

Challenges of Small-Scale Fisherfolks In Accessing Technical Support in San Sebastian, Samar

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ABSTRACT: Fishing is one of the major livelihoods of people living in the Philippines due to its abundance of aquatic resources. While numerous studies had been conducted to identify the major challenges of small-scale fisherfolks, none had paid particular attention to their difficulties in obtaining technical resources from the government and non-governmental entities and investigated only the extent of effectiveness of different support programs for small-scale fisherfolks. This phenomenological study explored the complexities and unique experiences of acquiring necessary resources for the fisherfolks using ten (10) participants purposefully selected from the fishing industry of San Sebastian, Samar. Through thematic analysis, the findings revealed that politics and bureaucracy posed a significant challenge for the small-scale fisherfolks. Meanwhile, limited information and inconsistent government support were the major factors that hindered efficient access to resources.

KEYWORDS: Challenges, Small-Scale Fisherfolks, Technical Support, Government Assistance, Fishing Resources

I. INTRODUCTION

The Philippines, being an archipelagic of its topographical nature, has a long coastline spanning 36,289 kilometers (Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources, 2021). This length of coastline provides an opportunity to make a primary livelihood in fishing. In rural areas, particularly in regions where aquatic resources are abundant, fisheries serve as a means of livelihood and economic activity. Despite the risks associated by the coast, artisanal and small-scale fishing is essential to the food, employment, customs, and cultural identity of coastal communities in the Philippines and contributes significantly to the GDP of the nation (Castro & Magnaye, 2023). According to the data from the Department of Agriculture of the municipality of San Sebastian, the town's primary livelihood sources are rice farming and fishing.

The Food and Agriculture Organization (2014) defines small-scale fisheries as "traditionally involving fishing households, using relatively small amounts of capital and energy, relatively small fishing vessels (if any), make short fishing trips close to shore, and mainly for local consumption. These fisheries may be used for business or subsistence. In general, small-scale fishing can be defined as a dynamic and developing sub-sector of the fishing industry that uses labor-intensive technology for distribution, processing, and harvesting to take advantage of inland and marine water resources. These sub-sectors full-time, part-time, or seasonal operations are typically focused on providing fish and fisheries products to domestic and local markets as well as for subsistence use (Staples et al., 2004). Other sectors that support small-scale fishing include net manufacturing, boat construction, engine maintenance and repair, gear suppliers, and other related sectors.

A growing percentage of Filipinos have been making their living from fishing in recent years; this number increased by 5.12% from the year before. As per the information furnished by the BFAR Fisherfolk Registration System (FishR) in 2022, 2,302,648 registered fisherfolk engaged in diverse fishing and aquaculture activities. Capture fishing constituted the most significant portion of the total livelihood distribution, accounting for 50.96%. Followed by aquaculture, gleaning, fish vending, and fish processing with 11.27%, 11.18%, and 1.96%, respectively. 24.66% of the total number of registered fishermen were between the ages of 41 and 50, 22.97% were between the ages of 51 and 60, 22.42% were between the ages of 61 and above, 21.13% were between the ages of 31 and 40, and the remaining 9.00% were between the ages of 21 and 30 and 20 and under. Additionally, Region VIII captures fishing obtained 109,458 individuals, aquaculture 9,271, fish vending 9,934, gleaning 15,660, fish processing 1,607, and others 28,894 with an overall total of 174,824 registered fisherfolks. Meanwhile, in the municipality of San Sebastian, a staggering 785 individuals are involved in the fishing sector (Department of Agriculture, 2023).

Through the lack of access to social services, small-scale fisheries are confronted with poverty, which severely affects them. As indicated by the World Bank (2023), extreme poverty has reached a staggering number of 700 million and is mainly situated in parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in conflict-affected areas and in rural areas. PSA (2021) estimated that 22.4% of the

Challenges of Small-Scale Fisherfolks In Accessing Technical Support in San Sebastian, Samar

population in the Philippines was living below the poverty line, earning less than 13,797 or roughly USD 246 for a person of five. This translates to 25.24 million Filipinos in the first quarter of 2023. Meanwhile, the estimated rate of poverty among families in Eastern Visayas was 26.1 percent. This means that approximately one in four families in the region were either impoverished or had incomes below the poverty line, defined as the amount needed to purchase basic food and non-food necessities. Furthermore, the poverty rate among families in Samar was 35.8 percent; in Eastern Samar, 35.6 percent; in Northern Samar, 27.5 percent; in Leyte (apart from Tacloban City) at 23.8 percent; in Southern Leyte, 16.6 percent; and Biliran, 13.2 percent. Based on the PSA for province clustering of Eastern Visayas in the first semester of 2023, Eastern Samar and Samar were classified as under cluster category two (2), with cluster one (1) considered to be the poorest.

According to PSA (2023), the poorest groups in terms of poverty in 2021 remained to be fisherfolks, farmers, children, and people living in rural areas. This recent PSA agency data shows that fisherfolks had the highest percentage of poverty in 2021 (30.6%), followed by farmers (30%), children (26.4%), and those living in rural areas (26.7%). These sectors had the highest proportion of individuals from households whose income fell below the official poverty criteria compared to the other basic sectors. It also stated that there had been notable increases in the incidence of poverty, with fishermen experiencing the largest increases at 4.4 percent. In the case of the municipality of San Sebastian, Samar, 95% out of the 785 fisherfolks are considered poor (DA, 2023).

Many individuals living in poverty often do not have the opportunity to acquire the necessary technical skills enhancement training required to secure well-paying jobs or engage in entrepreneurship that could assist them in venturing out of poverty. Technical skills enhancement provided for fisherfolks is a crucial aspect for the improvements of their fishing abilities, boosting their fish catch, and making their fishing practices more sustainable (Ahmed et al., 2021). TESDA (2011) asserted that given the appropriate training, expertise, and competencies, individuals engaged in fishing activities can become more innovative and resourceful in refining their entrepreneurial abilities and may endeavor to establish their enterprises.

Despite the various efforts made by different non-government organizations (NGOs) and the government agencies concerned, the proportion of fisherfolks living in poverty, further some of the small-scale fisheries have a deficiency of knowledge about sustainable fishing practices. Based on the World Bank report in 2023, it was indicated that as a result of overfishing, damaging fishing techniques, habitat loss, and unfavorable effects from land-based activities, fish stocks in the Philippines have decreased by 20% on average over the last ten years. In addition, inadequate post-harvest techniques result in the annual loss of 20–40% of all fish harvested and farmed. Although numerous training was conducted and support programs were initiated for fisherfolk around the Philippines over the years through the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR), the absence of training and inadequacy of aids for fisherfolks in some regions and municipalities is still prevailing. Tikadar et al. (2022) revealed that fishermen in the northeastern floodplains of Bangladesh lack training in revenue-generating activities that could improve their livelihoods. In addition, Alvina et al. (2022) disclosed a concerning lack of support, as their research findings indicated that fisherfolks in Masantol, Pampanga, did not receive any training from the government and used equipment that was passed down from previous generations.

Similarly, Pendi (2022) also found out that fisherfolks in Bangsamoro face the same scarcity of assistance, where they hardly receive any technical assistance from the government. The last fishing training held in the municipality of San Sebastian was in January 2023. However, this training was only attended by the fish wardens. Twenty (20) beneficiaries from Barangay Hita-asan also participated exclusively in the entrepreneurship and skills training focused on crab product processing and current goods manufacturing. Given the data, there is clearly a lack of support provided for the small-scale fisherfolk community of the whole municipality.

The literature on small-scale fisheries lacks a focus on the complex issues fisherfolks face, particularly in terms of technical support. The majority of research concerning the difficulties faced by fisherfolks predominantly centers on topics such as financial inclusion, access to markets, climate change, gender inequality, and the development of social support networks. Although it holds significance, the challenges of fisherfolks in accessing technical support from the government, which are critical for improving the efficiency and sustainability of fishing operations, remain insufficiently studied.

The researchers contend that if researchers can determine the factors and challenges hindering small-scale fisherfolks' access to technical support from government agencies and NGOs concerned in San Sebastian, Samar, they can then offer some alternatives to the problems they have encountered.

This proposed study aimed to determine the challenges of small-scale fisherfolks in accessing technical support in San Sebastian, Samar. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the challenges faced by the small-scale fisherfolks in terms of accessing technical support in San Sebastian, Samar?
2. What factors hinder small-scale fisherfolks in accessing technical support?

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework serves as the scaffolding that will guide the entire research, offering a structured lens to conceptualize and explore the research questions and objectives. The Social Capital Theory and the Resource Dependence Theory served as the cornerstone, providing a comprehensive understanding of the small-scale fisheries and the challenges faced by the fisherfolks. These

Challenges of Small-Scale Fisherfolks In Accessing Technical Support in San Sebastian, Samar

theories are not just abstract concepts, but practical tools that can be applied to understand and address the real-world issues of small-scale fisherfolks.

Social Capital Theory

According to Pierre Bourdieu's social capital theory, the resources and advantages derived from our social networks matter more than simply how many connections. Any aspect of a social interaction that fosters reproductive benefits can be referred to as social capital in evolutionary terms (Machalek & Martin, 2015). These advantages work similarly to cultural and economic capital. Examples include favorable treatment, information access, and emotional support. However, social capital is not dispersed equitably. The network's quality can be influenced by social class, color, and gender, and individuals with solid links inside groups can have more influence. The ability to network effectively, cultivate relationships, and be dependable allows one to accumulate substantial social capital that serves the interests of society and every individual. Furthermore, those who are well-connected within a group may have greater influence. The capacity to build relationships, network successfully, and exhibit reliability enables one to amass substantial social capital, which is advantageous to both society and every individual. Moreover, this theory offers an insightful perspective on the difficulties small-scale fisherfolks encounter in obtaining technical assistance. This study may examine how hurdles for small-scale fisherfolks are created by an unequal distribution of social capital by utilizing Bourdieu's Theory. They might not have ties to influential people or groups that manage who can obtain technical assistance services. This framework can clarify the particular difficulties encountered by these fisherfolks and pinpoint areas in which targeted interventions can enhance their circumstances.

The intricate lives of small-scale fisherfolks in San Sebastian, Samar, extend well beyond just learning technical skills. Pierre Bourdieu's Social Capital Theory provides a valuable framework for exploring their issues and prospects more deeply, particularly in terms of government technical support. This theory focuses light on the critical significance of social networks, trust, and shared norms in communities, providing useful insights into how these elements influence the landscape for small-scale fisherfolks. Using Social Capital Theory as a lens, researchers delved into the rich network of social ties, trust dynamics, and shared norms that exist within the San Sebastian fisherfolk community. Understanding these social dynamics allowed the study to transcend beyond identifying issues and providing solutions. Researchers offered strategies for leveraging existing social capital, such as developing community-based networks or encouraging peer-to-peer information exchange. The researchers also utilized Social Capital Theory to understand how the relationship, limited trust, and existing networks between the small fisherfolks and the government hindered or further aggravated the lack of access to technical support from the local authority.

Resource Dependence Theory

Pfeffer and Salancik's "The External Control of Organisations: A Resource Dependence Perspective," published in 1978, proposed that Resource Dependence Theory (RDT) is a concept in organizational studies that describes how organizations rely on resources over which they have no control, and how this dependency affects their behavior and connections with other organizations. Pfeffer and Salancik (1978) argue that organizations will survive if they are in complete control of acquiring and managing their resources. However, organizations are only partially self-sustained. They depend on various organizations that are linked to the environments, such as federations, associations, customer-supplier relationships, competitive relationships, and a social-legal apparatus defining and controlling the nature and limits of these relationships for the resources that they require. Despite being dependent on external factors, organizational survival does not rely entirely upon the availability of resources but leans on the dependability of the environment. Organizations require a variety of resources to function properly, including financial capital, raw materials, information, technology, and human resources that are often controlled by other entities. This power dynamic generates a situation in which dependent organizations may be required to comply with resource providers' requests to keep access to the resources. RDT recognizes that the environment in which organizations operate is uncertain, with changes in market conditions, government laws, and technological improvements. During periods of environmental uncertainty, organizations may become more dependent on external resources to adapt and respond to environmental changes.

Resource Dependence Theory (RDT) provides valuable insights into small-scale fishers' difficulties in obtaining technical assistance. In this study, RDT was used to examine small-scale fishermen's reliance on external resources, such as financing, equipment, and expertise, from the local government unit and how this reliance affected their capacity to obtain technical assistance.

III. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The researchers employed a phenomenological research design using a qualitative approach. A phenomenological study examines a specific phenomenon perceived by a collective of individuals. Its objective is to articulate and comprehend the fundamental nature of the lived experiences of those who have encountered a particular phenomenon (Lichtman, 2013). The rationale behind selecting a phenomenological approach is its suitability for investigating an individual's lived experiences in a particular setting. In this context, the researchers captured the varied challenges of fisherfolks in the specified locale. Furthermore, the researchers utilized transcendental phenomenology, which, according to Nieswiadomy (1993), researchers bracket or purposely put aside their personal

Challenges of Small-Scale Fisherfolks In Accessing Technical Support in San Sebastian, Samar

experiences to adopt a new and unbiased viewpoint when examining phenomena (Creswell, 2009). Describing phenomena as they appear to the subject and delving into the relevance and meaning of lived experiences aims to uncover the universal qualities of consciousness while avoiding assumptions about the outside world (Sokolowski, 1999). Specifically, according to Sokolowski (1999), Edmund Husserl's transcendental phenomenology seeks to identify universal logical patterns in human subjective experience to arrive at an objective knowledge of the world. The entire process delved into a comprehensive understanding of the unique challenges of the fishing industries through the lens of the participants' perspectives.

Research Locale

San Sebastian Samar is a 6th-class municipality in the province of Samar. According to the PSA (2020) census, it has a population of 8,704 people and is split into 14 barangays. Situated next to Maqueda Bay, San Sebastian's territorial limits span 38 square kilometers, and a substantial proportion of its residents make fishing their main source of income. Among the varied activities that comprise the economic landscape of this municipality are small-scale fishing, rice farming, and the selling of regional goods at decentralized marketplaces. Largely due to the large number of fisherfolks in San Sebastian Samar, the researchers chose to concentrate their analysis on the community, particularly in Barangays 1, 2, 3, and 4, which comprise the majority of fisherfolks with 216 fisherfolks, to primarily identify the difficulties that individuals encountered in connection to their access to technical support.

Research Participants

The participants of this study constituted a purposively selected group of fisherfolks who are directly involved in the fishing industry of San Sebastian, Samar. This study included ten (10) individuals encompassing fisherfolks, as suggested by Creswell (2013) that a reasonable sample size may range from 5-25 in a research study. To ensure the attainment of the research objectives, the participants were chosen through the following inclusion criteria: [1] Participants must be working as fisherfolk for at least 10 years; [2] Must be a resident of San Sebastian, Samar; [3] Participants must be 30 years old or above; [4] Small-scale fishing must be their primary means of livelihood, and [5] Receive or did not receive technical support from the local government. The exclusion criteria are the following: [1] Individuals who engage in other types of fishing activity aside from small-scale fishing; [2] Individuals facing severe health issues that may hinder their ability to provide accurate insights; and [3] Individuals involved in policymaking roles, as their perspectives may differ significantly.

Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling was used to select participants drawn from the municipality's small-scale fishing industry. According to Kelly (2010), purposive sampling is employed to choose participants deliberately, targeting individuals who are deemed most likely to provide relevant and valuable information for the study (Campbell et al., 2020). The researchers purposefully selected fisherfolks who have a substantial number of years of involvement in the fishing sector and can provide perceptive information concerning the multifaceted challenges of small-scale fisherfolks, particularly in technical support. By deliberately selecting individuals with a profound understanding of the issue, the researchers captured the varied viewpoints and experiences that contributed to the analysis of the dynamics of the small-scale fisheries in this particular setting.

Research Instrument

The researchers utilized a research-made instrument with a primary focus on the variables, such as the factors and challenges that hindered small-scale fisherfolks from accessing technical support. The goal was to recruit participants who represent the diversity of experiences and perspectives within the fisheries sector. The researchers gathered the necessary data through in-depth interviews. The purpose of in-depth interviews is to learn more about the participant's personal experiences, understandings, interpretations, and responses to a certain occurrence (Ompad, 2008). Specifically, the researchers employed a semi-structured interview in which the interviewer asked a series of prepared questions, and the respondents answered in their own words. The interviewer had the flexibility to explore specific areas based on the respondent's answers or pose additional questions for clarification purposes (Easwaramoorthy & Zarinpoush, 2006). The in-depth interview consisted of open-ended questions designed to elicit rich and detailed responses from participants. Furthermore, the interviews and conversations were conducted in the participant's native language and audio-recorded with their permission.

Research Procedure

The initial phase of the data collection process began by selecting individuals, particularly fisherfolks associated with the small-scale fisheries within the locality, using a qualitative approach that combined in-depth interviews and purposive sampling. Prior to the start of the interviews, the researchers briefly discussed the consent form as well as the study's objectives, informing the participants of their rights and the potential contributions of this study. As mentioned by Creswell (2013), written permission had to be obtained from the participants. The participants were encouraged to select the interview's date, place, and format based on their preferences to establish trust and elicit genuine responses. During the interviews, open-ended questions were posed to elicit comprehensive answers from the participants. With the participant's consent, the interviews were audio-recorded, capturing non-

Challenges of Small-Scale Fisherfolks In Accessing Technical Support in San Sebastian, Samar

verbal cues and emotions to enhance the interpretive analysis. The gathered data underwent meticulous transcription, interpretation, and analysis to gain a profound understanding of the unique challenges faced by individuals in this sector. Additionally, the information was stored in computer files and file folders after the data gathering was completed.

Ethical Considerations

Prior to the conduct of interviews, approval for ethical considerations is formally requested from the Ethics and Research Committee at Leyte Normal University. While the study may give useful insights into the local economy, it is imperative to examine ethical concerns. [1] Voluntary participation means all research participants are free to decide whether or not to participate, free from any kind of force or pressure. As a result, none of the study's participants need to stay on and can opt-out at any time. Participants were also not required to give a reason for quitting the study. [2] Informed consent: Before collecting any data, the researchers sought informed consent from the individuals through an informed consent form, which was available in English, and the researchers translated it into the Waray-Waray language. Participants were informed about the study's goal, data collecting procedures, and intended use of the data. Researchers also cleared out how long they will be involved in the study. Additionally, the researchers informed them that the information they provide will be kept private and that they can withdraw from the interview at any time for any reason. They can get in touch with the researchers to draw out their information as well. [3] Anonymity: Participants remained anonymous as their names or personal details were not disclosed, prioritizing privacy and minimizing the possibility of harm or stigma. [4] Confidentiality: Researchers pledge to maintain the confidentiality of participants' information, limiting access solely to authorized personnel. This commitment fosters trust, promoting truthful and open responses from participants. [5] Potential harm: The researchers ensured a transparent communication of all potential risks to participants before the study to obtain informed consent. [6] Member checking: To ensure that the study is carried out honestly and objectively, avoid conflicts of interest, and be certain other influences do not impact the study, the researchers communicated the findings to the participants.

Trustworthiness of the Study

Trustworthiness relates to the level of confidence in the data, its interpretation, and the techniques utilized to ensure its quality (Polit & Beck, 2014). This thesis will follow the criteria outlined by Guba and Lincoln (1994), namely:

Credibility: is the confidence in the accuracy of the study and its findings. It is the degree to which one feels comfortable with the efficiency of the study and its conclusions. The researchers triangulated data from several sources, used rigorous methodologies, and created an open and transparent research process to increase authenticity and guarantee the truthfulness of the findings.

Dependability: the consistent nature of the data within periods of time and under the study's conditions. It refers to how frequently the data holds up throughout time and in the context of the investigation. In order to ensure that others can repeat the study and get comparable results, researchers thoroughly documented their research activities through field notes to attain dependability.

Confirmability refers to objectivity and the point to which results may be reliably repeated. It is the extent to which outcomes can be accurately replicated and objectively measured. To maintain objectivity, the researchers met regularly to discuss their findings and interpretations with other researchers to ensure reduced biases and personal viewpoints when gathering and analyzing data.

Data Analysis Method

After the data-gathering procedures were completed, all the information that was gathered through audio recordings, video recordings, and notes was interpreted by the researchers. Subsequently, the researchers analyzed the data manually through writing. Pope et al. (2000) categorized these notes and transcripts as raw data, emphasizing the necessity to transform them into refined data for more effective analysis by the researcher. Once the information was interpreted, the researchers examined the data contributed by the participants and transcribed the answers into English in some cases where the participants used Filipino or Waray-Waray language.

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is a methodology used to identify, analyze, and report patterns or themes within a dataset. Subsequently, the researchers applied Colaizzi's method, which involved organizing and describing the dataset in rich detail to uncover significant insights in 7 progressive phases: [1] Familiarizing yourself with the data: included reading and re-reading the data; [2] Identifying relevant statements: The researcher distinguished relevant statements directly related to the phenomenon being studied; [3] Developing meanings: The researcher carefully examined each of the important statements to determine the meanings pertinent to the phenomena. To adhere closely to the reality as observed, the researchers instinctively "bracketed" their presumptions; [4] Identifying themes: entailed organizing meanings into potential themes; [5] Defining and naming themes: All of the themes created in step 4 were incorporated into the researchers' comprehensive and detailed explanation of the phenomena; [6] Producing the fundamental framework: All data were summarized by the researchers into a single, concise statement. The researcher not only restated what they discovered but also focused on the essential components that constituted the essence of the experience; and [7] Seeking verification: Confirming the accuracy of the descriptions and validating the findings, the developed description was returned to the participants.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, the outcomes of participants' challenges are arranged into themes, which are essentially collections of the participants' common challenges. Coding, however, was a useful tactic prior to developing the theme. In order to create a framework of thematic concepts about the material, coding is a method of indexing or categorizing it (Gibbs, 2007). These structures simplified and provided an abstract view of the extensive data. Themes helped in collecting and clarifying information that might have been challenging for readers to interpret on their own.

Theme 1: Power Dynamics and Bureaucratic Hurdles

Bureaucracy and power dynamics have long been a problem in the Philippine context in terms of accessing and distributing resources. Effective government service delivery is often delayed due to complicated paperwork and lengthy procedures, obstructing the public's access to efficient services (Hattke et al., 2019). The participants have shared their experiences in dealing with the arduous and burdensome process of applying for and acquiring technical support from the government and the process of forming and associating themselves in a particular association to be eligible for the support given by the government.

Despite the varied responses from the participants, they recalled having shared experiences in going through bureaucratic procedures and dealing with the politicization of social programs for the fisherfolks. This shared experience through bureaucratic difficulties emphasizes the institutional challenges involved with accessing support services.

Subtheme 1.1: Politicization of Support Programs

The politicization of social support programs from various government entities is one of the factors that hinder the immediate access of fisherfolks in acquiring assistance. Poteete (2018) claimed that diverse incentives drive different levels of political involvement in fisheries management: either elite resource-grabbing, where resources are used to benefit national elites for personal gain, or where benefits are distributed to local communities and fishermen in exchange for political support (decentralized clientelism). In fishing communities, the availability of subsidized essentials is largely dictated by the uneven power distribution between those with political connections and those without (Owusu & Adjei, 2021). Common responses from the participants highlighted how political connections greatly influenced the distribution of support available for the fisherfolks.

P1: *Waray ira la liwat tawo it gintatagan kay dinhi ha aton makusog man it politika, color coding man dinhi, kun diin ka na color didto ka gud la salit kilalado man dinhi ha aton an mga tawo kun diin ka. Halimbawa an una na mayor iya la liwat mga tawo an iya ginpipinannagan waray la liwat kami, hulat la liwat. Yana kay amon na, amon la anay liwat.* (No, only their people are given because politics is extreme here; it is color coding here, wherever your color is, that is where you belong, so people here know where you stand. For example, the previous mayor only helped his own people, and we got nothing, we just had to wait. Now that it is our turn, it is just ours now.)

P3: *Diri liwat makuri it pagdadaop ha gobyerno hit mga suporta ha gobyerno kun linyada ka liwat hit aton kulay liwat yana diba? Ikaw nga diri ka naabuyon tikang ha labaw бага maawod ka gud liwat kukurian ka't pag-aro. Sanglit di ka liwat makakakarawat kay iba ka man. Kalain hit-- aboyon tikang ha igbaw nga madagmit ka makakuha бага nakaka-iru-smile ka ngadi hit paluyo-luyo nga partido. Diri sugad hit бага diri naabuyon agidaw, waray, pipinakurian la talaga.* (It is not difficult to ask the government for support if you are a supporter of their political lineup, right? If you do not favor the higher-ups, you will hesitate and find it hard to ask for help. That is why you do not receive anything because you're different. Unlike those who are supporters from above, they get help quickly and can even smile at both parties. Not unlike for those who do not support, nothing, they struggle.)

P8: *Sugad yana kontra partido ka diri ka talaga makaka-avail tikang ha gobyerno kumbaga kun may pagbulig nira signgon hit mga pobre unta diri na ikadto ha munisipyo. Personal hira na kumadi pagbulig kasi signgon ta ha tikang government na mga ayuda bulig diri basta nakaka-avail kun diri anay ginpapa-agi hit mga municipal kay pag-abot dida ha municipal kinukurian namon may pinili na tawo signgon ta yana ha aton basta kun kontra partido ka harayo ka maka-- ginpipiliw kala anay. Kumbaga ayuda hira karuyag ko personal gud para hibaruan gud nira kun ano it kakurian sugad ha amon na parag-dagat.* (Just like now, if you are in the opposition party, you cannot avail government assistance if they really want to help the poor, it should not be necessary to go to the municipal office. They should come personally to help because government aid can't just be availed without first going through the municipal office because when it gets there, we have difficulties because they have already chosen who to help. So now, if you're in the opposition, you will not get anything—you'll be sidelined. I mean, the aid should be given personally so they can really understand the struggles of people like us who are fishermen.)

P10: *Nagpasa adto kami may mga picture pa ngani, may mga ID hadto. Nga tanan haros dinhi nga parag dagat ha tres, kuwatro adto. An uno, aw ha uno бага waray kay kulang ada nanhibaro. Dos, tres, kuwatro api pero waray man, waray man ito may inabot. An mga trainings tas an nakalabay liwat nga administrasyon nagmeeting liwat kami hadto kay bagyo liwat adto han Ruby pero an akon ginkuha na lisensiya kay para matagan la ak hadto kanan bintol kay mahal man an bunu-an lisensya kinyentos man. An bintol kay asya man panharatag, panharatag han BFAR bintol. Tas nagmeeting kami dida la han legislative, waray man liwat it bintol na umabot. Aw umabot pero an ginpanagan iba, sugad ha akon kontra partido waray katagi bintolon. Ginpanhatag ha uno tas ha*

Challenges of Small-Scale Fisherfolks In Accessing Technical Support in San Sebastian, Samar

kuwatro ngani may pukot an akon waray kay kontra partido man ako. (We submitted pictures, including IDs. Almost all fishermen from areas three and four. Barangay 1 had no one because they were not informed. Barangays 2, 3, and 4 are included but nothing, but nothing arrived. The training and the former administration conducted a meeting because of typhoon Ruby, but the license that I secured only so that I would receive bintol (crab lift net) because the license for bunu-an (fish corral) is expensive, 500 pesos. The bintol is the only one to be distributed by BFAR. Then we had a meeting there at the legislative, but that bintol never arrived. It arrived, but it was given to others. For me, as an opposition, I was never given a bintolon. They distributed nets in Barangay 1 and 4, but I got nothing because I'm from the opposition.)

Shared responses derived from participants revealed that being a supporter of the current administration greatly determines the extent of accessibility of the resources. Participants expressed that because of politics, they have experienced hardships in getting necessary support distributed by the government as they lack connections from the inside. They have stated that if they are not a supporter of the current administration, their call for help is often neglected. Being affiliated with the ruling party is a key factor in acquiring resources from the government. Although they had complied with the necessary requirements, participants did not receive any assistance due to political reasons, as they emphasized the pervasive influence of the "color coding" system in the community. Such scenarios highlight the extent of political manipulation and the inefficiency in distributing resources.

The Social Capital Theory asserts that people with more connections, relationships, and networks within society are at a disadvantage in obtaining information and resources (Bourdieu, 1978). This is connected with Bourdieu's belief that the quality of social network connections, rather than sheer quantity, determines the resources and benefits an individual receives implying that individuals with quality connections are at a disadvantage compared to those with many. It emphasizes that the benefits we gain from our social connections go beyond mere numbers; instead, they depend on the depth, trust, and usefulness of those connections. This further relates to the result of this study, which states that the government favors those with more social capital.

Subtheme 1.2: The Burden of Establishing Association

Institutionalizing and/or joining associations are major requirements for the fisherfolks to access various support from the government. The increase in the registration of small farmers and fisheries (SFF) with government agencies serves as a metric for their level of organization. The ability of SFF to organize themselves suggests a growing capacity to align their aspirations and engage in social interactions. Their registration with government agencies signifies a desire for legitimacy, which, in turn, will enable them to access government services (Songco, D., 2022). Properly established fishermen's organizations have a greater chance of attracting funding from various sources, government programs, and other significant channels (Ochavillo, 2023). The responses highlight the pivotal role of associations in facilitating access to government services. Individual requests for resources and aid are often neglected, emphasizing the importance of collective action through associations in navigating bureaucratic procedures and advocating for their needs. Small-scale fishers expressed struggles in accessing government support without affiliation to any association:

P1: *Makuri man 'to ma'am kay napaagi man anay kami hito ma'am hin suporta kun diri kami ginsusuportahan- ginsusuportahan kun diri anay kami nag-grugrupo kay kinahanglan man may asosasyon kami. Asya ito diri kami pirmi tatagan hito kun individual kinahanglan maghihimo anay kami hin grupo kun mga 20 kuno ngada igbaw an kadamo para ma-apruban kami hin gobyerno sugad hito.* (It is difficult, ma'am, because we go through support, ma'am; they will not support us if we do not form a group because we have to have an association. That is why we don't always obtain support if we ask individually because it's a requirement that we have to group of about 20 people above to get approval from the government.)

P4: *Kinukurian kami pag-aro kay may ada man iton asosasyon. 'Di ka man mahirantang na maaro ka kay may asosasyon mangangaro gud talaga kamo ha gobyerno pakabuhian, pero kun usa ka la di ka tatagan. Waray pa kami hito. Naghuhulat la kami. Makuri, diri ka tatagan, diri ka tutuuron. Mahatag it gobyerno kun may ada kamo asosasyon, damo kamo, kay kun it mga papel hito'n kumpleto 'di mapapahiya it presidente namon amo 'ton na matatagan ka kun grupo kamo, pero kun duha, tulo, ay waray kamo. 'Di aasihon, kailangan asosasyon niyo iton.* (It's difficult for us to ask for help because there is an association. You can't really just ask because there's an association that will ask for livelihood from the government, but if you're alone, you won't be given anything. We don't have it yet. We're just waiting. It's difficult; you won't be given anything, and they won't believe you. The government will provide if you have an association, if there are many of you, because if the paperwork is complete, our president won't be shamed, and that's when you'll receive help if you're in a group, but if there's only two, three of you, you won't get anything. You won't be noticed, you need association for that.)

P5: *Waray, waray man kami hito grupo. Asya ito an kinakarawat hit ahensiya nga mga grupo kun pira ka tawo.* (No, we don't have a group. That's what the agency accepts—groups with a certain number of people.)

P9: *Tungod ada kawaray organisasyon dinhi it kamakuri hit pag hatag hit gobyerno, amo it nakakapakuri. Oo, organisasyon para madali it pag hatag hit gobyerno. Iton la ngani na usa-usa makuri man ito. Diri ma't mahatag it gobyerno hin usa-usa, kinahanglan organisasyon.* (Because of the lack of organization, it makes the government difficult to provide support; that's what it makes

Challenges of Small-Scale Fisherfolks In Accessing Technical Support in San Sebastian, Samar

difficult. Yes, an organization will make it easier for the government to provide support. It's really hard if it's done individually. The government won't provide aid to individuals; it needs to be through an organization.)

The small-scale fisherfolks have stressed out their daily hardships and the potential benefits of having a representation. Without proper representation, such as organizations and cooperatives, individual fishers struggle to make their voices heard and their needs met. However, having an organized group will allow them to collectively advocate for their needs and effectively navigate the bureaucratic hurdles. These organizations can act as middlemen, giving fisherfolks the knowledge and assistance they need to access government resources. Representation through associations can help balance the situation, giving small-scale fishermen a unified voice and more bargaining power when dealing with government agencies.

Social Capital Theory can provide a lens through which to offer insights into the major role of associations in overcoming bureaucratic hurdles. Social capital refers to the networks, relationships, and reciprocity norms that enable collective action and resource mobilization within communities. The result of this study emphasizes the requirements of associating every fisherfolk in an association before being able to access government services and support programs. The lack of networks – herein apply to the association – provides a major obstacle for small-scale fisherfolks in accessing services and support. Social Capital Theory can be used to analyze how limited networks affect the attainability of resources for small-scale fisherfolks. Results have shown that networks proved to be a major factor that hampered resource accessibility in which fisherfolks with already established relationships and trust have the privilege to access information regarding support programs, thus acquiring resources.

Theme 2: Barriers to Effective Government Support and Resource Accessibility

Small-scale fisherfolk form the backbone of many coastal communities, providing vital contributions to local economies and food security. However, these communities often face significant challenges in accessing and utilizing government support due to a lack of awareness and information dissemination about available programs and resources. Many fisherfolks are unaware of the support they can receive because of poor outreach and communication from government agencies. This gap in knowledge hinders their ability to improve their livelihoods and sustain their traditional practices, ultimately affecting the overall well-being of their communities. Therefore, the dissemination of information to artisanal fishermen in the 21st century is crucial, as information is the bedrock for the effective operation of any occupation (Annune et al., 2014).

Subtheme 2.1: Inconsistent and Insufficient Government Aid

According to Gutang (2023), small-scale fisherfolks frequently receive government assistance in response to disasters, showing a reactive rather than proactive approach to help. Despite vital monetary aid offered during catastrophes, there is a need for more proactive and continual government assistance to facilitate long-term community-led initiatives and ensure sustainable livelihoods for small-scale fishermen. This subtheme investigates the experiences of small-scale fisherfolks who were unable to receive assistance unless there was a calamity. While government programs provide critical assistance during emergencies, the study reveals a disconnect between these programs and the long-term needs of these communities. As a result, it highlights the need for a shift from reactive aid to proactive, long-term support systems, regardless of whether a disaster occurs.

P1: *Diri kami hito gin-aaprubahan mga sugad hito. Dinhi la kun halimbawa lugod may nahihabtan tam mga bunu-an kun bagyo mayda lugod nagpapatupad dinhi sugad cash for work. Sugad hito asya la ito nahiaapi kami hiton dinhi.* (We are not being approved like this. Here, for example, when our bunu-an is reached by a typhoon, there are initiatives implemented, such as cash for work. This is how we are assisted here.)

P3: *Diri gad pirmi, sugad ha am бага may nakukuan бага may ruba an motor sugad nakukuan han calamity, naruruba, asya la ito it am pakakakuha ngan hin danay liwat ito an nanhahatag daman han pukot natagan liwat kami hadto. Pukot, pataw, tingga, sugad hito.* (Not always, like us, there are times when our motor is damaged, like during calamities, it gets damaged, that's how we receive assistance sometimes, just like that fish net we were given before. Fish net, floater, lead sinker, just like that.)

P7: *Nakakarawat man la iton diba an may gin-babagyohan, naruruba-an, may ada gihap alalay na kwarta.* (It's only those affected by the typhoon who receive assistance, they experience damage, and there's also financial aid available.)

Through the shared sentiments of the participants, it is clear that small-scale fisherfolks have received various resources from the government despite widespread devastation, but they are unable to access different resources when they seek them from the government, implying that they do not receive support unless there is a disaster. Although infrastructure and livelihoods are frequently severely interrupted, support services give critical monetary help to people in need, relieving acute financial stress. Structured programs such as "cash for work" provide immediate employment and income, assisting with recovery and reconstruction while stressing long-term, community-led activities. However, practical problems, such as the complicated licensing process for fishermen replacing lost equipment, impede recovery. Occasional assistance, such as the replacement of fishing equipment, demonstrates a small but critical support network while emphasizing the need for more consistent and systematic help to facilitate total catastrophe recovery.

Challenges of Small-Scale Fisherfolks In Accessing Technical Support in San Sebastian, Samar

Through the lens of the participant's responses, it is clear that it coincides with Resource Dependence Theory by illuminating limits experienced by small-scale fisherfolks in obtaining vital resources from the governing body. While the government occasionally provides some resources (post-disaster aid, cash-for-work programs), access to critical resources, such as replacements for lost fishing equipment, is limited and depends on specific conditions. This limited access encourages reliance on government support, slowing the rehabilitation process. According to Resource Dependence Theory, organizations, such as the fisherfolk community, require resources from their external environment (the government) to be viable. However, when these resources are scarce and inconsistently available, the organization's influence suffers. The fisherfolks are clearly reliant on government resources, but they lack the authority to provide regular access, limiting their ability to recover fully after a calamity.

Subtheme 2.2: Limited Technical Support Options Due to Lack of Awareness of Government Resources

Fisherfolk often faces significant challenges in accessing technical support due to a lack of awareness about where to seek assistance from government resources. This deficiency in knowledge impedes their ability to effectively address issues that impact their livelihoods. Consequently, these communities are unable to fully harness the benefits of available assistance and programs aimed at enhancing their means of living. The government's failure to communicate effectively with the people might be a contributing factor to this situation. If the government had better informed the people about how to obtain support or what actions they needed to take, the community might have been more proactive or felt more empowered to seek out assistance. Access to technical support is crucial for the development of fisherfolk. The government needs to construct easy access to information to fulfill the fishermen's information needs (Rachman et al., 2019).

The participants expressed frustration and confusion about their inability to locate support and their lack of information on necessary steps or where to turn for assistance, particularly from the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR). Their struggle underscored a deficiency in social capital, as described by social capital theory. They faced challenges due to their limited knowledge of available support systems, like BFAR, and uncertainty about where to seek help. This lack of information indicated a narrow network of connections and relationships, which hampered their ability to acquire essential information and navigate challenges effectively. The responses also highlighted the reliance of small-scale fisherfolks on the government's support. Their access to necessary resources is limited by the decisions of what and how much support the government will distribute. Furthermore, their reliance solely on knowledge of one organization while remaining unaware of other potential sources of assistance highlighted their constrained network.

P2: *Mga BFAR la ada ito. Diri man kami maaram kun hain makakaaro supporta.* (It's only BFAR, and we don't know where to find support. We also don't know what needs to be taken care of and where we should go.)

P7: *Ah, kay diri man kami hiton makakagbuot. Ira man iton it—gobyerno man iton it magbubu-ot kun tubtob diin it ira ginhahatag ha amon. Kami mahulat la kun ano it ira suporta ha amon. Kun ano it mahahatag ha amon okay la. Waray man kami hiton mahihimo kun gobyerno gud it magbuot ha amon. Asya manla ito tam ginkukuhaan.* (Ah, we can't really decide on that. It's theirs to—it's the government that decides how much support they will give to us. We just wait for whatever support they provide. Whatever they give to us is fine. We can't do anything about it if the government will be the one to decide for us. That's our only source.)

P10: *Diri kami hiton makakaaro salit makuri kun kami la kay diri man kami hiton maaaram. Diri man kami maaram pangaro kay adto man ito pangangaruon ha mga higrayo na lugar. Diri man kami hiton maaram kun hain kami dadaop basta maaram la namon DA usa man la iton it maaram namon dinhi. DA ngan BFAR pareho la ada it hira magka-usa la ada iton hira mag-iba la it opisina pero pareho la it ira function kun бага.* (We can't ask for that. That's why it's difficult if it's just us because we don't know how. We don't know where to ask for help because it's in far places. We don't know where to ask for help, we just know DA. DA and BFAR, I think it's the same, they are one, just different offices but their function is the same.)

The participant conveyed a sense of frequent difficulty in accessing support, primarily due to their lack of knowledge about where to go and how to navigate the process of seeking assistance or resources effectively. The statement reflected an affecting experience where individuals felt isolated and uncertain about where to find assistance. This resonated with Social Capital Theory, which highlights how individuals' access to resources and support is influenced by their social networks. In that context, the lack of guidance and clarity on where to seek help illustrated a deficit in social capital. These individuals may not have been fully integrated into networks that could provide essential information and support, such as those offered by local government agencies or community organizations. Generally, enhancing their social capital involved expanding their connections and knowledge of available resources, thereby improving their ability to address challenges effectively and access the necessary support they needed.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The complex interplay of bureaucratic barriers, politicized programs, and the requirement for association membership creates a system that disadvantages many fisherfolk. Moreover, the reactive approach to government assistance, limited technical support options, and a lack of understanding of available resources exacerbate the struggles of these groups. By addressing these fundamental challenges, the government can promote a more equitable and supportive environment for small-scale fisherfolk, enabling them to

Challenges of Small-Scale Fisherfolks In Accessing Technical Support in San Sebastian, Samar

thrive and make significant contributions to the economy. Additionally, this study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on social capital theory and resource dependence theory. The findings underscore the importance of social networks and access to information in empowering marginalized individuals to access resources and navigate bureaucratic institutions. The weak social capital of fisherfolk and their dependence on government resources create vulnerabilities that require targeted interventions. Therefore, this study emphasizes the critical need for a more responsive and inclusive approach to assisting small-scale fisherfolk. By implementing the researchers' recommendations, the government can empower these communities while ensuring a more sustainable future for the fishing industry.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the researchers recommend the following:

1. The local government unit (LGU) should assist the small-scale fisherfolks in processing the application forms and all requirements to qualify for the government support programs. Moreover, the government entities should simplify form processing and completion to save time and make it easier for the fisherfolks with low educational attainment. The forms should also be user-friendly with a readable font style, font size, and translations for each question into the local dialect. Official communication channels, such as an official Facebook page, should be provided, or an open communication line with each barangay should be maintained to ensure proper dissemination of information about existing support programs to everyone.
2. Regular meetings between the barangay local government unit and the fisherfolks are essential. These meetings ensure that the fisherfolks are well-informed about their current needs and the existing support programs provided by the BLGU. This regular communication is key to keeping the fisherfolks updated and aware of the resources available to them.
3. The Department of Agriculture (DA) should facilitate the establishment of fisherfolk associations to streamline the process of obtaining resources and assistance. The DA should also oversee the appointment of officers for each association to ensure their continued survival and effective governance. Furthermore, the agency should assist fisherfolks in registering and legalizing their livelihood to ensure they qualify for help from the local government unit.
4. Due to the limitations of this study, the researchers recommend further investigations on the challenges of small-scale fisherfolks in accessing technical support to ensure well-documented data on their experiences. Further research should also involve participants and representatives from every barangay in the community to generalize the data and fairly capture experiences from all fisherfolks in the municipality.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The completion of this study could not have been possible without the support of the people beneath our wings. Researchers would like to extend heartfelt gratitude to the following individuals who shared their time, effort, and expertise towards this study. Their invaluable support, guidance, and contributions enriched this research endeavor immensely.

Prof. Ryan G. Destura, our esteemed research instructor, for his invaluable support, expert knowledge, and unwavering guidance throughout the entirety of this study. His mentorship has significantly contributed to the scholarly quality and depth of this thesis.

Prof. Ramil A. Purog, our esteemed thesis adviser, for his invaluable guidance, scholarly insights, and unwavering support throughout the course of this research. His patient and thoughtful advice was a cornerstone in our journey, providing us with the clarity and direction needed to navigate complex research challenges.

Prof. Dennis M. Bautista, for his astute feedback, critical evaluation, and valuable recommendations that have significantly contributed to the scholarly refinement and academic merit of this research. His keen eye for detail and rigorous standards greatly enhanced the quality and integrity of our work, pushing us to achieve higher levels of academic excellence.

Ma'am Ma. Louise M. Roperez, for her valuable scholarly contributions, constructive feedback, and rigorous examination of this thesis. Her insightful comments and thorough reviews were crucial in refining our arguments and strengthening our overall thesis.

Ma'am Jane A. Manog, for her scholarly contributions, constructive feedback, and rigorous examination of this thesis study. Her thoughtful critiques and supportive guidance were invaluable in enhancing the clarity and coherence of our study.

Lastly, the researchers would like to acknowledge the invaluable support of their families, the Aviso family, and friends. Their encouragement and understanding were instrumental in the successful completion of this research.

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