

The Impact of Rapid Assessment for University-Community Partnership: Recommendations from Initial Community Engagement with Selected Barangays of Plaridel, Quezon

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Abstract:

This report draws mainly from the compiled reports on the conduct of the initial stages of what was originally planned as a long-term community engagement program in the Barangays of Plaridel, Quezon, Philippines. Basically, these initial stages comprised of rapid community assessment and social preparation, especially in the form of site visits and selected community assemblies and trainings, with key informant interviews. Thus far, the real impact of this engagement has been to make the prospective partners more aware of the key concerns and potentials of their community. Moreover, social capital was invested in the effort to mobilize the people and immerse the students. There needs to be a more programmatic approach to the next steps if there is an intent to further pursue the project. Social capital—trust—has to be built to counter the cynicism that has accrued through past half-baked engagements.

Keywords —Community engagement, community capitals, rapid assessment

I. INTRODUCTION

In school year 2014-15, the Sociology Department of the College of Social Sciences and Development (CSSD) of the Polytechnic University of the Philippines (PUP) initiated a community engagement project that aimed to explore the possibility of partnering with local government units to help them, at the very least, craft development plans and pump prime community activities in selected Barangays of municipality of Plaridel in Quezon Province, in northern Philippines.

The smallest municipality in the province of Quezon, Plaridel has an area of only 33 square kilometers that covers nine barangays, with a total population of about 11,000. It lies between the towns of Atimonan and Gumaca, hugging the

coastline of the Province alongside Maharlika Highway. Its inhabitants are occupied primarily with fishing and the agricultural production of coconut and rice.

The municipality was created in 1962 by virtue of Republic Act 3493, its territories carved out from Atimonan.

II. METHODOLOGY

This report draws mainly from the compiled reports on the conduct of the initial stages of what was originally planned as a long-term community engagement program. Basically, these initial stages comprised of rapid community assessment and social preparation, especially in the form of site visits and selected community assemblies and trainings, with key informant interviews.

To be forthright, drawing from our preferred conceptual definition of what an impact study is (<http://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/dcdndep/37671602>.) as posted above, this report is more a reflection on the possible or putative impacts, strengths, and weaknesses of the community engagement that the Sociology Department initially realized in partnership with nine selected rural communities in the Philippine province of Quezon. To avoid an amorphous exploration however, this report is framed analytically and informed by the so-called "Community Capitals Approach."

III. ANALYTICAL FRAME

Students of development would now conceptualize good community relations as being about "nurturing community capitals," especially "social capital." Robert Putnam notes that the many available meanings of "social capital" share the core idea that "social networks have value." As Putnam expounds, "Just as a screwdriver (physical capital) or a university education (human capital) can increase productivity (both individual and collective), so do social contacts affect the productivity of individuals and groups."

For Susan Fey, Corry Bregendahl, and Cornelia Flora (2006), social capital "is a group level phenomenon based on relationships of trust and reciprocity." They further point out that "When it is present, groups work together, communicate and get things done. Without it, communities seem fractured, groups constantly bicker, and conflict is common."

However, trust and community norms do not necessarily lead to collective action. One needs to tap other forms of capital. Along with social capital, these are referred to broadly and collectively as "community capitals."

David Adams defines community capitals as "the ensemble of relations that create meanings, take on organizational form, guide judgements, provide resources and form identity reference points for people in specific historical conjunctures."

To clarify this broad idea, one can borrow from Fey, Bregendahl, and Flora's 2006 work entitled "The Measure of Community Capitals through

Research." These other capitals, including social capital, are the seven forms of community capitals.

The most rudimentary and identifiable form of community capital is "natural capital." They are what we commonly refer to as natural resources like land, water, and minerals.

Then there are "financial capital," "built capital," "cultural capital," "human capital," and the last one which I shall mention and emphasize later. Specialists posit that these community capitals can be nurtured and mobilized to spur local development. The notable proposition is that community development is clearly not just about natural resources (natural capital) or money (financial capital).

Cultural capital refers to things of social value — "goods that make life more meaningful" like knowledge, community traditions, and festivals. Closely related to this but probably less abstract is "human capital," which refers mainly to individual education and training, which suggests the importance of an individual's knowledge and competencies.

Last, but certainly not the least since it is the most relevant item here given the purpose of this reflection, is this form of community capital (which public opinion surveys note the President possesses much of) — "political capital."

Political capital is about the need for leadership. In the context of community engagement, it refers to "the ability of a group to influence the distribution of resources as well as help set the agenda of what resources are available. It consists in organizations, connections, voice and power." (Flora)

Political capital may be in "elected officials, appointed positions, and even in volunteer positions" for a "community's ability to access public resources or impact the rules and regulations that affect its day-to-day functioning," argues Flora, "is often mediated through... leading community actors and stakeholders."

One study done on the importance of political capital in two different neighborhood community development efforts found that "sustained community development requires three elements to be successful." Economic and social capital are the

first two while the third element, often overlooked but yields from the first two, is political capital, and it “serves to link community building, government assistance, and private investment in a neighborhood.”

In their use of this community capitals approach, Fey, Bregendahl, and Flora have shown that political capital affects natural capital, and “natural capital’s effects” hamper or facilitate human, social, cultural, and financial capitals.

In other words, social change in a community may happen because of leaders who “activate social networks, creating centers of political and social power.” (How one wishes reality were truly this simple in our national or local communities.)

In these reflections on the putative impact--from a rough ex-post facto view--of the “intervention” or “community engagement” done by the Sociology Department of the CSSD of PUP in the nine Barangays of Plaridel Municipality in Quezon Province, the community capitals approach serves as our analytical frame.

IV. FINDINGS

The sections that follow describe key recommendations raised or suggested by the assigned student teams fielded in each of the barangays as reported to the department and described in the student teams’ official reports. From these, insights on the utilization and development of pertinent community capitals are posited.

The propositions made and reported to the Department by the student and faculty involved in the community engagement efforts were culled from discussions and key informant interviews at the barangay level. This meant staying for an extended number of days in the place and engaging locals in substantial discussions on their topics of interest and concern. Especially considering the local civil society organizations, this meant identifying key local personalities and touching base with other “respected” or “authoritative” figures in the place.

Case 1: Barangay Tanauan. The rapid community assessment team deployed to the Barangay noted that the barangay has great need for

irrigation facilities, potable water, provision of electricity, street lighting, and the completion of the network of farm-to-market roads.

Given its needs, the barangay was positing the idea of being part of a bigger community (Plaridel) that is advancing and promoting agri-tourism. It is believed that as a whole, the municipality and its constituent barangays, especially Tanauan, can hit two birds with one stone, as it were -- preserve the ecological state of the area while addressing the immediate needs of the people for increased family incomes. This would require much training, particularly upskilling, and talent development. It is seen that there is enough human resource with the area to push this development scheme.

On the political capital front, there is a need to craft and support related local legislative and planning instruments, such as an ordinance on banning the use of plastics in selected activities. Aside from targeting the place to be more ecologically sound, this was seen as encouraging the local leaders to exercise their political will and make them more environmentally aware and sensitive to current concerns on ecological issues.

Community capitals-wise, it was proposed that local industries based on materials commonly found or nurtured in the area be set up (e.g., bamboo products). In fact, the resulting dynamics from developing industries would require the mobilization of all forms of community capital, including the need to organize the people and thus spur even the growth of political and social capital among whatever grassroots or civil society network is extant in the area.

Case 2: Barangay Concepcion. This community is identified to have one of the biggest populations (read: human capital) among the barangays in Plaridel. Coupled with abundant resources for a possible handicraft industry, the barangay is seen as having the potential to add to its growth beyond agriculture which direly needs support systems especially for irrigation.

It was also noted that during feast days of its patron saint and in the days leading up to the said feast, many organizations and proto-organizations

crop up to lead in the preparations for the barangay “fiesta.” However, most of these formations eventually gets dissolved or fades away as the feast ends.

With these in mind, the assigned students’ team, under faculty guidance, has recommended for future organizing efforts to be focused on getting the civil society more robust by addressing the need to sustain community organizing efforts and direct these toward meaningful development issues faced by the community. In other words, the community was deemed to have a need to strengthen its political capital.

Case 3: Barangay M.L. Tumagay. In many ways, Barangay Tumagay is much like the aother Barangays of Plaridel. It is however also an old town center—a *poblacion*. Notably, in 2014, its Barangay Chairperson was arrested for involvement in illegal drugs trade in the place. This has underscored the need for this place to strengthen its local leadership and community organizing networks.

The community has the need to spur more economic activities and serve as a better hub for its surrounding barangays. This, in fact, requires more leadership and managerial skills from its local leaders than most other barangays. Hence, the problems that the barangay government faced given the arrest of its key officer all the more highlight the need for further community development interventions in the place.

In this particular case, political capital becomes a truly stark and significant matter. Nurturing social capital may be first order of the day especially for this community, where trust in the local leadership and among community members may need to be restored and reinvigorated.

Case 4: Barangay Central. In the case of Barangay Central, it was noted that despite the community’s proximity to the sea, only a handful of locals from the place are engaged in fishery. It was posited that assistance from the local government may need to be tapped to provide those interested in fishing to engage in said activity sustainably. In

particular, these people need fishing tools and equipment—capital that is much needed for their preferred livelihood. Such an assistance program could be forged from a partnership of the local government of Plaridel and the local fisherfolk organizations (the notion of a Barangay Fishery and Aquatic Resources Management Cooperative—BFARMC).

Furthermore, in the matter of livelihood, the women of the barangay are interested in engaging in secondary livelihood sources. A significant number of women populace has time enough to engage in economic activity beyond housekeeping. This human capital can be developed further through trainings and educational seminars. They have expressed particular interest in engaging in economic projects like handicraft production, sewing, and food processing—things not too far from their housekeeping chores.

There is also the matter of the youth in the barangay who are eager to learn and may be mobilized for community development efforts. Organizing and community-based educational work for the youth can go a long way in better ensuring sustained growth for the place.

Case 5: Barangay Paaralan. In the case of Barangay Paaralan (or Pampaaralan), which is in fact one of the “poblacion” (old town center), what is highlighted in the report is the lack of employment and livelihood opportunities which is pushing many of the locals to migrate or seek better opportunities outside Plaridel.

The women were particularly expressive about the lack of good income sources in the area. As a sector in the barangay, the women has a reliable track record of getting involved in various community activities and engaging in all forms of livelihood activities.

As a center or hub of business, the barangay does have some potential, the women noted. Its location is ideal and can connect key areas, they said. The recommendation is to have more trainings and social activities to engage the women and youth of the community.

One distinct concern of the place is the management of the river that passes through the

community—*IlogSiain*, a key element of the natural capital of the place. The mouth of the river has reportedly been blocked making the waters potential breeding grounds for mosquitoes and thereby threatening the health of the locals. An ordinance and attendant organizing efforts are needed to clean the river and the surroundings.

Then there is also Lamon Bay that environmentally frames the community. This Bay is reportedly rich in various natural resources and could be the centerpiece in invigorating the local economy and culture of the people.

Case 6: Barangay PaangBundok. In the report on this barangay, what stands out are:

1) The people's own observation that there are natural resources that can be maximized for livelihood in the place (the nexus of local knowledge or human capital and natural capital); and,

2) The many half-baked or discontinued community organizing and intervention efforts done in the past. The locals may have already become rather cynical of various attempts from outside agencies to help spur development in the area. This could mean a very weak social capital base upon to build future interventions on.

With these, of course, came the common issues of lack of employment opportunities, low yield from fishery, women's lack of livelihood opportunities, and weak support for the agricultural sector despite the potential of the place for Agri-tourism as noted in the other barangays as well.

The bottomline for the study team—the need to better organize the locals so they can work more effectively on their collective, community needs.

Case 7: Barangay Ilaya. Livelihood, electricity and lighting, health services, petty theft of poultry and other farm animals, and irrigation and potable water source. These are lead concerns expressed by the people of Ilaya.

The study team noted two capitals on which development efforts may be initiated first: 1) the skills and knowledge of the people in livelihood; and, 2) the rich flora and forestry of the place.

The group also particularly highlighted the need for the local government to work on first improving the potable water source of the community, including those of adjacent barangays.

In terms of livelihood and economic activities, the group underscored in its recommendations the potential of involving the women sector in more activities and the provision of support for the copra workers in the area. This “copra industry” is a notable theme in the whole of Plaridel, in fact, and may need some special attention in terms of development planning.

Case 8: Barangay Ilosong. Potable water source, access to health services and affordable medicines, literacy and education, street lighting, solid waste and environmental management (e.g., managing potential dangers in the riverside areas) and addressing potential were key expressed concerns by local officials and the people of Ilosong.

In terms of capitals, the barangay as one of the biggest area allocation for coconut production and thus copra is one key industry. Agri-tourism is a very real possibility with its sought-after “sumangmarwikos”, its waterfalls, caves, and rivers.

Key recommendations are: 1) Create a better information base on the barangay; 2) Support the livelihood activities of the locals; 3) Provide more educational venues for the people, especially the young, including bringing back the Alternative Learning System (ALS) of the Department of Education; 4) Provide adequate street lighting to give the people a better sense of security and possibly deter the commission of crimes in particular areas especially at night; 5) Support local farmers, particularly on irrigation; 6) Upgrade the local water system; and, 7) Improve the communications system, with the support of service telco providers, so economic activities can be facilitated.

Taken all together, this “wish list” suggest the need for substantial financial capital investment for this barangay alone. What more if one projects all these as similar needs and concerns (as they are) of all the other eight barangays of Plaridel?

Case 9: Barangay Duhat. Indeed, Barangay Duhat echoes the concerns raised above in Barangay Ilosong. In particular, the first recommendation is to conduct a more detailed survey on the economic and ecological potentials of the area leading to the prioritizing of specific livelihood activities and employment opportunities to be nurtured.

The transportation system and roads network (farm-to-market road) for the area leaves much to be desired. This is the second theme that the study theme highlighted in their recommendation. This is seen as something extremely needed by the local farmers and agricultural workers.

It is also important to note that the team recommends special attention be given to lighting the streets to improve local security.

Finally, it should be noted that the barangay has the biggest land area allocated for rice cultivation. This concern must be well considered in the whole development planning process for the community. For instance, as in the recommendation for Barangay Conception, Barangay Duhat rice farmers may consider producing Sorghum along their rice lines. In other words, there is also a need to look into the technical know-hows regarding the activities in the area. This clearly underscores the matter of innovation (human and cultural capital) as being a handmaiden of innovation.

V. SYNTHESIS

This community engagement initiative of the Department was able to:

1. Identify and establish contacts within the partner communities and local government units (LGUs);
2. Conduct selected orientation workshops for various stakeholders and pay courtesy calls to local officials to mobilize support for the project;
3. Run a rapid community assessment of the prospective partner community by doing library research for secondary data, key informant interviews, focus group

discussions, site visits, and student teams' immersions.

4. Draft project proposals on potential priority projects of the partner local government unit.

Now, scanning the key observations and recommendations made by the different study teams formed for this engagement, one can come up with the matrix below which marks the most salient forms of capital noted to be of prominence in the communities strengths and issues.

Forms of Community Capital Salient in the Cases of Plaridel Barangays

	Social Capital	Natural Capital	Financial Capital	Built Capital	Cultural Capital	Human Capital	Political Capital
Case A		X		X	X		X
Case B		X			X	X	X
Case C	X					X	X
Case D		X	X			X	
Case E	X	X				X	
Case F	X	X				X	X
Case G		X		X		X	
Case H		X	X	X			
Case I		X		X	X	X	

What this exercise suggests is the need to build on all the available community capitals but underscoring may be needed for natural, human and political capitals.

Thus far, the real impact of this engagement has been to make the prospective partners more aware of the key concerns and potentials of their community. Moreover, social capital was invested in the effort to mobilize the people and immerse the students. There needs to be a more programmatic approach to the next steps if there is an intent to further pursue the project. Social capital—trust—has to be built to counter the cynicism that has accrued through past half-baked engagements.

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