

# The Ambao Fish Sanctuary and Marine Reserve: A Strategy for Coastal Habitat Protection

**Country: Philippines**

**Project: Second Cordillera Highland Agricultural Resource Management Project (CHARMP2)**

**Contact Person/Email Address: Cameron P. Odsey/ ron.odsey@gmail.com**

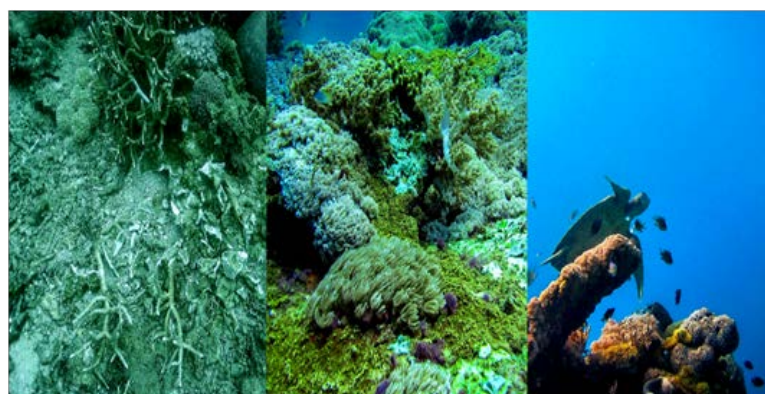
## Background

The Philippines has about 266,000 kilometers (km) of coastal waters and a coastline of about 17,460 km. The shelf area is about 184,600 km<sup>2</sup> which includes the coral reef, mangrove forests, seagrass beds, algal flats, soft bottom communities, sandy beaches, estuaries and watersheds.

Most coastal areas in the country are damaged due to illegal fishing practices. The establishment of fish sanctuaries has been one of the more effective strategies to address the damage to coastal habitats. The Ambao Fish Sanctuary and Marine Reserve (AFSMR) located in Hinundayan, Southern Leyte, Philippines was established on April 10, 2000. Its establishment was aimed to address the issues of overfishing resulting to low fish catch, damage to habitats, out migration of fishers and vulnerability to natural hazards. The 32.5-hectare AFSMR is a no-take zone and does not allow any activity inside the fish sanctuary (FS). However, the outer portion of the area allows access and use in a regulated or controlled manner for specific use or purpose. The AFSMR will benefit the major stakeholders such as the individual fishers, farmer and fisherfolk associations, among others. In particular, it will promote the improvement of the coral reefs by increasing its productivity; the “spill over” effect will enhance the increased catch in the adjacent areas; will serve as habitat and protection to migratory species; reduced conflict among fishers and other resource users; and protection from natural hazards such as storm surge or tsunami.

## Innovations / Good Practices

The management of the AFSMR is no one’s sole responsibility but of all stakeholders who derive



their source of livelihood, food and income from the coastal resources. The co-management approach is being applied in managing the AFSMR. The local government unit (LGU) allocates annual fund for maintenance, salaries and other logistics. The fishers assist in the conduct of surveillance and patrolling. There is a more coordinated and cohesive effort resulting to more efficient and effective way of law enforcement.

To lessen the fishing pressure and enable the damaged habitats to recover, the fishers and most of the people in the community are engaged in other livelihood activities. These livelihoods are water-based and land-based with very little negative impact on the environment. Capacity building is provided to the community, especially to women, to provide them with more and better options in earning a living.

A very important component is the Information, Education and Communication campaign. Before the AFSMR was established, massive consultations with various stakeholders were conducted. There were information dissemination activities on the importance of FS as a strategy for habitat rehabilitation and protection. IEC was conducted in

various forum and in schools to educate children on how to protect and conserve the coastal resources. The IEC should be a continuous activity as a way to inform the public.

## Impact

It was evident that the coral reefs were damaged due to illegal fishing practices. This resulted to low catch and eventually, low income from fishing. There are about 219 households benefited by the AFSMR. One of the outcomes is that the coastal community managed the sanctuary sustainably. Through the 18 years of implementation, there is an improvement of coral cover thereby increasing the fish catch of individual fishers benefiting from the buffer zone established outside the FS. The Ambao community is assured of live and healthy corals in its coastal area.

The increase of fish catch resulting in increased income is also an important outcome. The increased density of fishes, crustaceans and mollusks enabled the fishers and their families to improve their daily living condition. The out-migration of fishers to other location has been reduced.

There were a number of national and local awards and recognition given to the AFSMR. It was also the subject of cooperation with nongovernmental organizations, multilateral agencies and the academe.

The coastal communities of Ambao experienced the impact of Typhoon Haiyan. However, they were not as badly hit due to the presence of massive and healthy habitats such as coral reefs and mangroves.

## Facilitating Factors / Challenges

The active participation of the LGU is an important factor in the management of the AFSMR, particularly, the untiring efforts of the barangay chief and the local council members. It should also be noted that the fishers' associations and organizations were part of those who took part in the activities during the AFSMR's infantile stage. The active participation of the LGU also provided the needed impetus.

However, there are some challenges that beset the management of the AFSMR. Fishers from another province use compressor. There is also the encroachment of some local fishers from nearby municipalities. Unlicensed fishers within the municipality also continue to fish. To address the problem on the use of compressor and encroachment, the composite law enforcement teams have conducted more frequent patrolling. The unlicensed fishers were assisted to register in the fishery registry (Fisher) and boat registry (BoatR) system of the Bureau of Fishery and Aquatic Resources (BFAR).

## Lessons Learned

There is a need to involve technical support to provide the expertise on the research side. The collection of data and information needed to better assess the fish sanctuary can be done by the academe and other research institutions. Further, legal guidance/assistance should be provided.

The IEC is an important component when establishing FS. This will encourage more support from the fishers and the community, as a whole. An informed community makes a will help sustain the AFSMR.

The provision of other sources of livelihood will enable the fishers to diversify income. They will, for the time being, lessen fishing activities while the coastal fisheries are given time to recover. However, these livelihood activities must have very little negative impact on the environment.

## Recommendations

- Closely monitor the AFSMR to determine the changes in volume of catch and species composition.
- Strict enforcement of fishery and environmental laws.