

Four Women and the Role of “Kulapu” in their Lives—Part 1

I have long wanted to contribute an article in GRaD, but I could not find a suitable subject that will inspire me to make one until I encountered these four strong-willed women while doing a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) in line with our research on seaweeds. Four different women from different areas in Eastern Visayas (Region 8), practically from all walks of life, different jobs and fields in fisheries, but connected because of kulapu. So what is the role of kulapu in their lives?

One may ask now - what is kulapu? Kulapu is a local term for the brown seaweed *Sargassum*, particularly in the Visayas regions. *Sargassum* is an integral part of the marine ecosystem, being the habitat and breeding ground for many marine organisms. It is also considered a potential economic commodity in the country today. *Sargassum* is a good source of alginates, which has various applications for food and beverages, pharmaceuticals and cosmetic products, and many industrial uses (i.e., textile, fertilizer, paint, and printing). So we can imagine the big boost *Sargassum* could make in the seaweed industry. However, we have to protect the resource from unregulated harvesting because it affects the natural stocks as well as the many marine organisms that live and breed on seaweed beds. In 2014, BFAR issued FAO 250 to ban the harvesting, selling, and exportation of *Sargassum* for its conservation and management. Through series of consultations and workshops, the Fishery Order was amended into FAO 250 -1 to dispose of the remaining stocks of dried *Sargassum* for some time in 2015 and into FAO 250 -2 that allows only the gathering of washed ashore or drifted kulapu in 2019.

So how did kulapu affect and connect these women in Northern Samar? Let us take a closer look at these women with innate characteristics and the role of kulapu that made a difference in their lives and community.

GRaD

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For comments, suggestions and inquiries, please contact:

Information and Education Section, Training Division
National Fisheries Research and Development Institute.
Corporate 101 Bldg., Mo. Ignacia Ave., Quezon City 1103

 @NFRDPhilippines



Ms. Vicenta Projimo and the participants during one of her talks on seaweeds (Inset: “Kulapu” Seaweed *Sargassum*)

Ms. Vicenta S. Projimo, hails from Giuian, Samar. She is married, with two children, and presently a resident of Tacloban City. She represents the government sector, a senior technical staff from BFAR Region 8. “Ma’am Centa” or simply “Centa,” as her fellow seaweed coordinators fondly call her, is one of the pioneer advocates of seaweed development initiatives in BFAR. She has been in government service for more than 30 years, and most of these were spent on seaweed production, where she started as an assistant project leader in 2007. She was designated by Regional Director Juan Albaladejo of BFAR Region 8 as the Regional Seaweed Coordinator (RSC) in 2008, a role which she holds until today. Her work on seaweed is mainly on the production and utilization of *Kappaphycus* and *Euclima*, which are red seaweeds that are commercially and widely produced in the country. (MSFerrer)

Read our next issue for Part 2 of this article featuring the remaining women and how they were connected because of kulapu

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