Introduction

The sudden COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically affected many facets of the global economy, including the small-scale fisheries sector. This sector was already facing complex challenges before the pandemic. Sector stakeholders were already dealing with ongoing threats like overfishing, the uncertainties of climate change, and the political and regulatory changes at the national and local levels.

This pandemic, however, has introduced a massive shock of new uncertainty into the system. It has exacerbated the threats fisherfolk have been facing and has presented new ones. While governments address the urgent health and economic issues, they also must address the unique challenges to this sector. A natural question to ask is whether this new uncertainty has changed the way governments view and engage the small-scale fisheries sector.

This report discusses the findings of a pulse survey administered to local governments from 6 countries. The survey sought to assess the perceptions among government officials of (1) the effects of COVID-19 on the small-scale fisheries sector; (2) the quick relief and long-term response of the national and their local government units to the pandemic; and (3) the policy, financing, and other gaps that affect the small-scale fisheries sector. Rare conducted data collection and analysis.

Methodology

Rare designed the survey, and the final version is available as an Appendix. The survey has up to 33 questions, and the responses are available as a separate Appendix. Rare administered the survey using Google Forms between July and August 2020. The sources of the mailing list were from Rare Policy teams from each of the countries.

Two factors may bias our sample towards more proactive government officials. First, the survey was administered online. This may leave out localities and government units with limited to no access to internet service. Second, the survey targeted government officials who were already engaged by Rare through its Fish Forever program. This excludes localities and government units that have coastal fishing communities but are not part of the program.

A separate survey, also administered by Rare, on “Perceptions of coastal fishing communities on the impact of COVID-19,” is used in the discussion as another set of data points to help shed more light on the survey results in focus here.

This aimed to assess perceptions of coastal fishing communities on 1) the degree of impact caused to their lives; 2) causes of disruption to the fisheries practices they believe are associated with changes in their community, and 3) coping strategies they adopted to mitigate these perceived disruptions.
Summary of Results

Surveys were conducted across Fish Forever countries to assess government officials’ perceptions in their government’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic with regards to the small-scale fisheries sector.

A total of 70 government officials responded to the survey: 27 from the Philippines, 13 from Mozambique, 10 from Honduras, nine from Indonesia, eight from Brazil, and three from Micronesia. Of the total, 39 officials represented the municipal level of government, 20 for the district level, three for mancomunidades, two for the city level, two from the provincial level, two for the state level, one held an administrative post, and one respondent did not indicate.

Among those who responded, 62.9% said that the COVID-19 pandemic impacted their locality. An additional 32.9% responded that the respondent’s locality was severely impacted. Only three officials responded that their locality was not impacted.

A majority of the respondents cited the following as impacts that their locality experienced: (1) limited access to other cities and municipalities; (2) limited access to markets for their local goods; (3) major concerns in local health and safety; and (4) higher unemployment rates.

As to the pandemic’s impact on the small-scale fisheries sector, 85.7% of respondents said they were aware of these impacts. Some of these include (1) lower supply and demand for fish products; (2) limited access to markets, fuel, and other resources; and (3) decrease in income among fisherfolk. One respondent shared that illegal fishing activity increased in their town. Meanwhile, the respondent for the Municipality of Lubang, Philippines, shared a positive impact: “First, our fishers can still go on fishing and do their regular fishing activity. Second, Lubang people can now enjoy the first-class fishes since their catches are not shipped out of Lubang. We witness the bounty of our sea. For the surplus catch, LGU Lubang purchased these to the fishers and distributed for free to the community and Lubang people residing in the greater Manila area.”

Of the 70 respondents, 75.7% said that their national government provided at least one specific quick/relief response to address the impacts of the pandemic. Almost half cited information drives about COVID-19 as an example of a quick response, followed by cash or aid allocation for small-scale fisheries. As to whether their own unit of government had at least one specific quick/relief response, 81.4% said yes. The majority of respondents again cited information drives. A majority of respondents named lack of funding as the main reason why their response was limited.

Concerning long-term plans that address the pandemic’s impacts, only 40% of all respondents said that their national government had these in place. The most common of these plans include: (1) a comprehensive livelihood program; (2) development of fisheries recovery plans; (3) increasing the budget for the fisheries or agriculture departments; and (4) integration of biodiversity or climate
change into the recovery plans. As to their own unit’s long-term plans, 65.7% of the respondents said yes, they have them in place. Aside from the four mentioned above, a review of policies was also popular among the local units’ long-term plans.

On the topic of resources, 71.4% shared that they are anticipating or currently experiencing a decrease in available resources, specifically due to the COVID-19 government response. Several cited the realignment of funds to the pandemic response resulting in less available funding for the fisheries sector. A majority of 61.4%, were unaware of financing programs from the government or its partner lending institutions directed to small scale fishing communities or coastal sub-national or local governments related to COVID-19 recovery. A more significant majority or 80%, were interested in availing financing opportunities for the small-scale fisheries sector. Among those aware of existing financing programs in the Philippines, Land Bank was cited as an example. Other countries, meanwhile, specified their local initiatives such as Peixe and ProAzul. A majority of them, though, have not applied for any financing opportunities.

On policy implications and reforms for the fisheries sector, the following policy themes were thought to gain from small-scale fisheries by a majority of the respondents: (1) sustainable fisheries; (2) biodiversity protection and conservation; (3) oceans and coastal resources management; and (4) climate change adaptation.

As for the role of small-scale fisheries in the recovery from the pandemic, the following were cited by a majority of the respondents: (1) contribution to sustainable fisheries; (2) food sufficiency; (3) social resilience; (4) financial resilience; (5) ecosystem resilience; (6) contribution to green or blue recovery; (7) contribution to climate change adaptation; and (8) contribution to biodiversity targets.

There was high awareness among most of the respondents of short term policies and/or regulations that were released by the government, specifically in support of the sector during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some examples include: (1) exempting fisherfolk from quarantine; (2) establishing new or redefined fisheries management zones; and (3) providing access to markets.

There was also high awareness among a majority of the respondents of any existing policies or regulations for the fisheries sector that they thought will be affected by the pandemic or by the policies and regulations announced by the national government. A majority cited the availability of financing and enforcement as the top policies they were aware of.
Impact of the pandemic on the small-scale fisheries sector

85.7% of respondents said they were aware of the impacts

Most cited impacts
1. Lower supply and demand for fish products
2. Limited access to markets, fuel, and other resource
3. Decrease in income among fisherfolk

Quick/ relief response of national government

75.7% of the respondents say that their national government provided at least one specific quick/relief response

Most cited quick relief response

- 50% cited COVID-19 information drives
- Cash or aid allocation for small-scale fisheries

Why was response of local governments limited?

Majority said due to lack of funding
Long-term plans that address the impacts of the pandemic

40% answered that the national government had long-term plans in place

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondents who said that the national government has plans</th>
<th>Respondents who said that the government has no plans</th>
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<tr>
<td>60%</td>
<td>40%</td>
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The most common of these plans include:

1. Comprehensive livelihood program
2. Development of fisheries recovery plans
3. Increasing the budget for the fisheries or agriculture departments
4. Integration of biodiversity or climate change into the recovery plans.
5. Review of policies

Effect of COVID-19 on Resources for Small Fisheries Sector

71.4% Anticipating/ currently experiencing a decrease in available resources, specifically due to the COVID-19 government response.

61.4% Unaware of financing programs from the government or its partner lending institutions that are directed to small scale fishing communities

80% Interested in availing financing opportunities for the small-scale fisheries sector.

A majority have not applied for any financing opportunities.

Among those aware of existing financing programs in the Philippines, Land Bank was cited as an example. Other countries, meanwhile, specified their local initiatives such as Peixe and ProAzul.
Role of Small-Scale Fisheries in Recovery

As for the role of small-scale fisheries in the recovery from the pandemic, the following were cited by a majority of the respondents:

1. Contribution to sustainable fisheries
2. Food sufficiency
3. Social resilience
4. Financial resilience
5. Ecosystem resilience
6. Contribution to green or blue recovery
7. Contribution to climate change adaptation
8. Contribution to biodiversity targets
High awareness

The majority know of the short-term policies and/or regulations that were released by the government, specifically in support of the sector during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Some examples include:

1. Exempting fisherfolk from quarantine
2. Establishing new or redefined fisheries management zones
3. Providing access to markets
Insights from the Government Pulse Survey

1. Near-universal effect on price direction
While more government officials have shared how prices of fish catch and fish products have gone down due to an increase in supply not reaching their usual markets, a few respondents have also mentioned that prices have gone up. The restrictions on movement across towns were cited as one reason why this has happened.

Some localities depend on other municipalities for inputs and access to fishing grounds. When movement and transportation are limited, supply for these inputs goes down, resulting in higher prices for those that depend on them. This can be seen as proof of how the value chain for the small-scale fisheries sector can depend on multiple territories, and any disruption on one part can cause significant effects down the chain. This realization can help pinpoint which parts of the value chain are vulnerable in the case of future pandemics and other calamities, and can then help identify possible alternatives so that prices are stabilized much sooner.

2. Small-scale fishing considered as a safety net
Though only cited by a few respondents, certain localities saw an increase in the number of fishers as tourism and other industries ground to a halt. This is no surprise as some fishers have moved to the tourism sector before the pandemic. This suggests that for community members with tourism as their primary source of income, they consider small-scale fishing as their back-up plan. This underscores the need to identify potential and ready to implement back-up plans and diversified sources of income for fisherfolk should their fishing operations be disrupted again. In particular, a reduction in tourism activities was cited by respondents from the Philippine municipalities of Del Carmen, Culasi, Bais, and Omoa, Honduras.

As former fishers go back to small-scale fishing in times like a pandemic, it may be helpful for local governments to assess whether they need to be reoriented on new rules and regulations regarding local fishing practices.

3. Awareness of long-term plans from national government much lower than for quick response
Most sub-national and local government officials are unaware of their national government’s long-term plans to address the impact of COVID-19 when the survey was conducted, July to August 2020. While at least half of those surveyed from Brazil and Micronesia were aware of their government’s long-term plans, majorities of those surveyed from Honduras and the Philippines, and all of those surveyed from Indonesia and Mozambique, were unaware of their government’s long-term plans.

While the greater salience of quick response over long-term plans may be attributed to the magnitude of urgent needs, this finding also suggests that national governments need to do more to cascade their long-term recovery plans. To validate this need, it will be useful to determine the availability of any long-term national plans for COVID-19 recovery for
these countries’ small-scale fisheries sector. It will also be helpful to dig deeper as to what
government officials mean by long-term plans and their expectations from the national
government on the subject.

4. The decrease in government resources not universal
While a majority foresee decreases in their budget due to the pandemic, it is surprising to see
certain localities responding that they are not anticipating nor experiencing any reduction of
available resources. Some respondents have said that budget realignments and infusions
from the national government will ensure enough resources would be available, while some
even foresee increases. For example, 5 of the 8 respondents from Brazil shared that they
were not anticipating any decreases in their budget due to the pandemic even if all 8 of them
responded that their localities were impacted by it.

This indicates an opportunity for horizontal learning among government officials on how
they are managing their resources during uncertain times, such as this pandemic. To validate
this opportunity, it would be helpful to confirm if the localities that are not foreseeing nor
experiencing any budget decreases are also the ones who reported that they are not as
severely affected by the pandemic, or they are the beneficiaries of short-term stimulus
packages from their national government. This will help determine which localities are truly
managing their budget effectively for the long-term and which are simply benefitting from a
temporary surge in fiscal capacity.

5. High interest in financing programs, but few have applied
Only around eight respondents mentioned that they have applied to financing programs for
their small-scale fisheries sector. These respondents were from Honduras, Indonesia, and the
Philippines. This finding also corresponds to the low awareness of financing programs among
government officials. One respondent also cited that they did not push through because they
were informed that only a partial set of their fishers would be granted financing support. This
non-universal coverage will lead to rifts and disagreements among the fisherfolk, according to
the same respondent. Another respondent cited that they lack skills in developing feasibility
studies that are part of the requirements demanded by government financing institutions.

These anecdotes can be further validated so that a full picture of accessing these programs
can be deduced. Once confirmed, these could inform national governments on how they
design their financing programs so that more fishers can access them and so that unintended
consequences such as discord in the community are avoided. Digging deeper into the topic
can also help identify which types of financing are fishers and local governments willing to
pursue, which types still have a stigma associated with them and in which localities, and
which capacities and skills are still needed by local government officials so that they are better
equipped at accessing these opportunities.
6. Suggested policies and regulations match issues cited
Sub-national and local government officials shared policies and regulations that are already being implemented, or they wish to be implemented. The list can be a good source of inputs for mayors and other local leaders who need advice on relevant policies for their small-scale fisheries sector. These suggestions also match the issues and disruptions mentioned by both government officials and coastal fishing community members. The list includes: (1) treating fisheries as essential goods; (2) providing clarity on policies for group fishing, fishing grounds access, access to markets for fish products, and access to fish ports; (3) providing microcredit and other forms of financial assistance; (4) providing alternative livelihoods; (5) establishing and enforcing fish management zones; and (6) continuing and expanding fish registration and local licensing.

7. Local governments see SSF contributing to important and relevant policy themes and playing a role in the recovery from the pandemic.
Sustainable fisheries are the top theme that SSF contributes to in both long-term policy themes and related to recovery. Other themes that SSF contributes to include biodiversity protection and conservation, oceans, climate change, and social resilience. Local Governments also view the sector’s contribution to food sufficiency in the recovery process as one of the top responses, but not explicitly as a general policy outcome.
Insights from both COVID-19 and Government Response Survey and the Coastal Fishing Communities Survey*[1]

1. Perception of impact on locality among government officials matches perception among coastal fishing communities
Coastal fishing community members participated in a separate survey assessing their perceptions of the impact of COVID-19 on their lives. At least 95% of the respondents of both surveys agree that COVID-19 has impacted or severely impacted their locality. This near-universal agreement confirms the pandemic’s spread and how deep the disruptions are in the small-scale fisheries sector.

2. Specific impacts match those cited by coastal fishing communities
The disruptions most cited among government officials also correspond to those mentioned by coastal fishing communities. These include: (1) limited access to markets; (2) lower prices of fish catch and fish products; (3) limited access to fishing grounds; and (4) less income and food. Both sets of stakeholders agree that these are the top issues that have affected their community members. This agreement can be a potential starting point for dialogue on short and long term plans for the sector. Other disruptions mentioned include: (1) higher prices of inputs; (2) limited access to alternative livelihoods; (3) increase in illegal fishing activity; (4) decrease in tourism activity; (5) limited access to fuel and transportation; and (6) unclear guidelines and protocols from the national government.

3. Top examples of government plans match coping strategies of coastal fishing communities
Comprehensive livelihood programs dominate the list of plans, according to government officials. These planned initiatives match the coping strategies that coastal fishing communities have implemented: community and family fishing, farming, and fish processing. This suggests congruence between what is needed at the grassroots level and what those in government are planning to implement to address these needs.

Savings, meanwhile, came out as the fourth most popular coping strategy among coastal fishing communities. It will be useful for government officials to support or complement this as it has been proven to reduce vulnerability in communities that have them.

4. Low awareness of financing programs correspond to mixed results of financing as a coping strategy among coastal fishing communities
Most government officials are unaware of any financing programs for the small-scale fisheries sector. This survey result corresponds with the reportedly mixed results of coastal fishing community members who have tapped various financing modalities as their coping strategy. Among these members, around half mentioned that the coping strategy was not working. This validates the need for more and better-designed financing programs. This can be further explored by studying what worked for those few community members who responded that subsidies and bank loans as a coping strategy were working.
How did COVID-19 impact their locality?

62.9% said that the COVID-19 pandemic impacted their locality
32.9% of localities were ‘severely impacted’
Both sets of stakeholders agree that these are the top issues that have affected the members in their community. This agreement can be a potential starting point for dialogue on short and long term plans for the sector.

Other disruptions mentioned include:

1. Higher prices of inputs
2. Limited access to alternative livelihoods
3. Increase in illegal fishing activity
4. Decrease in tourism activity
5. Limited access to fuel and transportation
6. Unclear guidelines and protocols from the national government

RESPONSE

COPING STRATEGIES REPORTED BY FISHERS

FARMING SAVINGS

COMMUNITY FISHING FAMILY FISHING
Top examples of government plans match coping strategies of coastal fishing communities

Comprehensive livelihood programs

Savings

Low awareness of financing programs correspond to mixed results of financing as a coping strategy among coastal fishing communities

**80%**
INTERESTED

**62%**
ARE UNAWARE

**8**
RESPONDENTS HAVE SUCCESSFULLY APPLIED

FINANCING
COVID-19 and Government Response Survey

FOR SUB-NATIONAL AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS.

This form is designed to capture policy and financing work/ responses of government units in all Fish Forever countries in response to COVID 19 pandemic. The result will be used as input for Rare in adapting and designing further strategies. Thank you for the time!

Email Address

Name of Respondent

Country [Choose one]

☐ Brazil
☐ Guatemala
☐ Honduras
☐ Indonesia
☐ Micronesia
☐ Mozambique
☐ Palau
☐ Philippines

Local Government Unit [Choose one]

☐ Municipality
☐ Province
☐ District
☐ Barangay
☐ Vice District
☐ Village
☐ Other

Name of Local Government (Province or Municipality or District) Pls check spelling.

If not a province or municipality, pls write “not applicable” and answer next question.

Name of Local Government (others, if not a province, municipality or district)-pls check spelling..
Position/ Designation [Choose one]
- ☐ Local Chief Executive (e.g., Mayor/ Governor)
- ☐ Local Vice Executive (e.g., Vice Mayor/ Vice Governor)
- ☐ Head Planning Officer or Head Administrator
- ☐ Other

Gender of Respondent [Choose one]
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male
- ☐ Prefer not to say

Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Your Locality

Is the COVID-19 pandemic impacting your locality? [Choose one]
- ☐ I don’t know
- ☐ No, it is not impacting and we are doing business as usual
- ☐ Yes, it is impacting but we still are doing most of our daily activities as usual.
- ☐ Yes, it is severely impacting and we had to stop most of our activities.

How is the COVID-19 pandemic impacting your locality? [Check those options that apply]
- ☐ Limited access to other cities or municipalities
- ☐ Limited access to fuel and other resources
- ☐ Limited access to markets for our local businesses
- ☐ Major concerns in local health and safety
- ☐ Higher prices of basic goods and services
- ☐ Higher unemployment rates
- ☐ Other
COVID and Small-Scale Fisheries Sector
Understanding quick and long-term responses for the sector in relation to COVID-19 pandemic.

Are you aware of the impact of COVID to the small-scale fisheries sector?

☐ Yes
☐ No

If yes, what are the major impacts? Name as many that you are experiencing.

_________________________________________________________________________________________________________

Did the national government provide specific quick/relief response to address these impacts towards the sector?

☐ Yes
☐ No

If yes, what are examples of these quick/relief responses? [Check those options that apply]

☐ Cash/Aid allocation for small-scale fishers
☐ Information drive on COVID-19, social distancing, health safety measures, etc for small-scale fishers on
☐ Loans for small-scale fishers
☐ Exemption of fishers from Community Quarantine Measures
☐ Other

Did you or your department have specific quick/relief response to address these impacts towards the sector?

☐ Yes
☐ No

If yes, what are examples of these quick/relief responses? [Check those options that apply]

☐ Cash/Aid allocation for small-scale fishers
☐ Information drive on COVID-19, social distancing, health safety measures, etc for small-scale fishers on
☐ Loans for small-scale fishers
☐ Exemption of fishers from Community Quarantine Measures
☐ Inclusion of Representative from Fisheries Sector in the Government COVID response teams
☐ Other

If no, what were the reasons for or barriers from providing quick/relief response?

_________________________________________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________________________________________
Does the national government have any long-term plans to address the impact of COVID 19 to the small-scale fisheries sector, say in the next 2-4 years?

☐ Yes
☐ No

If yes, what are examples of these long-term plans to address impact of COVID 19 to small-scale fisheries sector?

☐ Comprehensive Livelihoods Program
☐ Development of Fisheries Recovery Plans
☐ Discussions about increasing budget for Fisheries/ Agriculture Departments
☐ Integration of Biodiversity and / or Climate Change and Future Recovery Plans
☐ Review of Policies on Enforcement, Fisher Registration, Licensing, others
☐ Other

Do you or your department have any long-term plans to address the impact of COVID 19 to the small-scale fisheries sector, say in the next 2-4 years?

☐ Yes
☐ No

If yes, what are examples of these long-term plans to address impact of COVID 19 to small-scale fisheries sector?

☐ Comprehensive Livelihoods Program
☐ Development of Fisheries Recovery Plans
☐ Discussions about increasing budget for Fisheries/ Agriculture Departments
☐ Integration of Biodiversity and / or Climate Change and Future Recovery Plans
☐ Review of Policies on Enforcement, Fisher Registration, Licensing, others
☐ Other

**Sourcing and Access of Resources**

Are you anticipating or currently experiencing a decrease in available resources (financial or other) specifically due to the COVID-19 government response?

☐ Yes
☐ No

Please elaborate on your answer.

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
Are you aware of financing programs from the government or its partner lending institutions that are directed to small scale fishing communities or to coastal sub-national or local governments related to COVID-19 recovery?

☐ Yes
☐ No

If yes, what are those, from which government agency, and estimated amount that’s available.

 Are you interested to avail of the financing opportunities for the small-scale fisheries sector?

☐ Yes
☐ No

If yes, have you applied? Were you able to successfully access those funds for your government or for the fishers? Please elaborate on your experience. If no, please share why you are not interested.

Policy Implications and Reforms for the Fisheries Sector

Do you think small-scale fisheries contribute to any of the following themes? [Check those options that apply]

☐ Climate Change Adaptation
☐ Climate Change Mitigation
☐ Biodiversity Protection/Conservation
☐ Oceans and Coastal Resources, Management
☐ Sustainable Fisheries
☐ Other

Do you think small-scale fisheries will play a role in COVID-19 recovery? If yes, in what ways. [Check those options that apply]

☐ Food sufficiency
☐ Ecosystem Resilience
☐ Financial Resilience
☐ Social Resilience
☐ Contribution to Climate Change Adaptation Target
☐ Contribution to Climate Change Mitigation Target
☐ Contribution to Biodiversity Targets
☐ Contribution to Green or Blue Recovery
☐ Contribution to Sustainable Fisheries
☐ Other
Are you aware of short term policies and/or regulations that were released by the government specifically in support of the sector during the COVID-19 pandemic? [Check those options that apply]

☐ Yes, policies and regulations around market access.
☐ Yes, policies and regulations around licensing and fishing registration.
☐ Yes, policies and regulations around ecosystem protection and restoration.
☐ Yes, policies and regulations around fishing enforcement.
☐ Yes, policies and regulations around other issues related to small-scale fisheries.
☐ None.
☐ Other

If yes, kindly specify the policies and regulations you are aware of. If none, which policies and regulations do you think should be in place for the sector?

Are you aware of any existing policies or regulations for the fisheries sector that you think will be affected by the pandemic or by the policies and regulations announced by the national government?

☐ Yes
☐ No

If yes, what are the existing policies/laws/regulations that will be affected and will be reviewed by existing announcements of the government? [Check those options that apply]

☐ Fisheries Law
☐ Enforcement Policies
☐ Fish Registration Policies
☐ Protected Areas Laws
☐ Fish Licensing Regulations
☐ Availability of Financing (cash assistance or loans) for Fishers

Thank you very much for your responses and your time!