

## EXCHANGE TRANSACTIONS OF APO ISLAND WITH THE MAINLAND: FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF WIVES INVOLVED IN FISH TRADING<sup>1</sup>

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IN COMPARISON to the position of men in the Philippine fisheries sector, the role of women in many aspects of this trade has been widely perceived as secondary. Studies on wives' fish production activities, for instance, have shown that women's earnings is considered only as additional income to that of their husbands' (Israel 1991). Furthermore, in community organizations not specifically organized for women, they are merely members and are seldom elected or chosen as officers. Although they also attend meetings on behalf of their husbands, they do not make major decisions without prior consultation with them (Abregana 1997). Moreover, compared to their husbands' fishing activities, the wives' marketing and processing activities are deemed as only small scale. This situation underlies the pervasive perception in the country that the fishing industry is dominated by men. Women's reproductive as well as domestic responsibilities have been singled out as the major factor limiting not only their participation in community, social and economic development, but their mobility and opportunities to engage in large scale trading activities as well (Israel 1991: 2). Abregana has pointed that these traditional role expectations attached to women have consequently deprived women of many opportunities for community involvement and other undertakings (1997).

Recent studies, however, have shown that the roles wives actually play are more diverse than those of their husbands'. They combine their major tasks in homemaking with actual fishing, fish trading, and some home-based productive activities such as livestock raising and vegetable gardening, and even acquiring a credit line (Abregana 1991, 1997; Illo and Polo 1991; Ybañez 1991). These studies contend that women's participation in the community is more significant than it is usually thought to be.

Following this thesis, this present study will examine in greater detail the actual role of women in community development, in particular the wives' involvement in the fishing industry. It also highlights the observation that the wives' role in the local fishing

industry especially in fish trading further gives them the responsibility for facilitating the movement of economic goods, social supports, and information from the mainland communities of Negros Oriental to Apo Island. This study likewise explores the social networks that have been established and the extent to which these have facilitated the exchange relationship.

### Problem and Methodology of the Study

Wives representing the various stages of household developmental cycle were the respondents of the study. They were identified with the help of the Development and Women Network (DAWN), an organization of women in the island. As purposive sample, twelve wives were chosen as key informants in the in-depth. Apart from the 12 respondents, a focus group discussion composed of six wives further reinforced the data and helped to determine common points and clarify conflicting opinions on their trading activities with the mainland. The respondents were asked questions not only about their personal experiences and other related matters, but likewise about their general observation of other wives' activities in Apo Island. In addition to the in-depth interview conducted in the island, a follow-up interview and observations were carried out in the regular Wednesday *tabu* (market day) in Malatapay,<sup>3</sup> in order to document the actual trading involvement of the respondents.

Additional data on the economic and ecological conditions of the island were also derived using secondary sources particularly from the Center of Excellence in Coastal Resources Management (COE-CRM) at Silliman University as well as from ocular survey through photo documentation.

### Brief Profile of Apo Island

Apo Island is located five kilometers off the southeastern coast of Malatapay, Maluay in the town of Zamboanguita, about 25 kilometers south of Dumaguete City. The island, however, is under the political jurisdiction of Dauin, a town before Zamboanguita. It is from Malatapay that people take-off for the island, which is about 30 to 40 minutes ride by a pump boat (see Fig. 1). Malatapay is known for its regular Wednesday market day where buyers and

sellers from the island and from the different towns of the mainland converge to trade their goods. Residents of the island refer to the mainland as *piliw* in the local dialect.

Apo Island is volcanic, of elongated shape, with a north-south orientation which measures about 74 hectares. The island ecosystem is comprised of three fishing communities, five sandy white beaches, two lagoons,<sup>4</sup> patches of mangroves, and extensive fringing reefs. In the southwest part of the island are located most of the houses, a public elementary school, a Catholic chapel, a *barangay* hall, private resorts, and the field office of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR).

Based on the 1995 census, the total population of Apo Island was 495 with a total of 101 households and an average household size of five. The most recent (1997) figure available from the *barangay* secretary of the island shows a total household count of 120 indicating an increase of 19 households in a span of two years. Dug well provides water for washing and bathing. There are also rainwater collectors built by the government in buildings with galvanized iron roofing. However, drinking water have to brought from the mainland and costs Apo residents about PhP8 to PhP10 per container (about 4 to 5 gallons) when it reaches the island. The amount covers the expenses in hauling the water from the source and transporting it through a pump boat.

Coconut trees dominate the vegetation of the plainer areas, while *ipil-ipil* trees thrive in the slopes. Residents also plant corn and cassava in flat and sloping areas of the elevated portion of the island, but are faced with problems of poor soil condition, scarcity of water, and limited arable areas. In the southeastern side of the island, a marine reserve covering an area of 284 hectares to 500 meters offshore, and bordering 450 meters of shoreline was established in 1982 (Alcala 1997). The reserve comprised about 10 percent of the total reefs of the island. A fish sanctuary with an area of 11.2 hectares to 250 meters offshore is located within the reserve and is maintained by the local marine management committee. With the establishment of the marine reserve in the island, dynamite fishing, *muro-ami* type of fishing, or related methods using weighted scare lines or poles, spear fishing using scuba, cyanide fishing, and use of very fine meshed nets, have become prohibited within the marine habitat around the island from the high tide mark to a distance of 300 meters offshore. Moreover, fishing, col-

lecting of marine organisms, and anchoring of boats are strictly prohibited inside the fish sanctuary area. Although pollution and human-induced changes in the island have been observed by marine biologists of Silliman University to be minimal, the increasing diving activities of foreign tourists organized by both local and Cebu-based resort operators have caused alarm for the possible disturbance of the fragile coral reefs.

Cogon Point, located on the northeastern side of the island, is one of the rich fishing grounds for local fisherfolks. The most common fishing method used by fishermen is hook and line, but other fishing gears such as *pukot* (gill net), *bubo* (bamboo fish trap), *pana* (home-made spear gun), and *sulo* (torch) have also been observed among fisherfolks. During the field survey in the first two weeks of June 1997, the use of hook and line was commonly observed and the species caught were *bagis* (*Naso sp.*), *indangan* (*Acanthurus bleekeri*), *banculisan* (*Elegatis bipinnulata*), *tangigue* (*Scomberomorus commerson*) and *mamsa* (*Caranx papurensis*). It also coincided with the appearance of *bukya* (from the family of jellyfish) which is used as bait for hook and line fishing. The use of *bukya* as a bait was introduced by a fisher in the mainland who came to fish in the island. Like other fishing communities along the coast of the mainland, fishing in Apo Island is seasonal and dependent on weather condition, lunar position, and the appearance of certain species of fish.

No regular passenger boat crosses between points and as majority of the fisherfolk only own *baroto* (nonmotorized banca) for fishing, commuters from the island often have to wait when pumpboat owners make the trip. Local commuters pay pumpboat owners PhP5 to PhP10 for the ride. However, a number of pumpboats are available for rent to visitors to the island at PhP500 to PhP1000 for a two-way trip depending on the number of passengers and the size of the pump boat. Resort owners usually bring tourists and guests to the island using their own pump boats.

Two diesel generators owned by two competing businessmen from the mainland provide the major source of light in the island. These generators provide electricity to the subscribers from 6 P.M. to 12 midnight. Electric consumers pay a fixed monthly rate of PhP50 per 30 watts of bulb or lamp used and an additional amount of PhP20 for every convenience outlet installed to power

*karaoke*, cassette recorder, video player and television set. Only eight households use solar energy.

About 35 households in Apo Island own television sets. Although signals of radio stations from the cities of Dumaguete, Cebu, Zamboanga, and Iligan are received in the island, only the programs of ABS-CBN television station is clearly received by television owners. This indicates that residents of the island are generally well informed about show business and political personalities, as well as about happenings in the province, the nation, and even around the world. Houses in the island are generally made of light materials like bamboo, coconut lumber, and *nipa*, or coconut leaves for roofing. However, a good number are also built of cement, hollow blocks, and galvanized iron sheets and owned by those usually engaged in fish trading, or *sari-sari* store business. Most of them have household members (either the husband or the children) who work in Manila and who usually come home especially during the *fiesta* of the island every April 4-5. This is in honor of San Vicente Ferrer who, incidentally, is also the patron saint of fisherfolk.

### Profile of Respondents

The 12 wives who were the subjects of the in-depth interview have ages ranging from 22 to 64 years old with an average age of 40.17 years old. Their husbands are usually three years older or an average age of 43.50 years old. Ten of these wives are Catholic and the remaining two are members of Jehovah's Witness and the Aglipay Church respectively. Most of the wives and their husbands have elementary education. Two wives have finished high school while one had reached college. One husband is a nautical graduate and presently works in a commercial fishing outfit based in Manila. The oldest respondents in the household cases interviewed was a couple who both had no schooling at all. On the average, the wives interviewed have had more years in schooling than the husbands (6.84 and 6.58 years, respectively).

While a majority of husbands are from Apo Island, six of the wives originated from other provinces. Two of the wives came from the mainland province of Negros Oriental and the others from Negros Occidental, Siquijor, Bohol, Leyte, Solinog Island in Mindanao, and Palawan who were brought there by their husbands when they got married. This suggests the patrilocal pattern of resi-

dence of the households interviewed. Only four wives were born in Apo Island and eventually got married there. On the average, the household members interviewed have been residents of the island for about 19.37 years after marriage. Newly married couples have been observed to live within the community or stay temporarily with the husband's parents. The participants in this study have an average number of four children and a maximum of ten.

The husbands of the respondents are all engaged in small scale or subsistence fishing as their primary means of livelihood. Five of them supplement their income by making hollow blocks, trading animals in the mainland, and farming. During the interview, the wives claimed that they are involved not only in the fishing activities of their husbands, but also in mat weaving, fish trading, operating a *sari-sari* store, selling souvenir T-shirts, dress-making, and manicuring as major economic activities. It was observed, however, that what one wife considers a primary economic activity may be secondary to another, and vice versa.

The wives interviewed are members of community organizations in Apo Island which include a consumer's cooperative, the Apo Weavers Association (AWA), Development and Women Network (DAWN), Marine Management Committee (MMC), and the Couples for Christ (CFC). Wives who had been residents of the island for many years now are members of these organizations and the older among them (about 40 years old) hold official positions. On the average, all wives interviewed have been members of community organizations for 8.54 years ranging in length of membership from 2 months to 12 years.

During the interview, the wives enumerated a number of problems facing the residents of Apo Island. Of these problems, the most urgent is the absence of potable water in the island when then has to be bought from the mainland and transported by pump boat. Another serious problem is the conflict involving legal rights over the use of the lagoon which has been converted into a fishpond. According to the wives, this problem has already mired the families involved in legal battles as they filed charges and counter-charges against each other before the court. During the time of the study, the court has yet to decide the case. Another problem mentioned by the wives is the scarcity of fish catch during typhoon months. Of equal concern to the wives is sanitation problem caused by the absence of toilets in some households. Some wives also pointed out

the damage caused by tourist divers in the coral reefs as a serious problem. Other problems the wives reported are political factionalism in the island, deforestation, limited opportunities for work, and lack of medical services.

### Subsistence Fishing as a Conjugal Enterprise

For so long, fishing has been traditionally viewed as a male-dominated economic activity. This perception has been largely due to the emphasis given to the actual activity of catching fish, especially involving deep-sea fishing. However, when this traditional definition is changed to include activities before, during, and after fishing, the contribution of women to the fishing activities of their husbands becomes more readily apparent. From this perspectives subsistence fishing can be considered as a conjugal enterprise.

All wives interviewed said that they cook the food and sort the things their husbands will bring with them to sea to fish. Some wives also help carry (*dahik*) the *baroto* to the water. When it is time for the husbands to arrive, usually early evening or dawn, the wives, together with some of their children, wait along the shores and again help carry the *baroto* offshore to dry. Although they might sometimes help their wives, husbands are generally allowed to take a much-needed rest after a long fishing trip. It then becomes the wives' responsibility to sort the catch and determine which are to be dried, disposed fresh, cooked for meals, or to be given away to a neighbor or relative who had not gone fishing for some reason. After sorting, the women slice those that have to be dried, then wash and salt them for sun drying the following day. They also deliver the fresh fish to the local buyer in the neighborhood who could also be their *suki* (regular customer).

While the husbands spend more time at sea, wives who have no employment outside of the home tend to domestic duties in their respective households. Unfortunately, the widespread penchant for comparing the domestic activities of women with the fishing tasks of their husbands tends to underrate the work of women. Yet, it was observed that after cooking the morning meal, many wives would wash the fish that have been soaked with salt overnight and lay them out for sun drying in elevated platforms lining up the shoreline. Afterwards, they go back to homemaking activities like washing clothes, feeding the pigs, or cleaning the

house oftentimes assisted by children who are old enough to help with household chores. When domestic tasks are dispensed with, some wives weave mats below or near the platforms while keeping watch over the dried fish.

Furthermore, it was likewise observed that husbands often delegate to their wives the task of selling dried or fresh fish to the mainland. Even if they accompany their wives during market day, the wives do the actual selling while the husbands assist, watch nearby, or chat with acquaintances. In this connection, some wives even revealed that their husbands prefer to give them the task of dealing with prospective customers out of a sense of shame (*maulaw*). On the other hand, the wives in the focus group discussion claimed that they feel a sense of pride for their skill in dealing with customers. Although they recognize their husbands' skill in fishing, they also realize their own worth and actually feel "much better" than their husbands along this area. Other wives commented that unless their husbands have important business in the mainland, they just go with them to the *tabu* to enjoy and relax after fishing.

As can be gleaned from the following observations, division of labor in a fishing household is operational and involves an arrangement between husband and wife that proceeds without creating tensions and frustrations between them. Time availability, expertise, and willingness to do a task are factors determining the division of labor in the household.

The responses to questions related to who usually takes over homemaking tasks when the wife is trading outside the island reveal interesting insights. When the wives are out trading, husbands are generally able to perform homemaking tasks and take-over chores like cooking, washing clothes, fetching water, and feeding the baby. However, whether they are willing to do the task or happy to perform them is another matter. The description of some wives of their husbands' activity as *limpio-limpio* or *silhig-silhig* (literally means to appear to be cleaning or sweeping) suggests that although husbands do not feel too comfortable doing some household tasks, they try to learn and carry out the tasks that their wives usually do. Some wives, however, claimed that they do house-keeping only when they arrive home from a business trip. Otherwise, they either assign a child, particularly a daughter, to do the chores or request a mother or mother-in-law who lives nearby to

look after the house and the small children if the husbands are pre-occupied with other tasks.

In the matter of family finances, it is the responsibility of the wives to do the budgeting and purchasing of household items. Since wives hold the money they earn from trading and are familiar with their household needs, they do the shopping for household necessities. Some wives even purchase the fishing gears for their husbands who just give them the list indicating the quality and quantity to be bought and where to buy them. Their trading activities in the mainland allow them the opportunity to perform this duty.

Meanwhile, decision making is shared by the couple. For instance, two of the wives who just started their families revealed that they persuaded their husbands to buy their own net and a fishing boat rather than use their parents' equipment. They financed this venture by borrowing money from relatives. Another wife convinced her husband to save money and buy a piglet which she could raise, thus supplementing the income of the household. Five of the wives, claimed that they usually suggest to their husbands what fish species to sell fresh or dry, and even to eat. Although this kind of influence exerted by wives may be viewed as minor, the implication that wives are also "heard" by their husbands already suggests the importance of the women's roles in household affairs. After all, wives as much as husbands are concerned with the economic welfare and security of the family.

### Marketing of Island Economic Goods

This section discusses in detail how the wives manage the marketing of their goods to the mainland and consequently the purchasing of household needs. The social networks they have established and maintained relative to their trading activities and familial connections are also examined.

As mentioned earlier, fresh and dried fish are the major economic goods that Apo Island, being a fishing community, trades with the mainland. Mats woven by wives from the island are also sold in the mainland. Residents of the island only occasionally sell domesticated pigs and chicken when really in need of cash. Of the full time fish traders in Apo, four are women who are on the average about 40 years old. They buy fish directly from the local fisher-

folk and bring the fish to the mainland daily when supply is available. They own pump boats and their husbands are also into fishing. They buy the fish in the island at a price about PhP10 per kilo lower than their selling price in the mainland. Despite the peculiar geographical location of Apo Island, these women fish traders could not be discouraged by rough seas or strong wind. When asked whether she would continue with her business during a typhoon, one woman fish trader said she would if the wind and waves were not too strong, and if the pump boat operator was willing to cross the sea. For this woman, bad weather also brings her some advantage despite the risk. Fish commands a higher price at this time due to limited supply as only few fisherfolks go out to fish when the weather is stormy. According to her, "*mas maayo kun may bagyo kay momahal ang presyo sa isda. Gamay ra may panguha ug daghan ang mamalit.*"

When catch is abundant, fish traders of Apo Island bring and sell the fish directly to Zamboanguita or Dauin rather than to the fish traders in Malatapay. Only occasionally when they have business to do in Dumaguete do they sell their fish in the city where the buying price is higher than in Malatapay. Some wives are involved in selling only dried fish in the Wednesday *tabu* of Malatapay. They display the dried fish either on the covered ground or on permanent stalls they had built. Most buyers of dried fish come from the hinterlands of Zamboanguita or visitors from other towns. Dried fish is sold by piece with prices ranging from PhP50 to PhP75 depending on the size.

Seven of the twelve wives interviewed sell mats during the *tabu*. Some of the mats are ordered ahead of time by residents from the mainland who also give specific designs. Aside from selling mats, one wife also sells fresh or dried *pandan* leaves at PhP25 per hundred. Her buyers come from Zamboanguita and Siaton. Wives who also weave in the island but do not have the materials buy leaves from her at PhP15 per hundred. The weaving wives, however, explained that the intensity of mat weaving in the island has presently decreased because of competition from weavers in the mainland. Mats made in Tayasan, Guihulngan and other northern towns of Negros Oriental have found their way into the regular Wednesday *tabu* and have since then posed a stiff competition to island-woven mats.

Although no quantitative data are yet available, it was reported that Apo island also provides the mainland with human labor. Because of their expertise in fishing, a number of adult males have been reportedly been working with commercial fishing outfits based in Manila and other commercial fishing firms operating in other places. Women who cannot find fishing-related activities for themselves work outside of the island as domestic helpers or sales ladies in department stores in the mainland and in other big cities.

### Purchasing of and Access to Goods from the Mainland

Although there is a consumer cooperative store and *sari-sari* stores in the island, some residents buy their household needs in larger quantity from the mainland. The occasion that wives sell fresh or dried fish is also taken as an opportunity to purchase needed goods in the household. Common items bought from the mainland include clothing materials, cereals, bread, food seasoning, vegetables, salt, canned goods, cigarettes, beverages, laundry and bath soaps, among others. Souvenir T-shirts with Apo Island designs sold in the island are bought particularly in Dumaguete. Because of the scarcity of coconut trees in the island, coconut lumber used for house construction is purchased from the mainland.

Nylon and hooks are also purchased in Dumaguete usually by women when their husbands do not have the time to do the buying themselves. The husbands specify the quality and quantity to be bought as well as the store from where these items are for sale. In some instances, husbands also asked their wives to buy in Malatipay fish baits which are not available in the water surrounding the island. Such fish baits which include species like *ihalason* (*Rastrelliger chrysozomes*), *bangsi* (*Cypselurus sinius*) and *tamban* (*Serdinell longiceps*) are used to catch bigger fish using hook and line.

Ice used to keep the fish fresh for trading in the mainland is bought in blocks from the mainland. Salt used in drying fish is also bought in large quantity from the mainland. However, securing salt sometimes becomes a problem when catch is abundant and everyone engages in drying fish. As well, gasoline and oil used to run the pump boats come from the mainland. The task of purchasing them was observed to the responsibility of Apo Island male residents who usually bought them before going home. At the time of the study,

gasoline was not available for retail in the island. Residents borrowed from each other when they run out of supply to be repaid later. *Sari-sari* stores keep a supply of kerosene used to light lamps at night in houses without electricity and during fishing. As mentioned earlier, the electric generators presently operating in the island are not owned by the residents, but are provided by businessmen from the mainland. These generators are only managed by individuals residing in the island who are closely related to the owners and are given compensation for the job.

Although there are a few carpenters in the island, some families hire workers from the mainland especially when constructing concrete houses. Since husbands are usually out fishing, it was often the job of the wives to look for hired labor from the mainland. Wives who manage their farms in the absence of their husbands hire farm workers among male family members or mainland relations who visit the island. Unlike the local residents, visiting relatives from the mainland generally do not engage themselves in fishing for lack of expertise. On the other hand, majority of the males in the island, according to the wives, do not engage in hired labor like house construction or farm clearing because their skills lie in fishing, an occupation considered more profitable particularly especially during the summer months.

### Other Forms of Socioeconomic Transactions and Networking

Other forms of exchange transactions between Apo Island and the mainland do not always involve money as an immediate medium of exchange. However, access to respective resources is facilitated by social networks established because of blood, affinal, and *suki* relationships or even by long family acquaintance. Transactions in the form of barter, gift giving, credit and loan which the wives interviewed engage in are basically socioeconomic in dynamics and content as the situations that follow illustrate.

In one of the interview sessions, a wife narrated that barter exist between corn farmers in the hinterlands of Dauin and the fishing households of Apo Island particularly during times when there is abundance in both ends. It is usually the fishing household of Apo Island that goes to the mainland. Relatives and family friends often exchange dried fish worth PhP100 with two sacks of corn on cobs with each other. On the other hand, one of the wives

who is engaged in mat weaving narrated how she started to plant *pandan*. She used to get *pandan* leaves from an aunt in Solinog Island until her aunt suggested that she grew her own plants in Apo. She has at present about 150 to 200 *pandan* plants in their small farm with seedlings from her aunt.

Some wives said that they sometimes receive some cash amount as gift or assistance from visiting parents or relatives, or when they visit them in the mainland. The practice of gift-giving is viewed as a gesture to strengthen relationship among kin. Giving, according to the wives, is likewise an expression of concern toward a relative in need, particularly for children who have just married and are starting life on their own.

Eight of the twelve women interviewed reported that they have incurred loans for various reasons from individuals in the mainland with whom they are consanguinally and affinally related. Foremost of the reasons was to secure capital to be used for purchasing souvenir T-shirts that they sell in the island to visitors and tourists. They also use the money for buy their own fishing net or *banca*, clothing materials for sale in the island, and other materials for mat weaving, among others. Others use the money for household needs as well as for medicine for a sick or hospitalized family member. One wife mentioned that she had borrowed money from a local politician residing in the mainland to post bail for her husband who was accused of stealing fish together with other men in the lagoon converted into a fishpond.

The wives also mentioned that they maintain open credit lines with storeowners and fish buyers in the mainland with whom they have established a *suki* relationship. The wives maintained that they take advantage of the open credit lines when they run out of cash for important household items while still in the mainland. Because of the peculiar geographical position of the island, women fish traders prefer to secure all necessary household items while they are in the mainland rather than wait for the next trip when they have the money. For their part, storeowners, allow Apo Island fish traders' to buy on credit because they trust their capacity to pay when they bring in the fish to sell the next time they meet. This arrangement has proved beneficial to both parties. While the storeowner is assured of a steady supply of fish from the island, the fish traders can purchase household necessities on credit when they run short of cash.

This relationship underlies the reason why fish traders buy from one storeowner or that fish traders sell fish to the same buyer. Unwritten rules regulate this relationship as well as define the privileges that could be enjoyed by the parties involved. For example, the idea that credit is allowed develops a sense of *utang na loob* and makes one obligated to transact with a *suki* (cf. Szanton 1979). Their relationship is also cordial and the other party from the mainland is often accommodating. The price of goods at a *suki* storeowner has been reportedly lower than at non-*suki*-stores. Moreover, the wives interviewed also defined the qualities of the person with whom to transact credit or loan. For example, according to them, the source must be dependable, helpful, and approachable particularly when the need is really serious and urgent.

### Sourcing of Information

The exposure of wives to the activities in the mainland and their interaction with other people give them access to information either directly solicited or observed from different sources. For example, their experiences in marketing island goods and purchasing of mainland goods have likewise made them realize that the increase in the price of oil will create a corresponding increase in the prices of goods and a decrease in the purchasing power of the peso ("*gamay na ug bili ang piso*"). They are aware that existing market price determines the buying price of fish in the island which in turn affects their decision whether to sell the fish in Malatapay or in Dumaguete and the nearby towns, or sell it fresh or dry whichever commands better economic return (Ybañez 1991).

The buying behavior of customers could provide wives involved in trading some vital information about their business. For example, wives engaged in mat weaving acquire information about color and design from customers who order mats ahead of time and give specific instructions regarding their preferences. From these buyers weavers also derive some insights about new designs that would sell well in the mainland. In striving to satisfy their customers by meeting their preferences, mat weavers are assured of their customers' continued patronage. On the other hand, a wife who is engaged in dressmaking in the island revealed that she derives some ideas about dress styles from watching other women in the mainland during market day.

Public transport constitutes one of the best contexts for social interactions. Passengers often exchange valuable information while riding together in buses to their places of destination. For instance, a wife narrated that while riding a passenger *jeepney* one day, she learned from the other women passengers about the immunization schedule for children which she, in turn, relayed to other mothers in the island. Usually, women fish traders are the carriers of notices such as those about training on fish and fruit processing technology conducted by the local government unit. Similarly, job opportunities outside often reach people in the island through friends and relatives who come home during *fiesta* or for a visit.

The first woman to realize the economic prospects of selling souvenir T-shirts learned about it from somebody coming from the mainland. The business prospered and started attracting the interest of other wives who followed suit. At present, the wife who pioneered the business has stopped but remains involved, albeit indirectly, by financing other wives. A wife who financed two women discovered that buying plain T-shirts and having them printed with her chosen design is more profitable than buying previously printed T-shirts. Depending on the quality and color, T-shirts sell from PhP130 to PhP150 in the island. The seller gets about PhP15 per T-shirt sold. Presently, seven women peddle souvenir T-shirts to visitors and tourists in the island. Some wives fear that the business will inevitably become unprofitable if more and more women will engage in it.

### Analysis and Implications of the Exchange Transactions for Apo Island Ecosystem

The exchange transactions of Apo Island with the mainland particularly those carried out by the wives will continue as long as the resources they are presently trading are still available. Such resources, however, are not inexhaustible. Unregulated fishing could inevitably prove disastrous to marine and eventually to human life. Thus, one of the problems facing the fisherfolks of Apo Island is the possible depletion of fish supply. It is common knowledge that fish supply in the island will not remain abundant if the factors contributing to their depletion are not checked during their symptomatic stage. The marine reserve and fish sanctuary estab-

lished mainly to protect marine life will ensure a steady supply of fish so long as it is not drastically disturbed. (Alcala 1997: 165). Although as yet no illegal fishing activities have been observed in the island, there is a need for the *barangay* government to continually monitor the activities within the sanctuary and strictly implement the promulgated rules. Furthermore, the implementation of such rules should be undertaken by the empowered people themselves. Legal sanction must be meted out to any person found violating sanctuary rules and initiating destructive activities. If left unchecked such violations will only motivate others to do the same, particularly when economic needs prevail over ecological considerations.

More than overfishing, however, unregulated diving activities in the reefs pose an even more serious threat to the sanctuary. Although they make money out of divers and tourists who are their potential customers of souvenir T-shirts, the wives interviewed said that they fear the drastic effects of unregulated diving activities in the sanctuary by these visitors. They have observed that despite the existence of a *barangay* ordinance regulating diving activities, the frequency of diving tours in the island appears unchecked, while the number of tourists and dives made in the sanctuary continue to increase especially during summer months. Pump boats carrying tourists and visitors have been seen traversing freely inside the fish sanctuary. During the study, a pump boat owned by a local resort was seen anchored to a buoy within the sanctuary, its engine left running while the crew was refilling oxygen tanks. It has been established that oil leaks and the vibrating sound produced by the engine can cause disturbance on marine organisms. The wives believe that these activities will eventually scare away the fishes. As they claimed, "*mangahadlok ang mga isda ug tingali mangawala sila.*" Alarmed by the present developments in the island such as the arrival of more tourist divers and the establishment of resorts, the wives are calling for an urgent review of existing rules regulating the activities within the marine reserve.

The wives are keenly aware of the far-reaching negative consequences to their lives of environmental destruction. For instance, they realize that when fish supply in the surrounding waters of the island will become depleted because of detrimental human activities, residents will have to fish farther away from the island. Given the limited land area of the island, the marginal condition of



the soil, and the growing population, island residents will be forced to leave home and their families to find work outside the island. Meanwhile, those who do not have the opportunity to work outside because of limited skills have to eke out a living from the steadily dwindling resources of the island.

In the face of these grim prospects, the role of wives in the protection and preservation of their natural resources cannot be underestimated. Among themselves, wives realized that they have to remain constantly vigilant of potential destruction to the environment. Similarly, they know that they need to constantly remind their husbands of the dim scenario destructive fishing could bring to the island. Aware of these potentially tragic consequences, wives continue to strive to look for alternative means of helping the economic well being not only of their own selves and their families, but of the entire island as well. For instance, wives engaged in mat weaving have begun to realize that despite the abundance of *pan-dan* plants in the island, competition with other weavers in the mainland poses a threat to their business. Consequently, it has become imperative for them as an association to develop a marketing strategy where they themselves would not be competing with each other. At the time of the study, the weavers association was planning to pool their products and exploring the possibility of establishing a ready market for these products in Dumaguete City.

### Summary

Although Apo Island and the mainland are viewed in this study as different ecosystems, they are not politically and culturally distinct. Residents of the island are generally subsistence or small-scale fisherfolks, while those in the mainland are diversified in their economic pursuits which give them wider resource bases to exchange with the island people. It has been observed that the major resources found in Apo Island such as fresh and dried fish, and mats are also available in some coastal communities in the mainland. In this sense, island products have to compete with mainland products in the market. Furthermore, people in the island are dependent on certain products or resources available only in the mainland. For this reason, mainland people are not always able to appreciate the significance of their exchange relationship with the island. Moreover, unlike island residents, mainland people have

more alternative sources available to them, a situation which actually creates a one-sided exchange relationship. This means that if the people of Apo Island wanted to sell their products, they have to take the initiative to bring these products to the mainland. And as the men are preoccupied with fishing, this task is primarily the responsibility of women, particularly the wives. This task constitutes an extension of the wives' involvement in the fishing industry of the island.

Although this study is basically exploratory and descriptive, the information gathered provides some knowledge on the dynamics of how wives are able to make themselves actively part of the social and economic activities of their respective families despite the demands of their biological and traditional roles. As this study has shown, women are not merely invisible resources but are significant contributors to the rural economy. But their involvement, as well as those of the rest of the people in the island in the efforts to secure the fishing environment of Apo Island from wanton destruction, needs to be fully harnessed in different aspects of coastal resource management such as managing resources, monitoring resources utilization, apprehending illegal activities on the environment, and developing appropriate alternative economic activities which are ecologically viable. In this endeavor, the support of both government and non-government organizations in educating and empowering the island people in coastal resources management programs cannot be overstressed.

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2. The author is an assistant professor of Sociology and a research associate at the Interdisciplinary Research Unit of the College of Arts and Sciences, Silliman University, Dumaguete City.
3. A coastal community in Zamboanguita, directly facing Apo Island.
4. One of these lagoons has been converted into a fishpond by local residents.

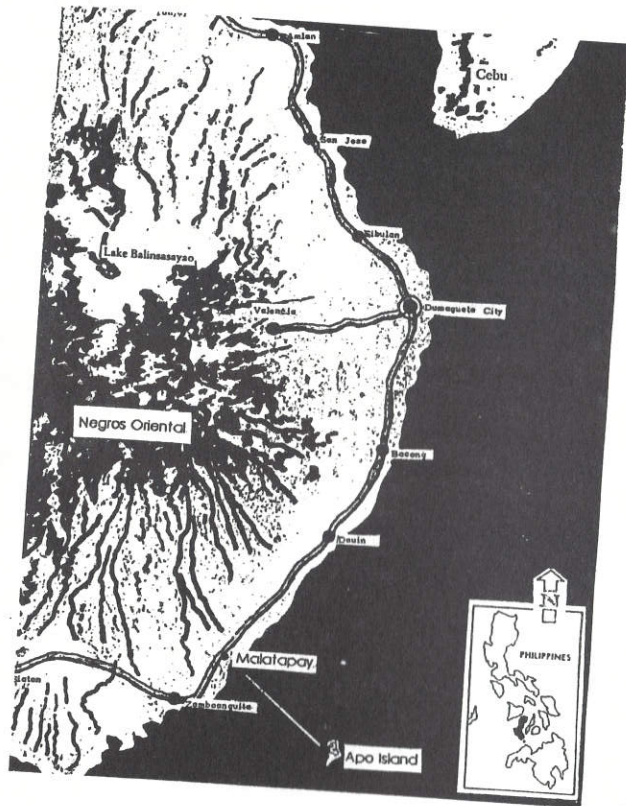


Figure 1. Apo Island in relation to the southeastern coastal towns of Negros Oriental showing travel routes.

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