

Gender Challenge: The Economic Resilience of a Coastal Community Household

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Introduction

A healthy wetland can provide various ecological services to the community living in the area. It can purify water, filter waste, reduce the transport of nutrients and organic materials, sediments, and toxic substances to the coastal area, and serve as a nursery and feeding area (Ing Marie-Gren et al. 1994: 57-58). In addition to providing ecological service, wetlands are very important to the people who live nearby, especially the poor. For fisherfolk who do not have enough resources (e.g., boats, gasoline, lamps, net, and so forth), wetlands have become their savior by securing their need for daily food and shelter. Having access to wetland, they can do shell gleaning which contributes positively to household consumption and livelihood. Unfortunately, the commodities and services that are being provided freely by coastal wetlands are not considered part of the global market. Thus, in the name of productivity and economic improvement, wetlands suffer from conversion and overexploitation.

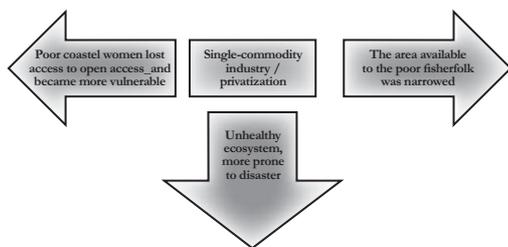


Table 1. Conceptual framework: The effects of privatization on poor households and environmental resilience.

The conversion of wetlands oftentimes results from a country’s macroeconomic policy. Although it might not be a direct result, an attempt to boost the production of a certain commodity for export can lead to the destruction of an environment. In this research, one of the findings was the loss of a

mangroves area which some industries considered an “underdeveloped swampland”.

Resilience is generally defined as the capacity to cope, adapt, and thrive every time a challenge is encountered. World Resources Institute, in its publication entitled *Roots of Resilience-Growing the Wealth of the Poor*, explains that in the context of rural communities, the word “resilience” can be categorized into three (WRI et al. 2008: 27-28):

- Ecological resilience: Level of disturbance of the environment (either natural or man-made) that can challenge the ecosystem and overwhelm its ability to recover.
- Social resilience: Level of coping and the ability to resolve a conflict, be it internal or external.
- Economic resilience: Level of ability to recover from shocks that happen in relation to economic conditions. This includes the ability to appreciate the benefits and importance of having various sustainable economic options for livelihood.

As Glavovic (2005 cited in WRI et al. 2008: 28) mentioned in the same report, it is crucial to understand and acknowledge that the identified categories of resilience—ecological, social, and economic—are interrelated and create a strongly coupled system. This statement explains what happened in the coastal area. First, changing the nature of an ecosystem can exhaust coastal resources and disturb the ecology. This in turn affects the coastal community as the people in it rely heavily on the environment for livelihood. The situation worsens when changes in the environment are not sustainable but are only intended for short-term revenue. Hence, the danger of oversimplified coastal livelihood sources could bring a community to a vulnerable state, both economically and socially. Economically, this

Why did these changes matter to the women?

People in Barangay Loyola live very dependently on environmental resources, even as the livelihood in this village is diverse: fishing, seaweed farming, catching crabs, doing day labor, and nipa thatching. Men dominate fishing, while both men and women farm seaweed. Women and children, on the other hand, are into nipa thatching and selling fish in the neighborhood.

One needs to be aware that a community is not a single homogeneous entity. Thus, women and men perceive change differently and adapt to it with coping mechanisms that is different from each other.

1 The life of a Nypa thatcher

Lola Donesia is 76 years old and has been making Nypa shingles ever since she was 16 years old. Her husband has been suffering from high blood pressure and headaches at times. He cannot do any work and instead depends on Donesia for his daily needs. Meanwhile, their son who used to work as a fisherman he tries to cultivate seaweed nowadays. This change was triggered by the fact that he could not depend on fishing anymore. “The environment has changed; now I have to go far to have a good catch. Some areas are guarded because they have been converted into ponds; my boat is old and we cannot afford to buy the gasoline necessary if we want to go further,” he said.

He uses his earnings from seaweed farming for his children’s education and to maintain his boat. The

family’s daily needs are filled using income from fishing and making Nypa shingles. This is how Lola Donesia plays a crucial role in supporting not only her husband, but also her son’s family.

For their livelihood, the family has six lines and can harvest 35 kg of seaweed from one line, if the seaweed is healthy and in good condition. Seaweeds can be harvested every 45 days and sold to middlemen for Php30/kg. Meanwhile the consistent supply of Nypa leaves has helped the family earn money every week. In a day, Donesia can make 50-60 shingles of Nypa. A buyer who comes to the village buys all the Nypa shingles she has. Although Nypa shingles are a crucial part of coastal houses in the Philippines, their price is extremely low: only Php0.07

2 Our backyard is our livelihood

Nora and her family used to own a fishpond but in the 1980s, when a lot of aquaculture start-ups were surfacing, a local officer encouraged her to convert the mangrove areas to an aquaculture farm. Not long after, Nora sold her pond after suffering a deficit as revenue from the harvest was not equal to the amount of money and time they had spent managing the pond.

The limited opportunity for women to work in a fishpond is not solely due to physical restrictions, but also to time allocation issues. A person who works in an aquaculture farm often needs to spend almost 24 hours on the pond. Aquaculture converts a vast area of land but only employs a limited number of people. It also destroys the soil because of the chemical inputs required to feed the fish



Picture 1: Trying to make ends meet by making Nypa shingles and through seaweed farming

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Picture 2: Privatization area and how women utilize an abandoned fishpond for shell gleaning

(Craig Johnson 1997: 19). While only one man is employed to serve as a watchman in aquaculture, the rest of the population needs to struggle with the narrowed space left for them to go fishing. As for the poor women in the sub-village, it is obvious that the abandoned pond is more useful for them since they can go inside and look for clams in the pond, either for their family's consumption or livelihood.

Mahaba Island, Surigao del Sur

3 A food security heroine⁵

Nida Rizaldo's family had long been dependent on fishing before she started her own small-scale business of buying and selling sea cucumber. Fishing for some people was not only a means of livelihood but a way of life. This held true for her husband Jose who believed that the sea would provide him a sufficient supply of fish for daily living. But, eventually, without knowing why, he noted that the sea had changed. He could not understand the season especially when a typhoon struck. Under present climatic conditions, he usually catches

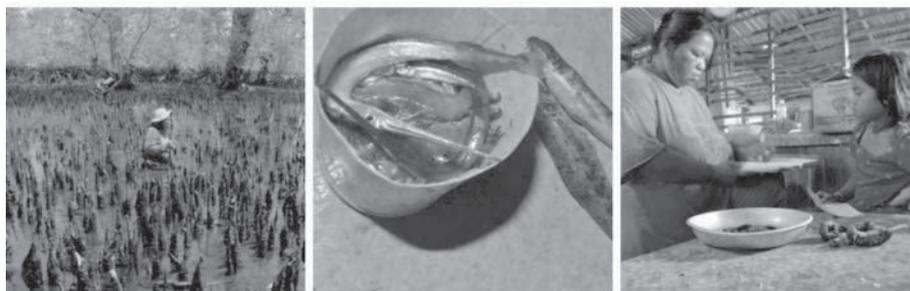
from 0 to 10 kg of fish that generates regular income ranging from only Php100 to Php300.

Realizing that the catch of her husband was no longer sufficient for the family's needs, Nida started her small-scale business in 2000. She recalled:

I noticed that no one collects sea cucumber in this island. So I collect them and this helps increase our income. After seeing that sea cucumber can bring income, the community here has asked me to buy sea cucumber from them.⁶

Nida's persistence and commitment to ease the economic burden of her family has resulted in providing an alternative livelihood not just for herself but for the entire island. She started with Php700 in earnings and can now earn up to Php2,000 per month.⁷

Despite Nida's earning more than her husband, she remains invisible in the statistics on the economically active population. Her profession is still considered informal and is thus not acknowledged in the formal sector.



Picture 3: Food security and income generation provided by the environment

According to Nida, changes occurred when she gradually earned income for her household. Her husband who used to drink often and also smoked cigarettes started to reduce his consumption of alcohol and even stopped smoking. Now, she stresses that she has become part of the decision making process in the family.

4 Cagayan de Oro

Mary Jane Paguya Pading lives with her husband and four children in a house that her husband built from driftwood. Pio Tamparong Pading, Mary Jane's husband, had never engaged in any livelihood besides fishing. They do not own a net or a boat; hence, her husband fishes using the help of a compressor.

Due to this limitation, his average daily catch is worth merely Php100 to Php150. More so now, he expresses concern about the developments bound to take place in Laguindingan when the airport is officially open: he believes that there will be a lot of establishments coming. Any small disturbance in the sea will likely affect a small fisherman like him and will, in turn, affect the survival of his household.

Mary Jane has a crucial role in the family especially because she is the one who manages all the money in the household. It is a daily struggle for her to be able to put food on the table. She prefers to buy corn for the family because it is priced reasonably. She rarely buys meals, instead she will go to the mangrove area to catch clams or small fishes. In addition, to help ease the economic burden of the family, she works as a laundrywoman. Female labor is always more flexible in low paying jobs and

Mary Jane can adapt to any seasonal opportunities that can be found in the community.

Thailand

Thailand lost up to 200,000 hectares of its mangrove forests from 1961 to 1995 mostly due to the intensive conversion of wetlands into aquaculture farms (Sathirathai and Barbier 2001: 109-111). Another crucial change in Thailand's environment has been the preference to shift from the planting of various different crops to monoculture (Sathirathai and Piboolsravut 2004: 3-8). Monoculture industries might provide a bigger income for the farmers; however, it does not come without a corresponding cost. One disadvantage is that the farmer's can only work as labor and not own the land because of land tenure issues. The middle-income owners need to buy inputs for the soil, a need that makes them dependent on other sources such as fertilizer seller. Further, due to overexposure and the overuse of chemical inputs, it could result into soil erosion (Sathirathai and Piboolsravut 2001: 6).

Another profound factor that has spurred change in the coastal community in Thailand is the growth of tourism. It is claimed that tourism in Thailand did not experience any downward trend even when the financial crisis hit in 1998. (Tantiwiranond and Pandey 1999: 27). But marginalized coastal communities in Thailand face challenges in sustaining their livelihood as they seem to have been forgotten by the policy makers.

Ban Laem Makhm, Trang

1. Defining self-actualization within the comfort zone



Picture 4: Cheap or unpaid labor that women engage in Laguindingan, Cagayan de Oro

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Picture 5: The family daily activities in Ban Laem Makham, Trang

Somma Madting stopped going to sea more than 10 years ago. He decided to sell one of his boats and started fish pens populated by groupers, instead. He bought one baby grouper for 20 bath and sold this again after 5 to 8 months for 200-400 bath. He mentioned that before he could rely on the fish cages for everything as it gave him and the family substantial income. Lately, however, the price for grouper has been falling. In addition to his grouper farm, Sommai works in a government office and also acts as a middleman in the buying and selling of small fish/peel crab. He claims that most of their money is managed by his wife, Sawitree Madting, whom everyone calls Mak Nui.

Mak Nui is a very active and outspoken person when it comes to household affairs and during friendly gatherings with her friends. However, her bravura disappears when she is asked to share her opinion about the environment. Surprisingly, her answer often is: "I'll go with my husband's answer." For Mak Nui, her main role is still closely related to motherhood and cooking. These contributions tend to be ignore since family labor is considered unpaid labor and not counted in the statistics

on the economically active population (Suteera Thomson 1990, 4). Her contributions and roles in livelihood undertakings are thus not deemed to be self-actualizing but are mere activities that she does to support their way of life.

2. Option is a privilege

Saicai and family have to move from their previous house due to erosion and risk of flooding. For livelihood, she goes to the sea twice a day, once in the morning around six and later in the night. In the morning she goes with her son, while at night she goes with her husband. They only have a small engine boat; thus, they can rarely go far into the sea. In one day, the family usually makes 200-300 bath. Being without access to the market, she prefers to sell their catch to middlemen. She usually spends 150 bath on household needs and uses the rest to buy gasoline or mend the net.

Saicai views her economic hardship as not only equivalent to money but as also affecting her power in deciding on everything that has to do with her options in life. For example, in the past, she would



Picture 6: Struggle in uncertainty

peel crabs and collect jellyfish; however, due to her declining health she could no longer manage to continue this type of work. In addition, her husband has three wives and, at times, this creates conflict between them. She said that she needs to be strong and to catch fish because as she has to be able to take care of herself. Therefore, fishing is the only option that she feels she has.

Klong Phra Song, Krabi

3. Fishing as livelihood: Reality and romanticism

Husein has been going to sea since he was twelve years old. The fishing culture in his family has been passed on from one generation to another. Husein goes to the sea two times a day to put out the crab traps and afterward, to check on them during the night. His wife, children, and female relatives peel the crab and do shell gleaning. In between, the women fulfill their responsibility of taking care of the family, especially the elderly and the children.

The family’s livelihood has encountered a downturn; the catch has declined from 30 kg of crab to only 4 to 10 kg daily. Still, they can earn 700 bath/day. Meanwhile, the family’s expenses total around 500 to 600 bath daily.

As someone who has been raised near the sea, Husein has developed fervent feelings toward the ocean. He affirmed that his family will not move from the coastal area and his children will not seek employment in town. His one concern, though, is that none of his daughters has gone to college so he fears that they might be deceived by some

people in the town if they have to work outside the village.

As head of the household and its “protector”, Husein wants his children to be near him always. The idea of the male as “protector” and the female as the one to be protected needs to be deconstructed. If the source of the problem is education, keeping women in the house will not solve the problem. They should be capacitated and empowered to face various challenges.

As a result of the patriarchal paradigm, all of Husein’s daughters spend most of their time at the back of their house, peeling crabs. The youngest, Farah, has been going to the sea since she was eight years old. Farah wants to be a doctor when she grows up; however, due to her situation she might have to set the dream aside.

Koh Phra Thong, Phang Nga

4. Where the future meets the past and hopes resemble fears

Koh Phra Thong has a rich story and history to begin with. When the island suffered from tsunami back in 2004, one of the villages, BakJok, was severely damaged so that almost all of its residents migrated to another village or to the mainland. A compound of houses was built near BakJok and named after its’ donor, Ban Lion. Unfortunately, the houses were neglected and only a few inhabitants were left. Some people have suggested that because the shape of the house is similar to modern houses where most of the villagers did not feel comfortable and the people still feel the trauma of the tsunami. Another reason they cannot forget it is that they also lost their source of livelihood to it.



Picture 7: Livelihood activities in Khlung Phra Song shell gleaning and crabbing



Picture 8: The traditional Moklen family and common villager, and a modern house in Ban Lion, Phang Nga

Another part of the island that was affected by the tsunami is a resort named “Golden Buddha”. After recovering from destruction, the resort has resurfaced and is back in business again. Moreover, some of the villagers now work and depend on it for their livelihood.

Slowly but surely, tourism has found its spring in this island whose diverse ecology (savanna, reef, beach, and coral) has become an interesting attraction. Some villagers have tried to take advantage of the opportunities brought about by tourism by providing modest homestay accommodations.

The families of Phimjai Klathalee and Tammanoon Koedcharoen do. Noon used to own a boat for fishing but as his debts kept rising, he stopped fishing four years ago. His wife started working in the resort in 2013. “Tourism will be big and I think it is the future,” he says. So now, while his wife works at the resort, he is taking care of the children at home.

Along the eastern shore, a coastal community of the Moklen and villager live side by side. They still depend heavily on the coast and the seashore. In the morning, the males go fishing, while in the afternoon, mostly women and children collect sea cucumber and conch. Despite their worries about the decline of the catch and the low prices of the resources, they have no intention of moving inward to the land.

Lesson Learned and Preliminary Findings on Gender Roles and Challenges

Integrating gender lenses assists us in analyzing and looking deeper into the division of labor in the household. In examining the division of labor, it becomes obvious that a commodity chain has started in the household. Oftentimes, pre- and post-harvest activities are neglected in the economic analysis of a product.

Further, one needs to be aware and needs to withdraw from the perception that the term “women” denotes a singular characteristic. Judith Butler citing Julie Kristeva in *Gender Trouble*, wrote: “Strictly speaking, ‘women’ cannot be said to exist”. This statement implies that we need to drive away the common assumption that the term reflects a singular identity. Gender intersects with class, ethnicity, race, economic issues, and culture (Butler 1990: 3)

Class Dimension

Gender analysis is strongly related with the class structure of the community. Based on the fieldwork of the author, women from poor coastal households take on bigger roles to sustain their families through adaptive mechanisms. Women from disadvantaged households experience labor as very flexible: they can go into any low-paying job, for example, as laundry woman, conch collector, shell gleaner. It

is true that they will face the biggest risk when the ecosystem had a downturn and fell past the resilience threshold. Nonetheless, at the same time they have the great opportunity to be agents of change who could guard and preserve the natural resources. Compared to women from the low level of the economy, women with higher status might be more vulnerable. This pronouncement is based on two main reasons:

- Their husbands usually are the main and only income generators; hence, when the economic shock happened they became more vulnerable since they were already detached from their environment.

- They might face challenges structurally and culturally when they want to join the work force: structurally, because the communities are still largely dominated by patriarchist values that make it relatively difficult for women to move up; culturally, because some cultures consider it a disgrace if the husband lets his wife go to the field to work, the field being considered as a dirty and mucky area.

The idea of men as the protector and women as the protected which promotes limiting the women’s activities has increased their dependence on men,

which phenomenon creates greater risk rather than a safe place for them.

Below is an adaptation table showing work done by men and women from better and worse-off households:

Oversimplification of economic activities and the roles taken up by men and women in supporting their well-being could lead to a vicious cycle that will drive marginalized people mostly composed by women into a vulnerable state.

A lot of women’s works are “informalized” by the community because they are not part of the global market.

Effects and challenges on women and men

Small-scale fishing, collecting Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs), and pre-post harvesting/catching are activities mostly done by women from poor households. Unfortunately, by neglecting the long work-hours and their importance in providing household support, the work of women are being “informalized” by the state and the community at large.

Men from better-off households	Women from better-off households
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government official • Fish farm/pen • Seaweed farming • Middleman for agricultural or coastal products • Fishing and own the boat • Raise livestock (more than one) • Childcare • Pond owner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage the family business • Middlewomen for agricultural or coastal products • Prepare food • Buy fish for consumption • Childcare • Raise livestock
Men from worse-off households	Women from worse-off households
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fish using modest gear (compressor, paddle boat, old net, crab trap) • Harvest and dry seaweed • Farm copra • Provide labor/service • Collect aquatic resources • Childcare • Raise livestock • Prepare food 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collect aquatic resources for household consumption and livelihood • Dry seaweed • Farm copra • Peel crabs • Sellfish • Childcare • Provide labor/service • Do post-catch selection

Table 3: Activities according to Wealth Category and Gender (Adapted from Meusch et al. 2003: 10)

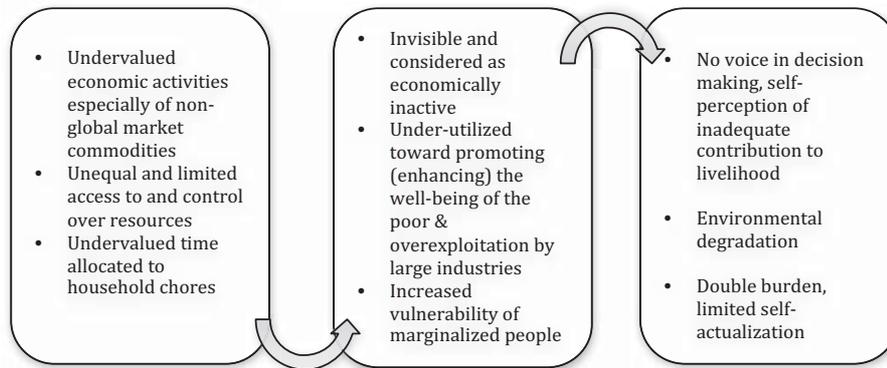


Table 3. Issues-Effects-Results of the changes and stereotyping in coastal communities.

The work of many men and women work of marginal coastal households are being undervalued even though these contribute significantly to sustaining their household. We need to look carefully at how we value or “formalize” things/activities, not only in terms of how they relate with revenue but also in terms of how they impact environmental preservation and social cohesion.

Development, Households, and Livelihood

Change is a certain thing, but its direction is uncertain. Households may undergo diversification due to changes in the environment. Productive and reproductive roles have slightly shifted across genders, with productive roles also filtering down to the children. Better understanding needs to be developed to avoid undermining the roles of women and men in the household.

“Development systems based on wage production have alienated households as a place of consumption and production. Great distinct made by a work which has wage and not” (Eviota, Elizabeth Uy, 1992, 113)

The collected stories from my fieldwork show that a household is a productive place; it creates and provides support that determines a product’s outcome. In addition, for the poor household especially women, working hours inside and outside the household could not be distinguished. Nonetheless, most women in coastal communities

only engage in seasonal, temporary, or cheap labor as laundry women, shell gleaners, nipa shingle makers, fish vendors, crab peelers, sea cucumber divers, and so forth. These livelihood activities have often been undervalued and considered as insignificant, albeit they provide secure income for the family.

In both the Philippines and Thailand, the development of coastal communities aims to improve incomes in the macro scale while often causing shocks to the environment and ignoring development’s effects on the micro level such as on the men and women from the poor households (Porter 2012: 67; Tantiwiramanond and Pandey 1999: 25). This action and our inaction have perpetuated the double burden borne by women especially from poor households.

Fostering Resilience through Do-No-Harm Policies

Economic Policies: Neglecting women’s issues—especially those of the poorest ones—in macroeconomic policies will only harm them even more. Development goals and planning should integrate and analyze marginalized people’s perspective, especially that of women in the household. The most essential action is to make marginalized people, especially women, visible by segregating data on economic activities done by men from those on women. This information should be

available, analyzed, and provided to policy makers. Diverse economic activities need to be considered and acknowledged in order to have effective results in improving income, not only for the upper middle class who already have power over resources, but also for the poor households.

Coastal activities: Despite facing many challenges, coastal communities have continued to adapt and find a way to survive. However, the adaptation mechanisms of men and women differ. Stories from the Philippines and Thailand, for instance, show us that when a household has declining income, e.g., a decline in catch, women will take action to fill the household's needs. This reveals a correlation: when the role of men in providing livelihood decreases, the role of women increases without the household chores' being neglected. Gender stereotyping is the biggest barrier to advancing the status of women.

“Women who actually believe that they are dependent, passive and emotional will undermine their own as well as other women's development and achievements.” (Suteera, 1990: 6)

Limiting women's access to the outer world or development is oftentimes justified as a protection method. But protection should mean improving the women's capacity, skills, and knowledge through better training, education, and others that make them well informed and aware of the challenges that they might face.

Environmental Preservation: Pursuing short-term goals for increasing livelihood usually entails sacrificing a big portion of the environment. The life support that the environment provides, especially for the survival of poor households, should not be exchanged for the increase in profit margins by big industry or wealthier people. Converting wetlands into aquaculture farms, dynamite fishing, non-regulated big trawling that pass coastal zones for small-scale fisheries, coast pollution from a plant that jeopardizes aquatic resources are a few ways of destroying the environment in exchange for wealth and profits.

We need to be aware that an ecosystem that is intact would benefit communities in the long term and will bring sustainable and lasting change and development to the communities and its surroundings.

Recommendations

As mentioned at the start of this paper, I mentioned how research results can be used as an advocacy tool to promote sustainable policies, and raise awareness and critical thinking that gender lenses should be integrated to aim for a community that more resilience toward changes. The advocacy works from two levels: grassroots and the institutional level. The stories chosen depict men and women from disadvantaged households who manage to cope through the hardships. Institutionally, ASEAN could play a lead role in mainstreaming gender in the economy and the environmental agenda. In 2012, there was Vientiane declaration on “Enhancing Gender Perspective and ASEAN Women Partnership for Environmental Sustainability” that mentioned how women's knowledge and experience should be acknowledged because they have an important role to play in adapting and mitigating climate change. Rio 20 is also a strong foundation for us to call people into action (government, NGOs, civil society, private sector, etc) to ally themselves with each other in the pursuit of the three pillars of sustainable development: economic development, social development, and environmental protection. Three main recommendations on how we could promote this are listed below:

- Develop awareness that boosting economic growth based on the market approach does not mean equal redistribution of growth in the community. The changes will not be sustainable, especially if the strategy disturbs the environment and sharpens social inequality.
- Look beyond the idea that women are victims by recognizing their roles as potential and effective actors in managing resources. Their involvement in environmental and economic negotiations could be crucial. The Philippines has

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started doing this by having a women-managed area and having women form a patrol group.

- Political will is a basic requirement in strengthening and initiating an institutional approach, as is having a multi-stakeholder group undertake the planning process, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

Coastal resources, livelihood, and the survival of a household are an integrated process for coastal communities, especially the poorer ones. These factors cannot be diverged from one another. Making women's work count are not trivial steps even if they might sound imaginary.

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¹ In the Philippines, the term “underdeveloped swampland” is used to refer to a wetland area.

² Based on an interview conducted with the barangay captain (head-of-the-village) in Loyola.

³ Seaweed can be harvested up to 45 days but, oftentimes, because the family needs money urgently, they harvest it every 30 days. “Ais-ais” is a disease that attacks seaweeds. When it does, some part of the seaweed becomes white and weak, thus easily falling apart. The farmers do not know how to address this disease. To prevent it, they do a monitoring check and try to cut the part of the seaweed that has been contaminated so that the disease will not spread to other parts.

⁴ This is based on my field experience in Surigao del Sur. It may be different in other places.

⁵ Oxfam has awarded Nida as one of the female food heroes in its GROW campaign.

⁶ The first problem that arose was that she did not have enough money to buy all the sea cucumber that the community sold. The Center for Empowerment and Resource Development (CERD), an NGO that has assisted the area, realized the potency of Nida’s small-scale business. CERD believed it could increase and improve the wellness of the community. They agreed to provide a soft loan to Nida to serve as her initial capital.

⁷ The most common type of sea cucumber that they got is what they called manapao. It is worth Php850/kg (US\$20.42) and Nida sells it at Php1.100/kg (US\$26.42) to the middleman. Other types of sea cucumber that the community collects are: Hangad (Php450/kg), Kigiran (Php850/kg), Brown (Php300 / kg), and Juk-juk (Php50 /kg).

⁸ Having no money to buy materials for a decent house, her husband collected wood that he found in the sea, little by little. They received additional funds to build their house from the government which gave Php35,000 as disturbance fee since the new airport in Cagayan de Oro will be built in Laguindingan. They spent the disturbance fee for buying a TV, flooring materials, and to make the roof.

⁹ SommaiMadting (58) is respected in the community due to his work in preserving the environment, especially the mangrove forest in Ban Laem Makhm. Sommai has been working together with a local NGO called YADFON and the Mangroves Action Project (MAP).

¹⁰ During the research the exchange rate was US\$ 1= 33 baht.