

Community Empowerment as Experienced in Barangay Guinaban, Ocampo in Camarines Sur and the Municipality of Loboc in Bohol

Introduction

Community empowerment is a key target outcome of the Department of Social Welfare and Development's National Community Driven Development Program (DSWD NCDDP). To achieve this, the program underscores the importance of community participation in the identification, implementation, and evaluation of development assistance to the community. It supposes that with participation embedded in the governance processes, the community becomes more aware of their needs, their capacities, and the resources within their reach and control, including those made to be within their reach and control, to address their own problems. Several iterations and the practice becomes normalized and internalized by the community, further empowering them to take control of their own development and improving the quality of community engagement.

The communities of Guinaban in Ocampo, Camarines Sur and Loboc in Bohol have experienced empowerment differently – in the dimensions of their lives, in relation to other external actors, in terms of improvements in personal capacities, and in signaling changes in power structures.

This paper describes these experiences based on accounts of community people interviewed during field visits made in July and August 2016.

Framework of Analysis

Participation and empowerment are concepts that are central to the community-driven development approach of DSWD's program. Participation is a key element for the empowerment of marginalized groups (ADB) and also an outcome indicative of the degree of empowerment that is reached by a certain group (ODI). Participation and empowerment are mutually reinforcing and together define the quality of engagement that a community is able to undertake by itself and vis-à-vis surrounding forces.

“The concept of empowerment has been viewed in its different dimensions, including initial endowments, opportunities, freedom of choice, and the capacity of individuals and groups to make effective choices and convert them into desired outcomes.” (ADB)

A people's empowerment can be manifested in their economic, social, political and cultural lives. Access to resources improve people's economic wellbeing, thus economic empowerment. When people are able to act on and define for themselves issues that are important to them, they become empowered as humans or as a community (social).

When they are able to analyse, organize and mobilize themselves to address their own problems, they are politically empowered. When they can redefine rules and norms and recreate symbolic practices, then they are culturally empowered. (ODI) These different dimensions of people's empowerment certainly interface and overlap. As a descriptive guide, it is useful lens to appreciate how empowerment is experienced by people in the different dimensions of their lives given various development interventions.

Empowerment works through agencies and structures. Agency refers to the capacity of individuals/ groups to take action independently. Structures refer to formal and informal rules and social forces (social class, religion, gender, ethnicity, etc.) that determine how people act. (ODI) When communities are empowered, individual capacities are improved. By the community's overt actions and expressions of these improved capacities, structures are slowly influenced and transformed creating more space for the further empowerment of certain groups/ peoples.

There is also the relational aspect of empowerment, that is, how individuals or groups experience power vis-à-vis other individuals and groups. Individuals discover "the power from within," when they are able to develop self-consciousness about their situation leading them to take action, or develop "the power to." When individuals are able to come together to take collective action, they develop the "power with" other similarly positioned individuals. Finally, when they are able to influence and move external forces towards a desired outcome, they develop a "power over" said external forces (e.g. other people, institutions, etc.). (Norway)

In development initiatives that seek to empower communities, participation is a necessary component. Participation challenges the usual top-down approach to decision-making, which stifles community growth and empowerment. Participation is generated either "organically" or "induced" by external actors like donors, government institutions, non-government organizations, etc. Organic participation is collective action naturally instigated by community members who have developed collective consciousness about a specific issue. Induced participation is one that is incentivized by an external actor through an intervention and for a specific purpose.

Participatory approaches to development initiatives use various arguments to support the action. There is the instrumental value argument for community participation that suggests participation improves a project's effectiveness and outcomes through people's feedback. Community participation in the project design likely produces relevant projects. And finally, people who are invested through participation in a project develop "ownership" of the initiative and therefore will likely sustain the initiative. Ownership of this kind increases the breadth of commitment to the project by the community, beyond its project life and financial support provided by external actors.

The equity and empowerment value argument for community participation in development initiatives looks more at the improvements in the individual and community capacities that allow them to take collective action on their own problems.

Ownership that is developed through this approach is to mean control of the project is ceded to the community and key decisions about the direction of the development initiative are upon the community.

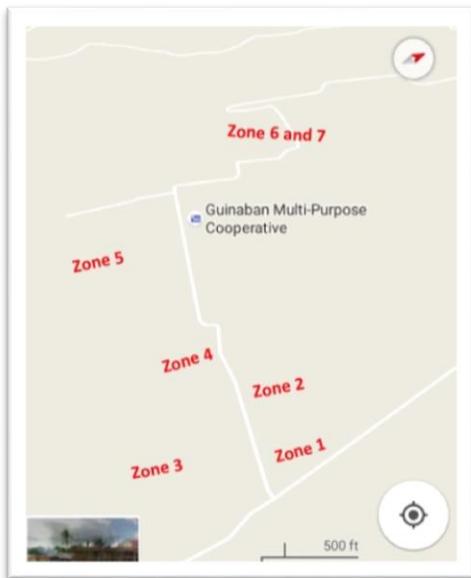
These different understandings of participation and empowerment will be the lens through which the KC experience of Barangay Guinaban, Ocampo in Camarines Sur and the Municipality of Loboc in Bohol will be appreciated, summarized as follows:

Dimension of empowerment
Empowerment through agency and/or structure
Relational aspect of empowerment
Organic and induced participation
Ownership

CASE STUDIES

KC RECONFIGURES POWER IN GUINABAN, BRIDGES ACCESS TO OTHER RESOURCES, AND OPENS UP PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Small, Remote and Ignored. Barangay Guinaban is a small community of 1,352 residents¹ located at the foot of Mount Isarog. It is 4.5km away from the town center of Ocampo and is considerably remote². Guinaban is divided into seven (7) zones or 'puroks,' with the barangay hall located at zone 4. Zones 1 and 2 are at the southern border of the barangay, closest to Barangay Salvacion, while Zones 6, and 7 are at the northernmost section of the barangay and the farthest to reach.



Ocampo is a 3rd class municipality, comprised of 25 barangays. As a 3rd class municipality, it has an average annual income of P35-45 million. Its barangays receive a total internal revenue allotment of P35.3 million, and from which Guinaban gets a share of P1.25 million.³

The people of Guinaban are mostly engaged in upland farming, mainly of sugarcane. Other agricultural produce include coconut, rice, vegetables, and abaca. These limited economic activities have rendered the people of Guinaban "poor." Moreso, as more than half of the total households in Guinaban (52% and 63%) had no access to electricity and clean water, respectively. Transportation was also a challenge, with expensive fares and unpaved roads.

KC Shines Light on Guinaban. As a small community in a poor town, Guinaban is used to being ignored. It has not received "major" development assistance that would have created an impact on improving the lives of its people. It was mainly dependent on its IRA share from the national government to undertake small development initiatives, like short pathways.

In 2012, Guinaban was chosen to be assisted by the Kalahi-CIDSS (KC) program of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), with support from

¹ Based on May 2010 census data. According to the barangay profile document prepared by the community, it has 1,419 residents.

² The municipality officers, including the mayor, have repeatedly referred to Guinaban as remote and distant.

³ The internal revenue allotment (IRA) is a fund transfer from the national government coffers to local government units. (CY 2014 Internal Revenue Allotment for Barangays: Province of Camarines Sur)

the Millenium Challenge Corporation (MCC). It was one of 15 barangays in Ocampo that undertook a community driven development (CDD) approach to address barangay concerns. This approach has allowed community members to be deeply engaged in decision-making – from the identification of top community problems to be prioritized and addressed, to the members of working committees, to the community volunteers who will be mobilized, and even to the resolution of grievances encountered along the way. It veers away from the formal structure and process of delegated representation and decision-making done by barangay-elected and appointed leaders. CDD engages directly with community members/ stakeholders in governance decisions, specifically in the implementation of community-identified projects. Community decision-making is facilitated through the Community Empowerment Activity Cycle (CEAC) of the KC.

During the first cycle of KC-MCC, the people of Guinaban decisively pushed and lobbied for an engineering challenge infrastructure project, a level 2 water system. A level 2 water system is a piped water system with a communal water point (e.g. spring water) serving several households within a distance.

As a technical challenge, even the KC engineer expressed doubts on the approval and success of the project. Determined, the people of Guinaban insisted on pursuing the project for the reason that they consider it most urgent but also because they recognize that it was the only opportunity for them to get the water system project funded. The municipality, with its limited funds, hasn't been able to respond to the barangay's expressed need for a water system in the past.

Bridging Access to Development.

Empowerment came in spurts for the people of Guinaban. First, they stood up to the challenge of building their own water system. They were not stopped by the technical difficulties of designing the system and securing permits from Manila and Naga City. Project preparation took them one year, from the usual six months. The punong barangay had to travel to Manila twice to secure a conditional water permit, only having with him limited resources from the barangay to navigate through the bureaucratic loops.

Table 1. Project Profile

Sub-project Title	Construction of Water System (Level II)
Location or Site Implementation	Zone 5, Barangay Guinaban, Ocampo, Camarines Sur
Proponent	Contact Person: Rodolfo Barbosa Zone 4 Barangay Guinaban, Ocampo, Camarines Sur
Project Beneficiaries	Total: 188 households Direct: 156 households Indirect: 32 households
Project Cost	Total: P 1,582,000 KC: KKB: P 1,107,400 MLGU Counterpart: P 316,400 BLGU/Community: P 158,200

The community “corrected” the design of the project to be more appropriate to the



Figure 2. BSPMO Head washes hand in water intake main valve.

reality of drought. The initial design of the water system did not have control valves, which the project foreman found necessary to equitably regulate water distribution to the different sections of the barangay during times of limited water supply. The community insisted on adding the valves, at the cost of the barangay, which had timely use for it during the El Niño bout this year when the barangay had to do rotational water service. As a gravity-fed system, water access was more limited to lower parts (zones 1 and 2) of the barangay without regulation. Valve 1 services zones 3, 4, and 5; valve 2 services zones 2 and 4; and valve 3 services zones 1 and 2. Zones 6 and 7 are closest to the water source and weren't as challenged.

The community, with resources from the barangay and the municipality, also expanded the reach of the water system from an initial 19 communal faucets (1 tap stand:10 households) to 31 (1:6). Further, under the independent management of the Guinaban Water Association (Guiwasa), the water system has been upgraded to level 3, directly servicing 85 households and a few more applicants on the way.

When before it was ordinarily disregarded, the Guinaban community has earned the spotlight because of its successful implementation of the water system despite the peoples' little technical know-how. This rare attention opened other doors for the community to access other development assistance. The community was also able to put to use their KC-learned skills in lobbying, networking, and public speaking to seek additional support from other groups.

Project	Fund Amount	Source of Funds	Implement'n Period/ Status
School building project	P1.5M	NCC-Kalahi (1 st cycle)	Completed
Barangay hall	P3M	Cong. Leni Robredo	Completed
Farm-to-market road	P2.5M	Cong. Leni Robredo	Completed
Drainage canal	P1.9M	NCDDP (1 st cycle)	On-going
Water system / Salintubig	P4M	MLGU/ BUB	On-going
Pathway with footbridge	P1.5M	NCDDP (2 nd cycle)	For implementation (2016)
Electrification	P5M	NEA	For implementation
Daycare center	P1M	MLGU/ BUB	For implementation (2017)
Health and Sanitation	n/a	NCDDP (3 rd cycle)	Proposed
Extension of Farm-to-market road (1km)	n/a	DPWH	Proposed

Women's Engagement. The participation of women in KC is a requirement of the project, with at least 30% of the participants including labor women. In Guinaban, women participation needn't be imposed or strictly monitored as many men also encouraged the women to volunteer, albeit for the wrong reasons. Women were mostly stay-at-home wives who didn't have anything "productive" to do and are therefore thought to have a lot of time to spare compared to the men farmers⁴.

In the 25 community volunteers of Guinaban for the water system sub-project, there were only two men. The male volunteers, on the other hand, were engaged for a different reason. They felt good about doing the paper work, "it felt like going to office."

Table 2. Accessed Development Projects

⁴ This view was expressed during the focus group discussion, to which most of the women volunteers also agreed.

A community volunteer was able to transition into the formal government arena as barangay kagawad. She attributes her victory in the 2016 elections to her visibility in the implementation of the KC project. She served as head of the Barangay Sub-Project Management Office.

The other women volunteers share that their being out there in the public space has changed their lives tremendously. A timid community volunteer testifies that before the KC project, she would just keep to herself. Now, she echoes to community members new knowledge she would learn from the seminars/ trainings provided by the KC project. Another volunteer says that she is able to put to productive use her idle time, especially with her husband away and with only a teenager to take care of. Other women share that they are now more confident about themselves and their public engagements.



Figure 3. Women volunteers talk about how participation has changed their lives.

The punong barangay noted that barangay assemblies have become more lively because of the discussions among community members. Transparency of project implementation has made it possible for the people to engage intelligently in the discussions about the status of the project, and become more involved.

Redefining Leadership.

Rodolfo Barbosa began his term as punong barangay of Guinaban in 2010. Before that, he served as kagawad beginning 2002.

Barbosa's leadership style, he notes, has been influenced greatly by the KC approach, having been guided by the KC way for 4 years (2012 to present). Guinaban has been a KC community for 3 cycles, and as such, the community driven processes have become routinary and habitual. He has fully adopted the planning and prioritization process of the KC, and revisits and updates the priority concerns of the community as may be necessary. For non-KC development initiatives, Barbosa convenes the barangay and informs/ engages the people in project monitoring.

He notes how transparency can be a 'big' mobilizer of people's engagement. He shares the challenge of getting people to be more involved in contractor-implemented projects that don't make available the program of works for scrutiny by the people. He finds that room for people's

Figure 4. Punong Barangay Rodolfo Barbosa explains the importance of project information for people to engage meaningfully.



engagement is limited when project information is not available.

The people of Guinaban already know how to measure gravel, sand, and other volume materials delivered to their barangay. They are also familiar with the cost of construction materials as they were involved in procurement and canvassing of proposals from various suppliers. These skills learned from KC could be put to good use for the monitoring of non-KC development initiatives in Guinaban, Barbosa says.

An Independent Community-Led Water Management Body. In the 1990s, a level 1 water system was constructed in Barangay Guinaban by an international non-government organization, Plan International. After constructing the water system, management and maintenance of the water system was turned over to the barangay.

Over time and without proper maintenance, the water system deteriorated with 40% of its pipes damaged beyond repair.

The level 2 water system constructed through the KC community driven approach was able to engage community members in the procurement of construction materials, construction works, monitoring, maintenance, and water system management. These engagements have not only developed greater ownership of the project, it also honed people's skills for the proper management of operations and maintenance of the water system.

An independent community organization, the Guinaban Water Association (Guiwasa), was established to manage the water system. It collects membership and user fees from the community people for operations and maintenance. With additional support from the barangay, it

upgraded the system to level 3 where water service is directly provided to homes (85) through hoses and is meter-regulated.

Guiwasa has among its members those that have the technical capacity to undertake maintenance and operations, as follows:

Table 3. Guiwasa skilled volunteers

Skilled Work	No. of Volunteers
Plumber	2
Water guard/ tender	1
Collector	1
Meter reader	1

CHALLENGES AHEAD

Further Democratizing Power.

Democratization of power has already begun in Guinaban, moving power from the formal decision-making structures (the barangay) to the community people, from the few to the many, from the experts to the ordinary. The KC process is instrumental in the redistribution of power this way.

There are other power inequalities among community members that may be geographically determined, depending on the issue at hand.

Water as a resource, for instance, creates power inequalities. Lack of access to water was very much felt by lower zones (zones 1-5) because they are far from the water source. Zones 6 and 7 are much closer to the water source and have access to water even without the water system sub-project.

Meanwhile, the barangay hall is located in zone 4 and is most accessible to the middle zones (2-5). Proximity to the barangay hall is tantamount to access to decision-making.

As the water system project was being chosen, it is interesting to note that the

poverty situation highlighted in the community report to justify the need for the proposed initiative was that of zones 6 and 7. While true, the extreme poverty faced by residents from zones 6 and 7 has nothing to do with water access. It can be further noted that the water system project did not service zones 6 and 7. It was only in the expansion that these zones were considered for service through provision of hoses to be directly connected to the water source (not passing through the constructed water intake tank).

There is also limited engagement from residents in zones 6 and 7 in the KC process. Of the 25 community volunteers engaged in the water system project, there was one from zone 7 but wasn't able to sustain engagement throughout the project. During barangay assemblies, residents from zones 6 and 7 would show up but wouldn't stay until the end because of the far walk back home.

In empowering communities, KC may want to investigate other dimensions of power relations defined not just by formal and informal structures/systems. KC's entry in communities is critical in changing decision-making practices. It may want to extend challenging power relations dictated by factors other than formal-informal arrangements.

Management for Sustainability.

Management is not always cut-and-dry for small communities where everyone knows everybody and is like family. This is the struggle of the Guiwasa as it deals with delinquent members.

Guiwasa president, Rolando Valencia, admits the difficulty of imposing penalties on friends and families. The management tends to give second, third, fourth chances to the detriment of collections, affecting the organization's operations and maintenance.

In a most recent organizational meeting in June, Guiwasa officers informed members on being stricter with their rules and regulations. They explained that by going soft on non-paying users, other good-standing members followed suit in the hope that they can also get away with non-payment.

Guiwasa recognizes that if push comes to shove, it can rely on the barangay to mediate and settle differences between the organization and its members.

PEOPLES' ORGANIZING IN LOBOC: QUICK AND FOR THE LONG HAUL



Loboc is a known tourist destination in the province of Bohol, offering lunch cruises along the famous Loboc River, a personal experience with tarsiers and world-class serenade from the Loboc Children's Choir. Even with so much potential for its tourism industry, Loboc falls in the fourth income class category of municipalities.

Most recently, Loboc encountered two major calamities that affected its main industry. In 2013, a 7.2 magnitude earthquake hit Bohol and damaged parts of the Loboc church and the lunch cruise docking port. The following year, Loboc was flooded by rainwaters brought by tropical storm Seniang. The flood damaged many lunch cruise boats.

These events have led the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) to provide assistance to the municipality and

all its barangays for their immediate recovery through its National Community Driven Development Program (NCDDP).

Disaster-hit areas were among the priority that went through accelerated disaster response operations procedures under the NCDDP. Unlike the regular cycle, the accelerated process cuts short the community empowerment activity cycle procedures (CEAC), waived local counterpart conditions, permitted emergency procurement, and increased the grant amounts given to the communities.

Loboc has 28 barangays, all of which were put under the accelerated NCDDP in 2015. In just one year, what was notably observed is the fast-paced organizing done by the community people. As of current, all except two barangays have established women's organizations in less than a year. Some organizations were reactivated.

Table 1. List of Reactivated women's organizations

Barangay	Women's Association
Camayaan	Panaghugpong ug Pakigbisog sa mga Kababaenhan sa Camayaan
Buenavista	Buenavista Loboc Women's Association
Cambance	Cambance Women's Association
Agape	Agape Women's Association
Bonbon Upper	Bonbon Upper Hugpong sa mga Kababayehan (BUHAY)
Bonbon Lower	Bonbon Lower Women's Association
Ugpong	Tingog sa mga Kababayan-an nga Ugponganon
Gotozon	Gotozon Women's Association
Calunasan Sur	Calunasan Sur Women's Association
Poblacion Ondol	Poblacion Ondol Women's Association
Bugho	Bugho Women's Association
Candabong	Candabong Women's Association
Quinoguitan	Quinoguitan Women's Association
Bahian	Bahian Women's Association
Calunasan Norte	Calunasan Norte Women's Heart Association
Canlasid	Canlasid Women's Association

Normally, community-based organizations (CBOs) were formed after the

implementation of the identified sub-projects, which is at the 3rd stage of the KC CEAC. CBOs are intended to sustain operations and maintenance of the sub-project. Interestingly, CBOs in Loboc were established/ reactivated at the first quarter of the year in 2015. This was just at the first stage of the accelerated CEAC or during which sub-projects were identified and implementation was just about to begin.

The quick organizing of CBOs caught the attention of many external observers, including the regional and national managers of KC-DSWD who have the vantage point of regional and national experiences.

A cultural trait

The characteristics of Boholanos as 'organized' people has come up as an explanation, an observed standout trait according to regional officers of KC. This is noticed vis-à-vis other provincial counterparts.

A woman leader explains it is almost always expected that after trainings participants would organize themselves to continue their correspondence with one another. She mentions with the many trainings she's attended, she has become affiliated with many organizations. Among those that she remembers are an organic farmers' group and the Bohol biogas advocates group. She is also president of the barangay women's association and serves as barangay kagawad.

As of March 2016, Loboc has 31 registered worker's association under DOLE.



Engr. Emerita Calacat Acuzena of Bahian Women's Association describes the different ways for organized groups to sustain livelihood projects.

Based on data from the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) as of December 2014, Bohol has 2094 organizations. Many people's organizations (PO) register with DOLE to access livelihood assistance. There are other people's organizations that are registered with other government agencies such as the Cooperatives Development Authority, and the Department of Agriculture among others.

With a total population of 1.26 million, Bohol has a PO-to-population ratio of 1:599 based on DOLE data. In Loboc, there are 23 workers' associations registered at DOLE. Taken together with the 26 women's organizations established and/or reactivated in 2015 with KC assistance, Loboc's PO-to-population ratio is 1:333. This is a conservative estimate as other organizations are also registered with other government agencies.

Table 2. List of registered organizations in Loboc per barangay, barangay population and date of registration

Barangay	Population ⁵	Registered Organizations	Date Registered
Bagumbayan	684	Bagumbayan Rural Waterworks and Sanitation Association (BARUWASA)	22/12/10
		Kapunungan sa Mag-uuma ug Lubi sa Bagumbayan	05/12/89
Bahian	519	Kapunungan sa Mag-uuma ug Lubi sa Bahian	05/12/89
		QUIBABON Organic Farmers Association	23/07/14
		Bahian Women's Association	17/11/14
Bonbon Lower	218	Bonbon Lower Women's Association	16/09/15
Bugho	572	Bugho Small Coconut Farmers Organization	07/01/92
Cabadiangan	276	Cabadiangan Small Coconut Farmers Organization	07/01/92
Calunasan Norte	631	Kapunungan sa mga Mag-uuma ug Lubi sa Calunasan Norte	05/12/89
		Women's Heart of Calunasan Norte Association (WHCNA)	12/02/16
Calunasan Sur	406	Calunasan Sur Hugpong sa mga Mag-uuma	10/04/14
Camayaan	1,039	Panahugpong ug Pakigbisog sa mga Kakainhan sa Camayaan	13/05/15
		Camayaan Basak Dako Farmers Association (CBDFA)	16/09/15
Candabong	736	Candabong Women's Association	09/11/15
Candasag	254	Candasag Small Coconut Farmers Organization	07/01/92
Canlasid	250	Canlasid Hugpong sa mga Kababayehan (CAHUSKA)	16/09/15
Gotozon	771	Kapunungan sa Mag-uuma ug Lubi sa Gotozon	05/12/89
		Gotozon Balsa Performers Association	09/10/12
		Gotozon Women's Association	07/05/14
		Gotozon Rural Improvement Association	21/05/14
		Gotozon Water User's Association	17/11/14
Jimili-an	1,211	Jimili-an Women's Association	31/10/06
Oy	1,387	Barangay Oy OFW's and Dependents Association (BOODA)	19/07/06
Poblacion Ondol	802	Loboc River Cruise Workers Association	24/01/12
Poblacion Sawang	671	Loboc Association of Barangay Livestock Aide	24/07/13
Quinoguitan	488	Kapunungan sa Mag-uuma ug Lubi Sa Quinoguitan	05/12/89
		Quinoguitan Women's Association	20/11/15
Taytay	259	Taytay, Loboc Women's Association	25/06/12
Ugpong	332	Panaghuisa Sa Ugponganong Kalambuan (PUK)	31/01/06
Villaflor	735	Villaflor Women's Association (VWA)	21/03/16
Loboc, Bohol	16,312	Loboc Seed Beneficiaries Association	28/08/14

⁵ PSA data as of May 2010 <

<http://www.nscb.gov.ph/activestats/psgc/municipality.asp?muncode=071229000®code=12&provcode=07>>

Organizing for the long haul

The communities that organized themselves with assistance from the KC were motivated by the long haul goal to escape poverty and achieve family progress. KC's assistance in people's organizing is intended to sustain operations and maintenance of identified sub-projects. The community people were not limited by this view however and saw the value of organizing beyond KC sub-project sustainability.

Barangay Camayaan's Pantawid women leaders formally organized themselves into the Panaghugpong ug Pakigbisog sa mga Kababaenhan sa Camayaan in 2015. The woman president explains that they decided to organize themselves during their third year (2012) into the Pantawid cash assistance program. The women were pondering that their assistance from Pantawid would end anytime soon and that they needed to find ways to help themselves more sustainably. They were motivated by their desire to access livelihood assistance projects or programs. With assistance from the KC area coordinator, they conceptualized and proposed a livelihood project that they submitted for support by DSWD's Sustainable Livelihood Program and DOLE.

According to a woman leader, most organizations seek for livelihood assistance because it is easiest to get funding support from. Any additional income to better the financial situation of families is a welcome opportunity.

The federated women's association was reactivated with the mayor's directive and with assistance from KC. The local chief executive of Loboc is a first time lady mayor who has witnessed the limited involvement of women in the town's development. Under her leadership, the mayor envisions



Marife Araneta Tumanda, President of Panaghugpong ug Pakigbisog sa mga Kababaenhan sa Camayaan, and her youngest child, talks about her dreams of escaping poverty and graduating from the Pantawid Pamilya program.

greater participation from the women groups in shaping the development of Loboc. She plans to support this with the LGU's gender development fund to assist the startup of organizations.

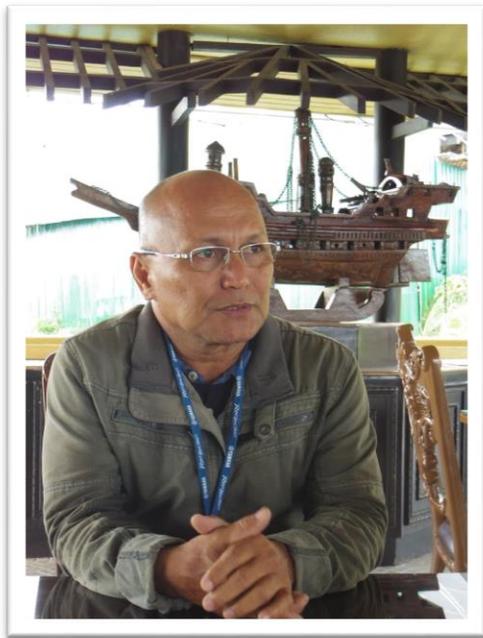
Organizing made easy

Loboc is a small town in the island province of Bohol in the Visayas. This makes access to government offices quite a challenge for the people of Loboc. This is particularly true for people's organizations that seek to be registered with government offices.

For organizations who want/need to register, the choice between the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) and the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) is critical. In terms of proximity, DOLE is more accessible than SEC, which is located in Cebu City or about 2-3 hours away from Bohol by boat. DOLE

registration, on the other hand, can be secured from Tagbilaran City in Bohol.

The entry of KC in Loboc came at a critical time, after the town was hit by two natural disasters. The town's key infrastructures were damaged and the people lost their livelihoods. KC offered the appropriate assistance to a community that had to start anew. The program offered assistance in rebuilding key infrastructures with the engagement of the entire community. Further, it supported the organizing of community members. This opened up additional opportunities for newly organized groups to access livelihood assistance.



Earl Matas sharing his experience as KC implementor to KC facilitator.

The KC area coordinator, Earl Matas, played an important role in quickly organizing the communities in Loboc. Earl Matas is a pioneer of the KC approach. He was mayor of a pilot KC site, Enrique Villanueva municipality in Siquijor, in 2003. As such, Earl didn't need any convincing about the effectiveness of the approach. He literally

hit the ground running when he took on the role of area coordinator and quickly assisted the communities to get organized.

While waiting for the KC sub-project funds to be downloaded, Earl and the community didn't waste time and began processing the papers for registration. In just a few months, the people's organizations were already formally registered with DOLE. Most organizations had the difficulty of putting together the papers needed (description, by-laws, vision-mission-goals) and Earl was just happy to fill in for that. He made sure that the organizations are functional, checking on whether meetings were convened as evidenced by the minutes. He also helped write up project proposals submitted to DOLE and NCDDP. These types of assistance were beyond his work responsibilities as area coordinator but he kept on anyway.

Having been active in local politics in Enrique Villanueva for 21 years, Earl knew how to navigate local governance systems to support people's organizations. Earl's knowledge was particularly useful to the new mayor of Loboc when she sought his advice about reactivating the federated women's association. Earl provided advise about local fund sources that can be used to support the women's organizations. He also emphasized the role of the local government unit to call for organizations to register with the municipality as a way of encouraging other people's organizations.

Challenge Ahead: Too early to tell

Organizing is a key feature for a people to realize their own empowerment vis-à-vis establishments around them, especially in terms of accessing resources, or standing up for/against government policies and programs, or simply in terms of working together to achieve a common objective. Organizing of communities in Loboc through

KC assistance did happen in a short period of time and while this indicates the readiness of organizations to undertake activities that can lead to people empowerment, it is still too early to tell.

There are indications that some organizations are ready to be launched, as in the case of the Camayaan women's group. Others are ready to take their engagement to the next level, as in the case of the Bahian people's organizations.

Currently, what is articulated as needed is a coordinated approach for undertaking their economic activities. Then there are groups that still need to be hand-held and mentored as in the case of the Federated Women's Association, with its weak leadership.

Nonetheless, this is a good quick start that has a good chance of immediate take off for the sustainable development of Loboc, through people's participation.

Analysis and Conclusion

The DSWD's National Community Driven Development Program (NCDDP) has created space for the community people to have a greater stake in development initiatives through their engagement in key decision-making stages. More than their engagement with development initiatives introduced, the communities have learned a new way of engaging with "development" that is more collaborative and democratic, multiplying the empowerment dividends among community members.

Barangay Guinaban folks experienced empowerment in various ways. There were social lives that were changed by the intervention. The women of Guinaban, in particular, have become more present in public spaces, where it once was not their "business." This has allowed for the greater amplification of women's voices on public issues and concerns. Sustained practice of women's engagement in the public space could lead to more gender-sensitive decisions of the community.

As a community, Guinaban folks learned to mobilize themselves to push and work for their determined development need despite technical advise of discouragement. The community prevailed over the technical project staff, not just during the initial choice of a development initiative to pursue but even in the technical design of the project. As such, the kind of ownership that people have committed in their engagement is not just limited to the objectives of the NCDDP or the supported project. The community people have taken control of decisions beyond NCDDP's support and towards their development goal of greater access to clean water.

Economic empowerment was also realized with more development initiatives coming the way of Guinaban. Guinaban's story reached other agencies that also brokered development and opened doors for other development projects, improving the lives of the Guinaban people.

Empowerment was mostly demonstrated in the individual capacities of key persons in the community. The punong barangay, for instance, is articulate and able to easily mobilize the community and even leadership to support the community development projects. The Guiwasa president and women volunteers were also instrumental in the organizing of the different community people for specific roles. It is noticeable how information was centrally important in moving the key personalities to be agents of change.

The NCDDP approach is a direct challenge to the formal power structure of decision-making. The key is for the community people to get used to this practice and sustain it beyond program presence. In Guinaban, leaders find functional value in sharing decision-making powers with the people, which is an advantage to sustaining the practice. However, it is also important for the people to find functional value in their engagement. Information is a key mobilizer that could do or undo people's engagement.

If not shared, people are unable to meaningfully engage. There are power relations that remain unchanged, however, such as the disadvantaged position of community people located in the farthest section of the barangay.

People's organizing in Loboc is organically driven by the desire of the people for economic empowerment. The community people recognized that they can use the NCDDP's presence in the community to serve their own purpose of getting organized. While also offered as a technical assistance by the community facilitator, organizing was a primary concern of the people who wanted to access funds for livelihood projects.

Individual capacities have not been improved however as the technical work for organizing has been delegated to the community facilitator. Without specific participation mechanisms in place yet in relation to a development initiative under NCDDP, ownership of the engagement means for the community people taking charge in steering the organization to the direction desired by the community members.

The purposive organizing of women in Loboc has potential of changing patriarchal power structures in society. This is particularly interesting to observe with a lady mayor also leading the development agenda of the municipality. It is early to tell, however, what spaces will be opened up for women in development and what mechanisms will be put in place for a more gendered development.

Empowerment is experienced differently in Barangay Guinaban and Loboc in ways more than one. NCDDP has created spaces for people to participate and engage with development initiatives. These engagements have led to improved capacities and lives of community people, signaling possible changes in power structures as well. Though these were observed during the field visits, empowerment is dynamic and can progress or revert depending on the interventions introduced.

It is important that DSWD take account of the gains made by these communities and the remaining challenges. New development initiatives that DSWD will introduce in these communities will likely affect the power relations within the community, either in terms of improving or weakening democratic empowerment.