STRATEGIC ISSUES FOR THE BAIS BAY BASIN DEVELOPMENT ACTION PROGRAM: LOOKING BACK AND TO THE FUTURE

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ABSTRACT. The Bais Bay Basin Development Action Program sought, during its first eighteen months, to strengthen local government and community capacities to manage natural resources. The program applied the "watershed" as a unifying planning concept. The implementation strategy, was based on specialized action teams or components, each employing different strategies for mobilizing community participation. The overall program strategy is both efficient and flexible. It has been difficult, however, to maintain program integration at the watershed-level. There has also been a tendency for individual components to over-specialize along disciplinary lines, weakening their ability to effectively address the inter-disciplinary problems faced by communities. Specific community mobilizing strategies varied considerably between and even within individual action components. Some were focused on mobilizing specific communities whereas others aimed to reach a wider population in the project area. Institutional collaborations with government and non-government agents have been used successfully and are seen as an important area of emphasis for the future to ensure local program sustainability and a broader overall impact.

The Bais Bay Basin Development Action Program (DAP) has sought to strengthen the natural resource management capabilities of local governments and communities in the Bais Bay Basin (see Abregana's article in this journal issue). As such, it has faced the difficult task of integrating environmental conservation with locally-based rural development. Experiences from the Philippines and elsewhere suggest that the strategies used to implement rural development projects may ultimately determine their success or failure (eg. Bonifacio, 1988; Cadelina, 1988; Chambers, 1983; Esman, 1991; Falconer, 1987; Korten, 1980, 1986; Korten and Siy, 1988). Our own preliminary experiences with the project lend considerable support to this suggestion. This paper examines some of the most visible and pressing strategic issues that have arisen during the first eighteen months of the Bais Bay Basin DAP experience.

Historical Overview and General Program Strategies

The Bais Bay Basin DAP is one element of a much larger CIDA-funded project, the Environment and Resource Management Project (ERMP), involving Dalhousie University in Canada and the University of the Philippines at Los Baños as the principal collaborating agencies. Specifically, a "Development Action Program" (DAP) component of ERMP involves the implementation of field projects at three different sites in the Philippines. The goal of each DAP is to apply action research methods to facilitate community-based resource management. "Community-based" is understood in this case to mean the strengthening of local capabilities and responsibilities in the management of natural resources.

It was within this broader context that the Bais Bay Basin was selected as a project site with Silliman University identified as the principal executing agent. The site includes two neighboring bays (North and South Bais Bay), the nearly 20,000 ha of uplands that surround these bays, and the various coastal and upland communities within the area. Although the bulk of the Basin lies within the jurisdiction of Bais City, approximately ten percent of the Basin on either side is within the neighboring municipalities of Manjuyod to the north and Tanjay to the south.

Following initial discussions among Silliman staff, a participatory agro-ecosystem workshop was held in August of 1991 in Bais City to identify the environment and development priorities of the Bais Bay Basin and thereby formulate a framework for project action. The workshop was attended by ERMP researchers and staff, and numerous government and non-government representatives. A number of priority issues were identified for the project area, including the need for background environmental and socio-economic data, upland reforestation and agricultural development, improved water supply, and mangrove reforestation.

With these priorities in mind, beginning in August of 1991 Silliman University developed and began implementation of an action plan with four basic components. The **marine component**, coordinated by staff of the Silliman Marine Laboratory, has involved mangrove reforestation and assessments of the fisheries and water quality in North and South Bais Bay. The **watershed component**, led by staff of the Silliman Biology Department, has promoted soil and water conservation technology in upland farming communities while reforesting upland creek and river banks with native tree species. The Silliman College of Agriculture heads the **agricultural component**, which has organized upland farmers as a basis for improving their livelihood. Finally, a **human resource component** has coordinated a comprehensive socio-economic survey of Bais City and a water system improvement project for the residents of Dewey Island in Bais. This group has also facilitated local networking and community mobilization while coordinating administration of the overall Bais Bay Basin Program.

Looking Back: The Challenge of Program Integration

Some of the most serious environmental problems in Bais were recognized at the outset as landscape or watershed-level problems. As an example, deforestation and soil erosion in the uplands were identified as the primary causes of downstream siltation and flooding and deteriorating water supplies. In its conceptual form, therefore, the Bais Bay Basin DAP was intended to be comprehensive and integrated: the watershed (or basin) concept was invoked as an comprehensive and integrating unit of analysis, the agro-ecosystem workshop was applied as a comprehensive and integrating planning mechanism, and a diverse staff from Silliman was enlisted to provide the comprehensive skills required to address the different problems.

The program has, in practice, made laudable efforts to simultaneously address diverse and complex issues. As such, the goal of comprehensiveness has been reasonably well met during the first 18 months. However, in striving for comprehensiveness, program integration has been compromised to a degree. This is because, with the complex and multi-faceted issues being addressed, it has made sense from the point of view of efficiency to adopt a component approach in which program responsibilites are sub-divided: a marine group addresses the marine issues, an agriculture group addresses agriculture issues, and so on.

We have, however, encountered two primary difficulties with this strategy. The first of these was expressed at the watershed (or basin) level. In short, sub-dividing program activities has had the unintended effect of sub-dividing the watershed, with one component active exclusively in one portion of the upper watershed, another active in a second portion of the upper watershed, and a third focused on the lower portion of the watershed. As a result, the watershed concept has over time lost much of its original relevance to the program.

This has been aggravated further by social and administrative boundaries that do not coincide with watershed boundaries. Watershed-scale issues are often not pressing concerns to individual communities. In addition, it has been difficult to enlist the participation of all three of the local governments that have jurisdictions over portions of the basin. This is because of differing political priorities and because the three local governments have different degrees of interest at stake: about three-quarters of the project area lies within the jurisdiction of one of the three local governments. Not surprisingly, this government (Bais City) is the most supportive of the three.

Overall, the program has been unable to sustain integration at the watershed level for lack of an effective, integrating mechanism. This finding is revealing, not only because it points to the possible need for a better integrating strategy, but also because it demonstrates just how difficult it can be in practice to apply the watershed concept within a broad strategy

promoting community-based resource management. Sincere efforts to establish watershed-level integration were applied in the planning stages. The failure of the concept in practice calls into question its practical relevance.

The second difficulty we have encountered with project integration has emerged at the local level and it has been, in important respects, an even more pressing problem than the first. In some cases, the multiple-component strategy has resulted in over-specialization with the result that individual study teams have sometimes lacked the skills and perspective needed to address local issues effectively. Individual program components tended to have a bias in favour of either a resources- or people-first development perspective, depending largely on the natural or social science leaning of the component staff. For example, the marine component, which is managed by a team of natural scientists, has lacked the human resource perspective and skills to facilitate effective community participation. Community-based resource management, whether in an upland farming community, lowland hacienda, or coastal fishing community, is necessarily an integrated, inter-disciplinary undertaking. It involves people and resources and thus benefits from the input of both social and natural science perspectives in its development.

While a multiple component strategy was probably necessary to a degree, with such an ambitious program and extensive target area, it would perhaps be more effective in the future to use inter-disciplinary component teams that include both social and natural science staff. For efficiency's sake, different component teams might, for example, be formulated along the lines of "coastal" community resource issues, on the one hand, and "upland" issues on the other. This would not necessarily resolve the watershed-wide integration problem, but it would likely strengthen community-level initiatives.

Looking Back: Community Participation and Mobilization

Using a multi-component strategy has also resulted in the application of a variety of approaches aimed at mobilizing community participation. The diversity of community mobilizing strategies provides for a degree of site and situation-specific flexibility. The program is addressing a wide variety of problems and an equally wide variety of social and environmental conditions. No set recipe is going to work for all of these. At the same time, however, it became clear that some approaches worked better than others under some circumstances and that each strategy demonstrated its own strengths and shortcomings.

In summary, the watershed component has contracted (paid) farmers to plant trees, and also held voluntary training sessions for persons interested in applying soil and water conservation on their farms. The agriculture component, in contrast, has applied a kind of learning process approach to community organizing to mobilize upland farmers. The marine component has relied on limited contractual participation to collect fisheries data. In

addition, they have collaborated with a local fisheries college (Central Visayas Polytechnic College or CVPC) and with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) to facilitate mangrove reforestation. The human resource component has facilitated the overall program through ongoing consultation and institutional collaboration with a number of key local government units and non-government organizations. At the same time, this component has initiated community organizing in three coastal communities to facilitate the water system project. One of the benefits this multi-component strategy has provided is the fruitful opportunity to learn from a diverse range of experiences.

The first general observation is that the breadth and diversity of the program has demanded a trade-off between local, community-level, and wider, watershed-wide, efforts to generate awareness and mobilize participation. (Communities and target user groups tend to be the focus of the former, while government and non-government organizations tend to be the most effective avenue for the latter. As an example of this tension, the watershed component worked in eight upland communities initially (the "shot-gun approach), but has since found it more effective to focus on two or three to achieve desired levels of impact.

It is not clear how much emphasis should be placed on specific communities instead of wider target populations, but it is clear there is a trade-off between quantity (number of persons) and quality (degree of mobilization). We have had to identify priority communities to provide them with the high level of support needed to strengthen their own capacities. We could not justify organizing communities for the sake of organizing people (which is a valid goal for many development projects). At the same time, however, we were able to magnify the impact of relatively little effort on larger populations by collaborating with key local government units and non-government organizations, like the Rotary Club of Bais City. These kinds of collaborations are critical, and are discussed in greater detail in the following section.

As a second point, it is well known that community participation is ultimately fostered by a positive and effective relationship between project field staff and target beneficiaries (Chambers, 1983; Falconer, 1987; Korten, 1980). In general, communities have been very receptive to project personnel where they have demonstrated a genuine sensitivity to the communities' interests and a willingness to examine the problems that the members of the community have identified as important to them. Whatever the specific strategy, to achieve this kind of positive working relationship, project staff have had to spend much time in the field directly interacting with target communities and collaborating organizations.

A third finding is that the practice of contracting participation, while useful for accomplishing set tasks, can hinder long-term participation. As an example, members of an upland farming community have questioned why they are not receiving payment for their participation in meetings and other project activities organized by the agricultural compo-

nent. This comes, in part, as a result of the watershed component strategy which paid selected persons in the same community 150 pesos per month to plant and care for trees. In addition, NGOs operating in nearby villages have also used contracting as a means to enlist farmer participation. Investigations of the watershed project revealed that some farmer cooperators who were contracted appeared resentful that their contracting fees were terminated at the end of the stated contracting period. This is in spite of the fact that the cooperators were aware from the outset that the payments were only intended for 8 months. These experiences demonstrate the questionable merit of contracting participation, particularly when the goal is to sustain participation beyond the contracting period.

Looking to the Future: Institutional Collaboration and Program Sustainability

Our experience with the Bais Bay Basin DAP has demonstrated clearly the benefit of having strong support from local government and non-government organizations. This support has ensured a rapid initial entry and relatively smooth execution of many different program activities. Long-term sustainability, however, will require not only the support of local organizations but their willingness and capability to assume principal responsibility for continued program implementation. ERMP can facilitate this by (1) building strategic linkages, (2) sharing relevant advice and information, and (3) strengthening the capacities of key local institutions.

The importance of linkaging can be illustrated with the following example. A farming community organization that was established by ERMP recently raised the issue of resolving land tenure ambiguity for their community. They requested that ERMP assist them to solve this problem by consulting the relevant government agencies. This example demonstrates the potential of a community organization to provide a mechanism for addressing locally-felt needs through collective action. But it also points out the need to take the process of community organizing a step further: to develop the linkages between the community organization and the government and non-government organizations that can service it.

Most ERMP activities in the uplands thus far have highlighted the importance of establishing viable, community-based organizations. ERMP has served as the surrogate line agency, providing resources and technical services. Ultimately, however, the sustainability and usefulness of community-based organizations will be determined by their ability to access local, provincial, and national resources and agencies, such as the Department of Agriculture, DENR, and NGOs. ERMP should serve as an effective catalyst for establishing such linkages before it begins to phase-out from the project area.

The timing is also ripe to apply ERMP's experience and make use of the information and lessons learned to date from the Bais Bay Basin DAP for future government and non-government initiatives. The devolution of power under the Local Government Code

creates many opportunities at the local level. Natural resource and development planning are more than ever the responsibility of local governments (Brillantes, 1993). Integrated, multi-sectoral planning processes are being developed by the local governments to address these issues. ERMP can make a valuable contribution to these and similar kinds of initiatives and thereby increase the likelihood that our limited experience is shared and applied elsewhere.

ERMP has established some very effective collaborations with local organizations. As an example, the Bais City Engineer's Office and the Population Office have assumed central responsibilities in the implementation of the Dewey Island water systems project. This has resulted in institutional strengthening through resource-sharing and, in some cases, the actual transfer of knowledge, skills and technology. Other local organizations and institutions, including key local government units, NGO's and possibly the Bais Developmental College, will likely play a vital role in future efforts to sustain the environment of the Bais Bay Basin. Most of these key organizations have already been identified. ERMP will continue to target them for intensive program collaboration and institutional strengthening with the goal of sustaining the momentum generated by the program. Strong collaborations will also ensure that ERMP's skills and experience are transferred to existing organizations that can then apply them throughout the Bais Bay Basin and elsewhere.

Conclusion

Experience from the first eighteen months of the Bais Bay Basin Program highlights the inter-play and tension between differing and sometimes competing action strategies. The program has sought to strengthen individual communities, on the one hand, and mobilize action at a wider (watershed) level, on the other. We achieved considerable gains applying each of these strategies. Actions were often reenforcing to both, although usually there was a trade-off between focusing on community-level and wider efforts. Up to this point, it has usually been the community-level efforts that assumed priority. This paper has argued that future efforts should focus increasingly on institutional and organizational networking, information-sharing, and collaborations. This strategy is necessary to strengthen and sustain past community-level efforts. It will also broaden the extent of the program's impact.

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