

Ecotourism Development in Basyaw Cove (Guimaras, Philippines) by a People's Organization in Cooperation with Development Partners

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Key Message

- A strong, active, and organized coastal community with a clear environmental advocacy and commitment can secure the trust of local governments and partners and optimize their support, as well as facilitate implementation of activities for improving the social, economic, and environmental well-being of the community.

The conversion of the Basyaw Cove mangrove forest into fishponds and the proliferation of illegal and destructive fishing adversely impacted the island's ecological system. A partnership between various government and donor agencies enabled the successful engagement of the local communities of Guimaras to overcome the challenges of environmental degradation, enabling them also to propose, execute, and manage community-based programs on environmental protection and conservation. One particular people's organization in Nueva Valencia was the *Katilingban sang Magagmay nga Mangingisda sa Dolores* (KAMAMADO), whose involvement in numerous programs to rehabilitate the coastal fishery resources of Barangay Dolores spanned over 15 years. Comprising marginal fishers, it established a track record of successfully implementing

Abstract

Barangay Dolores in Nueva Valencia was one of the richest fishing grounds in the island province of Guimaras. The mangrove forest of Basyaw Cove was able to sustain a healthy supply of marine resources before the 1970s. Traditional fishing was by hook and line, which provided the primary source of income for the fisherfolk.



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This case study is part of the book: Chua, T.-E., L.M. Chou, G. Jacinto, S.A. Ross, and D. Bonga. (Editors). 2018. Local Contributions to Global Sustainable Agenda: Case Studies in Integrated Coastal Management in the East Asian Seas Region. Partnerships in Environmental Management for the Seas of East Asia (PEMSEA) and Coastal Management Center (CMC), Quezon City, Philippines.

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conservation projects with a variety of partners, creating additional opportunities in the process. It formulated the Basyaw Cove Development Plan (KAMAMADO, 2007), a key component of which was the development of an ecotourism park. The plan fit in well with the country's National Ecotourism Strategy and Action Plan and received support from the local government, private sector and international development agencies.

Background

The island province of Guimaras is the youngest and smallest of the six component provinces of the Philippines' Western Visayas region. Guimaras is composed of five coastal municipalities: Jordan (the provincial capital), Buenavista, Nueva Valencia, Sibunag, and San Lorenzo.

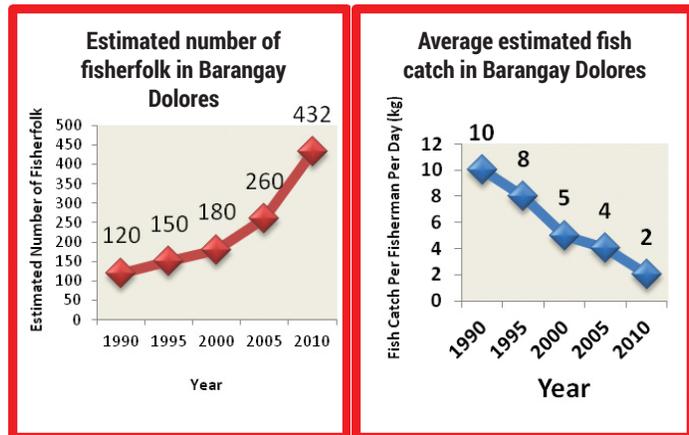
Known as the "mango country", the island has 8,000 ha of mango orchards managed by corporations and individual growers. The province is also endowed with fishing grounds rich in marine biodiversity, and boasts of white sand beaches and diving spots. It has been proclaimed as the "island to watch" due to the huge tourism potential of its pristine natural beauty.

In addition to being home to a variety of wildlife, Basyaw Cove is an excellent mariculture area – including mud-crab fattening and culture of high-value fishes. The natural barriers of small islets, joined by land bridges that are underwater during high tide, protect the cove from strong waves and storm surges.

Basyaw Cove is ecologically significant because of its key marine habitats. It is located beside the 18th-century Guisi Lighthouse, which used to guide Spanish galleons passing the Iloilo Strait.

Yet many people in the coastal communities were living at subsistence levels. A case in point was the

Figure 1. Socioeconomic condition of Dolores, Nueva Valencia, Guimaras.



fisherfolk living in the vicinity of Basyaw Cove in Barangay Dolores (Dolores Village) in the town of Nueva Valencia. Residents complained about the continuing decline in the quantity of their catch from the seas, which is their primary source of livelihood (Figure 1).

The decline in marine resources can be attributed to overfishing, illegal fishing, encroachment by commercial fishing vessels using modern fishing technology, waste contamination from growing human settlements, mangrove destruction by human activities, and a major oil spill. The Philippines' biggest oil spill occurred in 2006 when a tanker carrying two million liters of bunker fuel sank off the coast of Guimaras Island, severely affecting hundreds of hectares of mangroves.

Mangroves were being illegally cut or harvested not only for fuel and charcoal making, but also as a highly favored bonsai gardening material that commanded high market prices. Areas cleared of mangroves were subsequently converted into fishponds, which destroyed the area's ecological balance. It was therefore imperative to protect and preserve the Basyaw Cove mangroves as they serve as nursery grounds for all kinds of fish and shellfish, a primary source of income for 304 households in Barangay Dolores (Box 1).

Box 1. Basyaw Cove biodiversity.

- The mangroves are mostly *Avicennia* and *Rhizophora* totaling 4-5 ha, prevalent inside the Basyaw Cove. In the Baseline Biophysical Survey conducted, mangroves comprised 19 species of true mangroves belonging to four families and six genera.
- The naturally distributed mangrove – and a highly favored bonsai gardening material – *Pemphis acidula* needs protection from overharvesting.
- The mangroves in Basyaw Cove serve as nursery grounds for fishes and shellfishes (13 species of fishes, 8 species of shells, 4 species of crabs, and various sizes and quantities of unidentified shrimp species).
- The inventory of plants and terrestrial fauna identified more than 100 species of plants, 21 species of birds, 2 species of lizards, and 1 mammal species.

“Mangroves are essential to the ecological and socioeconomic health of the area in which they thrive. They serve as barriers to prevent erosion and sediment deposits from the mainland to nearby coral reefs, and from storm surges and high winds. They also play an important role in nutrient cycling and provide habitats to many species such as birds, small fishes, shells and crustaceans.” (PAWB-DENR, 2009)

Approach and Methodology

Engaging local communities in resource management

Various activities related to habitat protection, restoration, and management were incorporated in the work programs of the municipalities, despite the lack of a habitat management plan. Coastal municipalities were implementing programs ranging from establishment of artificial reefs, mangrove reserve zones, coral gardens, rehabilitation of threatened species and habitats, and establishment of mangrove nurseries for reforestation purposes.

In the case of Nueva Valencia, the local government decided to involve local communities as they were key stakeholders. Environmental degradation and ecological imbalance were affecting them most with declining income and they were best suited among the stakeholders to assume the lead role in implementing development projects at the grassroots level. This also ensured that the activities of local communities were aligned with national and provincial socioeconomic and environmental agenda. Of primary consideration was sustainability, driven by strong motivation from a sense of ownership of these projects. The strategy was that communities would fully embrace and actively pursue the ideals of development in their locality but needed external guidance and assistance from the government, donor agencies and NGOs. The advantages of this development mode included a strong sense of ownership, concerted efforts, seamless coordination, and synergistic outputs. Most importantly, a true sense of community at work was needed, which would greatly increase the sustainability of a development program and the likelihood that it would be passed on to the next generation.

One prominent and stable people's organization in Nueva Valencia was KAMAMADO. Comprising marginal fisherfolk, with clear mission and function, it was considered the most active people's organization in the entire Guimaras Province (Box 2).

The KAMAMADO was successful in actively seeking out relevant government agencies to assist and improve their capacity. Officers and members of KAMAMADO continuously participated in conservation and organizational strengthening seminars with assistance from various agencies. KAMAMADO's membership reached 120 at its peak, with 43 listed as active members. Its strong commitment as an organization and capability to successfully undertake programs made it the rational choice for partnership with various agencies.

Box 2. The KAMAMADO experience.

Registered in 1999, the KAMAMADO, translated as organization of small fishers in Dolores, aimed to create a strong and viable organization for the conservation, protection, and rehabilitation of coastal resources that would improve the socioeconomic conditions of small-scale fishers in the area. Specifically, it aspired to: (1) protect, conserve, and rehabilitate coastal and fishery resources, and promote public awareness toward this end; (2) maintain ecological balance of coastal fishing areas; and (3) increase fish production by at least 100% from the present level.



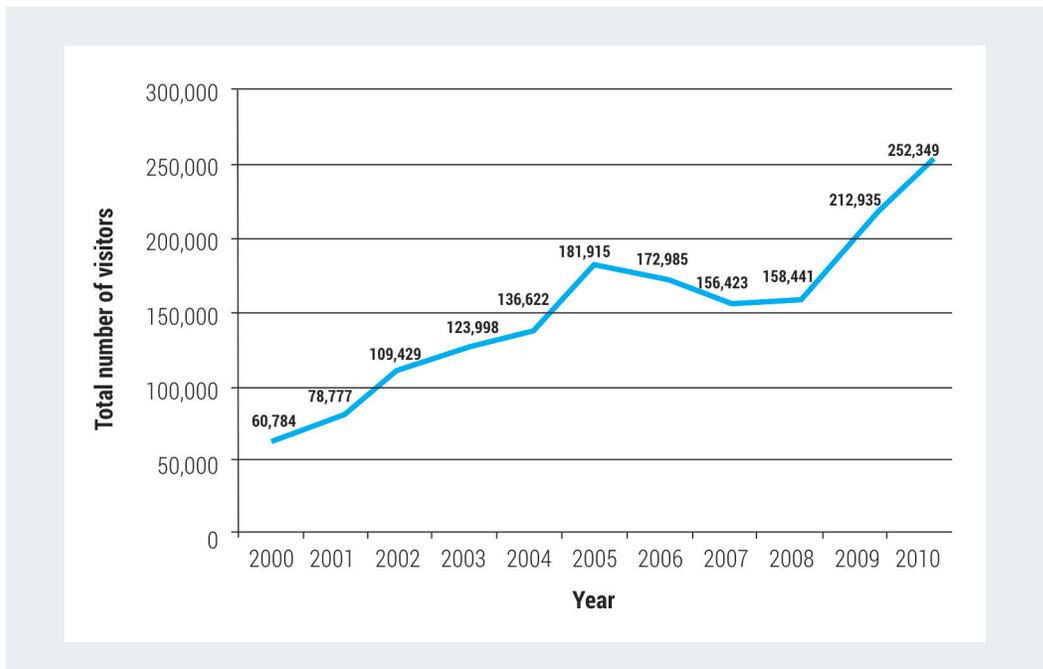
Ecotourism development

According to the Philippine's National Ecotourism Strategy and Action Plan (NESAP) 2013-2022, the potential market size for ecotourism in the country is between 1.25 million and 14.18 million tourists, and potential maximum earnings could reach PhP157 billion (US\$ 3.7 billion) by 2016 (NESC and ETWG, 2014; Box 3). Tourists visiting Guimaras increased nearly five fold from 2000 to 2010 (Figure 2).

The importance of developing and strengthening partnerships was highlighted in NESAP 2013-2022: "The communities and development partners are the key players in ecotourism development and this strategy aims to facilitate the engagement of partnerships among communities, entrepreneurs, government and funding sources."

Furthermore, Philippines' ecotourism development should be based "on the concerted efforts of concerned stakeholders including government, private sector, civil society and the host communities" (NESC and ETWG, 2014). In Guimaras, healthy and strong linkages and cooperation already existed among the

Figure 2. Number of tourists to Guimaras (2000–2010).



provincial government, Nueva Valencia municipal government, donor agencies, NGOs, especially KAMAMADO.

Over the past 15 years, members of KAMAMADO acquired and developed critical skills and capabilities from local experiences and several interagency partnerships. The partnerships in Guimaras for ecotourism, particularly the community-based rural tourism (CBRT), were based on the programs and approaches identified by the province, which involved the people's organizations, NGO, barangay development councils, national government agencies with the assistance of municipal and provincial governments. Each partner played a specific role, e.g., KAMAMADO was in charge of Tour Group Guides for the Guisi Heritage Site CBRT in Barangay Dolores.

Results

Partnerships in conservation

KAMAMADO's commitment and growing capability to implement conservation programs made it the rational choice for partnerships with various agencies. This enabled them to be successful in securing assistance from government agencies at different levels.

The need to protect and conserve Basyaw Cove's water quality was realized in the late 1980s when the local government issued a Fishpond Lease Agreement (FLA) to a private group of individuals, and which resulted in total deforestation of the area. KAMAMADO supported the cause for cancellation of the agreement, ending the long struggle with the agreement reversal in February 2002. Pending the release of the order of finality from the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources on the reversal of the FLA, KAMAMADO embarked on a mangrove reforestation project jointly with the provincial government through the Guimaras Environment and Natural Resources Office (GENRO). Taking the

Box 3. Ecotourism and poverty.

"Ecotourism is seen as a means for reducing poverty that will hasten the fulfillment of the UN's Millennium Development goals. The [country's] National Ecotourism Strategy 2013–2022 will not only conserve our biodiversity, it will also help the local communities to have another source of income without going into unsustainable natural resources extraction activities."

– **Former Sec. Ramon Paje**
Department of Environment
and Natural Resources
Philippines

risk that a Community-based Forest Management Agreement (CBFMA) would not be granted, KAMAMADO planted 20,000 seedlings of *Rhizophora mucronata* in 2004 and 2005. This was one of the major conservation efforts in the cove since the petition for reversal of FLA, and it boosted the morale of members (KAMAMADO, n.d.).

The Nueva Valencia municipal government approved the Coastal Fishery Resources Recovery Program (CFRRP) developed by KAMAMADO in 2004, which analyzed the problems and issues in fisheries; developed a workplan and budget; and worked out a partnership arrangement with concerned authorities for co-management of all activities in Basyaw Cove, which formed part of the Municipal Five-Year Coastal Resource Management Plan. This included the establishment of milkfish cage culture as a livelihood project.

To complement CFRRP, KAMAMADO then formulated the Basyaw Cove Development Plan (BCDP) in 2007, highlighting it as an ecotourism park. The BCDP envisioned Barangay Dolores as both a progressive fishing community and a tourist destination with better social environment and ecological balance. The development of the Basyaw Cove as an ecotourism park was expected not only to enhance fish production, but also to generate

alternative sources of income that would improve the quality of life of the people in the surrounding communities.

The project was to be implemented in four phases: (a) acquisition of authority for KAMAMADO to reforest the Basyaw Cove; (b) reforestation of Basyaw Cove; (c) installation and/or introduction of tourism facilities and services; and (d) introduction of livelihood projects such as crab fattening and culture of *talaba* (oyster), *imbaw* (clam) and tilapia. Implementing Phase 2 of BCDP, the reforestation of Basyaw Cove required about 50,000 *bakhaw* (*Rhizophora* mangrove) trees to be planted in a 10-ha area. Thereafter, tourism facilities and services would be installed, including: (a) construction of a bamboo footwalk around the cove, guardhouse, and small boat landing facility; (b) acquisition of boats; (c) conduct of training for tourism-related activities; and (d) installation of water system and lighting facilities.

Aside from mangrove reforestation, KAMAMADO established a coral garden and led the annual *Sibiran Festival*, a community-based tourism event showcasing traditional fishing practices using 'fish-friendly' gear and methods.

Recognizing the danger of resource overexploitation to the ecosystem and the need to strengthen and consolidate efforts in marine and coastal resource management, the province signed an agreement with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and the Partnerships in Environmental Management for the Seas of East Asia (PEMSEA) in 2008 for the sustainable development of its marine and coastal environment and resources, through the implementation of integrated coastal management (ICM).

Through the Guimaras ICM Program and PEMSEA, KAMAMADO became a recipient of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Small

Grants Programme and implemented the Mangrove Rehabilitation and Development of Basyaw Cove project beginning February 2012. The project's various components led to the following outputs (KAMAMADO, 2012): (a) capacity building for effective project and mangrove management; (b) development and conduct of information and education campaigns; (c) mangrove reforestation; (d) ecological solid waste management; (e) enforcement of environmental laws and policies development; and (f) livelihood projects.

The group continued to maintain strong interagency linkages. In partnership with the Zoological Society of London, it implemented the four-year Community-based Mangrove Rehabilitation Program (CMRP) in 2008, aimed at reforesting 6.4 ha of mangroves in Basyaw Cove. The CMRP strategies include active community participation, increasing capabilities of stakeholders, collaboration, and networking (Primavera, et al., 2012).

Capacity development continued with training activities on mangrove conservation and management laws and policies, ecology, project implementation, monitoring and evaluation, management and financial systems, and tour guiding.

At the national government level, DENR issued the CBFMA in 2009 to KAMAMADO for 25 years, renewable for another 25 years. Recognizing KAMAMADO's leadership in mangrove rehabilitation, the Department granted them a CBFM – Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Programme (CARP) Livelihood Development Project in 2012, aimed at expanding mangrove rehabilitation in Basyaw Cove beyond the 6.4-ha CBFM area. This project included milkfish culture in floating cages to generate income for the organization.

The Coastal Resource Management Framework (CRMF) was formulated under the guidance of the DENR-Provincial Environment and Natural Resources Office (PENRO) Guimaras. Proposed

activities for the management and utilization of Basyaw Cove within 25 years were incorporated into the CRMF, which was used by KAMAMADO as a guide in implementing mangrove rehabilitation and the utilization of the cove (KAMAMADO, 2009).

Mangrove cover improved, and KAMAMADO continued with mangrove planting and protection, with personnel assigned to maintain and guard the rehabilitated mangrove. The abundance of marine organisms (fish, shellfish, crustaceans, etc.) increased, resulting in increased fish catch and income for fisherfolk. Beach resorts continued to operate while new ones were built to accommodate increasing numbers of tourists.

The KAMAMADO established an 8 m x 12 m mangrove nursery constructed from lightweight materials, which held 5,000 *Rhizophora* propagules. Seedlings were grown to a minimum height of 1 m before being transplanted and were used for rehabilitating degraded mangroves and replacing transplanted seedlings that have died. This ensured success of mangrove reforestation. The improved mangrove cover increased ecosystem services including biodiversity and ecotourism.

Seventeen hectares of the Basyaw Cove mangrove area were under the Barangay Dolores Marine and Fish Haven, a newly declared 56.5-ha marine protected area in Nueva Valencia, which was established with the assistance of the Zoological Society of London.

KAMAMADO developed the Community Savings Credit Association. In its fourth annual cycle, the system involved purchasing a share in the association for PhP50 (US\$1). Members were able to borrow thrice the amount of the total shares purchased. The loan was payable in three months with 10% interest. A 5% surcharge was imposed when the loan was not paid within three months. After a year, shareholders decided where

and how the allocated budget would be used for development of facilities to support ecotourism. This system provided access to funds for education of children and fishing and other livelihood activities. Other fund sources included the Social Fund (PhP10/week/member) and penalties collected for absence at meetings and tardiness.

Lessons Learned

The case of Basyaw Cove and the active involvement of KAMAMADO was a clear testament of successful partnerships and institutional setup. It showed that a strong, active, and organized coastal community with clear environmental advocacy and commitment can secure the trust and optimize the support of local governments and partners, as well as help facilitate the ground implementation of activities for improving the social, economic, and environmental well-being of coastal communities.

The active participation of local communities is very important. They are affected by environmental degradation as their livelihood depends on the resources. Dwindling resources and declining income are a real threat that will galvanize communities to take action. They are best suited and motivated among the stakeholders to assume the lead role in implementing activities that offer improved sustainability, and having a sense of ownership for the project further ensures long-term involvement.

This case study demonstrated that effective cooperation with government and development partners can be sustained. Active involvement of KAMAMADO was a clear testament to the vital elements of successful partnerships and institutional setup. It showed that a strong, active, and organized coastal community with a clear environmental advocacy and commitment can secure trust of local governments and partners and optimize their support to facilitate on-the-ground

implementation of activities for improvements in the social, economic, and environmental well-being of the community.

Sustained capacity building of KAMAMADO members helped to ensure the successful development of ecotourism. Training and exposure visits increased their capacity in project management and enhanced the strong linkages with government agencies (local and national), funding institutions, and NGO. The members became fully aware and responsive to environmental concerns related to coastal resources management (CRM). Despite meager funds, their collaborative (*bayanihan*) spirit resulted in continued construction of facilities to support Basyaw Cove as an ecotourism site. Through their institutionalized law enforcement activities for environmental protection and financial savings mobilization system, they were able to improve their socioeconomic conditions, including sending their children to college.

KAMAMADO's capacity in sustaining its efforts in CRM, enhancing ecotourism development, and continued collaboration with other stakeholders helped the local and provincial governments to develop Guimaras as an ecotourism destination.

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