

ABSTRACT

ESMAO, JESSICA CABRERA. University of the Philippines in the Visayas, April 2004. Levels of Awareness and Understanding of Policymakers on Laws and Policies Relevant to Fisheries and the Environment and their Degrees of Concern in Addressing Environmental Issues in Western Visayas.

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This study was conducted to determine the levels of awareness and understanding of local policy makers on laws and policies relevant to fisheries and the environment, the factors affecting them, and their degree of concern in addressing environmental issues. The factors considered in the study include personal characteristics, institutional linkages of the local government units (LGUs), and the sources of information of the policy makers.

Forty-five policy makers from 84 coastal LGUs in Western Visayas were selected as study respondents. Primary data were obtained through questionnaires and both qualitative and quantitative analyses were employed; the Pearson product moment correlation coefficient method was employed for correlation analyses, and non parametric statistics such as the Mann-Whitney U Test and Kruskal Wallis Test were utilized in determining the relationships among the variables studied.

The major laws and policies considered in the study include: Republic Act 8550 (Philippine Fisheries Code of 1998), Republic Act 7160 (Local Government Code of 1991), and laws and policies on aquaculture, fisheries resource management, and fisheries post harvest, issued through fisheries administrative orders of the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources, and administrative orders issued by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

Results show that policy makers have *high* levels of awareness and understanding for RA 7160, *average* for RA 8550 and fisheries resource management policies, and *low* for aquaculture and fisheries post harvest policies. The Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Management Councils or FARMCs, as institutional linkages of LGUs, influence awareness and understanding levels of the laws and policies. However, the sources of information of policy makers is the most crucial factor. Sources such as peoples' assembly, the newspaper, and the academe, radio and non-government organizations highly influence the awareness and understanding levels.

The policy makers feel that the environmental issues that must be addressed immediately are (1) the use of destructive fishing methods; (2) the lack of enforcement of fishery laws; and (3) increasing environmental damage. Furthermore, the policy makers' involvement in fisheries and the environment sectors influence their degree of concern with regard to issues on decline in fish productivity, deforestation, presence of illegal settlers in coastal areas, and the decrease in biodiversity. The same sources of information that

influence awareness and understanding levels of policy makers were likewise found to influence their degrees of concern with regard to environmental issues such as overfishing, increasing environmental damage, the use of destructive fishing methods, and decrease in biodiversity.

Among the factors identified, sources of information showed to be the most effective namely the government agencies and media. Strengthening of IEC program of the government agencies which includes extension services should be considered; improve training designs, equip government personnel with technical capabilities and involvement of FARMCs in IEC activities are among the considerations. Utilizing print and broadcast media for IEC activities should be seriously considered. Translate technical studies into layman's language and humanizing information by providing hard news information which will not just provide information but entertainment as well. Local and national governments should develop stronger partnership with the media for it is the media that would eventually fill up the gap of government agency in information dissemination.