

Four Women and the Role of “Kulapu” in their Lives—Part 2

This is the second part of the article entitled “Women in Kulapu”. The first part was published in Vol 2 Issue 3 which identified the first of the 4 women. In this issue, the author describes the work and experiences of the second woman.

Mrs. Estrella I. Ociana, 59 years old, married, a resident of Kaburihan, Lavezares, Northern Samar, represents the Local Government Unit (LGU). She is presently the designated Municipal Agriculturist (MA) of Lavezares. She started as Agricultural Technician and became the Municipal Agricultural Officer (MAO) from 2001 to 2006, until promoted as MA of Lavezares in 2007 and holds the same position up to present. Her work as MA covered 26 barangays, of which 14 are coastal barangays and 5 are island barangays. She estimated that there were about 2,000 fisherfolk in their municipality, but to date, more than 1,000 are only registered. The fisherfolk include fishermen, processors, vendors, and other allied industries in fisheries.

Ma’am Estrella is very active in attending seminars or workshop related to fishery laws. She was one of the participants of the FGD regarding the gathering of “kulapu” and the information campaign on FAO 250-2, which the NFRDI conducted together with BFAR Region 8 on April 3, 2019 in Lavezares. Ma’am Estrella is very much aware of “kulapu” because the gathering of this resource in their municipality started in 2009. She said that the natural stocks of this resource are widely distributed in the coastal areas of Lavezares, such as Balecuatro, Villa, Island of Bangkawan, Libas, Urdaneta, Sabang Tabok, and San Agustin. However, the gathering of “kulapu” was only reported in Urdaneta and Sabang Tabok. This seemed to be a family venture because the parents and children are all engaged in the gathering of “kulapu.” She has personally observed the drying of “kulapu” along the highway. According to her, there were gatherers because there was a buyer of dried “kulapu” from San Jose. They have a consolidator in Lavezares who brought this to the trader based in San Jose. Even before the enforcement of FAO 250, or the imposition of ban on the collection, harvesting, selling, and export of seaweed *Sargassum* “kulapu” in 2014, Engr. Quintin B, Saledava, the incumbent mayor of Lavezares, had already prohibited the gathering of “kulapu” because he is very much aware of the importance of seaweeds in the marine ecosystem.



When asked for her comment regarding the latest FAO 250-2, Ma’am Estrella said that there would be possible gatherers if there would be assured buyers. She also agreed that the barangay captain must be involved to issue the certification for the collection of washed-ashore “kulapu” to conserve the resource.

After getting the barangay certification, the gatherer will get an auxiliary invoice from the LGU, and the MAO will inspect the collected “kulapu.” She is just waiting for a copy of FAO 250-2 to be able to disseminate the information in concerned coastal barangays.

In addition to her regular job, Ma’am Estrella joins in the apprehension of violators and confiscation of gears of the erring fisherfolk. In fact, she is a member of the Municipal Fisheries Law Enforcement Team (MFLET) composed of the LGU, PNP, NGO, and PO. She joins DENR’s Law Brigade Staff in the monitoring of the Marine Protected Areas as well as the apprehension of “kulapu” gatherers. This kind of work requires service beyond the eight-hour regular job, as the need arises or on-call assignment of the Mayor even weekends. She added that she has no hazard nor overtime pay, but she doesn’t complain. If luck strikes, she also uses her personal money to pay for the hauling of confiscated nets and reimburse it later from the mayor’s office. Just like Ma’am Centa (featured in the last issue), Ma’am Estrella is very much committed to her work and will continuously enforce the laws to protect the fishery resources. **(MSFerrer)**

Read our next issue for Part 3 of this article featuring the remaining women and how they were connected because of kulapu

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For comments, suggestions and inquiries, please contact:

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