

Engagement of NGOs in ODA: The case of Samar NGOs and WESAMAR

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research explores, for one, the dynamics of NGO engagement in an ODA program by identifying the following: crucial points, extent, nature, reasons, and consequences of such engagement. Doing so entailed studying the ODA program (institutional features, policy and development orientation, and culture), the NGOs (organizational situation, motivations, needs, resources and orientations), and the interplay of the elements of these two variables.

This research also explores the implications of NGO engagement in an ODA program from the basic assumption that NGOs pursue an alternative development agenda. Hence, the research cites the extent of how NGO engagement in ODA delivery constrains or makes this pursuit possible.

The research recognizes that some NGOs differ in orientations and purposes with other NGOs. Some NGOs treat engagement in ODA programs, particularly on a contractual arrangement, as part of the services rendered to communities. Officials of these NGOs say engagement in ODA naturally flows from the group's role as development actors in the area. These same officials are also keen in distinguishing such role of their NGOs and their new role as contractual agent under the ODA program.

Other roles that NGOs assumed or maintained while engaged in the ODA program include being critics, advocates, collaborators, contributors to policy, and implementers. The NGOs assumed these roles when they entered into contracts for community organizing.

The study on the WESAMAR program shows that while ODA managers accommodated ideas of NGO workers on community-centered development intervention and management and attempted to apply a "bottom-up" approach to the projects, difficulties abound.

One difficulty was dealing with NGOs as partners and contractors; another was bureaucratic impulses and narrow project-oriented evaluation of

development intervention. These difficulties lingered as the program's development paradigm ran counter to that held by NGOs.

The research shows it is important to consider the mix of factors relating to organizational needs, resources, motivations, goals and strategies before NGOs engage in ODA and assume the role of a contractual agent. Doing so would reveal the sources of tensions of NGO engagement in ODA.

A source of tension was suspecting NGOs of having a "hidden agenda." For another, the NGOs, after assuming roles as contracted agent, experienced difficulties in linking ODA engagement with their broader goals and strategies for achieving these.

Operators risk the existence of their NGOs if they betray the organization's values and goals, accountability to the people, and legitimacy as civil society member.

The research shows this was a tendency exhibited by some NGOs, especially those focused on meeting obligations in their contracts. This tendency was exacerbated by a competitive environment between and among NGOs, peoples' organizations, and government units, generating unhealthy tensions among the people behind these groups.

The NGOs who so feverishly sought their engagement as contractual agents, need to seriously reflect on the implications of such engagement on them as agents of alternative development as civil society organizations.

I. INTRODUCTION

Current ODA policy environment shows a broader and more consistent engagement by non-government organizations (NGOs) in development aid programs.

Such environment is underpinned by a neo-liberal democratic and economic belief favoring market and private sector initiatives to attain economic development and of civil society to restrain the State.

In this regard, NGOs have been seen as agents to achieve the objectives of democratization and as cost-effective means to deliver services [Edwards and Hulme, 1996b].

However, such trend is fraught with dilemma and pitfall. Some groups within civil society aver that the increasing popularity of NGOs in the ODA

realm have implications on their roles and operations, which are traditionally distinct from those performed by private and government agencies in development projects.

Still, modes of NGO engagement in ODA programs are varied, as Simaey and Vanderbroek [2003] cited: as contracted service providers, implementers, watchdogs, pressure groups, and contributors to policy dialogue. According to them, these modes evolve over time, and whatever mode or modes of engagement that a particular NGO adopts would be contingent on a host of factors such as attitude toward government, the nature of the NGO, the nature of the project, and external conditions [Simaey and Vanderbroek 2003]. An NGO may not only adopt any one role at a time, but also a combination of roles.

Some NGOs have become more and more willing to engage ODA in a constructive mode rather than opposing it as dictated by “civil society” advocacy and policy dialogue functions. However, given the policy environment of international ODA and its underpinning development orientation and management culture, opportunities for such “constructive” engagement and how this could be applied, remain problematic for most NGOs.

Some NGOs involved in ODA programs justify such involvement, claiming they bring “unique qualities” into the development process. They add that ODA provides opportunities for institutional building and for expanding services to communities. However, since NGOs are considered civil society organizations pursuing alternative development processes, the question lingers: What are the implications on the NGO in delivering the gains that the ODA promises?

The polemics on NGOs’ balancing act in their role as development actors and as contracted service providers is set in the context of the structure, policy, development orientation and culture of ODA, on the one hand, and the internal capacities of NGOs to manage the balancing act, on the other.

This case study of Western Samar Agricultural Resources (WESAMAR) Programme, a European Union ODA program implemented in the Western Samar province, provides the opportunity to enter the polemics.

II. THE RESEARCH

Generally, the research aimed to explore issues in NGO engagement in ODA in the context of the WESAMAR. A basic assumption underlying the inquiry is that development NGOs are ultimately accountable to communities for bringing about positive changes in people's lives through sustainable and empowering development process.

However, NGOs may choose various modalities to achieve set goals. Thus, the underlying concern was how prospects for NGOs to pursue their agenda for empowerment and sustainable development with communities have been enhanced or constrained in the context of whatever mode of engagement in ODA (WESAMAR).

The study specifically aimed to analyze the various modalities of NGO engagement in WESAMAR. The study analyzed these modalities in the light of the ODA program structure and orientation –including views on issues of participation and engagement of NGOs, on the one hand and, on the other hand, the situation, concerns and motivations of NGOs that participated in the program.

Given the institutional and ideological underpinnings of ODA, a key analytical concern was identifying crucial points for NGO engagement, the extent and nature of engagement at those points, why these were so, and its consequences. The analysis gave particular attention to the NGO's role as contractual agents in the program.

The study also reviewed a range of literature that throws light on some of the basic issues and concerns in NGO engagement in ODA and provides framework for examining NGO involvement in WESAMAR.

The research also entailed examining program documents related to the design (financing memorandum and program log-frame), implementation (given the wide geographical spread and the different bio-physical conditions in the program area work plans and reports) and evaluation (review mission reports) of the program. These documents were helpful in revealing the program's structure and orientation and framework of engaging NGOs as well as its impact on the development issues in the area.

Field research was conducted from April 27 to May 10, 2004. The researcher also interviewed NGO leaders and staff, including community organizers and community organizing supervisors who directly worked under the NGO community-organizing contracts with the program. Key personalities involved

in the management of the program were also interviewed.

The researcher also held focused group discussions and interviews with key informants, e.g. community leaders who had been involved in the program, to gain the perspective of beneficiaries.

III. ODA AND NGOS

Some see NGOs engaging in ODA programs as effective instruments in delivering services and implementing projects. Despite the unique abilities NGOs inject into the ODA program, they are valued foremost as cheap but effective agents.

A trend arising here is the development of the “purchaser-provider” or “principal-agent” framework that defines the relationship between those who sets program objectives (principal/purchaser) and those responsible for delivering requirements in meeting these objectives (provider/agent). This framework puts into question the essence of partnership as the value base of the relationship between NGOs and ODA agencies [Edwards and Hulme 1996b:967].

Some also see NGOs losing “autonomy” and “coopted” as mere service agents of the “modernization model of development”. This trend brings about loss of critical perspective [Biggs and Neame 1996:50] and diminished accountability towards NGOs’ social base [Edwards and Hulme 1996b:968].

The environment of willingness of governments and aid agencies to channel funds through NGOs has also been seen as pressuring NGOs toward greater bureaucratization.

With the contractual approach to providing funds, NGOs are compelled to adopt managerial approaches in their operations. These have drawn staff attention and resources to the intricacies involved in the management of contract [Lewis 1993].

It must also be considered that organizational changes characterized by increasing incorporation of bureaucratic modes of operation involves a “highly complex process in which activities, mission, structure, governance and resources are knit together in a complex and mutually dependent web” [Billis and MacKeith 1994:125].

As NGOs become “instruments for the delivery of services, democracy, or innovation on the basis of clearly defined inputs, outputs and NGO

interventions” [Biggs and Neame 1996:48], NGOs are forced to fit into the mold of a formal, linear, “project” approach to development intervention.

Such model of development intervention ignores the many context-based factors affecting development process: i.e. the complex, contingent nature of development [Fowler 1996] and the externalities of development intervention including the wider social and political context of development intervention and funding [Uphoff 1996:35] –“from personalities and politics, to deeply ingrained sociological and historical factors that do not lend themselves to solutions in bite-size, two-year chunks” [Smillie 1999:29].

Biggs and Neames [1996:41] contend that in order to succeed, NGOs have to rely on their creative ability to manoeuvre, “to adapt to changing circumstances, to maintain their accountabilities to different constituencies, subvert or [maneuver] around vested interests”.

This is based on the belief that development cannot be divorced from its socio-political setting and the links between actors and organizations in the same area. The problem is that the NGOs’ room to maneuver may be constricted when adopting a linear, formalized approach to development planning.

Biggs and Neames [1996:41] also believe that “the formal, linear, mainstream approach to development planning...is more of a threat to the development aspirations of some NGOs, and individuals within them, than is a growing dependence on donor funds per se”.

It has been pointed out that pre-conceived assumptions about NGO’s efficiency and effectiveness in the complex development work has set up unrealistic expectations on NGO performance and rendered them vulnerable to criticisms and attacks [Biggs and Neames 1996; Smillie 1999]. This, exacerbated by the competitive environment for NGO funding, has provided pressures for NGOs to hide failures and shortcomings [Smillie 1999:27-28].

However, having outlined some of the very real dangers that NGOs face in being cast into the role as effective agents in ODA delivery, the actual implications were not direct.

Here, the framework suggested by Coston [1998] is illuminating. Government (or ODA) and NGO relationship must be seen in a dynamic context that takes into account the varying modes of NGO-Government relationship within a continuum that ranges between asymmetrical and symmetrical power relationships.

The type of relationship will depend on such factors as the government's tolerance of NGO influence, control and autonomy, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the NGOs' willingness to engage in formal relations with government.

This relationship will vary according to the characteristics of the organizational actors, and shaped and constrained by the socio-historical context of the area.

Hence, in looking into issues of NGO engagement in ODA funding, there is need to consider the mediation between the very real constraints posed by the current structure of ODA and its policy environment, on the one hand, and by the capacity for autonomous response of NGOs, on the other hand.

Hulme and Edwards [1996b] observed that, while recognizing the very real pressures of ODA and its structure of accountability on NGOs [i.e. accountability towards funding sources vs. accountability towards the community], there is no universal relationship between ODA and "NGO corruption". They point to the need to consider endogenous as well as exogenous factors in looking at problems of NGO accountability and a host of other issues for NGOs in relating with ODA. As Brodhead and Herbert-Covey (1988] suggest, "institutional disinterestedness" is both a strength and weakness of NGOs:

A strength because it draws upon the tremendous energy inherent in the noblest of human urge for justice, compassion and service; a weakness because it seems somehow to place such organizations above critical assessment of their own motivations and operations [Brodhead and Herbert-Covey, 1998:31].

The complexity of the nature of NGOs and the variety of roles NGOs take should also be considered. NGOs have been traditionally identified as "third sector" voluntary organizations. In contrast, Uphoff [1996] contends that many NGOs are not third sector organizations but belong to the "not-for-profit, sub-sector of the private sector".

This view is based on the observation that NGOs are essentially service organizations with employees who produce and distribute benefits and are governed by the economic rationality of the private sector. However, it can be argued that the distinction Uphoff makes should not be seen in terms of an absolute dichotomy –NGOs can be seen in an arena where tensions between voluntary third sector ethos and "not-for-profit" private sector ethos are played out.

Several writers have pointed out that a key to understanding NGOs is to consider their complexity as organizations (i.e. Fowler 1998; Billis and McKeith 1994; Annheir 2000). Fowler [1998] accounts for the complexity of NGOs (particularly the non-government development organizations) in that, while these groups are primarily identified as third sector organizations, NGOs often find themselves operating in the more complicated areas of overlapping principles.

This occurs as NGOs take on the task of contributing to sustained poverty alleviation and social justice using voluntary attributes while functioning as businesses in providing public services.

From an organizational point of view, NGOs are challenged with maintaining a balance among different sets of organizational principles. They can therefore be considered “predominantly hybrid in nature, operating on the basis of multiple, partially conflicting, partially re-enforcing organizational practices” [Fowler 1998:31]. Indeed, this presents a particular problem for management of these NGOs where a combination of different motivations, standards and practices are at play [Annheir 2000:7].

It has been observed that NGOs often routinely adopt organizational forms and management models’ due to pressures of legitimacy and for external resources [Johnsson 1998:237].

Simply put, NGOs are inherently challenged into maintaining a fine balance among a multiplicity of organizational principles and rationales, managing tensions between their manifest identity and goals and modes of operation, and managing their various roles and accountability to various actors. All these obtain in the process of the NGOs securing their legitimacy and resources for work.

Success in this entails both a clarification of organizational goals and principles as well as the ability to base decisions on a critical analysis of relations with donors and governments.

It is important for NGOs to look into the implications of such relationships on their roles as development agents in their own right. It also requires keen awareness of the context of power relations between and among various actors and the very real constraints on NGO organizational options within the given socio-political setting, including the structure of global and local ODA policy and administration.

IV. THE WESAMAR PROGRAM

A. Background and history

The WESAMAR program traces its beginnings to a proposal for the development and rehabilitation of Maqueda Bay under the Samar Island Development Programme (SIDP). The SIDP, approved by then President Ramos in 1990, was part of the government's effort to pursue poverty alleviation programs under its Social Reform Agenda.

The Maqueda Bay proposal was pioneered by the national NGO Philippine Business for Social Progress (PBSP) and endorsed by the Department of Agriculture (DA). It subsequently became the SIDP's coastal management component.

The DA requested the European Economic Community (EEC) to consider funding the coastal management program. This eventually led to the signing of an agreement between the Philippine Government and the EEC in February 1991 for development assistance to Maqueda Bay. Consequently, the Maqueda Bay proposal was included in the Philippine government's Medium Term Investment Plan. Several local NGOs criticized the proposal for inadequate local consultation during its preparation, its lack of a coherent development strategy, and its emphasis on extractive rural enterprises [Cabardo 1994].

The EC sent a mission in February 1991, which came up with the design for the program then titled "Agricultural Resource Development Programme for Samar". While the original proposal was intended as a coastal management project focusing on the rehabilitation and development of the Maqueda Bay, the mission expanded its coverage to include upland areas. Project area was delineated along those areas that are ecologically linked to the Maqueda Bay.

The Financing Memorandum (FM) signed in February 1993, provided for an ECU15 million (\$17.963 million)¹ for the five-year Western Samar Agricultural Resources Development Programme (WESAMAR). Actual work on the program began with the arrival of the European Co-Director in May 1994 in Catbalogan, Samar, to prepare the implementation phase of the program set to commence in 1995. The program ended in 2000 after a one-year extension.

B. Key features of the program

The WESAMAR was marked by attempts to move away from the traditional blueprint, top-down, macro-project approach to ODA.² It

manifested current development thinking that saw institutional building, participation and empowerment as means for garnering public and private sector initiative for sustained economic development.

At the same time, WESAMAR's objectives and strategies were officially in line with basic development strategies of the Philippine government at the time, underpinned by the drive towards global competitiveness that entailed commercialization of agriculture while providing safety nets to the poor.

1. Development approach and strategy

The goal as stated in the Financing Memorandum's log-frame was "[t]o promote sustainable socio-economic development and to improve well-being in resource poor rural communities through sustainable resource development in Western Samar." To achieve such goal, specific purposes and components were laid out that covered agriculture and fisheries production, off-farm employment and enterprise development, women's capability, health and nutrition, environmental management, agrarian reform and institutional development.

The memorandum of understanding between the GOP and EC characterized the intervention as a support "to stimulating development in the poorest rural areas through implementation of small-scale, fast disbursing programs of assistance using the micro-project approach"³. The Financing Memorandum also stipulated an integrated area-based development approach towards the concerns of the rural poor. It would also emphasize a community-based, bottom-up sustainable development strategy.

Such approach to development programming was nothing surprising to EC development assistance in the Philippines at that time. Other EC funded programs that immediately preceded or were being implemented about the same time as WESAMAR had more or less same goals and objectives. They also had the same emphasis on integrated, area-based, and community-based approaches that were considered innovative, in as far as EC ODA programming in the Philippines was concerned [MacDonald, 1994:11]. Indeed, WESAMAR was seen by the head of the European Delegation at that time to represent significant strides in its development programming in the Philippines [see Santos 1994].

2. Components

The program was implemented through five key strategies or components, namely: community organization and development; rural finance services;

micro- and macro-enterprise development; and, cooperative development and institutional strengthening. [WESAMAR 2001]

The community organization component sought to put in place community-based organizations (CBOs) that are able to pursue development activities on their own. The community-based strategy followed the Memorandum's specification of an area- and community-based bottom-up development strategy. This strategy was given flesh by the community development process (CDP). The CDP was developed during the program inception phase and was refined and modified during its implementation. The CDP originally provided for a series of calibrated phases that enabled members of community organizations to plan and implement their own development activities.

A key indicator of the consolidation phase was the CBOs' ability to identify and build small-scale development projects related to infrastructure, health, resource rehabilitation and livelihood. These micro-projects were funded under the Program's facility for grant-assisted activities.

In addressing the objective of increasing incomes and employment opportunities, the program emphasized the creation of economic activities among CBOs. It was clear that the program gave importance to economic activities among the range of CBO activities. Initially, the program focused on small-scale economic activities that formed part of the CBOs' projects.

Two types of economic activities were promoted: group-based enterprises (GBEs) and micro-lending. GBEs introduced high-value agricultural production e.g., of eucheuma, goat-raising, coffee and abaca. Micro-lending programs, meanwhile, addressed lack of capital, which is a key constraint in the CBOs' economic activities. Later on, the program went beyond nurturing micro-level economic activities towards establishing large-scale enterprises to address economies of scale.

Another key component of the program was the institutional strengthening not only of CBOs but also NGOs, and local government units (LGUs). Community Development Planning –the locus of development efforts– provided the context for establishing partnership among LGUs and NGOs and in enhancing their roles as service providers, particularly in terms of assisting the CBOs in planning, implementing and evaluating development activities.

Meanwhile, program operators worked on area-wide institutional building initiatives to establish management structures and processes links of LGU,

NGO and CBO structures. This included establishing the Maqueda Bay Development Council. Institutional building was also linked to the question of sustainability of development efforts in terms of the establishment of a “sustaining entity” to ensure the continuation of development processes well after program life.

3. Program management

Program flexibility basically meant that while program goals, objectives and components have been spelled out specifically in the FM and its expected outputs spelled quite generally in the FM’s logical framework matrix, the program was open to adopting specific projects, approaches, and strategies. Such program flexibility was seen as congruent with an area- and community-based approach and ostensibly makes way for consultations with various stakeholders.

While the FM spelled out project goals and components, it allowed program operators to define the specific strategies for achieving these. The FM pointed out that the log-frame aimed to provide guidance in interpreting the technical and administrative provisions of the program and serve as basis for initial monitoring. The FM also expected revisions in the log-frame while the program was implemented.

During inception, the program demanded a transparent and participatory mode of implementation. The FM specifically mandated the program management office (PMO) to undertake “[d]etailed consultations with local community representatives relating to the identification, prioritisation and implementation of specific project activities.”

It also gave the PMO responsibility to “provide local communities, as well as other concerned persons or bodies with all appropriate information regarding the objectives, strategies and procedures of the program”. Moreover, the PMO was encouraged to foster a sense of community ownership, integrate with existing institutions, and collaborate closely with NGOs (Interim Inception Plan).

The WESAMAR was headed by a project management office under the co-direction of a National Director from the Department of Agriculture and a European Co-director appointed by the EC. With the wide geographical spread and the different bio-physical conditions in the program area, program officials established four zone offices comprising the technical and support staffs. Within each municipality covered by the project area, the Area

Management Team (AMT) was established as a means to involve the municipal LGU in the provision of technical and planning support to the community-based organizations. The AMT was composed of personnel from municipal LGUs seconded to the program. In 1998, the AMT was phased out principally because of lack of incentive or enthusiasm among LGU personnel to do sustained work for the program.

Program leaders established three committees to provide management support to the PMO.

The Executive Steering Committee, chaired by the Secretary of Agriculture, also had representatives from the provincial government, regional development council, concerned national government agencies, NGOs and private sector. The Technical Consultative Committee, chaired by the Provincial Governor, was made responsible for technical consultation and coordination among NGOs, LGUs and community organizations. A Review Committee directly under the Project Office was made responsible for the review and approval of all activities.

The program, covering 156 barangays (villages), was applied in 58 “pilot” barangays. In 1998 the program also started work in 54 “expansion” barangays. During the final phase 45 additional “radiation” barangays were included.

C. Dynamics of implementation

This section looks into critical issues in the implementation of the program. Particular attention is given to the manner in which the program’s development strategies were defined, evolved and put into practice. It looks into the underlying factors to explain such developments. Implications on program results as well as on the issue of participation were also explored.

1. First phase: community development

While the Financing Memorandum (memo) specified the overall strategy of integrated area-based approach emphasizing community-based, bottom-up development, the program management team was made responsible for applying such strategy. Following the memo’s emphasis for a consultative and participatory approach to identifying and implementing activities, the program operators developed the community development process (CDP). NGOs consulted in the process have significantly influenced the CDP’s design.

The CDP incorporates ideas of community-centred, adaptive, learning-by-doing and flexible approaches to development programming that relied on

the capacity of people in the communities to analyze their situation, plan and implement and evaluate development activities. The CDP was modelled after the participatory development approach popularly used by NGO development workers.

The CDP process consisted of five phases, each building on the previous one:

- 1.a. *Entry and scanning* phase, which refers to those activities related to the identification of target communities, orienting the people on the program, and getting their commitment to participate in the program.
- 1.b. *Planning* phase, which includes forming CBOs and building its capacity to pursue development activities. At the end of this phase, CBO members are expected to formulate strategic development plans and identify and prepare proposals for implementation of project activities for the next phase.
- 1.c. *Implementation* phase, which builds confidence of CBO members in independently pursuing development activities towards institutional sustainability. The implementation of grants-funded small-scale development activities would occasion the attainment of organizational growth through improved management systems, credit-worthiness and financial stability.
- 1.d. *Consolidation* phase, which assumes CBO members can pursue development activities in the community on their own. This would also mean the members are prepared to expand concerns beyond those of their members, seek representation within the barangay, and establish linkages with outside institutions to participate in broader development projects.
- 1.e. *Exit phase*, which marks the end of WESAMAR program intervention in the community and the formal hand-over of management of the development project to the community.

As reflected and validated by documents, such as the 1997 Annual Workplan and Budget (AWB), it was clear among program staff at the onset that community organization and development was the focus of the entire program. While saying that the log-frame has a very strong focus on predetermined targets and did not reflect the CDP, the AWB also noted that log-frame was meant to provide guidance for interpreting the administrative and technical provisions of the proposal only. It recognized the fact that the

CDP has become the basis for the entire development strategy. It also pointed out that the CDP was a product of a series of workshops involving WESAMAR staff, NGOs and LGUs “with the purpose of coming up with a more appropriate framework” [1997 AWB:8].

The document also referred to the CDP “strategic operational framework” of the entire development program and proceeded to elaborate sectoral strategies implicit in the program log-frame in terms of how these “complement the CDP” [1997 AWB: Annex2]. The document also underscored the centrality of the CDP in organizing program intervention. This can be gleaned from how it summarizes the underlying approach of the CDP in terms of the tasks of WESAMAR staff (PMO and Zone offices), LGUs and NGOs in accordance with the requirements of the different phases of the CDP.

The participatory and process-oriented design of the CDP applied in 56 pilot barangays resulted to time spent on preparing and enabling the people, the contracting NGOs that would facilitate organizing work, and the LGUs tasked with providing technical support. The 1996 AWB itself acknowledged that “[b]ecause of the participatory nature of the implementation strategy...the Programme has taken time to build up momentum activities”. It nevertheless said that the process provided a “strong foundation upon which to establish subsequent sequence of activities” [1996 AWB, 2].

In time, however, major shifts in program focus and strategies occurred that brought fundamental changes on the very nature and underlying framework of the CDP. These were largely occasioned by recommendations provided by two review missions that visited the program midway into its implementation: the Management Review Mission (MRM) in August to September 1996 and the Mid-term Review (MTRM) in June to July 1997.

The MRM was sent by the EC in 1996, a year before the expected FM-proscribed mid-term review. The MRM was sent to look into complaints by the EC delegation in Manila on the slow pace of the program. The delegation was concerned that after 18 months of implementing the program, the CBO uptake of project activities was slower than expected and that only a few moved from the implementation of grant-based activities toward income-generating and livelihood related ones.

While the MRM expressed satisfaction over the CDP as an impressive process, it nevertheless raised as a serious concern the slow implementation of program activities. The MRM criticized the program for not providing

clear or adequate guidelines on provision of inputs and credit and marketing facilities to the communities. It particularly pointed out the failure of the program to gain significant ground in implementing a credit project, which would be needed to shift from the grant-based, infrastructure-related activities to the more “sustainable” loan-assisted livelihood and income generating activities.

The MTRM in 1997 also discovered that the program’s inability to move beyond the group formation stage of the CDP was still not addressed. The review team noted that after two years, the program has significantly fallen back in the accomplishment of program activities, especially in implementing the credit and enterprise development projects.

The team attributed this regression to the social preparation process. The MTRM specifically traced the problem to the CDP, which, while recognized as a valuable tool for rural development (for its participatory processes), was nevertheless too complicated and covered too many activities some of which were deemed non-essential. The team then recommended simplifying the CDP and focusing it on essential elements.

The mission sought to address what it saw as a weakness in the original program log-frame –that the program was involved in too many areas that caused diffusion in focus. It specifically recommended that the program cease involvement in land reform and rural health activities while focusing attention on CDP, particularly the implementation of community-based initiatives related to environment, micro-enterprise and commercial activities, and the savings-led, micro-finance activities.

Overall, it called for accelerating the CDP to enable the CBOs to implement commercial activities at an earlier stage, and on focusing program resources and staff towards implementing enterprise development related projects.

The MTRM identified institutional and community development as foundations for the program operators’ work. It specifically defined the focus of institutional development component of the program on enhancing the NGOs’ and LGUs’ capacity to support ongoing development activities of program beneficiaries.

The MTRM also called for improved program management.

As an aftermath of the two reviews, a new national Co-Director was appointed in April 1997 and a new European counterpart was appointed in February 1998.

2. Second phase: commercialization and race against the clock

The new management, as the Programme Completion Report itself observed, “marked a significant change in the strategy and operational focus of the Programme, as the recommendations of the MTR were put into practice” [PCR 2000:83].

The 1998 AWB showed the program management complying with most of the MTRM’s recommendations. The workplan recognized the need to ensure a more intensive program of micro-project implementation for the coming year while citing efforts to simplify community processes without losing its value. It was specifically concerned with “new major CBO development facilitation processes” relating to micro-credit and enterprise development [AWB 1998:4].

Consequently, with work starting in the additional 54 “radiation” barangays, the CDP framework was revised and simplified in 1998. The process was reduced to four stages and the set of activities, training requirements, and outputs, and estimated time required per phase were specified. It also included the sequence of CBO activities towards the establishment of revolving loan funds and the setting-up of group-based enterprises. In its revised form, the CDP remained the convergence point for all program activities.

Beginning the middle of 1998, “WESAMAR adopted a more commercial approach in terms of the overall objectives and conditions of their contracts” [PCR, 9]. Given the emphasis on income-generating activities, and in the light of the criticisms about the slowness of program implementation, a huge increase in spending was also planned: from P189 million for 1994-97 to P144 million in 1998. This move aimed to fund 157 projects using the RFSP capital assistance funding line, half of which were to be revolving loan projects and half of which were to be GBEs.

This new framework for the CDP required new contracting procedures with NGOs with specific outputs and timetable.

In mid-1998, program managers proposed a one-year extension of the program up to December 2000, as the program was to end in April 1999 according to the FM. They also prepared a “Workplan for the Programme Completion”, which was based on the adoption of a “commercial enterprise development approach” that emphasized a vigorous pursuit of large-scale commercial activities.

ODA funders initially gave a six-month extension with no approved budget under Rider Number 1 of the program. In September 1999, Rider Number 2 was released allowing program extension until the end of the year 2000 based on the proposed CEDA.

The 1999 AWB reflected the adoption of the CEDA and dropped reference to the CDP as the strategic operational framework of the program. Still, the AWB referred to the CDP as the implementing strategy for community development of the WESAMAR to prepare for the commercial activities of the CBOs.

In line with the decision to expand program coverage to 45 “radiation” barangays, the revised CDP provided for a shorter entry and planning phase to implement grant- and income-generating projects. Clearly this showed a significant shift in perspective about CDP: it was seen as an element within the basic enterprise development and commercialization framework.

The commercialization thrust set the following major output for the program:

- 2.a. Completion of Phases I and II of the CDP (this specifically meant that all CBOs, even the newly included radiation barangays were to engage in income-generating and enterprise projects)
- 2.b. Re-organization of WESAMAR into a commercial operation based on the approved entity;
- 2.c. LGUs to become suppliers of technical support; and,
- 2.d. NGOs to become partners in commercial activities.

Even while scenarios of a post-WESAMAR sustaining entity were being studied, the document has already hinted the privatization of WESAMAR and its transformation into a “private sector, self-financing business entity”.

In addition to continuing work on helping build small-scale enterprises (i.e. the RLFs and GBEs) in all program barangays, program operators embarked on the establishment of two macro-enterprise projects: the “Aggregated Small Holder Enterprises” (ASHEs) and the “Joint Venture Enterprises” (JVEs).

The ASHEs initiative envisioned the integration of large number of small-scale producers as “producer base” within a structure that provided and coordinated the provision of financial, marketing and technological services. It was meant to provide the mechanism for scaling up economic activities of

the CBOs. These would cover 25,000 hectares to grow eucheuma (seaweeds) with a P12.5-million investment; 1,250 hectares for coffee with investment of P5.5 million; 500 hectares for abaca plantation with an allocation of P2 million; and a P6.5-million investment in coco-coir production.

The JVEs, meanwhile, were business ventures in which CBOs, NGO, business entities were encouraged to invest under a corporate set-up, with WESAMAR providing start-up capital.

Meanwhile, under the institutional development component of the program, activities shifted toward the transformation of the CBOs into cooperatives. This was in line with the decision to consider a peak level federation of cooperatives as the key sustaining entity for the development efforts. This peak level federation was meant to provide continuing financial and technical services to the CBOs which have been transformed into cooperatives while itself engaging in enterprise activities.

Thus, the program pursued the transformation of CBOs into primary cooperatives despite the absence of assessment or criteria to determine whether CBOs are organizationally and financially prepared to become cooperatives [Programme Completion Report 2000].

Thus, for all the serious attempts at adopting the paradigm of participatory approach, in the end, management approach to top-down conventional development came to characterize WESAMAR.

Indeed, new program managers attempts to reorient the program while setting new targets –macro enterprise projects and forming cooperative federation– while being singularly concerned with achieving its objectives within a short time provided strong impetus towards such shift in management style and program orientation.

3. Interpreting the shift

The transition from “community development” to the “enterprise development” phase was nothing smooth or uncontroversial. Not only did it result in a sudden change in key program personnel mid-way in implementation but also generated resentment and confusion among involved program staff and various groups, not the least the people in the communities.

Specifically, NGO leaders resented the abrupt and rather forced reorientation of community organizing work towards transforming the CBOs into cooperatives. At the heart of the controversy was the question of whether

what occurred was a matter of change of emphasis or a major and fundamental change in program orientation.

The report of the Pre-Completion Mission (PCM), commissioned near the end of the program, was particularly concerned about the reasons and consequences of the shift of program emphasis. The report argued that the commercial enterprise development would not have appeared to have radically shifted program orientation, and could have had better chance of succeeding, had it been incorporated as a strategy early on in the implementation. The report said:

If the development of income-generating opportunities and the creation of links between the commercial enterprises and communities [were] considered appropriate outcomes for a community-based development process then the enterprise development approach could [have been] included [PCR: 2000:121].

The PCM report was also vague on the matter of how precisely the incorporation of such strategy together with the community-based processes could have come about. However, it was cognizant of difficulties that this entailed, particularly on the adoption of the enterprise development approach: “focus would have had to be on the development of commercial enterprises rather than CBOs to address a wide range of community concerns” [PCR: 2000:121].

The PCM, while recognizing the basic difference between the “community development process” and the “classic enterprise development” process, nevertheless, believed that a “complex structure” that combines the two is not necessarily untenable. It attributed the problem faced in WESAMAR to other hindrances encountered, particularly to time constraint.

It may be argued that the very complex nature of what such a combination entails was at the heart of the problem. Indeed, it seemed that any attempt to combine these two approaches needed a well-designed plan with clear specification of its requirement. However, in the context of WESAMAR, the combination occurred in quite an ad hoc manner.

The PCM linked the problem on the contradiction between the program design and program goals. It observed that while the Financing Memorandum was structured as a “blueprint” for integrated area development, it nevertheless required WESAMAR to emphasize a bottom-up community-based development strategy. The program consequently “defined a course of development that conflicted with what the Programme understood to be the

essence of a bottom-up strategy” [PCR: 2000:121].

The PCM itself noted that the CDP as defined in 1996 seems to have been faithful to the Financial Memorandum [PCR 2000:27]. However, it also noted that “the highly time-consuming, self-determining, bottom-up approach cannot be reconciled with the EC’s requirement to achieve tangible results and reduce administrative overhead” [PCR 2000:97].

What this underscores is the contradiction inherent in the implementation of a development approach that puts premium on the ability of people to plan and implement their own development activities, in the context of a structured program that assumes a linear and predictable development process.

As such, it was inevitable that the “slowness” of program activities became a critical issue mid-way into the program. How program implementers responded to such a problem in possibly different ways could be gleaned from the following insights of the PCM:

The CDP as defined in 1996 seems to have been faithful to the Financial Memorandum. The implicit balance between non-income generating and income generating micro-projects seems to have been about right. Unfortunately, despite having designed an impressive process, and though the income-generating PAs were being carried out in almost all 58 barangays, the EC and the DA of the GOP felt that progress was too slow. PCM considers that this pace is normal in this kind of process [PCR 2000:27-28].

A more crucial matter, however, involved the question of how performance was measured. For the MTRM, for example, the issue of performance was seen in terms mainly of attaining targets within a given timeframe. The MTRM ignored the program’s commitment to the implementation of the CDP.

This is not to say that the original CDP did not have its weaknesses. It is interesting to note that the PCM attributes the failure of enterprise development projects to the “tendency for the early versions of the CDP to follow a standardized set of activities that CBOs were expected to undertake”. This goes against the grain of flexible approach to development [PCR 2001:105]. This move, it said, constrained CBOs to develop in different ways at different pace.

Program implementers criticized the PCM’s dismissal of the original CDP’s assumption that CBOs need a long period of general organizational training before embarking on enterprise development activities.

The CDP process was new to most of program staff, NGOs and the CDWs and was received differently by different stakeholders.

One community development worker (CDW) said “the CDP was too hurried and the time frame was too short. There is a tendency for organizers to just be concerned with accomplishing targets, and forget about the people.”⁴

Another blamed the length of meetings, training, consultations and planning for the slow project implementation.⁵ One former WESAMAR official pointed out that much of the later rush in implementation could have been avoided had the micro-enterprise development projects been undertaken earlier.⁶

The initial response of program to the MRM and MTRM recommendations did not seem to alter the basic assumption of the CDP as the focus of development intervention that program staff were hard-pressed to vigorously implement. The program staff did so through building micro-project activities, streamlining the CDP, and giving more attention to enterprise development activities of the CBOs. The drift towards the commercialization however, rendered resolving such issues as moot.

Such shift must be seen in the light of what the PCM itself recognizes: “[b]y 1997, not only in the Philippines, but all over the world, a new paradigm was dominant: market forces and the power of private enterprise [PCM 2000:8]”.

In the case of the WESAMAR, the turning point appears to have been the entry of the new European Director in 1998 in the aftermath of the MRM and the MTRM.

In due time, it became clear that a paradigm that puts the market, rather than people, at the core of the development process took hold of the program. Bureaucratic concern for achieving program targets that set program management towards a top-down program driven approach to implementation also became more prominent.

D. Results

1. Socio economic development

In many ways, the program affected the lives of target beneficiaries, as cited by interviews with community leaders. They expressed appreciation of certain benefits, such as improvement of facilities and some infrastructure projects – construction of latrines and community water systems– through grant-based project activities.

However, their disappointment over the failure of the program to live up to other promised benefits was evident. When asked whether the program has wrought any substantial changes in their lives, the community leaders said they were quite aware of substantial resources that went into the program. But most of them expressed regret that much of the resources have not been put to effective use and that much more could have been accomplished.

Of strategic importance to the program was the spurring of economic activities among the beneficiaries as the germ for long-term development like savings mobilization scheme and micro-enterprises among CBOs and macro-enterprises. The Completion Report notes that while both the group enterprise (GBE) and the revolving loan funds (RLF) may have contributed to imparting entrepreneurial skills among the participants, these had generally limited positive impact on household incomes and employment and savings generation because of their rather limited potential [WESAMAR 2000:48].

As a savings based credit scheme, the RLF was premised on the ability of beneficiaries for capital build-up and savings. To encourage capital build-up, the credit scheme provided for an infusion of capital by WESAMAR related to the share capital put up by the community-based organizations (CBOs). The CBOs were expected to buy back the WESAMAR capital. The re-flows would be put into a trust fund that would eventually be used for reinvestment in enterprises to be put up by the CBO federation. For the most part, the CBOs were able to generate their capital share through labor cost savings from previous grant-based project activities.

Delays in finalizing the scheme, implementers' lack of experience, and lack in program personnel hampered the implementation of the loan fund facility.

Most loans taken out were in the nature of providential loans rather than production loans and were thus limited in their ability to generate further savings. Loan repayment was also highly contingent on successful enterprises some of which did not materialize. Thus as observed by the PCR, most CBOs were unable to make the buy-back to the trust fund and repay the capital and interest on loans [WESAMAR 2000:48].

With the program's emphasis on macro-enterprises and building a higher level financing institution during the later stage, WESAMAR program staff became more concerned with ensuring the buy-back re-flows at the expense of the RLF system. This resulted to the "de-capitalization" of the RLFs and

micro-enterprises: loan repayments were used to buy-back WESAMAR investments and put into a trust fund which can no longer be accessed for re-lending. These put a cap on the RLF and slashed the success rate of enterprise development.

Such was the case in Barangay Pusong Daram, as cited by a CDW.

The women's group was able to save funds from the implementation of program for the provision of latrines. A P20,000-budget for 40 units of latrine was saved when the group provided the gravel and sand. The amount was used by the organization as counterpart for the revolving loan fund.

The women also tapped a loan of P80,000 for the RLF after giving P500 each as capital buildup (CBU) for an allowed P1,000-loan for every P500. Each month the women paid for the capital, the CBU and the interest. On each round they were able to access new loans of larger amounts.

This operation did well for a year. They had three passbooks for repayment, CBU and interest. The people really took care of the capital being repaid. The CBO was one of the best performers in terms of repayment rate.

The scheme was working well, in fact with minimal intervention of the CDWs, until the WESAMAR staff had to take out most of the fund in the CBU account. They said that the amount has to be used for the hatchery enterprise.

Indeed, it has been made clear to the people by the project staff at the outset that the fund provided by WESAMAR had to be eventually paid back. The problem was that the pull out was too early and effectively rendered the scheme unfeasible. At that time, some amounts were on loan to the people. Perhaps realizing that the RLF program was bound to fail, people no longer bothered to pay back their loans.

It is now difficult to implement such kinds of projects in the community. In fact some people may now be used to the idea of getting a loan and no longer bothering to repay. If, for example, an NGO will implement a project like that, people might end up just taking advantage of the project given the experience they had.⁷

Meanwhile, group businesses have, in most instances, failed to take off for various reasons.

NGO and community leaders said one reason was that program staff has driven the identification and setting up of enterprises. Leaders said they

were not convinced that the GBEs identified and promoted by the program were appropriate to the community. A community leader was indignant that while their CBO had considered other projects identified by them as worthwhile investments, the program staff often ignored these.

Yung pinag-usapan namin noon sa umpisa pa lang, noong planning, yung mga existing ng mga hanapbuhay namin, yun ang pag-uumpisahan. So yun dapat ang ma-pokusang...hindi natupad yun dahil yung gusto nila ang dapat masunod... Sa kanila ang gusto nila yung magkaroon ng seaweeds, lapu-lapu culture. Unang-una yung mga ganyan, sa kanila nanggaling. Kung siguro ang naging pokus yung dating hanapbuhay namin baka 'successful' pa. Tulad ng ginusto namin noon na magkaroon ng pump-boat na pang hanap-buhay. Yung gusto ng mga tao, yung mga projects na kabisado nila...kabisado nila at araw-araw na kaparte ng kanilang buhay ang gustong nilang implement. Pero iba naman ang gustong implement ng WESAMAR...yung mga high-value crops, mga imported na kambing na hindi naman suited sa mga areas.⁸

(What we talked about at the beginning, during our planning, as to start with our existing livelihood. These were to be the focus. But this did not happen because it was what they wanted that was followed. They wanted us to go into seaweed production, lapu-lapu culture. But all these came from them. I suppose that the program would have succeeded if it had focused on our existing livelihood. What the people wanted were projects that they know and are accustomed to. Yet what WESAMAR wanted to implement were high value crops, imported goats which are not even suited in the area).

Another community leader noted that the implementation of the GBEs were very much dependent upon the technical staff. Aside from these people's technical knowledge, their intervention was also required to coordinate scaled-up marketing activities.⁹ This means the program failed to inspire confidence among the people in implementing activities that are new, commercially oriented, and of high-value production.

The program staff's concern for "sustainable" economic impact is understandable. However, for all the talk about the sense of community ownership of programs and serious efforts on this especially in the beginning, this is a matter to which program managers appeared oblivious to during the later commercialization drive.

The two joint venture programs (hatchery and fiber-glass boat production) in which WESAMAR as well as NGOs and CBOs sunk considerable investments were veritable failures. Both were hounded by problems of poor market, technical difficulties, unwieldy management structures, and inexperienced managers. The basic problem has to do with these projects being too ambitious given the realities of constraints in time and resources and lack of experience of people in managing such large enterprises.

2. Institutional development and capacity building

Beyond physical and some economic benefits, community leaders also identified such benefits as the increased knowledge and awareness of social, economic and environmental issues and acquisition of a variety of skills and technological know-how. As one of the community leaders interviewed related:

Mayroon ding masasabing magandang alaala na naiwan ang WESAMAR. Dabil sa programa nagkaroon tayo ng organisasyon...natuto tayong buuin ang organisasyon kahit wala na ang WESAMAR. At saka yung ibang teknolohiya, natututo rin tayo at hanggang ngayon nasu-sustain pa natin yung ibang proyekto. Tulad ng marine sanctuary namin, yung marine protected area numan sa Barangay Talib, hanggang ngayon, nandon pa. Sa ngayon, ang pinagkukunan namin ng finance ay yung barangay IRA [internal revenue allotment]. May nakukuha kaming P4,000 a year mula sa barangay IRA.¹⁰

(We can say that a lot of good things came out of WESAMAR. Because of the program, we now have an organization. We also learned new technologies. We have also sustained some projects like our marine sanctuary. At present we get our financing for this project from the barangay IRA [internal revenue allotment] worth P4,000 a year.)

Community leaders were also particularly appreciative of the CDP. That the CDP was so much different from the manner by which other development

projects were implemented was quite apparent to them. The idea that development is something that the people in the community can do by themselves and not something that can be done for them had in one way or the other gained prevalence among the people.¹¹

Eventually however, the rush towards the formation of a cooperative federation itself created pressure for the conversion of the CBOs into primary cooperatives.¹² The process of formation of the cooperatives was in itself fundamentally flawed as observed by the Pre-completion Mission. It noted the CBOs were converted into cooperatives “even when the CBO officers and members have yet to prove their technical and organizational capacity for managing and sustaining their PAs and loan-funded RLFs and GBEs” [PCR:65].

It added that the process was conducted “without paying sufficient attention to the lessons learned of the Philippines’ Cooperative history: 1) bottom up approach; 2) avoid enticing members with apparent rewards or assets; and 3) an appropriate timetable and education and training are essential” [PCR: 66].

V. NGO ENGAGEMENT IN THE WESAMAR PROGRAM

This section looks into the dynamics of NGO engagement in the ODA program. It explores the various factors and conditions determining the modes of NGO engagement. It pays particular attention to the interplay between various perspectives, motivations and interests of both the NGOs and the ODA program and staff surrounding the engagement of NGOs.

A. The NGOs

Samar NGOs trace their origin during the 1970s on church-based social action projects for human rights recognition and against military occupation. These projects formed activists who became actively engaged in the militant political movement and later on in building NGOs. Some of these NGOs also incorporated socio-economic activities as part of their overall political agenda. Critical of government, these NGOs were expected to shun collaboration with government-sponsored development projects.

Some NGOs that have roots in this historical juncture engaged in such projects following ideological differences among NGO and PO leaders in the early 1990s. Leaders of these NGOs were more flexible in terms of their engagement with government and were more open to collaborative work with government, particularly at the local level. Influencing government programs

and policies became an important venue for pushing forward their advocacies and goals. In the process of doing so, these NGOs developed network linkages with government agencies and LGUs that served as an important organizational resource.

Such was the case of Tandaya Foundation Inc. (Tandaya), which engaged local government units on policies and programs while leading advocacy campaigns in Samar. After leading a group that criticised the WESAMAR Programme, Tandaya later on engaged the program.

Other NGOs were less politically inclined, like the Western Samar Development Foundation (WSDF), one of the Samar-based NGOs founded by the private-sector group Philippine Business for Social Progress (PBSP) in the 1980s.

In the light of government's policy preference in the 1990s for channeling welfare and development services through NGOs, new NGOs came into the scene. These were mainly government sponsored and often formed by politicians. These were also largely geared towards implementing government-sponsored projects as contractors.

From the start, WESAMAR Programme personnel recognized such differences among NGOs. In an assessment of NGOs who applied for organizing contracts with the program, WESAMAR Programme personnel classified the NGOs broadly into three groups.

One group consists of organizations engaged in community organizing towards forming cooperatives for enterprise or income-generating project management. These NGOs usually work on funded projects on a contracted basis with government or with the private sector. NGOs in this group included PBSP, WESADEF, Economic Development Foundation (EDF), Samar People's Economic Foundation Inc. (SPEFI) and Samar Enterprise Resource Center Foundation Inc. (SERCFI).

Another group consists of organizations involved in building people's solidarity to participate in overall socio-economic and political transformation. The report recognized that these NGOs do not consider themselves implementers of contracted projects but as partners in development interventions. NGOs in this group included Tandaya and the Center for Empowerment and Resource Development (CERD).

A third group included NGOs with specific purposes such as the Visayas Cooperative Development Center (VICTO), which focused on cooperative

development, and the Catholic Church's social action arm Caritas, which focused on organizing Basic Ecclesiastical Communities (BECs). [NGO Assessment Report 1995:14-15].

Thus, it was that WESAMAR was confronted with an array of NGOs with disparate goals, orientations and organizational experiences. These factors shaped the variety of ways in which they engaged with the program. The latter part of this paper would show it was the "contracting NGOs" that closely fit the underlying framework of the WESAMAR Programme's engagement of NGOs.

To note, these NGOs range from one pole composed of a group oriented toward 'contracting' and another pole by a group of NGOs where contracting is a common activity.

Still, the group of more "political" NGOs that were more vociferous, articulate, and with established networks in local government at their disposal cannot be simply disregarded.

While engagement in broad policy and directional issues of the program is a well defined terrain for NGOs –and perhaps for the program–, NGO engagement as contractual agents brought all sorts of complexities and tensions not only on the part of the program but also for these NGOs.

B. The WESAMAR framework for engaging the NGOs

Early in the program, WESAMAR proponents recognized the important role that NGOs were to perform in the project. Thus, along with the community ownership and integration with existing organizations, close collaboration among NGOs was identified as an underlying strategy in the implementation of the program.

The Financing Memorandum (FM) specifically provided for the institutional development of NGOs, LGUs and CBOs as one of its specific objectives. It particularly mentioned the need to enhance the planning and implementing capabilities of these institutions through training and skill-enhancement. Yet the FM was vague on how such objective was to be attained, and made no mention of whether this objective was to be attained in the context of active involvement of NGOs in program implementation.

Involvement of NGOs in program implementation, however, was nothing new to other EC ODA-funded programs in the Philippines. In the case of WESAMAR however, the NGOs from the very beginning were able to

register the point that they were a force to contend with, and made sure that they were not left out.

Quite early in the program, it was apparent that program personnel was quite aware of the complexities involved in engaging NGOs as contracting agents and, also at the same time, the distinct qualities that they were supposed to bring into the program.

Thus, WESAMAR's NGO Assessment Report in 1995 states:

It is generally observed that most NGOs are not only involved in development programs and projects simply as contractors. They show also a distinct tendency to be motivated by the commitment to help improve the endemic poverty which is encountered in marginalised communities. Furthermore some NGOs are active in providing motivation and technical assistance to areas which presently may not be reached by government services and programs [NGO Assessment Report 1995:1].

During the preparatory phase of the program, the Participatory Planning Workshop was held in July 1994 with a number of NGO representatives.

The following program activities in which NGOs were likely to be involved were identified:

1. assisting in the coordination among LGUs, coordinating agencies, CBOs, and program beneficiaries;
2. representation in the Executive Steering Committee as well as the Technical Consultative Committee and also contributing to the Project Review Committee;
3. assisting in the implementation of the Area Specific Plans in each Zone;
4. undertaking the community organizing activities; and,
5. conducting research.

Then again, during NGO Provincial Forum, September 1995, one of the foremost issues discussed had to do with the roles NGOs were to assume in the program. There, the EEC Delegate Head Alistair MacDonald emphasized that "the communities are the core but our projects should be working in a partnership with communities with NGO, with LGUs".

He specifically noted that "neither the NGOs as well as LGUs are the beneficiaries". While recognizing that institutional development of NGOs and

LGUs was a key objective of the program, such a concern was tightly linked to their role in the implementation of the program and in sustaining the development processes in the long term.

Accordingly, MacDonald proceeded to outline the roles that NGOs could be expected to take. Clearly, and which was also foremost in the mind of the NGOs themselves: it would be community organizing. He was quick to add, however, that community organizing should be seen merely as a part of the wider role of “implementation”. It is “a role reflecting the provision of certain services, reflecting and carrying out certain work based on the capabilities and mandate of each of these bodies” such as baseline data-gathering, research activities and technical capability building.

The EEC Delegate used “partnership” in defining the relationship with the NGOs. He was mindful of partnership as “an organically growing activity” and the difficulties of fostering such relationship given that several actors with different agenda were involved.

Quite significant, however, was his emphatic concern over the need to balance the partnership with the need to deliver “impact”. There is difficulty here in understanding what he means by partnership being possibly a constraint to impact since ‘partnership’ was largely left undefined.

It was unlikely, however, that what was suggested was partnership based on the recognition on the NGOs as development actors, nor was there in fact any serious consideration of what partnership really meant in the context of the program.

In the 1996 Annual Workplan and Budget for example, the “building of effective partnerships with NGOs” was discussed as an output and seen mainly in terms of the effective and timely accomplishment of the CDP process for which the NGOs were contracted.

Meanwhile, David Moles, WESAMAR European Co-director who was replaced near the end of the programme, said:

“We have to bear in mind that Samar has also had a serious problem with insurgency over the past 10 or more years that has caused serious dislocation of many people within the community who have moved from the inland areas down to the coastal zones and that somehow had to convert themselves from upland farmers to fishers without being too knowledgeable about how to be good fishermen. So these were

all the sort of problems that we have to contend with and it is our perception that in a situation like that NGO interventions could very well be very effective and that is why we want to explore quite seriously the opportunities for involvement of NGOs in these programs” [Moles, 1994:10].

While partnership as a framework of NGO engagement in the program was largely undefined, it was evident that an instrumentalist attitude that sees NGOs as effective instruments of the delivery of programs and services underpinned much of how WESAMAR proponents related with NGOs.

The following observation of the Programme Completion Report would indicate how the question of dealing with NGOs as development partners in their own right might have been a difficult issue for the program:

Although WESAMAR employed them to provide specific services and facilitate the CDP, some saw themselves as the initiators of local development rather than merely implementers acting on behalf of externally funded program. It was difficult to reconcile this difference in opinion on the role of the NGOs and the nature of the partnership and was cause of disagreement and misunderstanding throughout the Programme. There was noticeably less disagreement with NGOs accustomed to working with programs on a contract basis than with those that had been more involved in issues relating to human rights and local governance [WESAMAR 2000: 107].

Indeed, as the above observation indicates, dealing with NGOs as contractual agents was an easier proposition on the part of the ODA program. This thinking reveals a basic concern that revolves around difficulties in engaging NGOs as contractual agents in so far as they fulfil functions beyond their role as contractual agents but befits them as civil society entities. This indicates that “contracting” was very much at the value base of the ODA program’s engagement of NGOs.

This is not to say that the program did not open itself up to NGOs in terms of their capacity to influence policy and direction of the program. Indeed, especially in the early phase of the program, the NGOs were assiduously consulted by program management in identifying the appropriate intervention strategies that resulted to the adoption of the CDP as the strategic operational framework of the program. Such consultative approach was, however, no longer the case when the new program managers shifted program orientation toward commercial development and adopted a top-down management style concerned with beating the clock in generating investments.

It is interesting to note that with the shift towards commercial development, a new role for NGOs was also defined. That is, NGOs together with the POs were thrust into the role of partners in commercial activities, particularly in the two joint venture activities. With the phase out of the CDP process at hand, and with the question of sustainability becoming more defined in terms of the establishment of successful, scaled-up commercial activities in the area, NGOs were encouraged to take on a new role. Thus the 1999 AWB stated:

“[W]ith the attendant shift in focus to enterprise implementation and management and in order to capitalize on the relationships so far developed between the WESAMAR, the NGOs and the CBOs, it is intended to actively encourage the NGOs to remain with their respective communities. They can become involved as stakeholders in their own right, (an option being as equity participants) in the commercial development which are to be initiated in their communities or in terms of provision of consultancy services to CBO’s and LGUs to sustain and build on existing work [1999 AWB, 39].

The idea of commercial enterprises involving civil society organizations in ownership and management is indeed quite bold and innovative. Yet, this presupposes a lot of things, among them, the ability of these organizations to effectively fulfil these roles and the context in which such organizations were made to take on such roles.

As was the case, the two joint ventures largely failed because of the lack of experience of POs in managing such operations. Management of the two joint ventures fell heavily in the hands of the WESAMAR European Director. Not the least of concern should have been the overall organizational preparedness of the NGOs in terms of a clear specification of how such new role fits within their overall missions and goals.

C. NGO Contracts

A significant feature of the WESAMAR program was the considerable extent to which it involved local NGOs as contractors for the implementation of its organizing activities.

At the peak of their involvement in these activities, the NGOs hired more than 120 community development workers (CDWs) and community organizer supervisors (COS). The NGOs involved were all province based.

The NGOs had successfully lobbied that community organizing contracts be limited to the local NGOs, arguing that they are the development players on the ground and that, as indigenous NGOs, they are in a position to sustain the gains of the program over the long term.

Of 18 NGOs that responded to an invitation to bid in 1995, nine NGOs were given annual renewable contracts for the year 1996.

The contract provided for one community development worker (CDW) each for each barangay and one COS for every three to four CDWs. NGOs were selected based on an agreement between WESAMAR and NGOs that preference should be given to local groups committed to maintaining a presence in the area after the Programme ended [WESAMAR, 2000:107].

NGO contracts were renewed for the year 1997. This time, coverage area increased with the inclusion of the 54 expansion barangays.

In the light of the slow progress of program implementation observed by the MRM and MTRM, the MTRM recommended tighter monitoring performance assessment of NGO contracts and adoption of corrective measures if contracts were not met. Thus, the 1998 AWB stated that:

“The new contracts to be signed in December 1997 will lay out much more clearly than before the key objectives and outputs which each NGO commits itself to producing in terms of the CDP. These agreements will also detail the roles and responsibilities of NGOs and of WESAMAR so that greater responsibility and tighter management control can be achieved” [AWB 1998:20].

Consequently, the 1998 revised and expanded NGO contracts contained the following features:

Tighter, more specific, minimum, and obligatory output and targets were identified.

A non-performance article was added stipulating periodic and final contract payments to be released only upon completion of contract conditions.

Coverage of contract area expanded to include a new set of 53 radiation barangays where the previous 1 CDW: 1-barangay ratio was reduced to 1 CDW: 2-barangays ratio.

A performance assessment of NGOs was also conducted in 1998. The assessment focused on the physical outputs and organizational capability-

building outputs of the NGOs. It found out that NGOs were performing satisfactorily.

The adoption of the Enterprise Development approach in 1999 occasioned a recasting of the NGO contracts. It shifted from community organizing to the development of skills and systems among CBOs for implementing enterprises. Specifically, the NGOs were tasked with:

1. assisting CBOs in enterprise planning and implementation;
2. leading in CBO federation building through the registration of the CBOs as cooperatives; and,
3. assisting CBOs to qualify for financing from RFSI.

The shift to enterprise development and cooperative formation as ultimate objectives for community organizing did not sit well with most of the NGOs. For these NGOs, the new approach went against what they felt was the essence of the CDP for which they have worked so earnestly in the previous years.

For the closing out year 2000, no new NGO contracts were negotiated, and WESAMAR staff directly undertook work with the CBOs.

In January 2000, a performance assessment of NGOs was conducted, which showed that some NGOs have not satisfactorily fulfilled their contractual obligations. Specifically at issue was the failure of two NGOs that failed to register their CBOs as cooperatives. A two-month grace period was given to the concerned NGOs to fulfil their contract.

What is clear from all this is that the nature of contracts had steadily progressed from being open-ended to being oriented toward detailed specifications of activities, outputs and timeframe. Indeed, the lack of time-bound targets or indicators of achievements of the previous contracts, have for the most part been blamed for the slow progress in the early years of the program. To an extent, it could be admitted that clarifying outputs and timeframe constitute an improvement of the contracts in as far such-and-such was meant to avoid misunderstanding between the contracting parties by providing clearer benchmarks.

However, the program seemed to have gone overboard in that not only the targets were specified by contracts but also the methods or means by which these were to be achieved. Thus the PCM itself observes that “[b]y restricting interventions to those already described by the CDP, the contracts allowed little flexibility in the approach to developing CBOs and stifled

initiatives that the NGOs might otherwise have proposed to address the needs of specific NGOs” [PCR 2000:108]. Moreover, changes in the contracts seemed to have been also fuelled by suspicion, as expressed by the Mid-term Review Mission, that the NGOs were performing as they saw fit and program management had failed to supervise and control the NGOs during the CDP.

Indeed, such changes in the NGO contracts were indicative not only of the shift in program orientation but also of the steady move away from a climate of partnership based relationship with the NGOs.

D. The NGO’s understanding of their engagement in WESAMAR

For NGOs in the area, the WESAMAR program, given what it intends to accomplish in the area, its scope and the resources involved, occupied their attention.

A critical stance towards the Program was displayed during its conceptualization stage when NGOs led by Tandaya criticized the program both for its strategies as well as for lack of consultation with the NGOs. Given the subsequent assurance and display of openness to NGO participation in program management and implementation, the NGOs adopted a more collaborative stance toward the program. The NGOs later saw the WESAMAR as presenting a host of opportunities for the Samareno people and for NGOs.

One prominent NGO personality viewed the WESAMAR as providing the opportunity for NGOs to:

1. offer their expertise and track record in the development of the province;
2. create venues of continuing dialogues on development issues and concerns affecting Samar;
3. build their capacity to undertake on a larger scale development activities that they were already competent in; and,
4. develop their capacity in other areas [Cabardo, 1994:7].

NGO personalities interviewed shared a common view that such development intervention as WESAMAR has been long overdue in province long neglected by government. It is also apparent that the NGOs were acutely aware of the important role they play in the development of the province.

Thus, would they invariably note of many instances when the NGOs had come together, despite differences among themselves, to act on issues citing

the well-being of the Samar people. As the PCM itself recognizes: “NGOs based in Samar are managed by strong-minded individuals with firm ideas on what needs to be done to effect social and economic transformation in the area [PCR: 107]”. That they considered themselves correct in engaging the program was summed-up by an NGO official:

It is not always that a program of such scope and resources come into the province. We also know of past programs that did not really benefit the people, but only a few and often the politicians. That is why the NGOs had to make sure that the people would benefit.¹³

At the same time, the NGOs also gave much weight in the opportunity that WESAMAR would provide them especially for establishing their track record. The statement of an NGO leader provides a glimpse of such thinking:

We were at the outset receptive of the program. I know that projects like this will help people in the barangays. Also, it is an advantage for the NGOs, because as NGOs we don't have any support from the government. Through such program we can improve the capability of our staff involved in community development. It can contribute to the improvement of our organization. It therefore not only helps the beneficiaries but also the NGOs. NGOs cannot stand alone without these foreign funded projects.¹⁴

This particular NGO leader was straightforward and comfortable in describing her NGO's engagement with WESAMAR in terms of a contracting relationship and emphasized that the important thing is for the NGOs to perform well in terms of the contracts.

Others, however, emphasized that as service contractors, they were also putting in certain qualities into their work. They specifically referred to such qualities as the kind of organizing work they do, the kind of enabling relationship that they as NGOs were able to foster with the people, and the kind of perspective that they bring in influencing the program as a whole. NGO personalities who held such view were also the ones who were wont to express dismay that as the program progressed, they were treated more and more merely as contractors and no longer as partners.

Most of them defined partnership in the context of the program as ideally that of being able to influence the programme's overall direction. This flows

naturally from the perception of themselves as legitimate stakeholders in their own right for development of the area. That this was seen as a matter of right is very much evident in one NGO personality's assertion that making sure the program was doing things right was something they would do whether or not they were asked to.¹⁵

Still, a focal point of the NGO's engagement with the program had been their contracts for organizing work. This is understandable in light of the fact that WESAMAR contracts provided the main source of funding for some NGOs during the time.

A number of NGO leaders interviewed pointed to the reality that local NGOs have more difficulty in accessing resources compared to national NGOs. This was a concern that the NGOs expressed early in the program when discussions on the role of the NGOs in the program were ongoing. One NGO personality in the NGO Provincial Forum held early in the program specifically posed the question of how the WESAMAR program would choose between NGOs who already have the capability and NGOs interested in acquiring the capability. Concerned with the possibility that they could be edged out by national NGOs from organizing work contracts with the program, the NGOs lobbied for the contracts to be limited to the local NGOs.

To some extent, it could be said that there had been a tendency among the NGOs to be preoccupied with the contracts. One former key program staff acquainted with many of the NGO leaders was particularly critical of how NGOs tended to take on so much organizing contracts beyond their capacity. He said since most NGOs were unmindful of how work in the areas could be sustained beyond the WESAMAR program suggests that NGOs were more compelled by opportunities of financial resources than anything else.¹⁶ Interviews with NGO officers also revealed the manner of NGOs getting which contract and how much contracts had been a controversial issue. This created animosity among them.

There were divergent ways in which the NGOs viewed their engagement in the WESAMAR project. In the first place, there were differences among NGOs on how such issue was clarified. An NGO leader remarked that such questions would have assumed the NGOs have a clear idea of what they were trying to do and accomplish and the strategies to accomplish these. He said that such is not true for all the NGOs, claiming that not all NGOs had clear ideas of what its members were trying to accomplish in the area in the first place.¹⁷

On the other hand, a PBSP staff claimed that her NGO's participation in WESAMAR had been framed at the onset in terms of enhancing development activities the PBSP was already implementing in particular barangays. She noted as evidence PBSP's decision not to get organizing contracts outside its project area. In contrast, there is the case of a more 'political' NGO, Tandaya, that tended to get as much organizing contracts in several areas as possible. While one could easily interpret such actuation as motivated by financial considerations, one cannot discount the fact that this was quite congruent with the political nature of its work. Subsequent moves of the NGO to form a federation of POs after the WESAMAR program would bear this out.

WESAMAR operators found it more difficult dealing with NGOs that had clear commitment to their own agenda. Thus, program operators became wary, tagged such NGOs as having "hidden agenda," and moved towards restrictive provisions in the contracts with such NGOs. These NGOs, on the other hand, failed to check accountability to WESAMAR based on the terms of the contract.

NGOs involved in WESAMAR, however, had different reactions to the program's shift in orientation towards enterprise development. That shift failed to create a concerted effort among NGOs to again exercise their "civil society role" as they did in the beginning since some NGO leaders approved of the refocusing on enterprise development and the cooperativization of the CBOs. These NGOs, however, criticized the haste in the shifting process. Others criticized the direction the program was taking, saying the program moved away from the bottom-up participatory approach.

VI. CONCLUSION: DYNAMICS OF NGO ENGAGEMENT IN AN ODA PROGRAM

Since WESAMAR's inception, the NGOs have presented themselves as a strong sector that the program had to contend with.

Credit here goes to the NGOs' ability to put a common front, to project themselves as credible institutions, to register presence and relevance in the area, and to put forward credible proposals

The initial phase of the program was marked by a more collaborative relationship between and among program managers and NGO staff. Such relationship was based on mutual agreement on orientation and processes. This was possible because the NGOs saw the promise of the program's congruence

with their participatory community development approaches.

Meanwhile, the WESAMAR Program personnel, initially, was committed to participatory processes that they understood was mandated by the Program (specifically by the FM).

There was, however, a complex web of motivations propping each party's position towards WESAMAR. Likewise, the NGOs' treatment of the program as an opportunity to gain resources and institutional development and the program personnel's treatment of NGOs as effective means for accomplishing program outputs should be taken into consideration.

In so far as the NGOs saw concrete manifestations of their being able to influence program direction, such as the adoption of the CDP, they knew they were considered as genuine partners. As the program became more bureaucratic and shifted in orientation, more and more the NGOs felt they were no longer treated as partners.

The experience here has shown that to a certain extent, genuine collaborative partnership within the bounds of an ODA program such as WESAMAR was possible for NGOs. Crucial here was the extent to which WESAMAR and NGOs shared the basic development orientation and approaches, as well as the willingness on the part of WESAMAR to adopt more open-ended management processes congenial to partnership. That this was at all possible had to be seen in the light of what have been recognized as basic contradictions in the program design itself. That is, it had a blueprint while at the same time that it is committed to participatory approaches.

In the end, the overall bureaucratic context of ODA itself, as exemplified by the MTRM's emphasis on narrow project objectives in evaluating the CDP, constricted and eroded the bases upon which genuine partnership could stand.

The intricate and vexing question of how the Program could deal with the NGOs both as partners and contractors under the program was not adequately dealt with. Indeed, there was tendency for WESAMAR staff to see NGOs role in the program on an instrumental basis. In so far that there was serious thinking about the role of NGOs in the program, there was the tendency to conflate their role as 'partners' with their role as service contractors.

Contracts themselves do not necessarily define the overall relationship of the ODA with NGOs. Even with contracts, flexibility, open-endedness and room for negotiations can remain defining features of the relationship

between contracting parties. This seems not to be the case however with the WESAMAR and the NGOs. Changes in the NGO contracts very much reflected the shift in the overall direction of the program orientation as well as changes in the way that it dealt with the NGOs marked by a steady move towards strictly confining them to their contractual role.

Whatever appreciation by the Program of the NGOs as legitimate development organizations in their own right have not been clearly and specifically brought to bear in the arrangements for their involvement in the program.

The NGOs may or may not, but should, as independent civil society organizations see their engagement in WESAMAR as mere part of what they were trying to accomplish overall, which is their *raison d'être*. For WESAMAR to engage NGOs as contractual agents while at the same time being wary of whatever “hidden agenda” they have would always put the relationship in peril. This is an intractable matter and cannot simply be pushed aside. What seems to have been the case was that in so far as NGOs were considered development partners in their own right, the basic concern was the implication of this on their performance as contractual agents.

The NGOs, who themselves sought their role as contractual agents, would have needed serious thinking on the implications of such involvement on them as organizations and what they were trying to accomplish as development agents in their own right. This requires at the very least an appreciation of the fact that having taken on the role of contractual agents, they were bound to operate, perform, abide by the processes, and be evaluated and held accountable within terms of the contracts.

Inherently challenged as the NGOs were, in terms of maintaining fidelity to their organizational values and goals, their accountability to the people, their legitimacy as civil society organizations, the NGOs themselves could be put in peril as they may in the process lose sight of all these.

There is no question that NGOs had clearly distinguished their role as service contractors and their role as civil society organizations vis-à-vis the program. It seems, however, NGOs took for granted that these roles can both be fulfilled in the context of WESAMAR without much complication. Evidently, a variety of motivations and considerations informed the NGO's involvement in WESAMAR. Indeed, there were very real tensions among these motivations.

Managing these tensions would have required serious consideration of both the NGO's own institutional needs and resources and of the implications to them and the community of the program and of their actions in the context of the program.

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Endnotes:

¹ At 1993 exchange rate of 1 European Currency Unit=1.1975 US Dollar. p. 238

² The EC delegation head in Manila differentiated EC's implementation procedures from those of other agencies: i.e. its program flexibility and autonomy; its community-based approach; and its co-direction (one Philippine and one EC co-director having

joint responsibility for the program) approach to overall management structure (see Santos 1994). p. 239

³ This is alternative to the usual large-scale project approach to development programming. It can be considered to be more compatible with the participatory, community-oriented approach to development. p. 239

⁴ Interview with Pio Panfiliona, COS for CARITAS, 28 April, 2004. p. 251

⁵ Interview with Efren Piczon, WESAMAR Philippine Co-director, 4 May 2004 p. 251

⁶ Ibid. p. 251

⁷ Interview with Dina Magos, COS for TANDAYA, 27 April 2004. p. 253

⁸ Interview with Danilo Agute, Chairperson, Burgos Barangay Organization, 29 April 2004. p. 254

⁹ This situation put the program staff in a vulnerable position. Whether there is basis for this or not, a number of NGO staff members and PO leaders interviewed alleged that program staff were involved in corruption. They cited the case of the eucheuma (seaweed) enterprise where program staff allegedly colluded with traders so that they personally profited from the transactions. p. 254

¹⁰ Interview with Pablo Ramones, Chairperson, Paglaum Barangay Organization, 29 April 2004. p. 255

¹¹ Interview with Pio Panfiliona, COS for CARITAS, 28 April 2004. p. 256

¹² An officer of the Secretariat of GIOS confirmed moves to transform its member-POs into cooperatives. GIOS is a , a federation of coastal-based POs that were included as beneficiaries toward the end of the program. According to the informant, the federation resisted such moves, although the member-POs were left to decide on the matter (Interview with Gerardo Mahinay, Chairperson, GIOS, 29 April 2004). p. 256

¹³ Interview with Fr. Cesar Aculan, Executive Director, CARITAS, 2 May 2004. p. 266

¹⁴ Interview with Albina Balmes, Administrative Officer, SPECFI, 28 April 2004. p. 266

¹⁵ Interview with Don Mabulay, Tandaya Executive Director, 5 May 2004. p. 266

¹⁶ Interview with Raul Repulda, first national Co-director of WESAMAR, 4 May 2004. p. 266

¹⁷ Interview with Don Macabulay, Tandaya Executive Director, 5 May 2004. p. 267