

# Sustainable Fisheries Development in the Philippines: Key Contributions and Lessons from the Fisheries Improvement for Sustainable Harvests (FISH) Project

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The capture fisheries sector in the Philippines provides a host of benefits to the country's 90 million population. In 2007, the sector contributed to food and nutrition (2.5 million t of fishes and aquatic products, 45% of animal protein consumption), livelihoods (1.4 million small-scale or municipal fishers, 16 thousand large-scale or commercial fishers), and the economy (production value of PHP 122 billion, export revenue of about US\$ 570 million). These benefits contributed substantially to food security, livelihoods, and social stability, particularly in rural coastal areas where poverty and development challenges are more pronounced. A number of issues threaten the sustainability of these benefits from capture fisheries. The key issues include: the open access nature of the country's capture fisheries, overexploitation, the use of illegal/destructive methods, resource/habitat degradation, reduced productivity/incomes, distributional inequity, poverty, and increased competition and conflict among fishers. Moreover, the institutional system, capacity and resources for effective fisheries governance require improvements to effectively respond to the scope and scale of the issues impacting the sector. In addition, the sectoral issues are expected to be exacerbated by underlying trends in the larger (national) development context (e.g., increasing population and incomes, resources and environmental degradation, climate change, fiscal/debt challenges).

As part of overall government efforts to address the issues impacting sustainable fisheries development in the country, the Department of Agriculture (DA), through its Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR), is implementing the Fisheries Improvement for Sustainable Harvests (FISH) Project (September 2003 to September 2010). This paper outlines the key approaches/strategies and actions framework of the FISH Project and its contributions (to date) to the sustainable fisheries development agenda in the country. Recognizing that the sustainable fisheries "challenge" will be largely won in the local "frontlines", the FISH Project invested largely in four focal areas (Northern Bohol, Calamianes, Surigao Del Sur and Tawi-Tawi) as pilot/demonstration sites on how to effect sustainable fisheries (using the Ecosystem-Based



Fisheries Management Approach or EBFM) in the local context. Learning from past experiences, integrated solutions (based on differential diagnosis of sectoral issues) comprising various “growth”(G), “control”(C), and “maintenance”(M) mechanisms were put in place in these focal areas. The GCM solutions have resulted in improved local constituencies, policies/ordinances, plans and action programs, and capacities collectively leading to, among others, increased catches and mitigation of local capture fisheries issues. The program for replication of the GCM model for sustainable fisheries to other parts of the country is currently being developed with DA-BFAR. In support of management efforts in the focal areas, and anticipating the replication challenges, the FISH Project also invested in national policy/institutional improvement and constituency-building efforts. Key contributions in the policy/institutional improvement area (e.g., support to development of the Comprehensive National Fisheries Industry Development Plan or CNFIDP, the Integrated Fisheries Management Unit or IFMU Scheme, the National Stock Assessment Program or NSAP) and in constituency-building (e.g., information/communication campaigns, support to the Movement for Responsible Fisheries or MoReFish, “champions-building”) are also presented. A number of lessons are evident from the FISH Project experience which may be relevant to other developing countries with substantial small-scale cum large-scale fisheries. Lessons pertaining to programmatic action areas (comprising the integrated solution set) and implementation process are outlined and briefly discussed.