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Exploring Gender Dynamics in Rural Tuna Fishing Communities in the Lagonoy Gulf, Philippines

By Astrid Natasha O. Ocampo,¹ Joann P. Binondo²

Abstract

Women's contributions to rural fisheries in the Philippines are often overlooked and unrecognized. The "invisibility" of women is primarily a factor of prevailing traditional views on fishing as a male-occupied industry. Gaps in understanding the role of women in the sector may risk implementing interventions that poorly capture their needs as important players in the fisheries value chain. Developing holistic and integrated solutions becomes crucial as rural fishing communities are highly vulnerable to food and economic insecurity, aggravated by external crises and a rapidly changing climate. This study identifies and assesses the factors and motivations on the gender dynamics in the rural tuna fishing communities in the Lagonoy Gulf, Philippines. Focus-group discussions and key-informant interviews were conducted with 120 male and female respondents across six (6) of the 15 municipalities in the Lagonoy Gulf, tuna federation leaders, and female group savings association officers. Results of the study emphasize the traditional heteronormative structures that still influence household and community dynamics in Lagonoy Gulf. Women are active as ancillary workers, holding key responsibilities in marketing the harvest to local traders and markets and engaging in profit-saving activities. However, these roles are seen only as support and are not recognized to merit the participation of women in community decision-making. This perception also reflects disparities at the household level, where women are expected to assume household and childcare work. However, women recognize these functions as a source of empowerment, upholding their skill to handle multiple occupations to service their devotion to their family. They also highly regard their skill in financial custodianship, seeking means to address their family's financial problems. Lack of opportunities for women equally bears unhealthy expectations for men to remain the breadwinner despite struggles to reap economic benefits. Both men and women in Lagonoy Gulf echo the aspiration for women to earn to help address family poverty. This study emphasizes the need for institutional support to ensure gender-based strategies in the communities, including opening pathways for women to secure decent work and increasing their participation in local fisheries governance.

Keywords: Women in fisheries, Philippines, Tuna fisheries, Lagonoy Gulf

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Introduction

The Philippines belongs to an ocean region known as the global epicenter of marine biodiversity (Pinheiro et al., 2019). The country is reliant on its abundant aquatic ecosystems and fishery resources for food security and livelihood. Tuna is one of the country's largest produced and most highly-valued species and a top export commodity that earns approximately US \$231 million (Lamarca, 2017). In 2019, the Philippines produced over 500,000 metric tons of tuna, 27% of which was harvested by municipal or small-scale fisheries (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2019).

The Lagonoy Gulf is one of the major fishing grounds in the country with high concentrations of tuna outside General Santos City—the center of tuna fisheries in the country. Unlike General Santos' complex tuna fishing industry, the tuna trade in the Lagonoy Gulf is confined to local community markets or—if the tuna harvest is deemed “of quality”—exported to consumer markets in the capital, Manila. Seventy percent of the tuna in the Lagonoy Gulf is traded only within the vicinity or in adjacent municipalities (Lagonoy Gulf Integrated Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Management Council, 2017).

The Lagonoy Gulf is beset by the increasing threat of unstable fishery resources due to various factors, not the least of which are impacts driven by climate change. The belt of typhoons that ravaged the Gulf in the late months of 2020 destroyed houses and livelihood implements. Climate scenarios project that typhoons will only get stronger and more frequent due to rising ocean temperatures, increasing the vulnerability of coastal communities (Holden & Marshall, 2018). Tuna has also been growing scarcer due to warming oceans, with the fish migrating to colder waters, leaving the Gulf vulnerable to poverty and food insecurity (Monnier et al., 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic further impeded the capacity of fishers in the Lagonoy Gulf to resume their trade and blocked alternative quick-paying jobs due to national lockdowns. Despite its vital economic contribution, the fisheries sector in the Philippines remains one of the poorest in the country, with a poverty incidence rate of 23%. The Bicol Region, on which the Lagonoy Gulf is situated, had a poverty incidence rate of 20% in 2018 (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2020).

Women in Fisheries

Accurate data on women in the fisheries sector in the Philippines is sparse and difficult to obtain. The 1995 country population census reported that females comprise only 8.2% in the fisheries sector, which either indicates it as a male-dominated industry or the participation of women is underreported (Siason, 2000). Underreporting may be a cause of a narrow definition of fisheries to mean fishing by boat (Siason, 2000; Kleiber et al., 2014; Bradford & Katikiro, 2019; Torell et al., 2021), especially in communities that heavily rely on off-shore or deep-sea fishing (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2016). The 2006-2010 Medium-Term Comprehensive National Fisheries Industry Action Plan of the Philippines has admitted a lack of representation of women in local management councils and supportive policies to recognize women in fisheries development interventions. Targets to address these gaps were not answered or reflected in the 2016-2020 Mid-Term Plan. The Lagonoy Gulf Tuna Management Plan, finalized in 2016, does not stipulate any strategies to improve gender equality in the tuna supply and value chain. The “invisibility” of women in fisheries creates data gaps on gender divisions on labor at the local level, undermines the overall contribution of women in livelihood and other fishing-related economic activities, and presents challenges in identifying gender-redistributive policies towards sustainable fisheries management (Frangoudes & Gerard, 2018).

This research aims to: a) identify the gender norms and power relations in the rural tuna fishing communities in Lagonoy Gulf, and b) assess the motivations and perspectives for these relationships. Understanding the gender dynamics in rural tuna fisheries offers insight into women's access and contribution to local market and governance structures. This access, or lack thereof, enables or impedes opportunities to promote economic resilience and sustainable community-based fisheries management, especially in times of crisis and in a rapidly changing climate.

Theoretical Framework: Rural Gender dynamics

In traditional rural communities, men are characteristically an asset, because their physical capacity to do work equals economic productivity (Cole et al., 2015). Rural masculinity, especially in agricultural and fishing communities, idealizes “toughness” and “grit” as the dominant qualities to access the primary resources available (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Turgo, 2014; Gustavsson & Riley, 2019).

Long hours of work wedges a distinct division of labor that compartmentalizes the role of women into the affairs of the household—parental care and household management are left for the women to maintain; in turn, stymieing their opportunities for economic contribution in the family (Gustavsson, 2016; Abebe et al., 2020). Because domestic household labor and other informal subsistence activities do not equate to any evident economic value, the role of women becomes “hidden,” and they lose power, agency, and place in community decision-making as a cause of this “insignificant contribution.” (Kabeer, 1994; Harper et al., 2017). Dependence on an earning family member (Kabeer, 2005) undervalues women's position in society and fosters a tendency for them to internalize one's subservience (Gallagher, 2007; Bearman et al., 2009).

Poverty intensifies these power relations (Kabeer, 1994) but also cracks through them, as they are challenged by the prevailing priority for subsistence (Turgo, 2010). This is the case for agricultural and fishing communities that rely on what is otherwise becoming increasingly scarce and unstable natural resources (Balsdon, 2007; Steenbergen et al., 2020; Fayazi & Bornstein, 2021).

Women's increase in market participation, for one, addresses income gaps and helps them assert their bargaining power in the household. However, it also often encumbers them to stretch their time to commit to both domestic and economic duties (Kabeer, 1994; Lawless et al., 2019). There is, however, the idea of the “multi-dimensionality” of women's choice and adaptability to address economic necessities. Women can move into spaces men traditionally occupy and define these spaces as an extension of their womanhood. This is most especially true for mothers who actively engage and participate in the labor force as an added way to fulfill their maternal duties (Ayala & Murga, 2016).

Rigid expectations of “masculinity” can also suffocate disadvantaged or marginalized men (Alston & Kent, 2008). The pressure to maintain the role as the “breadwinner” intensifies when work starts to produce less output, eroding one's sense of worth and place in the community (Angeles & Hill, 2009; Turgo, 2014).

Rural households also operate as a singular and conjugal entity that defines distinct and separate productive functions, with women usually relegated to domestic household labor (Kabeer, 1994). However, adopting complementary economic set-ups in the household serves greater practicality in addressing family poverty (Ferrer et al., 2014). Marketing and post-harvest retailing activities, where women predominate, are essential ancillaries in catch or harvest produce (Lentisco & Lee, 2015; Salmi & Sonck-Rautio, 2018; Pedroza-Gutiérrez, 2019; Gustavsson,

2020). However characteristic of women in these communities, such functions are still overlooked in local production systems (Turgo, 2010).

Methodology

Research Site

The area of study in the Lagonoy Gulf is located in the Bicol Region of the Philippines. It covers an expanse of 3071 km², with a channel that opens towards the Pacific Ocean (Soliman, Mendoza Jr., & Yamaoka, 2008). Lagonoy Gulf comprises 164 barangays across 15 municipalities in Albay, Camarines Sur, and Catanduanes. More than 2,000 tuna fishing households reside in Lagonoy Gulf, 74% of which are registered (Lagonoy Gulf Integrated Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Management Council, 2017).



Figures 1 and 2: Location of study: Lagonoy Gulf, Bicol, Philippines.

Data Collection and Analysis

The research was conducted from March to May 2021. Data from this research was generated through focus-group discussions and key-informant interviews.

Focus-group discussions covered six of the 15 municipalities in Lagonoy Gulf; specifically, Tiwi, Tabaco, Putsan, and Malilipot in Albay Province; and Sagñay and Presentacion in Camarines Sur. In this study, respondents were divided into male and female groups in each municipality, except in Tabaco, Albay, where the only available respondent group was female. The respondents were identified through a mix of purposive and snowball sampling. Research assistants identified contact in each respondent group, who gathered some respondents randomly and assigned them to recruit others. There were a total of 57 male respondents and 63 female respondents that participated in the focus-group discussions. All recruited male respondents are members of the tuna fishing associations in their respective municipalities.

The focus-group discussions were semi-structured and framed under the following main questions (Torell et al., 2021):

1. How, and to what extent, do both men and women participate in community fisheries governance bodies or other community activities?
2. What are the roles of men and women in the tuna supply chain?
3. What are the perceptions that govern the functions of men and women in the household?
4. How do men and women cope with or contribute to the current conditions in the household/community? What motivates these coping or contributing mechanisms? What aspirations are attached to these mechanisms?

Key-informant interviews were conducted with two community tuna fishing leaders and four female community group savings and loan association officers to understand local status and processes on the tuna fisheries and plans for women community members.

A qualitative analysis software (Dedoose™) was used to analyze the data from the focus-group discussions. The analysis involved identifying recurring themes and patterns in the responses and the frequency of these patterns according to sex. Responses from the interviews were also transcribed accordingly.

Scope and Limitations

The research period was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, so correspondences with respondents had to be administered by phone and virtual platforms. The support of community coordinators was enlisted as research assistants to help gather the respondents, assist in the correspondences, and translate responses from the colloquial language to Filipino and English.

Respondent types are also only limited to the harvest and post-harvest levels of the value chain, to which the majority of rural tuna fishing community members belong. However, community structures are flexible in these sites; responses from *casa* owners (local traders) and fisheries management council members were also gathered.

Results

Gender Dynamics in Community Fisheries Governance; Women's Access to Decision-Making Spaces

Tuna Fishers Associations (TFAs) primarily govern community mobilization in each municipality. The general perception is that these groups are funnels for relief aid. Several of the respondents recalled that the TFAs have been instrumental in the provision of food packs and tarpaulins from government and private donations in response to the consecutive onslaught of Typhoons *Goni* and *Vamco* (locally known as *Rolly* and *Ulysses*, respectively) in late 2020. The TFAs also primarily serve as grassroots entities that negotiate and lobby agenda in local fisheries governance. The TFAs are under the supervision and guidance of the also municipal fishers-led Lagonoy Gulf Tuna Fishers Federation, Inc. The Federation represents the collective interests of the tuna fishers in the Integrated Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Management Council (IFARMC). As mentioned by a tuna federation leader, the TFAs exist to ensure that "the voices of the fishers are heard." As community fisheries management and governance bodies, TFAs also create mechanisms to ensure that tuna fishers within their vicinities are licensed and registered and are aware of proper tuna handling to increase its value. TFAs also secure sufficient collective savings to help shoulder the fishing operation costs of any member. TFA membership is male-dominated, except in Putsan, where male respondents mentioned current female TFA officials but did not specify their positions. A female respondent from Tabaco said that she serves as their TFA's secretary.

Generally, TFAs conduct their meetings once a month, but respondents cited that the pandemic has caused them to occur less frequently and only when needed. One female respondent said that the fisher-members are expected to attend these assemblies. Still, most female respondents said they participate in lieu of their husbands when they happen to be away at sea. Ironically, when asked about the agenda, many female respondents answered they are not aware of what is discussed in the meetings. However, a number of the female respondents, notably in Tabaco, Tiwi, and Malilipot, were able to cite that the TFAs talk about "how to properly fish and handle tuna" and "the registration and licensing of the boats."

Apart from the TFAs, no other groups exist in the municipalities except for the Group Savings and Loans Associations (conveniently coined by respondents as "Group Savings" or "GSLAS"). GSLAs act as de-facto financing outfits in the communities, who request members to regularly chip in a small portion of their earnings (each less than a quarter of a US dollar) every "cycle," or in every two to three months of the year. GSLAs stand in as women's committees, mainly because the members are all women. Almost all female respondents are members of the GSLAs, some of whom are officers who call themselves "taga-tago ng kahon" [treasure-keepers]. However, GSLAs acting as women's committees do not strictly apply, as some male tuna fishers still head some GSLAs. There are no GSLAs in Tabaco and Malilipot, so female representation in these municipalities is almost non-existent. A Tabaco respondent said that "there is no need to have a women's committee as there are only two of us [in the TFA]." GSLAs do not hold the same level of authority as the TFAs and are mostly seen as supporting bodies.

Women are not passive in their lack of representation. On the contrary, many female respondents complained that their needs should be addressed in TFA agendas. Female respondents in Presentacion and Tabaco further suggested forming a different body to manage their interests freely. As one respondent remarked, "Why does everything have to go through my husband? There should be a separate group for us. [People] should also listen to my voice, and not just my husband's."

A few male respondents said that it might be possible to set their wives' interests in the agenda, as they usually manage marketing the harvest. A tuna federation leader also aims to allocate a portion of a foreseen non-profit funding opportunity in organizing and sustaining women's led- and managed groups for tuna food processing and entrepreneurial development activities in the communities.

Individually, some female respondents engage as community volunteers. For example, public conditional cash grant beneficiaries participate in "highway beautification" projects. In addition, some women do honoraria-based work in the municipal social welfare offices; colloquially, male respondents referred to their wives as "[the ones who] handle(s) the PWDs (persons with disabilities)." A respondent also serves as a member of the Tabaco City Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Management Council (FARMC). Female respondents who are community and local government volunteers are regarded among their peers as "leaders." In the focus group discussions, they sometimes acted as spokespersons on behalf of their respective respondent groups.

Gender Dynamics in the Tuna Supply Chain

Tuna fishing follows a set ritual. Before departure, all provisions need to be prepared—the "baon" [food packs] for the fishers, the bait for the fish, the nylon for the handline, and the ice packs and gasoline for the boats. The length of tuna fishing excursions depends on the vessel, but, regularly, trips would last for six to seven hours at a time (WWF-Philippines, 2016). Other fishers

would leave at early dawn and others late at night. When the fishers return with a fresh catch of tuna, they will haul the fish to the *casa* or the local trader. The trader will sell this over to the wholesale retailer or exporter, who will then transport the fish product to domestic consumer markets. If the fishers return with only low-value small pelagic species, they will be sold to the local wet market or peddled individually.

The tuna fishers in the Lagonoy Gulf, are all men. This is the case because, as most of the respondents shared, tuna fishing is, in itself, dangerous. Yellowfin tuna—the primary catch in Lagonoy Gulf—is one of the fastest and heaviest fishery species (Oceana, n.d.). A sustainable way of catching tuna is through handline, a single nylon thread usually held and pulled only by hand. When the tuna hooks onto the bait and starts to resist, the fishers would have to be agile and compete with its massive and swift force. This method of fishing would result in injuries. In Sagñay, male respondents recalled a colleague who once lost a finger because he struggled to hold out against a caught tuna.

Tuna fishing in the Lagonoy Gulf is restrictive also due to geography and the natural direction of currents. Directly facing the Pacific Ocean, the waters around the Bicol Region are generally rough, and waves can reach as high as 15 feet on certain occasions (Tono et al., 2014). All male and female respondents said that women get seasick in the distances where the fishers catch tuna. A female respondent from Tabaco referred to this as the "the sea [outside] is different." Women who go with their husbands are not as common. Male respondents in Malilipot said that some wives join trips when the waters are calmer. Men in Putsan also shared that the other parts of Camarines Sur have wives who join their husbands in tuna fishing trips. However, women often join only when men fish near-shore (or "sa agran" in the colloquial language). Female respondents said that most women who can afford to join do not have any young children to tend to anymore, like one of the Tiwi respondents.

Pre- and post-harvest activities fall on the women to manage. They prepare the equipment and the necessities for the excursions. When the fishers land, they negotiate with the *casa* on the value of the landed tuna. When the fishers come home with only low-value catch, they bring these to the market to sell. Some cannot afford a booth in the market, so they peddle the fish on their own. Other women sun-dry small fish or squid. A female respondent in Tabaco said that "daing" [sun-dried fish or squid] would sell at USD 6 a kilo on average.

A mandate for the TFAs in the Lagonoy Gulf is to conduct "fish catch reporting." Fish catch reporting is a recording of the fishers' periods of excursions and the weight and value of the landed tuna. It is written documentation, with each household having their personal notebook. Male respondents shared that they handle the reporting, but women take on this function in most cases, as corroborated by the female respondents.

Gender Dynamics in the Household

It is common practice for women to manage the household. Household duties often refer to cleaning the house, doing the laundry, and looking after the children. The male respondents relied on their wives to see their welfare, especially after coming home from the sea. A male respondent from Tiwi referred to the women as having "malambot ang kamay" [soft hands] and are therefore more capable of taking on work that "rough hands" would otherwise damage or break apart. Another male respondent from Tiwi said the women are like "yayas." "Yaya" in the Philippine culture is the domestic helper, a migrant from rural poor communities employed by middle-class to affluent families. "Yayas" are informal workers who take care of the "amo's" [boss'] children and do menial household labor (De Guzman, 2014). When asked what women do

for work, a male respondent said that women are "babae lang" ["just" women], only responsible for housekeeping. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, female respondents also cited their added responsibility to "conduct learning modules," taking on the role of overseeing and facilitating their children's schoolwork, as an effect of the country's mandatory distance education. The FARMC officer mentioned that she is adept at managing her time between her work and her family, noting the schedule she proudly keeps to balance her responsibilities.

Male respondents also relied on women to manage the family's finances. Men, in jest, said that if they kept the money, nothing would be left because every penny would have just gone to "good time." Female respondents attributed this to their skill for financial management as being "ma-diskarte." "Diskarte" refers to the skill of finding creative means to solve social problems (Morales, 2017). Female respondents said they are adept at budgeting expenses and seeking means to stay afloat when the family is especially cash-strapped. However, some men still dominate monetary decisions. Female respondents from Sagñay, Malilipot, and Tiwi recalled knowing neighbors whose husbands get the final say on how the money is spent. Some female respondents from Sagñay and Tiwi also mentioned that men would restrict women spending on personal needs. However, men would often excuse themselves from spending on alcohol because they would do so "only from time to time," and only as a respite from long excursions at sea. A female respondent said, "if the husband does not approve [of an expense], I cannot do anything." Other respondents noted that monetary decisions are shared between spouses.

Impacts of Socio-Economic and Environmental Conditions on Gender Dynamics

Men engage in alternative menial labor to sustain their income during lean seasons or low fish catch. Many male respondents rely on carpentry and construction work, often taking on job orders either locally or in the capital, Manila. Other respondents would do welding and logistics driving. One male respondent in Tiwi tailored children's school uniforms on the side, but the pandemic stalled his occupation. When explaining his side job, the tailor was proud of his skill and remarked that his craft is not exclusively a woman's line of work. Other male respondents would go with their wives to farm tiger grass.

Women would also do side-jobs to augment their incomes, engaging primarily in home-based craftwork such as abaca twining and tiger grass farming (for creating brooms); women in Putsan belong to a cottage pottery industry in their municipality. Other female respondents with slightly better financial means also have "sari-sari stores" [micro-neighborhood convenience stores] or piggeries for those whose properties can afford extra space. A female respondent in Tiwi is a domestic helper. Female respondents cited their side-jobs as some of their means to practice "diskarte." Many women mentioned they are good at finding ways to do extra work even with limited resources.

These alternative sources of income are also unstable and often susceptible to external shocks. Some male respondents mentioned that construction work became impossible as pandemic lockdowns restricted labor migration from the provinces to Manila. Women also cited the difficulty in continuing abaca twining and tiger grass farming as these also became collateral damages from the onslaught of typhoons in the Lagonoy Gulf in late 2020. A female respondent in Malilipot is a public-school teacher, holding the only stable job amongst the respondent base.

Poverty in the area is, among many other factors, driven by the instability and volatility of fishing as a trade. Catching fish has become onerous, with the fishers often coming home empty-handed. Problems even in purchasing gasoline for boats are also common. Almost all respondents cited this instability to the increase in fishers that share resources within the Lagonoy Gulf, which

they said was not the case in the past. A male respondent in Putsan also mentioned the competition with commercial vessels and the existence of fishing aggregating devices that restrict the movement of fishers within designated municipal waters. Respondents in Putsan and Presentacion also mentioned still-prevalent reports on illegal fishing. Female respondents in Tiwi and Malilipot pointed to environmental degradation as a cause, with climate change restricting excursion periods and waste pollution destroying the Lagonoy Gulf's marine ecosystem.

Lack of harvest is compounded by the unjust tendencies of the *casa* [local trader] system, which is a primary source of indebtedness for many small-scale fishers. Off-shore fishing excursion requires an average of USD 850 a week for three to four people, while near-shore excursions cost USD 100-120 (WWF-Philippines, 2016). Fishers do not have the capital to support operation costs, so they seek loans from *casas*. Debt is paid off through the bought tuna—the *casa* cuts a portion of the tuna profit equal to the amount that the fisher owes. A tuna federation leader mentioned that *casas* sometimes dictate the price of the tuna, lowering its buying price, so the fisher takes home even less. A female respondent in Tabaco shared that if the tuna costs USD 1.6 per kilo, the fisher takes home only USD 4 to 6 for the entire fish. On average, fishers earn only USD 180 a month, falling below the poverty threshold. On lean seasons, they make only around USD 120 (WWF-Philippines, 2016). Apart from the money, the *casa* system also predisposes an “utang na loob” [“debt of gratitude”] from the indebted fishers. Another female respondent in Tabaco cited a case in which a TFA officer could not wean away from the *casa* as he could put his children to school due to his loans.

Male respondents also aspire for their wives to earn “para makagaan” [to ease the burden] in household finances and their necessity to keep fishing to take home food. A respondent in Putsan mentioned that if his wife finds work, he will share in the maternal duties of his wife. A respondent in Sagñay found this arrangement conditional, in that he can take on the household work if his wife secures a steady income. Male respondents in Presentacion viewed the opportunity of women to work as significant, especially in expanding their knowledge and worldview, “para hindi lang palagi nasa bahay” [so women do not ‘while away’ at home all day]. Many male respondents expected that work should not keep women far away from their home or community, so the wives can still have time to take care of the children.

“Work,” in the understanding of almost all respondents, refers to livelihood and entrepreneurial projects. When asked about work opportunities for women, the tuna federation officers cited funding support in sustaining livelihood training previously provided by the regional body of the national fisheries agency. All female respondents found “puhunan” as the only utmost necessity in triggering their access to income. “Puhunan” [capital] helps the women invest in raw materials and equipment to start an enterprise independently. Female respondents in Sagñay and Tabaco sought skills enhancement training to learn product development. A female respondent in Malilipot also mentioned the group's interest in operating a tuna food processing enterprise, except they do not have the refrigerators to store their food products. Female respondents preferred working from or near home to still manage the household and look after their children. All respondents echoed the sentiment that access to such financial and entrepreneurial opportunities will help ease their family's struggles and secure their children's continued schooling.

Discussion

Fishing communities in this research are highly traditional, as respondents cited fishing, as a vocation, has been passed down throughout generations (Turgo, 2014). Gender structures remain essentially unchanged in such rural societies. Men remain seen as the most economically viable

actors in the community because of their learned and perceived inherent skill in productive labor. The value of fish is seen as primarily dependent on the quality and effort of the catch itself (Siason, 2000; Harper et al., 2017). Hence, the main agenda of the TFA meetings are centered on fish handling and logistics. Tuna fishing is also considered dangerous (Gustavsson, 2016), limiting women's participation in the activity. Many women opt to join near-shore fishing excursions instead of where it is safest (Kleiber, 2018; Torell et al., 2021).

Because the understanding of fishing is parochial, ancillaries and post-harvest activities, where women predominate, are viewed only as auxiliaries (Lentisco & Lee, 2015; Harper et al., 2017). Women prepare fishing implements before excursions. They also negotiate and bargain the cost of the harvest to the *casas* (local traders). Women are also generally the fishmongers, peddling low-value catch individually or through stalls in community markets (Turgo, 2010; Salmi & Sonck-Rautio, 2018). To handle and manage the profit generated from fishing and fishing-related activities, women enlist in the Group Savings and Loan Associations (GSLAs). Functioning only as supporting units, GSLAs do not hold the same political leverage and representation in local decision-making spaces as the TFAs. GSLA agenda falls outside the ambit of the TFA agenda and has, therefore, no influence in FARMC or local government decisions. While there is the individual presence of women leading FARMCs, working as secretaries in TFAs, or owning *casas*, representation of women is lacking at the sectoral level (Finkbeiner et al., 2021). The GSLAs are currently the only viable space for the collective representation of women in the communities. However, the GSLAs' exclusion in local political spaces, in turn, overlooks the opportunity for women to lobby their interests as a unit (Kleiber et al., 2018; Rohe et al., 2018).

Community structures are equally reflective of the dichotomous arrangements of men and women at the household level. Men's economic advantage influences power relations between spouses (Turgo, 2010; Gustavsson, 2016). They are less expected to share housework because they have already "done enough" to support the family. While the female respondents mentioned that their and their husbands' personal care expenses are set aside to prioritize food and childcare, men's recreations (such as liquor) are budgeted. With less economic influence in the family, women are designated to fulfill the "supporting work" (Kabeer, 1994): they manage the house and their family's finances. They also carry a heavier burden on parental care. The female respondents, for instance, took on the added function of module facilitators for their children's schooling during the pandemic. These duties are often considered "soft" duties. "Soft" duties are perceived not to require strenuous physical work, thus reflecting little or no economic equivalent in the household. (Kabeer, 1994). This notion is evidenced in the male respondents' referring to women's work as "pang-babae lang," or fitting only for women. A male respondent also referring to women as "yayas" reflects the subverted views on women's labor, relegating women only as servile to one's family.

Traditional roles compartmentalize the value of women in rural societies. However, women in the Lagonoy Gulf redefine their roles as their chief asset. Motherhood is multi-faceted and can expand towards nontraditional occupations to service a woman's devotion to her family (Ayala & Murga, 2016). The female respondent working as a FARMC officer gave merit to her skill to fairly split her time between work and her husband and children. Women also took pride in their ability to "diskarte." "Diskarte," in the Philippine vernacular, is a learned skill drawn from one's adaptability and resourcefulness regardless of one's social and economic limitations (Morales, 2017). With their "diskarte," women are able and assiduous in seeking ways to augment their household income and ensure their family's subsistence.

Community and social welfare volunteers, TFA and FARMC officers, *casa* owners, and teachers are regarded as “leaders” in the communities. The distinction is bred from their proximity and opportunity to participate in decision-making and industry spaces (Pedroza-Gutiérrez, 2019). They hold such privilege because of relative stability in their income (Canagarajah et al., 2001), their educational background, or their overall access and network with key community actors (such as local government officials, among others). Women in the Lagonoy Gulf recognize their lack of sectoral access to decision-making and industry spaces, limited only to those with positions. There is recognition of the deficiency of their voice to influence these spaces and create reforms to improve their welfare as women and as participants of the local fishing livelihood systems. Having a “voice” implies the ability to lobby their interest to become productive mothers and community members (Martin, 1990). For the women in the Lagonoy Gulf, this means becoming privy to the TFA agenda and being given income-generating opportunities. Having a “voice” recognizes that their contributions to the communities are significant.

The traditionality of tuna fishing communities has an equal imposition on the rural male identity. As “productive” bodies, men are placed to a higher standard in providing for the household. They are positioned to undertake forms of labor that are more emblematic of their masculinity, assumed to bear higher economic productivity, such as in exercising strength through construction and carpentry work as side jobs for several of the male respondents (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Cole et al., 2015). However, growing problems on low catch turnout rates, pandemic restrictions, and indebtedness to higher actors in the tuna value chain challenge this ideal rural masculinity (Alston & Kent, 2008). There is the expression of exasperation in men to uphold such expectations while struggling to reap economic benefits from fishing. Men’s roles then become flexible to address urgent needs for subsistence (Turgo, 2014; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2015), as evidenced by the male respondents who would farm tiger grass with their wives. The male respondent, who is a tailor, also clarified that his work is usually attributed to women.

Men in the rural fishing communities in Lagonoy had the resounding sentiment for their wives to have access to a stable income, noting this will ease their burden as the sole breadwinner. They wanted “equality” in economic responsibility, co-sharing this function with their wives (Ferrer et al., 2014). Women equally aspired to acquire “puhunan” [capital] to better support their families. Earning capital leverages their economic value in the household and increases their stake in the community (Kabeer, 2005). However, it must also be noted that some male respondents expressed the expectation that women will still shoulder household duties regardless of securing work and an income. Traditional structures can maintain power disparities even as women gain privilege and access to financial opportunities (Karim et al., 2018), meriting systemic and institutional interventions to mitigate such risk and ensure that women’s rights are respected.

Conclusion

This research identified and assessed the factors and motivations on the gender dynamics in rural tuna fishing communities in the Lagonoy Gulf, Philippines. The analysis reinforced the findings of previous bodies of literature that emphasize women’s overlooked contribution in the fisheries sector. Women are active as ancillary workers, taking on roles that help compound the value of tuna. Women bargain and negotiate the value of fish to the local traders and serve as the fishmongers for low-value catch. Women also join community financing units to invest a portion of their household income. Many of these roles are seen only as support. The value of tuna is perceived to be already pre-determined by the fishing activity itself. Being seen only as secondary

labor, women lose their leverage to participate in community decision-making and lack access to lobby their interests as a sector.

The supposed lack of economic contribution of women results in social disparities in rural tuna fishing communities. Women are seen only as “domestic workers,” shouldering the function of managing the home and the children because men already fulfill their role as breadwinners. However, as identified in this research, women recognize their duties as a source of empowerment. They uphold their skill to handle multiple occupations to improve and secure their family’s welfare. In the communities, women are also recognized as good financial custodians who have an astute ability to “diskarte,” finding creative ways to solve their family’s financial problems.

Poverty is core to restrictive gender dynamics in marginalized rural tuna fishing communities in the Lagonoy Gulf. The lack of financial opportunities for women constrains their privilege to have economic bargaining power in the household and the community. Women who are generally reliant only on their husbands' income have the weaker advantage in decision-making and are limited only to domestic duties to fulfill their value at home.

Lack of financial opportunities equally imposes unhealthy expectations on men in marginalized rural communities. Rural men are set to a higher standard in providing for the family, often by taking on strenuous labor to reap quick profit. However, the increasing vulnerability of fishing communities to environmental, political, and economic crises makes it difficult for men to continue producing output, diminishing their primary responsibility to support the family and exposing them to greater food and financial insecurity.

Decent work and economic opportunities are vital in addressing gender inequality in rural fishing communities. It is essential to provide women with the necessary financial capital, training, and network to generate and secure their income (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2010). Local institutions, both government and non-government bodies present in the communities, should consider establishing structures to enable women to operate and sustain community-based enterprises, including providing communal areas where equipment is set up to store or process identified products. Fisheries governance and management authorities should also recognize and address the lack of sectoral representation of women in local decision-making and generate reforms to safeguard and improve women’s roles in the tuna value chain. Gender sensitivity awareness and education are also important to deconstruct traditional conceptions on gender and labor and include male perspectives and attitudes in development interventions.

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