



# **Women of the Coast: Life Histories of Deep-Sea Women Fishers**

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# Research Area



## DAVAO ORIENTAL



# Objectives of the Research

- To have a deeper understanding on the roles and activities of women in fishing
- To examine the belief that “women cause bad luck in (deep-sea) fishing”
- To highlight three stories of deep-sea women fishers
- To help in creating policies that are gender sensitive and that will promote gender equality in the fisheries sector in that Municipality and in the Philippines, in general
- To provide insights on how to effectively communicate and implement these policies to the ground level

# Research Questions

- What do women in coastal communities do?
- Why are women not allowed to fish in the deep-sea?
- How can life histories illuminate the status and plight of deep-sea women fishers in Governor Generoso, Davao Oriental?

# Methods

- Key Informant Interviews
- Participant Observation
- Audio and Visual Documentation
- 'sensory ethnography' (Pink, 2009)

# What do women in coastal communities do?

- Economic Activities:
  - a. Housewives
  - b. Farmers
  - c. Store Owners
  - d. Teachers/School Administrator
  - e. Involvement in (gambling)
  - f. Overseas Filipina Workers
  - g. Involvement in the Fisheries Sector

# What do women in coastal communities do?

- Socio-Political Activities:
  - a. Elected as Village Officials
  - b. Assume positions in the village (e.g., secretary, treasurer)
  - c. Teachers/School Administrators
  - d. Involvement in the activities of the Church
  - e. Volunteers under a government program















- Jane
- 25 years old
- Fisherwife/Stay-at-home wife
- Has four children
- Does much of the work during the pre- and post-harvest of fish
- *“When my husband gets home from a fishing trip, he does not do any chores at home. I just let him sleep and relax. He is already tired from fishing and it is my duty as his wife to attend to his needs.”*

# Women in Fishing

- Generally, women in coastal communities participate actively in many fisheries activities, including aquaculture. However, the lower status accorded to women in many Asian societies means that their contribution to fisheries is undervalued and unrecognized.
- The rate of participation and involvement of women in the fisheries sector in the Philippines is often **underestimated** (Siason 2001).

# **“Why are women not allowed to fish in the deep-sea?”**

- “That is what we are used to.”
- “Traditional belief”
- “Huh? Never heard about that.”

# **“Why are women not allowed to fish in the deep-sea?”**

- Women are believed to be “physically weak”; seasick
- They are more of a liability to the husband than supporters
- Women are not allowed to fish because of cultural prescriptions; women (mothers) must stay at home to take care of the house, to take care of the children, take care of the husband, etc.

# Life Histories of Deep-Sea Women Fishers

- Life History - an account of a life based on interviews and conversation. It is based on the collection of a written or transcribed oral account. It may be topical, focusing on only **one segmented portion of a life**, or **complete**, attempting to tell the full details of a life as it is recollected (Ojermark 2007).



- 62 years old
- Mother of 7, and a fisherman's wife
- Migrant
- Part fisher, part farmer
- Of Manobo and Mandaya descent
- Practiced deep-sea/ open-sea fishing for 6 years
- Fished with her son-in-law
- Newly-separated
  
- *"I may be old now, but I still want to fish in the deep-sea. I feel happy whenever I'm in the sea, especially when I have plenty of catch. Plenty of catch means a lot of money. I don't want to depend on my children for my daily needs. But now that the my physician advised me to rest my back and my chest, I could no longer fish. And I really miss it."*

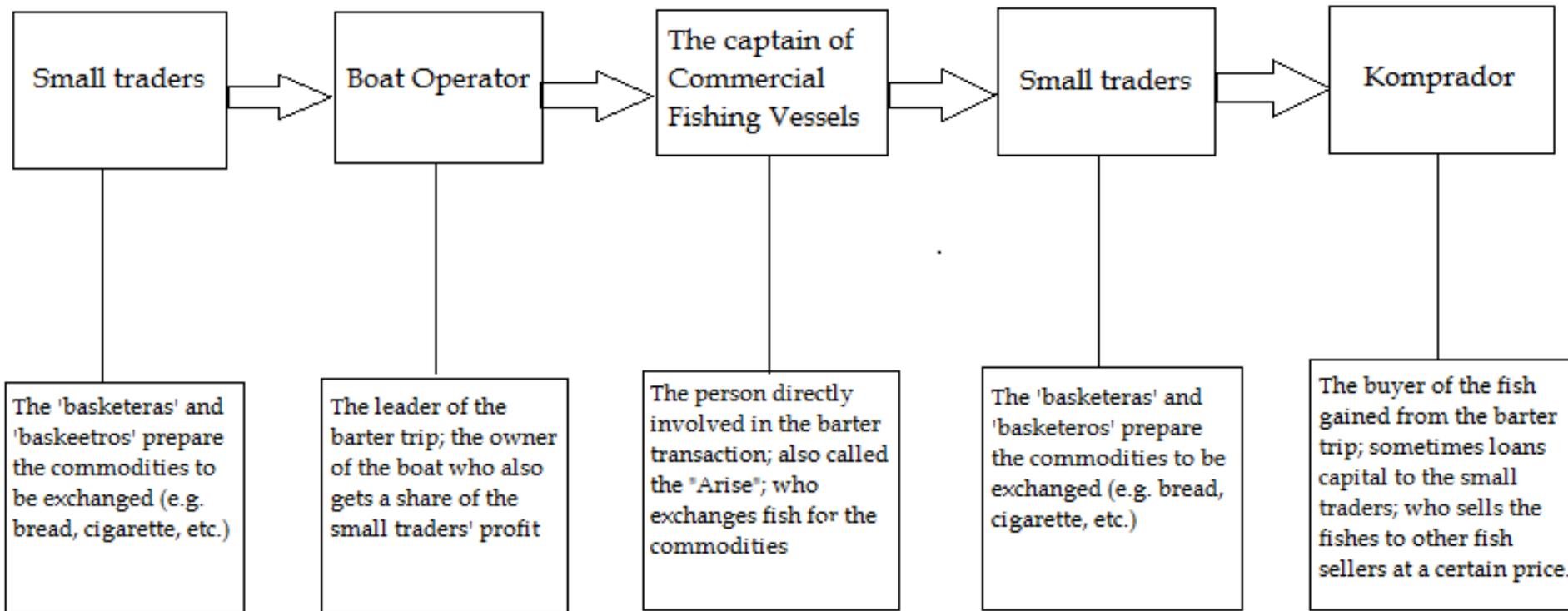






- 49 years old
- Migrant
- Mother of 3
- Widow
- Has experience in *sapyaw* and in Barter in the open sea
- Stories of discrimination and abuse from male fishers and from her neighbours
- Stopped fishing since last year due to the destruction of her boat
  
- *“If I had a boat, I would definitely go back to fishing. I enjoy fishing, and it is the only work I know. If I could go (fishing) now, I’d invite you. Would you go with me?”*
  
- *“If I could do it, why couldn’t you?”*

# Barter in the Open-Sea in the 1980s-late 1990s







- 59 years old
- Of Kalagan (Muslim) and Mandaya descent
- Part fisher, part farmer
- Mother of one, and wife of a part fisher, part farmer
- Does deep-sea fishing regularly with her husband
- Renowned farmer
- *“Fishing has become my husband and I’s bonding. We enjoy fishing as much as we enjoy farming. I have a lot of experiences from doing it, that made me much braver than before. I have also seen some things that you would think only existed in fantasy stories.”*



# Why fish in the deep-sea?

- “In the sea [In fishing], there is money.”
- “In the sea [In fishing], I can feed my family.”
- “In the sea [In fishing], I am happy.”
- “If I could do it, why wouldn't I do it?”

# Reflections/Conclusions

- There are women who fish in the deep-sea. Yes, they exist.
- Women do not cause bad luck in fishing.
- Their plight must be acknowledged and addressed too,

# Reflections/Conclusions

- Recognize the *agency* and individual capabilities of these women who choose fishing as one of their 'main' economic activities.
- “Fisherfolk” vs. “Fishermen”
- Create policies that give equal opportunities and privileges for both women and men in the fisheries sector.
- Lenin: What is to be done?

# Some insights

- Communication and Implementation – there should be an effort to make these policies accessible and comprehensible to the public, mainly to the small scale fisherfolks – could be in terms of the language that we use and how we communicate it to them, and make sure that they understand.
- *“If the public does not want our researches, we should always go knocking to their doors offering it to them ourselves.”*

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- Continuity and longevity in the efforts to form organizations.
  - Formation of local networks among fisherfolks' association, researchers, local government units, and even in universities.
  - Long-term solutions because the barriers that we have in achieving genuine equity and equality is so embedded among cultures that it would actually take generations to eradicate them