

***“I believe in the capability of each individual regardless of gender but often times, women’s capabilities are limited merely because they are women. I want to end this stigma.”***

## SETTING DIRECTIONS TO EMPOWER WOMEN FISHERS

**GENDER  
CHAMPION**



Senior Aquaculturist  
Gender and Development Coordinator, BFAR Regional Office XII

**MS. MERCY M. TOMO**

A Prime Mover in Engendering Fisheries

Ms. Mercy Tomo has been working in the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) for the past 40 years and is currently the GAD Coordinator of the office. She works closely with women fishers in General Santos City and has observed that women are generally active in fisheries post-harvest and processing. Hence, she makes sure that the agency holds an ample amount of trainings that focus on fisheries post-harvest and processing activities such as deboning, canning, smoking, and drying of fish. Ms. Tomo would initiate and lead in the organization of events and trade fairs in the region where the women fishers get extra income out of vending the value-added products that they produce as a result of the trainings.

She shares that women fishers in General Santos are also mothers who need to attend to their family’s needs aside from supporting their husbands in looking for income. Providing women with trainings that can result to long-term livelihood opportunities can empower them since they will have their own salary. Ms. Tomo believes that if only everyone is provided with enough resources and opportunity, then they will be more than capable to do the job that is assigned to them.

Despite the work that she has done in reaching out to women fishers, she admits that there is still a long way to go to end the discrimination experienced by women. At present, there are still existing stigmas that limit an individual's capabilities according to his or her gender. Despite various efforts to put an end to such stigma, she believes that education must be intensified to change people's outlooks and build respect for others regardless of their gender.

Ms. Tomo emphasizes that the community needs to work with the government to be able to attain their goals on gender equality and women empowerment. Officials serve solely as symbols in the community but the catalysts for change are always the people. The culture, tradition, and values within the community have to be re-engineered to be able to stop and eliminate the mentality that people's capacity relies on their gender.

Guided by the principles of the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources, Ms. Tomo will champion the creation of a community where fisheries and aquatic resources are being protected by both value chain players and enablers. More than this, she believes that the best kind of community to have is a community that values and protects the people's rights and well-being regardless of their gender.



**Mrs. Mercy Tomo of BFAR XII and LGU Personnel of Lake Sebu South Cotabato dispersed tilapia fingerlings during Farmers and Fisherfolks Month.**



**Ms. Mercy Tomo provided assistance during the workshop on Benchmarking and Best Practices for Tilapia Grow-out.**