

DECADES OF CHANGE IN A RURAL COASTAL ZONE: WATER, MANGROVE, FISH AND PEOPLE

Jon P. Altamirano, Lab. of Global Fisheries Science, University of Tokyo
Hisashi Kurokura, Lab. of Global Fisheries Science, University of Tokyo

KEYWORDS: coastal management, estuary, inshore fisheries, mangrove decline, overfishing, Philippines, poverty, siltation

In the Philippines, being an archipelago of 7,107 islands, coastal zones are considered to be the most important areas for residence and livelihood, especially for more than half of the country's 90 M people living in the rural areas. The Batan Estuary in the NE coast of Panay Island in central Philippines exemplifies a typical rural coast – with various resources and various conflicts. The present paper discusses key changes in this estuarine coast that occurred in the past decades as well as the reactions the community made.

Once noted to be a very productive fishing ground, the Batan Estuary now suffers from a seemingly degenerative phase. To assess this, investigations, including interviews and actual field surveys, were conducted in 2006 and 2007. Secondary data from available literature and reports were also used to establish the changes through the decades. Mangrove forests were reduced by 95% in 50 years to give way for aquaculture. The worsening water condition has become obvious, as well as the more restricted water flow and shoaling of rivers. In every decade since 1970s, population in the area has been increasing by 10% but artisanal fisheries production, most importantly for shrimps, has been declining by 50%. Desperate to increase income to feed an average family of 8, fishers intensified fishing effort by multiplying their fishing gears, reaching 400% more than 15 years ago, only to obtain a mere US\$2 per day.

The Batan Estuary has indeed changed but with current trends, this alteration is expected to continue. Although many management programs have been employed and various laws are in place, the environmental and fisheries problems in this coastal zone seem to worsen. The lack of political will and cooperation between the government and community, coupled with weak law enforcement, obscure the view of improvement. It is therefore imperative to, yet again, change this rural coastal zone. But this time, the change needs to start from the people themselves.

Jon P. Altamirano
Laboratory of Global Fisheries Science
Graduate School of Agricultural and Life Sciences
The University of Tokyo
1-1-1 Yayoi, Bunkyo-ku, Tokyo 113-8657, Japan
jonalta@gmail.com
Tel.: +81-3-5841-8115, Fax: +81-3-5841-5189