



WOMEN FISHERFOLKS AND GIRLS AT RISK OF TRAFFICKING AND OTHER GENDER- BASED VIOLENCE (GBV)

*A Focus Group Discussion With Government Service Providers of
El Salvador City, Misamis Oriental
17 December 2020*

FGD Team

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17 December 2020

**Executive Conference Hall,
El Salvador City,
Misamis Oriental**



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FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION (FGD)

**Women Fisherfolks and Girls at Risk of Trafficking and other Gender-Based Violence (GBV)
During the COVID 19 Pandemic and the New Normal**

17 December 2020

**Executive Conference Hall,
El Salvador City,
Misamis Oriental**

PROGRAM

Morning (8-12nn)

Registration

Opening Preliminaries

Objective Setting: Atty. Pilipinas C. Palma

FGD Proper- Government Agencies (FGD Team)

Closing Ceremonies

Women Fisherfolks and Women and Girls at Risk of Trafficking During the COVID-19 Pandemic in El Salvador City, Misamis Oriental

I. Introduction



As part of the sectoral monitoring of the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) being the Gender and Development Ombud under the Magna Carta of Women, a series of focus group discussions and Key Informant Interviews were conducted to look into the issues and situation of the women fisherfolks, one of the most vulnerable sectors that the Commission have identified to be focused on.

For Region X, particularly in Misamis Oriental, most municipalities are coastal and fishing is one of the major sources of income for families situated along the shorelines and this includes some of the communities in the City of El Salvador. Commission on Human Rights Region X have selected El Salvador as one the pilot areas for this monitoring within its jurisdiction because of the booming fishing industry in the area.

The focus group discussions and interviews were conducted in two separate occasions: (1) with the Inter Agency Government Service Providers of El Salvador City and; (2) amongst some of the women fisherfolks of Barangay Molugan, El Salvador City. This report will summarize the collected data from these 2 discussions.

In both occasions Atty. Pilipinas Palma, the Gender Focal Person of CHR X discussed that being the Gender Ombud, the Commission is mandated to monitor the Philippine Government's compliance of the Magna Carta of Women (MCW), ensure that guidelines and mechanisms are established to facilitate access of women to legal remedies under the MCW and other related laws and enhance the protection and promotion of the rights of women especially the marginalized women. CHR will also assist in filing of cases in instances of violation of the RA 9710.



The Gender Based Violence Observatory was also established by CHR which was envisioned to become the resource hub and/ or repository of data on GBV where domestic and international standards/ laws as well as researches, reports and situationers on how the laws are being implemented and how all this is manifested in the lives of women, are compiled.



In this COVID-19 global pandemic where stringent health protocols were implemented, including limited mobility of the people, the Commission on Human Rights continued its role as Gender Ombud doing - information campaigns on human rights and gender based violence, issued advisories to government agencies and HR Bulletin in ensuring human rights-based approach in the implementation of all COVID-19 related protocols including curfews. CHR also heightened its GBV referral and complaint mechanisms maximizing the online platforms.

As part of the discussion framework, Atty. Palma also discussed relevant definitions that guided the participants in the sharing of their insights:

1. What is Gender Based Violence? - an umbrella term for any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person's will, and that is based on socially ascribed (gender) differences between males and females.

- Violence is directed against women because they are female and have unequal power in relationships with men, and have low status in general.
- this lack of power and status makes women vulnerable to acts of violence.

2. Who are the Women Fisherfolks?

- **“directly or indirectly engaged in taking, culturing, or processing fishery or aquatic resources.”**

- These include, but are not limited to women engaged in fishing in municipal water, coastal and marine areas, women workers in commercial fishing and aquaculture, vendors and processors of fish and coastal products, and subsistence producers such as shell-gatherers, managers, and producers of mangrove resources, and other related produce.” - Section 4(d)2, The Magna Carta of Women of 2009 (RA 9710)

The invisibility and non-recognition of women as fisherfolks due to the prevailing notion and gender stereotype that only men are considered fisherfolks was highlighted in the introductory discussion. Women's roles in the entire process of small-scale fishing are overlooked thus making their contributions to the fishing sector less important. This underrepresentation of women fisherfolks leads to exclusion in policies and programs that addresses their needs and rights as women. Some scenarios mentioned are disenfranchisement in terms of benefits, social protection and participation in policy-making and consultations; migration for better opportunities; various forms of GBVs. This is the prevailing situation of women fisherfolks and this may have been exacerbated when the COVID 19 pandemic happened.

The information, insights and recommendations gathered in this focus group discussions aims to contribute in:

- Establishing a **baseline** pertaining to the roles and participation of women in small scale fishing, and of the issues of women fisherfolks including trafficking and GBV, the implementation of MCW provisions on women fisherfolks, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic;
- Gathering of regional **data on women fisherfolks and GBV during the COVID-19 Pandemic**, create partnerships with communities and CSOs and strengthening CHR regional office's situation monitoring on women in the marginalized sectors as Gender Ombud in their respective regions;

This FGD also includes specific objectives:

1. To render visible and document the roles and tasks undertaken by women fisherfolks in the household and in the community;
2. To monitor the implementation of MCW provisions on women fisherfolks by looking at: women's roles, economic participation and recognition, access to information, resources, and food production; Experiences of marginalization, discrimination; Gender Based Violence;
3. To document the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women fisherfolks
4. To document awareness of and availment by women fisherfolks of government programs in response to COVID-19;
5. To gather recommendations from the ground



II. SUMMARY OF RESPONSES

A. Focus Group Discussion with the GBV Inter Agency Service Providers of El Salvador City LGU

The discussion with the representatives of the government agencies in the City of El Salvador focused on three important aspects of their work as identified service

providers in the city in cases of gender-based violence and particularly GBV cases affecting women fisherfolks:

- Get their perspective on the situation of women fisherfolks within the City of El Salvador;
 - Share Policies and Programs of the City LGU that responds to the needs of the women fisherfolks;
 - Give a glimpse on how COVID-19 affected the implementation of the City's Programs and/ or Projects with specific focus on those that includes the women fisherfolks ;and,
 - Give recommendations to empower the sector, specifically to address invisibility, undervaluation, and underrepresentation of women fisherfolks as well as measures to enhance agency response to the women fisherfolk sector.
- ***On Policies and Programs on Gender Equality of the City of El Salvador***

The Fishing Industry and the Fisherfolks in El Salvador City



Mr. Nolly Adrian Gabale, the City Agriculture Officer gave a general situation of the fishing industry in the city. According to him since El Salvador is a city situated along the coastal areas of Misamis Oriental, the City LGU headed by the Mayor Edgar S. Lignes have prioritized the protection and promotion of this industry. Ordinances are in effect banning shell gathering and illegal fishing to protect the marine sanctuary ecosystem and there are programs to support the fisherfolks such as the provision of necessary and appropriate fishing gears, the establishment of the marine sanctuary as well as the construction of designated market areas for selling marine products.

Annually they have allocated P250,000.00 for procurement of fishing gears distributed to the fisherfolk, through the Fisherfolks Associations in different fishing villages in the city, to ensure that they will not use prohibited fishing materials such as small eyed fishing nets. These associations also undergo series of information, education and campaign activities to further enhance the skills and knowledge of the fisherfolks and help boost the industry conducted by the City Agriculture Office with assistance from the Bureau of Fisheries. Members of these Fisherfolks Associations includes women and men.

Illegal fishing and use of illegal fishing gears are the primary and recurring challenges that the City Government is still facing that is why the Bantay Dagat was organized to lead in ensuring that no illegal fishing activities will happen within the city/municipal waters of El Salvador. There are 30 Members of the Bantay Dagat as of this moment who receives 4,500 honoraria for a 10 days per month shift, all of them are men.

The City Agriculture office said that they have a data base of duly registered fisherfolks (which includes fish vendors, shell gatherers etc.) as mandated by the Bureau of Fisheries, but just can't determine how many are men and women at the time of the FGD.

Women fisherfolks, identified by the the City LGU as mostly "wives of the fishermen", on the other hand, are facing challenges on how to have sufficient capital for livelihood as most of them are in charge of the buying and selling of fish.

The City Social Welfare and Development Officer, Ms. Kristine C. Fimalino also presented the programs of their office that are implemented to directly benefit women, including those who are considered as fisherfolks. Ms. Fimalino mentioned the 4Ps data base is one of the best way to identify the number of women fisherfolk in the city as these are more detailed.



The CSWDO have accorded livelihood assistance for women's organizations in the coastal barangays in El Salvador (Brgys. Molugan, Sinaloc, Pedro Sa Baculio, Amoros, Taytay and Poblacion) such as the fish products processing in Brgy. Molugan and Sinaloc. Livelihood Assistance can reach up to P300,000.00 per organization and this excludes some individual assistance that was also distributed.

5% of the total annual budget of the City are allocated for Gender and Development funds (GAD budget) and are primarily used for livelihood projects for women in the villages but no data is available on how much goes to the women fisherfolks.

The representative from the City Health Office, also shared the perspective of the health sector. They have seen a trend of Violence Against Women in fishing communities in the city based on their data of VAW related medical assistance that they have conducted but she said that a thorough survey should still be conducted in this sector. She also said that there are other issues that still need to be addressed in the fishing villages in the city such as health and sanitation and waste management. Family planning is also one area that needs to be look into because of this notion in the fishing communities that women should give in to the sexual requests of their husbands specially when they just came back from being out in the ocean for several days.

Gender Based Violence and Violence Against Women and Children Response Mechanism in El Salvador

Ms. Kristine Firmalino of the CSWDO then further explained response mechanism of the Local Government of El Salvador in GBV and VAWC cases. There are functioning VAW Desks in all the 15 Barangays in El Salvador where the Barangay VAW Desk Officers are mandated to submit quarterly reports to the City Social Welfare and Development Office and based on the data collected from these reports they can



confirm that there are high cases of domestic violence against women from the coastal barangays particularly physical, emotional and economic forms of abuse.

The CSWDO is always on the look-out on how to better improve the Barangay VAW desks by the continuing support on information and education to the designated officers. They strictly follow the VAWC flow chart from the Barangay level until it reaches their office with the guidance of the Department of Interior and Local Governance. There are allocated budget to respond to the needs of the victim-survivors specifically on legal fees and psychological evaluation fees but are mostly limited so there are instances where victim-survivors or their families will give counterparts on the fees depending on their financial capabilities.

The CSWDO handles not only the needs of the victims but also does counselling for the perpetrators. Though they admit that there are still much to be done in terms of infrastructure and facilities for victims of GBVs they still consider their VAW desks ideal.

▪ ***Women Fisherfolks in the time of COVID -19***



The COVID-19 pandemic has shaken the fishing industry in the city due to several factors. The restriction of movements as part of the strict health protocols mandated by the national government prevented the small scale fisherfolks from going out on the ocean for several months affecting so much of their livelihood. When they were declared as part of the essential workers and were already given permission to fish the post-harvest market became another issue as many of their regular customers

were already affected financially by the pandemic so they went on looking for markets in the next few months.

Women in the coastal areas in particular have reached out to the City Government through the Mayor's Office and the CSWDO to ask for financial assistance for food and other non-food essential products such as diapers, detergent soaps and even alcohols.

The City of El Salvador according to the FGD participants, was able to respond to these challenges accordingly because they were able to allocate funds for this medical emergency. This is aside from the National funds through the Bayanihan 1 and 2. For the fisherfolks and their families the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources also allotted COVID 19 response funds.



▪ **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- a) Increase funds to improve the Barangay VAW Desks facilities and infrastructure for quick response on GBV and VAWC cases;
- b) To allocate funds to increase human resources for the City Social Welfare and Development Office as part of the first responders of GBV cases;
- c) To establish a data base of women fisherfolks in the city; and,
- d) For the CHR to collaborate with the local government of El Salvador City to assist them better understand the referral mechanisms on cases of Gender Based Violence.