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Aldon, Eva T.

Aquaculture Department, Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center

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Organizing the Malalison community

BY ET Aldon

SEAFDEC/AQD's coastal enhancement project requires a strong, self-reliant people's organization (Agbayani, 1995). AQD's first priority was then to organize the Malalison community to socially prepare them of the project's activities and interventions.

The Fishermen's Association of Malalison Island (FAMI) was formally organized in 1990 with the support of the Culasi municipal government. AQD upon recognizing its weakness in organizing a community, linked with PROCESS Foundation (or the Participatory Research Organization of Communities and Education towards Struggle for Self-Reliance Foundation), a non-governmental organization to facilitate organizing. Community organizing was to meet the following objectives:

- empower the people in Malalison through effective and efficient participation in socioeconomic and political activities;
- facilitate people's organization and community access to and control over resources and provide opportunities and means of production;
- develop skills and capability for self-reliant, self-managed sustainable organization, projects and community;
- inculcate values and promote awareness of and a proper attitude towards environmental conservation; and
- identify, explore and implement appropriate, indigenous and innovative technologies as well as sustainable alternative livelihood projects.

PROCESS has conducted various training programs for FAMI members.

Potential leaders were trained on basic supervisory skills, organization development and management, cooperative development, basic paralegal knowledge, and ecology and environmental protection and conservation.

For live-in seminars, FAMI members who are household heads and breadwinners were provided replacement income by AQD. (This practice was discontinued after a year.) The Foundation facilitated FAMI's membership in a regionwide federation of subsistence farmers and fisher's organization. FAMI members also attended other capability-building workshops and meetings organized by PROCESS and visited projects of other fishing cooperatives in Western Visayas.

A resource management committee was created comprising representatives from different fisher groups (hook-and-line, net, and spear), the local government units, AQD and PROCESS Foundation. As an organized group now, FAMI is expected to: (1) improve enforcement of fishery laws through self-regulation and vigilance, (2) stop illegal fishing, (3) develop skills in alternative livelihood, and (4) improve access to appropriate technology (Agbayani & Babol 1997).

About PROCESS

PROCESS is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organization (NGO) with a mission "to empower the grassroots and deprived sectors of society to take control of their destinies." It also aims to creatively form a strong people's organization, building-up their capabilities and harnessing their own potential for participatory and self-reliant development. As an offshoot of then *Sarilakas* (own strength)

in 1981, PROCESS's experimental projects stimulated the grassroots' initiatives and developed self-reliance in rural communities in Antique and Batangas. It has then grown into an independent organization and maintains several offices nationwide. PROCESS motivates the poor to become main actors in development programs and enhances their involvement in the socioeconomic, political and cultural endeavors.

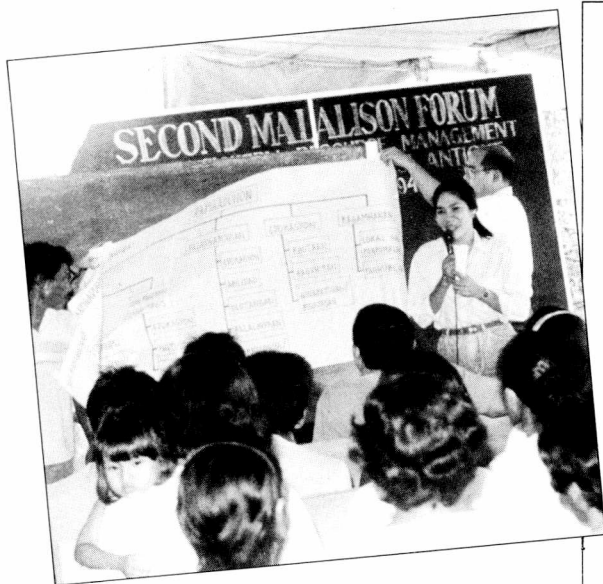
Wilfredo Homicillada, Executive Director of PROCESS Foundation outlined the steps to organize communities:

- The **first step** was data gathering, through a series of meetings with local officials. The support of the local government is important for, he said, these officials would serve as indicators for criteria the Foundation has to set.
- The **second step**, he said, was identifying potential leaders to serve as core group who would become partners of the Foundation in organizing the community. PROCESS applied the issue- and economic-based approach in Malalison.

Today, PROCESS has conducted various researches and developed linkages in local, national and international organizations. It has several publications and model building schemes from these linkages.

The Malalison community

The Malalison residents admitted they were at first hesitant to cooperate with AQD as they were apprehensive and doubtful of their intentions. They thought they would be deprived of their livelihood should the



project be implemented. The rest is history. With artificial reefs (ARs) now in place and the sanctuary keeping out fishers, Malalison folks are now thankful that SEAFDEC helped them get back the abundant resource they used to enjoy. They have become aware of their rights and laws and regulations affecting them. They are also actively participating in community affairs. As an awakened and well organized group, they wanted to extend this message to other coastal communities: **"It's wiser that people themselves manage their own resources."**

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8 years later ...

BY AP Surtida

In an interview with Mr. Jelson Dayo, 31, erstwhile president of the Fishermen's Association of Malalison island (FAMI), he noticed a distinct change in the quality of their lives in Malalison island.

He attributed the change to AQD's social intervention schemes. He then enumerated some tangible aspects of AQD's contribution that change their lives including among others:

- concrete pipes which AQD donated for the construction of additional deepwells in 1992 for safe drinking water
- advent of electrical power, which is being supplied by a private entrepreneur and island resident, Paterno Illo. A generator (5-KVA Fuso-Canter) supplies electricity at 4:00-6:00 am and 6:00-10:00 pm
- organization of FAMI which gave the island residents a sense of purpose and empowerment
- regular medical and dental visits to the island of doctors and dentists for consultation and treatment
- additional teachers to teach elementary schooling up to Grade six. The elementary schoolers need not go to Culasi
- regular church services / masses conducted by Father Bobit Javiera and Father Maghari for their spiritual well-being
- creation of fish sanctuaries and construction of artificial reefs by AQD and island residents that gave their marine resources a new lease on life
- access to instant communication and transportation, thanks to AQD's radio facilities and pumpboat
- a decent lodging house for guests of the island, again thanks to AQD for building a station
- access to the main station of AQD, which gave the islanders a sense of importance and a higher self-esteem
- purchases of TV, radio, and karaoke sets as an indicator that their lives have improved
- more children are sent to school and/or college, indicating that the importance of education was realized
- empowering the womenfolk of the island through gender sensitivity sessions

Asked what he wants more for the islanders, Mr. Dayo said he hopes the enthusiasm and zeal of his people would not wane.

He wants more for his fellow island residents in terms of getting more breaks in life. According to Mr. Dayo's figure, the 1998 households in the island is 104 and the population has risen to about 540. He wants to break the cycle of poverty in the island by education, empowerment, additional skills, entrepreneurship, and good old willpower.