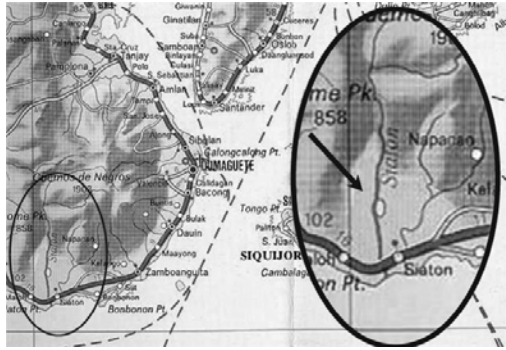


## Approaching the location



Sandulot is a barangay of the municipality Siaton in the far south of the Negros. You reach Siaton via bus from Dumaguete City. The center of Siaton is located east of the Siaton River flowing into the sea nearby. Sandulot is a remote area about eight kilometers north and on the west bank of the river.

Basically, there are two routes to get to Sandulot. One is going north from Siaton proper and cross the Siaton River near Sandulot. This route is served by tricycles. But there is no bridge awaiting

you there. You have to cross the river thru a ford after you get off the public transportation called pedicab in the southern Philippines.

The alternative route follows the national highway west, crossing the river on the road-bridge and then heads north on a path made from gravel - and the further you get the more big and bulky the stones are. You get to Sandulot by this path with only crossing some small creeks heading for Siaton River. There is no public transportation on this path - most European people, anyway, would only consider an 'enduro' motor-bike to be the appropriate vehicle.



During dry season the alternative for traveling to and from Sandulot is between: using the public transportation and walking thru a then fairly shallow river or owning an appropriate mean of transportation and use the path avoiding to cross the river at all.

During the rainy season the river is high - and if not it is still very unpredictable. So you think you should just not cross the river this time of the year at all, especially not whenever you carry important goods. But then the small creeks are no longer small and you need a mean of transportation because there are none on the 'circumferential road'. You would then have to

own a buffalo, called kalabaw here, a horse or a motor-bike to get to main road - or you would have to hire transportation again raising your costs ...

## The background and situation

The grown-up inhabitants of Sandulot, most of them catholics, regularly travel to the municipality once a week: for the Sunday mass (except for second Sunday of the month, when service is held in the chapel at Sandulot proper) and for buying what is not self-produced like salt, sugar, medicine etc.

For the people in this remote area, many of them marginalized in not only the spatial sense, their major income-generating source is selling coconut. The coconuts are bought by government run agencies according to a fixed prize: this fell from P8 to P1,9 per kilogram during the last years.

The local institution carrying the development activities to be dealt with in this paper is called Sandulot Siaton Negros Irrigators Association (SSNIA). It started with 27 members in 1976. There are 130 members this year, 2001. The area irrigated covers 45 hectares today. When starting in the 1970s the members did not - to their statement - understand the association as a political project of agrarian reform: Anyway, they experienced resistance by the landowners against the tenants organizing around irrigation. SSNIA, those who are members from the start recall, was founded under a tree in 1976. They erected the first building in 1980. The office-building used today, a real assembly room setting, was build in 1990. SSNIA is the nucleus of the project dealt with here: a corn mill.



Beneficiaries of this corn mill live within a diameter of 13 kilometers. They are harvesting corn twice a year. The seasons are April thru July and August thru December. This is the rainy season ranging from June to December. The milling has to be done in Siaton proper - endangering people, crop and the devices used to transport the crops (like horses, kalabaws and the sledges hauled and - if there would be - motor-bikes known as habal-habal). Today, there are only two people owning a habal-habal in Sandulot.

The fee for milling at commercial mills in the municipality is about 1 Peso per kilo. The cost for transportation back and forth "downtown" add up to 5 Pesos per bag or 15 - 20 Peso per horse. These are the costs not considering the time of work, that is going into this complicated way of preparing basic food. Because it is not 'export' from this remote area we are talking about but basic nutrition of those living up here.



Sandulot proper has about 200 households, the area within the diameter around the planned mill holds about 500 households. Nowadays, there are 4 - 5 children to a family, even though the marriage age is rising, the increase of population is at 5 percent per year. As the population is rapidly growing the community is still expanding. Though it is a remote area where people tend to be marginalized in many respects people in the SSNIA, fortunately, consider staying in this growing community more reasonable than migrating to the cities or even the mega cities, namely Manila.

Talking other than the poor economic status one's attention is directed towards education. And there is some kind of a success story: there already are 40 high-school stu-

dents in the barangay. One former student returned as a teacher, who now is working at the local elementary school. The high-school is situated at Siaton proper, so the students have quiet a way to go: walking to and crossing Siaton River, taking a tricycle from there. One-way is 3 Pesos and takes about one hour. State high-school is free, the private high-school of the Carmelitians takes a tuition fee of P 250 per month. All Students have to wear the school-uniform, which their parents have to afford.

The parent generation - naturally very proud of that development - like those taking responsibility in SSNIA had to take their opportunity and be successful in the non-school adult education sector: "You have to learn bookkeeping in two weeks - in college it takes them four years."

### Description of the project

"The proposed project will provide corn-milling services to the residents of the contiguous communities named Barangays Sandulot, Casala-an and Caticugan, through the establishment of a mechanical corn mill in Sandulot proper, Siaton, Province of Negros Oriental. The purpose of the project is to improve accessibility of milling services and ensure availability of corn grits for consumption for the household needs especially during the rainy season. It is expected that the established mechanical corn mill will reduce, if not eliminate, the difficulties of the SSNIA members and the corn growers in transporting milling and selling corn kernels to and from the nearest milling services, which is about 7 - 8 kilometers from their communities crossing an unpredictable river. Ultimately, the project will reduce transportation and milling cost, increase savings and income at the household and association levels within a period of three years." (PhilGerFund Project Summary 1999)

### Results meantime

What you see coming to Sandulot in March 2001: The building for a corn mill cum storage is finished next to the rice mill existing for some years now. The corn milling machine is delivered and is next to be installed along with inside finishing of the building.



Four different corn mills have been visited by the SSNIA-members in charge. The greatest difference to those mills, they assume, will be the equipment: The milling machinery will be new. Only the engine will be second hand. And unlike to other locations the building will be used for storage, too.



Training was conducted by Silliman University, Dumaguete for leading persons and those in charge of the finances and of the future operations and maintenance of the corn mill.

## **Program components and their meaning for construction and sustainability**

### **Planning**

In March 2001, when the authors visit the project site, re-planning of the project has to take into account some delays. One of the reasons is: clearing a cheque from PhilGer-Fund in beginning 2001 took one month. So by now, the construction is delayed. Still, full running is supposed to take place in mid June 2001. This would be on time for this year's first corn harvest. To meet this, the construction work inside the building has to start until mid March and the cementing of the foundations until mid April.

### **Project objectives and the real and actual needs of the beneficiaries**

The beneficiaries vision of the project focuses on:

- reducing the costs of transportation to and back the commercial mills in general,
- reducing the risks of crossing the unpredictable Siaton River and
- generating income for the association itself.

It is for the latter, that the members of SSNIA think about increasing the storage and extending the milling service to others outside the association and the communities.

### **Community participation**

Tagbo or bayanihan - the citizens engaging in activities for the sake of the community - is considered very strong. The examples mentioned are:

- Parts of the concreted road-segments in the barangay are built thru tagbo,
- so are the extensions of the irrigation system (10 - 15 meters per year).
- The construction of the corn mill building is done by people throughout the community, not only by members of the association.

Shares for the corn mill project are P200, there will be no ceiling as to the amount of shares. Dominating the association is not considered a thread, because there is an assembly and there are democratic procedures: "we will not allow politics to get in". (This reveals the rather typical Philippino refutation of 'the political' or 'politics' as not helpful to solve existential problems of ordinary men and women).

### **Material resources**

Machinery could not be bought altogether in Dumaguete but had to be completed in Cebu. This shows, the basic idea of buying equipment locally has to be re-thought considering the specific situation.

The economy of the corn mill's operation is reconsidered, too. The assembly has decided to follow the same wage-quota they practice in the nearby rice mill for 10 years: 5% for commission cashier, 25% for operators, 3% for watchman who are all appointed to their work while the book-keeper and the manager both are elected and receive 5% respectively. This is different from what is stated in the project proposal but according to local experience.

### **Human resources**

One trait which certainly will sustain in this context as well as in almost all the development projects has to do with women participation: more than 50 % of the members are women. Up to now, there has not been a woman for president. Reasons are discussed as, for instance, lack of time (being away from the family and household for all the meetings and appointments) and being so exposed. Still, in the barangay women are also doing the planting of corn and rice. Usually the harvesting is their job, too.

For leaders the assembly elects those persons, who are supposed to be "good" and have management skills shown for instance in the barangay council. The leader "moderates, facilitates the policies, issues and topics discussed by the board of directors. There is a need for good two-way communication" (Joshue E. Santiago). They also lead by "good example".

### **Institutional development and support mechanisms**

Leadership training enabled the two-way communication between the board and the assembly, the making and passing of drafts and in the decision-making as a whole. The major task of leaders is considered the binding back of social and technical processes to democratic procedures. Talking sustainability with respect to the communal aspects of development there is at least one clear conclusion: the advanced understanding of social-and-political processes that is revealed by those in charge of the association today will certainly carry on and enable future steps.

The local authorities in the municipality and the barangay cooperate with the irrigators association in general, anyway. In addition, the mayor is said to certainly support the corn mill. There are some linking pins to the local government. The president of SSNIA, Carmelito L. Sugabo and at least one member of the board of directors, Pedro Radones are members of the barangay council - on opposing political tickets but united in supporting the association.

There are no problems expected as to the citizens' acceptance of the corn mill, because of the positive experiences being made with irrigation and with the rice mill. The consumer store operated by SSNIA closed three years ago, because it was no longer needed: several small shops have been opened and are successfully run, now. So, SSNIA officials consider the consumer store project something like a ladder they needed to climb up but could get rid off after that - i. e. when some members were enabled to open up sari-sari stores themselves.

As for the corn mill, they do not anticipate private commercial competitors at Sandulot. The municipal authorities support the mill as making the upland barangays more viable. And so their explanation runs like this: the mill is not substitutable in its function like some sari-sari stores substitute the consumer store.

Sustainability of the corn mill - to them - then seems to just depend

- on operations of maintaining the devices,
- on the continuing education and training of those in charge,

- on the decisions of the association's officials and members on maintenance funds, reserve funds (for unexpected events, hazards etc.),
- on the ideas of collaboration, milling in ones own mill, patronizing the corn mill, and lastly
- on reducing the individual transportation costs and time spent.

### **In conclusion**

The overall impression of the Sandulot setting: living up here is desirable as contrasted with the urban settings many of those migrating to the major cities end up in. It seems very reasonable to grow corn on those fields which are not fit for growing rice. But still, living up here does not make you market-fit. As you are depending on services like the milling of the corn you are accumulating costs - if it is just for the transportation back and forth to the private run mills in the nearby town.

SSNIA has a good deal of experience in operating a mill. There is one technical aspect, that seems unrealistic in the planning: the ten weeks construction period assumed. There seems only one problem, that in the near future could render the corn mill not sustainable: the intrusion of market mechanisms, i. e. the erection of competitive privately run commercial mills in the upland area.

On the other hand, there are a lot of other positive traits to an association of small farmers:

- solving existential problems of those not turning their back on the countryside in favor of the (mega) city,
- concentrating on deciding communal affairs in a democratic manner reflected by at least the officials and at best all members,
- making the association a viable communal 'enterprise'.

Still the project of a corn mill

- is an investment of a considerable size,
- is market-economical in character and so - realistically -
- its market performance is open.

In the case at question here there is political support by the local government, which is both making people lucky and still not guaranteeing economically.

Experiences from other projects can teach, that focussing on marketing in an early stage can be decisive:

- to foresee potential competitive situation,
- to market the integrated service of an association or cooperative, i. e. to make clear that the institution carrying the maybe economically interesting service (here: the mill) is providing other service, too.

If one or more potential competitors move in and charge a competitive prize this would not harm the cost-structure for single household but still a loss of customers would harm the association significantly. (In early 2001, the authors visit another mill project on Bohol, that operates since 1994 and experienced firstly a very good turn-over and sec-

only the moving in of some competitors attracted by its success. It is now, when paying back the loan in time is at stake, the officials urge for more knowledge in marketing the cooperative itself and its services.)

There is another experience from comparable projects, that is very well taken care of by the way SSNIA already handles the rice mill: a project like this requires a strong involvement of the management officials in the running of the installation. They have to control it and these efforts have to pay off for them as a professional striving.

### **Perspectives**



The rice mill some meters away from the future corn mill is doing well. Part of this is its being a meeting point in the community. The members consider all this the model for their future success with the corn mill.

