

PARTICIPATORY COASTAL DEVELOPMENT PLANNING IN BOLINAO, NORTHERN PHILIPPINES: A POTENT TOOL FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION

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IDENTIFICATION OF THE CASE

The case study area is the Municipality (Town) of Bolinao, Province of Pangasinan, located along the northwest coast of Luzon, Philippines, and one of seventeen towns bordering the Lingayen Gulf (see Map 1). Bolinao has one of the most extensively developed reef system and associated habitats in northern Luzon. Demersal fish, shellfish and seaweeds living in reef and seagrass areas dominate the fisheries of the town.

From June 1994 to August 1996, the town dealt with a major development proposal to set up a cement plant complex (including a quarry site, power plant, cement factory, and wharf for water transport of unbagged bulk cement to Taiwan). The proposal, first announced in a public meeting in June 1994, was the first major initiative towards industrializing the 'Northwestern Luzon Growth Quadrangle' (Executive Order 175, 30 April 1994). The ensuing controversy was a classic case of industrialization vs. environment, Lingayen Gulf having been declared an environmentally critical area (Proclamation 156, 1993). The Bolinao-Anda reefs, comprising the only coralline section of the Gulf, function as the spawning and feeding grounds for a significant number of fish and invertebrate species. On 8 August 1996, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources disapproved the proposal with finality amidst local, national and international outcry to sustain the natural resource-based life support system of coastal communities.

The cement plant controversy provided the fertile ground for a heightened environmental awareness among the citizens of Bolinao and the adjacent towns around Lingayen Gulf. Fueled by a vigorous program on public environmental education, such awareness quickly gained momentum and evolved into one of a mass-based advocacy calling for a more appropriate mode of coastal development.

The authors are part of a project entitled 'Community-Based Coastal Resources Management (CB-CRM) Project, Bolinao, northern Philippines,' that was sponsored by the International Development Research Centre of Canada from 1993 to 1998. This project has played a catalytic role in the community mobilization and formation of CRM-oriented people's organizations, and in the formulation of a coastal development plan, the first to have been developed in the country in a participatory mode.

THE INITIAL SITUATION

From an environmental perspective, significant indicators of unsustainable levels of resource extraction were evident in the late 1980's. Talaue-McManus and Kesner (1995) documented the collapse of its valuable dollar-earning sea-urchin fishery in 1992, despite the existence of town resolutions imposing

close fishing seasons and minimum harvestable size. Evidence of overharvesting of reef fish included a decrease in adult fish density and in species diversity, as well as in the size of reproductively mature fishes using fisheries data covering a four year period (1988-1991) (McManus et al. 1992). For siganid fishes, the smallest size of reproducing females was found to be 3 cm, indicative of a strong harvest pressure that selected for small and fast reproducing individuals to maintain the population. A survey of the coral reefs of Lingayen Gulf conducted during 1987 and 1988, showed that sites in the Bolinao-Anda system had 30 to 51 percent live coral cover, with siltation and the use of dynamite and poison posing the major threats (Meñez et al. 1991).

A collective recognition of the need to take action in the light of declining catches and a deteriorating coastal environment was publicly articulated for the first time in Bolinao in July 1992. The Coastal Management Forum I sought to bring together the coastal community and development agencies with projects in Bolinao, to ventilate environmental issues and to begin to identify possible courses of action (Rodriguez et al. 1992). Testimonies from fishers and other stakeholders (fish vendors, shellcraft makers, etc.) indicated that the perceptions about the state of coastal living resources and their impacts on fishing as a livelihood and as basis of the town's economy echoed the findings of scientific studies. One of the resolutions of the forum was the need for development work in Bolinao to be coordinated into one resembling the approach of an integrated coastal management.

A subsequent public meeting, Coastal Management Forum II, was held two years later, in July 1994 to discuss the fate of the Bolinao environment and its citizens if the cement plant proposal was to be approved or disapproved (Second Annual CB-CRM Report 1994). The meeting underscored the need to achieve a consensus on the development strategy the Municipality should take, and for it to be fully cognizant of the costs and benefits its choice would entail.

Although the Local Government Code had been in effect since October 1991, it was also becoming clear that the leadership of the town and the community-at large did not have the wherewithal to make such a crucial choice without appropriate information and technical assistance. These were provided by the CB-CRM Project. The support provided by critical citizens groups as well as regional and national governmental and non-governmental organizations gave the momentum to raise awareness into one of a strong environmental advocacy across sectors.

The environmental education and information campaign was conducted in eleven of the fourteen coastal villages (barangays) of Bolinao. The data disseminated indicated that the direct users composed of 3000 families of marginal fishers or 30 percent of the town's population, would lose their resource base if this was not to be appropriately managed in the light of current development pressures such as the cement proposal.

THE CHANGE PROCESS

Conceptualizing the CDP Framework

The CB-CRM Project began its implementation in the second half of 1993, and the idea of formulating a zonation plan for Bolinao was conceived as early as 1994 (Yambao and Salmo 1997). Within the framework of the project, such plan would only be developed if a strong foundation composed of environmentally aware and CRM oriented local institutions, was set up (McManus 1995). Thus, for most of 1994 and 1995, the project focused on public environmental education, and community mobilization. By early 1996, there were four people's organizations (POs) set up in four coastal villages (two on the mainland and two in Santiago Island). Among the first proposals of the POs was the establishment of marine protected areas in the waters next to the villages of Balingasay, Arnedo and Binabalian, and that

of a mangrove rehabilitation area in Barangay Pilar.

In March 1996, the CB-CRM Project formed a thematic team to address coastal zoning and to conceptualize participatory strategies and the needed social preparation to go with these. Internally, the project had to grapple with the roles and functions of the local government (both the executive and legislative branches) and those of the fledgling POs whose collective voice needed to be amplified and heard, for the first time.

In April 1996, an in-house seminar on coastal zoning was conducted. The output of the seminar was a resource use map indicating the location of the three proposed marine protected areas, a mangrove rehabilitation area, the watershed management area and potential mariculture sites. In July 1996, the project staff arrived at a consensus to broaden the coastal zoning exercise into one of coastal development planning (CDP). It was agreed that all possible steps to provide the transfer of appropriate knowledge and skills must be taken in order to ensure the active participation of the community sectors and that of the local government.

Ensuring the Role of the Local Institutions Or People's Organizations

In May 1996, an orientation on coastal zoning was conducted for the officers and members of the four POs organized by the CB-CRM Project. The output of this meeting was a coastal resource-use map which indicated their proposed management activities. In the preparation of the map, the participants were asked to identify fishery and coastal management-related issues, problems and concerns, the bases for these, and the array of management options they may consider to address such concerns. Specifically, the map was focused on the proposed marine protected and rehabilitation areas in the four barangays.

By June 1996, after inter-PO consultations and some more community sessions on resource management, the four POs integrated their maps into an integrated resource use map. This became the basis of a PO initiated Coastal Development Plan for Bolinao. At the same time, the four groups became involved in the process of federating their organizations because of a growing realization that their concerns for coastal resources were common, and that management would be best achieved in a collective fashion.

From July to September, the integrated proposal or plan was the object of community consultations. In October, it was presented to the general assemblies of the four POs for adoption. At the same time, the federation was finally forged.

Soliciting the Support and Participation of the Local Government

Despite the refusal of the elected leaders to consider a more comprehensive development strategy while the cement plant controversy was raging prior to its resolution in August 1996, the CB-CRM Project suggested to the mayor to undertake a development planning exercise as early as November 1995. The continued refusal proved to be a crucial decision since the absence of a municipal land-use plan was a major reason for the denial of an environmental compliance certificate for the cement plant proposal.

In the second half of 1996, a series of discussions and negotiations with the key officials of the Municipal Development Council (the executive branch of the local government) was held. In November 1996, a meeting was held with the Mayor, the Planning and Development Coordinator, and the Local Government Operations Officer to discuss how the CB-CRM Project can provide assistance in coastal development planning. The three municipal officials were also informed of the integrated plan proposed by the federation and the desire of the latter to collaborate with the local government in refining and realizing the plan. The Municipal Mayor articulated his support for the collaboration, and agreed to sponsor a Multi-Sectoral Consultation on the Development of Bolinao in December, 1996.

A pre-consultation workshop was held in November, in order to present the integrated development plan of the federation to the other stakeholders. It was attended by representatives of the local government, the local organizations and other concerned groups. Also, the results of the study on land evaluation conducted by the CB-CRM Project was presented for integration with the proposed coastal development plan of the federation. The latter initially delineated three zones. During this workshop, a consolidated plan was formulated to include four zones: one for Ecotourism, Multiple-Use (Milkfish pens and Fish cages), Fishery Management (Reef fisheries), and Special Management (Trade and Navigation).

On December 5 and 10, 1996, the Multi-Sectoral Forum on Coastal Development Planning for Bolinao was held. The CB-CRM Project and the Office of the Municipal Planning and Development Coordinator functioned as the secretariat. The meeting was attended by about 120 people, most of whom were barangay leaders, heads of village-based organizations, the media representatives of the provincial government and other government agencies and community sectors. Among the objectives of the forum was the presentation of the consolidated zonation plan and the formation of a multi-sectoral body that will draft the development plan.

On December 7, the Municipal Mayor issued Executive Order No. 6 (Series 1996) that created the Multi-Sectoral Committee on Coastal Development Planning. The Committee was composed of 21 members representing 11 community sectors, including the four POs. The executive order also stipulated for the participation of the CB-CRM Project in providing technical assistance to the Committee. A budget of Phil Pesos 100,000.00 was allotted for the preparation of the CDP.

Making the Coastal Development Plan

The first two months of 1997 were devoted to setting up the internal mechanisms and workplan of the Committee (Yambao 1998). Regular monthly meetings were set including the conduct of community consultations in all coastal villages. By the second regular meeting, the Committee adopted the proposal to divide the municipal waters into four zones. In April, a team-building and planning workshop was held to articulate the vision, mission and goal of the Committee, as well as to provide a venue to renew the commitment of the Committee members in pursuing the planning exercise to completion. Community consultations were completed by the first half of 1997, and all inputs were collated.

From August to October 1997, the Committee conducted a series of meetings to finish drafting the text of the plan. The draft went through a parliamentary procedure of being read and scrutinized three times while the Committee sat en banc. To ensure that all the concerns raised during the public consultations were addressed, documentations and minutes of meetings were kept. The document was put together by the CB-CRM Project and was subjected to revisions and amendments by all members of the Committee.

On 25 October 1997, the draft of the proposed plan was approved on its third and final reading. On 8 November 1997, the Committee formally submitted the proposed coastal development plan to the Municipal Mayor. Shortly thereafter, copies of the plan were given to members of the legislative body, the Municipal Council, which had the authority to approve the plan. On 6 December, the Municipal Development Council (MDC) headed by the Mayor endorsed the plan to the Municipal Council for approval. It must be noted that five members of the Multi-Sectoral Committee were members of the MDC, and were therefore instrumental in securing such endorsement. On 16 December 1997, the proposed CDP was finally approved by the Municipal Council.

THE OUTCOME

The Coastal Development Plan for Bolinao is set for implementation this year, in 1998, and the impacts

of the management interventions contained here are still to be realized. What can be currently evaluated is the impact of the entire participatory planning process on the perceptions of the community sectors on the steps they took to articulate a collective development goal, and on the mechanisms they developed in writing a plan to achieve this goal.

It must be borne in mind that the events leading to the development of the plan were characterized by polarization in the Bolinao community because of the cement plant controversy. Shortly after this was resolved, another major issue surfaced in the second half of 1996. This was caused by the proliferation of milkfish pens along the main channel between Santiago Island and the mainland of Bolinao, most of which were owned by elected leaders of the town. The fishpen controversy subsumed issues on deteriorating water quality and access to traditional fishing grounds and navigation routes in the channel by subsistence fishers.

In both controversies, the coastal development planning exercise provided the most effective venue for consensus building in articulating a development vision as well as formulating action plans to achieve it. Although there were gradients of involvement, commitment and active participation among sectors within the Committee, the collective sense of ownership of the plan remained strong. The Municipal Council in a meeting held on 13 December 1998 (shortly before its approval of the CDP), in fact acknowledged that the whole consultative and participatory process used in the CDP should be iterated and incorporated in the formulation and passage of municipal legislation.

The timing of the planning exercise could not have been anymore opportune. On 17 October 1997, President Ramos issued Executive Order No. 450 (Series 1997) requiring all municipalities bordering Lingayen Gulf to dismantle all illegal fishpens and fishcages and other structures that limited access to traditional fishing grounds, and which contributed to pollution and hampered navigation. It also required all 800 coastal municipalities of the country to formulate their respective comprehensive development plans which will form the bases for the passage of fishery ordinances. When the executive order was released, the coastal development plan of Bolinao was about to be submitted by the Multi-Sectoral Committee.

As a result, the towns around Lingayen Gulf have expressed their desire to formulate their coastal development plans, and that perhaps, the people of Bolinao can provide the experience to do so. Key government agencies such as the Lingayen Gulf Coastal Area Management Commission (LGCAMC), and the National Economic Development Authority (NEDA - Region I), among others, had requested copies of the Bolinao plan for reference.

On 19-20 November 1997, the LGCAMC conducted a planning workshop on CDP with municipal officials from the coastal towns of the Lingayen Gulf, in order to facilitate the implementation of EO 450. The Bolinao Plan was presented and the member municipalities were encouraged by the LGCAMC and the NEDA to use the plan as a model. Other government and non-government organizations working in coastal areas around the country and in other sites in Southeast Asia have requested copies of the Bolinao CDP as reference in their planning exercises.

THE LESSONS LEARNED

The Bolinao experience in participatory coastal development planning underscores key strategies in institutionalizing sustainable collective management practices from the grassroots through the hierarchy of governance (local, regional and national).

The first lesson is that knowledge empowerment of community sectors through a vigorous public

environmental education is a fundamental element in orienting a community towards any collective form of action. Prevailing controversies (e.g. cement plant, fish pens, etc.) that divide sectors can provide potent venues for information campaigns but project activities must be conducted outside of partisan politics but well within a transparent CRM framework.

Second, direct resource users (subsistence fishers, fish vendors, etc.) must be mobilized, oriented and empowered through knowledge and skills to participate in a collective process. In the case of the CB-CRM program, such mobilization led to the formation of people's organizations. PO formation, however, may be just one of the many forms to mobilize resource users. This strategy does, however, specifically strengthened the position of marginalized fishers, who may not have any means (or venue) to meaningfully participate in a collective endeavor. It must be noted that the collective efforts of the POs in Bolinao in integrating their zonation plans for marine protected areas was a major turning point in the development of the coastal development plan. It not only crystallized what grassroots initiative could achieve when focused action was taken. More importantly, it spurred the local leaders to be involved in an exercise that had the potential to provide the much-needed blueprint for the town's development.

Third, the active involvement of the executive and legislative branches of the local government is critical in the overall institutionalization of a CRM planning process. That local leaders develop a sense of ownership as well as accountability in formulating and implementing a development plan, will probably indicate the degree of success in implementing such. At the moment, the wide acceptance of the Bolinao CDP by the executive (Municipal Development Council) and legislative (Municipal Council) bodies was a result of the fact that representatives of these groups were members of the Multi-Sectoral Committee that drafted the CDP. By doing, these representatives and their colleagues learned that there remained no substitute for actual consultation and sectoral representation in developing consensus for collective action. This, by far, was the most fundamental legacy of the CDP to Bolinao, and to those who would wish to replicate the exercise.

Fourth, a developmental research project such as the CB-CRM Project, could play a catalytic role in empowering key community sectors to take collective action for which they can be accountable to society-at large. As the major source of information and expertise, an external facilitator must never impose the 'right' choices. Rather, it must prepare the community sectors to choose the CRM-oriented options. The CB-CRM Project was successful in treading this delicate balance during the cement plant controversy and that of the ongoing fishpen issue. It has maintained a non-partisan yet strong environmental advocacy, which community members have learned to appreciate, even during very divisive times. This role can be taken on by any group that will be willing to provide knowledge and skills. Often, academic institutions are best suited to take on such function because of their mandate to teach, conduct research and provide extension services.

The potential to replicate the Bolinao experience is extremely high. In the Philippines, the Local Government Code provides the legal context for municipalities to define their development blueprints. In other countries such as those in Southeast Asia, there is a growing realization that the participation of communities and those of non-governmental groups as partners of government in taking collective action to address environmental concerns, is crucial. In both contexts, participatory development planning could provide the most potent venue for resolving conflicts and building a consensus, upon which an action plan may be formulated.

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