

Planning for a community

This review looks at the documentation of a community-based coastal resource management project in Danao Bay, Philippines

Rehabilitating Nearshore Fisheries: Theory And Practice On Community-based Coastal Resource Management From Danao Bay, Philippines by Arjan

Heinen. CBCRM Resource Centre, UP Social Action Research and Development Foundation, Inc., UP College of Social Work and Community Development, Oxfam GB-Philippines Office, Netherlands Development Organization (SNV Philippines), and Pipuli Foundation.

Much is being written and spoken about fisheries management today. There are several areas where fisheries management is being carried out either by coastal communities themselves or with the assistance of governments or other agencies. The approaches differ, depending on the fishery and the community of fishers involved. The Philippines, in particular, probably because of its specific island geography, has a fairly long history of community-based coastal resource management (CBCRM). Some of these approaches have been documented elsewhere, but one of the most illustrated of them is the one documented by Arjan Heinen in the publication under review. As its title elaborates, it is about the theory and practice on CBCRM in Danao Bay, Philippines, facilitated by the Pipuli Foundation.

This book not only makes very interesting reading as it alternates between the theory and processes involved with the actual strategies employed by the Danao Bay community, but it also clearly explains how the actual action was undertaken—a brilliant teaching manual.

Very complex activities ranging from listing biodiversity and stock assessment, to calculating productivity of the bay have been undertaken by the people and lucidly retold in the book. By getting involved in these activities themselves, the community understands the intricate relationship between the standing stock, the biomass and sustainable harvestable production. It is this understanding that leads them to affirm the need to restore the stock and make the difficult decision to manage it.

From this rather technical process, they move to the even more difficult task of understanding the psychology of the different players in the Bay. The stakeholders' perspectives are analyzed by assessing the disparities in their knowledge, lifestyle and values. By defining the shared and differing norms and values in the community and the local government, the people of Danao Bay could plan for change, and tackle resistance to it. Working out a clear vision was the next step, followed by defining the management unit, and working for a plan through a management body. The book explains how the core group of keen learners put their traditional and newly acquired knowledge together and, with the good of the whole community and future generations in mind, worked out the resource management plan for the Bay.

Different styles

Different management styles—the unrestrained exercise of power, charismatic leadership, consensus building among the resource users—are also discussed and illustrated. Heinen explains how as a shadow fisheries management body in Danao Bay, the fisher-managers learned to deal and negotiate with the town mayors who

served as the legally recognized management authority. He highlights how in the local elections of May 2001, the resource users used their voting power as a form of people power and voted back to office the incumbent mayor, who had not given in to the pressures of the illegal fishers.

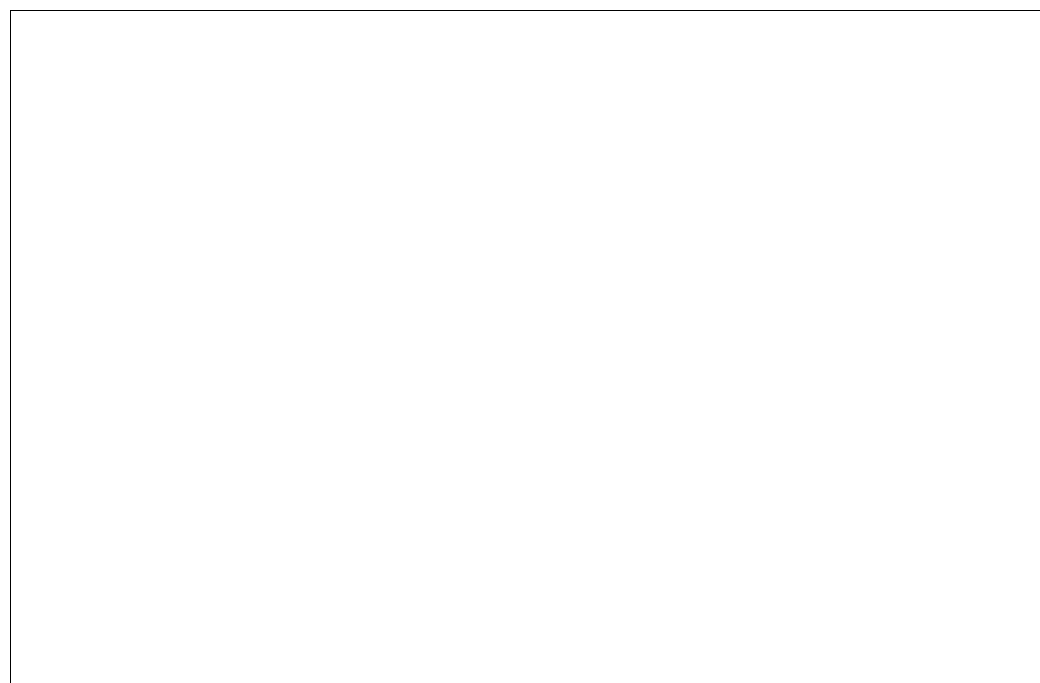
What is even more educative is the reflection both on the positive and negative steps undertaken by the group, and how issues that cropped up in the process were handled in reality. At the very start, Heinen writes: "Initially, the project fell into the trap of presenting environmental rehabilitation as the solution. Fortunately, the intervention became a venue for learning. Learning from nature and human interaction, the change agents climbed out of the trap and worked towards a more sustainable intervention." This assures good-intentioned practitioners that they undergo a process of change themselves and clarify their objectives as and when they genuinely respond to the people's needs and the reality. While explaining how the Pipuli staff and a few fishers from Barangay set up a sanctuary and faced major resistance, and later analyzing why it happened, Heinen concludes: "Had the Pipuli programme analyzed the situation in this way, more attention could have been given to the difference in lifestyle between the people from Landing and those from

Mison, and appropriate mitigating measures could have been introduced." This prepares the new practitioner for possible eventualities.

Towards the end of the book, the author includes a series of appendices. Among them is one that gives a chronological overview of the entire process, which stretches from 1990, with the first contact between the fisher/church workers from Baliangao and Pipuli Foundation through ecological awareness seminars, to 2001, when the local government and Pipuli staff are informed that the Baliangao Wetland Park had been declared a national park by Congress. That was when, for the first time in Baliangao, the month leading to the elections was not marred by the intensive use of explosives for fishing. That was a clear indication of the slow but meticulous process of community intervention and organization that had taken place in Danao Bay, which helped create both a sustainable coastal fishery and a sense of pride among the people of their vocation as fishers. The appendix that narrates the history of the use and status of the resource of the Bay situates the entire experience in a context.

Laudable effort

Having worked closely in coastal communities myself, I can only appreciate and applaud the effort and belief of both the external agents and the community of



Danao Bay in restoring the fishery through persistent community intervention.

This was facilitated by the National Fisheries Code that demarcated the municipal waters, without which such an involvement of the community could not have been legitimized. This again was the result of several years of action by fishworker organizations and their supporters.

What I missed was understanding how the community handled shore-based activity that relates to, and has impacts on, the fishery and the community—for example, the pollution of the water and the shore, the operation of the landing centre, and the disposal of the catches. Gender equity appears to have been present in the creation of the management plan and the management body.

However, we do not get to understand how the management of market mechanisms ensured that the final monetary returns went to the community, especially to its women, and were not siphoned off by middlemen and merchants, as generally happens.

To be sure, the focus of the book is on the management of fish resources, but one wonders how the other resources of the Bay, particularly the mangroves and marshland vegetation, were also used. For sustainable fisheries to lead to sustainable livelihoods and lifestyles, one would probably have to take into consideration the total biomass of the area, and how it is used and recycled. While I feel sure that several of these aspects must have been included in the Danao Bay programme, unfortunately, they are not covered in this book.

I had the opportunity to meet some of the people of the Danao Bay community and the Pipuli Foundation, and it was amazing to see how empowered they had become as a result of the CBCRM programme. Many a scientist and academic could learn effective skills of applied science from them—not in a disjointed, specialized way, but in an integrated manner. The book does succeed in achieving what it set out to do,

namely, to provide the reader useful theory and experiences in CBCRM. To Arjan Heinen, who was engaged in the process and has taken the trouble to document it so understandably, a big “Thank You!”

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