



EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF URBAN EXPANSION TO FISHING COMMUNITIES ALONG THE DAVAO CITY COASTAL ROAD:

The Women's Narratives And Its Intersectionalities

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Introduction

How do women along the coastline communities of Davao City make sense of the construction of the Davao City coastal road?



Introduction

This paper aims to zoom into how the multiple dimensions of coastal transformations affect fishing people, specifically women of the coast. (*Kadfak & Oskarrson, 2020*). The study's bias in favor of women's perspective is critically hinged on women's under-recognized contribution to the global agricultural labor force which includes fishing. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), women comprise about 43% of the global agricultural labor force, including fishing activities in the Global South. Unfortunately, the contributions of women's roles in fisheries are often invisible or undervalued (*De Guzman, 2019*).



Introduction

It is also important to note that the expanding global economy is causing rapid changes in aquatic resources, and development programs in urban city centers significantly impacting gender roles in local communities. FAO estimates that about 180 million women are employed in fisheries or fisheries-related activities worldwide (*Singh, 2024*). With urban development programs along the coast, very limited studies are done that documents the effects of these construction programs to women.



Introduction

To address the foregoing assessment of SSF, it is important to note that gender studies in SSF have been done in the past decades. These studies, however, are rural centric, and hold that women largely remain to be seen as fishers' wives and are reduced to their domestic roles in the household. Despite the extensive documentation, women fishers in peri-urban communities still struggle to assert their place in SSF. Macusi et al (2022), for instance, points out that women are absent in policy-making decisions. This absence affirms the absence of women in strategic positions in the SSF especially in urban sectors.



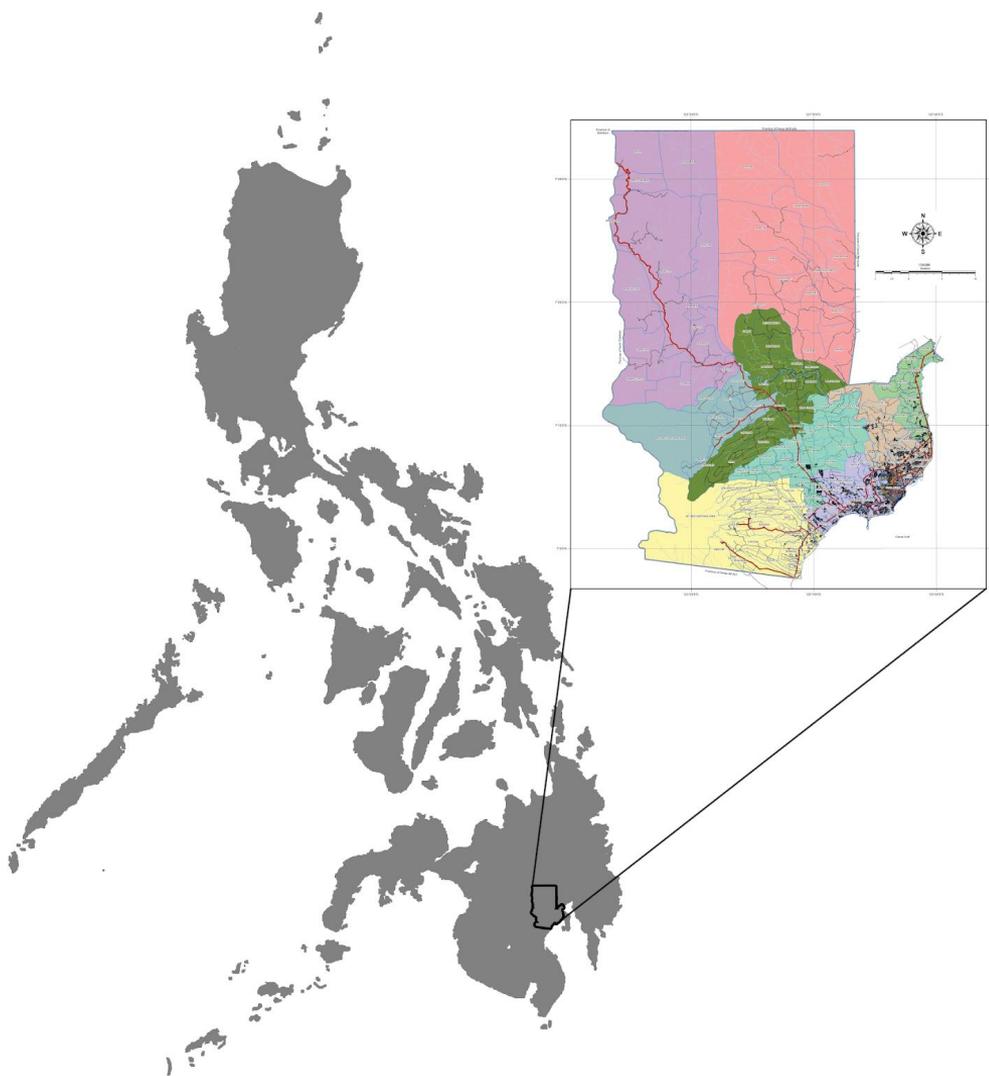
Introduction

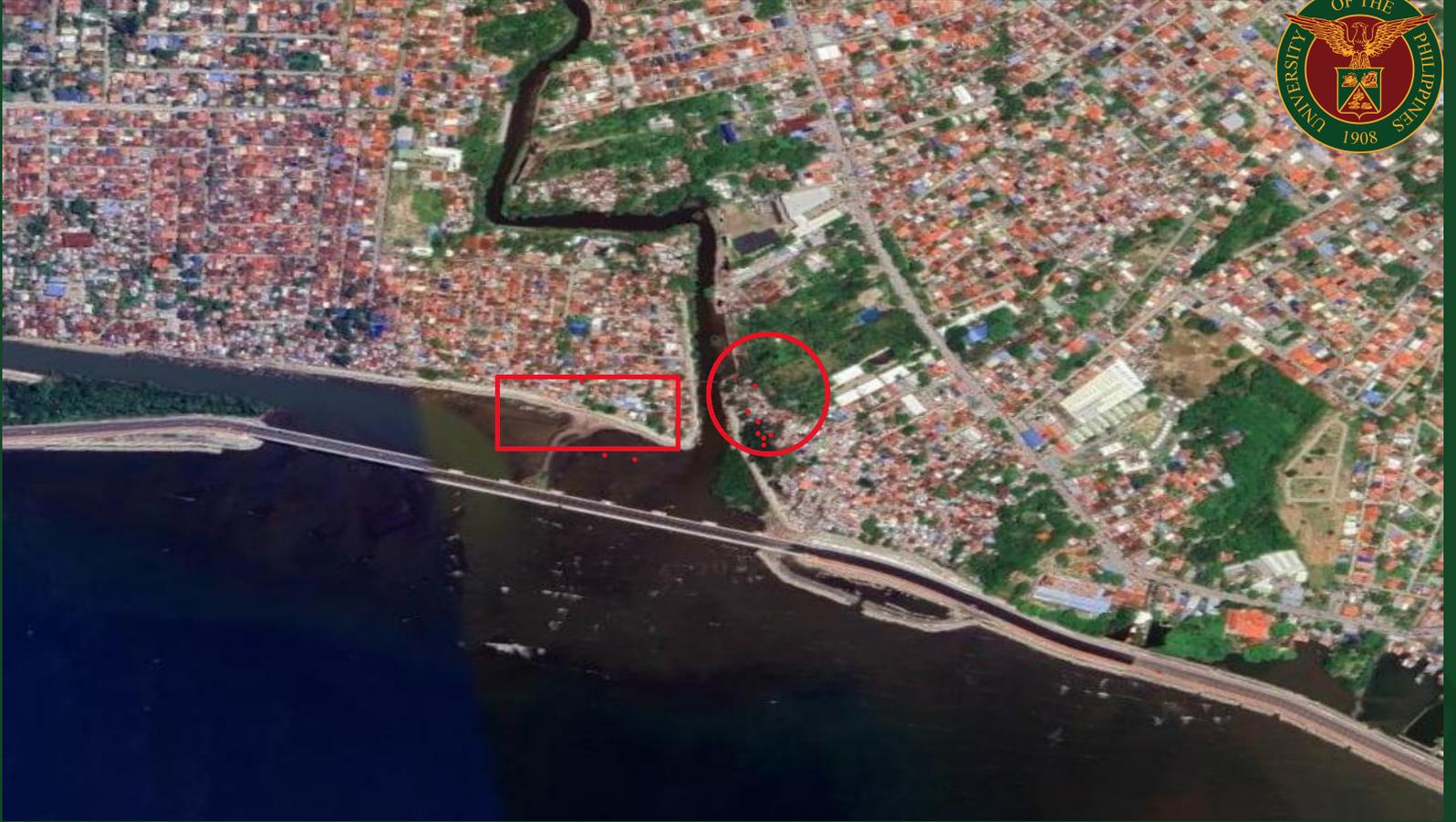
Given the gaps on women studies in SSF, this present paper hopes to contribute to the study of SSF within the urban landscape, and look into the effects of societal transformations as a result of urban developments such as the construction of the coastal road and dikes in the coastline communities from the perspective of women. With this women perspective, the narratives of women are highlighted and their experiences underscored.



Methodology

This study employs a two-tiered level of data gathering and investigation. In this research, a survey was first conducted with women and men in the three study sites, namely, Barangay Talomo, Barangay Matina Aplaya, and Barangay 23-C. These three barangays were selected amongst the 26 coastal communities along the Davao City coastal road, since around 25% of the residents in each of the barangays are into fishing (*CCCC Highway Consultants Co., Ltd. & CCCC-AECOM Eco-Environmental Co., Ltd., 2022*).









Methodology

A total of 53 women from the three barangays participated in the survey, and 10 women from each barangay joined in the focus group discussion. To locally ground the FGD, the female participants conducted community map-making before and after the construction of the coastal road to help visualize the key spatial changes in the community. The community map helped locate the discussions as follow-up questions were raised to better make sense of the important changes in the community as a result of the construction of the Davao City coastal road and the dikes along the shorelines.



Methodology

The results of the study were also presented for validation in a public forum last November 22, 2024. The activity was attended by the community representatives and representatives from various government agencies. This event allowed the communities to express additional perspectives and raise questions which facilitated in-depth discussions. With the study both done on women and men, this paper will specifically look into the perspectives of women. This is possible since the FGDs were done with either groups of women or men in each of the three barangays.



Theoretical Framework

This study seeks to engage with the theory of intersectionality feminism. This position stands for the complex and cumulative result of overlapping forms and experiences of discrimination and marginalization. The notion of the overlap or intersection magnifies the discriminatory implications (IWDA, 2018). Diez-Bedmar (2022) traces intersectional feminist perspective to Crenshaw (1991) which foregrounds the reality of binary forms of discrimination in knowledge discourses, and social systems. Examples of these binaries include sex and gender, black and white races, able-bodied and disabled persons, rich and poor, and masculine and feminine.



Theoretical Framework

These binaries tend to highlight differences between group and treats both elements as oppositional to each other (*Kang et al, 2020*). In contrast, intersectionality feminism underscores the multiple grounds of identity, for instance, between race, gender and class which makes women experience diverse. For instance, the struggles of women of color are different when compared to the struggles that white women face (*Crenshaw, 1991*).



Theoretical Framework

In Crenshaw's (1991) discussion, she proposes three levels and kinds of intersectionality, namely:

- (a) structural intersectionality which centers on the systemic stereotypes and oppression that unequally locate women which makes their struggles and experiences unique and diverse,
- (b) political intersectionality which focuses on political agenda and political climate which puts certain groups of women at the disadvantage, and
- (c) (c) representational intersectionality which underscores the way women are culturally and hierarchically framed in a society.

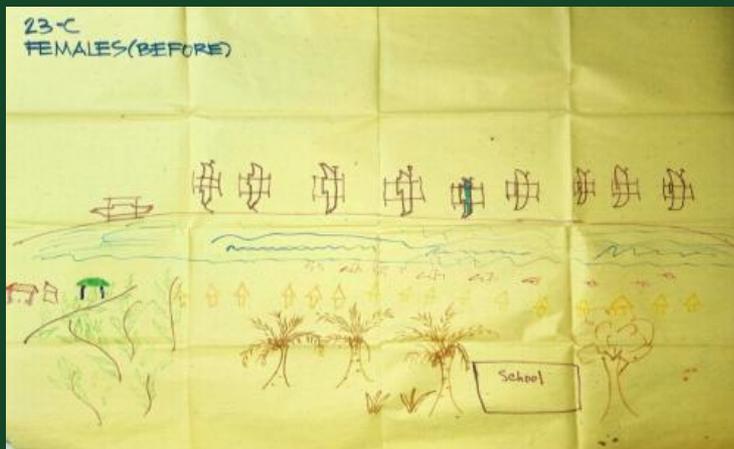
Results and Discussion



From the three focus group discussions, the community maps were made to indicate the women's interpretation of the changes that happened to their communities before and after the construction of the Davao City Coastal Road.



Results and Discussion



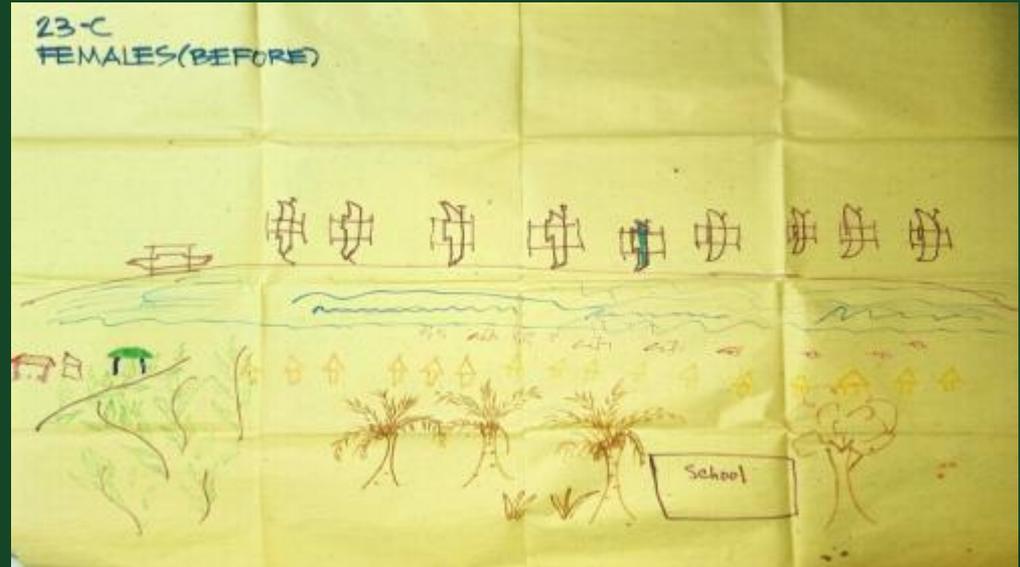
Map of Barangay Isla Verde before the construction of the coastal road and dikes



Map of Barangay Isla Verde after the constructions of the coastal road and dikes

Results and Discussion

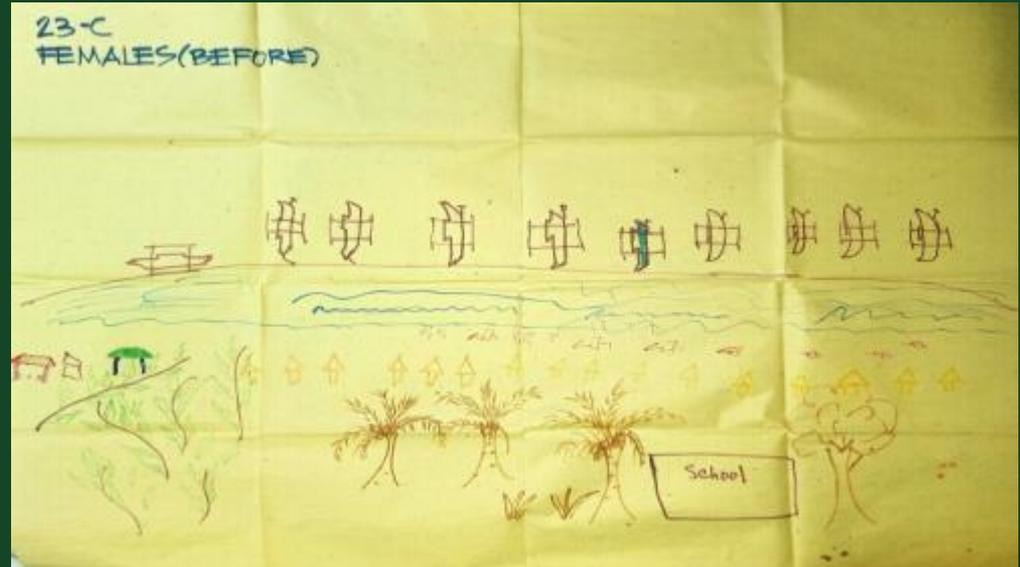
In this map, one finds the presence of a long and expansive shoreline where fishers comfortably dock their fishing vessels. These vessels are also visible from their households which made them feel secure over the safety of their livelihood vessel.



Map of Barangay Isla Verde before the construction of the coastal road and dikes

Results and Discussion

In the map, one also finds extensive vegetations such as mangroves which served as sanctuary for local fishery resources such as crabs and shrimps.



Map of Barangay Isla Verde before the construction of the coastal road and dikes

Results and Discussion

In this map, one finds that the fishing vessels are already stationed at the open sea. With the creation of dikes, the shorelines no longer exist, and there are fewer vegetations. Since the vessels are stationed far from their homes, they are uncertain if the following day, they could still see and use their vessels for fishing.



Map of Barangay Isla Verde after the constructions of the coastal road and dikes



Results and Discussion

In summary, the following items were drawn in the community maps in the three communities:

| Before | After |
|---|--|
| Open shoreline | Closed shoreline with Dikes |
| Vegetations (Mangroves, trees) | Fewer vegetations |
| Houses along the shores | Relocation of houses behind the dikes |
| Fishing vessels stationed along the shoreline | Fishing vessels stationed at the open sea or beside the dike |
| Absence of constructions | Presence of coastal road and dikes |
| An open sea can be seen from the households | A dike now separates the households from the sea |



Results and Discussion

The demarcation of the dikes in the community of Barangay Isla Verde from the open sea can be better seen in this photo:



Dikes along the shores of barangay Isla Verde



Results and Discussion

The following themes emerged after the discussions were coded using the free version of the QDA Miner Lite software:

| | Count | % Codes | Cases | % Cases |
|--|-------|---------|-------|---------|
|  fgdwomen | | | | |
| • nostalgia (of the beautiful past) | 29 | 28.2% | 3 | 100.0% |
| • safety concerns for boats | 19 | 18.4% | 3 | 100.0% |
| • safety brought about by dikes | 12 | 11.7% | 2 | 66.7% |
| • fish vending challenges as livelihood | 12 | 11.7% | 2 | 66.7% |
| • mangrove re-planting | 31 | 30.1% | 2 | 66.7% |



Results and Discussion

From the previous table, one can see that the five key changes in the community revolve around: (a) change in the local vegetation which prompted communities to engage in mangrove tree planting, (b) nostalgia of the past where participants recounted the better situation in their community prior to the constructions, (c) safety concerns for the docking areas of the fishing vessels in the community, (d) fish vending livelihood challenges, and (e) safety brought by dikes.



Results and Discussion

From the FGD, women participants recounted that the mangroves in the community were extracted using backhoes. They lamented the effects of such destruction to the local fishery resources such as crabs and shrimps. As sanctuary for these local species, the women in the community noted that it has become difficult to find such local species after the dike constructions. These local resources have helped families in providing food for their families. With the removal of mangroves, many women members in the community feel that it has become more challenging to provide food for the table.

As many women are gleaners of food along the shores (Torre-Castro et al, 2017), women find themselves adjusting to the new environment and now find the need to deal with the loss of food source in the community.



Results and Discussion

With this situation, women community members have taken initiatives to plant mangrove seedlings in the area, and be contribute to resource management (Macusi et al, 2023). Such effort can be seen in this photo:



Woman Volunteer Planting mangrove seedlings



Results and Discussion

The next concern of women is their memory of the past. In the FGD, the women participants recounted the cleanliness of their place, the open sea, and the beautiful sight of the sea from their households. The construction of the coastal road and the dikes changed the landscape and seascape in the area. Also, the present dikes have become filled with garbage with residents and visitors throwing plastics in the area.

While the community is doing something about it, the women participants lament that there are still some residents and visitors who do not value the environment enough.



Results and Discussion

Some participants recounted that the residents might still be in the process of embracing these new constructions as part of their new lifeworld. The changed view and atmosphere in the place can be recognized in this photo:



Construction changes in the local environment with dikes and the coastal road



Results and Discussion

With the changes brought about by the construction of dikes, women recounted how the male fishers in their community now experience **struggles in finding safe docking areas for their fishing vessels**. As wives of fishers, they share in the worry that their vessels might be damaged due to strong waves and winds.

This concern for the safety of their small boats is something that their families have tried to deal with by creating floating makeshift devices.



Results and Discussion

Some of the participants recounted stories of family members finding their fishing vessels damaged due to strong winds and waves especially during evenings. Such accounts make them worry that their vessels might not be strong enough to withstand these natural elements.



Fishing vessels with floating device beside the dike



Results and Discussion

The last two concerns of women in the three communities revolved around (d) fish vending livelihood challenges and (e) safety brought about by the dikes. For the fish vending practice, aside from the lesser fish catch, the women residents in one barangay shared that with the constructions in the area, a change in fish transactions took place. Before the construction, some of the participants shared that they could sell the fish catch from their neighbors with no monetary downpayment.

They recalled those times when they could still sell fish and pay their neighbors later in the afternoon. When asked why there was this change, they replied that since fishing has been difficult, fishers feel that receiving the monetary value of their fish catch was needed.



Results and Discussion

And for the last concern of women FGD participants, they acknowledged the benefits of dikes in their community. Prior to its construction, the women shared their sense of vulnerability to strong wind and waves especially during typhoon season in the country. With the dike construction, the women participants felt a sense of relief that there is a sturdy wall that can protect them from these natural elements. With the dike, they no longer worry over the safety of their families.

The other aspect of this sense of safety has to do with their observation that the boulders or armour units beside the coastal road have started to become a breeding ground for some local fishery resources.



Results and Discussion

This phenomenon is most true in one Barangay, 23-C or Isla Verde where the boulders or armour units are under water. In the absence of a workable shoreline where they can plant mangrove trees, the boulders or armour units seem to take the place as potential sanctuary of local fishery resources.



Boulders or armour units beside the coastal road as potential sanctuary for fishery resources



Critical Remarks

The women of the coast in Davao City can be taken to mean as structurally an intersection of histories, poverty, livelihood as small-scale fishers, and the seascape as their natural environment. As residents of the coastline communities, the women in the barangay value their coastlines as it is there where they grew up and learned about life. For these women, the coast is not just any place but a home. With regards to poverty, women in the communities have very minimal possessions. These women, together with their families are currently working on their tenurial rights over their land parcel where their houses are built. This tenurial concern is more pertinent in Barangay Matina Aplaya and 23-C.



Critical Remarks

With minimal income from the sea, the women have learned ways to contribute to household subsistence through gleaning (Harper et al, 2013) and income through fish vending. This everyday struggle to make ends meet is what characterizes their daily experiences with poverty. With no college degrees, women find limited options for employment. As artisanal fishers, women engage in gleaning for shells, crabs and shrimps. Also, women in Barangay Talomo once shared that their shorelines with mangroves once provided milkfish fingerlings which they sold to prospective buyers who are into fish farming. With the seascape as part of their environment, the women have always appreciated the kind of access that they have to the sea. They have always considered it a privilege to live along the coast where nature provides food resources

Critical Remarks



With the advent of the constructions in the area, the structural intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) in the lives of women along the coast also point to the intersectional injustice that women experienced. The changes in the seascape meant that the women in the coastline communities needed to re-adopt themselves in a new environment. From having shorelines with productive mangroves, they find themselves having to start all over again by replanting mangrove seedlings. With mangroves gradually growing, they hope that the once abundant seascape will once again teem with life, with fishery resources. With the eradication of the mangroves, these environmental changes pushed women further into poverty and a great deal of uncertainty (Khal et al, 2018). For instance, the sad state of the lost mangroves caused lesser subsistence options in the lives of women.



Critical Remarks

Also from the livelihood perspective, intersectional injustice takes place as women have no financial capital to begin their fish vending activities. On this note, their fish vending skills are not put to use. This economic disruption is a critical effect of the changes in the coastline community. This is where possible intervention can come in (Maynawang et al, 2023). With the changes in fish catch trajectory, local fishers find it hard to allow women to sell their fish catch first and only to pay later. This cultural change will hopefully be corrected as communities hope to rehabilitate their places through mangrove planting. What kinds of histories unfold as women relate with the big constructions such as dikes and the coastal road in their place? Hopefully, it will be a story of resilience. As Khan et al (2018) holds, fisherwomen's roles and identities are not static as they can initiate adaptive changes and processes.



Critical Remarks

For political intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991), this raises the concern on women representation in the consultation process prior to the construction of the coastal road and dikes in the community. Given that the LGU is a powerful institution, did the LGU accord a gender and development lens in its project to ensure that women's issues and needs are considered and hopefully, will not exacerbate as a result of the project. Given the effects of the constructions, it appears that politically, women were not empowered to raise their concerns.



Critical Remarks

For representational intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991), it is important to revisit how women are framed within the SSF sector. This bias against women's contribution in SSF appears to condition the marginal consideration of the effects of the constructions to women of the coast. While the LGU has reiterated the need for boats to be enlisted and be insured, no discussions transpired on how to support women fish vendors in the community. For this note, it remains important to assess and appreciate how women contribute to the local economy, and how women find ways to addressing subsistence needs in the household.



Conclusion

With intersectional contexts and identities, the urban poor women of the coast have to deal with interfacing structural, political and representational constraints. **The concept of intersectional injustices reinforces critiques against simplistic treatment of poverty and vulnerability among women (Murunga, 2021).**

As Khan et al (2018) notes Habtezion (2013), women are usually at a disadvantage in dealing with environmental changes because culturally, they are limited from acquiring new skills set to help them avoid emerging threats.



Conclusion

For political constraint, the question on how will the construction benefit the urban poor women of the coast is in order. For whom are the constructions designed? If the urban poor women will not directly benefit, will these projects push them further into poverty?

Based on the gathered data, it seems that women of the coast can be unfortunately considered as the project's collateral damage. With lost livelihood opportunities and depleted food resource for subsistence, will they be able to rise up from these predicaments?



Conclusion

For representational constraint, it is necessary to reclaim women spaces in SSF. Their contributions to SSF needs to be well documented, and appraised as key aspects in the over-all well-being of coastal communities. In the absence of this proper recognition, women's role and significance in the coastal communities will remain invincible from planners and leaders in the community (Kleiber et al, 2014).

As Macusi et al (2023) points out, the lack of sufficient data on women's role and contributions on SSF means missed opportunities for trainings and interventions that could empower women.



Recommendations

This study recommends the following to help address or at least mitigate the intersectional injustices experienced by women in the coastline communities:

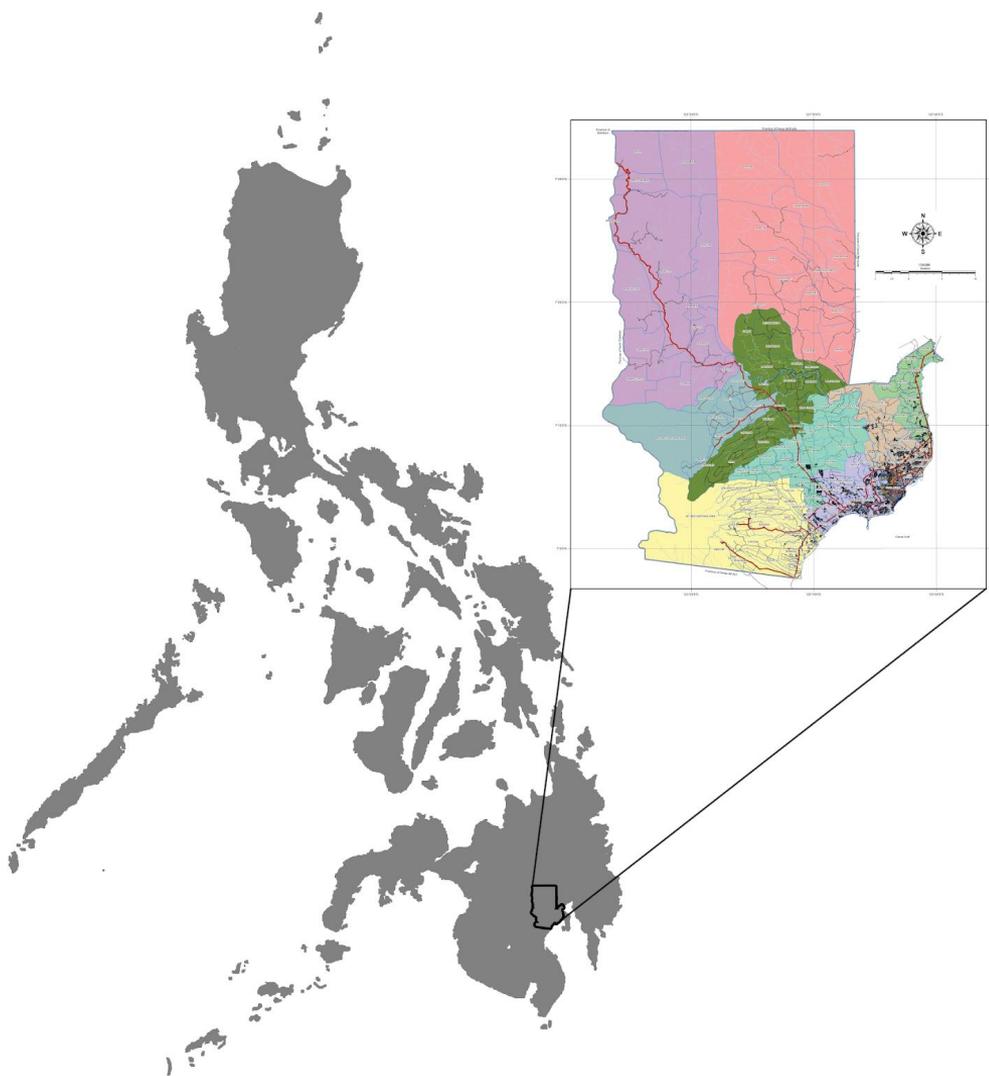
- Conduct a study with women on how to best proceed with mangrove reforestation in the affected communities. Notwithstanding local forms of knowledge, women in the community can be best informed of latest techniques to ensure that the mangroves grow and thrive in the community.



Recommendations

This study recommends the following to help address or at least mitigate the intersectional injustices experienced by women in the coastline communities:

- Conduct assessment of the situation of women fish vendors in the community, and inquire on how they can be assisted by the local government unit.
- Collect narratives from women on the community's past and safeguard these stories in community repositories, museums or archives.
- Gather extensive information on women activities on the coast to help establish their roles and contributions in the community.





Davao City Coastal Road

LEGEND

- OPENED
- CONSTRUCTED BUT CLOSED
- TO BE CONSTRUCTED

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Daghang salamat!

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