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Participatory extension for empowerment: Paradoxes unboxed in the fishery sector

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ABSTRACT

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The study looked at levels of participation in the extension approach of the NGO tapped to implement coastal resource management under the Fishery Sector Program and the Fisheries Resource Management Project (FSP-FRMP) in Leyte, Philippines and whether participatory extension led to the empowerment of fishers. The Spearman Ranks Correlation Test showed that participation and empowerment were correlated with correlation coefficient rs=0.30125, which represents weak correlation. Respondents' participation and empowerment levels were low due to several factors that included demoralizing attitude of local government officials, disruption in FSP-FRMP implementation, overassertiveness of NGO staff, squabbling among program implementers, and fisherfolk's sense of the futility of their efforts. Respondents saw participatory extension as a hollow process that pretended to give small fishers control over management of fishery resources, when in fact the elite continued to dominate. It was concluded that participatory extension may or may not promote empowerment, depending on several factors. Participatory extension was inadequate in bringing about true empowerment, because true empowerment calls for the revamp of socioeconomic-political structure that acts against the interest of poor fishers. With externally-initiated development programs being time-bound, NGOs implementing them are forced by expediency to accomplish fund-provider-set targets on time, thus disregarding time-consuming participatory processes.

Keywords: coastal resource management, NGOs, indifference, FSP-FRMP, catalysts to participation, barriers to participationmatter

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INTRODUCTION

The major goal of extension is empowerment of rural development stakeholders (Swanson 2009, Swanson and Rajalahti 2010), principally small farmers and fishers and their families. In their study on the effect of extension on women empowerment in rural Uganda, Lecoutere et al (2020) concluded that extension may be the first best means of empowering women in agriculture. They found that women with higher exposure to ICT-enabled extension programs exhibited higher levels of knowledge and skills, participation in household and farm decision-making, adoption of recommended technologies, and independent decision-making particularly in marketing their produce. Montalbo et al (2021) explored the impact of a state university-initiated extension project on the empowerment of women in a depressed community in Balamban, Cebu and found that women who had higher levels of participation in the project had higher levels of self-worth, environmental awareness and accountability, among others. Gombe et al (2016) concluded that extension is the bedrock of community empowerment after they found that extension projects in Nigeria helped reduce poverty, enhance capabilities of communities and facilitate sustainable development.

Narayan (2002) said that empowerment is the expansion of assets and capabilities of the poor to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control, and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives. He further maintained that "an empowering approach to development puts poor people at the center of development and views them as the most important resource rather than as the problem."

Extension approaches have evolved since extension's inception during the second half of the nineteenth century by the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, particularly in response to the Irish Sweet Potato Famine of 1845 (FAO 1997). From the traditional Transfer-of-Technology Approach and others that emerged through time, the Participatory Extension Approach (PEA) has become enormously popular since several decades ago. Its popularity is indicated by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) underscoring "empowering farmers through participatory extension" as one of the goals of its ground-level programs aimed at fostering rural people's advancement (Rivera 2001). To Laderchi (2001) participation sets off the process of empowerment. Antholt and Zijp (1996) declared that participatory extension, often through NGOs, can help make the coverage of extension services more equitable. According to Halwart and Haylor (2000) participatory approaches are important in ensuring that activities are implemented in an appropriate way and can increase the sustainability of activities by giving users the leading role in developing and adapting new activities.

Participatory extension came forth in the 1980s out of the realization of the incongruity between most technologies transferred and farmers/fishers' real needs, thus bringing the farmer or fisher into the heart of the development process became the clarion call of the 1990s. Hagmann et al (2000) listed some key characteristics of participatory extension that include among others equal partnership between rural people, researchers and extension agents who can learn from each other and contribute their knowledge and skills; and strengthening rural people's problem-solving, planning and management abilities. Participatory extension offers a methodology to empower rural people by involving them in identifying, prioritizing and analyzing problems, making and implementing action

plans to address the problems, monitoring and evaluating activities through their local organizations (MAC Zambia 2009). In participatory extension, the extension agent acts more as a facilitator than a manipulator, more as a catalyst than an expert, and he/she promotes an environment of free exchange of ideas and experiences and open interaction between and among extension agents and members of the local community that encourage group learning and sense of local control of the whole process of development.

Non-government organizations (NGOs) are generally recognized for their participatory community engagement approaches (Bhandari 2014, Court et al 2006). The NGO phenomenon in the Philippines, Brillantes (1994) explained, is part of the operationalization of the general strategy of decentralization of the highly centralized system of government. It is for this reason that NGOs were tapped to undertake community organizing and extension activities for the Fishery Sector Program (FSP) and the spin-off Fisheries Resource Management Project (FRMP) that the Philippine government implemented with funding from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). The FSP was implemented from 1991 to 1997 (Zaragoza et al 2001). FRMP was to follow suit from 1998 to 2004 (ADB 2007, Kawabata and Aoki 2009). FRMP was to build and follow up on the gains of FSP (Israel et al 2004) that focused on poverty reduction, empowerment of local communities to manage fishery resources and promote social equity, initially in 12 priority fishing areas, namely: Manila Bay, Calauag Bay, San Miguel Bay, Tayabas Bay, Ragay Gulf, Lagonoy Gulf, Sorsogon Bay, Carigara Bay, San Pedro Bay, Ormoc Bay, Sogod Bay, and Panguil Bay (ADB 2007).

The core component and main strategy to attain their rehabilitation objectives of FSP-FRMP was Coastal Resource Management or CRM (ADB 1999 2007). CRM is a development program that is based on participatory approach (Ferrer and Nozawa 1997). To help realize the objectives of the Local Government Code of 1991 and Executive Order 240 of 1995 to mainstream local government units (LGUs) and local communities into the forefront of CRM, the Department of Agriculture (DA) and the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (DA-BFAR) formed fisheries and aquatic resources management councils (FARMCs) composed of local fishers. FARMCs were mechanisms to enhance empowerment of subsistence fisherfolk through meaningful participation in the management, development and protection of fisheries and aquatic resources. Barangay (village) fishermen's associations (FAs) formed the core of Barangay FARMCs. Most officers of BFARMCs were FA officers and members, thus it can be said that BFARMC is attached by an umbilical cord to FAs. FAs and BFARMCs had intertwined identities. Often the FA president was also the BFARMC chairperson.

The NGOs' principal responsibility was to empower local fishing communities' by developing their technical and organizational CRM capabilities. NGOs worked directly with FAs/BFARMCs, which they also helped to embark on occupational diversification projects that would improve FA members' socioeconomic status and reduce their dependence on marine resources. According to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA 2020), small-scale fishers are among the poorest sectors in the country with a poverty incidence of 26.2% next to farmers (31.6%). With the barangay (village) being the smallest political unit in the Philippines, the barangay-based FA/BFARMC served as the microcosm of the level of participation and, hopefully, the empowerment of small-scale fisherfolk in the country.

FAs/BFARMCs federate at the municipal level. NGOs also worked with local government units (LGUs), particularly the municipal/city agriculture office (MAO).

This paper is an attempt at a deeper look into the participation of fisherfolk in NGO extension relative to the objective of capacitating fishermen's associations in managing community-based CRM activities and whether their participation resulted in their empowerment. Participatory extension has been extolled just as generosity is eulogized as a blessing to both the giver and the receiver. But even generosity can be challenged as to the motive of the giver and attitudinal consequences for the receiver. Thus, the relationship between participation and empowerment can also be disputed.

The study was not an evaluation of the implementation of a program, but an assessment of the participatory extension approach that was supposed to be employed by the NGO tapped to implement the program. Evaluation of the effectiveness of the program was undertaken by fund donors according to parameters they deemed relevant, like efficiency in achieving outputs and outcomes such as the financial viability of the microenterprises undertaken by the FAs, degree by which CRM was incorporated into the LGU development plans, assignment of permanent CRM personnel by the LGUs, LGU fishery law enforcement, capability-building of FAs re fisheries law enforcement and alternative livelihoods, increase/decrease in fish catch per unit effort, among others (ADB 1999, 2007, Kawabata and Aoki 2009). This paper is not meant to be exhaustive. It simply aims to present the challenges in subscribing to the tenets of participatory extension in the context of implementing CRM in the particular municipality covered in this paper.

METHODOLOGY

Locale of the Study

The study was conducted in a town along a bay in the Province of Leyte. Considering the sensitive nature of the respondents' testimonies, their identity as well that of the town has to be kept confidential, thus information about the town is kept to a minimum. The town has 11 barangays along its 10km coastline. The town had 16 *sensoros*, 13 beach seine fishers and 866 marginal fishermen at the time of the study. *Sensoro* is the local term for a big well-equipped fishing boat with campus-wide nets and superlights to attract fish.

Respondents

Each of the town's 11 coastal barangays had a fishermen's association (FA) organized. Nine of the eleven made a headstart, of which four disintegrated, one after the other, after some time. At the time of the study only five were active with varying degrees of dynamism or decline. The 59 respondents in the study were taken from both the active and inactive FAs. They were chosen purposively for their participation in the programs for at least three years, whether their respective FAs were active or not. Convenience sampling was used based on the respondents' availability during the series of visits to the town. Because FAs and BFARMCs had intertwined identities, FA or FAs is henceforth used for easier reference. Table 1 presents the number of fisherfolk respondents from nine FAs.

Table 1. Number of respondents from each barangay FA

FA	Members at time of organization	Status of FA at time of study	Members involved in the Programs for at least 3 years	Respondents	
				Active	Inactive
Barangay 1	15	Inactive	6	-	3
Barangay 2	18	Active w/ 36 member	15	12	-
Barangay 3	20	Active w/ 19	11	8	-
Barangay 4	25	Inactive	5	-	2
Barangay 5	28	Inactive	6	-	5
Barangay 6	15	Active w/ 13	12	9	-
Barangay 7	16	Inactive	5	-	4
Barangay 8	15	Active w/ 15	12	10	-
Barangay 9	22	Active w/ 24	12	6	-
Total	174	107	84	45	14

Mixed method. The study employed a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative method was used mainly in processing data from the first phase of the field survey when respondents were asked to rate levels of their participation in and empowerment from NGO extension. The qualitative aspect provided the stories behind the ratings, the meaning respondents attached to their participation, and whether it resulted to their empowerment, and how. These stories were obtained through open-ended discussions with officers and members of the FAs present during the meetings arranged to present and validate the results of the first phase field surveys.

Data gathering strategy. Initial information on the FAs were provided by the municipal agriculture office (MAO). The MAO assigned a staff member to introduce the researcher to the FA presidents. Two meetings were set with officers and members of the five active FAs in their respective barangays. The first meeting was to inform the FAs of the study and its objectives, and solicit their participation. After the meetings, a series of individual interviews of FA members who were involved in the program for at least three years were conducted. The individual interviews aimed to determine the levels of participation in and empowerment from NGO extension. The second meeting, done by barangay, was conducted to present the results of the processed data from the individual interviews to validate whether these reflected the respondents' true sentiments. Some NGO barangay development workers (BDWs) attended the barangay meetings. They were given the opportunity to present their perspective on the issues confronting the implementation of the FSP CRM. This helped the researcher form a clearer picture of what transpired during the project. Even after the second meeting, follow-up interviews were done with FA members and NGO staff when there was a need to further enlighten the researcher on the information obtained.

Operationalization of Variables

NGO extension refers to the interrelated, systematic and continuous projects and attendant activities implemented by the NGO to accomplish the objectives of the CRM under FSP-FRMP.

Participation refers to the level of respondents' involvement in the planning, implementation and maintenance (I & M), and monitoring and evaluation (M & E) of NGO extension projects as assessed by respondents themselves. Each of the level in the participation typology used in this study was accordingly defined and distinguished. Passive participation, for example, was a kind of participation that did not shake fisherfolk from Malthusian "ignorance and indolence". Fisherfolk were either not informed of plans made entirely by NGO staff or if ever they were informed, they were informed that the plan was being implemented or has been implemented. Fisherfolk ideas, opinions, suggestions about the plans are not entertained. Empowering participation on the other hand, the highest level, was the kind that developed the fisherfolk's capability to take initiative in self-reliant efforts unconstrained by external influence. FAs may establish linkage with external agencies, but only to facilitate their own objectives yet still taking charge of the decision-making. Table 2 presents level and type of participation with the rating scale that guided the respondents.

Table 2. Level and type of participation

Participation Level	Participation Label	Rating Scale
Very low	Passive participation	1
Low	Participation by providing information	2
Somewhat low	Participation by contributing resources like labor and materials	3
Moderate	Participation by consultation	4
Somewhat high	Functional participation	5
High	Motivational participation	6
Very high	Empowering participation	7

The participation typology developed for this study was largely based on Pretty's (1995) typology, modified for the specific circumstances surrounding the FAs that were the focus of the study. Participation scores were distributed into a frequency distribution table (FDT) that corresponds to the seven levels of participation shown above. The means for each stage was determined. The combined mean for the three stages made up the overall participation mean.

Empowerment had three dimensions: competence, confidence and commitment (3Cs). The highest score that a respondent could get for questions that measured empowerment was 80, which is the total for competence (35),

confidence (35) and commitment (10). Scores were distributed into an FDT with five levels, namely: unempowered, slightly empowered, fairly empowered, empowered and highly empowered. The 3Cs were determined through respondents' responses to a series of question that looked into their levels of knowledge and/or awareness of issues affecting fisherfolk, their attitude toward and actions they took regarding these issues as well as the performance of their roles as custodians of coastal resources. Specifically, the 3Cs were determined by:

Competence, the respondent's ability to respond to opportunities to advance one's situation in life and to threats against one's interests as determined through nine questions that measured awareness of, attitude toward, and action on: assistance programs for small fisherfolk and issues/problems confronting small fisherfolk; and discharge one's roles as member of the FA as determined through three questions that measured one's awareness of, attitude toward and performance of such roles. There were 12 questions that measured competence. Responses could garner a maximum score of 35.

Confidence, the respondent's belief in his/her ability to make decisions as determined through four questions that measured whether s/he would prefer a task with no difficult decisions at all at one end or one that requires making difficult decisions at the other end; handle bigger responsibilities in the community as determined through two questions that measured whether s/he would rather be just an ordinary resident at one end or be a municipal mayor/president of a municipal-level organization at the other end; take action on issues affecting small fisherfolk as determined through two questions that measured his/her concern and initiative on such issues; assume risks involved in livelihood enhancement ventures as determined through four questions that measured whether s/he would rather invest or save his/her earnings; and exert considerable control over circumstances in his/her life as determined through two questions that measured whether s/he believes that the future of small fisherfolk is dependent on good luck at one end or on their collective self-reliant effort at the other end. The highest score a respondent could get from the total of 14 questions that measured confidence was 35.

Commitment, the respondent's sense of accountability to carry out or support the policies and activities of the FA as determined through four questions. The questions measured whether the respondent would oppose or support an FA policy that s/he did not like, attend an important FA meeting or go with a very close friend who s/he had not seen for years, and the number of times s/he attended FA meetings. The highest score s/he could get for his/her responses was 10.

FINDINGS

Quantitative Findings

Level of participation. FA members participated in three stages of NGO extension: planning, I & M, and M & E. As can be seen in Table 3 respondents' participation in the planning stage was low with an overall mean of 3.12. Members of active FAs had a mean of 3.49, which was higher than the 2.76 of the inactive FAs.

Of the total of 59 respondents, 19 or 32% hinted of participation mostly through provision of some resources used in the extension activities, such as volunteering labor, materials for the construction of billboards and artificial reefs, and venues for group activities, among others. Table 4 shows that of the phases in the planning stage, respondents participated more in the identification of priority concerns and least in the identification, evaluation and selection of alternative projects and strategies.

Table 3. Level/type of participation in planning

Level/Type of Participation	Scores (class width)	Distribution of Respondents by Rating					
		From Active FAs		From Inactive FAs		Both Groups	
		N=45	%	N=14	%	n	%
Passive participation	1.00-1.81	4	9	5	36	9	15
Participation by providing information	1.82-2.63	6	13	1	7	7	12
Participation by providing resources	2.64-3.45	15	33	4	29	19	32
Participation by consultation	3.46-4.27	7	15	2	14	9	15
Functional participation	4.28-5.09	8	18	2	14	10	17
Motivational participation	5.10-5.91	4	9	-		4	7
Empowering participation	5.92-6.73	1	2	-		1	2
Total		45	99*	14	100	59	100
Mean		3.49		2.76		3.12	

*Due to rounding off

Table 4. Participation in the three phases of the planning stage

Aspects in planning	Respondents	
	Active	Inactive
Identification of priority concerns	3.73	3.14
Formulation of project goals and objectives	3.51	2.79
Identification, evaluation and selection of alternative projects and strategies	3.22	2.36
Mean	3.49	2.76
Overall mean	3.12	

Table 5 shows that the overall mean for participation in I & M was 3.25, a little higher than the 3.12 in planning, but still low and characterized mainly by provision of resources. Table 6 shows that aspects in I & M respondents had the least participation in the re-adjustment of extension activities.

Table 5. Level/type of participation in I & M

Level/type of Participation	Scores (class width)	Distribution of Respondents by Rating					
		Active FAs		Inactive FAs		Both Groups	
		N=45	%	N=14	%	n	%
Passive participation	1.00-1.81	3	7	5	36	8	13
Participation by providing information	1.82-2.63	2	4	2	14	4	7
Participation by providing resources	2.64-3.45	14	31	2	14	16	27
Participation by consultation	3.46-4.27	9	20	4	29	13	22
Functional participation	4.28-5.09	10	22	1	7	11	19
Motivational participation	5.10-5.91	6	13	-	-	6	10
Empowering participation	5.92-6.73	1	2	-	-	1	2
Total		45	99	14	100	59	100
Mean		3.87		2.64		3.25	

Table 6. Level of participation in the three phases of the implementation and maintenance stage

Aspects in I & M	Respondents	
	Active	Inactive
Labor/financial/material contribution	4.07	3.14
Readjustment of extension campaign strategies	3.76	2.29
Coordination of project inputs, services and activities	3.78	2.5
Mean	3.87	2.64
Overall mean	3.25	

Table 7 shows that respondents had the lowest level of participation in M & E with overall mean score of 2.17. Table 8 shows that of the three aspects of M & E, highest participation was in determining the purpose of the M & E, while participation in deciding what to measure or information to gather was minimal and in selecting the appropriate evaluation methods the least.

Table 7. Level of participation in M & E

Type of Participation	Scores (class width)	Distribution of respondents by score					
		Active FAs		Inactive FAs		Both Groups	
		N=45	%	N=14	%	n	%
Passive participation	1.00-1.81	9	20	8	57	17	29
Participation by providing information	1.82-2.63	14	31	3	21	17	29
Participation by providing resources	2.64-3.45	14	31	3	21	17	29
Participation by consultation	3.46-4.27	4	9	-	-	4	6
Functional participation	4.28-5.09	4	9	-	-	4	6
Motivational participation	5.10-5.91	-	-	-	-	-	-
Empowering participation	5.92-6.73	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total		45	100	14	99	59	99
Mean		2.59		1.74		2.17	

Table 8. Participation in the three aspects in M & E

Aspects in M & E	Mean	
	Active	Inactive
Determining the purpose of the M & E	3.09	2.14
Decision on what to measure or gather information about	2.58	1.64
Selecting the appropriate methods to use in the evaluation	2.11	1.43
Overall mean	2.59	1.74

Overall Level of Participation

Overall mean rating of respondents' participation was 2.85, which fell within the category of "participation by providing resources". It was a kind of participation where the fisherfolk's role was limited to providing resources that the NGO needed, such as volunteer labor, bamboos and used tires for the fish sanctuary, plywood for billboards, venues for meetings and trainings, but they were not involved in planning and decision-making. The 45 respondents from active FAs rated their participation with a mean score of 2.59, which the Mann Whitney U Test showed to be significantly different from the respondents from the inactive FAs 2.38 with z-score of 2.53898 and *p*-value of .01108, which is significant at $p<.05$ (Table 9). The highest level of participation was in I & M (overall mean of 3.25 [Table 5]) followed by planning (3.17 [Table 3]) and lowest in M & E (2.17 [Table 7]).

Table 9. Mann Whitney U Test of difference in participation ratings between active FA members and inactive FA members

Group	Mean of Ranks	*U*-value	Combined SD	*Z*-score	*p*-value (2-tailed)
Active N=45	33.18	172	56.1249	2.53898	.01108
Inactive N=14	19.79	456			Significant at $p\leq.05$

Level of individual empowerment. Empowerment was measured by the respondents level of competence, confidence and commitment. The highest score that a respondent could get for questions that measured empowerment was 80, which was the total for competence (35), confidence (35) and commitment (10). Scores were distributed into an FDT with five categories, namely: unempowered, slightly empowered, fairly empowered, empowered and highly empowered.

As can be seen in Table 10, 22 out of 59 respondents (37%) had scores within the slightly empowered category with almost equal percentage for the active (18 or 40%) and inactive (5 or 36%). Sixteen percent and 50%, respectively, of the active and inactive respondents were in the unempowered category. Five (11%) and one (2%) respondents from active FAs scored within the empowered and highly empowered categories, respectively. None among the respondents from inactive FAs had scores classified in these categories. Mean score of 45.82 for both groups fell in the slightly empowered category. Mean score of 49.70 for active FA respondents barely stepped into the fairly empowered category. That of the inactive FA respondents' 41.93 narrowly landed in the slightly empowered category. The Mann Whitney U Test showed the two means to be significantly different with z-score of 2.67261 and *p*-value of .00758, which is significant at $p<.05$ (Table 11).

Table 10. Level of individual empowerment

Level	Scores (class width)	Distribution of respondents by score					
		Active FAs		Inactive FAs		Both Groups	
		N=45	%	N=14	%	N=59	%
Unempowered	29-38	7	16	7	50	14	23
Slightly empowered	39-48	17	38	5	36	22	37
Fairly empowered	49-58	15	33	2	14	17	29
Empowered	59-68	5	11	-		5	8
Highly empowered	69-78	1	2	-		1	2
Total		45	100	14	100	59	99*
Mean		49.70		41.93		45.82	

*Due to rounding off

Table 11. Mann Whitney U Test of difference in empowerment scores between active FA members and inactive FA members

Group	Mean of Ranks	*U*-value	Combined SD	*Z*-score	*p*-value (2-tailed)
Active N=45	33.34	164.5	56.1249	2.67261	.00758
Inactive N=14	19.25	465.5			Significant at $p \leq .05$

Relationship between participation and empowerment. Spearman's rank correlation was computed to assess the relationship between participation and empowerment. There was a positive correlation between the two variables with r_s=0.30125 and *p*-value of 0.02042 (Table 12). The correlation was statistically significant at .05 alpha. However, the correlation was weak as correlation coefficients r_s of ≤0.35 are generally considered to represent low or weak correlation (Schober et al 2018, Taylor 1990).

Table 12. Spearman Ranks Correlation Test between participation and empowerment

Variable N=59	Mean of Ranks	*SD*	Combined Covariance	*R*	r_s	*p*-value (2-tailed)
Participation	30	17.13	88.09	0.301	0.30125 (significant at alpha.05)	0.02042
Empowerment	30	17.07				

Qualitative Context

The NGO. Through its regional field office for the Eastern Visayas Region in the Philippines the Department of Agriculture (DA) was responsible for the overall management of the FSP-FRMP. The DA contracted the services of NGOs to implement the FSP-FRMP. The NGOs were chosen through consultancy bidding. The contract was awarded on the basis of the track record and reasonable service fee quotation. The NGO tapped to implement FSP-FRMP in the town was a regional NGO whose aim was to address development concerns of the marginal sectors in the Eastern Visayas. It had been involved in environmental advocacy. The NGO team implementing FSP-FRMP in the town was headed by a bay-municipal coordinator, who supervised one administrative assistant, one computer

programmer, one utility man/driver, one enterprise development officer, one training officer, three enterprise development assistants (EDAs) who each covered three barangays, three fishery specialists (FSs) who each covered three barangays, and six barangay development workers (BDWs) who each covered one barangay. Each EDA also served as a BDW in the barangay, thus in this paper EDAs are also referred to as BDWs. Due to turnovers, some staff members occupied two or more positions at one time or another. Turnovers were caused by reassignment or resignation.

NGO extension activities included distribution of information/education materials, community theaters, poster- and billboard-making competitions, balak (poem) and song contests and earth day parades among others. These projects involved the FAs and revolved around the subject of coastal resource management. The NGO also conducted trainings, seminar-workshops and symposia on resource conservation, fish sanctuary establishment, cooperative membership and leadership, organizational development and management, business planning and packaging, and seaweed culture, among others.

Blurred delineation of FAs and BFARMCs. As with other NGOs, the NGO in the town worked with FAs in the barangays to carry out extension activities to restore stability and economic order in the utilization of the resources of the town's coastal strip. FAs were granted the use of demarcated fishery areas to engage in fish capture and/or other collective socioeconomic activities. Some FAs were unregistered, but officially recognized by the barangay and the municipal government. Some converted into a cooperative, which served as an FA's economic tool. Members of the FA were the members of the cooperative. The FA's interests and legal rights are protected through the BFARMC that is principally concerned with protection of ecological resources, establishing fishing zones and navigation lanes, and law enforcement in coordination with the *Bantay Dagat* (sea guardians or fish wardens) at the barangay level. The BFARMC and the *Bantay Dagat* enforce laws against destructive fishing like dynamite blasting and cyanide poisoning and the prevention of commercial fishers from encroaching into the 15km coastal waters.

Chaired by the *Sanguniang Barangay* (village council) chairperson of the committee on agriculture/fisheries, eight or two-thirds of BFARMC members were FA members. The other BFARMC members were the representative of the Barangay Development Council, NGO representative and private sector representative. Technically FAs and BFARMCs are different, but their objectives interlaced. NGO extension, therefore, practically dealt with both FAs and BFARMCs. Fisherfolk representation on the BFARMC was not even limited to eight, because most consultations done by BFARMCs are with the FAs. Fishery laws trainings, for example, were not limited to BFARMC members, but also included FA members who were affected by these laws. Blurring further the distinction between FAs and BFARMCs was that in many cases the FA president was also the BFARMC chairperson owing to the fact that in fishing villages, members of the *Sanguniang Barangay* are fishers one of whom becomes chair of the committee for agriculture/fisheries. Although formed by the municipal and barangay LGUs, the BFARMC in essence serves as the FA's law enforcement arm. The explanation provided by NGO BDWs was that there were only a few willing and able fisherfolk in the barangay, thus leaders for both the FAs and BFARMCs were the same persons. One FA president who was also BFARMC chair said that only very few fishers could

handle leadership responsibilities for lack of leadership training. He added, "Fisherfolk are among the sectors most neglected by the government, which had many programs for farmers but few for fisherfolk." The BFARMCs are supposed to be federated into the municipal FARMC (MFARMC). At the time of the study, the MFARMC in the area was practically non-existent.

The NGO trained the FAs-BFARMCs on leadership, cooperative management, bookkeeping and nearshore fisheries and habitats management (ADB 1999, 2007). Specifically, the scope of the NGO's services included, among others, extension interventions that would introduce the concept and rationale of CRM; improve fisherfolk capabilities in organizing, leadership, group dynamics, conflict resolution, planning, participatory research and evaluation, and project and financial management, resource management and self-regulation; and enable fisherfolk to embark on livelihood diversification activities that will minimize reliance on fishery resources. They were also trained on coastal fishery laws as they were deputized as fish wardens.

Catalysts and barriers to participation. As mentioned, part of data triangulation was to present the first phase results to the respondents for comments. When told that they rated their participation low, they agreed to the results and offered the following information to explain the findings.

Respondents said that they were delighted when they heard of the FSP-FRMP. They were so excited to participate in the FSP, the first phase of the twin programs because of the anticipated benefits, which included support for alternative livelihoods and, most importantly, having a voice and influence in the management of coastal fishery resources. They had high hopes that with the NGO as partner, they could institute change in the oppressive socioeconomic and political structure that condemns small fishers into a life of poverty and misery. The same level of interest was absent with the spin-off FRMP because of the delay in FRMP implementation, and more critically, the unwholesome experiences with the FSP.

What turned the initial excitement into apathy and the promised commitment to indifference? Respondents provided several reasons. Aside from personal reasons like lack of time for FA activities due to the need to struggle to eke out a living, some external factors were highlighted because they were caused by the failure of processes and political-economic structures that were supposed to promote fisherfolk participation in coastal resource management. These factors were:

1. Demoralizing attitude of municipal and barangay officials toward the programs. Eighty-three percent of the respondents said they were demoralized by their own barangay and town officials' attitude toward FSP-FRMP. Not just toward the programs, but toward the FAs themselves. The FAs could not depend on municipal personnel, even those charged with fishery sector assistance, because they were under the baton of the municipal officials who undermined the implementation of the programs because they themselves were *sensoradors* (fishing boat owners) or protectors of illegal fishers who intrude into municipal waters reserved by law for small fishers. One FA/BFARMC chairman grumbled:

> *"Our biggest problem are the sensoradors. But they could not be stopped. They are either the relatives or close associates of the mayor*

One FA/BFARMC chair who resigned from his position (his FA/BFARMC also dissolved later) expressed disappointment:

> *"I was so frustrated. I and the other FA/BFARMC officers worked hard to stop destructive fishing. For example, we demanded that fishing boats weighing three tons or above should not be allowed within 15km from the shore to protect small fishers. But the officials of the town did not heed our call. They even defended the sensoradors, saying that if they would be stopped, they would be denied of their livelihood. We wrote to national leaders. Still nothing happened. Embarrassed that I was not able to do anything, I resigned as FA/BFAMRC chair."*

Another FA chairman did not resign from his position. He was ousted in a politically-motivated maneuvering by the barangay captain and other barangay officials aligned with the barangay captain. He said that it was so humiliating, but he had consolation from those who admired him for his courage to stand up against those who trample upon the rights of small fishers.

A former chair of an inactive FA/BFARMC shared his chilling experience:

> *"I and another FA/BFARMC officer caught two people dynamite fishing. I and my co-officer were deputized Bantay Dagat members, which is an added responsibility with added risks without added remuneration. Anyway, we brought the two we caught to the MAO for appropriate action. The MAO coordinates Bantay Dagat operations and undertakes legal action against offenders. We followed up with the MAO three days after. We learned that the offenders were released by the order of the mayor. A week after the two offenders paid me a visit with a styrobox full of fish captured through dynamite fishing. They said that the fish was mine. If I accepted the fish, that would mean I am their friend, and if I don't, then…. That was a threat with unmistakable meaning. Cold sweat began dripping down my forehead. I didn't only feel uneasy. I was alarmed and fearful. I still have small children who need me. And I know these people. They are dynamite fishing for someone powerful. I accepted the fish, but gave up on the hope of ever attaining justice for the small fisher. As deputized fish wardens, we expose ourselves to so much risk. We would not know that people we are to arrest are armed, while we are not."*

One FA officer admitted: *"I just could not take the risk of offending those opposed to the program."*

Two respondents from an inactive FA revealed that the reason why their FA did not last long was that their barangay captain was not only unsupportive, he also harassed FA members.

One respondent asked: *"How can small fishers have the fish they deserve when the enemies of small fishers have the political power? There is a mockery of CRM in our town. Here CRM means coasts ravaged maliciously."*

The foregoing testimonies were also documented by other researchers. Similar to hush money, giving a portion of the catch by illegal fishers to fishery law enforcers was also documented by Buenavista et al (1994) in their study in Agbanga, Matalom, Leyte, Philippines. Graham (1998) who studied illegal fishing in Diamante, Prieto Diaz, Sorsogon, Philippines (Graham 1998) noted that the moment the enforcer accepted the fish, the enforcer can no longer denounce the illegal fishers, constrained by a social debt. Aside from that, fishery law enforcers were subjected to threats and harassment, and sometimes got involved in violent confrontation with illegal fishers. Buenavista et al (1994) found that municipal politicians and businessmen were the ones who paid the fines of illegal fishers and supplied them with dynamite, boats and gears. Graham (1998) reported that in Eastern Samar illegal fishing continued unchecked to the benefit of local powerholders who usually belonged to a small circle of families that traditionally controlled most aspects of village life.

2. Disruption of program implementation. It took time for the spin-off FRMP to take-off after FSP ended because of government bureaucratic paralysis. This caused the NGO to stop operation for a while, which in turn disillusioned FA members. Not a few fisherfolk grumbled that when their zeal to contribute to the objectives of coastal resource management was peaking, the NGO stopped working with them. This doused cold water on the fisherfolk's hopes and trust in the government. An FA member who was also a barangay captain lamented:

> *"The government is only fooling us. It is not serious in serving us. The assistance government is providing is only cosmetic, token and unsustained."*

When FRMP kicked off on the ground, the fisherfolk reacted with cold shoulders. Many FA members quit. FAs recruited new members to help keep the associations afloat. Some FA members revealed that they were forced to join to fill the slots of those who left. They had not gone through the basic orientation and training that the original members underwent. They did not fully internalize the thrust, objectives, principles and ideals of the FA and that of CRM for which they were involved. Their commitment was not as strong. In due time, they too departed. Eventually their FAs crumbled. Of the five active FAs at the time of the study, two were on their last legs.

Israel et al (2004) corroborated the aforementioned finding in their Panguil Bay (Northern Mindanao, Philippines) study. They discovered that while FSP and FRMP were to be implemented in succession, the two projects were taken as separate programs where each required the same bureaucratic bidding procedure with all its technical and legal requirements. The time gap and the vacuum created between the end of FSP and the start of FRMP weakened interest and stopped momentum. They further noted that the FSP, which had a higher budget than the FRMP, had created so much expectation that it disadvantaged the FRMP efforts that followed.

1. Overassertiveness of NGO Barangay Development Workers. Respondents said that they participated in NGO extension for CRM because of the encouragement from NGO BDWs who sought their ideas and

opinions and were very indulgent no matter how "simple" their ideas were. Later though, the BDWs' attitude changed. One respondent said,

> *"They gradually became assertive and were less likely to consult us. If they consulted us, often it was their ideas that prevailed."*

Another lamented:

> *"They began to treat us not as partners anymore, but as lower-rung NGO BDWs who had to follow what supervisors directed. Really, it dampened enthusiasm, because we thought we were their partners not their lackeys. We thought that all throughout that it will be a joint decision-action process by both the fishers and NGO BDWs. It would have been better if they did not tell us at the start that it would be participatory so that we would not have high expectations, because anyway we have been used to being told by outsiders what's best for us."*

When these and similar comments were presented to the NGO BDWs, they confirmed the comments and were sorry for the undesirable attitude they showed. They explained that toward the last year of the program's first phase, it seemed that they were lagging behind the targets set by DA-BFAR. One BDW said:

> "The pressure to double-time was building up. As top management became more assertive owing to the pressure from DA-BFAR, we in the field also became more assertive, more top-down, than participatory. Too sad, we came in with the promise of a participatory process, but ended up pushing people to what we think would hasten the accomplishment of targets, or we would not be awarded the contract for the second phase. We realized that participatory processes and programs with targets to be accomplished within a certain period of time, say five years, are not compatible. Participatory processes take time, which programs, like what we're contracted to implement, do not have the luxury."

Another BDW added: *"When the first phase of the program was winding down and the NGO was not sure of winning the contract for the second phase, some of our staff left for greener and stable pastures, especially those with families. Thus those of us who were left did not only struggle to meet our targets, but also the targets of our colleagues who left. Expediency caused us to disregard participatory and consultative processes."*

4. Squabbling among program implementers. There was no unified effort in CRM implementation in the town. The municipal LGU, which was supposed to spearhead CRM implementation, was halfhearted and provided only hollow rhetorics belied by their actions that dampened the enthusiasm of FAs. One fisherfolk respondent said,

> *"This situation caused division in the FA. There are those who said we should do something to pressure the LGU. There are those who argued that it is courting unnecessary trouble, saying that a kitten will always end up dead fighting a lion. One side argued that it is the FA's responsibility to protect coastal resources. The opposite side argued that the FA's principal responsibility is to ensure the livelihood and safety of its members, and not compromise those with law enforcement that is the responsibility of government."*

One BDW confided: *"Dealing with the LGU indeed was very challenging. It demanded a lot of patience and delicate maneuvering. The attitude of the municipal LGUs, and some barangay officials, unfavorably affected our operations."*

5. Fisherfolk's sense of the futility of their efforts. The attitude of local leaders, program disruption and overassertiveness of NGO BDWs led to the feeling of worthlessness among FA members. One said, *"I've lost motivation to continue in this crusade of protecting coastal resources. I'd rather focus on making a living to provide for my family."* Expressing similar sentiment, another said, *"With all these adverse forces against us, I don't think our efforts will make any difference."*

The other side of empowerment. Several opinions surfaced when respondents were **i**nformed that overall they were only slightly empowered. This paper highlights three opinions that are very insightful. The first came from one officer who asked, but without giving this researcher time to answer. He said:

> *"What was the objective of your study? After your interview, I was reflecting on the objectives of your research and the questions you asked. You said you wanted to link participation in NGO extension activities to the level of fisherfolk empowerment. But the questions you asked were biased. They all revolved around our participation in NGO extension and our commitment to our Fas. But can't a fisher not be empowered outside the ambit of participation in NGO extension and FA activities? Are those who decided not to participate anymore, like some of us, and who scored low in your empowerment model, unempowered? Are these not perhaps the people who were truly empowered because they had the courage to say "no more, enough is enough" to a process they considered as sham and worthless? They saw through the hollowness of a process that pretends to give small fishers control over the management of fishery resources, when in fact the rich, the powerful, the politically-aligned continue to dictate the rules of the game in their favor."*

Another respondent echoed a similar sentiment:

> *"I agree. Those among us who quit were the ones truly empowered because they had the courage to stand by what they believe. They did not bend. Neither did they break. They just could not continue to pretend that everything was okay. They were brave enough to face reality, while those of us who continue,*

without offense meant, are the ones fearful to wake up from the make-believe that participation will truly bring control over crucial fishery resources into the hands of poor fishers."

One last comment was no less significant:

"When a dam leaks, you don't put band-aid (a brand of adhesive bandage) *on the fissures. Participatory extension is like band-aid that could not bring lasting solution to a heavily entrenched injustice perpetuated through decades against small fishers. Participatory extension can never succeed for as long as there are forces determined to undermine its success. What is needed is a double-edged approach: participatory extension matched with a decisive program aimed at dismantling an oppressive socioeconomic and political structure. How is that possible, I don't have an answer. So many programs have come to raise our hope for a while, but all these program have gone with our hopes dashed to shores again, and again, washed by the waves. We are tired. We are disenchanted."*

DISCUSSION

CRM was the core strategy of FSP-FRMP. It was implemented through NGOs that are known for their participatory processes, which are believed to be most effective in bringing about empowerment. The NGO that implemented the CRM extension in the subject town raised the FA members' motivation to participate because of, among other things, initially highly participatory engagement. The participatory alliance between the NGO and fishers however faded toward the last stretch of the first phase of FSP-FRMP implementation. NGO BDWs began to be overassertive toward the end of the first phase of the twin-programs. This was unsettling because NGOs were supposed to be champions of participatory engagement.

The explanation offered by NGO BDWs was that it became expedient to forego time-consuming participatory and consultative processes because of the need for the NGO to meet FSP targets set in their contract with DA-BFAR. Failure to accomplish these targets would mean the NGO would not be re-contracted for the subsequent FRMP. The remaining BDWs were placed in a pressure cooker because they had to accomplish not only their own tasks but also those of their co-BDWs who left for higher-paying and/or more secure jobs, especially with the delay in the awarding of FRMP contract. Israel et al (2004) confirmed this finding in their study in Panguil Bay, Northern Mindanao, Philippines. They found that BDWs multi-tasked, overworked and did not have appropriate incentives.

The other factors that weakened participation were the demoralizing attitude of local officials, disruption in FSP-FRMP implementation, squabbling among program implementers, and fisherfolk's sense of the futility of their efforts were among the reasons for this low-level participation. This sense of futility was vividly captured by Israel et al (2004) in their study where respondents asserted that the FSP-FRMP and the entire CRM effort in Panguil Bay was another government program that provided much talk, some hope, and not much else.

This exposes a weakness in NGO extension: it aims for the targets set by the funding institution, not the targets of the marginalized group served. Filho and Vargas (2017)

lamented NGOs' losing their freedom to and becoming more accountable and subservient to fund providers. This also points to the reality that expediency and participation and empowerment are not compatible. This finding adds another dimension to literature on participation and empowerment being incongruous with cost-efficiency (Kamruzzaman 2020), with ad-hoc programs and interventions (Bacque and Biewener 2013), with business-as-usual (Thomas 2013) and with quick-fixes (Oakley 1995).

The instrument used to measure participation in NGO extension showed respondents' participated largely by providing resources needed in the extension projects and activities, which was the third level from the bottom in the seven-level participation typology in this study.

The highest level of respondents' participation was in the I & M stage, less in planning and much lesser in M & E, indicating that planning and M & E were largely led by BDWs. Lowest participation in M & E could be linked to the low participation in planning because accomplishments monitored and evaluated were the targets set in the planning stage where respondents had little contribution. Respondents' low participation in planning and M & E could suggest that either they lacked adequate planning and M & E capabilities or that they only served as lackeys of BDWs to accomplish the latter's objectives. It could be both.

Respondents' participation in all stages were superficial. In planning, their participation was mainly in identification of priority concerns and less in formulation of project goals and objectives and much less in identification, evaluation and selection of alternative projects and strategies. In I & M, they were more involved in provision of labor and contribution to material and financial resources, less in readjustment of extension campaign strategies and coordination of project inputs, services and activities. In M & E, they were primarily involved in determining the purpose of the M & E, and less in deciding what to measure or gather information about and in selecting the appropriate methods to use in the evaluation. Again, it could be because they lacked the tools to adequately contribute to these aspects, or that they played a subservient role, doing only menial tasks and errands for BDWs in an unequal relationship where the voice of the “experts” dominated.

Respondents' empowerment level was low, which the Spearman Ranks correlation test showed to be correlated to low participation level. Respondents from active FAs had significantly higher empowerment level than those from the inactive FAs as the Mann Whitney U test showed. This could point to the empowerment effect of participation, supporting the finding of Samah and Aref (2009) that level of engagement impinges on level of empowerment. However, as the correlation coefficient from the Spearman Ranks correlation test showed, the correlation between participation and empowerment was weak, which was reflected in the sentiments expressed by some respondents that empowerment may not necessarily come from participation in NGO extension and that those who quit participating in FA activities may even have manifested higher level empowerment because they displayed courage to stop serving as tools in cosmetic and meaningless programs that hide the reality of the rich and powerful ravaging coastal resources with impunity and without regard to the welfare of small fishers. To respondents, participatory extension is fruitless without corresponding change that overhauls a socioeconomic and political structure that oppresses poor fishers. To them, empowerment cannot happen if the rich and powerful continued to pull the strings, with the poor fishers dancing to where the strings take them.

CONCLUSIONS

Several conclusions can be drawn from the study. These have theoretical and tactical implications.

Theoretically, it is concluded that 1) non-participation may not indicate unempowerment and 2) participatory extension may not promote empowerment.

1. Testimonies of respondents show that those who chose not to participate may not necessarily be the less-empowered, but were in fact more empowered because they were able to see through the mockery of the whole process of participation, including those operationalized by NGOs that are beholden to government, who in turn may be beholden to the vested interests of the elite. “Power” is the root word of empowerment. According to Bragee (2006) power is a relational phenomenon that exists only between and within people. The decision of some FA members to stay away from a relationship that did not truly promote their interests manifests empowerment, for as Kabeer (2002) argued, the ability to make strategic decisions, in this case to stop participating, is central to the concept of empowerment. It is thus the thesis of this paper that nonparticipation may be as operable an indicator of empowerment as participation, especially when nonparticipation emanates from a person's or group's intelligent and conscious exercise of the right to make independent decisions. In her inquiry in Iloilo, Philippines, Baquiano (2016) also observed that the storylines of her respondents alluded to the community's collective “un (involvement)”.

2. Participatory extension may or may not promote empowerment, depending on several factors. In this study, participation and empowerment were weakly correlated because of many challenges that diminished the positive effects of participatory processes. Graham (1998) who studied participation in community-based CRM in Eastern Samar and Sorsogon observed many barriers to participation, particularly in Camanga, Salcedo, East Samar, where participation had not resulted in the empowerment of the majority of the community. Fabinyi et al (2010), who investigated fishing communities in Palawan, Negros Oriental and Cebu, Philippines, contend that fishing communities are socially complex and various aspects of this complexity have serious ramifications for the outcomes of participation in CRM projects. Eder (2005), in his study in Palawan, Philippines, concluded that social differences impinge on the efficacy of community participation in fisheries co-management regimes.

Tactically, it is concluded that 1) participatory programs for empowerment must have support from all relevant government agencies and other stakeholders, especially the LGU; 2) participatory programs must be accompanied by a genuine revamp of socioeconomic and political structures to be truly empowering; 3) labeling development initiatives as “participatory” may be counterproductive because it raises expectations, which if not be met, diminishes enthusiasm; 4) NGOs may be constrained to subscribe to the objectives of fund providers rather than address the interests of the marginalized communities served; and 5) government can do a better job in participatory extension for empowerment than NGOs.

1. To succeed, participatory programs aimed at empowerment of the marginalized must have the sincere and determined support not just of one branch of government, but all relevant government agencies, especially the LGU that directly influences ground-level program implementation. The NGO, LGU, FAs and other actors must work together. Squabbling among implementers, an all too common problem that was also documented in other studies, bugged CRM under the FSP-FRPM. Balgos and Pagdilao (2002) described in their paper on institutional frameworks for community-based CRM in the Philippines that there were conflicts in functions among those involved. In her study in Iloilo, Philippines, Baquiano (2016) noticed what she called "issues and discords" surrounding CRM operations at the local government level. In his paper on promoting empowerment, Jahan (2010) emphasized the need to enhance synergies and collaborative action among stakeholders in pursuit of common goals.

2. No matter how participatory the extension process, by itself, it is inadequate in bringing about true empowerment without the corresponding revamp of the socioeconomic and political structures that act against the interests of poor fishers. As one respondent asserted, "What is needed is a double-edged approach: participatory extension matched with a decisive program aimed at dismantling an oppressive socioeconomic and political structure." This calls for strong political will *"to give fishers control over the management of fishery resources"* in the words of another respondent. It is here where national government must come in, and come with a strong hand to establish new structures and mechanisms that give poor fishers enough space and clout in the management of coastal resources, because, as another respondent asserted, without a decisive program aimed at dismantling an oppressive socioeconomic and political structure, participatory extension is simply like "band-aid" applied on fissures of a leaking dam. In his study of participatory approaches to development, Reid (2011) discovered that efforts at political reform and poverty alleviation were only token contradicted by counter-trends towards development decline. Narayan (2003), Ahmad and Bt. Abu Talib (2015) and Wahid et al (2017) declared that without state intervention the elite will continue to dominate at the expense of the marginalized. In his study in Palawan, Philippines, Eder (2005) proposed greater institutional changes to achieve the potentials o coastal management initiatives. Green et al (2004) who looked into the status and trends of fisheries in Central Visayas, Philippines, believed that the national government through the DA-BFAR, in coordination with local groups and the provincial governments, are in a perfect position to strongly institute coastal management reform initiatives.

3. Labeling development initiatives as "participatory" may be counterproductive because it raises expectations, which if not met due to bureaucratic and other roadblocks, may only diminish motivation to participate. A development project may not call itself participatory, but simply apply participatory principles and practices. Externally-initiated development initiatives are time-bound. They start and end according to the schedule set by fund donors. The next program may take some time to arrive, like the FRMP that was supposed to come immediately at the heels of the FSP. This results in the local community's enthusiasm rising and falling, rising and falling, until no energy is left from the dizzying process. As one respondent brought to light, "So many programs have come to raise our hopes for a while, but all these program have gone with our hopes dashed to shores again, and

again, washed by the waves. We are tired. We are disenchanted." The respondents in this study may enter into a stage aptly described by Kamruzzaman (2020), "Over the time, especially after participating in numerous occasions and after experiencing minimum/no meaningful change, one can grow tired of being an active citizen."

4. NGO extension may not truly serve the interests of the marginalized group, but the objectives of fund providers, like government, that designs and sets targets for the program. As Thomas (2002) found, it is donor conventions regarding program design, monitoring and evaluation that are followed, and these are seldom conducive to effective participation.

5. Government can do a better job in participatory extension for empowerment because empowerment takes time and cannot come about overnight. NGOs implementing development programs are limited by time, on the average five years per program, thus they need to hurry things up to accomplish time-bound targets, which is inconsistent with genuine participation. Government, however, has perpetual presence in a community and thus has all the time to nurture participatory development processes that promote empowerment. This calls, however, for re-orientation of government's top-down and bureaucratic approaches. This may not be easy. Inagaki (2007) said there are operational challenges. However, Ako (2017) said, there are several participatory platforms already tested by other local government units. Ako (2017), however, recommends that participatory standards should not be put in place only for specific projects or issues, but should be incorporated into the local government unit's overall process of governance.

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