

COMMUNITY ORGANIZING IN THE UPLANDS: THE LAKE BALINSASAYAO

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Introduction

In 1983, a community survey was conducted among the farming population living in the watershed area of Lake Balinsasayao.

The survey was an exploratory activity designed to determine the problems the farmers were facing and to plot out the possibilities for developmental efforts that may help improve the living conditions of the farmers. The survey had a team of researchers who came from various disciplines. Areas on health, farming practices and productivity, forest condition, beliefs and attitudes, biophysical condition of the area and local political systems were explored. The survey evolved into a design for developing the upland community of Lake Balinsasayao using "community development" model. The model envisioned an integrated development process where farming systems and health development could be used as entry points. With this approach, three main goals were outlined.

First, the development of the farms in Lake Balinsasayao will bring an overall increase in household farm productivity. By introducing proper soil management system and appropriate cropping practices, efficiency in the use of land and its resources will lead into better performance of crops. Appropriate farming systems will also serve as a check to possible pest outbreaks, thus reducing the risks and hazards of agricultural production.

Second, improved production will contribute better welfare to the upland farmers, while the health component will further improve the general well-being of the population.

Third, all these improvements will reduce the increasing incidence of illegal logging and *kaingin* activities in the upland areas, thus protecting and conserving the remaining forest cover in Lake Balinsasayao.

Using community development model as our approach requires that the integrated development program be channeled through a community organization. Community organization is a form of a social structure deliberately established to serve as a vehicle through which development efforts can be channeled. Therefore, community organizing should constitute as an initial step to the whole developmental process of Lake Balinsasayao.

This paper is an attempt to outline the organizing experiences that our field personnel went through as we implemented Lake Balinsasayao development project.

THE IMMERSION PHASE

After the exploratory survey, the field personnel gained general ideas on the Lake Balinsasayao community. However, it was found out to be inadequate for planning specific strategies in approaching the population. For instance, questions like what are the characteristics of critical households that can serve as an immediate target for intervention activities could not be adequately answered. It is true that community organization can serve as the channel, but information concerning those questions are very important especially for the organizing process.

Hence, community organizing was never attempted during the immersion phase. This phase almost lasted for one year which was designed as a research exercise. Two technical men were hired; one was a community organizer and the other was a sociologist.

The two field personnel organized themselves as a research team trying to explore the developmental characteristics of domestic units of the Lake Balinsasayao farmers. It was assumed right at the start that the households of the farmers provide the key in understanding the constraints and opportunities under which household members make decision concerning the use of the forest and their farms.

The team proceeded into familiarizing all the households of the farmers around Lake Balinsasayao. In the familiarization process, three basic household information were sought: (1)

of the household; (2) age distribution of household members; (3) labor supply in the household in relation to household farm size. On the bases of these data, the following household types were identified:

Type Number	Characteristic
1	Newly married couple without children
2	Couple with young non-working-age growing child or children
3	Couple with one or more working-age children
4	Couple without children anymore (all are married and are living in their own separate dwelling units)

A specific household was selected to represent each of these four types. These households were systematically observed by the team every month using participant observation. The immersion process of the team consisted of efforts towards understanding the dynamics of household decision making under different demographic characteristics and land resource availability. Information on food needs, food supply, use and need of household activities on land and forest use, and interhousehold exchange of goods and services were closely monitored. Since these four household types observed were under different demographic and land availability characteristics, the research team was able to identify the opportunities and constraints underpinning each household toward farming systems development.

As the team began to fully understand each of the four household cases, the team also started to get a good picture of the rest of the households around Lake Balinsasayao which have similar characteristics to the four cases. The research process exposed the team to the local population thus creating and improving the social acceptability of the team to the farmers. This, in a way, was a part of preparing the social ground for the later processes to be done in the place.

While the regular informal visitation of the farmers' households by the research team provided the latter to see the processes that are involved in various upland farming activities, this visitation also serves as the initial channel of communication to the farmers concerning the project that was just about to start.

THE SOCIAL PREPARATION PHASE

When the immersion phase of the field team was over, attempts were made at determining whether the farmers adequately knew what we are going to introduce to the Lake Balinsasayao farmers. The result was negative. The farmers were neither aware of the plan nor knowledgeable about the benefits they can get from the project and their responsibilities to the project. The farmers thus need prior exposure to the planned project.

Hence, after the immersion phase was completed, the social preparation phase started. While the immersion phase was primarily designed to orient the field personnel to the socioeconomic processes of the Lake Balinsasayao farmers, the social preparation phase was designed primarily to prepare the farmers concerning the implementation of the development project for Lake Balinsasayao.

For social preparation, two methods were used. One was household-to-household visitation and discussion. The other was through community meetings. The team that went through the immersion phase was also used to do the social preparation of the farmers. The rapport that the team had gained during the immersion phase was very useful for their activities during the social preparation phase.

To maintain the level of naturalness in the household environment during the household-to-household visitation, the visits were done randomly. Neither appointments nor arrangements were made prior to the visitation. Since we wanted to talk to the farmers under normal setting, the farmers were not given the opportunity to prepare for the team's visit. The discussion was carried on an informal basis, touching on various issues that unfolded as the discussion progresses. When the issue on the developmental a

program for the uplands evolved during the discussion, the team immediately injected the Silliman University plan for the uplands. There were essentially three kinds of information that were transmitted to the farmers during this contact: (1) the objectives of the project; (2) the benefits that the farmers will get from the project; (3) the responsibilities of the farmers to the project. We assumed that these data were very essential for the farmers in making decision concerning participation in the project.

During these household visits, the team always prefers to discuss with the people. Since it was learned during the immersion that the husband and the wife take farm work as their main activity, it was decided that the couple had to be involved during the social preparation phase. The field experience of the team showed that wives tend to be more open and vocal during a discussion than their husbands.

The household-to-household visitation was done first as a preparation for a community meeting or assembly. During the household-to-household contact, the farmers were informed to prepare about the future community assembly that had to be held. The sequence of contact was considered logical since the household-to-household visitation was assumed to have initially developed interest on the part of the farmers in the project. Hence, it was expected that community assembly can be easily implemented after the household-to-household visitation had been made.

In the household-to-household contact, the farmers had no chance to listen to, and interact with other farmers' ideas. A farmer had to relate only with the team and he had no chance for his issues to be clarified with depth since possible reactions from other farmers could not be made available. This problem was solved by supplementing a community assembly or meeting.

During the social preparation phase, community assemblies or meetings were essentially initiated by the field team consisting of a community organizer and a sociologist. The excellent attendance during these meetings was attributed to the prior household-to-household visitation by the team. Sometimes, the meetings were manned by the team only, and in some cases the

meetings involved faculty members from Silliman University. The involvement of various faculty members during these meetings was to add further impetus toward our multidisciplinary perspective for the implementation.

The meetings were managed in such a way that optimum actions from the farmers were elicited. It was noted that no contradiction of ideas between the farmers generally led into a better understanding of the problems and opportunities the farmers faced. These information also prepared us to modify some of the strategies that we had to employ when we implemented the project.

Like what the team did during the household-to-household contact, the series of meetings or assemblies also provided basic three kinds of information to the farmers: (1) objectives of the project; (2) benefits that the farmers will get from the project; (3) responsibilities the farmers have to the project.

The team's experience showed that there were substantial questions raised by the farmers during the community meetings which were never raised during the household-to-household contact. These questions emerged as results of interaction of ideas between the farmers.

While these series of community assemblies or meetings provided the farmers the opportunity to collectively present their doubts, misconceptions and reservations about the project, the activities also allowed additional inputs of ideas on various related issues concerning the project. The faculty members from Silliman University who attended these meetings rendered lectures on various areas such as ecology, farming systems and forest conservation. These information enabled the farmers to appreciate or "appreciate" more the project. Positively, knowledge on these areas helped improve the attitude of the farmers toward the project.

After the household-to-household contact and the community assemblies or meetings were completed, the team went back to the farmers and asked once more the following three questions:

(1) What are the goals of the Project that we plan to implement soon in Lake Balinsasayao?

(2) What are the benefits that the farmers can expect to obtain from the Project?

(3) What are the farmers' responsibilities to the Project?

When the answers of the farmers to these questions were considered adequate by the team, the community was considered socially prepared to implement the project. In the early part of 1984, the team declared the farmers in Lake Balinsasayao as socially prepared. Hence, after the social preparation phase, community organizing followed.

COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

Since, as mentioned earlier, a community development model had been employed for Lake Balinsasayao, community organization was considered to be an essential component of the project. Community organization would serve as a vehicle through which our development processes could be channeled.

Both the community organizer and sociologist who had completed the immersion and social preparation phases in the area initiated the organizing process of the Lake Balinsasayao farmers. A series of seminars were held on community organization and leadership system, after which, an organization was formed.

BANAGBANAG

In the later part of 1984, the Lake Balinsasayao farmers finally decided to organize themselves. More than 74 farmers signed to become members who later on constituted as the core members. It was decided that the group should be opened for additional membership to upland farmers as long as they pay the membership fee of ₱5. As a member, they will also have to pay monthly due of ₱1 and an annual due of ₱2.

Through a community assembly, the organization decided to select a name. The one selected was: *Balinsasayao Naghiusang Nagay nga Nagbawul*. For its acronym, *BANAGBANAG* was selected which means a new dawn or life for the upland farmers in Lake Balinsasayao.

BANAGBANAG served as the umbrella association for developmental activities and organization in the area. It tried to raise funds for its own operation through its fees, dues, and contribution. Its fund was deposited in the bank under the name of the association.

In 1985, the first election of officers was made. They were the following:

Name	Position
Pedro Ingo	President
Silvano Sotillo	Vice-President
Gilda Peras	Secretary
Dolores Yayong	Treasurer
Cristituto Batal	Forest Protection Council
Estanislao Bulagoa	Forest Protection Council
Alberto Quizil	Forest Protection Council

In 1986, the second election was conducted and the officers were the following:

Name	Position
Maximo Silorio	President
Eduardo Pegarum	Vice-President
Victoria Orcia	Secretary
Dolores Yayong	Treasurer
Ricardo Sotillo	Public Relations Officer
Aguido Montegrejo	Public Relations Officer
Agapito Ruiz	Public Relations Officer
Cristituto Batal	Forest Protection Council
Alberto Zerna	Forest Protection Council

The last election was in 1987 and the officers consisted of the following:

Name	Position
Maximo Silorio	President
Estanislao Bulagoa	Vice-President
Victoria Orcia	Secretary
Dolores Yayong	Treasurer
Calso Yayong	Public Relations Officer
Romy Bormilado	Public Relations Officer
Alvis Sotillo	Public Relations Officer
Aguido Montegrejo	Public Relations Officer
Mary Tagud	Auditor
Eduardo Pegarum	Auditor
Sato Yayong	Forest Protection Council
Marcelino Orcia	Forest Protection Council
Ester Taqui-ang	Forest Protection Council
Catalina Taqui-ang	Forest Protection Council

At present, the membership of the organization has gone down by 14%. We only have 64 members at present in contrast to 1984. The decline is caused by a number of factors such as military job and transfer of residence. The data show— from 1984 to the present, four have died. Another two had left the area and joined the Civil Home Defense Force (CHDF) which is a paramilitary unit. Since the area is a New People's Army (NPA) resting place, some farmers were threatened by the presence of the former. Another four had transferred residence without necessarily joining the paramilitary group.

With the formation of the *BANAGBANAG* Association, team (community organizer and the sociologist) relinquished the responsibilities related with community affairs to the office of *BANAGBANAG*. The *BANAGBANAG* officers now serve the frontline.

The distribution of planting materials (hardwood trees and fruit trees) was now channeled through the association. Likewise the planting of trees was carried through *BANAGBANAG*. Even the process of pooling labor, the association provides a very important integrative function.

Forest Protection Council

One of the objectives of the Lake Balinsasayao project is the protection of the remaining forest cover around the lake. Around 40% of the total forest cover within the watershed area of the lake is still intact. The rest are gone caused by illegal logging and *kaingin*.

To assume the task of protecting the remaining forest, a Forest Protection Council was formed. Members of *BANAGBANAG* automatically become members of the Forest Protection Council. Since *BANAGBANAG* does not have the legal strength to enforce the law against *kaingin* and illegal logging, the Forest Protection Council only monitored illegal logging activities within the area and transmit the information to the locally constituted authority which is the Philippine Oil Company to prosecute the law breaker.

The Forest Protection Council works on the basis of zones. Each zone is under the jurisdiction of a farmer who resides in that particular zone. Since members of *BANAGBANAG* are widely distributed around the lake area, each zone can be under the responsibility of at least one or more farmers. These farmers within each zone will take care of their own respective areas. If any incidents noted on their respective zones were immediately reported to the legal authorities for appropriate actions.

The Forest Protection Council is therefore an arm of BAMBANAG in conserving the remaining forest cover around the lake. Its basic function is largely monitoring since it does not have any legal status to enforce the law.

Working Groups

Since the implementation of various soil conservation measures on the respective farms of the Lake Balinsasayao farmers is labor intensive, the farmers have to draw labor outside of their respective households. This could be done through hired labor. However, in the absence of money and labor for sale in their households, additional labor had to be drawn in through voluntary collective process.

A group of farmers occupying a contiguous area was encouraged to form a working unit. This was found out to be a convenient collectivization since the farmers in this area are generally related either by blood or marriage. It was found during the implementation phase that related households or families tend to congregate themselves in one place for very obvious economic, social and security reasons. This kind of alliance prevailing among the farmers in one contiguous area provided a very effective control mechanism in getting the full cooperation of its members.

A working group consisted of some 15-20 farmers cultivating one contiguous area. They agreed to pool their labor together to work on their respective farm in a series or cycle. Each member got an equal number of labor force to work on his farm during an agreed number of days. When all the members have been completely served, a cycle again begins. The working group was concentrated on the construction of soil conservation terraces on their farms.

Three working groups were organized since three contiguous areas were identified. These were the southern area, the central area and the northern area. The three working groups were named—*Bothon*, *Alayon* and *Tambayayong*.

Bolhon: This name of a working unit evoke the idea of working-bee group. It represents a collective unit of work organized around one task to be performed and accomplished. Generally, the unit is informally organized and is only formed when there is a demand for a relatively larger volume of labor to accomplish a given farm task within a short period of time.

Alayon: The term suggests a shared labor provided by one household to another domestic unit. Such shared labor may not necessarily have to be replaced or compensated for immediately. It could be a form of a generalized sharing of labor without a specified form and schedule of return.

Tambayayong: Tambayayong represents the act of giving assistance to needy individuals without any solicitation. It largely stems from the altruistic consideration of the individual. The act of assisting is assumed to be spontaneous without any consideration for replacement or compensation.

Mothers Club

Among the Lake Balinsasayao farmers, the wives constitute as major partners of the husbands in farm work. They constitute major labor input in the planting maintenance and the harvesting of the farms. Hence, mothers serve as a significant personnel in a household farm.

To provide support to the working group which is largely consisting of male workers, the Mothers Club was organized. Since the Working Group needs substantial food supply during labor session, the Mothers Club worked together to provide food.

Other support services to farming systems development were also channeled through the Mothers Club. For instance, health, nutrition and educational development programs for the children were coordinated by the Mothers Club. Mothers organized themselves in providing the necessary local resources for health and the nutritional developmental activities. With the assistance of the health and nutrition technical personnel of the project, the Mothers Club draws the regular services from the government rural health unit for the Lake Balinsasayao population.

Youth Club

The other significant group of the Lake Balinsasayao population is the youth. Assuming that there will be no significant migration of the youth, they consist of the succeeding generation that will be using the land and forest resources in the lands of Lake Balinsasayao.

While it is true that the youth assumed only peripheral role in the utilization of the land and the forest at present, they are not ready in the position to understand any process of development that was implemented in the area. It was therefore decided that the youth should be drawn into the focus of the developmental process as a preparation for their future takeover in the management of the upland resources.

To facilitate the process of exposure, the youth was organized into a club. The club had to provide additional pooled labor to various working group when additional labor was needed. In the construction of infrastructure unit such as fishponds for working group, the youth was heavily tapped.

The development of the mini-nursery was largely the responsibility of the Youth Club. The group also served as the facilitator in various reforestation activities which the project did.

It was assumed that the involvement of the youth in those activities just outlined would expose them to the concept of forest protection and the application of appropriate farming system in the upland. Such exposure, hopefully, would allow the youth to internalize the necessity and the techniques of appropriate management of upland resources.

EMERGING IDEAS CONCERNING COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION

Traditionally, community organizing involves a top-down process of putting in ideas from the community organizer to the governed to be organized. The possible model of community structure and the manner by which community power and control

can be drawn are inputs that flow from the organizer down to the clientele population. The clientele population absorbs processes and assimilates the inputs and eventually integrates the inputs into the organizational process that will take place later. In short, community organizing is a one way process of learning. The clientele population being the learner. As the population learns the nuances of community organization, they put up their own community structure. In this case, community organization is defined as a sociopolitical structure deliberately designed by the population through the assistance of a community organizer. Hence, community organizers come into the community primarily as mentors of the people toward community organizing. Therefore, community organization as a structure is fashioned by the community organizer as a vehicle through which community development process can be channeled. It is a monolithic process where the community organizers serve as the mentors while the clienteles serve as the learners.

As such, when organizers approached a community, they are assumed to be equipped with all the information and tools toward community organizing. On the other hand, the clientele population is assumed to have at least only minimal amount of information about community organizing which will have to be enriched by the organizers.

Our Lake Balinsasayao experience, showed otherwise. Community organizing requires a dual process of learning. It was perceived that a community organizer is both a mentor and learner. Likewise, the clientele population is considered as teacher and a student.

It was assumed that community organizing is a continuous process which involves community organizers learning through critical social events and units in the clientele population relevant to community organization. In our project, we call the process as social immersion. The organizer came into the community as a learner while the populace served as her mentor. She explored both the household and the community level processes relevant to the socioeconomic life of the people. Since our Lake Balinsasayao projects' focus was farming systems development, the

organizer was essentially searching for relevant social conditions and processes in the household that would facilitate the implementation of the project. Such information were put in into the organizing process when various structural units were identified and established.

The immersion process was essentially a research activity designed to enable the community organizer to understand the social dynamics of the whole community. To allow depth in the information, participant observation was used as the method. While the process allowed the community organizer to have adequate bases for fashioning the community organization, the process also allowed the community organizer to develop more rapport and trust with the farmers. This provided a firmer ground to the community organizer when she finally went into community organizing.

Since community organization had to be structured according to the context of the project, the community organizer had to start preparing the clientele population for the coming project even during the immersion phase. This was found to be a handy way of justifying the presence of the community organizer during the immersion period. As the community organizer absorbed selectively the information about the community as revealed by the population, she also began exposing plans for developing the population as generally designed from the outside. Information on objectives of the project, the benefits they could derive from the project and the responsibilities they would have to the project were shared by the community organizer with the farmers. These ideas were shared to the farmers on the developmental activities they would have to do after the community organization was established. Also, the farmers were placed in a position to figure out how they could form their organization according to the needs of the project they would implement later.

When the community organizer was already equipped with the necessary and adequate understanding of the social dynamics of the households and the community, she proceeded toward the process of community organizing. This time she shifted her role

from that of a learner during the immersion and the social preparation phases to that of a teacher. Her inputs were necessary in the formation of various structures necessary for community organization. Later on, she served only as a facilitator toward the formation of various social aggregates whose functions were to carry out various activities relevant to the goals and objectives of the projects.

Community organizing, therefore, was a dual process in Lake Balinsasayao designed to prepare both the community organizer and the farmers toward the final phase of community organizing. It was a continuum of activities starting from social immersion of the community organizer, social preparation of farmers, and finally to the community organizing phase.

SUMMARY

The Lake Balinsasayao project demonstrates that community organizing is a dual and dynamic process where the community organizer takes a dual role of a learner and a teacher. As a learner, she employs a systematic method of research using participant observation. Her unit of investigation is appropriately selected on the basis of the need of the project. As a teacher, the community organizer provides the necessary inputs toward the establishment of a community organization. The dual process allows both the community organizer and the farmers to prepare themselves adequately for appropriate structuring of the community organization.