

# **DAGAT UG KINABUHI: A SURVEY OF BAIS FISHERFOLK AND THEIR SURVIVAL STRATEGIES**

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This study describes the socio-economic conditions and survival strategies of the registered fisherfolks of Bais City, Negros Oriental based on a survey of fishermen, gleaners and seafood vendors. The study findings point to the fact that municipal fisherfolk earn subsistence incomes. Most fishers and gleaners utilize simple fishing technologies, their catch is highly seasonal, and generally declining. The registered seafood vendors are slightly better off than the fishers and gleaners in terms of deeming their income to be sufficient for their needs. The registered fisherfolk's coping mechanisms in response to insufficiency of income include getting goods on credit, spending their savings, and borrowing money from others, but does not include government assistance. Other sources of income include gleaning, 'working in the *hacienda*' (sugarcane plantations), oyster culture, seaweeds farming, carpentry and construction work. These fisherfolk observe that the sea cannot provide much and do not want their children to continue fishing, gleaning and vending like them. They hope to see their children complete an education in order to secure better-paying jobs. The survey was conducted in 2014-2015 and supplemented by follow up interviews and participant observation.

***Keywords:*** *Fishers, gleaners, fish vendors, survival strategies, Bais*

## **Introduction**

For at least a century, Bais has been known for sugar and seashells, opulence and poverty, power and powerlessness. This story is much about the latter in each of these three categories. It is about life at the lower end.

Bais City has a long coastline which covers a strip in mainland Negros Oriental and those of Dewey Island or "*Pulong Dako*" ('big island') and Olympia Island or "*Pulong Diyot*" ('small island'), with

*Pulong Dako* attached to the mainland by a bridge. Two bays, North Bais Bay and South Bais Bay, create a long coastline that is ideal for gleaning activities. The landscape of lowland Bais is one of *hacienda* after *hacienda*<sup>1</sup> and wave upon wave of sugarcane as one travels on the highway from south to north. Bais is the habitat of the very rich and the very poor, with a small middle class. Land ownership is very much skewed toward the wide lowland area being owned by only a few (Intervalo 2011). Nothing changes in this sugarland it would seem. A notable exception was the massive sugar cane workers' strikes at the inception of the decade of 1970 (Maxino 2014).<sup>2</sup> The poor person in Bais City is typically a farm worker, who is usually “*tapasero*” (sugarcane cutter who harvests, cuts, bundles, and loads sugarcane into trucks or wagons), or one of the fisherfolk. The latter are embraced by the pages of this article.

The study involved three types of registered fisherfolk: ‘fishers’, ‘gleaners’, and ‘seafood vendors’. The survey looked into the respondents’ means of livelihood and their survival strategies: the methods and technologies they employ, the constraints they encounter, their income-expense equations, the credit facilities accessible to them, their aspirations and dreams. Included in the survey conducted were the following variables: length of experience; time, place and frequency of conducting the activity, seasonality of income, other sources of income, ways of meeting needs, and forms of government assistance. This report sketches in broad strokes the lives, struggles, and hopes of fisherfolks. For more material which could not be presented here, the interested reader is referred to the work of Torete (2015).<sup>3</sup>

The senior author has been a participant observer in Bais. He has his own gleaning and fishing experiences and has, at various times, stayed in Bais and interacted with different sectors of the population. As a child in the early 1950's he sold in his hometown, Ayungon, 40 kilometers north of Bais, the seashells gleaned from the latter that his father used to purchase from Bais. Traveling north toward Ayungon from Dumaguete,

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<sup>1</sup> The sugar haciendas in Negros are privately owned plantations that mushroomed by means fair and foul during the sugar boom in the second half of the nineteenth century (Aldecoa-Rodriguez 1983, Lopez-Gonzaga 1994, Aguilar 1998).

<sup>2</sup> With other marginalized sectors, they tried once to wrest power in 1971 with *Partido Kabus* (Party of the Poor) They failed (cf Maxino 2014).

<sup>3</sup> For data mining, three thickly-bound volumes of accomplished questionnaires from the study are kept at the library of Maxino College in Dumaguete City.

buses used to stop midway at Bais City for 15-30 minutes to enable passengers to buy seafood and other food items. He also continues to visit Bais. In the late 1960s-early 70s, Bais was practically the senior author's home in connection with his community work.



Figure 1. Negros Oriental and Bais City  
(Source: Wikimedia Commons)

Twelve out of the thirteen coastal barangays of Bais<sup>4</sup> formed part of this study: Barangay II, Biñohon, Cambuilao, Canlargo, Capiñahan, Looc, Okiot, Olympia, San Isidro, Talungon, Tamisu, and Tanguculagan. Katakaghan was the lone in-land barangay which has registered fisherfolk. During high tide, boats can travel from Katakaghan to the sea by the river. If you happen to be in Dewey Island, then the house, 16 square meters or less, may stand on stilts with seawater beneath it, the rows of houses connected together by pairs of bamboo pools. Do not look for a comfort room to save embarrassment. “*Mao ra intawon ni ato* (‘This is all we have’) is said as they offer you with sincerity and some hesitation some *lugaw* (rice porridge) saved for the children. When the catch, harvest, or sale is low, the fisherfolk buys a kilo or less of rice or corn and cooks *lugaw*. Two meals a day is not uncommon. In Cambuilao and

<sup>4</sup> In Calasgaan, the remaining coastal barangay, no resident is registered as fisherfolk. They work in the sugar mill, Central Azucarera de Bais (CAB).

Canlargo the houses, tiny huts made of bamboo and nipa as in Dewey Island, sit on ground at the edge of the sea. If you find a comfort room, it has a water-sealed toilet bowl directly on top of a one-chamber septic tank. One can visit the tiny huts at the banks of the river in Kantagahan only during high tides. The children when not helping out in fishing, gleaning, vending, or household chores, attend school, in many cases, not finishing the elementary grades. There are high schools in Okiot, Tangculongan, Canlargo, which are near the residences of fisherfolk, but hardly any of the graduating students goes on to tertiary education.

The survey was aimed at the registered fisherfolk in these barangays, comprised of ‘Fishers’, ‘Gleaners’, and ‘Seafood Vendors’. The registration of fisherfolk in Bais City started in 2013 and is currently carried out in accordance with Republic Act No. 10654 which lapsed into law on February 27, 2015 without the signature of the President. According to the City Agriculture Office of Bais, the advantages of registration are: (1) identification of fisherfolk so that they can exercise the right to use resources, (2) easy tracing/location of fisherfolks in case of accident, (3) easy access to funding (unregistered fisherfolk can not receive assistance/benefits), and (4) exercise of the ‘right to register’ (Teves 2014).

According to the City Agriculture Office of Bais City, fishers are “those involved in fishing whether captured or cultured”, gleaners are “those who collect shells”, and seafood vendors are “those who sell products of the sea” (Teves 2014). There are 629 fishers, 327 gleaners, and 134 seafood vendors registered in Bais City. The registered fisherfolk are categorized into fishers, gleaners, and seafood vendors based on their main source of income. Each fisherfolk is registered in only one category, no overlaps are allowed even if there are cases where he or she may engage in another category as a sideline.

The list of registered fisherfolk was obtained from the City Agriculture Office of Bais City, where it has been used as one basis for programs and identification of beneficiaries for locally-initiated projects which granted assistance to fisherfolks in cash<sup>5</sup> and in kind, e.g. equipment. However our survey did not inquire into the specific government assistance programs that respondents were beneficiaries of. It is estimated that there are about a thousand more fisherfolks in Bais who are not registered (Teves 2014). These unregistered fisherfolk do not attend

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<sup>5</sup> Under different government programs. A few of the respondents may also be recipients of conditional cash grants under the 4Ps program (Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program).

meetings that have been called by the Bais City Agriculture Office to explain the benefits of membership. A common reason often heard for not attending the meeting is expressed in the phrase “*wala tay makuha ana*” (‘we will not get anything from it’).

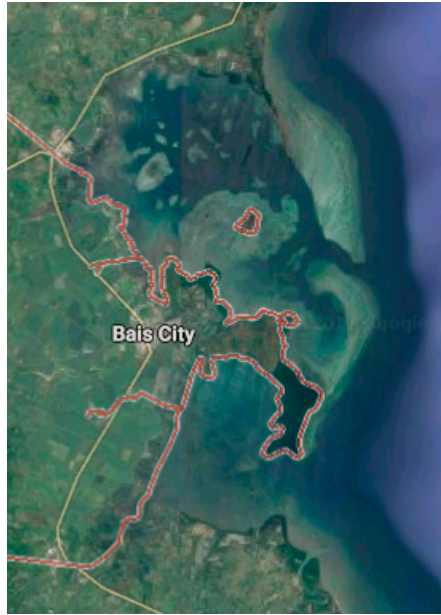


Figure 2. Satellite photo showing Bais City boundaries and the coastline.

As there were only 134 registered seafood vendors, the census method was chosen since it is free from sampling error. Sample survey was used for the populations of 629 registered fishers and 327 registered gleaners as they were considered too large to handle with available resources and time. To determine the size of a representative sample set, the following formula was used:  $n = N/(1 + Ne^2)$ , where  $n$  is the size of the sample set,  $N$  is the size of the population (fishers/gleaners), and  $e$  is the error or uncertainty. In this study, an uncertainty of 0.05 (or 5%) was used. To select the respondents randomly, the name of each registered fisher/gleaner/seafood vendor was written on a piece of paper which was then rolled up and placed in a container which was shaken each time to pick a respondent. The sample was also stratified according to the following formula: sample size/barangay = (population of registered fishers [/gleaners] in the barangay/total population of registered fishers

[/gleaners] in Bais) x sample size for Bais. The total respondents were 251 fishermen (or 39% of the 629 registered fishers), 188 gleaners (or more than half, 57.49%, of the 327 registered gleaners), and 134 seafood vendors (100% of registered seafood vendors). Since the respondents for each category were randomly chosen, there would be a slight chance that two or more respondents, each representing a different category, would come from the same household. The structured questionnaires of the survey were supplemented by follow-up interviews with some of the respondents.

The authors observed that parents and children as old as six years of age contribute to the family income by engaging in fishing, gleaning, or vending. Fishing is usually done by male adults. Gleaning is usually done by female adults and by children. Vending is usually done by female adults.

**Table 1.** Profile of respondents by sex

Barangay	Fishers		Gleaners		Seafood Vendors	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Biñojon	27	3	3	14	0	10
Barangay II	4	2	2	4	1	0
Cambuilao	16	2	2	23	1	8
Canlargo	14	3	3	11	0	4
Capiñahan	33	4	5	4	0	25
Katacgahan	9	0	1	3	0	11
Looc	19	1	1	8	0	6
Okiot	28	2	4	10	0	18
Olympia	16	6	1	11	0	13
San Isidro	9	0	11	17	1	7
Talungon	27	4	2	17	0	8
Tamisu	3	0	4	19	1	2
Tangculongan	18	1	4	4	0	18
<b>Sub-total by sex</b>	<b>223</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>145</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>130</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>251</b>		<b>188</b>		<b>134</b>	

The profile of respondents as to sex and age is presented in Table 1 and Table 2. There is a predominance of males among fishers and a predominance of females among gleaners and seafood vendors. That fishing is done mostly by males, gleaning mostly by women, and seafood vending mostly by females is more of a practice than tight gender roles.

The frequency column in Table 2 suggests a normal distribution. It can be seen that the plot of frequency against age (class limits column) produces a bell-shaped curve. The implication of this is that the sample set is representative of the population; a description of the sample set would be a valid description of the population of registered fisherfolks too. Moreover, on the average the fisherfolk is middle-aged. Referring to the ages of fisherfolk, the mean is 45.8 years, the median is 45.7 years, and the mode is 46.0. The fact that a considerable number beyond sixty years old continue to fish, glean, or sell may be an indication that the life of the fisherfolk does not allow him to save enough for old age. That there are more fisherfolks with ages above 70 years than fisherfolks with ages below 21 years old, indicate that a considerable number of children of fisherfolks are not following the footsteps of their parents. Among Bais fisherfolks, only very few reach college; hence, one may conclude that the young are into jobs other than fishing. A significant number of young people, with their parents' encouragement, go to Manila or Cebu City to take on jobs as domestic help or factory workers. To them, life cannot be worse than that in Bais City.

**Table 2.** Profile of respondents with regard to age

Class Limits	Mid-point ( <i>m</i> )	Frequency ( <i>f</i> )	<i>fm</i>	Cumulative Frequency
0 - 10	5	0	0	0
11 - 20	15.5	6	93	6
21 - 30	25.5	81	2,065.5	87
31 - 40	35.5	114	4,047	201
41 - 50	45.5	164	7,462	365
51 - 60	55.5	123	6,826.5	488
61 - 70	65.5	69	4,519.5	557
71 - 80	75.5	15	1,132.5	572
81 - 90	85.5	1	85.5	573

Estimate of mean age: (total *fm*/total *m* = 26,231.5/573) = 45.78

### **The fishermen**

The fishers of Bais use diverse gears including nets, hook and line, fish corral (*bunsod*); *salakab* (a conical fish trap made of bamboo and string, and used to catch crabs and fish in the lowtide zone), ‘flashlight’, ‘spear’, and crab pots (*panggal*). Other equipment used, in varied combinations, include the *kulis* (a metal rake used to comb sand), *sibot* (a fine net), *bara* (crowbar), petromax (pressurized lamp), *sanggot* (sickle) and *antipara* (goggles). A few (6 out of 251 in the sample set, representing 2.4%) stated that they just used their ‘bare hands’ as they could not afford to buy fishing gears or equipment.

Most fisher respondents (83%) said they own their own fishing boats. Options for those without a boat include to ‘borrow’ one (“*manghulang lang*”), or to practice “*abay*”- they request fishermen friends to allow them to ride and fish together with the latter in the latter's fishing vessel and they share the catch with the owner of the boat. Three fourths (76%) of registered fishermen (190 out of 251 in the sample set for fishermen) use a *baroto*, a dug-out boat with outriggers that can carry one or two persons and propelled by paddles, as their fishing vessel. Twenty-four percent said they use motorized boats. One percent (3 out of 251 in sample set) specified that they use a “*banca*” (which is like a baroto except that it can carry two to three persons). But eleven percent of fishermen said they do not use any fishing vessel at all and merely fish by wading in the shallow parts of the sea.<sup>6</sup> Thus, a fisher can go fishing without a boat by staying in shallow water. When the above-cited percentages are added up, they exceed 100%. This comes about because some fishermen own more than one type of boat and so they are counted more than once.

The respondents’ fishing experience ranged from less than a year to 65 years. The ranges of experience that have each at least 10% of respondents are: 1-5 years (14% of respondents), 11-15 years (12%), 16-20 years (15%), 26-30 years (12%), and 31-35 years (10%). It is interesting to note that 4.4% of respondents have more than 50 years fishing experience. (Only those ranges experienced by at least 10% of fishermen are included in this enumeration; consequently, the percentages do not add up to 100%).

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<sup>6</sup>Fishing is distinguished from gleaning even if both are done in shallow parts of the sea thus: the object of ‘fishing’ is fish while seashells and clams are the object of ‘gleaning’ (*manginhas*).



As to regularity of going fishing, most of the fishers (76 %) claimed that they fish ‘everyday’. Other responses included: ‘three times a week’ (9%), ‘twice a week’ (5%), and ‘only during low tide’ (4%). (Those with less than 4% are dropped from the enumeration; hence, the percentages do not add up to 100%.) The first three categories were provided for in the questionnaire; the last was volunteered. Those who fish only during low tide are unable to fish everyday. Some days have only *ayaay* (a situation where sea level is between low tide and high tide and persists for hours) and no low tide.

In response to the question “What time do you usually go fishing?”, majority said they fish ‘in the morning’ (57%), others specified that they fish ‘at night’ (28%), ‘in the afternoon’ (26%), and ‘only go fishing during low tide’ (10%). [The total of percentages exceeds 100% because some fishermen fish at two or more different times.]

One finding that we consider to be significant was: all months were identified as a ‘lean month’ by at least twelve percent of fishermen. This is perhaps not a reflection of a lack of contrast between lean and bountiful months, but rather an expression of the general insufficiency of income. *Amihan* season (northeast monsoon) is associated with the months of September to February, during which time strong winds and big waves are experienced by the fishermen, preventing them from fishing. However those who use fish corrals consider *amihan* as good season. Looking at the relative numbers who consider a month as lean, it can be seen that ‘lean season’ begins around July and lasts until February of the following year. The months with the most number of fishermen identifying them as lean are, in descending order October (40%), August (38%), December (29%), September (25%), January (23%), February (23%), November (22%), and July (21%).

The factors identified by the fishermen as unfavorable to fishing are, in descending number of fishermen considering them as such, *amihan* (57%), *aya-ay*/high tide (35%), full moon (32%), and *habagat* or southwest monsoon (27%). New moon is considered favorable to fishing. Thirty-two percent of the fishermen respondents stated that they would fish ‘even during bad weather’ (“*bisag dautan ang panahon*”, “*bisag magdaot ang tiempo*”). Of those who would fish during bad weather, most stated it was necessary to do so ‘to have something to eat’—sample responses: “*kon wala na gyud makaon, moadto gyud ug pogos*” (‘if there is nothing to eat, then I must out of necessity fish’), “*unsay kan-on kon dili managat*” (‘what will we eat if I don’t fish?’). Those who fished only during low tide could still fish during bad weather. But there were also

fishers who stated that they would fish during bad weather because, they said, the catch would be big, especially if the water is murky. Some, like owners of fish corrals or crab pots, were concerned that if they do not go to the sea others will harvest their catch. Here are some typical responses on why they fish at these times: ‘this is the only means of livelihood/way to feed my family’ (“*mao may pangita*”, “*maoy panginabuhi*”, “*mao ra may gisaligan para panginabuhi*”, “*mao ra may trabaho*”, “*mangita para makapakaon sa akong pamilya*”); ‘it is necessary’ (“*kinahanglan man*”); ‘if I find it manageable, if the waves are not very big’ (“*basta madala ra, dili ra kaayo dagko ang balud*”); ‘at least to have something to buy rice/corn to eat’ (“*iyawat lamang naay mapalit bugas/pangkonsumo*”).

Majority of fishermen consider their income to be sufficient for their needs (61%), but about a third (38%) said that their income was not enough. Thirty-three percent of fishermen said that they supplement their income from fishing by gleaning. Other options include working in haciendas (14%), engaging in oyster culture and seaweeds farming (10%), working in construction projects (7%), carpentry (6%), selling seafood (5%), working in fishponds (3%), *sari-sari* store (3%), work in government (3%), driving public/private vehicles (2%), doing laundry (1%), and farming (1%). Other sources of income mentioned include getting and selling sand and gravel, hog raising, *manulo*’ (fishing in shallow water with a torch made usually from dry coconut palm and leaves), collecting and selling firewood, massage, working in whale watching, *mandalupapa* (fishing for large squid), repairing appliances and gadgets, streetsweeping, working as *kargador* (stevedore), *sepultorero* (grave digger), house helper, *aguador* (fetching water from the source for a fee), and ‘making wigs’. When cash is low or absent, the fishermen stated that they meet their needs by: ‘getting goods on credit’ from their neighbor’s store and other general merchandise establishments (75%), ‘spending own savings’ (53%), ‘borrowing money from other people’ (50%), ‘borrowing money from lending institutions’ (44%). Also mentioned: ‘receiving assistance/support from wife/children/relatives’, ‘borrowing rice/corn from neighbors’, ‘pension’, ‘honorarium as barangay captain’.

Fishermen manage their debts by various means, including selling their catch to a buyer and, out of the proceeds, pay the creditor (cited by 82% of fisher respondents). Some also use the salary of the husband/wife or the wage from working in the hacienda (14%). Other options for settling debts include giving their catch directly to the creditor, income/profit from small business, pension, direct salary deduction, and

honorarium as barangay official. Most (229 respondents or 91%) stated that they ‘did not receive any form of government assistance’. Of the twenty-two (9%) who said they have received assistance, these were in the form of equipment for fishing (7 respondents), seaweeds (5), materials for seaweeds farming (4), cash<sup>7</sup> (3), and concrete posts for oyster farming (3).

Nearly all of the fishermen respondents (94%) stated that they do not want their children to become fishermen like themselves, for two main reasons: uncertainty of income and subsistence in proportion to the difficulty or effort of fishing; and secondly they projected that the sea will no longer provide a living for their children. As also described by the respondents, their working conditions expose them to extremes: in the day it is very hot; at night, it is very cold. The fishermen would like their children to finish their studies so that they can find better jobs, to have a good future so that they would not struggle like them to make ends meet (“*aron dili siya parehas namo nga maglisod*”). In that way, they can help their parents.



**Figure 3.** Fishermen setting out to sea.

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<sup>7</sup> Cash grant from the local government unit.



**Figure 4.** Note the exposed portion of the beach during low tide.



**Figure 5.** Fishers of Bais.

Fisherfolk in Olympia sadly recall happier days: “*Sa una, inig taob, ang isda moabot sa among silong. Sayon kaayong dakpon*” [‘In the past, during high tide fish would be swimming beneath our floor. It was so easy to catch them’.] Now, fish are nowhere to be seen.

### The gleaners

The gleaners enumerated thirty-nine kinds of shellfish harvested in the coastal areas of Bais. The top ten species, ranked by number of gleaners who harvest them, are: “*litub*” (*Anadara antiquata*), “*punaw*” (*Mercenaria mercenaria*), “*balisala*” or “*bisala*” (*Grafrarium tumidum*), “*tikod-tikod*” (*Pitar citrina*), “*sisi*” (*Crassostrea cucullata*), “*aninikad*” (*Strombus urceus*), “*ugpan*” (*Eufistulana mumia*), “*tahong*” or green shells (*Modiolus metcalfei*); “*tandiis*” or “*kandiis*” (*Tapes litterata*); and “*tagnipis*” or “*talipis*” (*Anomia trigonopsis*). [A list of all the shell species mentioned by the gleaner-respondents is appended to this article.] Nearly all of the gleaner respondents (94%) would claim that gleaning is their only source of income. The length of gleaning experience of those surveyed ranged from 1 to 60 years.

As to frequency of gleaning, of the 188 gleaners surveyed, 74 (39% of respondents), stated that they glean ‘on days having low tide during the day’, while 49 (26%) glean ‘everyday’. The rest stated that they gleaned intermittently during the week. As to time of gleaning, for 158 (84%), gleaning is done during low tide (at no particular time of day); but twelve percent specified ‘in the morning’; and nine percent ‘in the afternoon’. Gleaning is done in the “*hunasan*” (part of the beach exposed or having minimal seawater level during low tide) by nearly all the gleaner respondents, several also cited gleaning in the “*katunggan*” or ‘swamp’ (9 gleaner respondents, 5%).

For nearly all of them (96%), gleaning is done ‘for own consumption’, but more than half of them (66%) also sell their catch, and a few (4 respondents, 2%) mentioned that they directly exchange their gleanings for other goods. Apart from the seashells which comprise the main catch, crabs or “*lambay*” (*Portunus pelagicus*) (cited by 68 or 36%); sea cucumbers or “*balat*” (*Stichopushermanni*) (27%); shrimps or “*pasayan*” (*Penaeid*) (23%); and “*kasag*” or crab (*Thalamita sp.*) (17%), are obtained as well. Fish and “*lukot*” (sea hare) (*Dolabella aureularia*) are other creatures that may also be caught or harvested while gleaning.

High tide and *ayaay* (which is midway between low tide and high tide and persists for hours) were cited by nearly all the respondents as unfavorable for gleaning. Some months were cited as particularly bad for

gleaning: August (cited by 44 or 23% of respondents) and October (cited by 42 or 22%). Most gleaners, however, said that there is no specific lean month; since as long as there is a low tide they can gather seashells. However, many also pointed out that during the summer months there are fewer seashells since the relatively higher temperature of the season kills seashells. Seventeen percent of the gleaner respondents stated that they would continue to glean even during bad weather.

Eighty-five or 45% of the gleaner respondents claimed that income from gleaning is insufficient for their needs, 41 (22 %) said that their income is sufficient, but fully a third preferred not to answer the question. Some of the gleaners' other sources of income include: 'working in haciendas', 'fishing', 'sari-sari store', 'selling seafood', 'farming', 'working in construction', 'laundry', 'seaweed farming', 'working for the barangay', 'chicken and hog raising', 'cooking', 'working as household help'. To meet their subsistence needs, gleaners resort to the following: 'getting goods on credit from a neighbor's store and other general merchandise stores' (cited by 74% of gleaner respondents), 'borrowing money from other people' (50%), 'spending their own savings' (48%), 'borrowing money from lending institutions' (36%). A few respondents specified 'using spouse's salary/wage', 'receiving support/assistance from children/relatives', 'borrowing rice/corn from neighbors', and 'pension'. But only only nine (5% of gleaner respondents) stated that they have received any form of government assistance. This assistance was in the form of cash (5), concrete posts for oyster farming (2), equipment for seaweeds farming (1), and equipment for fishing (1). These forms of assistance are initiatives of the local government of Bais City.



**Figure 7.** Gleaner with plastic bag.



**Figure 8.** Gleaners.



**Figure 9.** Low tide.



**Figure 10.** Women gleaners.

Nearly all of the gleaners dream of a different livelihood for their children, although six percent stated that they would like their children to be gleaners in the sense that gleaning can be a good source for their food consumption if other forms of work are not available. The respondents stated that they want their children to finish their studies (*“makahuman gayud ug eskuela”*) so that they can find better jobs and escape from the ‘great suffering’ and difficulty experienced by the gleaners (*“pait kaayo manginhas”*, *“lisod kaayo ang dagat”*); and because shells ‘have become rare’ (*“wala na kaayo makuhang kinhason, lisod ang panginhas”*). Gleaning was described as not an easy job, done under excessive heat; ‘one gets a lot of wounds and earns very little’ (*“magkasamadsamad, unya diyutay ug kuha”*).

### **The vendors**

Twenty six percent of the Bais registered ‘seafood vendors’ have been engaged in the occupation for just one to five years. The rest have had more experience. The seafood vendors sell everyday (71%), or several times a week (26 vendors / 19%), or more intermittently. As to time of selling, most (78% of the population of vendors) engaged in the activity of selling seafood in the morning. As to place of selling, 89 vendors (66%) are to be found in the public market; others are selling in their own neighborhood (30 vendors or 22%), ‘along the street’ (15 or 11%), or in an itinerant manner (*“suroy”*) (12 respondents or 9%).



The seafood vendors typically sell the seafoods their families catch or gather. Some get their goods ‘on consignment’ (“*angkat*”). Only four percent (five of the 134 registered vendors) buy and sell seafoods. The survey results show that 126 (93%) or most of the seafood vendors sell fish; they also sell shells (73 or 54%); shrimps (69 or 51%) and crabs (65 or 48%). There are some that specifically sell squid and *lukot* (sea hare), *talaba* (oysters), *balat* (sea cucumbers), dried seaweeds, *pantat* (catfish), and *alimango* (large-sized crabs found in fishponds and swamps).

Making a living by seafood vending is unfavorably affected by “*amihan*” or northeast monsoon (cited by 72% of seafood vendor respondents); “*aya-ay*”/high tide (40%), ‘full moon’ (36%); and “*habagat*” or southwest monsoon (30%). ‘Lean season’ for seafood vending starts from October to mid-February (which coincides with *amihan*). The respondents explained that during this period, the surplus catch of fishermen is minimal. Forty-six percent of seafood vendors sell during bad weather, where it is their only source of income.



**Figures 11.** Makeshift stalls provided by the local government unit.



Figure 12. An itinerant vendor with her wares. She gleaned them herself and that was practically all she harvested.



Figure 13. A vendor offers her wares to passengers of a bus parked momentarily.

The registered seafood vendors are slightly better off than the registered fishers and gleaners. A majority, sixty-one percent of the registered seafood vendors say their income is sufficient for their needs.

Some of the alternative sources of income of the registered seafood vendors are: 'fishing' (cited by 37 (28%) of registered seafood vendors); 'gleaning' (for 36 or 27%); 'sari-sari store' (17 or 13%); 'working in haciendas' (13 or 10%). 'Seaweeds farming', 'hog raising', 'working as househelp', 'working as barangay official/worker', were also mentioned.

To meet their needs, they would ‘get food on credit from their neighbor’s store and general merchandise stores’ (cited by 80 or 60% of seafood vendors), ‘spend their own savings’ (70 respondents or 52%), ‘borrow money from lending institutions’ (64 or 48%), and ‘borrow money from other people’ (63 or 47%). Most of the vendors pay their credit in installment (according to 117 or 87%) of registered seafood vendors, a few could manage one full payment (2 respondents).

Only four of the vendors (constituting three percent of the population surveyed) have received government assistance (from the local government unit) (97% percent have not). Of the four respondents who were given government assistance, two received cash, one received equipment for fishing, and one received seaweeds.

Nearly all (93%) of the registered seafood vendors would say that they do not dream of their children as becoming also seafood vendors. For them, vending is not easy, especially now ‘when there is nothing to catch anymore’ (cited 91% of respondents). To quote two of the respondents: “*wala naman kaayo makuha ang dagat, pait kaayo na ning panginabuhia, walay kaasenso-asenso*” [‘The yield from the sea is scanty. Life is bitter. No improvement is expected’]. “*Wala naman gud kaayo isda nga makuha ug mabaligya.*” [‘There are hardly any fish to procure and sell’.] They want their children to ‘finish school’ (“*makahuman ug eskwela*”; “*patapuson gyud nako ug kurso bahala ug magkalisud ko*”), because it would help them to find better jobs to help their family (“*makaeskwela para makakita ug trabaho nga maayo*”, “*paeskwelahon para makatrabaho ug gaan ug makatabang namo*”). The seafood vendors ‘do not like their children to be like them’ (“*maayo ug dili maparehas namo*”), i.e. suffering from too much poverty. Some also stated that it is better for their children to have jobs other than fishing and selling. If today they encounter difficulty making a living by seafood vending and are stressed by the minimal catch, it is expected to be much worse during their children’s time when there would be nothing to catch anymore.

## Conclusion

Below is a recurring dialogue between the senior author and a gleaner / fisherman / seafood vendor:

Q: *Unsa may imong panginabuhi?* (‘What is your livelihood?’)

A: *Manginhas / Managat / Mamaligyaay* (‘Glean’ / ‘Fish’ / ‘Vend’)

Q: *Nganong mao man na ang imong pangita?* (‘Why are you into that livelihood?’)

A: *Walay laing kapaingnan kay wala an ko kahuman ug eskwela.* ('There is no alternative. I have not finished schooling.')

Q: *Nganong wala man ka kahuman ug eskwela?* ('Why have you not finished schooling?')

A: *Walay kwarta akong mga ginikanan.* ('My parents had no money.')

Q: *Nganong wala may kwarta imong mga ginikanan?* ('Why did your parents have no money?')

A: *Manginginhas / Mananagat / Mamaligyay man lang gud intawon to sila.* ('They were mere gleaners / fishers / vendors'.)

Q: *Nganong manginginhas/mananagat/mamaligyay ra man sila?* ('Why were they mere gleaners/fishers/vendors?')

A: *Kay wala sila kahuman ug eskwela.* ('Because they did not finish their studies.')

Q: *Nganong wala sila kahuman ug eskwela?* ('Why did they not finish their studies?')

A: *Akong mga apohan walay kwarta.* ('My grandparents did not have money.')

Q: *Nganong walay kwarta imong mga apohan?* ('Why did your grandparents not have money?')

A: *Kay manginginhas / mananagat / mamaligyay man lang to sila.* ('They were mere gleaners / fishers / vendors.')

Going beyond this point sometimes turns courteous accomodation into annoyance. But it seems that generations have been trapped in gleaning, fishing, or seafood vending, and a lack of inter-generational occupational mobility (Bacol 1971).

Life for the registered fisherfolk of Bais reduces to bare existence. The land is wide, the coast line is long; but hunger stalks the fisherfolk everyday. When the stomach is half-filled, life is uneventful and the days ahead are unpromising. Thus, never, they wish, shall their children be like them, fisherfolk.

The fisherfolk do not see a better future in the sea. It is like a pit of difficulties and suffering. They would like their children to climb out of it through college education. Their dream is that their children will obtain a college degree some glorious day. Then they will have better incomes, and, as they say, 'liberation from the suffering of poverty.' This means that the registered fisherfolk have not given up hope. The unregistered fisherfolk however are skeptical about government initiatives (Teves 2014).

The alternative sources of income seem to be inadequate. Should they turn away from the sea and learn and engage in other livelihoods, perhaps migrate to elsewhere? Should they become microentrepreneurs and direct their energies to the shell trade that flourished in Cebu and Bohol (Amper 2013)? Meanwhile, the fisherfolks worry about the dwindling population of fish and seashells. Worse, the threat of adverse effects of climate change looms.<sup>8</sup> What can be done? The answers are difficult to come by. Somehow they should be found in the triangulation of the fisherfolks' life and dreams as this study has described, the capabilities of government agencies and non-governmental organizations, and environmental integrity.

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<sup>8</sup> Their awareness of climate change, ability to respond to it, and sense of urgency may need improvement (Caparida 2012, Ibalig 2014, Labrador 2014, Rebutazo 2011, Rubio 2014).

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## APPENDIX

The following table lists the sea shell species that gleaners gather in Bais. It lists the local names of the shells, the scientific names, the number of gleaners who gather them, and the percentage of these gleaners to the total number of gleaners.

Local Name	Scientific Name	Gleaners	
		Number	% of respondents
<i>Aninikad</i>	<i>Strombus urceus</i>	29	15.4
<i>Bakalan</i>	<i>Pitar citrinus</i>	5	2.7
<i>Balisala/Bisala</i>	<i>Grafrarium tumidum</i>	81	43.1
<i>Bayogan</i>	<i>Anodonta cynea</i>	1	0.53
<i>Bayoyal</i>	<i>Margaritiferidae margaritifera margaritefera</i>	1	0.53
<i>Bilaag/Bilaog</i>	<i>Scaphopod sp.</i>	1	0.53
<i>Bolokbolok</i>	<i>Macra mactridae</i>	12	6.4
<i>Bongkawil</i>	<i>Strombus canarium</i>	5	2.7
<i>Butabuta</i>	<i>Morum kursi</i>	1	0.53
<i>Bug-atan</i>	<i>Magnifica periglypta</i>	1	0.53
<i>Dalodalo</i>	<i>Terebralia sp.</i>	1	0.53
<i>Imbao</i>	<i>Phacoides philippinarum</i>	6	3.2
<i>Kalaykay</i>	<i>Donicidae donax trunculus</i>	1	0.53
<i>Kibol</i>	<i>Voluta ebraea</i>	3	1.6
<i>Lampirong</i>	<i>Placuna placenta</i>	2	1.1
<i>Ligis</i>	<i>Limopsis crassula</i>	15	8.0
<i>Linginlingin</i>	<i>Saxolucina saxorum</i>	1	0.53
<i>Litub</i>	<i>Anadara antiquata</i>	173	92.0

<i>Pisospisos</i>	<i>Circe scripta</i>	16	8.5
<i>Piyongpiyong</i>	<i>Anadara sp.</i>	10	5.3
<i>Punaw</i>	<i>Mercenaria mercenaria</i>	111	59.0
<i>Punyete</i>	<i>Veneridae sp.</i>	9	4.8
<i>Putian</i>	<i>Lutraria oblonga</i>	9	4.8
<i>Saang</i>	<i>Tridacna maxima</i>	1	0.53
<i>Sangkasangka</i>	<i>Chicoreus (triplex) florifer</i>	1	0.53
<i>Sikadsikad</i>	<i>Strombus sp.</i>	1	0.53
<i>Sisi</i>	<i>Crassostrea cucullata</i>	48	25.5
<i>Sulodsulod</i>	<i>Vepricardium sp.</i>	8	4.3
<i>Tagnipis/Talipis</i>	<i>Anomia trigonopsis</i>	15	8.0
<i>Tahong (green shells)</i>	<i>Modiolus metcalfei</i>	20	10.6
<i>Talab</i>	<i>Atrina rigida</i>	3	1.6
<i>Talaba</i>	<i>Crassostrea sp.</i>	14	7.5
<i>Talipsay</i>	<i>Venus toreuma</i>	3	1.6
<i>Tambakan / Tambakalan</i>	<i>Pitar noguchii</i>	1	0.53
<i>Tamislat</i>	<i>Lutraria magna</i>	3	1.6
<i>Tandiis / Kandiis</i>	<i>Tapes litterata</i>	20	10.6
<i>Tikodtikod</i>	<i>Pitar citrina</i>	49	26.1
<i>Tuway</i>	<i>Geloina suborbicularis philippi</i>	3	1.6
<i>Ugpan</i>	<i>Eufistulana mumia</i>	20	10.6