

“Coastal women, use your talents and wit to continue our cause! Women nowadays have heightened awareness about their plight. We are not stupid. Women are not only the light of their own households; they are the guiding light of their communities as well.” - Conchita S. Masin

In 1997, when Conchita S. Masin and others from her family and community were evicted from their homes, they decided not to take it lying down. A group of Catholic nuns supported the displaced fisher people, giving them shelter and, most importantly, urging them to fight back and challenge their

been framed by men, for men. The provision of priority use rights for the women in the community within a designated area for fishing was, therefore, a big step forward. This was a space of their own where they could engage freely in using and managing marine resources. The rehabilitation, reforestation and protection of the WMA were in women’s hands. Mother Conching also became very active in fighting for the full implementation of the Fisheries Code. In the process, however, she acquired numerous enemies among commercial fishers.

The road Mother Conching has chosen to journey on has not been an easy one. As a member of the women fishers’ association in her community, the *Agraryong Reporma Samahang kababaihan ng Pangisdaan*, she and the rest of the association members had to lobby for their rights. A big obstacle came in the form of conflicts with local government officials. But Mother Conching was vocal in her efforts. So much so that she came to the point of receiving death threats for her obstinacy and perseverance. Ignoring these, she continues to fight undeterred, for women’s rights. She draws support and inspiration from people in the community. Mother Conching says she is happiest when she serves fellow women in her community. She attributes part of her success to the unwavering support she receives from her husband, whom she considers to be a “gift from God”. It was not all smooth sailing, however, and their relationship went through rough times when she began her involvement in the women’s movement. Eventually, things started to get better and today her husband is her most important ally.

Currently, the WMA that Mother Conching and the women in her community have laboured to build has become a model for coastal communities across the world. It conveys a simple yet powerful message. “Yes,” it proclaims, “Women can!”

PROFILE

Conchita S. Masin

Mother Conching, as she is popularly known, received a national award in 2007 for her exemplary service to the women’s movement

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eviction. The incident marked a turning point in their lives. Conchita took the lead, organizing women along the coasts, gradually coming to the front ranks of the women’s movement in the Philippines. Her deep involvement in the women’s movement was formally recognized in 2007 when was given a national award for exemplary service. Yet another award, in the form of an honorific title, was given by the people and those who knew Conchita well. Mother Conching, they called her.

One of Mother Conching’s most significant achievements to date has been the establishment of a Women Managed Area (WMA) within the fishing grounds in her community in Governor Generoso, Davao Oriental. Prior to the establishment of the WMA, women in her fishing community had always played supporting, background roles. They had never been involved in decision-making activities. Fishing tenure arrangements had always