

CHAPTER IV

THE TRANSFORMATION OF CONCEPCION MUNICIPALITY AND BARANGAY NIPA

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will focus on the historical view of the Municipality of Concepcion and its people, and will describe the land and water territories of the Municipality, the place itself and the fishing activity; the evolution in fishing gear and the political development of the Municipality. The fishing community of *barangay* Nipa will also be discussed in detail, including the seascape, the land and its people, as well as the resources available in the community. The local beliefs, traditions and culture of the fishing families will also be discussed, as well as how these local beliefs have been used for the conservation of fishery resources. Furthermore, how these local beliefs and traditions have changed over time will also be tackled. Lastly, the municipal rules and regulations for the sustainable management, conservation and development of coastal fishery resources will be explained.

4.2 Historical View of the Municipality of Concepcion and its People

The Municipality of Concepcion is situated in northern Iloilo, and is best known for its 16 scenic islands that occupy a considerable proportion of Concepcion's territorial area. The largest and probably most popular of these islands, is Pan de Azucar (or Sugar Loaf) where Mount Manaphag (also popularly known as Mount Pan de Azucar) stands with its spectacular crags and steep sides. This majestic mountain is the most commanding landmark in Concepcion; its peak rises 573 feet above sea level, and it serves as the most conspicuous physical and navigational landmark for Concepcion and its people. It is considered the tallest peak among the islands that dot the northeastern coast of Iloilo, and has been described as the steepest mountain in the country. Out of the sixteen islands, only eleven are inhabited. The nearest island to the mainland is Tago, whose southern promontory is not more than 200 meters from the mainland. The farthest island is Baliguian, and this island is separated by 24.5

nautical miles of sea from the mainland. The island with the largest land area is Pan de Azucar, which covers more than 1000 square kilometers. The smallest island is Bocot, which at the time of this study, was uninhabited (Pacete et al. 2005)

The coastal portion of Concepcion stretches along a bay now called Concepcion Bay, which is surrounded by a string of islands which make it an ideal and natural harbor for boats; it is easily accessible to vessels plying the Luzon-Visayas-Mindanao route.

The mainland of Concepcion follows a typical lowland/upland pattern, with the southeastern portion characterized by thin strips of lowland starting from the coast, and then giving way to low, slightly rolling hills which gradually rise to steep hills which converge on the slopes of Mount Apitong. Clustered around this mountain are the *Barangays* of Nipa, Loong, Poblacion, Tamis-ac, Nino, Macalbang and Plandico; which together cover about 56 per cent of the mainland area. By and large the islands of Concepcion are physically highland masses, except Baliguian, which is primarily a low coral reef island. From a distance, these islands appear as half-drowned mountains jutting out from the sea; characterized and manifested by sedimentary rocks. The mountains and hills of these islands are so close to the sea, that only very narrow and random strips of arable land are available for farming. These narrow strips bordering the island shores are the limited areas upon which the islanders have traditionally built their homes. On the coasts of these islands are unspoiled beaches and diving sites, known widely among foreigners and domestic tourists alike. Fortunately (or unfortunately for some), the islands are not yet developed, thus only a little accommodation is available. The combined size of these islands comprises 40 per cent of total land area of the Municipality (Pacete et al. 2005).

As you travel along the coastal *barangay* of Concepcion, where the marine resources are rich and where fishing is an industry of tremendous importance, it is customary for you to witness the early morning tableaux of fishermen hauling in nets full of their catch, or the women and children welcoming a fleet of *bancas* heading for shore, each loaded with a day or night's harvest from the sea. The men are usually subsistence fishermen, the majority born to, rather than properly trained for the trade;

bearers of fishing traditions that have been passed on by the communities to which they belong.

The sagas told of these people's fishing lives often unfold to us vignettes of valorous deeds, mysterious adventures and dramatic encounters with the forces of the sea, forces which have continued to be a source of wonder and fear, not only to those who fish, but perhaps also to all others; for while it is conceded that man has subdued continents, the sea has remained unconquerable and unfathomable to him. The sea's incalculable moods continue to mystify. The waters that sometimes appear so calm, often churn into treacherous, mountainous masses, orchestrated by gusty winds that blow to oblivion any object in their path. Yet, despite of these dangers, the fishermen, captives of their culture and traditions, continue to risk their life and limb to avail themselves of the limitless bounty of the sea in order to survive. Thus, when I visited the area, abaca and cotton nets had given way to nylon, and coral fishing was highly commercialized. Yet despite this, there were still areas of Concepcion which had maintained their traditional fishing traps, nets and coral fishing. Many fishermen had continued to use their paddle boats, while others had abandoned them. The need to concede to 'progress' had become apparent, but despite this, the local fisherman had continued to safeguard their community's culture and traditions; still finding time to weave and unweave tales, songs, riddles, proverbs and continuing to ritualize occasions that underscore their relationship with the sky, the coast, the river and the sea.

According to the local history of the Municipality, the original inhabitants immigrated there in the 1500s, from the municipality of Btác Viejo, Igaras in Miagaao, as well as from other places in Panay. In the year 1572, Severo Aglosado from Btác. Viejo came to look for a clearing and thus became the real *tumandok*, or 'first inhabitant of the area', in the place where *Barangay* Aglosong is now located. During those times people inhabited the coastal sites, which were densely covered with mangroves; dominantly by *bacjaw* trees.

In the year 1950s the Municipality was primarily a coastal municipality within which fishing remained highly important, and with a municipal fishing ground of 22,000 hectares. The total land area of the Municipality at that time was 9702 hectares (MPDC 2005). The Municipality was also an agricultural area devoted to wet rice

cultivation; whilst other crops planted were coconuts, bamboo, bananas, corn, vegetables and other root crops. Most families who were engaged in fishing, were also involved in dried fish processing and fish drying. The dried fish were usually sold to the local market on market day, or sometimes they were sold to another municipality or to a wholesaler who purchased their product in bulk.

The Municipality had two market days; every Wednesday and Thursday of the week. Market days were very important to the local people, especially for those living on the islands. Market day was their time to buy the family necessities for the whole week and at the same time to sell their own products. Wednesday was barter day, when people from the island *barangay* exchanged their dried fish products with people from the mainland; people who produced rice, vegetables, fruit and other root crops. Thursday was the time to buy their family needs because, the *bulanter*, a person who buys and sells from different municipalities came to their area to sell different products. The products sold during market days included kitchen wares, clothes, farm tools, fishing tools and gear, rice, vegetables, dried fish, grocery items and *ukay-ukay*; popular products from the UK, such as second-hand clothes, which were sold at a very cheap price. The *ukay-ukay* were very popular, especially with the island people, because they could buy these clothes at a very cheap price of around five pesos and upwards.

The Municipality of Concepcion was originally called *Bacjawan* following the native practice of naming places after natural landmarks. The name actually means the placed of *bacjaw* trees, which used to proliferate in the wide swampy areas along the coast. Today, two adjoining *barangays* west of Poblacion still carry the name Bacjawan. In 1855, during the Spanish colonial regime, Bacjawan was formally founded as a pueblo, with Elizardo Azucena as its first *capitan basal*, or *governadocrillo*. Later the local *Cabezas de Barangay* petitioned the Spanish *comandante*, Enrique Garcia, to change the name of the town from Bacjawan to Concepcion, in honor of the first-born daughter of Capitan Azucena. In 1895, the town became officially known as Concepcion, and was recognized as a political subdivision of the National Government (MPDC 2005).

Historically fishing, together with simple food gathering and hunting, was one of the earliest sources of livelihood in the Municipality. Its progress up to the modern

period involved the continuous development of technology, tools and instruments, transportation and human skills. Before traditional fishing tools were invented, the local people started catching fish with their hands, and only later developed simple tools like the bamboo trap, the spear, nets, and the hook and line. Later, for greater efficiency, whole communities went to fish and then shared the catch equally.

With the increase in population and subsequent rise in demand for food, fishing technology and human skills progressed. In the process, more sophisticated fishing vessels, gear and equipment were introduced, such as the compass, the telescope, larger ships and fish finders. Fishermen also ventured beyond the smaller streams and rivers towards the bigger lakes and seas. Later, they discovered that the oceans are the planet's biggest producer of living organic matter in terms of size and overall productive biomass. This led, among other things, to the development of trawler fishing. Trawler fishing involves large motorized vessels equipped with fish nets running to hundreds of meters long that, for the sake of efficiency, often reach the sea floor. The most sophisticated vessels use the latest in modern fishing technology, like computers, electronic gadgets and telecommunications.

In the overall scheme of the national economy, the importance of individual fishermen still using primitive tools and technology for catching fish, has decreased at an accelerating rate over recent years. In fact, they have been marginalized by the spread of new knowledge, the invention of new fishing tools and crafts, the rise of new specializations, the trend towards a greater division of labor, with greater a fragmentation in the aspects and processes of production, and a growing concentration of capital in the hands of a few.

The economic and political situation within the municipality over the previous 30 years had been characterized by severe deprivation, a lack of decent shelter and a lack of access to basic services such as portable water. As a fourth class municipality, in 2001 Concepcion had an annual budget of only 28 million pesos, 89 per cent of which came from its Internal Revenue Allotment (Gawad Galing Pook, 2006). The municipality's low income base had grave implications for the provision of services it had been able to deliver to its constituents. For instance, health provision was sorely inadequate. In 2001, this inadequacy had been reflected in a malnutrition prevalence rate (MPR) of 6.87 per cent, among pre-school age children and a maternal mortality

rate of 334 per 100,000 births (ibid). Reproductive health education services were also found wanting, as the contraceptive prevalence rate was only 28 per cent. As a result, in the same year, the municipality was also confronted with a very high population growth rate of 2.79 per cent (ibid). Water borne diseases alone, affected 8.28 per cent of the population in 1996. During disease or illness outbreaks, most households left everything to fate, since they could not afford medication. Among elementary pupils, the dropout rate over the same year was 5 per cent, and only 50 per cent of the rest advanced to secondary education (ibid).

When Raul Banias, a practicing medical doctor, became Mayor of Concepcion in 1998, his administration took on board poverty as its greatest challenge. He embarked on a series of consultations, community discussions, ocular visits and research (including poverty, resource and industry mapping) in order to identify the factors that breed poverty. In 1999, the Municipality established a database so as to have a clear picture of the situation. Among the factors identified as aggravating poverty at that time were depleted coastal resources, high population growth and poor quality of basic education. From there, the Mayor formulated the vision for his governance of Concepcion: a highly competent and dynamic local government, serving as an agent of change in partnership with civil society; targeting zero poverty by 2020.

This vision was translated into a flagship program called Zero Poverty 2020, the aim of which was to use a convergence strategy to create a synergy in addressing poverty. At its inception, it was made up of the following work-streams (a) the re-engineering of bureaucracy (b) the mainstreaming and redirecting of programs towards poverty reduction (c) decentralizing and sharing program management and accountability (d) strategic partnerships with institutions and groups (e) networking and resource mobilization, and (f) community empowerment through the co-management and co-financing of projects (Gawad Galang Pook 2006).

The program uses minimum basic need (MBN) data, community mobilization, people's participation and alliance building as tools to promote its initiatives on (a) human resource development (b) enterprise development and livelihood enhancement (c) resource management (d) health (e) education, and (f) infrastructure development (ibid).

Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Management Councils were established in twelve *barangays* with one also at the municipal level and since that time, these councils have helped the municipality managed and regulate fishery resources. A total of 187 fish wardens were designated to reinforce the *bantay dagat* to patrol the municipal waters and arrest illegal fishermen.

Another initiative of the LGU, one set up in order to promote the Municipality, the local culture and their traditions, all through tourism, was launched as the *Tampisaw* festival; a celebration of water - the root of life. Former Concepcion Mayor, Dr. Raul Bantias, said that the festival symbolized the unending affection of the residents towards the sea, which continued to be a primary source of livelihood for them. "For years, water has greatly influenced our people's life; that is why we are celebrating a custom and a tradition that greatly appreciates the importance of water", Mayor Bantias explained at that time.

The Tampisaw Festival is timed every year to coincide with the celebration of Earth Day, which begins on April 22nd and culminates on April 24th. *Tampisaw* was conceived as a "home-grown, nature-based" festival, according to Concepcion's Tourism Officer, Mario Lazarito. The term, which was coined by the Department of Tourism's (DOT's) Helen Camarista, means "to playfully wade in water". The three-day festivity usually includes a fluvial parade, bonfire, song festival, water sports competition; a dance festival, live band and coastal clean up campaign, all undertaken along the shore and the waters of Concepcion; particularly at the cone-shaped Mount Pan de Azucar.

With the dynamic and development-oriented leadership under former mayor Raul N. Bantias, the Municipality of Concepcion underwent a dramatic change in terms of its political, economic and social aspects. On the political side, the people had more freedom to vote for whoever they thought was deserving of the position, without fear of harassment from armed gangs and secure in the knowledge that, whatever their decision might be, they would not be thrown off the land they were occupying at that time. The majority of the people in the municipality were squatters on the land of other powerful people or families. As a result, prior to the appointment of Mayor Raul Bantias, they had had to vote for whomever the landowner told them to vote for, or else they had to live on the street.

In terms of the economy, local products in the Municipality were developed and promoted throughout the region, and even over the whole country. By year 2000 the area was exporting their fish products, both fresh and dried, to adjacent cities and municipalities and also to the capital city Manila. Live fish, such as groupers, were also being cultured on one island, *barangay* Tambaliza and then exported live to Hong Kong and also a crab meat processing plant had been set up in the Municipality, exporting its products to Japan. This economic development had both positive and negative results for the people. The positive results were that it had increased the income of the Municipality as a whole and provided jobs to some residents. However, one negative impact was that it has also resulted in the rapid exploitation of fishing resources in order to meet the demand of both the domestic and international market.

In terms of social aspects, people's participation at every stage of the program's (Municipal Protected Areas) development was highly encouraged, and so the participation of the community members was ensured. This resulted in a high degree of stakeholder ownership. *Barangay* officials and representatives of the community organization participated in the planning process. This had allowed the members of the community to air their problems and needs, and to envision their desired future, design interventions and deliver the services expected by the residents.

During the leadership tenure of former mayor Raul N. Baniyas, Concepcion had begun to attain a semblance of balance. Infant mortality rates and crude birth rates dropped. There was also a marked increase in the quality, accessibility and availability of family planning and reproductive health services. Health facilities were provided with equipment and structural improvements; particularly electricity and running water.

A deeper understanding of the complex relationship between population, health and the environment helped stir the community residents to participate in the establishment of the Municipality's Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), to focus on upland reforestation and coastal clean-ups, and also on other activities that addressed the declining fish catch and reduced incomes.

Concepcion established eight marine protected areas with an area of 240 hectares, which were designed to regulate fishing and replenish marine resources. The program also provided alternative fishing methods to 242 fishermen. One result

was that the small-scale fishermen reported an increase in their fish catch, from 1.8 kilos in 2002 to 4.8 kilos in 2005 (Armada 2005).

4.3 The Fishing Community of Barangay Nipa

The fishing village of *Barangay Nipa* is about 8 kilometers from *Poblacion* town. As of 2007, its land area was 469 hectares and it had a total population of 1147 people living in 213 households. Table 4.1 below shows that 94 per cent of the population were *municipal* fishing families at that time, with six per cent working as farmers, wage labor and in other service oriented jobs such as motorcycle drivers and carpenters, and with less than one per cent as small-scale commercial fishers.

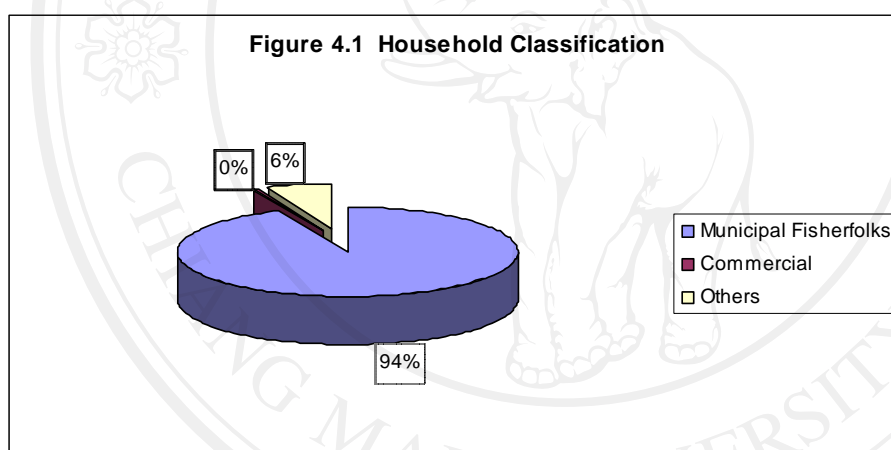


Table 4.1 Household Classification in Barangay Nipa (2007-2008)

Types of Job	Number of Households	Percentage of Total (%)
Municipal Fishing	199	93.43%
Commercial Fishing	1	0.47%
Others	13	6.10%
Total	213	100.00%

Source: Household Survey Conducted (Dec. 2007 to February 2008)

At the time of my visit, the regular mode of transportation to *Barangay Nipa* was to use a single motorcycle; other four wheeled vehicles could also drive the rough road, but since the *barangay* was not very modern and only a very few travelled to the

town at that time, other regular means of transportation were very limited. You knew you were within the vicinity of *Barangay Nipa* when you could see the pristine and crystal clear water overlooking the banks of the rough road on your left hand side, and on your right hand side, thickly forested mountains with scattered rocks, some very large, on the side of the mountain.

Barangay Nipa was a very quite and tranquil place, where all you could hear was the waves as they hit the shore, the birds singing in the trees and the sound of the leaves being blown by the wind from the sea. You could also smell the sea salt in the wind, mixed with the tangy smell of leaves when you walked along the shore. In this area you would seldom hear a loud noise from the radio, or the honking of a car horn. Without even looking at the street, the people would know if there was a motorcycle coming, because the sound of it would be very clear, even from afar, being the only sound to disturb the silence of the place.

In the year 1950s to present the community was primarily a fishing village, but some people were also involved in small-scale farming, vegetable and root crop production, and coconut planting. However, the land allotted for farming was too narrow for the growing population, and most of it was rocky, hence, rice farming was very limited. There were no irrigation systems in the *barangay* and the people had to depend on the rain alone for growing rice. Rain falls during the period June to August each year. As a result of this and a lack of irrigation, rice farming was only able to be carried out once a year. Also, since most of the land is rocky, the people in the community had planted coconut trees and other root crops to supplement their everyday living. It was therefore to the sea that the villagers turned for their food. The sea offers a greater potential for obtaining food and for earning a living. The sea around the area offers varied and rich resources; many different species of fish abound, especially *lagaw*, plus there are numerous kinds of shellfish like clams, crabs and squid, which inhabit the bottom of the sea. During low tide, the children and women woke up early in the morning to gather seashells and fish found between the stones. In the early afternoon, the fishermen would come home with the fish while the other men, women and children waited on the beach for them to arrive; the men chatting or repairing the nets, and the women weaving mats or making *nipa* roofs to keep themselves busy, while their children played on the seashore.

The results of the survey conducted during my data collection in Nipa during the period December 2007 to February 2008, showed that the majority of the population were aged below 40 years old, meaning that the population in Nipa had only started to increase after the late 1980s and up to the year 2000. According to my informant, during the early 1980s the population had been less than half of the 2008 level. The surge in population was the result of early marriages between teenagers, because their families could not afford to send them to college or university for further education, and as a result they tended to marry early; and also the migration of some from an adjacent municipality, something which had also resulted in an over-exploitation of fishing resources.

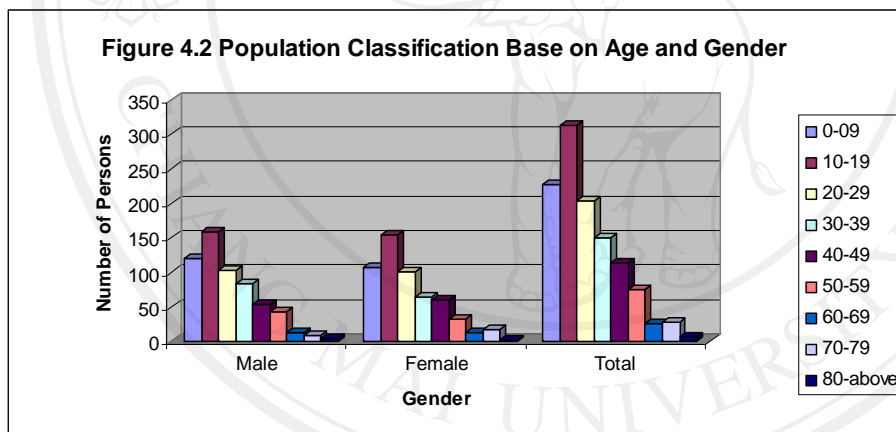


Table 4.2 Population Classification in *Barangay* Nipa Based on Age and Gender

Age	Male	%	Female	%	Total	%
0-9	120	20.24%	108	19.49%	228	19.98%
10-19	159	26.81%	154	27.80%	313	27.29%
20-29	103	17.37%	101	18.23%	204	17.79%
30-39	85	14.33%	65	11.73%	150	13.08%
40-49	54	9.11%	60	10.83%	114	9.94%

Age	Male	%	Female	%	Total	%
50-59	43	7.25%	32	5.78%	75	6.54%
60-69	14	2.36%	13	2.35%	27	2.35%
70-79	10	1.69%	18	3.25%	28	2.44%
80-above	5	.84%	3	.54%	8	.70%
TOTAL	593	100%	554	100%	1147	100%

Source: Household Survey Conducted (Dec., 2007 to February, 2008)

4.3.1 The Local Beliefs, Traditions and Culture of the Fishing Families in Nipa plus their Livelihood Strategies

The sea has been traditionally viewed by the local people as part of the spiritual world. Spirits oversee the sea's well-being and tend to its resources. The movement of the wind and water is a manifestation of the predisposition of the spirits. The spirits are generous in sharing the resources with human beings, but can be vengeful for their misuse. Because of this view, the local fishing communities had always related to the sea in a manner that meant its resources were safeguarded. However, the penetration of the market had opened many coastal areas to mass exploitation. This had also shattered the view that the sea was a spiritual world. The resulting resource degradation had led to the impoverishment of coastal dwellers. The spirits took their revenge and the coastal dwellers received a direct hit.

In Nipa, according to *lolo* Enso, one of the oldest fishermen in the community and whose great grandfather had been one of its first inhabitants, in the past, the fishermen were subconsciously aware of a spirit world dominated by unknown forces that held sway over all the activities related to fishing. He grew up believing that the vast waters were owned by *engkantos*, or the enchanted. These *engkantos*, who inhabited the sea or river, were generally classified as belonging to the second level of the universe; the *katung-anan*, or the middle portion, and while this was usually associated with earthly spirits, water spirits were a sub-division of this group. They were generally known as the *tubignon* or 'of the water', referring to the rivers and streams. Those who inhabited the sea were called *tabuknon* or 'those who live across'. They might either be good, bad, playful or mischievous, and could take many forms.

They were among those whose wishes were to be obeyed and whose rules were to be strictly followed. Through the tales heard and the rituals observed and participated in, the local fishermen had cause to believe that these creatures' favors were to be courted, if they wished to establish cordial relations with them. The old man accepted all these stories without question, because they gave him assurance that as these traditions had been faithfully followed and practiced by his ancestors as a way of coping with the forces of the sea, his own observance of them would likewise enable him to go about his life with the least interference from them. Psychologically, he felt less anxious about having to contend with the unseen, and likewise assumed a sense of power over the hostilities he might meet along the way.

Consequently, the requisite measures undertaken to please the spirits included a sacrificial offering officiated by a *babaylan*, or a person versed in the art of curing ailments supposedly inflicted by spirits; someone who chanted prayers in both Latin and *Hiligaynon*, the local language of people living in Iloilo Province. The *daga*, or offering, was required for all new boats which were also required to have fresh native chicken, or black wild pig's blood spilled and rubbed on them. By doing this, the fisherman expressed his intent to spare no effort or money in launching his boat, and to ensure its protection from disaster or ill-luck, for it was also widely believed that unless a sacrificial offering was given for this purpose, the water spirits themselves would exact their toll or payment from the boat owners. The pig and chicken blood ensured a rich harvest, for just as pigs will eat anything, boats smeared with their blood could be relied upon to gather all kinds of fish during their fishing trips. There were however several fishermen who refrained from using chicken blood, believing that since chickens could also fly, the fish would likewise flee from, instead of being attracted to, the boat. Pigs were therefore the more generally favored offering, because they would eat anything in their path.

Other food offerings included native delicacies like *suman* and *ibus*, both native sticky rice delicacies. Along with such offerings, they also included money in odd numbered denominations, such as Php 3 and Php 5, and also whatever other items the fishermen may have chosen to add, assuming that the sea *engkantos* took a fancy to them. Sometimes the *babaylan*, or 'doctor', suggested what other offerings should be included. After everything was ready for the offering, it was set on a bamboo raft

fashioned exclusively for the occasion. The food laden raft was then set afloat towards the intended fishing grounds of the fishermen, amidst the *babaylan's* and owner's cries:

“Spirit of the sea, from
(*Mga tinuga sang dagat*)
North, south, east and west,
(*norte, bagatnan, sidlangan, nakatungdan*)
Please do not envy the owner/me
(*indi dapat paghisa-an ang tag-iya ukon ako man*)
Your share you can always count upon”.
(*ang imo parte imo gid masaligan.*)

The prescribed days for the ritual were Tuesday and Fridays, as the morning's of Wednesday and Saturday were the fishing vessel's first days at sea.

The *tu-ob*, or smoke ceremony, was another ritual observed by fishing communities. During Easter week, the fishing families would gather coconut palms to be blessed on Palm Sunday. Some of these were put up in their houses, on doors and walls especially, but some were bundled together with bits of clothing and wood, or with strands of hair plucked from the *Santo Intierro*; and then burned with candles used during the holy week procession. To add fragrance they used a substance called *kamangyan* which was thrown into the smoking vessels with rice straws and husks. The ashes were then also smeared on the boats and fishing gear, by the *babaylan* who officiated at the ceremony. It was believed that no self-respecting *engkanto* would dare lay a finger on what had been smoked and smeared, as fish would be attracted to these, just as people were drawn to church on holy week, in order to worship the *Santo Intierro*.

Having observed all that needed to be observed, each fisherman was then expected to bring in a bountiful catch. If he did not, there was reason to suspect that he might have overlooked some important gesture, or violated some unwritten code necessary to appease or to ensure the friendship of the unseen ones, and therefore he must make quick amends to ensure his safety and a good catch. According to local stories, the manifestation of the presence of some *engkantos*, like for example a mermaid and sea fairies, was associated with the sounds of neighing horses, crowing

roosters, chirping birds like the *pitaw* or *salasakan*, frogs croaking and dishes being washed. When sounds like these were heard in the middle of the sea, it served the fisherman to politely pretend not to have heard them. Sometimes he may also have seen cooked lobsters suddenly surfacing in the water, a beautiful bird flying from nowhere, or even a golden haired half-fish maiden. Again, if these things happened, he had to control his impulse to catch them, for they did not belong to him. He was only allowed to feast his eyes on these; never point his finger at them nor say anything, as doing so might have spelled disaster or doom for him.

One would suppose that diplomatic overtures in the forms of offerings and the polite observance of silence while at sea would have been protection enough against temperamental spirits, but this was not so. To ensure continued friendly relations with the *engkantos* of the sea, the fisherman had to equip himself with the necessary 'tools' for his protection. These were used to 'immunize' him against teasing or taunting, difficult to please and sometimes mean "friend" or spirits. According to the local people the *engkantos* had many -moods, were highly sensitive creatures; sometimes childish and sometimes cranky. Unless the fisherman understood their psychology, he could easily get himself into trouble, without knowing why. Therefore, among the relics gathered during holy week to fuel his sacrificial offerings, he kept some to tie about the bow or the mast of his vessel, as a *panabang*; a survival kit or good luck charm. Some items were also tied on to hooks and fishing gear.

Aside from the religious relics or images, objects which were difficult to come by, such as the teeth from a live dog, the dried head of a snake which had devoured the head of a frog, or a fish pierced by a hook passing through its gills and into its mouth, were also reliable *anting-anting*, or charms.

Some plants were also used as *anting-anting*, because of their magnetic qualities. These included *agunoy*, *sapinit* and *amorseko*, or other such plants which were known for their attractive propensities.

The potency of an *anting-anting* largely depended on the degree of secrecy which surrounded it. It seems as if a deeply private pact was made between the possessor and the object, something which gave this relationship an aura of mysticism.

With this *anting-anting* in tow, the fisherman set out with confidence. He wished not to allow anything or anyone to upset his new found sense of security, nor to cause him anxiety. Thus, he kept himself on the alert for people and situations which might have threatened his now anticipated cordial relationship with the *engkantos*. Another belief that the fishermen had was that they should not be allowed to take women on board their vessels, during their menstrual cycle, for this might have turned-off the fish. Neither was the fisherman allowed to carry any dead animals or people on the boat. Even while ashore, his boat had to be protected from envious people who might have inserted bones, hair or teeth of the dead into the slits, holes and crannies of the boat. Once the fisherman had set out to sea, he was not allowed to go back to the shore for anything he forgot to take along.

They also believed that to find a snake inside a bamboo stalk, or a horse's skull buried in the beach facing the fisherman's corals, or a dog urinating on or near the fishing boat or implements, were all bad luck. The fisherman had to also rub and wash his nets and boats with *tanglad*, or lemon grass, before using the boat or fishing gear again.

If by chance a fisherman met a *pawikan*, or sea turtle, he felt bad, as sea turtles were believed to be harbingers of bad luck and therefore to kill one accidentally spelt doom. If this has happened, the fisherman had to sail to shore without delay, wash his boat with *tanglad* or smear it all over again, not only to erase the smell of the *pawikan*, but also to smoke away all memory of it.

According to the local people, all occupations have their own share of anxieties and tensions, and fishing is by no means spared. Despite the fact that in the course of fishing, nervous tension crops up now and then, augmented by many moods of the sea and its insatiable inhabitants, the picture is not dismal all the time. The fishermen believe that this is the case everywhere; the kind of response a man can expect from his environment is in equal measure to the manner in which he relates to it. The sea, and its creatures, is only cruel to those who are insensitive to its unwritten code.

With the cautious and discernment the sea had treasures to share such as abundant fish catch. They told me that there were mountain tops and stars which guided the fishermen to the richest fishing areas, if they knew how to interpret their

position from the sea. There continued to be good omens that foretold luck. For example, an area where two imaginary lines were drawn from two mountain peaks and converged to a place on the sea, was considered a rich source of fish by the fishermen; those who had attuned themselves to nature's clues. They were also able to approximate the distance between the morning star and the shore, and employ this to measure the distance between the star, and the spot expected to yield the richest harvest. Thus, the fishermen repeatedly weighed anchor in this area until the next sign told him otherwise.

A dog howling towards the sea, a cat facing the sea as it cleaned its face, ants gathering in the fish coral; all of these were used as good signs. If the fisherman was both sensitive and sensible, he would know that immediately after these signs appeared, it was time to set out to fish. When the moon appeared round, it was likewise a good time to go fishing; even more so when the current was not too strong at night following a morning of clear water. On the other hand, during a storm, a fisherman could tell how soon he would be able to go out to sea, if he saw a group of three *lampisaw* birds flying, as this was a signal that clearer weather was approaching.

While at sea, the fisherman had to be on the lookout for a bird that accidentally bumped his boat. If this happened, he had to catch it and put it in a basket; to be carried with him when fishing, for, as this bird was drawn to the boat, so the fish would likewise be drawn.

Rituals, *anting-anting*, and the observance and reading of signs, were all the ways of the fishing community. These beliefs carried with them messages that a fisherman must observe, in order to maintain harmony with the spirits of the sea and ensure the abundance of their catch. These local beliefs, which had been passed down by word of mouth, had also been used for conservation of the fishing resources. However, as modern life and new technologies had been introduced into the fishing community, these local beliefs and traditions had slowly fading into the background and were replaced by more intensive and market oriented types of fishing which used destructive fishing methods and gear, and which contributed to the rapid degradation of fishing resources.

4.3.2 The History of the Fishing Industry in *Barangay Nipa*

During the colonial period, the fishing community in Nipa had been based purely on subsistence fishing. According to one of my key informants, one of the oldest people in the community at that time, as far as he could remember, his father caught only enough fish for his family to consume. Any extra fish caught were given to neighbors who had not been able to go fishing that day, or sometimes his mother would dry the extra fish for future consumption. During that time, there was an abundant supply of fish and the people never had to worry whether they would have enough fish to feed their family. According to *lolo* Enso, he and his family were more worried about their supply of rice at that time, considering that the land area where his family had lived was rocky and as a result, they could not plant rice. Instead, they had planted root crops and coconut trees, because these were the kinds of plants that grew easily in this kind of soil. Others in the community were able to plant rice, but only on a small-scale.

In the early 1930s there were only 5 households in the *barangay* and fishing was the main source of income for all of them. The fishermen used *balsa*, a raft made of bamboo, as their fishing boat, and there were only 4 fishing boats in the whole community. No engines were used during that time, and the use of sails as a means of propulsion was very common in the community, until the use of paddles was introduced, replacing the sail.

The people in the community transported their products to the town through the waterways using the *banca*, because there were no roads from the *barangay* to the town. Sometimes, if they had a transaction in the town, they had to walk for about 1.5 hours. The inaccessibility of the *barangay* to the town was another reason that discouraged the children from going to school, because they had to walk a long way. Before the 1950s there was no secondary school, even in the town. Those who wanted to attend secondary school had to go to the adjacent municipality, Sara, about 7 kilometers away. Thus most of the children, after finishing elementary school, decided not to continue their education and instead learned to fish by joining their father or elder brother on their fishing boats.

The fishing gear commonly used during the 1960s to 1970s was a *labay*, which was made of *lubid* (abaca strings) and had a *taga*; a hook. One set of *labay* had

200 pieces of *taga* attached to it; called hook and line, and *kiming* made of bamboo was used for catching fish and crabs. With the change in times and technology, the fishing gear used had also improved, like the *abaca* which changed to nylon, and the first motorized boat which was introduced into the community in the 1970s, during the time that the population in the community had also increased.

During the early 1970's, fishermen from other municipalities sometimes went fishing in their *barangay*; like the fishermen from Samar, Cebu and Negros Occidental. Later on, some of these fishermen, especially from Negros, brought their families and migrated to the community, and they then became permanent residents of Nipa. According to these fishermen, the fishing grounds in their respective municipalities had already been overfished, hence they had looked for other fishing areas, and ultimately reached Nipa. With the increase in population came an increase in the number of fishermen in the community, and during that period dynamite fishing had started to be used by some.

Dynamite fishing became very common in the community during that period, even though PD 704 prohibited the use of explosives for fishing. Some fishermen used explosives without fear, because the law had not been implemented strictly. The law provided that the Municipality have jurisdiction within municipal waters. However, this interpretation of the LGU was for taxation purposes only (Luna 1992). As a result, dynamite fishing proliferated in the Municipality, with most of the owners of fishing boats using it also being prominent people in the area.

During the 1980s, *super hulbot* and *hulbot hulbot* were introduced into the community, and these vessels flooded the coast of Nipa. According to *Manong*, Adin, with the proliferation of *super hulbot*, the number of fish caught in the community started to decline. Most fishermen wanted to work on a big fishing boat, because they could earn more. According to them, at that time the *super hulbot* was able to catch as much as 50,000 to 80,000 pesos worth of fish in just one day, while the hook and line fishermen had a problem simply catching enough fish for their family's needs.

When I was at the research site, I became curious as to what the livelihoods or sources of income of some prominent families in the Municipality were. As you entered the town proper, you could see big houses lining the streets going to *Poblacion*, and these were in sharp contrast to the shabby houses located in the

fishing community. I enquired about the background of these rich families and found out that most of them had business interests in fishing in some way or another, but always on a commercial scale. Even some of the elected officials also owned commercial fishing boats and a very prominent family who had been in politics for decades, was considered to have the most number of commercial fishing boats in the Municipality. The contrast between those who were involved in commercial fishing, and those who were using hook and line and other traditional kinds of fishing, was so wide that the resulting, inequitable distribution of wealth was very evident.

The farm to market road, from Nipa to the town, was constructed in 1979. This was built in response to the need to facilitate the transportation of fish products from the community to the municipal fish port. The commonly used transportation at that time was a *tricycle*; a motorbike with a side car for holding a passenger. There were only three *tricycles* going back and forth from the *barangay* to the town during the early 1980s. Nipa is in the foot of Mount Apitong, hence there were some hilly parts on the way to the community, while on the other side of the road you could overlook the sea. Because of these steep slopes and muddy roads, the *tricycle* found it hard to traverse this road, especially during the wet season. However, in 1986 the single motorcycle replaced the *tricycle*.

In Nipa, the *municipal* fishermen sold their fish catches to a *manog kilo*, or fish buyer, a person who bought the fish directly from the fishermen. Trading relations between the fishermen and the *manog kilo* were established when the fishermen borrowed money for buying operating inputs like gasoline, and other fishing gear like *lambat*, or nets, nylon stings, *tingga*, *taga* and *patlaw*. As well as the operating inputs that the fishermen had to purchase using money borrowed from the *manog kilo*, the fishermen also obtained some of their family needs, such as rice, coffee, sugar, noodles, cigarettes and other household needs, in the same way. Hence, there seemed to be an unwritten agreement between the fishermen and the fish buyers. Since the fish buyer had provided for whatever the fisherman needed, he had to sell his fish catch directly to that buyer, and to no other. If a fisherman sold his catch to another fish buyer, the original buyer would not like it and he would not be able to borrow from that fish buyer again.

Whatever goods and money the fishermen borrowed, the buyers would add a certain percentage; between fifteen to 25 per cent depending on the fish buyer, and then this would be automatically deducted from the price of the fish sold for that day. If the fisherman had had a good catch, sometimes he would bring home a small amount to his family, but most of the time, the daily fish catch was not enough to cover all his debts from the fish buyer and as a result, the fish buyer simply added it to his new debts and then it just piled up, especially if the fisherman was not able to sea because of bad weather conditions, or sometimes they would not be able to catch anything. I asked one fisherman what was the smallest amount of fish he caught whenever he went fishing. He said that sometimes he went home with nothing, or sometimes he might catch just two grams or two pieces of squid.

While I was staying in the area, I noticed that, on the surface, the fish buyer had a better life than the small-scale fishermen. One fish buyer whom I interviewed, said that before, her husband had also been a fisherman, but that they had then decided to buy fish, because they noticed that the fish buyers in the area had better living conditions. At first, she had no capital to operate her proposed business, so she joined the local SEA-K Association, organized by the Municipal Social Welfare and Development Office (MSWDO) in their community. She borrowed money from the Association and used this as initial capital to put up a small *sari-sari* or small grocery store, and that's how her business developed. Out of the profit, she was able to use the money that she had borrowed for her initial capital, and was able to save the capital to build up her business with the Association, buying five motorized *banca* and a *tricycle*. She also took out a ten thousand pesos housing repair loan from the SEA-KABAYAN, when their SEA-K Association moved to level II and joined the Loong Nipa SEA-KABAYAN. As a result of this, she was able to repair their house and also borrow additional capital for her business; buying additional household appliances. At the time of my interview, she said that she had 30 fishermen on her books, those who regularly sold their fish catch to her.

I asked the fishermen who it was that dictated the price of the fish. They said it was up to the fish buyer how much he or she would pay for the fish. They were not able to bargain a higher price, because the fish buyer had their own fixed price, and it rarely went higher, always lower, especially if it was *kutsitsa*, a period during which

there was an abundant supply of fish. This period occurred between the months of September to December. During these months, the price of fish was usually very low. In Nipa, at the time of my visit, there were about twelve fish buyers in the community.

The fish buyers, aside from the percentage they received from the money and other goods that the fishermen had borrowed from them, also added another five to ten pesos for every kilo of fish they sold. I asked one fish buyer how many kilos of fish she was able to buy in a day. She said it depended on the fishermen's catch; sometimes she said she was able to buy 150 kilos in one day, but sometimes only twenty to 30 kilos. This meant that if she had 30 fishermen, she could buy about 150 kilos, as one fisherman would catch approximately 5 kilos during a good season, but less than 1 kilo if they had not been lucky, or even as little as none.

A wholesaler from another municipality such as Sara, Banate and Passi came every afternoon to purchase the fish from the fish buyer, or sometimes sold their fish to the fishing port in the *Poblacion*. The fish buyers preferred to sell their fish to the wholesaler, rather than in the fishing port, because with the wholesaler they were not able to control the price. However, in the fishing port it was the fish broker who dictated the price of the fish, plus they incurred additional expenses for transporting the fish to the port.

While I was interviewing one of the *Sangguniang Bayan*, or Municipal Councilors, he explained that from the fishing port they usually transported the fish to the big malls in Iloilo or Manila. He said that they transported the fish to Manila on Roll-on Roll-off (*RO-RO*) ferries, introduced as part of a flagship project by President Arroyo and also along the Strong Republic Nautical Highway (*SRNH*), a project which had aimed to link the islands and reduce the cost of inter island transportation.

With the small fish catch experienced by the *municipal* fishermen, and the manipulation of prices by the fish buyers and fish brokers, this had made it doubly hard for the fishermen and his family to survive in their daily lives; made worse by the high cost of fishing gear and its maintenance. According to the *municipal* fishermen, the lifespan of *lambat* fishing nets was about 6 months to 1 year in normal circumstances; with just normal wear and tear. However, if a commercial fishing boat

passed by and hit their *lambat*, the net would be torn and broken immediately, even if brand new.

The *banca* used for fishing by the *municipal* fishermen, was made within the community by the local people. At the time of my visit, the cost of a newly built *banca* was about Php 10,000 to Php 15,000 (US\$200 to US\$300), not including the engine, which cost another Php 8000 to Php 10,000 (US\$160 to US\$200), depending on the horse power. The life span of a *banca* was about six to ten years, including the engine, as long as you were able to maintain it carefully. I asked how much the cost of repairing a *banca* was. According to the local people, the labor cost about Php 1000 (US\$20), excluding the materials. The owner of the *banca* was responsible for the purchase of all the materials needed for the repairs.

With respect to the fishing gear used, the common gear used was the hook and line, the *kiming*, a bamboo pot used for catching crabs and fish, *pang lukos*, a hook used for catching squid, *labay*, made up of nylon with a hook, and *lambat*, or a fishing net. The cost of a hook and line was about Php 10 (US\$0.2), and every fisherman used two clips of hook and line for fishing. The *lambat* or fishing net, cost about Php 250.00 (US\$5) per *paldo*, a local measurement meaning one set, and every fisherman used three *paldo* for the *lambat*, as it still needed the *bahayan*, or large nylon, which was about Php 240.00 (US\$4.8) per kilo; three *paldo* of *lambat* needed six kilos of *bahayan*. Other accessories necessary for fishing were the *tinga*, metal used as a weight for the *lambat*, and costing about Php 180.00 (US\$3.6) per kilo and a *patlaw*, which was a piece of rubber used as a float. A fisherman needed about 100 pieces of this and the cost was Php 45.00 (US\$0.9) per hundred, and lastly the *taga*, the hook used for hook and line fishing, and *labay*, which cost about 50 centavos per piece.

In Nipa, based on the household survey I conducted during my field research and using a 40 per cent sample, out of the 199 household municipal fishermen and 79 households, 92 per cent had a fishing boat, of which 78% were motorized and 43% were non-motorized. With regards to fishing times, 80 per cent of the municipal fishermen fished during the early morning, between four a.m. and eleven a.m. and 20 per cent fished during the night time, between six p.m. and midnight. According to my informant, the night fishermen usually caught squid, and some were those who worked in the *tangkal*, or fish pen. The housing conditions of the municipal fishermen

showed that life in the fishing community was becoming harder, as 82 per cent of the population's houses were made up of light materials. This meant that the houses would last between two to three years. In terms of land ownership, most of the population were squatting on somebody's land, with 94 per cent of the population not owning the land upon which their houses were built. Most families were not able to afford to send their children to secondary school or college. Table 4.3 below shows that only 24 per cent and two per cent of the population had finished secondary and college education respectively.

Table 4.3 Community Profile of Nipa

Description	Number of Households	Percentage (%)
With Fishing Boat	73	92.41%
- Motorize	57	78.08%
- Non-motorize	32	43.84%
-Commercial	1	1.37%
Without Fishing Boat	6	7.59%
Total	79	100.00%
Time of Fishing		
- Morning Fishing	63	79.75%
- Night Fishing	16	20.25%
Total	79	100.00%
Housing Condition		
- Light Materials	65	82.28%
- Semi-concrete	12	15.19%
- Concrete	2	2.53%
Total	79	100.00%
Land Ownership		
- Owned	5	6.33%
- Others (tenant/squatters)	74	93.67%
Total	79	100.00%
Educational Attainment		
- Elementary	57	72.15%
- Secondary	19	24.05%

Description	Number of Households	Percentage (%)
- College level	2	2.53%
- None	1	1.27%
Total	79	100.00%

Source: household survey conducted during December, 2007 to January, 2008

4.4 The Municipal Rules and Regulations with Respect to the Sustainable Management, Conservation and Development of Coastal Fishery Resources

The Municipality of Concepcion, in its municipal ordinance, declared the following as their policy in terms of municipal fishing:

- To achieve food security as the major consideration in the utilization, management, conservation, development and protection of fishery resources, and in order to provide for the food needs of the population
- To limit access to the fishery and aquatic resources of the Municipality for the use and enjoyment of its common folk
- To ensure the rational and sustainable development, management and conservation of the fishery and aquatic resources of the Municipality, consistent with the fundamental objectives of maintaining a sound ecological balance, and of protecting and enhancing the quality of the environment
- To protect the rights of fishing families in the preferential use of the municipal waters, including safeguarding offshore fishing grounds against the intrusion of large-scale fishing vessels
- To provide support to the fishing sector, including its women and youth, through the development of appropriate technology, research into the provision of adequate financial production, the construction of post harvest facilities, and also marketing assistance
- To manage marine and aquatic resources in a manner consistent with the concept of an integrated coastal area management, in specified natural fishery management areas; appropriately supported by research, technical services and guidance provided by the Municipality, and
- To grant the private sector the right to utilize fishing resources under the basic concept that the grantee, licensee or user shall not only be a privileged

beneficiary of the Municipality, but also an active participant and partner of the Government in the sustainable development, management, conservation and protection of the fishery and aquatic resources of the Municipality of Concepcion in particular, and also the country as a whole (Municipal Fishing Ordinance 2004).

The municipal ordinance of Concepcion provided that the use and exploitation of the fishery and aquatic resources of the municipal waters of Concepcion, should be reserved exclusively for all *Concepcionanos* (those from Concepcion).

The ordinance provided also that research and survey activities should be allowed under strict regulations; purely for research, scientific, technological and educational purposes and for the benefit of Filipino citizens, and provided further that the entrance for the operation of fishing vessels and non-destructive fishing gear from other municipalities, would be allowed only after complying with all pertinent requirements under the ordinance (Municipal Fishing Ordinance 2004).

The first part of this law specifically stated that the municipal waters should be reserved “exclusively” for the local people. However, the next paragraph of the same law also allowed other municipalities to exploit the municipal waters, provided that they could comply with the pertinent requirements. So, why use the term ‘exclusive’ when in truth it is ‘not exclusive’? According to one member of staff whom I interviewed regarding the management of fishery resources, she said that “it was very hard to implement the law, because the law itself had a lot of loopholes” (January 2008). According to one local fisherman, when I asked him his views regarding the recurrent problems of commercial fishery encroachment into the municipal waters, he said “the way I look at it, it’s like *negosyo* or ‘business’, because, if the local officials were really sincere and determined to stop illegal and commercial fishing from encroaching into the municipal waters, they would do so.” However they had their own personal interests to protect, hence, it was just the same problem which occurred again and again. Thus, other fisherman felt that sometimes it was quite frustrating that they encouraged the local people to participate and fight illegal and commercial fishing, when on the other hand they also gave permits to commercial fishing operations in the same area (January 2008).

This differential treatment by the local officials had resulted in the marginalization of the municipal fishermen. Thus, the small-scale fishermen had continued to live a hand-to-mouth existence, depriving their children the chance to receive a better education and as a result, breaking the heart of every parent whose only dream was to provide a good education and a better future for their children.

4.5 Summary

The development of the fishing industry in the Municipality of Concepcion, and *Barangay Nipa* in particular, has shown a dynamic change in the fishing practices of the fishermen. The traditional fishing practices originally adopted by the municipal fishermen have gradually evolved into destructive fishing methods, as a result of the introduction of a market oriented economy. The promotion of commercial fishing has increased the income of the Municipality, and also swelled the bank accounts of the powerful commercial fishermen, but to the detriment of the municipal fishermen and at the expense of the natural resources.

Looking at the history of the management of fishery resources in *barangay Nipa*, has shown us that the area has greatly relied on the trust and priority programs of the LGU. It is interesting to note however, that during the period 1998 to 2007, fisheries management in the Municipality had been made a priority program and, as a result, the area had recovered a little bit from its previous fall.

With continuing information dissemination and education regarding the negative effects of illegal fishing, the municipal fishermen have realized the need to cooperate with the LGU, in order to rehabilitate and save the fishing resources. However, in the middle of their fight against illegal fishing and in trying to save the fishery resources, the municipal fisherfolks have not been sure whether or not their former allies are still with them, or whether they might have had a change of heart.

This dilemma of who was on their side and who was not, continued to haunt the municipal fishing communities. Local officials often said that they supported the fishermen all the way, but their actions showed a different aim. Thus, the lack of political commitment of the LGU to properly implement the fishing laws and thus protect and preserve the rights of the municipal fishermen, resulted in the continued social suffering of the small-scale fishermen and their families.



Figure 4.3: Kiming or Crab Pots (used to catch crabs and fish)



Figure 4.4: A Banca (Fishing Boat)



Figure 4.5: A Young Boy Repairing a labay