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# #SheForTheSea

**USAID Fish Right Newsletter**  
**MARCH 2022**



## **March is Women's Month!**

So, this special edition of the USAID Fish Right Program Newsletter celebrates women in fisheries who play a critical role in maintaining healthy marine ecosystems. As value chain actors and wives responsible for household finances in coastal areas, women play a vital role in the fisheries sector, yet their contributions are oftentimes overlooked. Read below the stories of some of Fish Right's most ardent partners and celebrate these #WomenInFisheries

**Women in Fisheries  
Science: Making  
Science Matter in  
Fisheries  
Management**

The National Stock Assessment Program (NSAP) of the Department of Agriculture-Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (DA-BFAR) is responsible for providing data and analyses on important species in major fishing

grounds in the Philippines that are critical to developing evidence-based fisheries policies, plans, strategies, and practices. Meet the two women at the forefront of NSAP's work in the Visayan Sea, a key fishing ground encompassing waters of Bicol (Region 5), Western Visayas (Region 6) and Central Visayas (Region 7).

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## **Sheryll Mesa**



As the lead for NSAP6 and the National Blue Swimming Crab Technical Working Group Secretariat, Sheryll plays a key role in the implementation and rollout of policies based on the science provided by NSAP. Sheryll believes that fisheries management should always be grounded on what is best for the fishers and the marine ecosystems where they fish. She says it is important that fishers understand and appreciate that harvest measures are meant to protect the source of their livelihood.

## **Bruna Abrenica**

Bruna is the lead for NSAP7 responsible for fisheries stock assessment in 51 landing centers and monitoring sites in seven fishing grounds in Central Visayas. Her team has collected comprehensive data on the capture of sardines, herrings, and mackerels that advise concerned local governments on seasonal fishing closures. Brunna shares that as a child, she fell in love with the ocean because her father is a fisher, and because of her father's work, she sympathizes with the struggle of the fisherfolk, whom she considers frontliners in securing food for the country. She has some words of advice for young people looking to pursue a career in fisheries: "The vast blue sea is there for you to explore, study, manage, and love. [But] think twice ... the job is very challenging and entails much dedication, commitment, focus and passion."





## Women in Fish Trade and Processing: Taking the Lead in Embracing Change



*The women of the Banilad Maguilawod Fisherfolks Association (BAMAF). Mia L. Cuizon, Karen C. Luces, Melody Babor, Mirasol Timosan, Julieann Taneo*

In South Negros, women have been reliable partners for Fish Right in the implementation of Fish Tiangge, a Facebook marketplace launched at the height of pandemic restrictions in 2020 to connect sellers and buyers impacted by the lockdowns. Women, who make up a significant proportion of Fish Tiangge consolidators, and fishers' wives from Fish Right's partner fisherfolk associations are supported by the program through various trainings on fish processing, financial literacy, and responsible fishing among others. A local organization, the DCCCO Multi-purpose Cooperative, helps the initiative by providing startup capital to clusters of women who consolidate fish using the Fish Tiangge platform, and thus enables them to diversify into other fish products during the lean months, when there is less fish to sell and fewer buyers

to sell to. In the aftermath of Typhoon Odette, when they were unable to immediately sell their catch, the women avoided wastage and income loss by processing fish into frozen ready-to-eat products with longer shelf life. Get to know two of these enterprising Fish Tiangge-South Negros women: Mia and Rowena, both from Banilad, Dumaguete City.

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## **Mia L. Cuizon**

Mia – or Yang – is a member of the Banilad Maguilawod Fisherfolks Association (BAMAFAs) together with her husband Cyrus, with whom she has three daughters. She is thankful to the Fish Tiangge initiative for helping BAMAFAs improve the livelihood of its members through value-added fish processing training. She says this has been particularly helpful at a time when they are experiencing lower fish catch due to more frequent strong typhoons and stronger waves, and the much greater number of fishers operating in their area. She vows to pay forward the support they are receiving: “I would like to help rehabilitate the corals so there will be more places for fish to shelter and reproduce, and there will be more fish to catch and sell.”



## Rowena Solis



Rowena is a stay-at-home fisher's wife and mother to two boys. Like Yang, she acknowledges that their catch has not been as plentiful as before, no matter what gear they use. Still, she and her husband continue to catch and sell fish. She shares that Fish Tiangge has been especially helpful as she has started marketing her fish and fish products online on Facebook. Rowena regularly attends Fish Right trainings on illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing. She shares her learnings with her fellow fishers and is a staunch advocate for responsible fishing. She hopes government can help fishers like her protect marine ecosystems.

*"Kobkob (ring-net) fishing should be properly penalized, as well as the use of illegal fine mesh nets and poison that catch even juvenile fish. Dynamite fishing especially during the spawning season must be stopped,"* she asserts.



## **Women in Marine Conservation: Winning Gains for Family and Community**

The Calamian Islands of Palawan are home to many coastal communities who rely on the sea for food and livelihood. They use a combination of modern technology and traditional knowledge to warn themselves of calamities, and to help manage their forests, swamplands, and seaside areas. IUU fishing is a major concern, with experts saying more than 1,000 tons of fish are taken illegally in the area every year, about 30% of which are caught by local fishers. To address this, men, women and youth across the four Calamian municipalities have banded together as the “Calamianes Eco-warriors,” reaching out to around 19,000 fishers to communicate the need for and the benefits of fishing right. Among them are two women who are showing that, when women take part and take a lead in marine conservation, their families and communities benefit.

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# Imelda Mazo

Imelda is the President of the Shalom Women's Biodiversity Conservation Cooperative and a leader of the Balisungan Women-Managed Area (WMA) in Coron, so called because the area is especially designated for management by women. Under her leadership, her group won the 2021 Recognition Awards for Calamianes' Enhanced Ecosystem (RACE) for Best WMA. Imelda also leads a Community-managed Savings and Credit Association (ComsCA), a peer-to-peer savings and banking system for coastal communities seldom reached by microfinance institutions.

ComsCA members regularly deposit an agreed amount into a common fund that is then used to provide credit to members in need. Says Imelda, "To a family who gets by on a day-to-day basis, ComsCA is a big help. Our place is poor. Here, you can turn a life around through community savings."





## Editha Dranto



Editha is the president of TAMABA, a women's organization based in the municipality of Linapacan. TAMABA, which stands for *Tarabidan 'Y Ang Magtarangay sa Bakawan* (friends united for planting mangroves), runs a WMA like Imelda's. And, like Imelda, Editha leads a ComSCA in her community. In December 2021, her 50-member ComsCA achieved their highest savings on record amounting to almost \$4,500. Together with the other members of TAMABA, Editha also manages a mangrove nursery and conducts educational campaigns on the important role mangroves play in fisheries production, and in protecting coastal communities. Their work has borne fruit: "Everyone used to openly cut down our mangroves to use for their houses. Ever since we started our organization, no one has cut down the mangrove trees, thank God," she relates, adding: "The community works together to plant and take care of the mangroves."



# In The News

## NWTF | Lilibeth Hautea

At 54, Lilibeth is just one among many empowered Filipinas today. She juggles taking care of her family and managing the household on one hand, and supporting her fisher husband's livelihood on the other. And there's more to this hardworking woman than meets the eye. [Read more](#)

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*The USAID Fish Right Program is a partnership between the governments of the United States and the Philippines to promote fisheries management and marine biodiversity conservation. Fish Right enables sustainable fisheries by reducing threats to biodiversity and improving marine ecosystem governance.*



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