



**G**emma Gades is an active leader of a local fisherfolk group protecting Hinatuan Bay. Located in the province of Surigao del Sur on the eastern side of Mindanao Island in southern Philippines, Hinatuan Bay is made up of small island ecosystems abundant with marine life. Women from Mahaba Island are part of a community group called “Ladies in United Movement Onward to Development” (LUMOT), formed to address the threats facing coastal resources – their primary source of income. The threats include fishing using compressors and fine mesh nets; the use of

## PROFILE

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This information has been compiled from the following sources: [www.lmmanetwork.org](http://www.lmmanetwork.org) and [www.icsf.net/SU/Mon/EN/88](http://www.icsf.net/SU/Mon/EN/88)

destructive devices and poisons; the clearing of mangrove forests for fishpond construction; siltation of seagrass beds due to limestone quarrying; and algal overgrowth due to domestic wastes. Members of LUMOT have been trained to deepen their understanding of the coastal environment and to boost their ability to contribute to the management of coastal resources.

Ka Gemma, an active member of LUMOT, became president of the organization in 1999. Later that year, the group NAMAHAHIN or the Alliance of Fisherfolk Organizations in Hinatuan was formed to address bay issues at the municipal level and to link different stakeholder groups. In 2000, Ka Gemma was elected President of NAMAHAHIN. NAMAHAHIN leaders are currently working with a national

coalition of voluntary groups and fisherfolk federations called NGOs for Fisheries Reform (NFR) for effective policy responses on the issue of fisherfolk resettlement in Hinatuan.

Reefs in Hinatuan Bay are slowly making a comeback after years of abuse. Eight fish sanctuaries exist within the bay and are patrolled by community members. Hinatuan Bay, where efforts are on to empower women to protect their seas, is one of the few sites in the Philippines with women fish wardens. Ka Gemma patrols the sanctuaries together with the wardens. Their efforts are bearing fruit; the big fishes have returned and the coral reefs are recovering. Dynamite fishing has been stopped for nearly two years thanks to active enforcement by fisherfolk organizations, fish wardens and the maritime police.

Since its formation, LUMOT has undertaken gender mainstreaming in its activities; husbands help women establish their fish sanctuary and build the guardhouse, as well as participate in mangrove reforestation and patrolling and enforcement of the sanctuaries.

Not everyone is happy about the sanctuaries. Some fishermen argue that sanctuaries should be opened up to local fishers now that the fish is back. In October 2003, tension between supporters and opponents grew when discontented fishers from Cambatong began a petition campaign. Ka Gemma and supportive local fisherfolk continue to advocate that the sanctuaries be maintained. With the help of the non-government organization, Center for Empowerment and Resource Development (CERD), campaigns to inform the displaced fishers about the benefits of maintaining the sanctuary are being carried out to this day. ❏