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WOMEN IN FISHING VILLAGES: ROLES AND POTENTIAL
FOR COASTAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

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1. INTRODUCTION

The significant contribution of women in sustaining the community's socio-economic life is often glossed over by statistical data. This neglect or ignorance result to underutilization of women's potential and confine them to passive acceptance of their abject conditions.

The Declaration of the International Decade of Women by the United Nations in 1975 generated awareness of gender as an important variable in analyzing social issues and in formulating appropriate development schemes. This concern is manifested in the proliferation of researches and projects on women's role in development. Many women researchers and activists argue that improving women's conditions does not merely imply integrating them to the current development mainstream, but there is a need to re-orient the male bias of the dominant development concepts and strategies (Loutfi, 1980; Nelson, 1979). A crucial element in this re-orientation is the deeper understanding of the changing roles of women.

In many parts of the Third World, including the Philippines, the deteriorating economic conditions exert added pressure on women, especially those in poor households. The women's domain is no longer confined to the household as mothers, daughters and

sisters. Experiences reveal that in recent years many women have contributed more working hours, ventured to varied productive activities, and worked outside their homes, at the same time that they continue to perform their traditional gender roles in the family. In spite of these changes, however, their political involvement, particularly in decision-making and leadership roles, has been limited or even negligible.

Studies show that women in many Philippine rural households actually work for as long as 15-16 hours daily (Pagaduan, et.al, 1986; Illo, 1983): doing household chores, rearing children, working in the fields either as unpaid family labor or as waged seasonal workers during peak seasons, and engaging in other income-generating or income-substituting activities. For Philippine fishing communities, there are very few accounts on how women actually contribute to family sustenance. Acheson (1981) maintains that there remains a strong sexual division of labor in many fishing societies where the men fish while the women maintain the household. Field observations, however, tend to suggest that such roles have changed in recent years.

2. THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

A significant component of the Philippine economy is the fishing industry. It contributes 5% to the Gross National Product and comprises 20% of the total agricultural output. It employs about 1 million, and is the source of survival to an estimated 6 million Filipinos.

The deteriorating condition of the Philippine coastal resources calls for more efficient management strategies. Quite recently, the Lingayen Gulf, located in Northern Philippines and one of the traditional fishing grounds facing gradual destruction, has been the focus of a comprehensive study on coastal resource management. To some 48,882 fishing families living in the coastal towns surrounding the Gulf and other households residing in neighboring towns, saving the Gulf means saving their major income and food source.

Ferrer (1988) proposes a community-based coastal resource management scheme to protect fisheries resources and enforce laws. A community-based approach to coastal resource management underscores the need to involve the greater masses of people in decision-making and action programs to protect the environment. It is in this context that women's roles and potentials are analyzed in this study. As the other half of fishing villages, women exert pressure

on the coastal resources. Its protection and proper utilization also demand their primary concern especially because the future of their children is at stake.

The present study focuses on the following areas of concern:

- What are the major contributions of women in sustaining fishing households?
- What is the extent of women's involvement in economic- political activities in fishing communities?
- How do women cope with the double pressure from their traditional gender roles and increasing economic activities?
- What are the implications of these data for a community-based coastal resource management scheme?

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK/REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In the Philippine context, women constitute almost half of the population. The current focus on women's studies is brought about by the growing recognition of the significant role of women in development efforts. Feminists argue that women's conditions can best be understood not only in terms of poverty issues but also in terms of gender issues.

3.1 WOMEN IN POOR HOUSEHOLDS

Poverty is the most basic problem by men and women in most rural areas of the Philippines. This is partly manifested by malnutrition, high infant mortality rate, unsafe water, lack of health services, low wages and underemployment, and unstable peace and order situation.

"Under this conditions, women's problems are related to the question of survival, the drudgery of domestic and productive activities outside the home, and inequalities in the distribution of income and wealth, as in all class societies."

(Pagaduan, et. al., 1986. p. 19)

Empirical studies in Asian, African and Latin American countries suggest that women in poor households contribute immensely in ensuring their families survival amidst such abject conditions (Heyzer, 1986; Boserup, 1970). Contrary to the notion that women's role is relegated to auxiliary and subordinate position in industrializing societies, women in subsistence production tend to expand their role especially in the economic sphere (Heyzer, 1986). Boserup (1970) contends that poor households have three main livelihood sources where women play a major role: equal involvement in the informal sector is

According to Heyzer (1986), the persistence of petty production and distribution ensures the existence of low-cost services and goods.

Housework is non-monetarized or non-valued. Miralao (1980) points out that women bear the burden of housework whether they are married, unmarried, employed or unemployed. Many researchers emphasize the magnitude and significance of women's domestic tasks (i.e., daily household maintenance and care of children and family) to the family's sustenance (Illo, 1977; Licuanan & Gonzales, 1976).

In a situation of constant poverty, the main concern is how best to generate additional income and allocate available resources. In the Philippines where women generally control household finances, decreasing real incomes in the countryside means greater difficulty for women to make both ends meet. It has been observed that in times of cash shortages, the burden of finding supplementary income, food for household consumption or sources of credit for the family subsistence fall on the women (Bautista, et. al., 1986).

*Informal sector is characterized by small-scale enterprises which rely on indigenous resources, family ownership and skills acquired outside the school system (Heyzer, 1986, p. 3.)

There is also a growing number of female-headed rural households due to separation, death or search for income opportunities. Boserup (1970) cites cases of wives of small farmers becoming more burdened by agricultural work because husbands take on non-agricultural work.

3.2 GENDER ISSUES: SUBORDINATION AND EMANCIPATION

Most women are trapped in the double burden of household tasks and economic pressures. The dominant belief in the countryside remains that "women do not work" or "women are secondary breadwinners". And since men are considered breadwinners, even if they fail to earn sufficient income, Heyzer (1986) contends that the power of decision-making is with the men in situations of conflict.

In the larger social sphere, it is the man who assumes the role of contact point between the household and the outside community. Most government programs such as training and extension services are also geared for males (Godley, 1987), while females have access to extension programs pertaining to women's traditional concerns such as cooking and sewing (Heyzer, 1986). Men are generally recognized as

owners of the land, hence, credits or loans, trainings, and many socio-economic projects are usually channeled through the male members of the household.

Agricultural improvement also tend to have a male bias. With the introduction of labor-saving techniques, particularly farm machineries, more women are displaced from paid labor (Illo, 1983). At the same time, new technology has created marginalized tasks for women, e.g., picking left-over grains as the palay is being threshed (Bautista, et. al., 1986).

Membership and leadership in rural organizations are generally male-dominated, except for the traditional women's domain such as civic and religious groups. Their non-involvement is mainly due to the demands of household tasks and the necessity of contributing to the family livelihood.

In spite of the long history of women's movement in the Philippines and the growing consciousness about gender issues (Camagay, 1986; Gabriela, 1985; Maranan, 1985), most rural women seem undisturbed by their secondary role in politics. For many, women's problems remain subordinate to, or worse, separate from national

and class oppression (Pagaduan, et.al., 1986). There are efforts, however, towards education and organization of, for and by women, especially among the poorest sectors of society. These women's organizations aim to respond to specific gender issues as an integral and vital component of local and national development issues.

METHODOLOGY

The main source of the data were the ethnographic studies of seven fishing villages in Pangasinan and La Union:

- Sinabalian, Bolinao, Pangasinan
- Carot, Anda, Pangasinan
- Telbang, Alaminos, Pangasinan
- Capandanan, Lingayen, Pangasinan
- Nibaliw West, San Fabian, Pangasinan
- Balawarte, Agoo, La Union
- Alaska, Aringay, La Union

The ethnographic data were gathered basically through integration methods, interviews and field observations. In-depth interviews, discussions with key informants, and case studies were further conducted to focus on the relevant information for this study. The review of the literature on women's studies provided the framework for analysis and synthesis of the data gathered.

Due to the qualitative nature of the research results, preliminary data validation were attempted through informal discussions with other researchers and community organizers who have worked with women in fishing villages. It is suggested that the study be subjected to further discussion and refinement through group discussions/workshops with women in fishing villages themselves and other groups concerned with women's issues.

5. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

5.1 WOMEN AS MOTHERS AND WIVES

5.1.1 Household Responsibilities

The care of children, cooking, washing clothes, tidying of the house and sweeping the yard are responsibilities that are considered inherent to being women. The task of fetching water, both for drinking and washing purposes, is most often done by women even when the source of water is quite far from the house. Though men can be asked to fetch water, they are usually not available most of the day.

With more women now sharing in economic activities, husbands see it fair that they assist in household tasks such as watching over children and cooking. However, this cooperation rarely extends

to washing clothes, the most time-consuming of all household tasks. This is usually done by the daughter or a close female relative. Men will only perform this essential task when there is no other female able to do it. It is said that when one sees a man washing clothes, this could indicate that his wife has just given birth. When a man is often seen doing women's tasks, he is labelled 'Andres' (dominated by the wife).

The household falls back on the support of relatives, specifically the grandparents and other female relatives when wives are unable to attend to household chores. Maiden aunts or single women relatives are automatically seen as caretakers of their sibling's offsprings. Older children also contribute to household labor.

5.1.2 Childbearing And Rearing

A pregnant woman usually continues working till the day she senses the child will be born. People explained that that keeps the mother's body strong. A few days after the delivery, the mother is back

at work. In Nibaliw West for example, a mother working as a fish vendor would come home at lunchtime and in the afternoon just to feed the baby.

The average number of children is six. In some study sites, women have up to more than a dozen children. A factor which influences high birth rate is the desire for many children whose assistance in the household is a big help. As one woman said paradoxically, she wanted to have more children so that they would take care of the younger children that were to come. Infant mortality rate is also quite high. Some informants expressed a feeling of harassment after having more than four children, but at the same time have the attitude that once born, children should be accepted and cared for.

There is awareness of different family planning methods but their use is limited. It is commonly known that women regularly drink an herbal concoction to "hasten menstruation". Some make use of methods which are available for free: pills, tubal ligation. A few experienced ill effects of these methods. They also

practice natural birth control methods. Vasectomy is shunned because it is believed to weaken the man physically. Birth control tends to be part of the women's responsibility.

Children learn their sex roles early. It is a common sight to see small girls accompanying their mother at the pump with their own basin and small article of clothing to wash. When the mother is busy at some other task or if both parents are away, the oldest daughter is usually assigned the responsibility of looking after a younger sibling. Children's games imitate their future roles thus complementing the learning process. It was noticed that despite the nearness of the sea, most women do not know how to swim. Seven-year old girls in Alaska and Balawarte on the other hand are already adept at bargaining and selling fish. They even fill in for their mothers once in a while.

Both parents exercise authority in disciplining their children. However, the father is usually away working for most of

the day, so this is more frequently associated with the mother.

5.1.3 Family Decision-Making

Household finances are managed by the wife from earnings which the husband is supposed to turn over to her. Sometimes the money goes directly to the wife when she is the one who sells her husband's catch. In Telbang for example it is a woman, usually the wife of the net owner, uses her discretion to divide the catch from sigay between the crewmembers and the owner of the net. Some women meet their husbands returning from the sea and are the ones who sort out the fish caught according to size and kind. Larger catches are disposed off by the fisherman to compradors or rigatons, without the intermediation of his wife. He is then expected to turn over the complete amount to her when he gets home. (There are complaints by women though about husbands who spend the whole amount on drinking.) The norm is for the wife to give her husband the pocket money to spend on cigarettes, liquor or other needs when he asks.

Aside from seeing to the household budget, wives also allocate money for expenditures for boat and gear maintenance, including investment in new nets or gear, purchase of spare parts for the motor and the buying of gasoline for the next day's fishing trip. This role but naturally belongs to women since the family's welfare depends on the success of the fishing operations. It entitles the wife to take an interest and to participate to a certain extent in decision making on matters pertaining to fishing. However, ownership of the gear, boat and property are usually attributed to the man since it was he who earned the money that was used to purchase them.

As the ones in charge of finances, it falls on women to find ways for the family to survive when their husband's income is not enough. This is exemplified in sari-sari stores where women are the frequent borrowers of food and other daily household needs. Lean times call for women to help augment family income or even become the main income-earners by working. These income-generating activities are

seen as supplementary to the husband's and temporary which can be dropped when the need arises. When the alternative livelihood is done at home, women continue to attend to household responsibilities. When making a living takes the wife outside the home, some household tasks are passed on to the husband, children and female relatives. If it will mean that no mature female will be left behind to watch over the home, often the wife does not leave, instead the teen-age daughters are the ones who go out to earn. A man can refuse to allow his wife to leave home to help support the family because of the perception that the household would be neglected by this.

The husband tends to dominate in decision-making outside the home. The researchers were confronted with this during the baseline survey last year when wives were asked if they could answer the first half of the survey since their husbands were away. The wives said they would like to do so only after they had told their husbands about it and asked the researchers to come back when their

husbands were home. Another example is the fish vendor's association in Nibaliw West, composed mostly of women, who chose a woman who had separated from her husband to be president because "she had no husband who would restrict her from doing things".

5.1.4 Relationship with the husband

Women marry early: at the age of 16-19 years old with virginity literally "highly-priced". The sum of money traditionally given by the family of the groom to the family of the girl (meant to be used by the wife-to-be in starting the household and to cover wedding expenses) goes down if the girl is widely suspected to be pregnant. Despite this ideal however, pre-marital sex is common and often pregnancy is the reason for early marriage. Once a girl is pregnant, there is "no choice" but to get married. Both families, instead of only the groom's, then chip in to finance the wedding. Elopement is common but it is important that a wedding take place after this to establish their new status. After the

marriage, one is expected to start a family.

The phenomenon of wife-beating occurs in the study areas. Informants say it often stems from seemingly petty reasons such as the husband complaining that the wife talks too much. The underlying reasons however may be the husband's inability to cope with economic pressures and the need to assert dominance. The quarrels often stem from the wife's complaining about her husband's drinking, coupled with the fact that he does not bring home enough to support the family. In one case, a husband was having an extramarital affair and the wife fetched him to come home from the other woman's house. Because of the "shame" this caused him, blows were landed on the woman in the fight that followed when they got home.

Such "macho" logic is ingrained among the people in the fishing villages studied. Men are not blamed for their infidelity to their wives. Rather, both men and women rationalize that an affair happens because the other woman flirted with the man, and he being weak, gave in

to temptation. Extra-marital affairs are generally tolerated by the community if the man can carry it off. There are cases in all areas studied wherein the other woman is maintained by the man in a separate household along with his children by her and known commonly as his "second wife" (or third...). In such a situation, temporary or permanent separation is an option for women who are not totally dependent on their husband for support because they are also earning. Family unity however is an ideal which its members and their kin would strive to maintain.

5.2 WOMEN AS INCOME EARNERS

5.2.1 Fishing-related activities

In fish production women perform numerous tasks. While it is the men who actually catch fish, women's contribution especially before and after the fishing activity itself cannot be underestimated. Without the indispensable labor they provide, men would have to be saddled with more work than they can handle. Women mend the nets of their menfolk in the afternoon

when household chores have been finished. They do this while the husband or son sleeps/rests after a night at sea. Pre-fishing activities engaged in by them includes, in Telbang, Alaminos attaching bait on the "kitang" (hook and line), a major fishing gear in the area; in Balawarte, Agoo, where blastfishing is rampant, they help prepare the dynamite used by pounding the gunpowder.

As soon as the men reach shore from several hours of fishing, women meet them. If the catch has not been sold to a "comprador", a woman immediately takes over in sorting the catch and dealing with the buyer or bringing them to the market or, as in the case in Carot and Binabalian, weighing and selling them to the neighbors or to the other residents of the community.

If fish is not sold, women take charge of making the necessary processing to preserve them. When large quantities of monamon (anchovies) are caught in Nibaliw West, it is the women who dry them under the sun. The same is true of many monamon

caught by blastfishers in Carot. The fish are spread on long mosquito-fine nets on the concrete pavement of the wharf, usually braving the insults hurled by disapproving fishers. (Blastfishing is not accepted in Carot - a coralline area.) Women are also primarily involved in bagoong-making. In Binabalian, where aquarium fishing activity thrives, usually wives of aquarium fishers, also clean the plastic bags where the fishes are packed and assist the men in packing fishes.

Women in a limited way also have a hand in actual fishing. Most of the fishing they do is considered "light work" hence they are said to be capable of it. Women in Nibaliw West also pull with their menfolk the calocor (beach haul seine). In Carot, women fish at night with the use of carocod (beach seine) a gear not requiring great physical effort, in catching various tropical fishes in shallow waters offshore.

When any of the male members of the fishing household becomes unavailable (they get sick or are away) women fish in the river using sigay (gill nets) or they

harvest fish from bukatot set in the river. The wife of the manager of an aquarium fishing group also participates actively in the undertaking. She assists her husband in packing marketable fishes, keeps the records of expenses incurred in fishing, packaging and shipment (to Manila) and gives wages to the aquarium fish collectors working for them. In Carot and Binabalian, among owners of fishing vessels like the basnig or managers of spearfishing groups, it is the woman (whether wife or adult daughter) who performs accounting tasks - keeping records of fishing expenditures, loans of crewmembers, the share due them and the volume of catch. In Telbang, it is the woman who decides the amount of share which goes to the members of a tabokol team.

The women's role as "accountant" in production as well as the dispenser of money reiterates their position within the household - the holder of the purse strings.

Faced with the insecurity of depending on coastal resources exploitation for survival and grappling with their spouse's diminishing income derived from the sea, the women have to seek ways to "make ends meet".

5.2.2 Women's Income-Generating Activities

To help sustain the needs of fishing households, women engage in various income-generating activities. Buying and selling of fish or becoming a comprador is widely entered into by women.

In Balawarte, most of these compradors buy higher-priced fish (e.g., tuna, tanguige) and bring them to a nearby province to be sold at wholesale prices to fish vendors. Work starts early in the morning when they purchase fish from their sukis, load them into a tricycle then into a jeep or mini-bus, later deliver them to their suki vendors, and finally return to the community at around noontime. The women earn from ₱100-300 a day.

In Carot, six to ten women buy fish and sell these. They buy fish from 2 to 4 fishers every Thursday or early morning of

Friday. They bring from 8 to 10 kilos of fish to the Anda town Market on Friday, the market day. Thursday sees them transacting with fishers on fish prices depending on the size and kind of fish. After fish is bought, they are placed with ice inside styrofoam boxes. At the town market, ₱7-8/kilo is gained from selling fish and sometimes higher especially when few fish vendors are around. Before noontime all fish have been sold. Payment to fishers from whom fish are bought is done when the women go back to the community. In Balawarte, women also become fish vendors. They buy lower-priced fish and shrimps and sell them in the markets of Agoo, San Fernando and Dagupan - earning in the process about ₱50-100 a day.

~~Many other income generating~~ activities are engaged in by women ~~without~~ leaving the house where her presence is vital. ~~The making of bagoong is an~~ example. Fish caught by odaod (drive-in-net) or basnig (bag-net) outfits are processed in Carot. Whether this is the catch of the husband or bought from other

roles.

The part of hermana mayor during the fiesta is also a woman's. A more well-to-do woman is usually chosen for this role.

Women play a more active role than man in religious activities in the barangay. More women attend mass on Sundays than men, and many are active in organizations such as the Catholic Women's League.

In fishing organizations and cooperatives, women are usually chosen to serve as treasurers and auditors, an extension of their money holding activities in the home. Participation in such associations is seen more as a role for men. In groups such as the Foster Parents cooperative in Alaska where both spouses are considered members, only husbands attend the meetings. A wife attends as a representative only when her husband is unable to. There are few organizations with mostly women members; one such is the Fishvendors Association in Nibaliw West.

6. ANALYSIS OF RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS:

The current economic pressures on fishing households demand greater efforts from women to contribute to the family's livelihood without

disrupting their traditional household responsibilities. In spite of this expanded role, women's involvement in decision-making and leadership roles remains minimal. The economic-political life in the fishing villages continues to be male-dominated.

6.1 Household Sustenance Weighs Heavily on Women

Domestic tasks and child rearing are considered women's domain; whether they are married or not, employed or unemployed. In their absence, other family members, including husbands, take on some of their tasks. However, this is only on temporary basis because the work remains to be their primary responsibility. Even if women engage in economic activities, within or outside the home, they still have to attend to household chores. Thus, working women have longer working hours.

The socialization process among females prepares them for this role. Starting from a very young age, girls see their mothers and sisters as models. And as they grow older, they gradually perform similar tasks.

Although household sustenance is non-monetized, its contribution to the maintenance of productive labor (men, women and children) is

significant. Without food, shelter, clothing and other basic needs, how can individuals work the next day?

6.2 Like their sisters in farming and urban communities, women in fishing villages suffer from the double burden of domestic and economic pressures.

In a poverty situation, women extend their roles in household sustenance to the economic sphere. Since they hold the family finances, they have to make both ends meet during cash shortages. They engage in varied livelihood activities and look for other food and credit sources.

During lean fishing seasons, women contribute immensely to the family's livelihood. Some may even argue that women earn more than the men during these times and thus, act as the main breadwinners for the family. The employment opportunities open to women are generally within the informal sector: seasonal, temporary, home-based and an extension of their household tasks. They are also engaged in marginalized fishing-related activities -- in near-shore activities which are considered less tedious than actual fishing, or as part of family labor including preparation for dynamite fishing. Some also look for employment in town centers, especially single

women.

For most women, the double pressure of maintaining households and contributing to the family's livelihood is accepted as the natural order of things. They seem to cope with this very well to a point of passivity. This view is also reinforced by the dominant cultural norms in society that women play subordinate and auxilliary roles.

6.3 Women's subordination is manifested within the family and the larger community.

The domestication of women extends to decision making within the family. Although women handle the family finances and decisions over the children's education, the husband's decision generally prevails in major conflicts because he is still the "padre de pamilya" (head of the family).

Women's involvement outside the home include economic activities, interaction with immediate neighbors, minimal leisure, and membership in civic or religious groups. A few professional women, particularly teachers, have managed to exert more influence. Women community leaders are rare and often eyed with discomfort.

Political activities and community concerns are generally regarded as male domain. Thus, leadership is commonly associated with men. A few who are able to join **community groups** are often tasked with activities considered to be extensions of their female roles (being secretary or treasurer). Even development efforts including technological innovations, especially in fishing, is male-centered simply because fishing is considered a male activity. However, there are groups like the fish vendors association which has a predominantly female membership due to the nature of their activities.

Women who show leadership potential are confronted with the challenge of balancing their multi-faceted roles in the family, and in demanding and proving their leadership and management capabilities. It is not merely a question of delegating housework so as to find time to actively participate in activities outside the home. It involves pushing for an integral character of being leaders and housewives at the same time, both as a personal viewpoint and as a social reality acceptable to the larger community.

6.4 Women should be actively involved in a community-based coastal resources management scheme

As the other half of the fishing community, women also exert continuing pressure on the declining coastal resources of Lingayen Gulf. This is an inevitable consequence of their current livelihood concern, i.e., to augment income for the family's subsistence.

In the context of community-based coastal resources management, women can play significant roles in the following areas:

6.4.1 Educational campaigns.

As part of their nurturing roles in the family and community, environmental awareness and protection can best be disseminated through the home and school.

6.4.2 Alternative livelihood.

Many women have ventured into varied non-fishing economic activities. Although fishing remains to be the major occupation, other income sources seem more profitable. For alternative livelihood programs, productive skills of women must be considered.

6.4.3 Building local organizations.

Building local management capabilities does not only involve the fishermen, but the whole community as well. Women's groups can be formed as part of this effort. Consultations regarding possible management mechanisms for coastal resources must also include women.

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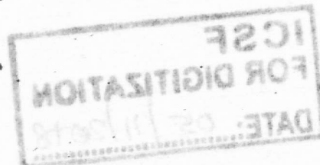
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