money.”

Because of the money he was earning, Haimbala was able to bring his three children to come live with him in a rented flat in Kuisebmond and go to school at Walvis Bay, and he could even afford to bring a younger relative to come live with them to take care of the children when he was at sea. When he lost his job he had to send them all back home to his mother’s homestead in 2018. Aside from financially supporting his family, from 2014 Haimbala was also buying bricks and other materials to build a house at his mother’s homestead at Engela, and he also bought cattle to start his own herd. Because he lost his job he hasn’t been able to finish the house and he lost his seven cattle in the drought of the late 2010s because he couldn’t afford to buy cattle feed.

After losing his job, Haimbala spent most of 2018 looking for work even though he couldn’t afford to feed himself at that time, relying on other fishermen who still had work to at least buy him “Top Score” (maize meal) while he was looking for work. He had to move out of the flat he had been renting into “a ghetto” (shack) in the informal settlement of Twaloloka. He says he was staying “illegally” and “not paying rent”, and that there was “no water, no electricity”. By late 2018, without finding work he could no longer afford to stay at Walvis Bay and moved back to Ohangwena."
Haimbala returned to Walvis Bay in 2021 to sign up to a scheme negotiated between the Namibian government and fishing companies through which quotas are awarded to companies that then pay the former fishermen N$4,000 per month. It is his only income, he says. He is now renting “a house” with four other unemployed fishermen who are also receiving the monthly allowance. “No one is working, we just get that [N$4,000],” he says. “Life is so difficult now, not like that time I was working,” he adds, saying sometimes he has to go without food. He says he continues to go “door to door looking for job”, but hasn’t found anything yet, and that if he doesn’t find any work by mid-2024 he intends going back to Ohangwena, as he hasn’t seen his family in two years. “I feel so bad,” he says of his life at the moment. “I want to buy [things], but there’s no money. I want to get married, but there’s no money. I have somebody at the north (Ohangwena), but there is no money.” “My age is the age of having my own property,” he says. “I’m concerned about the future, about tomorrow … if it will be worse or if it will be better.”

Regarding his son’s situation, Thomas Haimbala says he can only afford to pay N$500 per month (N$250 per subject) from the N$4,000 he gets to help his son improve his Grade 11 grades. “I’m trying to keep him going to school,” he says. “But there is no money to go further.”

**Message for Samherji:**

“Come and negotiate with our government. Either you [Samherji] can come and give us a job or give (pay) us something.”
We are the ones that suffered the most’ – the human rights impacts of the fishrot corruption scandal on fisheries workers

Andrew Mandume Kagola still has dreams of becoming an entrepreneur, and from the sound of it, the drive to achieve it, but a lack of money has hampered his efforts over the years.

Kagola, from Ondangwa in the Oshana Region, came to visit relatives at Walvis Bay at the end of 2010, after completing his end-of-year Grade 12 school-leaving exams. He was just supposed to be on vacation, but ended up staying because shortly after arriving at the harbour town one of his relatives informed him that Namsov Fishing Enterprises was looking for casual labourers. He immediately applied at the company’s offices.

He started working as a casual general worker on Namsov Fishing Enterprises vessels – Sunfish, Namibian Star, Starfish and Jupiter – from 1 January 2011 until early 2018, when he was informed, along with other casual labourers, that there would no longer be any work for him due to drastic cuts to the company’s quotas.

Kagola’s name appears on a list published as a public notice by the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources in early 2020 “of former employees of Namsov who were retrenched due to non-availability of quotas” (See Annex 4).

He hadn’t done well in the Grade 12 exams of 2010 and saw the job as a way to pay to improve his grades. While he didn’t earn much – between N$1,400 – N$2,000 on average per month for the months that he worked – he nevertheless could make ends meet and contribute to his brother’s household, which he was a part of at the time, as well as sending a little money home.

“I had to support myself, my mother, my father, my younger brother and some of my nieces and nephews,” Kagola says. “You have to send something.” The big paydays for casual workers usually came at year-end when the permanent employees would go on leave. Kagola says that one December (he doesn’t remember which year) he earned N$13,000. That was the most money he’d ever made as a fisherman.

What Andreas Kagola really wanted to do was go to university, so he saved a little money as well along the way.

In 2015, having sufficiently improved his grades over the intervening years, he applied to the University of Namibia (UNAM) to sit for a qualification in logistics, and was accepted for the 2016 academic year. However, he was accepted for business administration, instead of what he had applied for. The acceptance meant that he had to relocate to Windhoek. Kagola needed and wanted to keep his casual fisherman’s job, and so an understanding supervisor arranged that he would be called to return to work when he had time or was on academic holiday.

“I needed money to go survive in Windhoek,” he says. Given that he had only saved a little money, Kagola applied for a loan to the Namibia Students Financial Assistance Fund (NASFAF), but was unsuccessful. He also tried the Namsov Community Trust, but was informed that part-time workers were not considered for study loans from the trust.

“I was utilising my savings, but they got depleted,” he says. “Family couldn’t help out – my parents were unemployed and my brothers had their own children to take care of.”

“I’m not a failure, God knows I’m not a failure’
“I needed transport money. I needed food. I needed books.” Kagola says. “At some point I had to skip classes to come struggle here [at Walvis Bay]. I had no choice.”

This situation impacted his studies. “While I was here my classmates were given group assignments and they were writing tests, and some individual assignments, but I wasn’t attending to them,” Kagola states.

He says that while he did well in some subjects, he still failed his first year. He re-registered for his first-year in 2017, and passed that year, but couldn’t register for his second-year at the start of 2018 because that was when he lost the job he had come to rely on heavily. “We were just told there are no jobs [anymore],” Kagola states.

And that was also the end of his university studies. “If I had enough money I would go back, but there’s no money,” he says quietly.

Andreas Kagola says he can’t get by with the N$4,000 a month he has been receiving since the beginning of 2021 under a scheme arranged between the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources and fishing companies which are awarded quotas from which to pay the unemployed former fishermen the monthly stipend. To supplement the N$4,000 he does occasional stevedoring and, when it is available, manual labour at a local salt packing company. But he often goes months without work.

“I try to survive. It’s not easy,” he says. “I have to hustle to also support the family.”

In spite of all the hardship, Andreas Kagola didn’t give up on his dream of getting a qualification, and in 2021 he registered with the Namibian Maritime and Fisheries Institute (NAMFI), at Walvis Bay, for a six-month course to become a Deck Officer Class 6. Due to his financial situation he only managed to complete the course in 2023.

With his qualification in hand, Kagola has tried to find employment in the fishing industry, but has been met with the same answer everywhere he’s gone: “Apparently there’s no job.”

Aside from constantly thinking about ways to make money, Andreas Kagola, who says he now lives in an “ugly ghetto” (shack) in Kuisebmond, adds that he also thinks about starting a family, given his age. “He’s been seeing someone on-and-off since 2017, but he realises that his employment and financial situation was an obstacle. Luckily, he states, he has no children, saying: “I don’t have a kid because I can’t afford to feed a kid. I want my kid to live a decent life like any other.”

Message for Samherji:

“We just want our jobs back and to be compensated. We just want justice to be served. We are broke, we live in destitution. Some are suicidal and some have died in the process. If it wasn’t for it [Fishrot], we would be normal people, living decent lives, like any other.”
Life used to be good because there was money

Nambele, who hailed from Onankali in the Oshikoto Region, came to Walvis Bay in 1998 as an 18-year-old in search of work. He started working in the fishing industry in 2001.

Nambele’s story is one that replicates itself across the lives of so many former fishermen whose relationships, marriages and families tragically crumbled and broke apart in the wake of the loss of a prized job due to the fisheries corruption perpetrated in what has become known as the Fishrot scandal.

Nambele’s name appears on a list published as a public notice by the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources in early 2020 “of former employees of Namsov who were retrenched due to non-availability of quotas” (See Annex 4).

The soft-voiced Nambele was speaking through an interpreter – former Namsov colleague Andreas Kagoila – for this interview because his English wasn’t very good.

Nambele, who had mostly been a deckhand on the Namsov trawler Sunfish from 2010 to 2017, was a casual labourer who says he used to earn on average between N$13,000 - 14,000 per month when he worked. It was just commissions, with no basic salary or benefits. Some months he would work and some months there would be no work, and sometimes months would go by without working. He says his largest paycheck was N$19,000, when he worked as a holdman for one month in late 2016. It was at a time when Namsov fishermen had been on strike and casual labour, such as Nambele, had been called in to stand in for the strikers.

Despite the employment insecurity, the money he had made during those years was the most he’d ever made before or since. In fact, he could afford to buy a car in 2014 – a Golf MK5 – and he rented a flat where he lived with his partner and young sons.

During that time period he also started buying building material to build a house back in Onankali, and he even started building the house. He also started making plans to buy cattle to build up his own herd, however he never got that far. He even had hopes of securing permanent employment with Namsov so that he could buy a family house in Walvis Bay, because he didn’t want to rent forever.

All his plans, hopes and dreams collapsed with him losing his job at the end of 2017. He says all they were told was that the company hadn’t been allocated enough quota and that there would be no more work for them going forward.

Months later, in 2018, his partner broke up with him and eventually moved back to the north with their sons.

In 2019 his car broke down and he couldn’t afford to fix it, so he sold it. He sent some of the money to the north to support his children, and also used some to go and visit them. The bulk of it he used to support himself and to pay rent at Walvis Bay. However, the money ran out and he had no other source of steady income, so he moved into a shack.

Since December 2020 his only steady source of income has been a monthly stipend of N$4,000, under a scheme arranged between the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources and fishing companies that are awarded quotas from which to pay the unemployed former fishermen. Some of this money he sends to the north for his 10 and 12-year-old sons.

The rest he has to spend on food and rent of a shack he shares with two other former fishermen. Africa Nambele says he would like to bring his sons to visit with him for a holiday, but he has nowhere for them to stay because they can’t stay in the rented shack with him and the other fishermen. The space is too small.

For now, when he really misses his sons, he uses some of the little money he has to go and visit them in the north.

He says that he doesn’t want to relocate back to Onankali, to be closer to his sons, because he still hopes that his employment situation will change for the better and he wants to stick around at Walvis Bay for when an opportunity arises again in the fisheries industry.
‘Life was good because when you get paid you can help someone’

My hope is just for the company to give us a nice contract so we can start working like others, so we can have a good life like others.

For Daniel Ricardo, helping others is an important thing in life, that’s why, when he worked as a fisherman, he used to help out others when he could. “It was good because when you get paid you can help someone,” he says. “That’s why I say life was good.”

During the years that he worked as a Namsov fisherman he says he used to support 13 relatives back home in the north, at Ondangwa in the Oshana Region, as well as helping out neighbours and others when he could. Ricardo says that aside from sending home money regularly, he “used to send them even fish”.

My plan was to finish my house and then after [that] I can get married. But I came to lose everything.
Being able to help others meant that they could help him, if they were able, when he needed help. And since mid-2017 he has needed that help.

He says he was terminated as a casual labourer by Namsov in June-August 2017 and since then has been needing help from others to help him. Since then he has been able to secure regular employment. Because he has not been able to secure regular employment, he says he has been needing help from others to help him. Some people who have helped him in the past have not helped him since he lost his job. And since mid-2017 he has needed that help.

Ricardo says he started working for Namsov in January 2009, as a holdman on the company’s Venus trawler, after having worked for years as a fisherman for Novanam out of Luderitz. He would later become a holdman on another Namsov trawler, Sunfish, after the Venus was sold due to the company not having secured enough quota from 2015. That was the period (2013 – 2015) when the company was in dispute with the then fisheries minister and now Fishrot corruption accused, Bernhard Esau, over the awarding of quotas.

Domain Ricardo’s name appears on a list published as a public notice by the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources in early 2020 “of former employees of Namsov who were retrenched due to non-availability of quotas” (See Annex 4). Like most of the fishermen interviewed for this study, Daniel Ricardo has been receiving a NS$4,000 per month stipend since February 2021 under a scheme arranged between the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources and fishing companies which are awarded quotas from which to pay the unemployed former fishermen the monthly stipend.

With no other regular source of income, Ricardo has to support himself and his three children (one residing at Gobabis, in the eastern Omahheke Region, and the other two in the north) from the money. Ricardo says that for the eight years he worked for Namsov, even though he was a casual labourer and on average only worked nine months per year, “life was good” because of what he had earned during that period.

He says his monthly earnings ranged between NS$10,000 and NS$17,000 for most of that period, and he says “2014 was my best year” with his best earnings period coming that year when he earned NS$24,000 one month. Life was so good at the time that in 2015 he bought a car, a Toyota Corolla, and started building his house in the north.

“My plan was to finish my house and then after [that] I can get married,” he says. “But I came to lose everything.”

After losing his casual job in mid-2017 Daniel Ricardo hung around Walvis Bay for the next five years, hoping something else in the fishing industry would come his way. But nothing ever did, and so in 2022 he returned to the north because he couldn’t afford to stay at the coast anymore.

With work being scarce in the north, Ricardo says he did “small jobs” and worked the fields in order to “earn something to bring bread in the house”. He and two other former fishermen had returned to Walvis Bay in mid-January 2024 because they had heard that there might be work coming for the former fishermen. Like most other former fishermen spoken to, he says he would like to work and not just receive the monthly stipend.

“My hope is just for the company to give us a nice contract so we can start working like others, so we can have a good life like others,” he says. However, if that does not happen, Ricardo says he will have to return to the north as he cannot afford to stay at Walvis Bay.

“We just have to force ourselves to go back to the north,” he says.
‘I want to see us getting something for all the years we have been suffering’

Name: Natanael Andreas
Age: 36
Company worked for: Namsov Fishing Enterprises (Pty) Ltd
Position: Deckhand

The year 2014 was supposed to be a turning point year for him, says Natanael Andreas. That year a supervisor told him that he would become a permanent employee in 2015 when the company bought another vessel. Andreas, who had been a casual employee since joining Namsov in May 2010, wanted to become a permanent employee because he saw it as a door to open further opportunities. >
Being a permanent employee would mean that he could go to the bank to get a loan with which he could start a business, which was what he really wanted to do. Along with going back to school. But he really wanted to be a businessman.

“But it never happened,” says Andreas of his long-gone hope of becoming a permanent employee.

Because in 2014 it was already becoming clear to him that something was happening. He says he used to go to sea three or four times per month, but from early 2014 things started to change.

“From 2014 you work only one trip per month or two or three transhipments, if you are lucky,” he says. “If you are not lucky, you can do only one transshipment.”

Casuals made their money from transshipments and commissions, so the more fish that was caught and the more transshipments worked, the more money that was earned.

Instead of buying a vessel, in 2015 Namsov started selling its vessels due to its quotas having been cut by fisheries minister Bernhard Esau.

Despite this, Andreas says he was called to work every month, even as the work was becoming less. And the retrenchments and terminations were becoming more.

He recalls how in 2016 the “company was telling us, ‘guys, we care about you but we have no choice but to release you because the ministry of fisheries cut our quotas’.”

Luckily he survived the cuts in 2015 and 2016, but in 2017 his luck ran out.

“In April 2017 they sent us letters saying ’there’s no more work for you guys here’,” he states. “We were just sent home.”

Natanael Andreas’ name appears on a list published as a public notice by the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources in early 2020 “of former employees of Namsov who were retrenched due to non-availability of quotas” (See Annex 4).

Andreas, who hails from Ongwediva in the Oshana Region and came to Walvis Bay in early 2010, says his best years as fishermen, mostly aboard the Starfish and Jupiter trawlers, were between November 2010 and early 2014.

He says that during that period he earned between N$15,000 to N$17,000 per month, in commissions and transshipment fees.

He says his best period was November 2010 to January 2011 when he earned N$19,000.

During the seven years he had a steady monthly income he financially supported his mother back in the north and his nieces and nephews – the children of his eight siblings.

“I was supporting a lot of people, and myself also,” he says.

During the good years he also started building his own house in the north, in 2012, buying building materials as he could and starting construction. By the time he was released by Namsov in early 2017 he had already spent about N$50,000 on his house, he says.

“Every year I would send something to the north,” he says. “I didn’t finish it.”

Aside from building his own house, among other plans, Andreas had also been planning to buy a car, but this also never happened.

“I was having plans,” he says. “I was planning to go back to school and I planned to start a business.”

“I don’t have a kid, but I was planning to start a family,” he adds. “But you have to budget first.”

Natanael Andreas also receives the N$4,000 per month stipend under a scheme arranged in 2020 between the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources and fishing companies that are awarded quotas from which to pay the unemployed former fishermen the monthly stipend.

Like all the fishermen interviewed he says that while he’s grateful for the N$4,000 it was not enough to sustain him and those he supported financially, and that he preferred having a job, because “sitting home is driving people crazy”, he says.

Unlike many other former fishermen interviewed, Andreas does have another source of income: A roadside tuckshop in Kuisebmond. The small amount of money he makes from it – between N$4,000 – N$6,000 per month – goes towards paying his rent, but he can’t live off it, he says.

Natanael Andreas had hoped that by 2024 his employment and financial situation would have changed because he had planned to get married and start a family in 2025. But now things don’t look so certain.

“How can you support your family with N$4,000?” He asks.

Message for Samherji:

“They must come up with something like, all those people who lost their jobs because of Fishrot, they must get fishing rights so we can support our families. Because all these years we have suffered. Some people have died. We have lost our colleagues.”
“We were not being told the truth”

There was a rumour the people (the Icelandic company) wanted to run away. We were not being told the truth. There was nothing we could do.

After Reagan Mukande lost his fisherman job in November 2019, he couldn’t afford to send his daughter back to the mission school in the north of the country in 2020 where she had gone up to Grade 10 in 2019. Up to the end of 2019 he had paid about N$12,000 per term to have his daughter at the school, he says, but he couldn’t send her back because he didn’t have the money. In fact, she had to drop out of school altogether, having only completed Grade 10. He says his daughter, who lives back with him and his wife and their two other children in Kuisebmond, has since had a baby. His four grandchildren also live with them, he says.

Mukande and his family’s lives have come to a standstill. The electricity and water to his house have been off for four years now, since after he lost his job. The Mukandes now get their water from a neighbour. Reagan Mukande had come to Walvis Bay in 1990 from the far northeastern Zambezi Region in search of work. He hails from a village 75 km east of Katima Mulilo.

Mukande had been a fisherman with ArcticNam Fishing, a joint venture between Icelandic fishing company Samherji and Namibian partners, from 2015 until he was retrenched on 22 November 2019. By the time of his termination Mukande had been a fisherman for more than 18 years.

Even though there had been rumours swirling for a while, Mukande says his retrenchment was still sudden and surprising as there had been no indication from the company that such a move was coming. He says rumours that the remaining Namibian crew of the Heinaste would be terminated started circulating in 2019, following the retrenchment of some of the crew at the end of 2018. When fishermen were retrenched at the end of 2018 they “were not given anything”, says Mukande.

He says that when he was terminated, he had just come ashore. When they came off the ship they were told to report to the ArcticNam office. When he went to the office he received a severance letter and a certificate of service, and he and the other fishermen were told that there was no longer work for them. He received severance pay of N$7,000, which he says was paid immediately into his bank account.

He says there was no clear explanation provided as to why they had been terminated.

“There was a rumour the people (the Icelandic company) wanted to run away,” he says. “We were not being told the truth.” “There was nothing we could do,” he adds.

Reagan Mukande had made good money in his time as a Heinaste fisherman. During the four years he worked on the ship, under various Samherji companies, he says he averaged earnings between N$18,000 to N$20,000 per month.

He says his best earnings period came in 2016 when he spent two straight months at sea and when they eventually came to port he “came off the boat with N$42,000”.

Like many other fishermen, Mukande supported many people from what he earned. He says aside from his own household at Walvis Bay, he also sent money back home to the Zambezi Region. Altogether 15 people directly benefited from his earnings, he says.

“I’m supporting them, but they are also supporting other people,” he says of those he regularly assisted back in the Zambezi Region.
Mukande says he used to visit his village at least once a year when he was employed, but hasn’t been back there since 2020, for his mother’s funeral, because it is too expensive and he doesn’t have money to spare. Reagan Mukande receives the N$4,000 per month stipend under a scheme arranged in 2020 between the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources and fishing companies that are awarded quotas from which to pay the unemployed former fishermen the monthly stipend. He has been receiving the money since December 2020.

Aside from this stipend he does odd jobs to bring in extra money, and his wife does domestic work.

Message for Samherji:
“Samherji must just compensate us. What we hope for is that Samherji must come to their senses and pay us. At my age I just need to be compensated and then maybe I can do something to employ other people.”

Name: Golden Kashuwa
Age: 42
Company worked for: ArticNam Fishing (Pty) Ltd
Position: Factory hand

It’s a struggle life. Each day is a new page, I have to go and look here and there to find food for the table.

‘The way they left us, we couldn’t feel happy’

For Golden Kashuwa the thing that has struck him the most over the years since losing his fisherman’s job in November 2019 is how his relationships have changed. >
Kashuwa, from how he talks, comes across as someone who values his bonds with extended family and friends. He says the period when he was working as a fisherman for ArcticNam Fishing, on the company’s Heinside trawler, he supported or assisted his “entire family”.

Kashuwa hails from Impalila Island in the remote northeastern Zambezi Region.

“I was the breadwinner in the family,” he says. “Most of my elder brothers, they are not working also, they are just peasant farmers at home. That time, when I was getting enough, I normally used to provide for them.”

Beyond his immediate family he also helped out where he could among extended family, he says. “Since I lost my job, for some of us, it created some difficult problems within our families,” he explains. When he had something to “provide on the table”, as he tells it, he was important in the family and there was constant communication between him and his relatives back home, but now: “Some hardly communicate anymore.”

“I don’t know how to explain this, people sometimes come to you when you have something to provide on the table,” he says. “If that thing is no more there, those people start to fade away.”

He says he realises their reasoning: “What’s the use of this man who doesn’t even provide anything on the table.” But it’s still something that makes him “feel very much sad sometimes when I’m alone”.

“We communicate, but not the way we used to,” he says. “It is something that is triggering me every now and then. When I knew it was a bond that was very close to me, but now it is a bit distant.”

Golden Kashuwa came to Walvis Bay in 2014 in search of work and almost immediately after arriving at the town found work as a fisherman, a casual employee, with ArcticNam Fishing, a joint venture between Icelandic fishing company Samherji and Namibian partners.

As with most of the other fishermen interviewed for this study, Kashuwa says that during the brief five-year period he was a fisherman he had earned more money than he had seen before or since. While he was on a basic salary of N$5,800 per month, he made double and sometimes triple that with catch and transshipment commissions on a monthly basis, he says.

Aside from being able to regularly support or assist his extended family, he earned enough to afford rent for a three-bedroom house in Narraivic, a working class neighbourhood in Walvis Bay, where he lived with his wife and four children, and he travelled to Botswana in 2015 to buy a Volkswagen Golf GTI cash.

He says his biggest paychecks usually came in “Decembers”, when he would earn in the region of N$22,000 – N$23,000. Now all he has to rely on as a regular income is the N$4,000 he receives as a monthly stipend under a scheme arranged in 2020 between the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources and fishing companies that are awarded quotas from which to pay the unemployed former fishermen the monthly stipend. He has been receiving the money since December 2020.

“Even though it’s not enough, it helps to cover rent and buy some stuff,” he says. Aside from this money, he earns a little from doing odd jobs.

“It’s a struggle life. Each day is a new page, I have to go and look here and there to find food for the table,” he says. His wife has a steady job at a fish factory and is the main breadwinner, but she too has to share what she earns with others.

“Even though it’s stable, it’s not enough. Even though she’s a breadwinner to the family, she has to care for her mother,” Kashuwa says. Golden Kashuwa and his family live in a one-room flat in Kuisebmond for two years now, and he had to sell his car in 2021 to pay school fees, and settle debts and accounts.

“Some of the furniture I had I also had to sell,” he adds.

At the time of this interview, in mid-January 2024, it was the start of the Namibian school year. Most Namibian parents are required to pay a fee when their children start the school year, as well as having to buy books and stationery. Kashuwa says he doesn’t have the money for this.

“For me it’s a bit heavy,” he says, but adds that he will have to find a way.

With regard to the circumstances surrounding his termination by ArcticNam Fishing, Golden Kashuwa says: “We were not actually informed about the closing of the company. All of us were not expecting the company to close in that manner. We were just told ‘guys, take all your luggage from the vessel, we end here’. We were told to go to the office. When we reached the office we heard the information that the company is closing.”

He received N$15,000 as severance pay.

“Not everyone was getting the same amount,” he says. “Some were getting less than that, some above. That was the last pay I got.”

“The way they left us, we couldn’t feel happy,” he adds. “We were just dumped here.” Kashuwa talked about his fraying family relations again, saying he couldn’t afford to visit his family in the Zambezi Region.

“Now it’s almost four years that I haven’t gone,” he says, adding that he used to visit every year when he was working. Part of the reason he can’t afford to go home, he says, is that “people are also expecting you to provide, to buy food” when visiting.

Even so, he would like to go see his homestead again that he had been maintaining while he was working. He used to pay someone to maintain it for him.

“Now it’s no more in good use. No one is taking care of it,” he says.

Message for Samherji:

“I really want those people (Samherji) from that side (Iceland) who are in this case to at least come with an amicable solution of compensation. That’s what we need. To the government, we don’t have faith anymore.”
Wendy Shikukwete’s dream was to become a teacher, and she thought that she would be able to achieve that when she started working on ArcticNam Fishing’s Heinaste fishing trawler as a steward, a member of the kitchen staff.

“When I initially started this work, since the pay was so good, my plan was to at least work for three years or so and then take myself to university,” she says. Unfortunately, Shikukwete wasn’t long enough with the company to be able to realise that plan, as a mere seven months after starting work on the vessel in April 2018 she was let go at the end of November 2018. She was part of the first group of Namibian crew of Heinaste who were retrenched at the end of 2018, followed by the rest a year later, at the end of November 2019.

Wendy Shikukwete was born at Omuthiya in the northern Oshikoto Region and came to Walvis Bay to live with her father and go to school in 2002, at the age of eleven.
Since leaving school in 2010 she has struggled to find permanent employment at the coast, doing various casual jobs over the years and even starting her own small business – selling vetkoek and soup from the shack she lived in at the time in Kuisebmond.

For Shikukwete, who is a mother of three, the Heinaste job presented an opportunity to build a life, since she was earning more money than she had ever had, and says of the work: “I enjoyed it.” She says she was paid a basic salary of N$6,800, but over the seven-month period that she was on the vessel, she regularly earned between N$21,000 and N$30,000 per month in basic salary and catch and transshipment commissions. The largest paycheck she received was her last one, when at the end of November 2018 she was paid N$40,000.

During that seven-month period, with the money she was making, she could afford to support her two older, unemployed sisters and their children back in the north.

“I really didn’t mind because I was making money,” she says. “I could send enough back.”

Aside from the money, Shikukwete, who was one of the two Namibian female crew members on the Heinaste, also got to take home chicken and meat cut-offs, as well as used cooking oil, from the ship’s kitchen once they reached port, even though she mostly didn’t spend much time ashore during the seven months she worked. And like the other crew members, she also received fish to take home, she says. “I was sending a lot of that back home,” she says.

Since that brief period of good earning work, Shikukwete, who also cares for two nieces who are living with her in her grandmother’s house in Kuisebmond, has struggled to find permanent employment with a steady income.

Luckily, she says, “my two younger brothers are also employed so they help me.” Her only regular source of income is the N$4,000 per month stipend she receives under a scheme arranged in 2020 between the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources and fishing companies that are awarded quotas from which to pay unemployed former fishermen and vessel crews the monthly stipend. She has been receiving the money since December 2020.

She says the money is just enough to buy food for the month for the household she manages. Aside from the N$4,000, she says she gets paid an average of N$1,500 for a casual, low-paying fish packing job at one of the fish factories at Walvis Bay. Since starting the part-time job as a general worker in early 2020, Shikukwete says she has managed to become a team leader when she gets a chance to work, which can be anything from one day to five days per month.

“I supervise the line. I tell people what sizes to pack, how to pack them, the kgs to pack and all that. And just make sure that things run smoothly,” she says of the work.

From the little money she earns and the stipend she receives, she says she still tries to send money to her sisters when she can. Shikukwete, who speaks English very well and assisted with translating during some of the interviews of former Heinaste fishermen, says many of her former colleagues “are really struggling” since losing their jobs.

“Things are really really hard,” she says. “People are going through the most and things can get worse.”

“For the men it’s tough. They all have lost families. Their wives have divorced them. Some of them have even been told ‘these kids are not yours’, simply because the person has no income,” she says. “I’m grateful my family did not abandon me, like most of them,” she adds.

Wendy Shikukwete is clear-eyed about finding another lucrative fishing sector job.

“I don’t think there will be any good fishing jobs in the next five to ten years. So I would rather be compensated than get my job back because I can do much more with those funds. Maybe start a business, maybe go to university,” she says. She says she would still like to become a teacher.■
For Haufiku Ndillinaye, being able to feed his kids is something that he worries about constantly. “Sometimes you sleep then you start to cry because you think ‘where can I get the money to buy food for my kids?’,” he says. “When the kid opens the fridge they start to cry because they can see there is nothing there.”

“And then you can cry also because you don’t know how to feed your kids,” he says.

The last few years have been hard on him and his family. Like many of the other former fishermen interviewed, Ndillinaye has struggled to put food on the table and keep a roof over his family’s heads. And like most others spoken too, he used to provide for his extended family as well. Now he can barely get by.

Ndillinaye, who hails from Okalongo in the Omusati Region, lives with his wife and four children at Walvis Bay. He has seven children in all. Two of his children are now at university, one starting at the beginning of 2024.

Haufiku Ndillinaye was a fisherman on the Heinaste trawler of ArcticNam Fishing, a joint venture between Icelandic fishing company Samherji and Namibian partners, from November 2014 to November 2019.

“That time my life was very good,” he says.

Ndillinaye said that he was paid a basic salary of N$4,800, but averaged monthly earnings of between N$15,000 and N$20,000 per month over the five years he was a Heinaste fisherman. His biggest paycheck usually came at the end of the year when he would make around N$22,000.

Ndillinaye says he owned a bar and restaurant at Okalongo, which he had started in 2004. He also owned gambling machines that he operated in his bar. These businesses supplemented his income as a fisherman, but the combination of him losing his job at the end of 2019 and the devastation wrought by the Covid-19 pandemic from early 2020 has meant that his businesses suffered. He had to close the businesses in 2022 because they were not generating an income and he had to sell his gambling machines to pay debts.

He had also bought a second car in 2016, but had to sell it in 2021 because he couldn’t afford to run it anymore and to contribute to one of his children going to university.

He already owned an older car which he had bought in 2006, but that car is broken down now and he can’t afford to fix it.

The only income Haufiku Ndillinaye can rely on now is the N$4,000 he receives as a monthly stipend under a scheme arranged in 2020 between the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources and fishing companies that are awarded quotas from which to pay the unemployed former fishermen the monthly stipend.

Ndillinaye says his wife works and is the main breadwinner in the household now. It is important to Ndillinaye that his children think well of him.

He says he tries to be honest with his family about his situation. “I talk to her (wife) and I talk also to my children so they know my situation,” he says. “About the way we were and the way we are now.”

He says that he also asks the mothers of his other three children to tell the children how he was before and to just trust him, maybe life will become better again one day.

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**Name:** Haufiku Ndillinaye  
**Age:** 48  
**Company worked for:** ArcticNam Fishing (Pty) Ltd

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**Message for Samherji:**

“First, I want Samherji to apologise to us, the fishermen who worked for Samherji. They must apologise because they damaged our lives. Then they must pay us.”

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**24 WE ARE THE ONES THAT SUFFERED THE MOST – THE HUMAN RIGHTS IMPACTS OF THE FISHROT CORRUPTION SCANDAL ON FISHERIES WORKERS**
You find yourself walking in the street just talking to yourself.

‘Sometimes I go to the sea, just standing there, to think about my life’

Martin Sakeus is having a tough time coping with his situation at the moment. “This life is very hard. It’s very hard,” he says. Sakeus was a factory hand on the Heinaste trawler of ArcticNam Fishing, a joint venture between Icelandic fishing company Samherji and Namibian partners, from September 2014 to November 2019, and he says his life was really good during those years. Now his unemployment and financial situation are weighing heavily on him. “It’s affected my life because sometimes I find myself waking up at midnight to go out and I don’t know where to go,” he says, adding that he feels like he has no options and “nowhere to go”. “Sometimes I go to the road to Swakopmund, just standing there,” he says. “Sometimes I go to the sea, in the middle of the night, just standing there, thinking about my life.” “You find yourself walking in the street just talking to yourself,” he says, adding that he thinks people think he’s “going crazy”.

One of my colleagues committed suicide because of this situation, he says. “Because you’re thinking deeply about your life.”

He tells of his friend and former cabin mate on Heinaste who committed suicide in the north in September or October 2023. Other fishermen or former Heinaste crew spoke to also made mention of the 30-year-old man who committed suicide and have also ascribed it to what he was going through since losing his fisherman’s job.

“He was my friend,” says Sakeus. “We were together in the same room on Heinaste.”

Martin Sakeus, from Eenhana in the Ongangwena Region, came to Walvis Bay in 2006, and for years did part-time work and odd jobs to survive. He worked as a fisherman for Namsov Fishing Enterprise before joining ArcticNam in 2014 as a casual labourer on its flagship vessel. He says he was paid a basic salary of N$5,800, but his monthly income ranged between N$19,000 and N$25,000 as a result of catch and transshipment commissions. He says the best periods were “December-times”, when he would earn around N$25,000. “That time my life was fine because I could do whatever I want to do. I could go wherever I wanted to go,” he says.

“If I wanted to go to buy something I could go. If I wanted to go to Windhoek, I could go to visit my family there,” he says. “If I wanted to go and buy my car I could even go and buy my car in Botswana.”

And he did that, in 2018. He went to Botswana and bought two Toyota RUNX cars that he turned into taxis at Walvis Bay. During those years he also started building a house and buying cattle in the north, back in the Ongangwena Region.

At the time he was also living with a partner in a flat in town, and all seven of his children were at Walvis Bay and he could provide for them, he says. He could even afford to regularly send money home to his family in the north. Sakeus, the eldest of seven children, says he was the main breadwinner of his family.

After he lost his fisherman’s job on the Heinaste in November 2019 his life started collapsing around him. All seven of his children had to be sent to the north to live with relatives as he could no longer afford to have them with him at the coast.

His relationship started crumbling and his partner, whom he had wanted to marry, left him in 2022. “Now we are no more together due to this situation,” he says. Even his relationship with his family has suffered.

One of my colleagues committed suicide because of this situation. Because you’re thinking deeply about your life.
“Now my family don’t ever communicate with me anymore,” he says. “Because now they don’t like me anymore because I have got nothing. Even my family ... due to this situation.”

The building of his house in the north stopped and he had to sell his cattle.

“I was having 12 cattle, but now nothing,” he says. “I had to sell them all to settle [debts], to pay school fees for my kids. I was trying to build a house, but now the thing is just standing, not finished, because there is no money.”

On top of all this, he had to give up the flat he had been renting on the outskirts of Walvis Bay town centre and now lives in a shack in Twaloloka settlement, in Kuisebmond.

“I stay there illegally, with no water, no electricity,” he says.

He even had to sell his two cars in 2021, during the Covid-19 pandemic, because he had no job to fall back on to keep them in running order, as well as to settle debts.

Martin Sakeus says his only income now is the N$4,000 he receives as a monthly stipend under a scheme arranged in 2020 between the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources and fishing companies that are awarded quotas from which to pay the unemployed former fishermen the monthly stipend.

From how he tells it, it is all this that has weighed heavily on his mental health.

He says he has tried to share what he was going through with others, saying: “I talk to some of my colleagues, but nothing changes.”

Sakeus says he thinks more of his former Heinaste colleagues will die or commit suicide because of what they are going through since losing their jobs, as life is “very hard” for most of them.

“So something has to be done soon,” he says, adding that the Icelandic company Samherji, should assist its former workers. “They must do something to save our lives.”

Martin Sakeus says his mental health doesn’t seem to be getting better.

**Message for Samherji:**

“At least they must do something that makes our hearts better. Even if they get for us a job or do something to make us happy as previous employees.”
Abraham Abraham had plans. The big plans were to work until he was 60, to build himself a house at Oniipa, in the Oshikoto Region, to buy himself a car, to start a small business (a cucashop) and to grow crops for himself and his family on the parcel of land his grandmother had given him in 2018.

He could have made such plans because during the time he was a fisherman on the Geysir trawler of Saga Seafood, a Namibian subsidiary of Icelandic fishing company Samherji, from April 2017 to early 2020, he could afford to make such plans.

“That time to me it was a good life,” he says. “I was putting money away. If I get paid, I was saving.” Abraham says he was paid a basic salary of N$5,700, but was earning the bulk of his income from catch and transshipment commissions, with his monthly income ranging from N$12,000 to N$18,000 depending on the catches over the nearly four years he was on Geysir. The biggest paycheck he ever got while a Geysir fisherman was N$20,000.

“I had a nice income,” he says. “I was satisfied with my income.” It was in fact the best of times in Abraham Abraham’s life, for he had never before had so much money.

Name: Abraham Abraham
Age: 37
Company worked for: Saga Seafood (Pty) Ltd

“I was on a nice ship, paying me good”
By 2019 he had saved up N$70,000 and started building his house on the land he had received a year earlier.

“I started buying bricks, buying cement,” he says, adding that he managed to erect some walls of the house he was building. During those years he was also able to assist or support his siblings and extended family back in the Oshikoto Region.

“The time I was on Geysir I was sending [money],” he says. “I send here, I send there. Maybe someone pass away in the family, I send something.”

And then it all came crashing down in early 2020, following the revelations of the Fishrot corruption scandal at the end of 2019. In the wake of the allegations made against Samherji, the company started withdrawing from Namibia and removed its vessels from Namibian waters, leaving the Namibian crews high and dry, just as the Covid-19 pandemic was unfolding.

Abraham Abraham’s plans were shattered. There was no longer a job from which he could retire at 60. He could no longer continue to save to complete his house.

“Everything is no more in order,” he says. “I can’t afford anything anymore. I can’t continue anymore (building the house), even though I want to continue.”

“Now I can’t afford things anymore,” he says. The only income Abraham Abraham can rely on now is the N$4,000 he receives as a monthly stipend under a scheme arranged in 2020 between the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources and fishing companies that are awarded quotas from which to pay the unemployed former fishermen the monthly stipend. Since losing his Geysir fisherman job in early 2020 Abraham has not been able to find regular work and earns small amounts from odd jobs.

With the N$4,000 stipend and what he makes from hustling, Abraham says he can’t afford much. “I can just buy food,” he says. “I can’t buy any shoes. All I have to buy is food.”

“Everything has to come from the N$4,000. It’s a very bad situation,” he says. Abraham, who has two small children, says he feels as if his life has come to a standstill.

“I feel like I’m dead,” he says. “It’s like a person just walking, but he is dead. It’s like I’m dead, but I’m alive. Ag, my friend, you go home sometimes and you cry in your bed. Nobody will see you, but you are crying the whole night.”

“I’m in that situation,” he says. “It’s a very bad situation.”

“When those vessels of Samherji went back everything just started to lose hope,” he says. Over the years even his friendships have dried up, he says. “Even people who used to laugh with you no longer come to you,” he says. “Who will come to you when you have nothing? There’s no more sitting, talking, laughing, enjoying. There’s nothing.”

Abraham Abraham says he has even had to let go of his plan to marry his girlfriend. “I was having a plan to get married,” he says. “Now I cannot think of that plan anymore. My girlfriend asks me ‘I gave you kids and you said one day you are going to marry me’, and I don’t know how to answer her. I was talking [about marriage] because there was employment,” he says.

Message for Samherji:

“My hope is for Samherji to bring those vessels back again to start over. Just to bring them back and employ us. Or maybe if they can’t bring the vessels back, to just think about us (compensate us) because we made a lot of money for those guys.”
Ananias Shitilu does not like how the best period in his life came to an end.
Shitilu, who came to Walvis Bay in 2000 in search of work, was a fisherman on the Geyser trawler of Saga Seafood, a Namibian subsidiary of Icelandic fishing company Samherji, from December 2016 to February 2020.

“I was at the north for holiday, then they called me that I must come to Walvis Bay to offload the vessel,” narrates Shitilu. “They just said ‘you must come for offloading’.”

“To my surprise, after finishing the offloading, we heard that the vessel was going to Mauritania,” he tells. “We didn’t know whether the vessel would come back or if it would be gone forever.”

“Then they took some of the crew members,” he says. “Me, I didn’t go.”

“Then a few months later, the crew that had gone with the ship, returned to Walvis Bay by plane,” he says, adding that was how he and the other fishermen realised that their jobs were gone.

“The vessel was gone, they didn’t say anything,” he says. Shitilu, who is from Ongandjera in the Omusati Region, like other fishermen interviewed, tells of having earned an income he never had before and being able to do things and buy things he had only been able to dream of before.

“That was the best money I ever received,” he says. “That time I was working for Samherji, whatever I wanted to do, I could do it easily.”

During the years he worked as a casual labourer for Saga Seafood, Shitilu says he earned on average between N$16,000 and N$20,000 per month, and during really good months he would make about N$25,000.

“When I came to Samherji is when I started building my house,” he says, telling how he managed to save and pay for the builder – to build a house back in the Omusati Region. However, he had intended to build a boundary wall for the builder – to build a house back in the Omusati Region. However, he had intended to build a boundary wall for the builder – to build a house back in the north. These plans have now been abandoned.

And he says even his relationship with his extended family has changed.

“Ah, my friend, even the communication between me and the family that time I was working, it was good,” he says. “But now, whenever there is a wedding or somebody has passed away, they do not contact me because they know I cannot come and help with anything there.”

“I was supporting even their children by sending them money,” he tells of how he assisted some of his relatives.

“I was even paying the electricity at the north, and water also. I was responsible for paying that bill.”

Now he can’t keep up with paying the water and electricity bill of his own house at Ongandjera, in which his wife and three children reside, and he says the bill now stands at N$3,000.

The only steady income Ananias Shitilu can now rely on is the N$4,000 he receives as a monthly stipend under a scheme arranged in late 2020 between the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources and fishing companies that are awarded quotas from which to pay the unemployed former fishermen the monthly stipend. He has been receiving this money since late 2020.

Shitilu says he can’t find steady, well-paying work and earns extra money by doing odd jobs here and there, but most of the N$4,000 and any extra money he earns has to go to his wife and children, not leaving him much to live off at Walvis Bay. He is usually left with only about N$400 to get by, he says.

“Even the soap for washing, you cannot afford to buy it,” he says. “I can’t afford to buy a t-shirt or trousers. If you didn’t buy the food and you bought clothes, where are you going to eat?”

At the time of the interview in January 2024, Shitilu said there was a death on his wife’s side of the family, and that he was struggling to scrape together the money to go and bury her relative.

“There is no one who can give me even N$500 to help me to go,” he says. 

Message for Samherji:

“At least, maybe, Samherji must do something for us because the way they left us, we did not expect it. The Samherji company must give us something so we can at least start our own businesses, so we can start living again.”
During the brief period of nearly five years that Job Timotheus was a Saga Seafood fisherman he was able to support three households.

Timotheus, who came to Walvis Bay in 2000 in search of work, was a fisherman on the Geysir trawler of Saga Seafood, a Namibian subsidiary of Icelandic fishing company Samherji, from December 2016 to August 2020.

Two of the households he was supporting were his mother’s house, consisting of his seven siblings, and his uncle’s household, in which he grew up.

“I didn’t grow up with my siblings, I grew up in my uncle’s house, so I was helping my siblings and my uncle’s house,” he says. “That time I was living good, it was easier to help the family.”

The third household he supported was his own – he lived with his girlfriend and three children at Walvis Bay during those years. He now has four children.

“I’m the breadwinner of the family,” he says. “You have to help where you can help.”

Timotheus, who hails from Omuthiya in the Oshikoto Region, says during the good years he had been “targeted” by the family to pay school fees, including hostel boarding fees, and other school-related costs of the family children. The number of school-going children he was supporting then was nine.

It was a burden he could carry, he says, because during that five-year period he was earning an average of N$16,000 to N$17,000 per month, and during the periods he was with the Geysir in Mauritania – for nine months in 2019 and for six months in 2020 – he says he was making between N$25,000 and N$30,000 per month. As with all the other fishermen interviewed, it was more money than he had ever earned before, or since.

Despite all the family expenses, Timotheus was able to buy himself a car, a Volkswagen Passat, and he bought livestock in the north, as well as spending around N$30,000 over the years to construct a small business premises back in the Oshikoto Region from which he intended to start doing business. This was on top of paying rent and living costs at Walvis Bay.

“Life was good because everything was easier to do,” he says.

Job Timotheus has not been able to support his ex-
tended family, or himself, as he used to since being released at the end of August 2020 from the Geysir while in Mauritania. He and other Namibian crew were told that the vessel would not be returning to Namibia and they were flown back to the country.

Now the only income Job Timotheus can rely on is the N$4,000 he receives as a monthly stipend under a scheme arranged in late 2020 between the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources and fishing companies that are awarded quotas from which to pay the unemployed former fishermen the monthly stipend. He has been receiving this money since late 2020.

He describes his situation now as a “disaster”. “That N$4,000 is not enough if you pay rent and have kids and have a family,” he says.

Aside from that, he hasn’t been able to complete the building of his business property and he has lost his livestock to drought during that last period of employment with Saga Seafood.

Timotheus, like many of his former colleagues, has not been able to secure any other fixed employment since losing his job with Saga Seafood, and has to go out and search for odd jobs to supplement the monthly stipend. But he says “a month can go by and you can not get anything”.

Job Timotheus is still hoping to somehow scrape together the money to start a small business from which he can support himself and his family.

Message for Samherji:

“My hope is maybe one day, at least, this company, Samherji, must know that it has unfinished business. It must at least do something for us. We know there is no more job with Samherji, so they must at least pay us something, so we can start our lives, do our business.”
When he lost his job, he just went quiet. I used to ask him what was going on. He told us ‘Things are not well and our employer is not treating us well, they are retrenching us’.

Life was good and the family stayed together during the time that Josua Hafeni still had a fisherman’s job aboard the MFV Heinaste, operated by Arctic-Nam Fishing, out of Walvis Bay. ArcticNam Fishing was a joint venture between Icelandic fishing company Samherji and local Namibian partners. Josua Hafeni was a Heinaste fisherman from 2013 to 2018, and his children remember those times.

“I don’t know what [job] my father was doing, but everything was good,” says 21-year-old Joshua Kaloloka. “There was no complication, and we were staying together in one big house. When my father came home, he could afford anything that I wanted. We had DSTV (digital satellite television). He used to take me out to KFC.”

Anna Mukede, a niece of Josua Hafeni whom he had raised as one of his own children, also has fond memories of that time in their lives.

“My father took care of me when I was in school. I did not need anything. I was in the hostel in Tsumeb [in the Oshikoto Region],” she says. “When he came from the sea, he used to bring us fish eggs and fish. We used to enjoy it,” she remembers.

Even though he had still been very young during those years, 13-year-old Josua Hafeni Jr. also has memories of those times. He remembers that they ate a lot of fish those years. “We enjoyed fish. We even got tired of it. He also used to bring us yoghurt,” he recalls.

Life changed for everyone when Hafeni Josua Hafeni lost his job in late 2018. “When he lost his job, he just went quiet,” says Anna Mukede. “I used to ask him what was going on. He told us ‘Things are not well and our employer is not treating us well, they are retrenching us’.”

Josua Hafeni and his children in Kuisebmond, Walvis Bay, at the end of 2023.

‘We are the ones that suffered the most’ – the human rights impacts of the fishrot corruption scandal on fisheries workers

Voices of the children of a former fisherman

‘We sometimes only see our father after three months’
"It hit us mentally," recalls Joshua Kaloloka. In 2019 the family had to move out of the house Josua Hafeni had been renting in Kuisebmond, and since then the family has been split up. He had been planning to buy the house, but his retrenchment destroyed that plan. Three of his children now live with his brother in the Tutaleni informal location at the town, while Anna Mukede now shares a one-room shack in Twaloloka informal settlement with his sister. The fact that the family no longer lives together has impacted relations between Josua Hafeni and his children. “Now me and my two younger brothers are living with our uncle in another house,” says Joshua Kaloloka. “Sometimes I just want us to have a father and son conversation as we used to when we were living in the house in Kuisebmond. But that is difficult because we only see him when he brings us bread sometimes,” says the younger Kaloloka. The children say that sometimes three months can pass without them seeing Josua Hafeni, despite all of them living in the same town.

When Anna Mukede returned to Walvis Bay in 2019 from Tsumeb, Josua Hafeni had initially been able to pay for her enrollment in a chef’s course at a hospitality training institute, but she had to drop out because he could not afford to continue paying for the course. Joshua Kaloloka had also wanted to study, to become an engineer or in a vocational field, after leaving school in 2020, but has had to let go of that dream as his father cannot assist him with paying for his studies. “When I went to Grade 12, my dream was to become an engineer," states Joshua Kaloloka. “I knew whether I passed or failed Grade 12, my father would not be able to afford anything for us. He is the only person among our relatives who could do something for us.”

Hafeni Kaloloka Jr., who lives with his mother in another part of Kuisebmond, and who is in Grade 8 at Duinesig High School in the neighbourhood, says his father’s situation has impacted his dreams. “It was very hard for me because when my father was working at sea, he used to take us out to KFC. Life was just nice. He was even the first person to buy me soccer boots,” says Joshua Hafeni Jr., who has dreams of becoming a professional soccer (football) player. The football fanatic says if his father were to get his job back now, the first thing he would want is new clothes and soccer boots. Joshua Hafeni Jr. also wants to learn how to use computers but he cannot afford the course that costs N$350 per year. He also says he sometimes cannot participate in group projects at school that require him to contribute material or go on an excursion. “Before, my father took us to Dunes Mall and bought us nice things,” he says. “Now he buys us cheap clothes because he is also struggling.”

The story of Josua Hafeni and his family is one that plays out across many lives at Walvis Bay in the wake of the job losses that have accompanied and been a direct consequence of the turmoil caused by Fishrot.
Reflections of local politicians on the local impacts of Fishrot

The Mayor of Walvis Bay, Trevino Forbes, the Walvis Bay Rural Constituency Councillor, Florian Tegako Donatus, and the Swapo Party Information Mobiliser, Patrick Bartholomeus, all attended the local launch of the Fishrot human rights impact assessment study at the Namsov Learn in Peace Centre, in Kuisebmond, Walvis Bay, on 28 November 2023. The statements published here either came from the speeches made at the meeting or from interviews conducted with these local politicians after the event.

The Walvis Bay meeting had been organised to host about 50 people. However, more than 100 former fishermen and fisheries workers showed up, wanting to know what the study was about and some wanting to tell their story right there.

**Walvis Bay Mayor Trevino Forbes**

*On the situation local fishermen find themselves in:*

Some of these gentlemen sitting in the audience today have been in my office. We are now looking at an industry that was once so rich, and now the people who worked in that industry have been so affected to the point that they have become, allow me to say this, beggars. I’m very sorry to use that word, but that is what we, as Walvis Bay, have been reduced to. As you are sitting here, you have lost jobs, some of our brothers have lost their lives and livelihoods. In the past, when you came to Walvis Bay, everybody wanted to become a fisherman. That need, that want, that passion is no longer there. It’s gone.

*On the impact of Fishrot on the Walvis Bay community:*

“The fishing industry was the industry that brought life to this community of Walvis Bay. All other businesses stem from the fishing industry in our harbour town. So, it is unfair that we can just move on from what happened. I do not know much about the fishing industry, but I can see the effects of what Fishrot did to Walvis Bay. People came from all over, and they’re still coming from all over the country to Walvis Bay for the prospects of a better life. But what is happening to our people, the ones coming from the south, the ones coming from the north, they’re coming to Walvis Bay now to suffer. And that is the reality of the Fishrot scandal, the biggest uncovered corruption in our country. It can never be downplayed. Never. We must take the proper and appropriate steps to rectify this.”

*On governance and regulation of the fisheries sector:*

“It’s my belief that when you give a quota to a company or vessel, it employs people like yourself (fishermen) in the industry. You are doing the right thing. But when you give a quota to an individual, for whatever reason it may be, you are doing it at the expense of the Namibian people. The resources of this country belong to the majority, to all the people of this country. It cannot be put in the hands of a single person. After the laws were amended to give a certain individual all the powers and rights to do certain things, I want to ask you: Was that specific legislation reversed, or is the power still in the hands of the individual? Have we done right by our people, or are we still continuing on the same path? Nothing has changed. You are sitting here today because you know nothing has changed.”
Florian Tegako Donatus, Walvis Bay Rural Constituency councillor

On the impact Fishrot has had on Walvis Bay:

“I don’t think we understand the suffering of the people of Walvis Bay. People have suffered a lot psychologically, emotionally, physically and financially. Everyone has been sugar-coating the situation and painting a picture that everything is fine. But to be really honest, things are not fine. Fishrot has damaged the face of Walvis Bay beyond repair and it can only be fixed when we start talking about the truth and nothing else. Fishrot has brought poverty in Walvis Bay. And not only Walvis Bay. The poverty, you can also see it in other parts of the country.”

Before Fishrot, there were no ghettos by the regional council office, there was no Twaloloka.

On how fishermen are regarded today:

“Women are no longer interested in marrying fishermen because they fear that they will lose their job the next day. They are afraid that they will not have bread for their children the next day. And they no longer see fishermen as breadwinners of the household or heads of the household. The majority of fishermen had houses in Walvis Bay, and they lived with their wives, and their children were in school. Today, the majority of the fishermen are a burden to their wives because they have lost their jobs. They can no longer afford to pay for the bond of the house and vehicle instalments. They can’t even afford to keep their children in school. Young women who were inspired by their parents to marry the fishermen are being discouraged. And that’s why we have a lot of fishermen who are battling mental health issues because life is no longer easy for them.”

On how fishermen were regarded in the past:

“Growing up on the streets of Walvis Bay, I vividly remember the years between 1995 and 2000 when fishermen brought in a lot of fish from the sea. Every ghetto (shack) had fish on the roof, and it was a commodity that everyone had access to. People cooked fish for the love of it, not necessarily to eat, and when it was cooked, everyone could eat. Nowa- days, it’s no longer like that. One must go and buy fish, and it’s very expensive. No one is coming from the sea with fish anymore, and that’s why we have a lot of fishermen who are battling mental health issues because life is no longer easy for them.”

On the condition of local communities:

“Before Fishrot, there were no ghettos by the regional council office, there was no Twaloloka (shack community). There were no illegal squatters and people grabbing land in Walvis Bay. People were comfortable living with their brothers and sisters, renting or staying in backyard shacks in an orderly manner. But now, there is the mushrooming of illegal ghettos, and people grabbing land. Because they can no longer afford rent for backyard shacks. Every day, in this office, around 10 to 20 people will come in, and they are only asking for food. We are a harbour town and people are supposed to have food. These people used to survive on fish they get from the sea. But now they have to go buy the fish, instead of getting them for free like the way they normally used to get.”
Patrick Bartholomeus, Swapo Party Information Mobiliser for Walvis Bay Rural Constituency

The government has recognised that these people were affected by Fishrot. That’s why Namsov employees were the first to be assisted to get jobs. Now the issue of the Saga and Geysir vessels, they were overlooked.

On the ruling party government’s response to Fishrot and the conditions of fishermen:

“So, those people who were retrenched in 2019, some of them in 2020, they are affected as they are narrating themselves. They lost their incomes, they lost their houses, they lost their family members and the women lost their husbands. The government has recognised that these things have an effect in the community. The government has come up with a remedy. That’s why you see when the government started addressing the issue of the fishermen they started with Namsov. The government has recognised that these people were affected by Fishrot. That’s why Namsov employees were the first to be assisted to get jobs. Now the issue of the Saga and Geysir vessels, they were overlooked.”

On changes in the fishermen community over the years:

“Let me say I joined the fishing industry in 1995 and I have good experience when it comes to the fishing industry, being also an employee of the Ministry of Fisheries. Those were the good days. When the one vessel comes in you will see the wind of change in the town of Walvis Bay. Then you hear vessel A is in and the fishermen are here. One could look at the life of those fishermen, they were more social than the current fishermen, who are more focused on their own development. Whenever they get money they want to develop themselves. The spending of those old fishermen and the spending of current fishermen is completely different. But you will also have to look at fishermen from former Ovamboland, those years they were not really interested in having houses, even me, we were just renting. But now that we have established ourselves, we have our families here, unlike before. So now life has become difficult because we changed from just merely coming to work and going back home. Now we have established ourselves as Walvis Bay-ers and we have our families here. Life has changed and it’s become difficult if you don’t have income.”

Swapo Party Information Mobiliser for Walvis Bay Rural Constituency, Patrick Bartholomeus, speaking at the local Fishrot human rights impact study launch in Kuisebmond, Walvis Bay, on 28 November 2023.
Many former fishermen and fisheries workers at Walvis Bay are still in the grips of the fallout of Fishrot. The state of the affected fishermen and fisheries workers was summed up as follows by Philip Munenguni, acting president of the National Union of Namibian Workers (NUNW), in an interview for this study, when he stated: “Unfortunately they are still suffering. They still don’t have employment, especially those that don’t have qualifications or skills. They are still in the street. Many of them are still in the north. Those that are in Walvis Bay are still not having work.”

He added: “I understand that they are being paid a fee of N$4,000 per month (under the government employment redress programme). For the past three years they have been living on this N$4,000 and it’s very difficult. That’s why most of them, since the Fishrot time, have not gone to their villages. They are still in Walvis Bay because they cannot afford to go back.”

Based on the interviews, many of the former fishermen and fisheries workers perceive themselves as stuck, not just physically in Walvis Bay, but also at a standstill in their lives. They simply don’t have the means to move forward or in another direction from where they are. For many, this situation was causing them mental stress.

At the study introduction and launch event on 28 November 2023, in Kuisebmond, Walvis Bay, a group of former Saga Seafood fishermen handed the researchers a letter (See Annex 6) they had written and submitted to the fisheries minister, pleading for assistance. The tone and content of the letter capture and express the frustrations, anxieties, desperation and devastation of the prolonged effects of Fishrot being experienced by the former fishermen and fisheries workers.

At the end of the event, another former fisherman, from ArcticNam’s Heinaste vessel, handed a note to the researchers, in which he expressed his personal sense of loss and damage, and stated that: “This affected me personally, especially my health.”

However, it is clearly not only the former fishermen and fisheries workers that are still grappling with the effects and impacts of Fishrot. According to local politician and former Walvis Bay local authority councillor, Gibson Goseb, who was interviewed for this study, the town and community of Walvis Bay continue to struggle and limp along. “Fishrot, in all essence, didn’t only have an effect on the fishing sector, it had a domino effect,” he said. “Most of the companies did have contracts with fishing companies. Those companies had to lay off employees due to the side effects of Fishrot. So, one can see that the effects of Fishrot had devastating effects on the economy of the town. It was devastating and it still, today, does have an effect.”

Goseb noted that the decline in municipal revenue meant that the “municipality couldn’t keep up to its mandate of giving services to the citizenry of Walvis Bay. And it was a sorry state and it still remains a sorry state of affairs”. He added that the “municipality is trying here and there to keep up to their mandate, but then people still remain unemployed, people still remain without an income. Yet the municipality of Walvis Bay is trying by all means to keep its head above water. But it’s a difficult situation.”

One thing that everyone spoken to appears to share is the viewpoint that Icelandic fishing company Samherji needs to account for the negative impacts it has left behind at Walvis Bay.
The study adopted a qualitative approach that consisted primarily of interviewing informants in order to gather information about their life / lived experiences. Interviews were conducted from October 2023 through January 2024.

The secondary method of information gathering consisted of desk research and document analysis. The key question that the study sought to answer was: How did / has the alleged corruption perpetrated in the Fishrot fisheries corruption scandal impact the lives of fishermen and fisheries workers directly affected?

The secondary question that the study sought to answer was: How was the local / specific community within which the former fishermen and fisheries workers lived impacted by the fallout of Fishrot?

In this regard, two main groups of informants were identified and interviewed in order to answer these questions:

- First, former fishermen and fisheries workers who were / had been employed by the companies directly implicated or affected by the alleged corruption;
- Second, the local and regional politicians and unionists with insights into how local communities were affected / impacted by Fishrot.

Most of the former fishermen and fisheries workers were identified for interviewing in consultation with their union or fishermen’s group / association representatives. The remaining informants / participants are / were representative of the various unions operating among fishermen and fisheries workers, and their dependents in some instances, as well as interviews of local politicians and unionists, and supplemented by information and observations drawn from documents, reports and statements.

Research Tool

The research tool consists of a list / range of questions meant to gather as much information about the informant as possible. The questions were adapted to the participants’ responses. The questions are / were:

- Please state your name, age and where you are from in the country?
- When did you come to Walvis Bay and where did you come from? Why did you come here?
- Did you come here alone or with a family?
- What work did you find in Walvis Bay? How long did you work there?
- When did you become a fisherman / fisheries worker?
- When did you start working for [company]? How did you get the job? How long did you work there?
- What was your employment status (casual / permanent)? What position did you hold and what did it entail?
- What vessel(s) did you work on?
- Did you have a basic salary? How much did you earn (basic salary / commissions)? Did you have any benefits?
- What was your biggest paycheck and when did you earn it?
- How did you spend your money?
- How many people depended on you / did you support with your earnings? What did that assistance / support look like?
- Did you own / buy / build a house? Did you own / buy a car? When did you buy it?
- What was your life like during that period?
- How did you lose your job and what were you told?
- How do you feel about your situation?
- Do you receive the N$4,000?
- How do you see your life going forward? What expectations / hopes do you have about life going forward?
- What message do you have for Samherji? What message do you have for government?
- What would you like to see happen?
- Is there anything else you would like to say or that you want to be included in the report?

About the study participants

Study informants / participants were specifically and primarily chosen from among former fishermen and fisheries workers residing or located at Walvis Bay, in the western, coastal Erongo Region of Namibia. The fishermen and fisheries workers interviewed overwhelmingly reside in the Kuisebmond neighbourhood / area of the harbour town. This is significant because anecdotally, it is the community of Kuisebmond which has been hardest hit by the Fishrot corruption, as the community was and remains highly dependent on the livelihoods and fortunes of fishermen and fisheries workers. The remaining informants / participants are / were representatives of the various unions operating among fishermen and fisheries workers, local politicians, including a former mayor of Walvis Bay and a regional constituency councillor, and a few members of the Kuisebmond community.

A sample size of between 30 – 50 (former) fishermen and fisheries workers was adopted in order to ensure the findings were as representative as it was possible to get. See Annex 3 for a complete list of the (former) fishermen and fisheries workers interviewed.
Consent Form – Interviews

Project / Study Title: Fishrot – Human Rights Impact Assessment
Interviewer: Esther Mbathera
Principal Researcher: Frederico Links

Consent

I consent to being interviewed for this project / study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

I acknowledge that participants / interviewees can choose one of two options around confidentiality: either I can be identified by name in any publications arising from the research / interview, or if I prefer, I can be referred to by pseudonym and my name will not be used in publications. Please choose one of the below (delete / strike through as applicable):

- I consent to being identified by name when my interview is used in any publication arising from the research.
- I consent to participating on the basis of confidentiality, where my name will be pseudonymised and only the researcher / interviewer and principal researcher will know my identity if my interview is used in publications.

I consent to the interview being recorded and that a transcript of the interview may be produced from the recorded interview for publication purposes.

I consent that the information / data / material that I provide during the interview may be used in future publications, both print and online.

I understand that the other researchers named on this project / study will have access to this information / data / material.

I understand that the other researchers may use my words in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs.

Privacy Notice

We only collect information / data / material that we need for the research project and if you have requested confidentiality, we will de-identify your personal information / data from the research data through pseudonymisation or anonymisation.

All the personal information / data you submit will be processed by myself as the interviewer / researcher and by the principal researcher.

You can request access to the information / data we process about you at any time.

All the personal information / data / material collected during this project / study will be retained and securely stored by the researchers and / or the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) for as long as the information / data / material is necessary for legitimate research purposes.

Consent Agreement

I have read through this form and consent to being interviewed for this project / study:

Participant name: ……………………………
Signature: ………………………………………
Date: ……………………………………………

Interviewer: ………………………………………
Signature: ………………………………………
Date: ……………………………………………
Fishermen and former fishermen interviewed

**Namsov Fishing Enterprises (Pty) Ltd**
- Thomas Haimbala
- Andreas Mandume Kagola
- Natanael Andreus
- Africa Nambele
- Daniel Ricardo
- Sakeus Kandjulu
- Ipinge Joel
- Wifried ipinge
- Matias Amakali
- Ikango Johannes
- Apollo Malwa

**ArcticNam (Pty) Ltd – MFV Heinaste**
- Reagan Mboo Mukande
- Golden Kashuwa
- Hamutenya David
- David Hamalwah
- Jeremiah Shigwedha
- Paulus Shikongo
- Erastus Hamunjela
- Martin Sakeus
- Simon Nambango
- Hauflku Ndlilllinate
- Wendy Shikukwete
- Theophelus Dula
- Simson Natanga
- Mweshihala Shidule
- Hafeni Josua

**Saga Seafood (Pty) Ltd – MFV Geysir**
- Ananias Shitilu
- Abraham Abraham
- Job Timotheus
- Joseph Nghishiyange
- Inasiu Handjengo
- Erkki Mwahangange
- Ileni Weyulu
- Abraham Shilumbu

**Saga Seafood (Pty) Ltd – MFV SAGA**
- Eliakim Hamukoto
- Hitumbwile Simson
- Immanuel Jonas

**Seaflower Pelagic Processing employees**
- Andreas Kazanga
- Ruben Hinalume
- Joseph Kamati

**Fishermen children and dependents**
- Josua Kaloloka
- Hafeni Kaloloka
- Anna Mukende
- Moses Tshiweka
"We are the ones that suffered the most" – the human rights impacts of the fishrot corruption scandal on fisheries workers

MINISTRY OF FISHERIES AND MARINE RESOURCES

PUBLISHERING THE NAMES OF RETRENCHED NAMSOV EMPLOYEES

In the interest of transparency, fairness and good governance, the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources hereby announces the names of former employees of Namsov who were retrenched due to non-availability of quotas. Hence, if any anomaly is detected, in the form of omission or addition of names, the public is kindly requested to contact the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources respectively.

The following names were submitted by the Trade Unions, Associations and verified by the Karas and Erongo Governor’s offices respectively:

ANNEX 4
'WE ARE THE ONES THAT SUFFERED THE MOST' – THE HUMAN RIGHTS IMPACTS OF THE FISHERY CORRUPTION SCANDAL ON FISHERIES WORKERS | 41
FORMER EMPLOYEES OF SAGA SEAFOOD.

We’re former employees of saga seafood, we’re bellyaching about the situation that our company left us unexpectedly. For now, they put our life in danger because we lose most of our properties due to fishrot.

Most of the people were having thoughts of getting married, and some people were busy building their houses and some of them were having unfinished loan and most of them did not fish paying their houses so all the properties are gone due to that situation in the company, which is the main courses is fishrot.

This situation affects our children also because most of our kids were school in different towns but due to this situation we can’t able to afford their school fees. Most of our names are blacklisted due to outstanding loans and the main courses is the situation of fishrot. But the most painful part is that some of our colleagues lost their life due to the situation of work that they can’t able to handle the situation.

Some of the parent have kids that are schooling at private school and high institution now because we can’t able to resolve their school funds now their chased out, and some people were renting as well but now they pursued.

We don’t real have problem with samheri company for island, we only want our Namibian government to put any agreement with island company, for that company to at least help us to fix our damages and to enable to pay our outstanding payments.

We will be thankful if they react on our request in a short period of time due to the terrible latitude we’re living now.

For more information, contact:
1. Jonas Immanuel :081 331 4997
2. David Kakuwa :081 316 1028
3. Hangula Melkisedek :082 383 8641
"We are the ones that suffered the most" – the human rights impacts of the fisheries corruption scandal on workers.
About the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR)

Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) was founded in 2001 as a not-for-profit organisation with a mission to deliver, independent, analytical, critical yet constructive research on social, political and economic issues that affect development Namibia. The IPPR was established in the belief that development is best promoted through free and critical debate informed by quality research. The IPPR is independent of government, political parties, business, trade unions and other interest groups. Anyone can receive the IPPR’s research free of charge by contacting the IPPR at the contact details below. Publications can also be downloaded from the IPPR website.

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