



Case Study

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Empowering Community Organizations in Rural Destinations: Challenges and Lessons from COVID-19



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ABSTRACT: Stakeholder engagement has been regarded as an important strategy towards the attainment of sustainable tourism development. Responsible tourism also highlights its importance, valuing the potential role individuals and groups partake in resolving problems and issues concerning tourism. However, despite these well-meaning approaches, rural communities who engage in tourism livelihoods are often faced with challenges that impedes them from fully having empowered voices and choices. Using the principles of people-centered development and community organizing as the lens of analysis, this case study examined the experience of community organizations in Cagbalete Island, Philippines as tourism stakeholders of a rural island destination. Findings showed that despite their active participation in trainings and programs initiated by the local government, the organizations were lacking in resources and self-defined activities to improve their collective welfare. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, many organizations had a hard time keeping their purpose due to the lack of tourism activities in the island, as well as their dependence on government directives and programs. This study underscores the value of applying community development approaches to enrich the participation of community organizations and empower them to be responsible stakeholders in the sustainable development of their respective destinations.

KEYWORDS: crisis; rural communities; community empowerment; people-centered development; community organizing; responsible tourism; sustainable tourism; COVID-19

Background

In 2005, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Tourism Organization (WTO) released the 12 Aims – an agenda for sustainable tourism that addresses the economic, social, and environmental impacts of a growing global tourism industry. With multi-stakeholder engagement as one of its key principles, local control was identified as a sustainability aim to ensure that host communities equally benefit from tourism development. Local control is characterized as engaging and empowering local communities to influence tourism development decisions, and actively participate in planning and decision-making activities in the destination (UNEP & WTO, 2005).

This same principle of “*giving people responsibility and control over their lives*” (UNEP & WTO, 2005, p.34) encompasses the goal and essence of responsible tourism. According to Ting, Morrison, Leong, Kumarusamy, and Leong (2021), everybody has a potential role to play in mitigating the harmful impacts of tourism development and providing solutions to address problems. These roles are influenced by people’s awareness and concern on tourism issues, and highlights efforts taken by individuals and groups as they interact with one another. Responsible tourism does not replace or compete with sustainable tourism but rather, it aims to promote sustainability through a shift in paradigm and practice. While the concept has long been present since the 1990s, a resurgence of interest recently emerged as a response to global issues such as climate change, overtourism, and the COVID-19 pandemic (Ting, Jean, Meng, Cheah, & Cheer, 2020).

Drawing on people’s capacity and responsibility to action, one could argue the important role community organizations play in achieving sustainable and responsible tourism development. In tourism literature, this is often attributed to community-based tourism (CBT) programs in rural areas where the planning and maintaining of tourism development is directed by its host community to alleviate poverty and pursue environmental conservation (Beeton, 2006; Zielinski, Jeong, Kim, & Milanés, 2020). These tourism activities are commonly tied with Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) (Ashley, 2000) that is characterized as a process where locals organize themselves to responsibly manage and utilize their resources and achieve their defined needs, goals, and aspirations (Fellizar, 1993). Similarly, applications of the sustainable livelihoods approach (SLA) in tourism highlights the need for institutional capital where community members are able to receive the most benefit from tourism if they have access and participation in policy-making processes (Shen, Hughey, & Simmons, 2008).

However, community organizations in tourism destinations are often faced with challenges such as donor dependency and unsustainable economic viability due to the small tourism market it caters to (Gabito, 2012; Goodwin & Santilli, 2009). In situations where external stakeholders play a significant role in establishing tourism activities in a destination, mismatched values and leadership conflicts with community members may arise, therefore leading to other concerns that limits favorable tourism livelihood outcomes (Wang, Cater, & Low, 2016). According to Blackstock (2005), CBT initiatives also often lack transformative intent for community development wherein people are simply expected to accept tourism programs with little consideration on how to foster local control and empowerment. These concerns imply that while establishing community organizations is good, it is ultimately their capacities that dictate how they shape and influence tourism development towards the improvement of their individual and collective welfare. And with the industry’s growing risk to disasters and crises (World Bank, 2020), the role and participation of local communities are given further importance in building tourism resiliency. Therefore, it is essential to know how empowered community organizations truly are by examining their capacity to exercise responsibility and control over issues impacting tourism development in their destination.

Contextualized in their experience of the COVID-19 pandemic, this study examined community organizations in Cagbalete Island, Philippines who experienced a crisis. The purpose, activities, and vulnerability-coping strategies of nine organizations were identified to understand their roles and responsibilities as tourism stakeholders. The principles of people-centered development and community organizing were used to assess how empowered they are and highlight the importance of empowering community organizations as active agents of change. This study contributes to literature on community organizations,

focusing on their experience of a crisis and its impacts to their tourism livelihoods. It also provides insights on tourism development in rural communities and island destinations in Southeast Asia. Furthermore, the research underscores the importance of the disciplinary interplay between tourism and community development towards achieving a more sustainable and responsible tourism industry.

Literature Review

Tourism and Rural Communities

In 2019, the World Bank reported that 44% of the world population reside in rural areas (World Bank, n.d.). Seventy percent (70%) of the world's poorest people belong to these communities (Steiner & Fan, 2019) and they continue to live in poverty due to factors such as underdevelopment and vulnerability from threats of wars and natural disasters. When natural disasters occur, rural communities dependent on natural resources are easily deprived of their assets due to loss of catch, crop, or livestock. Sometimes, it can also lead to loss of property and lives. With loss of income and source of income generating resources, many rural households are further driven into poverty (Mphande, 2016).

To overcome these challenges, rural communities have turned to tourism development for its promising economic benefits. Tourism offers new and additional uses for rural environments that help diversify the local economy and livelihood activities (Saarinen & Lenao, 2014), as well as providing locals with easier opportunities to earn cash (Alcantara, 2023). Many have approached this through CBT, highlighting the valuable role of communities in controlling and managing the conservation of their own culture and natural environment (Zielinski et.al., 2020).

Tourism in the Philippines is actively pursued as a tool for poverty alleviation. In coastal communities like Barangay Looc in Biliran, they pursued tourism as a complementary livelihood to their mangrove protection program which helped provide income for 100 sustenance fisherfolks in the town (Cayubit, 2017). In Palompon, Leyte, visitors to Kalanggaman and Tabuk island provided a supplementary activity for local fishermen that helped diversify their economy (World Tourism Organization and Griffith University, 2017). For Donsol, Sorsogon, their whale shark watching activities spilled-over to island hopping, river cruise, and firefly watching activities which helped change their simple town from a fifth class to a first class municipality (Gabito, 2012; The Manila Times, 2015). Often times, tourism also helps provide livelihood opportunities to neighboring rural areas like barangay Rizal of Guimaras whose model toy boat making receives most of its earnings from international and domestic tourists who visit Boracay island in Aklan (Asong, Mabunay, Aure, Seraspe, Braganza, & Corda, 2002).

Unfortunately, tourism development in rural communities are also faced with challenges. Gabito (2012) identified that aside from having poor infrastructure base and limited knowledge and skills on marketing and management, community-based tourism projects in the Philippines often offer seasonal and limited employment opportunities. Ownership and access to resources are also critical issues that are often overlooked, causing organizations to become dependent on profit, government, and non-government organizations. Meanwhile, in rural areas where agritourism is being developed, Montefrio and Sin (2019) pointed out that the supposed benefits to underprivileged small farmers went instead to old and new landed

elites. Local politics further adds to the vulnerability of tourism activities in rural communities (Gabito, 2012).

People-Centered Development

Contrary to centrally controlled, functionally defined, and resource exploitative systems in production-centered development, people-centered development emerged as an alternative paradigm centered on enhancing human growth and well-being, equity, and sustainability. It highlights the role of individuals as actors and the application of human values in decision making processes. To facilitate this, enabling settings must be created to produce mechanisms for self-organizing structures and processes, local resource control, and building of power outside of traditional bureaucratic structures (Korten, 1984).

In social work and community development, people-centered development emphasizes the capability of people to become agents of change towards their desired state of development. According to Schenck and Louw (1995), people should be perceived as “capable and have the potential to develop, grow, learn, and make their own decisions” (p.86). This requires developing people's “capabilities, potential, power, resources, knowledge, and skills” (p. 85) and allowing them to assess their own needs based on how they experience and make sense of their realities. This process of self-awareness and critical consciousness is crucial in instilling self-confidence and inspiring self-expression as people better understand the forces that shape their world (Brohman, 1996).

Dela Cruz (2005) identified six principles that should guide the design and implementation of people-centered programs and advocacies. These are empowerment, participation, self-reliance, bias for the poor and most vulnerable, equity, and accountability. This is enabled by forming self-propelling groups and associations that have a strong sense of identity, group responsibility, and capability to identify, plan, implement and learn from their own development priorities. It moves away from top-down goal directed models and prioritizes local initiatives and diversity where people are always put first.

Community Organizing

Manalili (1990) describes community organizing as a community process that revolves around the lives, experiences, and aspirations of people. It is empowering them to identify, analyze, and solve their shared problems through technical skills training and programs that reinforce social linkages and networks. Organized under one shared mission, people are encouraged to collectively control decisions, projects, programs, and policies that affect them as a community (Rubin & Rubin, 2001). Ultimately, people are given the power to write their own history by enabling them to decide for their own future (Manalili, 1990).

Genuine participation is expected in all aspects or stages of community organizing in order to form self-reliant groups that would facilitate sustainable development (Norman, 1998). When community organizing is successful, it implies a continuing capacity of the community to address new problems as they emerge. Drawing from their unity as one collective unit, people continue to develop skills and confidence that pushes them to feel empowered in fighting and solving challenges and threats (Rubin & Rubin, 2001). According to Speer and Hughey (1995), empowerment is the exercise of social power and social power is accessed only through organization. This power is more effective and long lasting when built on relationships rather than issue-focused organizing.

While organizing from the grassroots do occur, the process of community organizing is often initiated by external organizers from government agencies, non-governmental organizations, or the academe. In Dizon's (2012) literature review of community organizing, four key processes are essential in community organizing practice. These are social preparation, education and training, value orientation, and mobilization. Mobilization or the realization of participatory decision making occurs when community members willingly give up individual interests for communal gain, have gained expertise on issues faced, and have available resources to act on their activities and strategies.

Case Study Area

Cagbalete island is located along the eastern coastline of the municipality of Mauban, found in the province of Quezon, Philippines. It boasts of white sand beaches and mangrove forests where its visitors can enjoy activities such as boating, swimming, and snorkeling. As early as 1998, the tourism potential of the island has been recognized by the Philippine national government. However, it was only in 2015 when tourism became a significant livelihood activity for the local community because of its perceived quick and high monetary returns (Municipal Tourism Office of Mauban, 2017).

Using the SLA framework, Alcantara (2023) examined the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic to the tourism livelihoods of the rural community in Cagbalete. Findings showed that tourism activities are concentrated in one village in the island (Cagbalete Uno) and became a preferred source of livelihood for locals due to better income opportunities compared to fishing and farming. Through tourism, favorable livelihood outcomes were achieved and helped the community overcome shocks and stresses brought about by natural hazards and limited infrastructure in the island. Unfortunately, the pandemic caused mobility restrictions in and to the island, leading to its closure from tourists for a whole year. This negatively affected their capital assets, livelihood strategies, and livelihood outcomes which led them to a realization that tourism must be developed alongside other non-tourism livelihood activities. Furthermore, its residents' lack of land tenure was recognized as a key source of vulnerability because it limits their access to and use of capital assets. This is attributed to the fact that majority of the land in Cagbalete is privately owned and belongs to a few prominent families from the main town.

Methodology

A qualitative case study method was used in this paper. Qualitative research design is helpful in explaining experiences, meanings, and perspectives of participants (Hammarberg, Kirkman, & de Lacey, 2016) while case studies are appropriate for unexplored or underexamined topics with how or why questions. In hospitality and tourism research, qualitative case studies are mostly used for subjects of limited sample size and for stakeholders in the destination (Çakar & Aykol, 2020). Documents review and onsite key informant interviews were conducted during the first quarter of 2021.

Focusing on community organizations recognized as tourism stakeholders, purposive sampling was employed in selecting the respondents of the study. In consultation with the Mauban Arts, Culture, and Tourism (M-ACT) office, nine community organizations in Cagbalete were identified to be involved in tourism activities in the island. A total of 12 organization representatives were interviewed for the study (see Table 1). The Municipal

Tourism Officer of Mauban was also interviewed to contextualize the participation of the organizations from the perspective of the destination management organization (DMO).

A semi-structured interview questionnaire was prepared with the following topics:

- How and when the organization was established
- Purpose and main objectives
- Programs/activities (e.g., trainings, collection of fees) and participation in tourism development in the island
- Number of members and their characteristics (e.g., age, gender, livelihood)
- Response to community shocks or stresses (vulnerability context) and assistance received from the government (if any)
- Impact of the pandemic and the organization response

Table 1: Profile of community organization representatives

Representative	Position	Community Organization
1 female	Dispatcher	Cagbalete I Motorbike Association
1 male	President	Cagbalete Hilot Wellness Workers Association
2 males 1 female	Members	Cagbalete Resort Association Incorporated
1 male	Secretary	Lamon Bay Aqua Farmers Association
2 females	Communications Officer; Member (President's wife)	Sitio Dapi Farmers Association
1 male	President	Small Boat Association
1 female	President	Souvenir Makers Association
1 male	Acting President	Tour Guides Association (<i>Samahan ng mga Tour Guide</i>)
1 male	President	Vendor's Association (<i>Maglalako ng Isda</i>)

Results

To effectively examine the community organizations in Cagbalete, their profile and experience as tourism stakeholders in the island are discussed in four parts. The first section discusses how the organizations were established, including the livelihood trainings and assistance they received from local and national government agencies. The second section focuses on their activities as an organization before the pandemic, while the third section describes the experiences of the organizations during the pandemic crisis. Lastly, the fourth section tackles the challenges these community organizations face.

Establishment of Organizations and Trainings Received

The community organizations in Cagbalete represent the different sectors in the community. They are grouped according to livelihood activities and may be classified as agriculture and tourism organizations. The agriculture related organizations are the Lamon Bay Aqua Farmers Association and the Sitio Dapi Farmers Association. Its members are residents in the island who have access to small farm lands leased by land owners for farming and aquaculture activities. Aside from selling their produce to locals and tourists, they also play a

key role in managing the mangrove forests in the island. Tourism related organizations on the other hand includes the Cagbalete Hilot Wellness Workers Association for massage therapists, Cagbalete Resort Association Incorporated for resort owners, Souvenir Makers Association for souvenir makers, the Tour Guides Association for guides, and the Vendor's Association for residents who sell fish to both locals and tourists. The Cagbalete I Motorbike Association and Small Boat Association are also considered as tourism organizations because their primary purpose is to provide transportation services to tourists in the island. The profile of the community organizations are presented in Table 2.

It is important to note that members of these community organizations may have membership in two or more organizations depending on their interests and livelihood activities. This is attributed to the diversification strategy rural communities often apply to ensure that their income from farming activities are augmented by non-farm livelihood activities (Bhandari, 2013; Ramos, Estudillo, Sawada, & Otsuka, 2012) such as tourism. Some farmers are small boat owners while some vendors are also souvenir makers. An exception to this set-up is the Cagbalete Resort Association Incorporated. Members of this organization are resort owners whose primary livelihoods and residence are mostly in the mainland. The organization is also identified to be largely comprised of relatives whose ancestry can be traced back to the Pansacola brothers known to have bought the island from the Spanish government in 1859 (Alcantara, 2023). Since they are the landowners of Cagbalete and are the primary providers of accommodation services in the island, they were still included as a community organization in the study.

Table 2: Profile of community organizations in Cagbalete Island

Community Organization	Year Established	Membership	Description
Cagbalete I Motorbike Association	2019	Has 64 male members aged 18-55 years old and 1 female member who is the organization's dispatcher (arranges the queue of motorbike trips).	Organized by the local motorbike or <i>habal-habal</i> drivers to give tourists good transportation service around the island. They established a queuing process for trips to ensure that its members have equal opportunities of having guests to drive for.
Cagbalete Hilot Wellness Workers Association	2016	Has 29 members, 25 are female while 4 are male. Only 20 of them were officially trained by the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) while the other 9 were <i>manghihilot</i> by experience. Their ages are 25 years old and above.	Was established after the TESDA training on massage therapy arranged by the M-ACT office. Its purpose is to provide livelihoods and promote the practice of traditional <i>hilot</i> (ancient Filipino art of healing). Some members are freelancers while others are mainstays in a specific resort who entered a contract or agreement that they will be their official massage therapist.
Cagbalete Resort Association Incorporated	2018	Has 10 resort members and the owners are mostly relatives.	Was established to promote harmonious relationship with other resorts and to have a collective voice when raising concerns to the LGU.

Lamon Bay Aqua Farmers Association	2010	Has 48 members but only 20 are active. Majority of the members are men aged 50 years old and above.	Organized through the assistance of the Department of Agriculture (DA) with the purpose of promoting organic farming and aquaculture not just in Cagbalete, but in the neighboring towns of Lamon Bay as well. They have a common farm in a piece of property lent by the owner of Doña Choleng Resort. They received several trainings and support from the DA but unfortunately, these trainings ended in 2012 when there was a change in DA leadership. They used to have a greenhouse that tourists visited occasionally.
Sitio Dapi Farmers Association	2019	Has 30 members with ages ranging from 30 to 60 years old. It has a mix of male and female members since most of them are spouses.	Organized through the assistance of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and DA, its purpose is to promote farming through the free saplings, fertilizers, and other relief support they receive from the national government. They maintain the planting of mangroves along the San Jose River located in the island.
Small Boat Association	2013	Has 198 male members where the youngest is 15 years old. Most members have their own outrigger boats or <i>bangka</i> with a passenger capacity that ranges from 2 to 15 people. Other members only borrow or drive with those who have boats.	The organization is a Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) registered association that was established with the goal of providing an orderly system of getting tourist passengers.
Souvenir Makers Association	2020	An all women organization that has 10 members. Their ages range from 30-40 years old.	Was established on February 2020 through the efforts of the M-ACT office. However, the organization has not been able to start any project since their establishment because of the pandemic. There are more souvenir makers in the island but are not yet part of the group.
Tour Guides Association (<i>Samahan ng mga Tour Guide</i>)	2016	Has 50 members with ages ranging from 14 to 60 years old. Most of their members are males but they also have a handful of female members who are mostly mothers.	Was established through the initiative of the M-ACT office after organizing a seminar for training tour guides. Its purpose is to provide livelihood for the residents of Cagbalete and to help tourists enjoy their vacation in the island.
Vendor's Association (<i>Maglalako ng Isda</i>)	2007	Has 19 members whose ages are mostly 40 years old and above. It has a mix of male and female members.	Was established with the purpose of providing high quality fish at the right price to tourists when they go to resorts. They buy fishes in bulk and sell them. Sometimes, they import or source their fish supply from the main town.

The Philippine Department of Agriculture (DA) and M-ACT office are the primary government institutions responsible for livelihood programs and trainings in Cagbalete island. The DA provides livelihood assistance for fishers and farmers while the M-ACT office provides trainings for tourism and tourism-related services.

For the agriculture organizations, the DA provided trainings on planting organic and high value crops, as well as technical support for operating fish pens. Other national agencies that gave them livelihood assistance are the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) who gave financial incentives for planting mangroves and the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) who gave fiber glass boats and financial capital to operate fish pens for those qualified under the *Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program* (4Ps).

For the tourism organizations, the M-ACT office provided trainings on cooking, tour guiding, souvenir making, and massage therapy. Some of these were done in partnership with the Philippine Department of Tourism (DOT), Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) and the Department of Trade and Industries (DTI).

It was through the trainings that were conducted that most of the community organizations in Cagbalete were established. This is a common practice for government agencies in the Philippines wherein creation of people's organizations are necessary to facilitate faster government support and assistance. Furthermore, the 2017-2021 Mauban Cultural Tourism Master Plan (CTMP) identified community organizing as a strategy to enhance community participation in the municipality. In order to build a strong foundation for their growing tourism industry, it was specified that sectoral groups should be organized after conducting programs on tourism awareness and skills training. The community organizations were envisioned to work hand-in-hand with the M-ACT office for the successful implementation of its tourism programs.

Organization Activities Before the Pandemic

Information dissemination, coordination of activities with the M-ACT office, and promotion of fair play among members (e.g., agreed price on fish sold to guests) are the main activities of community organizations in Cagbalete. They also attend tourism stakeholder meetings when the M-ACT office calls for one, either in the island or the municipal office located in the mainland. Aside from doing their individual livelihood activities, interviewed representatives shared that they did not have their own programs for trainings, capital acquisition, or membership welfare. Agriculture organizations mentioned providing technical support to members and assisting each other in farming, but they have no activities that are designed for profit sharing or are geared towards increasing the collective production of their products or harvest. Even so, organizations were perceived positively because of the capital and training support the government courses through them.

Only three organizations, the Lamon Bay Aqua Farmers Association, Cagbalete I Motorbike Association, and Cagbalete Resort Association Incorporated, disclosed that they have a common fund from fees collected from their members. However, it was only the Cagbalete I Motorbike Association that elaborated how much is collected and what it is used for. According to their representative, members are required to give PHP 5 (USD 0.09) for every trip that they have. The money is then added to an emergency assistance fund that may be given to members who are in need.

When asked about how their organization responds to community shocks and stresses (e.g., typhoons, cancellation of boat trips due to high waves), most of the representatives replied that they have no programs or activities for such events and that members just act individually or on their own. Fishers look for other sources of income when the weather is bad while farmers try to find their own means of collecting water for their crops. For those engaged in tourism activities, they just simply wait for the shock or stress to pass. Furthermore, they mentioned that they rely on their *barangay* (village) officials for evacuation warnings and relief aid.

Organization Experiences During the Pandemic Crisis

When the pandemic hit, there were also no organized response from the community organizations. All of them were affected by the lockdown and social distancing protocols which affected their capacity to gather in groups and participate in their normal livelihood activities. Some respondents even expressed that they felt as if their organization was non-existent due to lack of communication among the members. There were also no internal initiatives to start programs that built the capacity and improved the welfare of its members. Same as before, they relied on their local officials for relief aid and short-term livelihood opportunities such as cash-for-work programs. Fortunately, national government institutions such as the DA and DSWD gave additional financial and in-kind support (rice, eggs, and other grocery items) to qualified recipients in Cagbalete.

Aside from coordinating with the M-ACT office for new protocols on accepting visitors in the island, the organizations were simply waiting for the restrictions to ease. Most of them felt that they cannot do anything else aside from wait and hope that they can go back to their livelihood activities before the pandemic. They also expressed their desire for tourists' return to the island so they can recover their losses due to the lockdown.

Organization Challenges

Although organized into groups and trained for various livelihood activities, little can be said about the other capacities of community organizations in Cagbalete. These are manifested in the following issues and concerns they have encountered.

- Lack of organization funds. Officers could not ask for membership fees because the members have no or limited livelihood.
- Some livelihood programs or support did not continue when there was a change in leadership in the local government unit (LGU) or national agencies. In the case of the Lamon Bay Aqua Farmers Association, their representative expressed that they have continuously received support from the DA with regards to their organic farming and aqua fishery activities. However, this ended in 2012 when the leaders of the agency were changed. They tried asking for assistance from the LGU, but they have not been successful in introducing new projects that can help improve their production.
- The emergence of new organizations that offer a competing or similar activity decreased the livelihood opportunities of already existing groups. In the experience of the Tour Guides Association, the *habal-habal* services offered by the Cagbalete I Motorbike Association discouraged visitors from availing tour guide services because they prefer riding a motorbike to the resorts than walking. Moreover, when the pandemic hit, the M-ACT office decided to form a new organization of Tourist Porters that will assist visitors in the reopening of tourism in Cagbalete. Its members

are former tour guides and *habal-habal* drivers and this, unfortunately, created some confusion on who are the permanent members of which organization.

Discussion

In a people-centered development approach, organizing community members into formal groups is an important step in facilitating their participation in any development project. When organized, locals are able to collectively voice out their concerns and have representation when coordinating with the government and other stakeholder groups. In the Philippines, membership in community organizations also meant easier and faster facilitation of livelihood assistance from the government.

In the municipality of Mauban, community organizing was embraced as a strategy to achieve the goals of their Cultural Tourism Master Plan. The M-ACT office, as its DMO, dutifully implemented this strategy by conducting tourism awareness seminars and livelihood trainings in Cagbalete that eventually led to the creation of several tourism community organizations. Such is the case for the Cagbalete Hilot Wellness Workers Association, Souvenir Makers Association, and the Tour Guides Association. The M-ACT also coordinated with the agriculture related community organizations, recognizing their importance as stakeholders of tourism development in the island.

Prior to the pandemic, activities engaged in by the community organizations in Cagbalete are mostly focused on their respective livelihood activities. They did not have self-organized programs aimed to improve their organization skills and resources, nor did they have sufficient funding to do so on their own. However, they actively participated in trainings provided by the government and attended meetings arranged by the M-ACT office due to the flourishing tourism industry in the island. This gave their organizations purpose and facilitated their members to meet. As for facing common shocks and stresses in their community, they relied on the government to support their needs and augment their loss of livelihoods.

Unlike typhoons and other weather disturbances they have experienced, the COVID-19 pandemic was a crisis that caused restrictions on mobility and social gatherings in Cagbalete. The local government initially could not arrange meetings and trainings that community organizations could participate in, while the locals could not perform their tourism livelihood activities due to lack of visitors in the island. Due to this, communication amongst members were perceived not necessary, leading others to feel that their organizations were non-existent. Strategies to improve the welfare of members were also described as “*kanya-kanya*” or each to his own and for most of the respondents, they said that they would only gather if there were instructions from the M-ACT office. Reliance on government dole outs continued while the community waited for tourism activities to resume in the island.

Drawing from Dela Cruz’s (2005) definition of people-centered development, it is apparent that the community organizations in Cagbalete are not fully self-propelled. Their ability to identify, plan, and implement development programs are limited because their sense of identity and responsibility as a group are not well established. This was not easily observed prior to the pandemic because tourism activities were abundant and people were occupied with their livelihoods. Organizations were also actively attending meetings and trainings from the M-ACT office. However, when these programs were discontinued for a long duration due

to a crisis, most locals lost purpose of their membership. Even with their own set of elected officers, the roles and responsibilities of the organizations were largely dependent on the directives of their local government. This affirms Speer and Hughey's (1995) observation that issue-focused organizing tend to be less effective and dissolve much faster compared to organizations built on relationships and common values. In the case of Cagbalete, the issue being addressed by the government were livelihood creation and tourism development in the island.

The pandemic, as a crisis, exposed the weaknesses of the organizations as exhibited by their poor management of members, as well as lack of initiatives to pursue improved collective livelihood goals. They were not unified as one collective unit in solving the threats and challenges they faced, a characteristic described to be present when community organizing is successful (Rubin & Rubin, 2001). It also seemed that the multiple membership of some residents are merely driven by their motivation to receive livelihood assistance from the government, and not because they share the goals and aspirations of the organization they belong to. According to Norman (1998), genuine participation is necessary to form self-reliant groups but it is difficult to ascertain genuineness when one is motivated by the need to survive.

The efforts taken by the M-ACT office for community organizing is commendable as it enabled sectoral groups in Cagbalete have representation in the municipality's tourism planning and development programs. They also conducted capacity trainings to help the local community acquire skills they can use for their livelihoods. However, as Manalili (1990) asserts, community organizing is empowering people to identify, analyze, and solve their shared problems. More than the livelihood skills, trainings on capacitating organization leaders on how to effectively manage their groups also ought to be done. This includes assisting organizations to identify their mission, vision, and goals, and helping them build their confidence to act as one unified unit. Furthermore, it requires transformation of their individual and collective values, as well as having sufficient and locally controlled resources to enable them to act on their self-determined goals (Dizon, 2012). The concern now lies on whether DMOs like the M-ACT office are equipped to conduct such capability building trainings with community organizations.

Implications

With a stronger thrust for sustainable and responsible tourism development, more and more destinations are enjoined to prioritize community participation in their plans and programs. This led to the proliferation of CBT programs and the consequent creation of community organizations expected to be empowered in making decisions for and by themselves in a manner that benefits their community and environment. In fact, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) released a Community Based Tourism Standard manual in 2016 with the hopes of strengthening community involvement in the region's tourism industry. It defined CBT as a "tourism activity, community owned and operated, and managed or coordinated at the community level that contributes to the well-being of communities through supporting sustainable livelihoods and protecting valued socio-cultural traditions and natural and cultural heritage resources" (ASEAN, 2016, p.2).

However, studies have shown that community organizations in tourism destinations encounter several challenges and are not always equipped to play their potential role in

tourism development. Such is the experience of community organizations in Cagbalete that are characterized to be dependent on government programs and lacks organizational unity to initiate activities for their own collective welfare. While they participate in tourism planning and development activities arranged by their DMO, their social power and empowerment can be described as lacking since they have a hard time keeping their purpose outside the government initiatives they participate in. This is a manifestation of Arnstein's (1969) model that acknowledges different levels or gradients of participation. The highest level, citizen power, is attained when people have sufficient capacities to have control over the course of development in their community.

Therefore, it is entirely possible for destinations to have several community organizations engaged in tourism planning and development but are unable to define and act on their own goals and aspirations. It is also possible for DMOs to value stakeholder engagement and participation but miss out on empowering stakeholders. Community organizations must be able to pursue self-defined roles that are built on their values and awareness of tourism issues that is beyond the politics and programs of the government. This can help ensure that their interests are put first. And lastly, it is possible to mistake community organizations as strong and capable when the tourism industry is flourishing only to find out their weaknesses and shortcomings when faced with disasters and crises.

If sustainability is the final destination of our development journey, and responsibility is the vehicle that brings us there, it is equally important to fill up with fuel that will sustain the individual and collective efforts of stakeholders in the tourism industry. An application of people-centered development and community organizing principles can provide valuable tools of analysis and practices to bridge responsible tourism and sustainable development.

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