

#### IV. KULUNGAN, STA. MARIA, DAVAO DEL SUR

##### NONITA RELATADO DUMAGAN

### General Profile of the Village

Kulungan (San Agustin) is one of the 17 barrios of the town of Sta. Maria. It is three kilometers away from the *poblacion* proper and can be reached via the tricycles that frequent the place. It has five *sitios* and a total land area of 2,890 hectares. At least 50 percent of this land area is agricultural planted with coconuts. Other crops include corn, rice and coffee. Houses are dispersed in rolling and hilly areas.

The latest population count done in the barrio by the Barangay Service Point Officers (BSPO) of the Population Commission revealed that there are 200 dwelling units with 333 households. There are 976 females and 937 males. The annual income of the barrio is approximated at P3,600 or an average family income of P300.00. The people are of mixed origin. There are Ilocanos, Tagalogs, Cebuanos, and natives such as Tausug, Kaolos, and other Muslims. Except for a mail delivery system (usually done by the barrio captain), the barrio has no other communication facilities.

The barrio has chapels for Roman Catholics, Seventh Day Adventists, Protestants, and the Philippine Benevolent Missionary Alliance (PBMA). Aside from the presence of a KSP leader for the Catholics, no other resident pastors or ministers live in the barrio. There are seven *hilots*, one licensed midwife, and one government clinic in the area.

Almost all of the households have radios. Very few have access to newspapers and only one family owns a TV set. People share the public artesian well which is the source of their drinking water. The well used to be a free-flowing body of water which was converted into an artesian well by a group who had served in the community under the so-called "*Paglilingkod Bagong Lipunan*" of the local government. It has been repaired once by the barrio folks themselves since the local government saw no need to replace it with a new one. As a result of the defective well, dysentery is a frequent occurrence in the barrio.

Fortunately, however, the barrio is blessed with clear sea water. As you walk along the sandy shore, schools of small fish vie for your attention. This abundance of fish makes most of the people dependent upon the sea for their source of livelihood. Aside from the fish resources, the barrio has a white beach at the farthest end, a rendezvous area for the romantic and young at heart. Inhabited by peace-loving and friendly people, the place is quiet except for the sound of the roaring engines of the fishermen's boats. The people are simple, contented with what they have. Wives stay at home, caring for the children and

their homes, waiting for the arrival of their husbands. There are also many children in the place.

Despite the presence of comfort rooms it remains a wonder that the shore is still strewn with human waste especially in the early morning, thus marring the beautiful sandy seashore.

Most of the residents of San Agustin are fishermen. About 90 percent of them own bancas, around 20 percent of which operate by paddles while the rest are powered by motor. There appears to be no competition among the fishermen. They even set schedules for their fishing. Fishermen whose bancas use paddles leave at around 5:30 in the afternoon and come home at around midnight. Those whose bancas are powered by a motor, commonly called "pump boats," leave at around 2:00 in the morning and return at around 1:00 to 2:00 p.m. of the following day. By following this schedule, they believe that they are practising fairness and equality in their occupation.

Fishermen who own, non-motorized bancas do their fishing offshore. The usual fishing gear are *palangre* (hooks placed in a box-like frame), *baling* (beach seine), and *sapyaw* (hand net). Fishermen engaged in deep-sea fishing use *estangre* (multiple set of hooks in a long line), *pasol* (using a nylon and a bait), and a *pukot* (encircling gill net). The fishing industry in Kulungan is small-scale, using crude technology. Most of them attribute the quantity of their catch to *suerte* or sheer luck. Because of this "*suerte lang*" attitude, most of them feel that they can not do much to make their present lives prosperous, thus the fatalistic feeling of contentment. They do have hopes for the future, especially for their children, yet, the *suerte lang* attitude and "can't do anything" orientation is pervasive making ambition difficult.

The fishermen's wives play a vital role in marketing the products. They take care of weighing the catch along the seashore upon their husband's arrival. They record the weight and usually decide on the price of the catch per kilo. The neighbors also help in weighing the fish. They help the fishermen's wives find containers for the catch, especially when it is abundant. The fishermen who are resting likewise help those who have arrived by properly anchoring their bancas. Daytime is rest time for the fishermen. They sleep till the time they leave for another fishing trip. They do not drink any liquor, not even the *tuba*.

The center of the barrio presents a contrasting picture with the fishing *sitio* of the place. Here, the children learn to smoke and gamble early. Young and old drink liquor. In contrast to the fishermen, the residents in the center are more aggressive. During our two-week stay in the place, two persons were killed by a drunk. Despite these contrasting characteristics of the *sitio* in San Agustin, the place is still well-liked. Everybody knows everyone. There are no secrets since what one does becomes public knowledge. Influential people are respected by them.

Data-gathering was conducted during a two-week period. To facilitate field activities, the project director and the student-interviewers stayed in the area. Such an arrangement allowed the cross-checking of survey data which otherwise would have been difficult with one-shot field interviews.

## Profile of Fishermen

The presentation of the findings is divided into three major sections. The first section presents the socio-economic profile of the fishermen. Included in the profile are the demographic characteristics and the different indicators of levels of living, household size, food consumption pattern, and morbidity incidence in the family. This is followed by the discussion of fishing activities. A description of the fishermen's fishing background introduces this section. Other topics included are the volume of production during lean and peak months, marketing, and the expenses involved. The last section discusses the participation of the fishermen in existing organizations and their awareness of government-related projects in their *barangay*.

Ninety-four percent of the fishermen are married. They are also middle-aged, many belong to the 30-40 age group (mean age is 37 years old). Twenty-nine percent belong to the 20-29 age group, while twenty-two percent are 50 years old or over. These indicate that fishing as an occupation is popular among young household heads and persists as a livelihood during the later years of adult male life. More than half of the fishermen (60 percent) were born in the province of Davao del Sur. Of this, 40 percent are from the same municipality. Half of those who came from the town of Sta. Maria were born in the village and have stayed in the area for 30 to 60 years. Average years of residence, however, is 20 years with a standard deviation of 18 years.

## Socioeconomic Profile

The educational status of the fishermen is low with 70 percent reaching only the elementary level. Of this, only 23 percent finished grade six (model educational attainment). The mean years of schooling is four years with a standard deviation of two years. Very few (16 percent) have reached high school and only one percent reached college. Low educational attainment probably stems from financial constraints.

Most of the respondents are Catholics (60 percent). The rest of the fishermen are Protestants (13 percent), Philippine Benevolent Missionary Alliance (PBMA) members (12 percent), and Moslems (5 percent). Although all of the fishermen speak Visayan, only 59 percent are Cebuanos. The rest of the population are natives (Kaolo, Kalagan - 32 percent) who mix their mother tongue with the Cebuano dialect.

Majority of the fishermen (99 percent) own their houses, but only 12 percent own both house and lot. Seventy-eight percent of the 99 percent live in rent-free lots. Only nine percent rent the lots where their houses are found. The rent-free privilege of most fishermen can be ascribed to the fact that Kulungan is an hacienda owned by only three families. One of these families allowed them to stay in their lot without any rent. Their dwelling units are mostly made of light materials like nipa/cogon for roofing and nipa/coconut

leaves/bamboo for wallings. Majority of these houses (63 percent) are in good condition; 19 percent are in need of repair. Very few houses (9 percent) were built using permanent materials like GI roofing and cemented walls. The average number of rooms in the house is two, usually the kitchen and the sala. A number of the houses (34 percent) have only one room with a multi-purpose function. It serves as the bedroom during nighttime, sala at daytime, and dining room during mealtime. In this arrangement, the kitchen is found in the corner of the room or downstairs.

Aside from radios which are owned by 63 percent of the respondents, the fishermen do not own appliances which urban dwellers consider as necessities like television sets, refrigerators, or gas ranges. Most of the families (98 percent) do not have dining sets as known by lowlanders. What they have are tables with long benches to sit on during mealtime. A few of them do not even see the need for tables. Wooden sala sets are owned by 86 percent of the household. This also holds true with bed ownership. Only nine percent are reported to have beds, while a greater majority (91 percent) sleep on the floor.

Ninety-four percent of the households depend on kerosene for their lighting needs. Although some of the houses in the *sitio* of the village have access to electricity, the village as a whole still has not benefited from the main power station at the time of the survey. They use wood for cooking purposes (99 percent). For water, majority of the respondents still rely on public artesian wells. All households have toilet facilities, most of which are water-sealed. There is, however, a great disparity between ownership and use of comfort rooms. While everybody said they have toilets, the seashore still abounds with human waste. This is caused perhaps by the distance of their toilets from their houses. Most toilets are found several meters away from their houses, thus, most of the children prefer to use the seashore.

Livestock ownership is rare in the barrio. Only about 20 percent of the families domesticate animals, such as chicken and pigs. This rarity of livestock ownership indicates that most of the residents get their sustenance from the sea, and very few supplement their income through domestication of animals. Majority (72 percent) however, have equipment for their fishing activities. Fishing equipment ownership ranges from one to three per fisherman. Sixty-three percent of these fishing equipment are of the single-hook variety locally known as *pasol*, twenty-five percent are big nets or *baling*, and seven are *estrangres* or multiple hooks.

The average household size is six. The total number of household members is 573, with 144 working and 429 household members not working. Thus, every working household member has to support three other family members. Very few housewives work outside the home. The traditional model of a woman tending the house or looking after their children is still adhered to in the village. Among the working wives, majority are fish vendors, while the rest work as mat weavers. All the households are nuclear families.

Per capita income from fishing activity is P1,137.31. The main source of household income in the village is fishing with ninety-seven percent (97 fishermen) depending on it. The remaining three percent are part time fishermen

who only fish during peak months. In lean months they work in the farms or are hired as carpenters. Since fishing is the majority's means of livelihood, most of them (88 percent) own *bancas*; 36 percent of which are motorized and 52 percent non-motorized. Only 12 percent of the respondents are either renters or hired crew.

The mean annual income of the households engaged in fishing is P6,516.8. This, however, is enjoyed by only very few fishermen (around 5 percent) as revealed by the standard deviation of P9,826.80. The median income is P3,650.00, though the middle 50 percent have an income range of P2,020.00 to P6,450.00 annually. Only twelve percent of the respondents are reported to have secondary sources of income. These include work as farmers, carpenters, or factory workers in Davao City. Annual mean income received from secondary jobs is P2,404.83. The standard deviation of P3,464.36 shows a disproportionate distribution of the income for those who claim to have secondary sources.

Rice is the staple food of most fishermen (70 percent) who spend more or less P29.27 a week for it. This amount comes to twelve kilos at P2.20 a kilo. Others eat corn, while others eat cassava for their breakfast if corn grits are not available. As expected, the most popular viand is fish. The imputed mean value of fish consumed in a week is P23.61 (4 kilos at P5.00 per kilo). In addition to rice and fish, they usually have vegetables especially during noon time. For these, they spend an average of P5.00 per week. Very little amount is spent on vegetables since the wives usually have backyard gardens where *malunggay* and other plants are cultivated. Conspicuously absent in their diet is meat. Very few (5 percent) have eaten meat at the time of the survey. For those who eat meat, they buy one-fourth to one-half kilo a week. Other food items consumed are dried and salted fish, sugar, cooking oil, and salt.

The most common illness in the barrio is flu/fever (87 percent), followed by colds (66 percent). Another illness which half of the fishermen reported is gastro-diarrhea. This may arise from the dubious quality of water supply found in the village.

Eighty-five members of the fishermen's household fell ill during the previous year. Of these, 57 members needed treatment. Of those who got sick during the past year, 54 members were brought to the doctor. This shows that the families in Kulungan have access to medical care in the town and consult the doctor in times of illness. Around 20 percent of those who got sick were treated at home. Some of them rely on the "*herbolario*" for curing different kinds of health disorders.

### Fishing Activities

Out of one hundred fishermen interviewed, 97 percent reported that fishing is their primary occupation. The average number of years spent on fishing activities is sixteen years. The standard deviation of 11 years indicates, however, that there are those who have been fishing for more than fifty years, while others have just started.

Eighty-six percent of the fishermen acquired fishing skills through experience. Others learned the trade from friends (4 percent), from parents, or relatives (8 percent), others (1 percent.) When asked about opportunities to attend seminars related to fishing, the majority (91 percent) said they do not avail of any. Among those who attended seminars (18 percent), only fourteen percent said that these seminars were useful. The majority were unable to use the knowledge they learned. Seminars on technology were hardly useful owing to the lack of capital to buy the advertised equipment on the part of the fishermen, and failure to follow the prescribed method advised by the sponsoring agency of the seminar (usually the government).

Seventy-four percent of the respondents own the *banca* they use for fishing. Twenty-two percent are hired crews (known as *pasajeros*) and the remaining four percent are boat renters. The average size of the boat is twenty-one feet long (standard deviation = 10 feet), three feet wide (standard deviation = 1), and three feet deep (standard deviation = 1). On the average, a fishing trip lasts for 5.6 hours with a standard deviation of 4.4. The number of hours spent on fishing varies among the fishermen since the middle fifty percent spend nine to ten hours at sea. Ordinarily, the catch during those hours goes to the boat owners if there are no *pasajeros*. If there are *pasajeros*, the latter receive their share through a percentage of the catch in one fishing trip. The usual percentage share is 40 to 45 percent of the total net income. The boat owners take charge of selling the fish to the market or to a buyer. After deducting all the expenses of one fishing trip, the boat owner gives the share to his *pasajeros*. Aside from the cash share, the hired crew gets a portion of the catch as a token from the boat owner.

Almost all the respondents (96 percent) own fishing gear. Sixty-one percent of the fishing gear are single hooks locally known as *pasol* and only 24 percent are nets locally known as *baling*. Owing perhaps to the "crudeness" of the fishing gear used, the income of the fishermen is low. In addition, 52 percent of the fishermen own non-motorized *bancas*. Thus, the majority of them stay off-shore for their fishing activities, so that even if they fish almost everyday such industry hardly contributes to the improvement of their life considering the limitation of the fishing technology used.

### Production

Peak and lean months vary among the fishermen. Generally, peak months in Kulungan last from three to five months. Months that are considered good for fishing are March, April, May, June, and July. Twenty-seven percent of the respondents report that their peak months is 4.4 with a standard deviation of 1.33. This short duration of peak months can be attributed to the type of technology being used. It must be remembered that 52 percent of the respondents use non-motorized *bancas* and 61 percent use the *pasol* (single-hook fishing gear) as their main equipment. Thus, a typhoon causes considerable losses in income.

However, fishermen with bigger motorized *bancas* still manage to get adequate catch. This simple difference of technology appears to be the main cause of the recorded imbalance between the number of peak and lean months. This study shows that the number of lean months varies from seven to nine months. The average number of lean months is 7.2 with a standard deviation of 1.5.

The volume catch of the fishermen is unevenly distributed for the duration of the peak months. The lowest volume is recorded at ten kilos and the highest at more than 900 kilos. The average volume is 159.3 kilos with a standard deviation of 183.1. The standard deviation shows the wide variation in volume of fish caught during peak months. The catch of the middle 50 percent is between 40 to 999 kilos with a median volume of 100 kilos. The disparity in volume of the catch is caused by the presence of the *capitalista* — operator who averages at least 1,000 kilos during the peak months. The catch is usually sold at P4.00 to 5.00 a kilo.

The average value of a catch during lean months is P834.56 with a standard deviation of P1,074.78. The standard deviation shows how varied the value of a catch may be. This is directly caused by the disproportionate volume of catch during the lean months. In lean months, the catch is expectedly lower than those during peak months but it demands higher prices in the market. For the fishermen in Kulungan, the average volume during these months is 30 kilos with a standard deviation of 38.9. The median catch is 20 kilos with a median value of P100.00. The price per kilo during the lean months varies from P5.00 to P6.00. At this price, the mean value registered at P187.5, with a standard deviation of P220.9.

The fishermen's customary expenses include fuel, food, and ice. In terms of cost these expenses are very minimal. For food, the average expense is P5.56 with a standard deviation of P8.6. Average expense on ice is P2.00 with a standard deviation of P4.17. Median ice expense is zero. The zero median expense can be explained by the fact that most of the fishermen use non-motorized *bancas*, staying out at sea for 8 to 12 hours. Thus, there is no need for ice to keep the fish fresh.

The study reveals that majority of the fishermen (69 percent) do not have access to credit. For those who have availed themselves of credit (31 percent), 80 percent obtained them from private individuals. Most of the study's respondents borrowed money from their *suki* or favorite customer who usually are middlemen (*compradors*). The *suki* relationship as found in Kulungan makes the marketing of the catch easy. Whenever the need arises, the usual practice is to borrow money from the *suki*. In return, the fishermen delivers the catch to him after each fishing trip. The *comprador* buys the fish and then deducts the corresponding amount from the debt incurred by the borrower. This arrangement places the fishermen at a disadvantage since the *suki* buys the fish at a much lower price compared to other buyers. Despite the one-sided bargaining the fishermen are still obliged to sell the catch to him.

### Marketing

The selling is usually done by the fisherman himself. Only thirteen percent report that it is the responsibility of the wives to sell the fish. The selling done by the wife usually refers to the peddling of the catch around the neighborhood. Convenience is the reason why most of the fishermen sell their catch to the *suki* who, most of the time is the fish dealer or middleman. The bargaining is usually done at the fish landing. In this way the fishermen are not saddled with bringing the catch all the way to the marketplace for which they will necessarily spend for transportation and other expenses. In the previous year, 1981, the average sale of the fishermen was P806.64 with a standard deviation of P890.99. The median value is P500.00. The biggest volume sold averaged at 145 kilos, with a standard deviation of 36.27 kilos. Mean value of the smallest sale is P168.14, with a standard deviation of P288.80. The median is P51.00 at the median volume of 10 kilos. The prevailing price then was between P4.00 to P5.00 per kilo.

### Awareness of Government Projects

Sixty-six percent of the fishermen are aware of government projects being undertaken in their barrio. The projects they are highly aware of are electricity (90 percent of the 66 respondents), water system (86 percent), infrastructure (71 percent), and *Biyayang-Dagat* (51 percent). They are also aware of the *Kilusang Kabuhayan at Kaunlaran* (KKK), Development Bank of the Philippines project (loans), and BLISS projects (housing) now being planned by town officials. Very few of these projects, however, were reported to have benefited the fishermen. Aside from the infrastructure program and water system, the rest of the projects accomplished very little in terms of direct benefits.

### Attitudes Toward Government Projects

Sixty percent of the fishermen agree with the statement that for the most part, government programs and projects serve the interests of a few organized groups in business or labor and are not very concerned with the needs of the people like themselves. Around 74 percent also agree that the government is undertaking certain activities and programs which they think the government has no right to do. These attitudes toward the government and its projects may stem from the fact that most of them have not received any benefits from government projects.

### Organizational Participation

Majority of the fishermen (67 percent) are not members of any organization in the barrio. The most prevalent reason is the lack of time for such activities. Most of them said that they are too busy to attend meetings. When asked which organization they would like to join if given the chance to become members, most of them (60 percent) refrained from naming any. For those who are members of organizations (33 percent), the average number of years of membership is three years. For the last six months, members reported having attended six meetings.

Out of the thirty-three fishermen who are members of *barangay* organizations, twenty-four hold no position other than as members. When asked to rate their participation, twenty of the fishermen (60 percent) perceive themselves to be very active members. They receive some forms of benefits, the most popular of which are social benefits followed by financial ones. The most popular organization in the barrio is the *Kasakit Organization*. This is an organization that maintains a common fund from which its members may draw from in cases of death of a family member. The fund is maintained from contributions of its members. Problems commonly met in the organization are leadership and lack of cooperation. Its members believe, however, that constant follow-up of members who are less cooperative solves the problem.

### Needs, Aspirations, and Perceptions

Considering the circumstances of their lives, fifty percent of the fishermen still maintain that they are happy about their life as a whole. Twenty-five percent said, however, that they are a little less than happy. When asked about the ability of their families to satisfy wants and needs, 65 percent reveal that they are satisfied and happy, while 22 percent reveal "somewhere in between" (neither happy nor unhappy).

Eighty-two percent of the fishermen who have participated and are members of the existing organizations in the *barangay* say that they are happy about their participation. Only 17 percent have ambivalent feelings about their membership. The same holds true when asked about the government-assisted projects. Ninety-six percent of those who have heard and are aware of the different government programs are happy about them. When asked if there was anything that they could do to improve their living, 84 percent of the fishermen answered positively. They also think that the government can do something to help improve their living conditions and to stimulate the economic and social progress of their barrio. There is a consensus among the majority of the fishermen that the government should lend money for their fishing activities without too many requirements on their part.

Five years ago, 91 percent of the fishermen believed that they were within the first and fifth rungs of the ladder (mean rung is 3 with a standard deviation

of 1). At present, 84 percent still believe that they have not improved their lives. Five years from now, 74 percent see themselves in the same rung. The mean rung is, however, increased to four which reveals that some of the fishermen see themselves as improving their lives in the future. Most of the answers of those fishermen who remain in the same level, state as a reason their inability to cope with the increasing cost of living. As they said, "the time is getting worse that improvement of our lives is becoming impossible."

The values considered in the survey and the corresponding rates by the respondents are as follows: "salvation" ranks first with 98 percent of the fishermen saying it is very important. This is followed by "self-respect" (91 percent), "family security" (89 percent), "comfortable life" (84 percent), "sense of accomplishment" (75 percent), and "social recognition" (72 percent). Seventy-nine percent of the fishermen desire that their children finish college and land a stable job. This is one of the reasons cited by the percentage of the respondents who hope to have an improvement of their lives in the future. It was said that even if they suffer now, their children must finish their studies in the near future. It will be their parent's turn to rest.

### Conclusion

This study was conducted to gather some baseline information on the socio-economic conditions of fishing villages in Eastern Mindanao. Four coastal villages were chosen for the study based on the criteria set by the Research Committee.

Findings revealed that fishermen constitute one sector of the marginalized and impoverished Filipinos. They are poor in many aspects of their life — education, income, food, housing conditions, technology used, benefits received from the government, and even in their social life. The fishermen acknowledge and accept their poverty without so much complaint.

The respondents from the four villages differ in the degree of their poverty. There are the very poor, and the not so poor. The fishermen in Barangay 10 of Buenavista, Agusan come out the poorest, while those in Magsaysay, Parang, Maguindanao, relatively, are better off. The former's mean annual income is P3,392.65, while the latter's is P8,781.31. The factor behind the difference, seemingly, is the type of boat the fishermen own and use. The fishermen from Magsaysay own more powerful boats that can better withstand bad weather and travel great distances. They can travel to richer fishing grounds and suffer less from lean months. Consequently, they get a bigger annual catch which means more income. Since they earn more, they eat better food, possess more property, and enjoy a better life.

It was also found out that the poor fishermen go into credit more often in an effort to augment their income and obtain more capital. As a result, they are forced to sell their catch to the money lender who buys the fish at a much lower price than that in the market. Thus, the fishermen are deprived of better returns for their fish.

The overall feeling among the fishermen of happiness and contentment may hide feelings of helplessness in the midst of poverty. Majority claim that they are contented with their food and housing conditions which are actually far from satisfactory. This fatalistic attitude results from a strong impression among them that they can not do anything anymore to improve their lot in life. Most of the fishermen look to salvation as their only reward after going through so much suffering here on earth. In contrast, the Magsaysay respondents who are better off consider family security of primary importance, which was rated only second to salvation by the poorer respondents from the other areas. The former conceive the education of their children as their hope of escape from poverty.

The fishermen from the four areas differ in their attitudes toward government programs. Bago Aplaya and Magsaysay fishermen were non-committal, while respondents from Kulungan and Barangay 10 looked negatively at government projects. These fishermen consider the seminars given on their behalf not helpful. Such attitudes toward the programs of the government could be due to the way the projects are planned and handed down to the intended recipients. Most of the time, projects and assistance are planned out and given to fishermen without prior consultation with those who will be affected by them. Hence, these people are alienated from planners and implementors, and from the project as a whole.

The study's findings reveal that the problem of poverty among the fishermen is multi-faceted. Such has important implications for policy-makers and program planners. It points to a need for rethinking government programs and their development approach to this particular sector of the society.