



# HISGUT KALIBUNGAN

## HURUHISGUTAY 2 POLICY BRIEF

15 February 2021

### SUMMARY

Environmentalists and fisheries professionals discussed and analyzed the current state of fisheries production in Region 8 during the second episode of Hisgut Kalibungan. The following recommendations were put forward to achieve sustainable fisheries in Eastern Visayas and the rest of the country:

- Formulate and implement science-based plans, programs, projects, and policies for the enhancement, conservation, and management of fisheries resources.
- Reconcile and harmonize data and data collection methods to provide timely and accurate information on total fisheries production.
- Strengthen coordination within and among local government agencies (LGAs) to harmonize project and program development and improve implementation.
- Adopt evidence-based regulatory measures in the country to boost total fisheries production.
- Improve the management systems of fishery refuge, sanctuaries, and marine protected areas (MPAs).
- Improve municipal fishers' access to basic services.
- Educate the community, local government units (LGUs), and other stakeholders about current initiatives for sustainable fisheries.
- Strictly implement existing policies on fisheries by strengthening and capacitating local enforcement teams.

### INTRODUCTION

Eastern Visayas is comprised largely of coastal municipalities. Many of the households in these communities rely on capture fisheries and aquaculture for income and food security. Based on Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Regional Office 8 (BFAR RO8) data, over 186,230 registered fisherfolk operate in the region. A fifth of them (36,420) are women. Meanwhile, Philippine Statistics Authority data from 2014 to 2019 show that Eastern Visayas has consistently contributed about 3% to the total fisheries production of the Philippines. A large portion of the aggregate fisheries production in Eastern Visayas comes from the municipal fisheries sector, followed by aquaculture and the commercial fisheries sector, which is similar to the data for the whole Philippines. Fishing, like manufacturing, mining, farming, and tourism, contributes significantly to the economy of Region 8.

As in other parts of the country, wild stock harvest of commercially important fisheries commodities in Region 8 is dwindling mainly because of unsustainable fishing practices. The use of illegal fishing gear like bottom trawls, cyanide, dynamite, and compressor is still prevalent in some areas, particularly in Samar and Eastern Samar. These irresponsible fishing activities result in the destruction of the feeding and breeding grounds of fish and other types of aquatic organisms. At the same time, increasing fishing pressure due to increasing demand contributes to overfishing, which likewise leads to declining fisheries production in Eastern Visayas and the rest of the country. Meanwhile, aquaculture operators are burdened by the added cost of importing finfish fingerlings from other parts of the country because the hatcheries in the region produce a very limited supply of seeds or fingerlings.

The dwindling fisheries harvest is detrimental to the already poor living conditions of the people who are dependent on fisheries for livelihood, particularly the municipal fishers. As most of the fishery-dependent households are the poorest of the poor, there is an urgent need to plan and implement interventions for the sustainable development of the whole fisheries sector in Region 8 and the rest of the Philippines. However, there are certain impediments in planning for informed and appropriate programs, projects, and policies for sustainable fisheries, such as inaccurate reporting of fisheries production data for each region and overlapping and conflicting development programs and projects by LGAs. On the other hand, some of the existing laws on fisheries and related environmental policies are not seriously implemented in the region. To achieve sustainable fisheries, it is important to address the issues and concerns affecting the fisheries sector and the environment in Eastern Visayas and the country as a whole.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Nine policy recommendations were drawn from *Huruhisgutay 2: Pangisdaan ha Sinirangan Bisayas* (Fisheries Production in Eastern Visayas) held on 29 January 2021 with Dr. Nancy A. Dayap, Professorial Lecturer in the MS Environmental Science Program of UP Visayas Tacloban College, as the lead discussant and Guiuan Development Foundation, Inc. Executive Director Prof. Margarita T. de la Cruz; Mrs. Nonita S. Cabacaba, Chief Science Research Specialist of the National Fisheries Research and Development Institute - Marine Fisheries Research and Development Center in Guiuan; and BFAR RO8 Regional Director Dr. Norberto T. Berida as panel members.

- 1. Formulate and implement science-based plans, programs, projects, and policies for the enhancement, conservation, and management of fisheries resources.** More research studies on the social, economic, political, cultural, biological, ecological, and environmental aspects of fisheries are needed to provide updated knowledge and information on the status of the fisheries sector in the region. Research organizations should be encouraged to share their findings with policymakers and implementers of fisheries management and related programs, projects, and policies to help them appreciate the importance of research in policymaking. At the same time, policymakers are encouraged to utilize the knowledge products derived from research as inputs

in the formulation of appropriate policies and in the planning and development of conservation programs and projects. For instance, concerned LGAs may continue with stock and habitat enhancement but this should be based on sound scientific and technical advice from experts.

2. **Reconcile and harmonize data and data collection methods to provide timely and accurate information on total fisheries production.** Data on total fisheries production in Eastern Visayas are collected only from the three major fishing grounds: Samar Sea, Camotes Sea, and Leyte Gulf. Meanwhile, some of the fish harvest in Eastern Visayas are transported directly to Sorsogon, Cebu, and Mindanao. Issues in the collection of data lead to the inaccurate representation of fisheries production in Eastern Visayas and in other parts of the country. To avoid this, it is important to gather production data from all fisheries sectors, including in minor fishing grounds in Region 8 that also produce tons of commercially important fishery commodities. In addition, there is a need to record accurate information about the place of origin of the landed catch and ascribe the volume of catch to the place of origin rather than to where the catch is landed. This strategy will avoid inaccurate reporting of aggregate fisheries production and enable better planning for sustainable fisheries in all regions.
3. **Strengthen coordination within and among LGAs to harmonize program and project development and improve implementation.** This strategy will help avoid the development of conflicting plans, programs, and projects within an organization and between and among different LGAs. Moreover, contradictory projects will be avoided, such as those that impact negatively on fish habitats (e.g. planting mangroves on seagrass beds). Most importantly, this approach will enable the LGAs to maximize and channel their limited human and fiscal resources to comprehensive programs, projects, and policies.
4. **Adopt evidence-based regulatory measures in the country to boost total fisheries production.** The implementation of harvest control rules (HCRs) and closed season for fishing, among others, has been proven to reverse dwindling fish stock in some areas of the country and in some parts of the world. By implementing similar regulatory measures and other existing laws that are designed to protect and enhance fisheries resources and the environment, Eastern Visayas may be able to recover and achieve sustainable yield and increase its fish sufficiency index sooner.
5. **Improve the management systems of fishery refuge, sanctuaries, and marine protected areas (MPAs).** Local government units (LGUs) should be encouraged to establish 15% of their municipal waters as a fishery refuge, sanctuary, or MPA pursuant to Republic Act 10654 or the amended Philippine Fisheries Code. In addition, it is important to provide support for the management initiatives of the community, civil society organizations (CSOs), and other groups that help in the proper management of MPAs. This type of support can be provided in the form of capacity building activities or by allocating a regular budget for MPA monitoring and assessment, including incentives for the monitoring teams (e.g. honoraria, healthcare insurance). Furthermore, creating Coastal Resource Management (CRM) offices in LGUs will contribute to the enhancement of coastal fisheries and eventually local aggregate fisheries production in general. Finally, LGAs, like BFAR, must support and lobby for important bills filed at the Senate and the House of Representatives in support of the fisheries sector of the country.
6. **Improve municipal fishers' access to basic services.** Resources should be made available for the growing number of municipal fishery-dependent households to sustain their livelihood and improve their living conditions. In partnership with other stakeholders, LGUs must seriously plan and implement appropriate interventions that will help alleviate the living conditions of municipal fishers, such as providing technical assistance, scholarship grants, and healthcare packages. Meanwhile, strengthening local hatcheries to augment the local supply of fingerlings will help the local fish farmers reduce their operating cost. On the other hand, the government should also provide fisherfolk with alternative livelihood opportunities to augment their source of food and income. Doing so may help reduce fishing pressure and its adverse effects on marine and freshwater resources. Providing basic services to fisherfolk will greatly improve the wellbeing of fishery-dependent households.
7. **Educate the community, LGUs, and other stakeholders about current initiatives on sustainable fisheries.** Concerned LGAs, CSOs, academe, and other organizations engaged in fisheries development must intensify their information, education, and communication (IEC) campaigns. This approach will help raise awareness among local stakeholders, LGUs, and the members of the community. At the same time, this approach will help the organizations gain the support of the rest of the community, LGUs, and other stakeholders to advance and amplify their sustainable fisheries initiatives.
8. **Explore alliances with other LGUs and LGAs for inclusive enhancement, conservation and management of fisheries resources.** In addition to the enforcement of fisheries-related policies, LGUs may explore alliances with other LGUs, LGAs, academe, CSOs, and NGOs to efficiently and effectively plan and implement programs and projects. The existing convergence models in the country may be explored to achieve shared goals on fisheries and environmental conservation and management at the local, national, and international level.
9. **Strictly implement existing policies on fisheries by strengthening and capacitating local enforcement teams.** Enforcement and protection can make a significant difference in terms of sustaining local resources. For example, proponents of aquaculture projects covering more than 100,000 hectares of coastal waters are required to conduct an environmental impact assessment before securing an environmental compliance certificate, which is one of the requirements for operation. This provision under PD 1586 or Establishing the Philippine Environmental Impact Statement System must be upheld, along with the serious implementation of existing laws, ordinances, and policies related to fisheries and environmental conservation.