

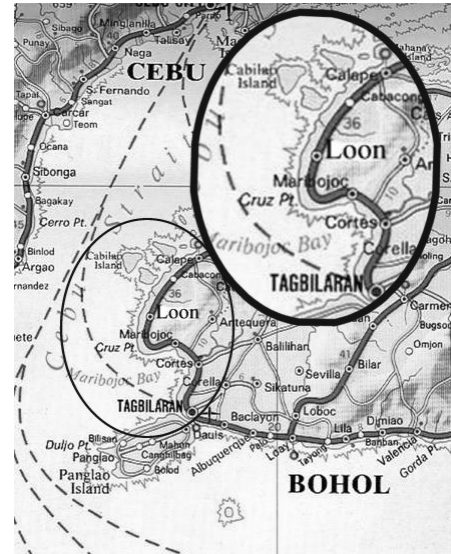
*Acting never means to just realize or implement a plan, but it means exploring unintended effects of a provisional and revisable version of a project. We moved from science to research, from objects to projects, from implementation to experimenting.*  
French anthropologist **Bruno Latour**

## Approaching a toilet (-project) via the political context

### The background and situation

The municipality of Loon has a population of approximately 40,000 inhabitants. It consists of 67 barangays; seven of them make up "downtown". The town is located on the south-western shore of the island province of Bohol about 25 kilometers north of its capital Tagbilaran City.

As a location with some touristic potential - there are for instance some widely known spots for diving around Cabilao Island - the municipality has to solve a lot of problems around nature protection which are even more urgent, because there is quite some increase in population. The apparent urge is for development integrating social, economic and ecological issues. Constructing public toilets in seven shore-line villages (barangays) fits in, apparently. This is a joint venture of the community based organizations of the beneficiaries, the local authorities and the proponent NGO by the name of Bohol Integrated Development Foundation (BIDEF).



### Aspects of the local political, administrative and non-governmental frame

In any setting for development the local government plays an important role. So it makes sense to start an exploration on the municipal level. Hence, the authors visited the mayor of Loon in his office located in a very modest building behind the town hall. Cesar Tomas M. 'Yul' Lopez is the Mayor of Loon since 1998. He has become vice-mayor in 1992 and 1995. Dr. Lopez is a medical doctor graduated from the University of the Philippines at Diliman who then worked as a surgeon on Bohol. Taking political tasks seems a "cultural habit" in his family, he claims - showing political dedication and intellectual reflexivity alike.



For this legislative period he has several projects concerning social and ecological issues. The mayor works with NGOs in a Development Council, where all barangay chairmen are assembled and a quarter of the members of the council are presidents of NGOs engaged locally.

Mayor Lopez' attitude towards BIDEF, the proponent of the project we are dealing with here is the following: "since they are involved, things work faster and are truly reflected". This reads as: the implementation is faster and the monitoring is more detailed and more sincere as compared to feedbacks generated thru the political and administrative hierarchies. NGOs like BIDEF spot local needs realistically and help to organize the communities.

The Development Council passed an involvement plan for Loon. In the mayor's opinion, the administration and the superiors should act demand driven. They should practice a corrective bottom-up approach instead of a classical top-down management. The secret of success: working with NGOs hits this point. Still 'classically minded' people are suspicious. The Mayor faces this by inviting the 'classically minded' to workshops and seminars. For these courses he is tapping the NGOs, too.

At Loon, there is a federation of small fisher-folks and farmers the municipality cooperates with. Mayor Lopez views them as an alternative to formal hierarchies for reaching out to implement projects and for the feedback on their performance. There is at least one project, that is realized with a mix of local, regional and international NGOs, the municipality and even the Japanese government.



After campaigning for fish sanctuaries to be established by national laws for some years Loon established four fish-sanctuaries by municipal ordinance. All in all the process discussing environmentalist and economic issues took eight

years. On the international level the municipality was supported by US-Aid and the Japanese government. The latter for instance would support in buying boats to warden the fish sanctuaries.

The municipal ordinance carries definite penalties on violations. They are gradual: starting from a fine and taking away the eventual catch, over higher fines and the taking away of the fishing gear up to imprisonment for the third offence. If the court decides so, the imprisonment could be for two months. Lately, five offenders had been taken to prison, and were set free on bale of P 10.000. "They were on their knees after one night in jail." This shows to everybody, so hope the municipal authorities and all engaged for the sake of nature protection, that violating the sanctuaries is not a petty offence and the rules are really enforced.

Back to the macro-level of local development, Mayor Lopez sees the need for a comprehensive waste disposal plan (which would be new to the province, even the Philippines). The situation up-to-today is like this:

- Garbage is simply burnt or disposed in some open pit.
- At Loon a garbage truck daily collects the garbage and dumps it in an open site (which will soon be filled).
- There is no segregation or recollection of garbage.

The mayor's thinking about the situation is like follows:

- He is looking for technical help to find an appropriate solution.
- He is thinking about a 'waste characterization' project to collect basic data to refer to in planning future courses of action.

Loon also faces a waste water problem:

- Toilet waste water runs just into the septic tanks.
- There is no awareness of a problem in the barrios outside the municipal center.

Upon his re-election this year 2001, Mayor Lopez wants to start with some integrated pilot project concerning waste disposal in general focussing on the seven central barangays of Loon.

Dr. Lopez figures a still untapped potential in tourism. One way to connect the nature protection concept with the tourism potential would be collecting fees for using the areas for diving. The fees collected could be put into a trust fund to finance some facilities like cottages or huts for rent. An investment into handcrafting that is in some way connected to tourism or into tour-guiding could be reasonable as well.

The official description of the project dealt with in this case study - proposed by BIDEF and funded by PhilGerFund goes as follows:

"Seven units of water sealed latrines will be constructed by the project for the seven community-based organizations (CBOs) in seven villages. Materials for these infrastructures shall be provided by project funds while the labor to be contributed by the beneficiaries. The organizational strengthening and education component will also be facilitated by the proponent organization. The Local Government Units in each beneficiary village will be contributing for the water consumption of the toilet in their village. At present, of the 5,408 households in the targeted seven coastal villages, only 10% (540 HH) have toilet. These make the shores and near shore seawater and tidal flats extensively polluted with human wastes. This project aims to lessen the human wastes being excreted direct to the sea by the residents in these coastal villages. The project further aims to empower the villagers and train them to plan and implement their plans collectively. This project also intends to foster closed relationship among its members through other community-based projects." (PhilGerFund Project Summary 1999)



The authors' visits to the seven project sites in different barangays on March 13, 2001 showed different states of perfection of the 'comfort rooms'. Furthermore, the locations are different in character: from indoor settings in public buildings to shore settings with a 'recreational character'. The authors talked to different people: beneficiaries, community organization and barangay officials, alike. And they thank the staff of BIDEF for all their support - especially so, because this project is the first one

BIDEF is conducting with PhilGerFund.

**A local non-governmental agent**

BIDEF (Bohol Integrated Development Foundation, Inc.) was founded in 1988 as a non-stock, non-profit, non-governmental organization to render and extend technical support and generate financial assistance to grassroots organizations and individuals for their socio-economic uplifting and self-reliance within the framework of sustainable development.

Its activities are focussed on the island of Bohol, as it is outlined in the BIDEF's commitments and philosophy of development and development perspective. The vision is a totally developed community of Boholanos living in an ecology-sound environment, whereas the quality of life of the poor is improved through people-managed, integrated, environment-friendly and sustainable development. The programs and fields of expertise include community organizing, education, livelihood, health, environment protection, gender and indigenous knowledge.



The main strategy is to build the capability of local communities to manage their own sustainable development. The board of trustees consists of 7 persons, including the President, Rev. Fr. Romeo A. Dompur and Vice-President Rev. Fr. Victor Bompat. At the time, there is a staff of five to six permanent and 17 connected project officers. Most of them already experienced working on projects - either as officials on communal or state side or as organizers or members of other NGOs. There is a continuous training to "update" the staff. Out of the permanent staff, four members can do feasibility-studies.

The house of Fr. Romeo's parents serves as the BIDEF office. It too, is a part-time home for the staff. In case of meetings or workshops the house turns into a hostel and work camp, as well. Its being put to this use in general, the maintenance and the extension of the house now going on is due to private donations.



Fr. Romeo Dompur was also involved in the process of creating an Agenda 21 for the whole province of Bohol. This Agenda - the only one in the Philippines – states a unique and sustainable approach to all further development and activities on Bohol. So there is a strong personal linkage of BIDEF to other institutions as well.

BIDEF facilitates the CBOs by organizationally strengthening and educating the members. Down to earth this means initiating cleanliness and upkeep of the facilities and reporting to funding agencies. The project proposal correctly states, that "the organizational capability of the proponent organization to generate support from the people is good".

1. Barangay **Pantudlan** is located on the western shore of Cabilao Island. The population is 780 in 170 households. Every private house has a water toilet. The toilet site is at the shore area, close to a commercial Sea Explorers Diving Center and next to an already existing facility besides the basketball court. The area is a popular meeting point and on weekends there are up to 200 people gathering here.



The toilets do not have a water tank, users are asked to get water from the sea. One of the arguments for not having a water supply is, that the architect forgot to put it on the work-out plan, others blame it on the low budget. Nevertheless, the barangay plans to tile the floor now.

Two guards - man and woman - keep the toilet clean. All people - locals and tourist - use the toilets and consider them an improvement, since there are no more human wastes "in the bushes". Visitors give favourable comments, the locals proudly realize.

People think the installation will sustain and they would like to set up another toilet at the fish sanctuary outpost about 1000 meters away. (On the day of visit, the members were asked to meet in the morning in order to clean the setting; so it looked very proper.)



The impression is: the community proudly uses the facilities.

2. **Cabacungan** is in the south of Cabilao Island some hundred meters away from the sea shore. The toilet is located on the south-eastern cliff, next to a fish sanctuary outpost and a picnic-area. It has access to the sea via a concrete stairway.



(Here also lie the remainders of the boat, that was once given from MISEREOR to the community members as a patrol-boat. But enemies of the sanctuary concept destroyed it some years ago. Now, it is a "reminder" of the struggle for the meanwhile established sanctuary.)

The toilet construction was finished last year. There is no water supply for the toilet up to now, so the users have to bring water from the sea. The community members are thinking of putting up a concrete water-tank next to the toilet building, that can be filled with sea-water (hand-carried) or / and might be connected to the roof of the outpost hut to collect rainwater.

The members assisted in the construction work while a carpenter living in the barangay conducted most of the work; there was no need for outside technical training etc. The wardens manning the outpost of the fish-sanctuary take care of the facility. The members of the community appreciate the toilet as "something given to their lives here" - "any support is good". They perceive themselves as losing their sustainable resources in fishing. Because no one can make a living on it today - contrary to 20 years ago. They blame this on illegal and on commercial fishing they themselves can not do anything about.



The impression is: the people see the facility as a stone in a larger building of development to be supported from the outside.

**3. Sondol** is a barangay along the mainland's shoreline north-east of Cabilao Island. It has 40 households, maybe up to 20 without private comfort rooms.



The toilet site is below the settled area, next to the rather steep coastline. The construction work is not completely finished, "the carpenter stopped fixing the roof on the backside". Up to 20 beneficiaries assisted in the construction. Actually, it looks like a construction site abandoned for quite some time. Anyway, the facility could be used. But there is no water supply; users are expected to fetch water from the sea while the path down to the sea would be quite a hassle.

The impression is: the construction work of the toilet was experienced more external to the community - many were engaged but "assisting", only. This seems a very needing community. There are large families - six plus children. These looked poorly nourished and dressed.

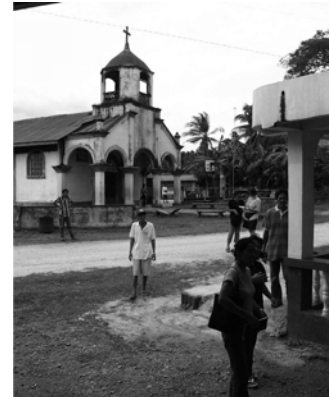
4. The barangay **Calayugan Sur** has 95 households, most of them have private toilets. The site of the public toilet is located next to the barangay office and hall. These are across the church building, which makes the whole setting look like a 'classic' village center.



All construction work was done by people from the barangay. They did this on a voluntary basis, they emphasize. The facility is in use since year 2000 and people appreciate it.

The toilet building up to now has no water supply. A water faucet and pipe is planned by the barangay and shall be finished soon. The toilet key is

available in the office; the person who keeps the key also is the one on duty for cleaning up.



The impression is: the community and the local government appreciate the toilet as a - no more missing - link in this public setting.

5. The barangay **Catagbacan Norte** has a population of 900 in 200 households. The toilet is located at the local basketball court, right across the barangay hall. The construction work was paid by the barangay which hired labor force. One member assisted.



The toilet building was finished by August 2000, water is available thru water faucets in the cabinets. The key is with the store owner nearby and the beneficiaries (but mostly the women) take turns in cleaning the facilities. People appreciate the facility. The women from the community organization's board suggest, to

improve the king's cabinet by building an additional urinate on the floor.



The impression is: it is a community carried, that is very well kept, project. This is so - even though or because the facility is done professionally (mainly by hired skilled labor).

6. The barangay **Cantumocad** has a population of 800 in 160 households. The toilet site is backstage of the barangay hall behind the basketball court.



The toilet is integrated in the hall building. By now, this is the only public toilet around. The construction work was put in as a counterpart by the barangay; skilled labor was hired; beneficiaries assisted. The construction work is just finished, but the water supply fed by a deep dwell will not be realized soon. (This is blamed on an official construction-ban because of upcoming elections.) Beneficiaries take turns in keeping the key and cleaning the toilet. The people really appreciate the facility and the given support.

The impression is: the people experience the toilet, which is really filling a gap on these public grounds, as a very start of response to their basic needs.

7. The barangay **Pondol** has a population of 1000 in 260 households. The site is at the barangay sports-field, next to the worn down barangay hall (that is now undergoing repair and reconstruction while it looks as if the original was never really finished in a way that protects its components like the enforcing steel etc.) and the nearby church.



The toilet building was just finished (March 2001); but there still is no water supply as planned before. Because of the election ban, no money for a pipe is available. The construction work was partly paid by the barangay, partly done by the beneficiaries.

Since the facility is new, there are no regulations concerning the connected duties as key-keeping and cleaning. (There also seem to be some political "frictions" between the community and the barangay authorities.)



People appreciate the facilities as being "good for the public, like for fiestas, during church services etc." There is the idea of maybe putting up a rain collector (to collect the water from the roof of the barangay hall, once it is fixed).

The impression is: Except for the new toilet building the barangay hall and the sports-field were in bad shape. But: the children happily used the field as a playground and there is some aspiration on the community's side to improve the setting.



### **Program components and their functioning towards sustainability**

**As to the planning of the project:** It is not clear to the authors how the planning of the overall project made reference to different capacities in the communities (see below on Human Resources).

**Project objectives and the real and actual needs of the beneficiaries:** There is no doubt about the objective and subjective needs for public toilets - be it for the use during community gatherings or by visitors or tourists, especially at the coastal settings. The gratitude expressed everywhere towards the funding agencies and donors behind them certainly comes from the heart.

**Community participation:** The communities participate in different degrees. The perfection of the setting and maintenance correlates with the community involvement and the sense of ownership. The collectively understood rules, for instance on who is holding the key, cleaning the facilities etc. play the 'key role' for sustainability here.

**Material resources:** The factual lack of water pipes in most of the facilities is to be blamed on the local governments not filling in their duties as fixed in the project plan. In some cases the nearby sea serves to quite scepticism on the quality of the finishing, i. e. the missing of the water installation. One has to concede, that in some cases the announcement of the installation 'soon to be finished' seems very reliable.

**Human resources:** In all cases the communities put in helping hands. There seems to be a problem with qualified labor. Interestingly enough, those who put in qualified labor have an idea of

1. that the toilet project can be a start into other funded development activities and (!)
2. what the specific qualification could be they themselves could put in as an equivalent.

**Institutional development:** The way the CBOs established the roles for maintaining the facilities is decisive for sustainability, naturally. Externalizing the construction work (hiring skilled labor) does not threaten this. But on the other hand the 'esprit' of the community seems decisive. Working out formal rules on who is responsible depends on the members realizing there is a need to rule that.

The places visited vary in the way the communities handle the question on who is responsible, i. e. to start with: who are the officials to talk to our official visitors etc.? The easiness of solving these problems, which is not necessarily in formal terms of barangay captain or the like, correlates with the quality of the construction and the maintenance. It is simply, that if the roles are clear, the community's interests seem transparent, too: "Mabuhay, we are ... [roles in the community]; we welcome you; and we thank PhilGerFund ... !"

**Support mechanisms:** BIDEF, the proponent organization, certainly has an overall view on and concept of developing the area and the communities. The support coming from the local government units differs a lot, as shown in the descriptions above.

**In conclusion:**

The quality of the constructive work depends on qualified labor. A detailed research on qualifications at hand within the community shows extremely necessary. (That reaches from finalizing the concrete / steel construction to craftsman's standards back to work-out plans according to architect's standards etc.).

If the project is depending on shares of the local government one certainly has to take into account they may still hesitate to (a) work with NGOs in general, so (b) not fill in all their duties and (c) not always give adequate feedback on what is the situation before and after a project is implemented.

The feedback on the success from outside the community (visitors from wherever) seem to be important to stimulate identification. Anyway, the usefulness of the toilets was mostly argued for in terms of communal events (from church services thru Sunday picnic meetings to fiestas).

The 'esprit de corps' of the CBOs appears to be decisive in how the facility is really finished, well maintained and therefore made sustainable. The use of external sources like hired skilled labor does not undermine this. It might even show the esteem for the value of the product.

Attention has to be directed to who is putting up the rules and how are these decisions made and made transparent to the community members. There is a lot of attention in Philippine culture to titles and formal roles. But what is meant here is a way of generating rules such that identification is raised by all who consider themselves being part of the collective body or community.

It is in this respect, that the educational components as training people for chairing committees and the like have their place. The project at stake here will sustain were the esprit of community will carry the finishing of the construction (where not done yet) and the taking care of the installation. So, the dependence is on hard and soft facts alike. The 'reinforcement' of community participation and of 'key roles' for the toilet project certainly can come by the community workers of BIDEF. They facilitate details on tasks and roles thereby initiating cleanliness and upkeep of the facilities (as formulated in the project proposal).

The experiences with this specific project show again, that the optimum development activities are those who are able to pick up (explicit) projects of the members of the collective body. The community's identification with the object is good where there is a collective interest like in those communities using it for communal events.

Anyway, future projects should take into account for instance, that the ecological impact of the facilities is only mentioned by those people who live on Cabilao Island and are as a group constantly confronted with and in some communicative relation to the tourist divers and to the foreign owner of the neighboring hotel. This shows, the mayor's dedicated visions on steps towards ecological improvement and his sceptic remarks on the awareness of the people out in the barrios both are far from unrealistic.