

BUILDING PARTNERSHIP WITH ENEMIES: A COASTAL GOVERNANCE STORY OF SOUTHERN ILOILO, PHILIPPINES

Liberty N. Espectato

Institute of Fisheries Policy and Development Studies
College of Fisheries and Ocean Sciences
University of the Philippines Visayas
Miagao, Iloilo, Philippines

Introduction

The Southern Iloilo Coastal Resource Management Council Inc. (SICRMC) is an alliance of five coastal municipalities (Oton, Tigbauan, Guimbal, Miagao and San Joaquin) in Southern Iloilo, Philippines (Figure 1). It was created with the purpose of coordinating the efforts of the said municipalities in jointly managing the waters of Southern Iloilo, which is a part of Panay Gulf area. This kind of initiative is in line with the provision of the country's Local Government Code of 1991 (Republic Act 7160) which decentralizes government functions to local government units (LGUs) and encourages them to group themselves and coordinate their efforts for purposes commonly beneficial to them.

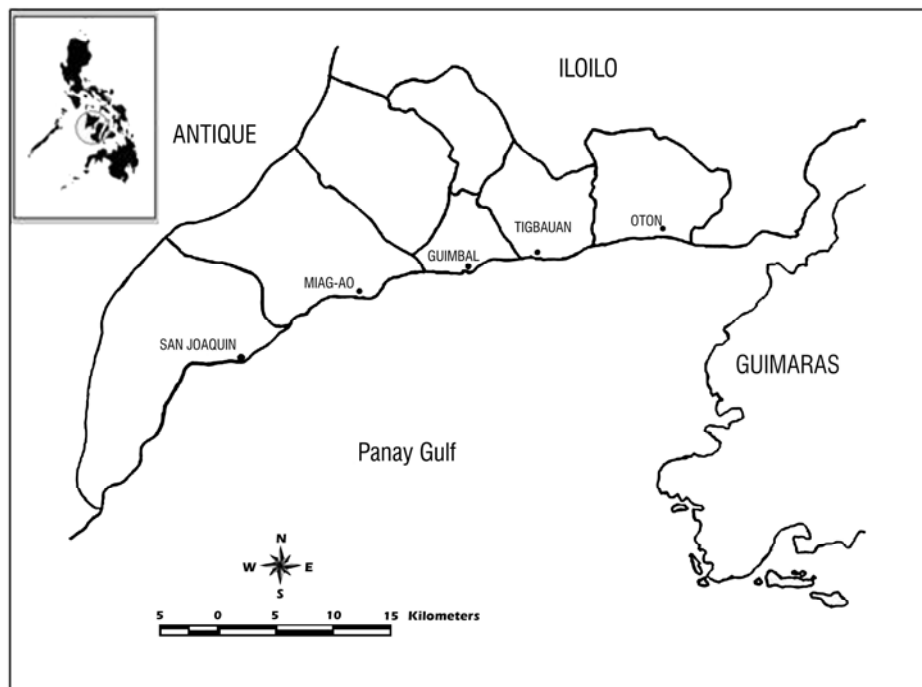


Figure 1. Map of Southern Iloilo, Philippines

The Birthpains

Prior to the birth of SICRMC, the Congresswoman of the First Congressional District of Iloilo Province in 1998 initiated a special program called Panay Gulf Development Program which aims to rehabilitate and protect Panay Gulf. The target beneficiaries of the said program are the fisherfolks of the five coastal municipalities of Southern Iloilo. However, the program did not flourish because of political animosity among the Mayors. The Congresswoman and the Mayors of the two municipalities at that time belong to a political party, while the three other Mayors are on the opposite political party. The latter group refused to join the program because of doubts that the initiative will be used to advance the political agenda of the proponent.

The University of the Philippines Visayas (UP Visayas), acknowledging the importance of the proposed program, expressed intentions to support and facilitate its implementation. A proposal was drafted to link with the Panay Gulf Development Program and the University provided the initial funding. The UP Visayas team paid a visit to all of the Municipal Mayors of the five municipalities to gather their views on the possibility of inter-LGU collaboration. It is noteworthy that those Mayors who were apprehensive to participate in the program before signified interest to join the partnership as long as the name of the program will be changed and that the initiative will not be identified with the former proponent. They also expressed their trust on the intentions of the University being a “neutral” institution.

The Partnership

After more than a year of preparatory activities, the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) was finally signed by the five Mayors on February 8, 2002, agreeing to work together for the sustainable development of the coastal resources of Southern Iloilo.

SICRMC devised a system to fairly share the authority and responsibility of managing the Panay Gulf resources through the rotation of the leadership position among its member-LGUs. During the meeting on November 30, 2005, the Board of Trustees agreed that the leadership of the Council (i.e. the positions of the Chairman of the Board of Trustees and the Executive Director) will be rotated among the member-LGUs.

To share the cost of operation, the member-LGUs decided to contribute Php20,000 annually to the trust fund. This fund will be used for the activities and projects that the Council will implement.

SICRMC served as a good venue to coordinate the efforts and integrate the plans of the five aforementioned municipalities. Through the Council, disputes on municipal water boundaries have been settled and efforts on law enforcement were strengthened, consequently resulting to increase in apprehension rate. Also, to be able to have a uniform policy, the Council attempted to unify the municipal fishery ordinances of its member-LGUs. This is an evident of SICRMCs effort to go beyond political or

administrative subdivisions of their respective municipal waters and to facilitate management of Panay Gulf as single resource system.

Discussions and Lessons Learned

Coastal resource management is a political process (Renard 1991). The principles and goals of the fisheries management process are matters of preference and choice, consequently resulting to political struggle (Jentoft 2006). The experience of SICRMC has clearly shown how politics has able to shape its inception and consequently influence its thrusts and direction.

The cooperation of the local government and the political elite is important to fisheries co-management (Pomeroy et.al. 2001) as their political willingness to lend credence and to share the cost, responsibility and authority is a big factor in determining the success or failure of the initiative (Jacinto 1997). In the same manner, the political influence of local resource groups or political coalitions may also inhibit local government officials from implementing environmental management initiatives (Lowry et.al. 2005).

Evidently, in a decentralized set-up like the LGUs of the Philippines, local political health and political infighting have a great impact on local governance (Dressler et.al. 2006; Trousdale 1999). As shown in the case of SICRMC, Mayors belonging to opposing political parties have apprehensions on forging alliance with each other because of distrust on the motives of the proposed initiative. However, with the intervention of a neutral institution and with their common concern for coastal resource management as a unifying factor, they were able to transcend politics and finally entered into partnership with their “enemies”.

References

- Dressler, W.H., C.A Kull, and T.C. Meredith. 2006. The politics of decentralizing national parks management in the Philippines. *Political Geography* 25 (2006): 789-816
- Jentoft, Svein. 2006. Beyond fisheries management: The *Phronetic* dimension. *Marine Policy* 30(2006): 671-680.
- Jacinto, E. (Ed). 1997. *Community Legal and Institutional Studies*. Tambuyog Development Center, Quezon City, Philippines.
- Lowry, K., A. White, and C. Courtney. 2005. National and local agency roles in integrated coastal management in the Philippines. *Ocean & Coastal Management* 48(2005):314-335.
- Pomeroy, R.S., B.M.Katon, and I. Harkes. 2001. Conditions affecting the success of fisheries co-management: Lessons from Asia. *Marine Policy* 25(2001):197-208.
- Renard, Y. 1991. Institutional challenges for community-based management in the Caribbean. *Nature and Resources* 27(4): 4-9.
- Republic Act 7160. *The Local Government Code of 1991*.
- Trousdale, W.J. 1999. Governance in Context: Boracay Island, Philippines. *Annals of Tourism Research* 26(4): 840-867