

COMMONS FORUM *RESPONSE*

Response to: [Collective Action, Common Property Forests, Communities, and Markets](#) by David Barton Bray

Revolutionizing Community-based Approach: Collective Action in Community-Based Coastal Resource Management (CBCRM)

Kathrine I. Hilario
School of Politics and International Studies,
University of Leeds, United Kingdom

As a development practitioner and social researcher, I can completely relate with David Barton Bray's argument that collective action should not be remote from the concept of community or communities. I appreciate his assertion that the community is an important level of analysis, where community can be bearers of social norms and institutional arrangements as it constitutes cooperative behavior and collective action. In response to Bray's argument, I wish to flesh out the concept of community organizing which fundamentally relates to the dynamics of collective action.

I will highlight the important contribution of community-based approach from a community-based coastal resource management (CBCRM) project in the fishing community of Honda Bay in Puerto Princesa Philippines, as a result of the community's collective action.

CBCRM is essentially based on the inherent capacities and practical experience of the community to collectively address their needs and problems in commons management. CBCRM programs in the Philippines have emerged from Robert Chambers' idea of people's participation and empowerment, and have been inspired by the movement for greater community control and democratization of access to natural resources. According to Ferrer and Nozawa, CBCRM effectively employs community organizing (CO) as its core strategy to ensure that participation is fostered on a collective basis so that the majority of the members of the community, if not all, will have equal opportunity in decision-making and project benefits.

In Honda Bay, the community effort and the collective action of fisher folks in organizing themselves into people's organization have effectively increased their legitimacy in matters relating to the management and sustainable use of natural resources. Honda Bay is a home to rich and diverse flora and fauna found in both land and sea. Until now, there are sporadic sightings of rare and endemic species such as seacows, dolphins, whale sharks and green marine turtles in Honda Bay which tourists and divers enjoy. Because of the beauty of the island, the Department of Tourism (DOT), Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), City Tourism Office (CTO) in cooperation with boat operators, resort owners, real estate developers and other private business groups, formulated a master plan to develop the island as one of the major ecotourism destinations in the country.

However, the influx of eco-tourism and the commercialization of the island have caused distress among the marginal communities in the island. The national plan for real estate development and private investment have resulted in land tenure issues, violation of community property rights and human rights. The increasing amount of waste due to the commercialization of the city, and the inappropriate location of the sanitary landfill in Honda Bay contributed to excruciating water and land pollution in the area. Other environmental concerns in resource use also afflicted the village of Honda Bay, such that of mercury contamination resulting from mining activity, and water siltation due to illegal quarrying. The tragedy of the environment not only endangered the health of the community, but also damaged the traditional fishing grounds at Honda Bay, forcing the local fishermen into the open sea to sustain their livelihood.

The fishing village of Honda Bay encountered immense livelihood difficulties. This situation motivated the community members to organize themselves against the development plans for the island. The community members of Honda Bay worked with a local NGO, the Environmental Legal Assistance Center (ELAC), for developmental legal assistance and they lobbied for proper consultation by the city government to regard alternative livelihood for marginal fishing communities. The strategies of the local NGO have involved local people's participation in community development work, public and policy advocacy and capacity building for establishment of co-management structures in community resources management. Through community organizing strategy, leadership formation and core groups were organized and later expanded into peoples' organizations. The community has increased their capability and confidence in forming organizations and in institutionalizing participatory governance mechanisms to manage its natural resources.

Community mobilization in Honda Bay has empowered the community to influence structures and processes toward achieving economic, political, and social transformation. The fisher folks found themselves in the ELAC office writing letters to the City Council members, preparing speeches for city council meetings, and reviewing drafted ordinance of the City Tourism Office. The community organizing initiative, and the increased participation of the community towards CBCRM also started the establishment of community managed marine sanctuaries, watershed system, livelihood-support projects, regular fish catch monitoring activities and continuous lobbying and advocacy work at the community level and city level planning for policies that support marginal fisher folks agenda.

Furthermore, the city government also recognized the community fisher folks as Volunteer Community Paralegals (VCPs). They have been acknowledged as a co-management structure of the Local Government Unit (LGU) in matters relating to the management and sustainable use of natural resources. The VCPs have been authorized to apprehend environmental law violators. They have taken part in the documentation of the impact of mining, tourism and commercial activities to biodiversity and have worked with government agencies to stop illegal quarrying operations in affected communities. People's collective action provided the community a vital ground with which to establish their tenure in the area, making the municipal government's recent attempts at relocating residents politically unfavourable and highly questionable.

The organizing effort of the fishing community in Honda Bay enhanced the capacities of community groups to develop environment-friendly systems, establish networks with other communities, groups and partners in order to advance its vision and goals, and eventually manage their resources for the benefit of the greater majority through collective action and pursuit of common interests. The experience of Honda Bay has shown that community organizing and collective action can facilitate the creation of community institutions, structures, programs and systems which are important elements in commons management. However critiques have been raised about the limitation of community-based approaches in addressing more complex ecological and socio-political relationships, such as resolving disputes that extend beyond the community's territory, particularly conflict of interests within national, regional and international levels. This implies a challenge to scale up community participation and people's collective action at a global level.

Co-management and collective governance of common property resources are analogous terms providing a framework for common property theory. The idea of collective action based on communal property, which begins with a set of priorities and specific issues within a small and geographically defined community is an important level of analysis in looking at access and control of common pool of resources. Collective action does not occur where there is no organized body that sets the rules concerning resource management and resource use. This may also be identified by a community of users. The process in CBCRM, according to David Korten, concerns a group of people with common interests in creating mechanisms to reach consensus in management of conflict, community control and management of productive resources, establishing local systems or mechanisms in utilizing available resources, local accountability and broadly distributed participation of stakeholders in community-based management.

kathy_hilario@yahoo.com