



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations

FAO In Action
IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

*Philippine seaweed farming
flourishes after Typhoon Haiyan*

PHILIPPINES



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Coron Island, Philippines – For 31-year-old Jessica Paguia, from the Tagbanua indigenous group on the Philippine island of Coron, farming seaweed is a family affair and has been their main source of income for this small coastal community for the past 20 years.

When Typhoon Haiyan (known locally as Yolanda) struck in November 2013, it severely damaged or destroyed many seaweed facilities, crippling the income of Filipino coastal farmers who relied on this as their main source of livelihood. The Philippines is one of the world’s largest producers of seaweed and initial assessments after the typhoon showed that US\$12.2 million was lost in aquaculture and seaweed production alone.

“When the typhoon came, our house and all our farming materials were washed away,” said Paguia, looking out at the water. “We didn’t know where to start, because we lost everything and have relied on seaweed farming for so many years. Everyone was affected – not only our family.”

“With so many seaweed farmers affected, it was critical to re-establish their assets in order for them to recommence their seaweed culture operations,” said Godardo Juanich, FAO Senior Aquaculture and Mariculture consultant.

The assistance provided by FAO in close coordination with The Philippines Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources included seaweed farming packages with nylon lines, floats and planting materials, and home-based seaweed drying facilities. FAO also set up seaweed nurseries, enabling diversification and culturing of seaweed species.

While the damage to seaweed farming was extensive, it also presented an opportunity during the recovery and rehabilitation to introduce better farming practices. Training was provided that covered how to select more suitable farming sites, the preparation of seedlings, seaweed farm maintenance and how to gain access to markets.

“We learned things like proper cutting, transferring to nursery grounds, and the period it takes for seaweed to reproduce,” Paguia says. “Prior to this, we were just harvesting the seaweed and drying it which caused the seaweed to shrink. We didn’t know that we had to transfer it before drying, so the training helped us cut our losses.”

In the aftermath of the typhoon, loan sharks victimized many of the farmers as they borrowed money at very high interest rates in order to buy seedlings and other things needed to re-establish their farms.

“The inputs and training that we have provided means they will no longer need to get loans from these middlemen,” Juanich explains. “We’re showing farmers how to directly access the markets, and they now know how to produce their own seedlings, thereby allowing them to not be too dependent on other sources for inputs.”

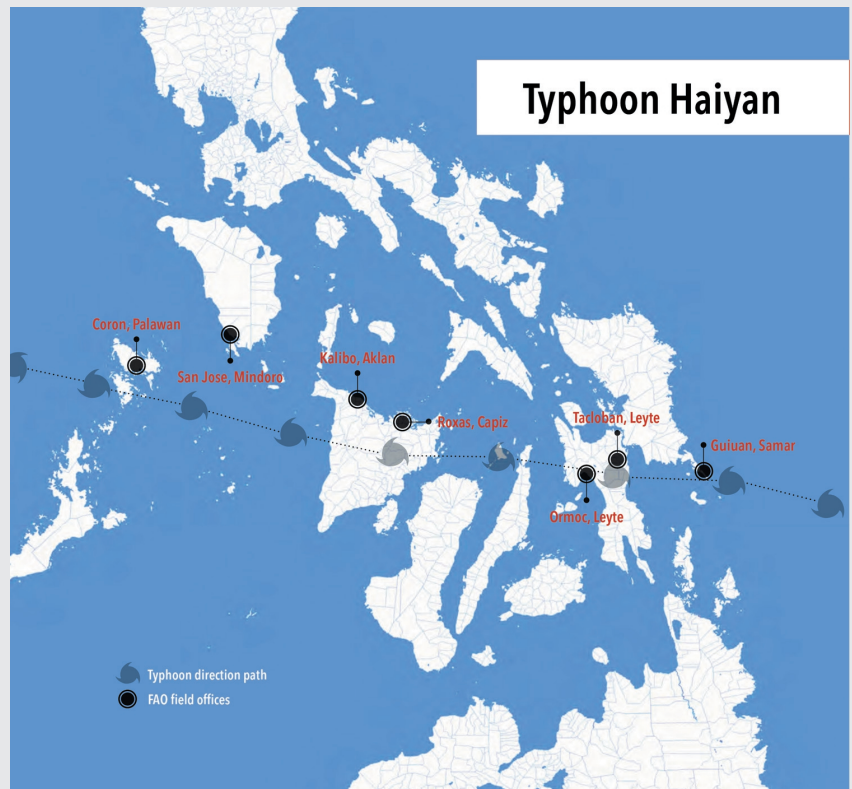
“We didn’t know where to start, because we lost everything and have relied on seaweed farming for so many years. Everyone was affected.” – Jessica Paguia, Filipina seaweed farmer

With the kits, materials and training they've received, seaweed farmers like Paguia and her family are slowly recovering and reestablishing more productive and resilient seaweed farms.

"Without this support we wouldn't have a source of livelihood," she says. "We can now expand our seaweed farms through a variety of techniques that we've learned and adapt our strategies according to climate conditions."

Paguia doesn't know what the future holds, but she is sure about one thing: "We are now able to meet our basic needs every day and the materials provided are also sufficient for us to recover from our losses."

Support to seaweed farming was part of FAO's US\$8.2 million Haiyan Recovery and Rehabilitation Programme for the fisheries sector, assisting 19 000 fishing families across three regions of the Philippines: Eastern Visayas, Western Visayas and MIMAROPA.



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ACHIEVING FAO'S STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

Increasing the resilience of livelihoods to disasters and enabling inclusive and efficient agricultural and food systems are two of FAO's strategic objectives in achieving a food-secure world.

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