



BANGSAMORO WOMEN'S JOURNEY TOWARDS PEACE, EQUALITY AND GOOD GOVERNANCE



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- Ms. Fatima Allian
- Atty. Hamid Barra
- Ms. Maria Ida Giguiento
- Atty. Raissa Jajurie
- Atty. Norma Maruhom
- Dr. Jurma Tikmasan

This book is a recognition of your contributions in expanding the spaces for women's leadership in the Bangsamoro.

LIST OF ACRONYMS USED

AFP	Armed Forces of the Philippines
ARMM	Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao
ASG	Abu Sayyaf Group
BASULTA	Basilan-Sulu-Tawi-tawi
BBL	Bangsamoro Basic Law
BMLO	Bangsamoro Liberation Organization
BTA	Bangsamoro Transition Authority
BTC	Bangsamoro Transition Commission
CAB	Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro
CSO	Civil society organization
DepED	Department of Education
DSWD	Department of Social Welfare and Development
FAB	Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro
GAD	Gender and development
GPB	GAD Plan and Budget
GPH	Government of the Philippines
HB	House Bill
KFRG	Kidnap for Ransom Gang
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IP	Indigenous People
LGU	Local government unit
MILF	Moro Islamic Liberation Front
MIM	Muslim Independent Movement
MOA-AD	Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain
MNLF	Moro National Liberation Front
MSU	Mindanao State University
NAPC	National Anti-Poverty Commission
NGO	Non-government organization
NHTS	National Household Targeting System
PBF	Peacebuilding Fund
RCBW	Regional Commission on the Bangsamoro
UN WOMEN	United Nations Entity for the Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
WPC	Women Peace Center
WPS	Women, Peace and Security

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INTRODUCTION

In 2015, the UN Women, through the support of the Peacebuilding Fund, spearheaded a mapping of selected women leaders and civil society organizations (CSOs) in the proposed core territories of the Bangsamoro. The mapping activity, which covered 79 women leaders and 157 CSO groups, was intended to determine the baseline capacities and perspectives of Moro and female indigenous people on the following three themes: peace, gender and good governance.

Mapping results show that there are capacity needs and gaps in the three mentioned thematic areas. This pushed UN Women to carry out capacity development and advocacy interventions in these areas.

The UN Women selected 79 women leaders from the provinces clustered as follows: (1) Lanao del Norte and Lanao del Sur; (2) Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi; and (3) Maguindanao, North Cotabato and Cotabato City. These women leaders served as partners in carrying out the advocacy work, which aimed to identify key features of the Bangsamoro that may serve as levers for women leaders and CSOs to create spaces for more effective women's participation and leadership.

In April to May 2016, the selected Bangsamoro women leaders went through workshops and mentoring sessions called Leadership Journeying.

The activity involved prominent mentors and speakers such as Atty. Hamid Barra, Atty. Raissa Jajurie and Ms. Fatima Allian. Key subjects tackled include gender in the context of Islam, the role of women in the peace process and gender-sensitive good governance. In these sessions, the Bangsamoro women leaders engaged in constructive discussions and critical analysis of the stakes that they have as Muslim women amid the peace process. In particular, their reflections highlighted the struggles they had to go through living in communities where armed conflicts result in women becoming victims of cyclical poverty and structural violence. Moreover, they determined that the Islamic faith dominant in their communities largely influences the culture of patriarchy that discouraged women to assume public leadership positions. Thus, women participation and contribution to politics and governance in their areas become limited.

Nevertheless, the stifling conditions did not prevent these women leaders in pursuing public service. Instead, these societal realities fueled them to claim their spaces in their communities and take part in determining their future. The women ascertained that they are leaders in their own right.

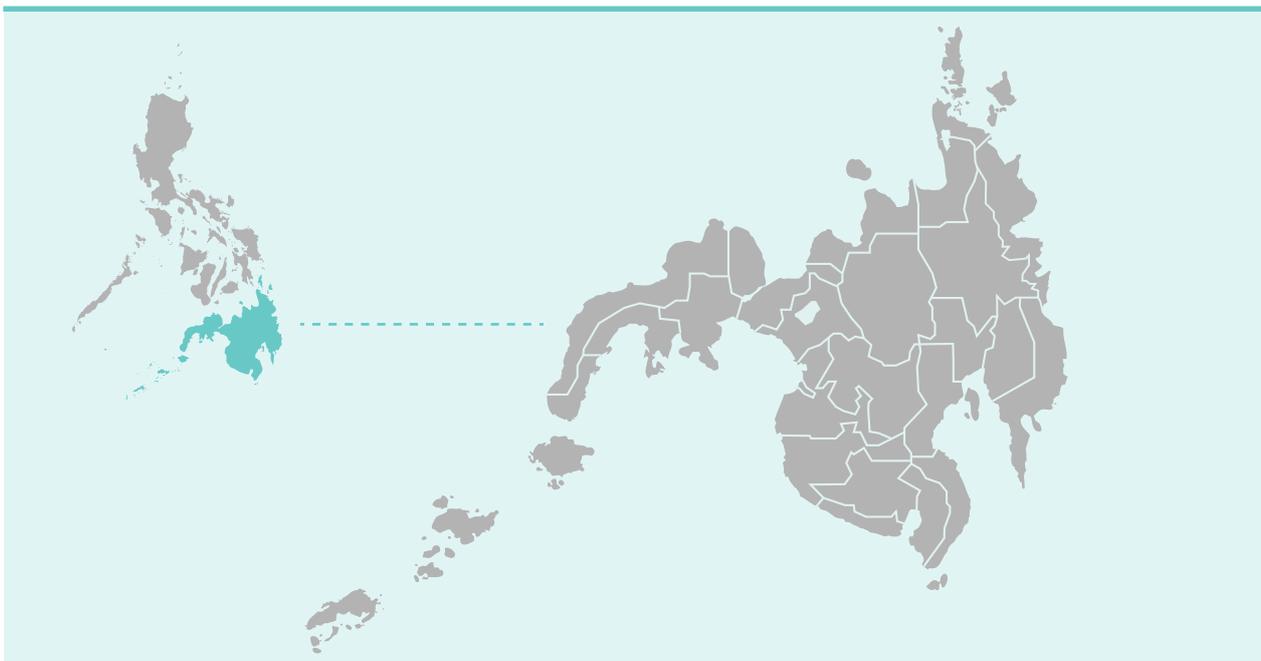
This recognition of their role inspired them to introspect further and look at the issues that plague their communities. Through some problem structuring sessions, they were able to identify priority issues that affect their lives as women in general and as citizens of the Bangsamoro. Recognizing that most issues are shared by all, the women leaders formulated action plans that were later on transformed into concrete women's agenda.

After crafting the agenda, the women leaders went back to their communities and held consultations with their constituencies to determine if the items in the agenda are consistent with the issues and aspirations perceived by their communities. After the consultations and the finalization of the agenda, they faced their local government officials, a first time for few of them, and held dialogues to transform their visions to concrete policies.

This publication intends to capture the journey of the Bangsamoro women leaders who, as partners of the UN Women, embody leadership and commitment to their respective advocacies. Set against the backdrop of cyclical armed conflict and dehumanizing poverty, the realities they live through provided fertile ground for leadership to rise and thrive. It chronicles their struggles, hopes and dedication to participate in the collective making and remaking of the Bangsamoro history. Ultimately, this collection of stories recognizes their valuable contributions as peace builders and leaders in their own right and provides inspiration for the Bangsamoro people and for those living the same realities.

BACKGROUND

The Mindanao conflict



The long path to autonomy of the Muslim Mindanao region can be traced back to the founding of the Muslim Independence Movement (MIM) in 1968 and its call for a distinct Moro state. The MIM, later called the Mindanao Independence Movement, failed to obtain widespread support and remained a loose, weak movement with little recorded activity. Its leadership agreed to disband in 1970 under pressure from the Ferdinand Marcos government. The Moro elites then established the Bangsamoro Liberation Organization (BMLO), composed of older elites and student leaders. Soon after its creation, BMLO disbanded due to generational differences and the young leaders led by Nur Misuari founded the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF).

The MNLF defined the territory of Bangsamoro to cover Sulu, Mindanao, Palawan, and Sabah. With the end goal of achieving independence, the MNLF carried out an armed insurgency against the Philippine Government (GPH) using mostly Bangsamoro volunteer soldiers. This prompted several peace negotiations from 1976, with both parties taking a peaceful path towards autonomy through a joint effort in formulating and implementing a legal framework for genuine autonomy. As a result, the MNLF and the GPH signed the Final Peace Agreement in 1996, paving the way for the creation of Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), an area composed of two mainland provinces and three island provinces that are predominantly Muslim.

Despite the peace agreement promising self-rule in the ARMM, disgruntlement within MNLF leadership still surfaced leading to the rise of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) led by Hashim Salamat. The MILF separated from MNLF for two reasons: (1) the belief that the Bangsamoro Land should be an Independent Islamic State, and (2) the Bangsamoro freedom fighters should not negotiate with GPH. This resulted in a new insurgency and despite the tough stance against negotiation, the MILF agreed to engage in talks with the GPH.

The GPH and MILF talks led to the crafting of the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD) in 2008. However, the supposed signing of MOA-AD did not happen as it was declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court. This ignited skirmishes led by some MILF commanders causing many deaths and displacements.

Another round of talks was initiated soon after, with tremendous advances taking place under President Benigno Aquino III who assumed office in 2010. On 12 October 2012, the MILF and the GPH signed the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB) aimed at replacing the ARMM with a new autonomous region called the Bangsamoro. Over a year after its signing, the FAB was followed by the signing of the Comprehensive Agreement on Bangsamoro (CAB) on 27 March 2014. In the CAB, the MILF agreed to decommission its armed wing, the Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces (BIAF), and in return, the government would establish an autonomous Bangsamoro.

Proposing to establish a new autonomous political entity known as the Bangsamoro Government, the Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC) submitted to the Philippine Congress the draft Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL). The proposed Bangsamoro Government is set to replace the current ARMM upon the promulgation and ratification of the BBL, and the Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA) will take over to run the region under a ministerial form of governance until the election of the first set of Bangsamoro officials. However, the target enactment of the law originally set in June 2015 did not happen following the Mamasapano incident in January 2015, among other delays.

The Philippine Senate and House of Representatives separately proposed revised versions of the BBL: the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region Law (Senate Bill 2894) and the Basic Law for the Bangsamoro Region (House Bill 5811) presented on 11 August 2015 and 04 August 2015, respectively.

The new administration promises to respect existing pacts on the fate of the Bangsamoro people. President Rodrigo Duterte committed to continue with these agreements and maintain the ceasefire mechanisms in place. New set of panel from the government was formed and tasked to immediately convene and continue with the negotiation. Consequently, both panels issued a joint statement signifying their interest to continue with peace negotiation during their first talk in Kuala Lumpur.

These developments firmly placed the MILF as the dominant group within the Moro separatist movement, drawing the disapproval of some factions of the MNLF which believes that it will be more efficient for the MILF to support the 1996 Final Peace Agreement.

Even the MILF has had internal differences. The Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF), founded by Ameril Umbra Kato who died in illness in April 2014, broke away from the MILF in 2010 allegedly because

he was not included in the MILF-GPH Peace Process. The BIFF reverted to the claim of an Independent Bangsamoro State because they felt that the government was insincere in its negotiations following the Supreme Court's nullification of the MOA-AD.

Apart from the bigger fight for autonomy pushed by groups in the Bangsamoro area, there were also some conflicts happening within its communities. Feuds between families or clans locally known as rido are common in Mindanao and are often caused by land conflicts, business and political rivalry among others. They are often characterized by violent conflicts, assassinations and other forms of criminality such as kidnapping involving individuals or groups depending on the cause and affiliations. The proliferation of small arms exacerbates this further, often leading to all-out war between feuding parties. Some feuds spark cycles of revenge that can go on indefinitely; resolving some of these feuds involves intricate negotiations and compensatory action.

This publication showcases leadership experiences of women in the Bangsamoro who thrived amid the socio-political setting discussed above. This also takes into account the different context of the clusters where these women leaders came from and developed their leadership skills.

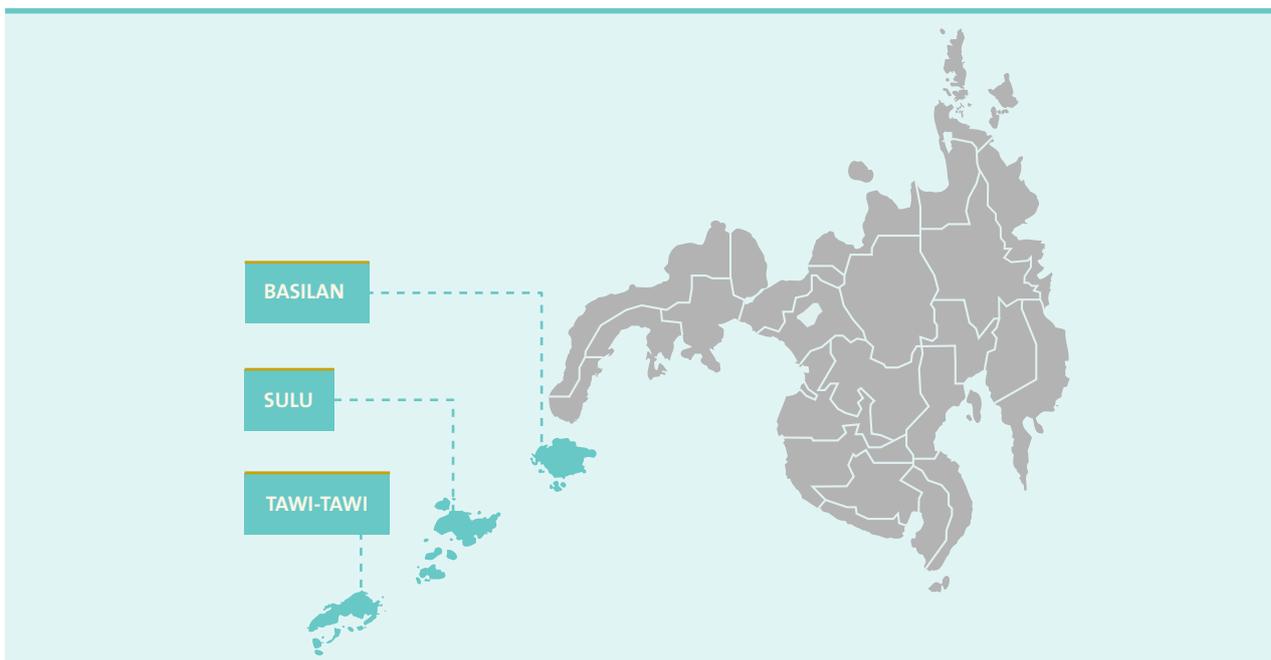
HERSTORIES AGAINST THE BACKDROP OF CONFLICTS

The lives of the 79 Bangsamoro women advocates convey to us narratives of living through difficult circumstances and rising above the adversities.

This section provides us glimpses of the environment where the women came from and how these circumstances shape their day-to-day living and their dreams of an ideal community. Fifteen inspiring stories were selected as vignettes, which let us see things from these women's own lenses. These provide first-hand accounts of Bangsamoro women's struggles and successes amid the backdrop of conflicts. Theirs are tales of women's strength, courage and resilience.

These are their stories.

Overview: Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi



The three island provinces under the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) serve as the homes of the three major non-state actors in the Southern Philippines. The MNLF, under its founding Chairman Nur Misuari, is primarily based in the province of Sulu where most of the encounters between the government troops and the MNLF were recorded, including the tragic burning of Jolo town in the 1970s. Even after the signing of the 1996 Final Peace Agreement, the clashes between the parties continued in this area.

The Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) is also present in Sulu, particularly in the municipalities of Patikul, Indanan, Maimbung, and Parang. Their presence resulted in series of military operations that displaced people in several barangays of these municipalities. Since there were communities where ASG and MNLF were both present, there were also reported clashes between them in these areas, especially in 2005. Many civilians were either forced to leave their homes and farms or became casualties of these intense fights in 2005. One of these cases is the alleged indiscriminate firing against the Padiwan Family in Barangay Kapuk Punggul in Maimbung, Sulu.

The MILF is also operating in the province of Sulu under its 117 Base Command located in the municipality of Omar.

Aside from Sulu, Basilan also houses some ASG camps and is even known as the home of this insurgency group. Most of the reported encounters between the government troops and ASG took place in this island. The group has been tagged in different sub-groupings that were involved in various activities such as kidnappings and beheading. Despite being considered separate sub-groupings, they present themselves as a united group “fighting the common enemy”, hence extending support for each other during encounters. Kinship can also be seen as another factor given the size and proximity of the islands. Thus, everyone is related with each other by blood or by affinity.

Yearly, there were reports of encounters and military operations particularly in municipalities of Al-Barka and Tipu-Tipu, reportedly stronghold of the ASG. These incidents resulted in displacements of civilians almost every year. In 2015 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) report, there were 17, 571 Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) who left their homes due to incidents of armed confrontations between the AFP and the ASG.

Encounters and operations continued and even intensified since early 2000, triggered by reported attacks perpetrated by the ASG which include the:

- Kidnapping of around 50 students and teachers in Tumahubong Elementary School in Tipu-Tipu on 20 March 2000;
- Kidnapping of Martin and Gracia Burnham during the attack on Dos Palmas Resort in Palawan on 27 May 2001;
- Lamitan siege in June 2001;
- Beheading of 10 Golden Harvest Farm workers in Lamitan on 11 June 2001; and
- Execution of members of the Philippine Marines in July 2007 and July 2011.

These were among the incidents that resulted in the continuing strife and displacement of civilians that usually last for three months on average.

The incidents in 2000 resulted in the state of lawlessness and launching of all-out offensive against the ASG declared by then president and now Pampanga Representative Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. As a result, 73 alleged members of the ASG were arrested after being accused of committing the crimes in 2000 in Tipu-Tipu and Lamitan. Human rights groups claimed that there were innocent civilians among those arrested at the time, but they remain incarcerated at the Camp Bagong Diwa in Taguig up to present. Wives and mothers of these known Basilan 73 continue to call for the release of their loved ones.

Apart from ASG, Basilan also houses some MILF members under 114 Base Commander Hadji Dan Laksaw Asnawi in Al-Barka. Unlike clashes between ASG and MNLF in some communities in Sulu that they were both present, ASG and MILF were alleged to have been in connivance in Basilan. Commander Hadji Dan was linked in the beheading of 14 Marines in Al-Barka town in Basilan in 2007. He was arrested but eventually was able to escape from the provincial jail in 2009.

Last province in the cluster is Tawi-Tawi, which is considered to be relatively safe compared to Basilan and Sulu. While there were reports of *Pagbanta* or clan feud in this province, these are seen as merely spillover of feuds from Basilan and Sulu clans.

Pagbanta is a Tausug term for *rido*, one of the issues that plagued the communities in Basilan and Sulu. This exacerbates the condition in the island provinces as it creates internal insecurity and image of lawlessness externally. This greatly affects the development of the region and continues to constrict the spaces of opportunities for the people to live in peaceful and decent life.

Aside from strife between the government troops and the Moro rebels, *pagbanta* also affects the delivery of services in the communities especially in health and education. The common causes of *pagbanta* are control, land disputes and political positions that can be attributed to strong value of *Martabbat* or honor and dignity.

This situation in the Island Provinces illustrates the longstanding realities for women and their families in communities within these provinces. There were women who took initiatives to advance the rights of their people and bring basic services to their communities by joining human rights groups and other development non-government organizations (NGOs) and engaging in advocacy activities in their respective local governments.

The women advocates of Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-tawi

Of the 79 women advocates who participated in the journeying sessions, 23 came from this cluster (6 women from Basilan, 8 from Sulu and 9 from Tawi-Tawi). The core group of advocates hailed from different sectors such as the academe, government, indigenous peoples, youth, religious sects and liberation movements. They underwent journeying and advocacy planning sessions in May 2016. Advocacy Coordinator Dayang Karna Bahidjan led the cluster activities while Atty. Raissa Jajurie and Professor Jurma Tikmasan served as mentors.

From the sessions, the women were able to reflect on their rise as female leaders. They also discussed prevailing issues of women in their respective communities. Basilan participants identified the lack of social services for women in war areas as a main concern. They believe this drove high poverty and high illiteracy among women. Representatives from Sulu almost shared the same dilemma but added that violence against women has become more severe due to the culture of violence in their province. On the other hand, Tawi-tawi raised the need to claim the state accountability over the GAD budget as their issue, given that their province has a GAD Code which they can access as a resource to make women's lives better.

An outcry against discrimination

Mary May B. Julhari

IP Mandatory Representative
Isabela City, Basilan
Badjao

I am a graduate of medical technology who, instead of joining the lucrative medical industry, chose to engage myself in civil society organization to help my constituents. At the same time, I intend to continue my father's legacy as "*Batang Matoa*" or tribal leader in our community by serving my fellow Badjaos in Isabela City, Basilan.

As Badjaos, we are deeply connected and dependent to the sea since most of us rely on fishing as our primary source of income. Given this reliance on the sea, most of us permanently reside in the waters that resulted in apparent and rampant discrimination against our tribe. This is why I always have a strong stand in defending my people and do whatever it takes to eliminate this discrimination. I want to see them finish their studies and work as normal people in the offices or private establishment.

One of the milestones in my life as a Badjao is when I became the Indigenous People (IP) Mandatory Representative in the City of Isabela. However, my position in the local development community did not spare me from being discriminated. The local government unit (LGU) of Isabela City did not consult in the formulation of plans that affect us. We were only invited during the budget hearing.

I pity the Badjaos in our area. We are deprived of certain basic services. When we go to health centers, we are the last ones to get attended to, to get medical assistance we need even though we arrived earlier than others. Why is it that way? Just because we are Badjaos?



“How can we get help? How can we be empowered if they continue to discriminate us?”

I tried my best to inform the other officials about the plight of our people. Still, nothing happened.

There are times that I feel that even if did my best, they still do not appreciate my reports. I ask for help, but they still refuse to address our problems. How can we get help? How can we be empowered, if they continue to discriminate us?

From volunteering to influencing policy

Jerrylyn M. Asanti

Teacher and Gender and Development Coordinator
Department of Education,
Isabela City, Basilan

I took education instead of pursuing a medical profession as what my father initially wanted me to do. Disobeying your father is not something one can easily do especially in our culture. However, as a young woman, I believed that I have to do what is relevant to my community.

In Basilan, you always see children work or roam instead of being in school. You would not be surprised if they will be recruited by lawless groups given the lack of meaningful activities in their lives such as going to school to learn. Illiteracy is very high especially among Moros. Growing up in an area where poverty and conflict is everywhere, one is really called to make a difference for your own people. And this is what inspired me to be an educator for my people.

After graduation, I started doing volunteer works to educate the children and adults in the hinterlands of Basilan. I could not believe to this day how had I done this without being harmed. Amidst the military pursuits in the areas where I had worked I emerged unscathed.

Thereafter, I was given this opportunity to join the Department of Education (DepEd) as a teacher. I was assigned to a far-flung area where my salary was barely enough to sustain my needs including expenses for transportation going to my assigned area and educational materials to effectively carry out my job. Still, I mobilized other volunteer teachers to help me in educating the kids, and shared what little I have to cover their fares going to these areas. I believe in volunteerism.



“Growing up in an area where poverty and conflict is everywhere, one is really called to make a difference for your own people.”

Now that I am in one of the top positions in the DepEd office in our province, I looked back at my experience as something that would prove the saying, “If you plant goodness, you will reap it one day”. As the Gender and Development (GAD) Coordinator of the DepEd at the provincial level, I am now in a position that can influence policy changes that could make the education system not only more effective but also more gender sensitive.

I will not abandon the cause I committed into—to educate the poor children in Basilan. I see this as a way for us to achieve peace and alleviate poverty among our people.

Advancing greater collaboration for peace

Mercia S. Ali

NGO Worker

*Matawkasi Foundation Incorporated
Sulu*

I had long been involved in socio-civic work here in Sulu. There are times that even without support from the local government you have to collaborate with other people with the same cause because our situation here demands us to work hand-in-hand with others.

Matawkasi works on helping the victims of the conflict here in Sulu through emergency relief works for displaced by the clashes, among others. We also do advocacy and peace-building works to teach the culture of peace, especially to the young ones. We cannot be forever in this cyclical situation where violence becomes the norm.

It is not easy to work in our context especially that CSOs are believed to be anti-government. Of course, we are not. We just serve as watchdogs if our elected leaders are doing what they are supposed to do.

We will support the UN Women in their cause to promote gender and peace. Women are always the victims of war and they have to suffer unimaginable conditions just to rebuild what they have lost in these horrible battles.

We also dream of a community where we can sleep at peace in the night time and not worry when the next bomb is going to hit us. We are tired of these wars so we are working to be at the forefront in ending them through peaceful means.



“It is not easy to work in our context especially that CSOs are believed to be anti-government. Of course, we are not. We just serve as watchdogs if our elected leaders are doing what they are supposed to do.”

Helping through profession and religion

Carolina Tarang

Nurse and Islamic Teacher

Tawi-Tawi

I am both a Moro nurse and a Madaris or an Islamic teacher. My passion for what I do now began when I met, and later on joined, a group of women in KUDWATUN NISA, an NGO that does advocacy works in our community. It is through this NGO that my efforts as a health worker and as a Madaris teacher are recognized.

I am proud of my background in Islamic teaching. It is effective to advocate when you are both a nurse and a Madaris teacher. It is rare to see an open-minded Madaris teacher and a health worker in one, able to serve as a health worker while advocating Islamic teaching, which is not at easy at all especially on people's health aspect.

My challenge is when some people cannot understand my work. I also encountered some people who are conservative in some reproductive health issues. These challenges did not stop me from doing my job as health worker and Madaris teacher.

Lobbying is actually my weakness, but I am working to overcome and hoping to be given the opportunity to enhance this skill.



“My challenge is when some people cannot understand my work. I also encountered some people who are conservative in some reproductive health issues. These challenges did not stop me from doing my job as health worker and Madaris teacher.”

Harnessing the voice of the youth

Dayanara Sevilla Aming

Youth Leader

Tawi-Tawi

As a youth leader, my leadership role started when I was in college, I became a student leader, served for two years as secretary and on my 4th year I became the president of the student council.

One of the learning I acquired is how to handle or balance time between work and studies where I realized that if one is committed to her advocacy, she/he can manage pressure. Currently I am with the National Anti-Poverty Commission (NAPC)-Youth and Student Sector as Chairperson in the Peace Committee.

As a youth chairperson representing the youth sector, I participated in the lobbying activities for the passage of a CAB-Based BBL in the congress. Even if I continue my work in NAPC, I will only remain in my current position. While there is struggle in my volunteer work, there are also incentives. So, my plan is to find a work or take up masters degree in Community and Development.



“Even if I continue my work in NAPC, I will only remain in my current position. While there is struggle in my volunteer work, there are also incentives.”



Atty. Raissa Jajurie sharing developments and her insights on the comprehensive peace process (top). Women leaders from Sulu sharing their leadership journeys (bottom).



Women leaders from Basilan crafting their advocacy agenda.



Tawi-tawi advocates presenting their individual leadership experiences (top). Participants of the Advocacy Planning Workshop in Zamboanga City on May 24-25, 2016 (bottom).

Overview: Lanao del Sur and Lanao del Norte



Lanao del Sur and Lanao del Norte are known as homes of the Meranaw tribe, the natives occupying the land around the Lake Lanao in the central part of Lanao del Sur.

Lanao also houses 14 base commands of the MILF and is considered one of the group's strongholds. It is also the hometown of the former MILF vice-chairman for military affairs Abdul Azis Mimbantas who died in stroke in May 2012.

People in Lanao experienced series of all-out wars that resulted in massive displacements in 2000 and 2003, as well as after the aborted signing of the MOA-AD in 2008.

In 2000, MILF's Abdulrahman Macapaar, also known as Commander Bravo, and his forces occupied and took control the Kauswagan municipal hall in Lanao del Norte for eight hours. This incident brought fear to people in Kauswagan, making the area a ghost town for several months. It also resulted in clashes with government troops and left scores of people dead and thousand others displaced. The day the occupation of Kauswagan, then president Joseph Estrada declared all-out war against the MILF that spilled over across central Mindanao. The all-out war, which only ended when AFP overran the MILF's camp Abubakar in Maguindanao, displaced around 800,000 civilians.

In 2003, another all-out war policy ordered by then president Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo hit Mindanao particularly Lanao provinces, North Cotabato, and Maguindanao. People, who were affected by the 2000 all-out war, were displaced again by the same policy declaration.

Also in 2003, commander Bravo reportedly launched attack and massed his troops and deployed them on both ends of the highway bordering Maigo town in Lanao del Norte. This move by MILF affected the flow of vehicles carrying people and commodities at that time.

These incidents severely affected both the Moro and non-Moro residents in Lanao provinces. They ignited the anti-Moro sentiments and established mistrust among mixed communities, particularly in Lanao del Norte.

In 2008, when the supposed signing of the MOA-AD between the GPH and MILF in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia was aborted, attacks took place in two towns in Lanao del Norte. As reported in the news, Commander Bravo and his men were said to be responsible on these attacks that resulted in the killing of 28 civilians and three soldiers, triggering government offensives against the MILF in Lanao provinces. The 2008 war following the failed signing of the MOA-AD started in North Cotabato against the group of Ameril Umbra Kato who launched attacks in North Cotabato and Maguindanao.

Despite the armed conflicts, many CSOs still continued its peacebuilding initiatives in Lanao and urged the parties to continue with the peace negotiations that have already started.

Given the developments in the peace process, MILF leadership was able to convince Commander Bravo and his men to support the current peace negotiations. He expressed his continuing support to the peace process and belied the allegations that he was creating a faction in the MILF.

Rido or clan feud that has been present for decades is also one of the problems faced by the Meranao. Some studies show that *rido* is more prevalent in Meranao society. In Lanao del Sur alone, there were 337 *ridos* that took place from 1994 to 2004 that resulted in many lives taken. Six (6) major causes of *rido* were found to be politics, land disputes, pride/maratabat, retaliation, accident and drug-related cases.

Women leaders in the province expressed concern about *rido* as it does not only affect one or two persons in the family but the entire members of the clan, including women and their children. In the absence of clashes between the government troops and the Moro rebels, feuding parties continue to make Lanao provinces conflict-stricken.

This situation greatly affects the economic development in the provinces. According to 2015 National Household Targeting System for Poverty Reduction, ARMM remains the poorest region in the country. With at least 11 percent or 573,446 of the 5.1 million households in the region considered as poor, Lanao del Sur ranks as the second poorest province next to Maguindanao.

The women advocates from the Lanao provinces

There are 27 participating women advocates from the Lanao Norte and Lanao del Sur cluster, who are all Maranao and mostly in their 20s to early 30s. As such, many of them are young professionals who just graduated from universities. They represented women from the academe, government and grassroots civil society organizations.

Two journeying sessions were done in June 2016. Led by Ms. Zahria Muti-Mapandi, the women were able to know themselves better during the sessions. These were followed by conversations with their mentors, Atty. Hamid Barra, Atty. Norma Marohum and Ms. Fatima Allian on Gender in the Context of Islam, the Bangsamoro Struggle and Women's Leadership, respectively. In July 2016 they crafted three advocacy agenda representing their geographical clusters.

Among the young women's common agenda is the desire to know more about their identity both as Muslims and as Moro. They believe that learning about each other is the key to building trust and understanding among Filipinos. As such, they deem it necessary to popularize their history with fellow Muslims, and to those outside their faith. Another goal set by the young women is the strengthening of women's participation in local peace and security structures. They deem that having a numerical quota for women (at least 40%) in the local peace councils will influence the plans to be more responsive to the needs of women in armed conflicts.

Prejudice from misconceptions

Amal Arimao

Sharia Educator and Community Organizer
Lanao del Norte

I am a community organizer and a Sharia educator. I am not a conservative type of Muslim woman during my younger years as I joined beauty contests and similar competitions, until such time that I decided to change and started to become religious.

My advocacy is on Muslim Identity and. I am thinking of Lanao del Norte area. So why Muslim identity? It is because I feel that there is misconception on being a Muslim. We cannot feel it here in Marawi but in Lanao del Norte, it is really happening. There are biases and prejudices against the Muslims in the province.

My second advocacy is on “cold war” or the brewing conflict between Muslims and non-Muslims, where Muslims are tagged as terrorists and extremists. Now, if you are wearing abaya or black dress, they will start calling you an ISIS member or a terrorist. These suspecting looks become worse when we are entering shopping malls. I even experienced being inspected more rigorously than others as if I am hiding something precarious in my bag.

It is critical to educate people about the real history of Muslims in Mindanao, which I think the DepEd could play an important role especially in educating the young ones. Conducting awareness raising in non-Muslim communities can also help enlighten the minds of the communities. I can tap some professors who are knowledgeable on this issue.



"I feel that there is misconception on being a Muslim. We cannot feel it here in Marawi but in Lanao del Norte, it is really happening."

Ending conflict through education

Sapiyah M. Abdulmoin

Community Worker

Lanao del Sur

Due to difficulties in life, I had to stop from school as I need to support my family in sending my siblings to school. I let my siblings finish their studies first before I continued my bachelor's degree. I play many roles in life: I am a mother to my 14 siblings, an event organizer, adviser and a facilitator in our family. I have always dreamt of sending my parents to Saudi Arabia to perform Hajj, but this remains unfulfilled as it needs huge financial resources.

My advocacy is to end discrimination against the Bangsamoro, which I believe does not only refer to people but to the territory as well. Providing education on the real history of both Moro and Lumad in Mindanao will be of great help to open the minds of people whose biases and prejudices remain in their hearts.

I want to form a core group that would study the causes of discrimination against the Bangsamoro and conduct awareness-raising activities in both Moro and non-Moro communities. I understand how difficult to eliminate the negative impact of war to communities in Lanao as this has developed hate and mistrust among Moro and non-Moro over the years. Nevertheless, I am determined that this will work with the help of some Meranao professors of History Department in the Mindanao State University (MSU).



“Providing education on the real history of both Moro and Lumad in Mindanao will be of great help to open the minds of people whose biases and prejudices remain in their hearts.”

Education for all

Jamaliah Saruang

Educator

Marawi City

My concern is really about basic education. If there is no education, everything is useless. We cannot move forward. I believe there are several deterrents to education for all. One is financial problems. Parents don't have money to send their children to school. Second is lack of support from the parents. Instead of sending them to school, children go to the farm or take care of other younger siblings. Third is lack of interest. There are children who are just not interested to study even if they are well-supported by their parents and teachers. Another factor is the lack of school facilities and teachers.

To address these issues, it is really important that schools are promoted such as that of Brigada Eskwela (school brigade). I want to motivate and encourage learners to register and convince them that going to school is good for them and that their future is brighter with education. During PTA (parent-teacher association) meetings, we also motivate parents to continue their support to their children's schooling. We also do monitoring through the coordination of the principal and teachers in the school.

I have to commend existing programs like the DSWD's PAMANA and 4Ps that have helped enhance our community's way of life and by supporting children to school. LGU and NGO collaborations have also improved our school facilities. It is also worth noting that we have several allies in this agenda to ensure success which include our Principal (school head), BLGU (barangay LGU), MCD (Marawi City Division), DSWD, BEAM (Basic Education Assistance for Muslim Mindanao), UNICEF and DepEd ARMM.



“I want to motivate learners...encourage them that going to school is good for them.”

Fighting fear through advocacy

Sahailah Mustapha

Community Development Worker
Lanao del Sur

I joined politics and elected as barangay chairperson, which I considered as a big blessing because I was able to serve my people. I am a family-oriented person. I get easily affected every time my parents are going through something that I cannot concentrate on my studies. What is more bothersome for me, however, is my experience during elections in the community. Hearing gunshots from the polling precincts has become an ordinary experience for the people in the barangay, which to me is more alarming.

Politics is the number one cause of *rido* that claimed many lives of people in communities in Lanao. To end *rido* in my province is a personal advocacy. I witnessed how *rido* destroyed many lives and dreams of children who were forced to quit from school due to fear of their lives. Economic opportunities are very limited given the security issues in our province, exacerbating poverty experienced by our people.

I am determined that I can contribute to end *rido* in my area by knowing the causes of *rido* between families and exploring the possibility of negotiations. I know that this would not be that easy but I believe it is attainable, as long as there are people that share the same views with me and are willing to work to achieve peace in the communities.

Through the support of our Mayor, Sultans, and Datus in my place, I believe that we can make a difference.



“I am determined that I can contribute to end *rido* in my area by knowing the causes of *rido* between families and exploring the possibility of negotiations. I know that this would not be that easy but I believe it is attainable, as long as there are people that share the same views with me and are willing to work to achieve peace in the communities.”

Finding renewed faith in life from islam

Novaisa A. Acampong

Community Worker

Lanao del Norte

After graduation, I went to Manila and got a job as an office clerk. With that, I discovered a new skill and broke people's stereotypes on Muslims that we can also do other things. However, my parents called me back home. They said that it's not good to stay in Manila alone as a Maranao lady and there were so many jobs offered to me so I conformed.

When I got home, I became unemployed and my mother told me to take the Certificate in Professional Teaching (CPRT) so that I can do something. When I went to the Mindanao State University, I saw a flyer for an entrance exam in College of Law which made me choose to take it first instead of CPRT. I prayed to Allah to give me a sign. I passed the exam so I did not pursue Education but went to Law instead.

Entering the College of Law, I faced so many hardships, especially in my love life and my family. My mother opposed my studies and even stopped giving me allowance. I had to teach in a public school that hindered me from focusing and doing well in my studies.

Everything was hectic to the point that I wanted to kill myself. What I did is that I read and recited Dua'as (from the Holy Quran) to prevent myself from committing suicide. It really affected me which I never thought it would.



“I read and recited Dua’as (from the Holy Quran) to prevent myself from committing suicide. It really affected me in ways I never thought it would.”

After those hardships, I got back on track. My grades went uphill, I got closer to my faith and even my love life got better. I told myself that if I couldn't become a lawyer, then at least I can work in the government while having a business and help society. Even if I have little knowledge of Islam, I intend to share it so I can aid in fostering peace in our community.



Mentor Atty. Norma Maruhom and Coordinator Zahria Muti-Mapandi leading the conversations on gender equality (top). A young Maranao leader contributing her ideas on gender and peace (bottom).

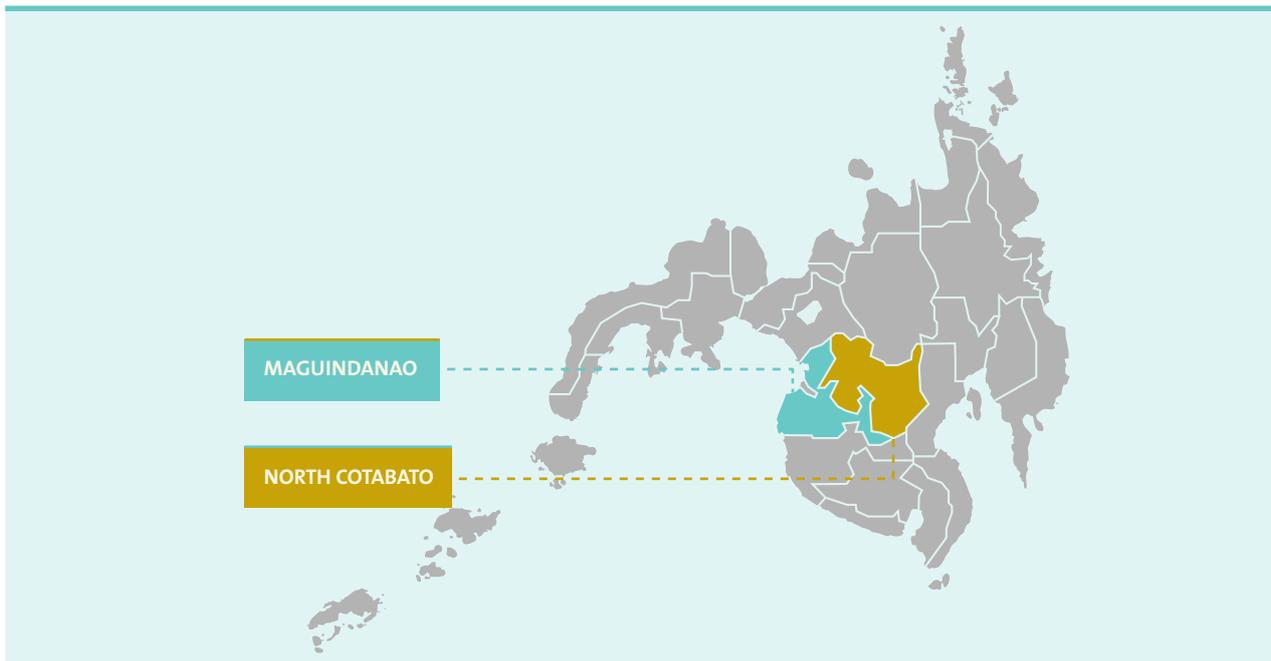


A participant of the series of conversations sharing her personal journey as a Bangsamoro woman (top). Women leaders from Lanao provinces having a discussion on their experiences as Muslim and as Bangsamoro (bottom).



Amal Arimao facilitating a discussion on the issues that affects Muslim women (top). The participants of the Conversations on Gender Identity on June 21, 2016 at Marawi City (bottom).

Overview: Cotabato City, Maguindanao and North Cotabato



The provinces of Maguindanao and North Cotabato and Cotabato City are located at the central part of Mindanao. North Cotabato and Maguindanao are both known as strongholds of the MILF as they are home to 19 MILF base commands. They are also home to revolutionary leaders in Mindanao. Cotabato City, on the other hand, is the political center of the MILF. It has become one of the host communities for IDPs from North Cotabato and Maguindanao who left their homes due to clashes between the government troops and Moro rebels.

Given the strong presence of insurgents in the two provinces, they became recipients of all-out war policies of the previous administrations. Many people in these areas were displaced, some even lost their homes and livelihoods while others lost their lives. In 2000, when the former president Joseph Estrada declared all-out war against the MILF in Lanao, the clashes spilled over in North Cotabato and Maguindanao.

In 2003, then President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo accused MILF for cuddling Pentagon kidnap-for-ransom group in North Cotabato, she gave ultimatum to the MILF although the latter continued to deny the allegation.

On 11 February 2003, while communities were performing their congregational prayer in the celebration of Eid'l Adha, the AFP launched major offensives against MILF strongholds in Pikit. The intense bombardments and burning of houses led to displacement of 410,000 people, including women and children (DSWD report July 2003).

The government justified the attacks against the MILF by linking it to alleged connivance between the MILF and the Pentagon Kidnap for Ransom Gang (KFRG). The Pentagon KFRG had reportedly found sanctuary in the areas controlled by MILF. However, shortly after the launching of offensives in February 2003, the AFP acknowledged that the real target was not the KFRG, but was indeed the MILF group and that the attack

on their strongholds was merely a response to reports that the MILF was massing troops in the area. (The Philippine Daily Inquirer, 17 February 2003).

Also in 2003, the government issued warrant of arrests against the MILF leaders and 144 other MILF guerrillas following the Davao International Airport bombing on 17 March 2003. The AFP accused MILF of staging retaliatory attacks against the government after what happened in Buliok complex, but the MILF vehemently denied the allegation. Less than a month after the bombing in Davao airport, Sasa Wharf in Davao was also bombed that killed and injured 17 and 56 people, respectively (Human Rights Watch report, 2007).

As the bombings continued in different parts of central Mindanao, the arrests of alleged bombing suspects, including innocent civilians that are mostly religious leaders in North Cotabato, Maguindanao and Cotabato City, became rampant.

In Cotabato City, Ustadz Emran Gumanod and five others were arrested and accused of Davao bombings. The case filed against Gumanod was dismissed due to lack of evidence in 2007, while others remained in jail.

The communities in Maguindanao suffered the same fate with people in North Cotabato. Repeated displacements continued even after the all-out wars. Maguindanao is where the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) was founded by the late Ameril Umbra Kato after the 2008 aborted MOA-AD signing.

When BIFF launched attack in Baliki, Midsayap, North Cotabato in August 2008, the government ordered military operations against the group which eventually spilled over in Maguindanao. Once again, people were forced to leave their homes and livelihood.

Maguindanaoans has the highest exposure to violence. Aside from presence of MILF and BIFF in the province, Maguindanao is known as home of warlords and political clans. Every year, people were displaced either due to clashes between the government and Moro rebels or wrought by fighting between the warring clans.

The impact of displacement does not end when IDPs were brought back to their homes. Returned IDPs were also as vulnerable as those who are still displaced, and their problems for food security, income poverty, and access to services were almost as severe.

Maguindanao ranks on top as poorest among the five provinces in the ARMM, which was also ranked the poorest region in the 2015 NHTS survey of DSWD. Given the existing realities in the province, it would be difficult for people in Maguindanao to recover when they constantly have to leave their homes and livelihood amid continuous armed conflict in this area.

Development is only possible when there is peace, which remains elusive for people in Maguindanao.

The women advocates from Cotabato city, Maguindanao and North Cotabato

There were 29 women advocates from this cluster representing the MNLF, MILF, academe, youth, indigenous people, government, religious institutions and civil society organizations. Led by Advocacy Coordinator Hazel Lozada, the women underwent the journeying process to rediscover themselves as leaders. They were also mentored by Atty. Raissa Jajurie and Ms. Maria Ida Giguiento.

In April 2016, the women embarked on their leadership journeys through which they identified various social issues that plagued them. Outstanding among the Maguindanaos is poverty. They claimed that the cyclical wars in Maguindanao caused unbearable sufferings to women. Women were forced to go out of their province to find a living in other areas or Middle Eastern countries. Those who were left behind had no choice but to live in poverty.

For the women of North Cotabato, the difficulty is being a Muslim minority in a dominantly Christian province. Adult illiteracy is also very prevalent in the 39 barangays of the six municipalities who bade to be included in the ARMM in the 2001 plebiscite. They see the popularization of Bangsamoro history as one way for the province to understand them more and be more sensitive to their needs as people.

Similar to Maguindanao, the primary social issue raised in Cotabato City is poverty. Many clamored for more capability building programs for women that will allow for participation in economic activities. Also recognized is the prevalence of violence against women and children, both among Muslims and Christians.

In May 2016, the women advocates crafted their advocacy plans to address the aforementioned issues. These action plans were then subjected to popular consultations in August 2016. One of which is the dialogue and presentation of women's agenda to Mayor Cynthia Guiani which involved women leaders of the 39 barangays of Cotabato City

Affecting change by proving one's self

Zaynab Ampatuan

Moro People's Core

Kabacan, North Cotabato

I am a native of Kabacan in North Cotabato, former head of the League of Filipino Students (LFS) and University Student Council president at the University of Southern Mindanao Kabacan, and now executive director of the Moro People's Core. I was also the deputy secretary-general and one of the nominees of the Suara Bangsamoro (Voice of the Moro People) party list.

In my childhood, I would always go against the rules of my family. They prohibited me to make friends with Christians since our house was burned by the ILAGA during the war. Despite the prohibition, I still frequently visited the houses of my Christian friends, we played together and bathed the pigs. I also joined Christmas parties without the knowledge of my parents. When I was in college, I joined sports activities like softball and even played in the Palarong Pambansa. Even if some Muslim leaders would tell me that what I am doing is prohibited, I would stick to and stand by my decisions, provided I am doing what I believe is right. When we prove to ourselves that we can do it, we introduce change and that changes how people see us.

I am active with youth program initiatives in Kabacan in partnership with DepEd. The program includes basic literacy and numeracy activities. We also included discussions about peace in our module. After three years, the module was adopted in other areas. During the implementation of the program, I would go with the volunteers to assist and give guidance in conducting the activities so that later on they can do it by themselves. It is important to be grounded in the community, understand the issues and be fully immersed. This will fuel us to continue our efforts.



“I would stick to and stand by my decisions, provided I am doing what I believe is right. When we prove to ourselves that we can do it, we introduce change and that changes how people see us.”

If we lose this basic theory, we will also lose our direction. We should maintain and sustain our efforts in this kind of practice. Change will happen if NGOs will focus in community organizing work.

Aside from youth program, my group also works on adult literacy and numeracy program where we integrate other issues such as women's rights and child rights. We also tried to explore other possible livelihood projects to support the economic activities of our partner communities. With this, we were able to address literacy issues as well as economic problems of their partners. We also assisted Madrasah Schools since less assistance is being given to these Madrasas. I believe that education and learning starts during birth up until the time of death.

Despite having no funding support, they still continue their efforts through networking and partnership with the LGUs and some partner individuals abroad to sustain their initiatives. Openness, adaptability and community immersion are the best and proven practice that makes an initiative successful.

Renewing confidence amid lost trust

Monica Taupan

Indigenous People
Midsayap, North Cotabato

I am an IP woman and I served the people as a barangay councilor for three terms in Barangay Milaya, Midsayap, North Cotabato.

My story is about my community who lost their trust to an organization who promised to give our children scholarship grants. At the beginning, some of us were able to send our children to school because of the promised scholarship but later on, the children were terminated from school for a reason we did not know. Eventually, we learned that this organization moved to other barangays and began influencing other communities.

Due to this, IP women in our barangay were upset and got mad with this organization. They felt that IP were used for other people's interest. This experience resulted in lack of trust and loss of confidence. Whenever there are efforts to organize them, they express disagreements. This has become a challenge for me.

Despite these challenges, I continued with my advocacy to organize my fellow IP women. I have consistently explained the situation and made them realize that they can manage crises without relying on others. Thankfully, my eagerness to help mobilized them.



“Now, my fellow IP women are active and stronger than before. They actively participate in community meetings while some of them became officials in the barangay. Children are going to school.”

Now, my fellow IP women are active and stronger than before. They actively participate in community meetings while some of them became officials in the barangay. Children are going to school.

I am proud that if I was unable to organize them again, they will not move on from what another organization did to them.

Talking for peace

Linda Erese

Teduray, Indigenous People
South Upi, Maguindanao

I belong to Teduray tribe of Indigenous People. I am currently a municipal councilor in South Upi, Maguindanao, chairing the Committee on Police Matters. They consider me as one of the active councilors in my municipality.

In the height of conflict between the Moro rebels and the government troops in early 1990s, I acted as negotiator between the warring groups in our community.

It was difficult to act as a negotiator between powerful men. I had to transfer from one place to another to chase the rebels and convince them to stop fighting and just concede to the government. When clashes were in Barangay Lamud and Biarong, I would go to Datu Odin Sinsuat, and when the fights were in Barangay Kuya, I would go to Barangay Tran in Lebak, Sultan Kudarat.

After series of talks, convincing them to return to the government, I succeeded and influenced Commander Peping Dalimbang of MNLF and his men to return to the side of government. I did not stop there and went on to convince others. As a result, I was also able to influence Commander Kagi Mohammad Digo Omar in Biarong in South Upi.

We became good friends. I consider this as my big accomplishment, not only as a government official in my municipality but also as a woman.



“It was difficult to act as a negotiator between powerful men. I had to transfer from one place to another to chase the rebels and convince them to stop fighting and just concede to the government... I consider this as my big accomplishment, not only as a government official in my municipality but also as a woman.”

Faith as a conduit to public service

Arnika Kusin

Social Worker, City Government of Cotabato Cotabato

My profession allows me to influence policies and programs for women of the city government. I've seen the worse of this place and all kinds of poverty by the people. Cotabato city is a host to many people from Mindanao. Those internally displaced by the war go here hoping for a better future. But that is not always the case. This is not the land of milk and honey for them.

Some turn to drug peddlings and petty crimes just to make a living. When you go around you would see children driving "sikads" to help their families made ends meet. These children would grow illiterate, never have the opportunity to go to school and there you see again the intergenerational cycle of poverty. What's the biggest problem of women in the city? They do not have access to economic opportunities because they do not have the skills to match the available jobs.

Violence against women and their children is at an alarming level here. You try to understand this and you would see that the Muslim's culture of silence is one factor that perpetuate this. Mothers do not report when their children are sexually abused because they are ashamed. Sometimes this could spark *rido* so families opt to amicable settlement.

My profession consumes much of my time. Juggling time for family and work is always challenging. I do not complain though because this is what I am called to do. I am humbled to see suffering and that I am put in a position to help these people.



“I believe turning to our faith, Islam, will help our Muslim brothers and sisters... There is a need to strengthen our faith and our values because these will help us cope with life's difficulties.”

I believe that turning to our faith, Islam, would help our Muslim brothers and sisters because what we do could only provide for the material, as well as psychosocial needs of people in difficult situations. There is a need to strengthen our faith and our values because these will help us cope with life's difficulties.

Unity amidst our political differences

Alambay Mantawil-Buday

*Moro National Liberation Front State Leader
North Cotabato*

Growing up with a high ranking MNLF leader as a father is really difficult. We always run because the government forces hunt our family. I had seen the hatreds caused by the wars. It divided our people, even turned the Moro against each other.

Now that the CAB-based BBL is being fought by the MILF, we do not oppose it. It supports and adds to what the Tripoli Agreement has provided for us. We are tired of the wars and divisions. This is the time that we unify and fought as one Bangsamoro people.

As a state leader of the MNLF in North Cotabato, I will use my position and influence to advocate for lasting peace. I can go to the communities myself and explain to the people why we need to support the implementation of the provisions of the CAB. Our children need not go through the sufferings that we have gone through. They should go to school and not take up arms. We all want a peaceful life.



“Our children need not go through the sufferings that we have gone through. They should go to school and not take up arms. We all want a peaceful life.”



Mentor Maria Ida Guigiento leading the workshop on rediscovering women's leadership (top). Women leaders from North Cotabato exchanging ideas on how they understand advocacy (bottom).



MILF Leader Saida Maruhom participating in the identification of Bangsamoro social issues (top). Participants of the Advocacy Planning in Cotabato City having a light moment (bottom).



Moro and IP women crafting their women's agenda (top). Participants of the May 28-29, 2016 Advocacy Planning Workshop in Cotabato City (bottom).

LESSONS LEARNED

The wisdom of the old fuels the idealism of the youth

Advocates from the Lanao provinces are mostly representatives of the young generation. Some of them are new graduates who are still searching for their personal identities and their place in their community.

Their idealism is very vibrant and still something pliant to external influences.

They were mentored by the leading experts on gender in Islam and civil society mavericks, the likes of Atty. Norma Barra, Dr. Hamid Barra and Dipsy Maruhom. The meeting of the minds among the young advocates and the old trailblazers led to a state where the wisdom and experiences of the experts shape the perspectives and values of their posterity. Some advocates even felt awakened by their sharing of their knowledge about the Bangsamoro.

Their common history and similar struggles help them solidify their Bangsamoro identity. Some felt anger because of the oppressions they lived as a minority of the country. Some felt liberated with the thought that their Islamic religion and tradition is not really oppressive to women. Finally, some felt empowered that taking on leadership roles as a Moro women is now being slowly accepted by their largely traditional society.

Engaging men is needed in the work for gender equality

The Maranao society is still a rigid system where tradition highly defines standards of behavior and relations. Advocating for gender equality is seen as an inter-generational mission. The status of women is still regarded by custom inferior to that of man. Power, opportunities, and material resources are still much in the control of men.

Getting a man of stature to speak about the necessity of recognizing women's leadership is a rarity, but it was an accomplishment by the Lanao advocates. Inviting a leading Islamic jurisprudence expert in the person of Dr. Barra is a feat that was not replicated in the other areas.

In the journeying sessions where he served as a resource person, he highlighted the verses in the Holy Quran that recognizes gender equality much less the leadership of women. Having a gatekeeper of tradition talk about gender equality is a radical departure from the norm and this empowered the women further to learn more on the provisions of Islam on women.

The advocates realized the need "to clone" the likes of Dr. Barra in the hope that men will likely listen to their fellow who takes on the cause of women. On the other hand, he advised the young women and the program implementer to work with male religious leaders because they are a powerful voice in the Muslim Ummayah.

Alliances count

Cotabato City is the catch basin of internally displaced survivors of conflict. Hence, it is also home to the different social problems. The women leaders here are a conglomeration of Moro, settlers and indigenous clans who embraced other religions such as Christianity and Iglesia ni Cristo.

The women has a strong advantage when they do the advocacy because most of them are members of organizations and mechanisms that directly engage the government. For example, some of the advocates are local leaders of KALIPI, a socio-civic organization accredited by the Department of Social Welfare and Development to be its extension arm in delivering social services.

This strong ties with the city government gives them the opportunity not only to conduct dialogues with key government officials but to have a say on policy matters as well. Some of them even sits in the City Women's Council to advice the local chief executive on issues affecting women. One of the advocates is also a Social Welfare Officer of the city government which was seen as an advantage given her influence on the department's programs that look after the welfare of women.

Having women in key positions of the government also makes women less hesitant to go to them when they do their lobbying. Women leaders helping and counting on their women constituencies and the other way around is a prospect in Cotabato City.

Local government support is essential to make impact

Local government support is crucial to the advancement of any social agenda. The government remains the locus of power, authority and resources. Partnering with the government to leverage resources and human resource is an achievement in Maguindanao.

The women leaders, together with the UN Women, convinced the provincial government of Maguindanao, through their GAD Focal, to work together in building a women's agenda. Since the two are eyeing a common goal of coming up with a province-wide updated women's agenda, they cooperated in several activities. UN Women provided technical trainings to the staff of Maguindanao for them to be able to conduct gender and conflict-sensitivity analysis of women's issues.

In turn, the LGU provided the logistical and human resource support that will enable the carrying out of a province-wide gathering of women. These women are encouraged to voice out their issues and consolidate them with what they want to push through as program and project for their welfare and advancement.

In Maguindanao, instrumental to the pushing of a Rural Transformation Program are the inputs gathered from the women. The Rural Transformation Program is a local initiative of the provincial government that aims to address poverty by establishing backyard and small-scale economies.

Women needs to work with the powers-that-be to leverage their power. In the process though, they should remain firm on their grounds and not be swayed to political vested interests.

Minority politics is not an obstacle to political participation

Being a part of minority in North Cotabato did not dissuade the women advocates to stand their ground. Lead by Zainab Ampatuan and Alambai Mantawil-Buday, Moro women bravely straddled the corridors of the provincial capitol to talk with the Governor and her officials. They bring with them issues of women, particularly issues of Moro women who are left out in a predominantly non-Moro politicians.

Challenges such as recognition of their role and influence were very evident in the beginning. There was even denial that Moro women can be at the forefront of political leadership because their tradition forbids them to excel in this realm supposedly only for men. This was debunked, however, by the Moro women advocates.

Armed with their knowledge and public speaking acumen, they convinced the provincial officials to look into the issue of adult illiteracy in the 39 barangays of North Cotabato who wished to be included in the core territories of the Bangsamoro.

The North Cotabato experience showed that the voices of the minority are also being listened, too. Advocate should only need to know what they are fighting for and be ready to show evidences of claims because some government officials are convinced to act on one's request only if presented with compelling reasons.

Capacity building is crucial in shaping women leaders

Women from Basilan are grateful of the interventions done by the UN Women, particularly on engaging them to be advocates. Their participation in UN Women activities made them realize the strong need to advocate both for gender equality and peace. In the past, they looked at these two agenda as totally unrelated. Through the interventions, their mindset shifted from being victims of war to humanitarian workers and local peace builders.

The women advocates also gained confidence to engage the local officials. In fact, the women lobbied successfully with no less than Governor Jim S. Hataman as the principal audience. Mary May Julhari, an IP representative, even claimed that she could not imagine herself directly talking with a governor prior to the event. These activities resulted to the clamor for more sustained trainings that will build women's leadership in the context of conflict.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The strife in Mindanao varies from each region and impacts on the lives of women differently. The narratives of the women advocates show that, while the wars have torn lives and caused destruction of properties and relations, these have created a unique opportunity for women to transform their societies. The wars have become a push factor for them to take on non-traditional roles and contribute to the dynamics of the conflict itself.

The following observations present lessons for programming future interventions, developing policies development and creating an enabling environment where women may shape, influence and reform the norms of gender equality, peace and governance in the Bangsamoro.

Connection in diversity

The 79 women leaders who participated in the sessions represent the diversity of the Bangsamoro. Most of them are united by Islamic faith while few practice other indigenous belief systems. Of the Muslims who practice Islam, they are further divided into the major tribes of Maguindanaon, Iranun, Maranao, Yakan, Sama and Tausug. Adding to this layer of differences are other social intersectionalities such as age, social status and political ideologies.

The experience of armed conflicts creates connection among them. Most, if not all, lived through the wars that happened in a historical continuum. They have witnessed how women became helpless victims of armed violence and its ugly consequences. They have known human rights abuses and political exclusions and are forced to live in the margins of a static Filipino identity. These experiences helped them forge their identity as a Bangsamoro people.

Development programming in the Bangsamoro should not look at the women as monolithic entities. While there are shared experiences and common aspirations as a people, distinctions pronounced across age, cultural identities and others must be looked into because the women do not share the same gendered needs and issues.

Opportunities in conflicts

Resiliency is the main character exhibited by the women in Maguindanao, Cotabato City and North Cotabato. The wars had somewhat shifted gender roles and relations so that women take on the traditionally held male role as a family's breadwinners. This is not negative per se because more Bangsamoro women are contributing to the productive spheres. In itself, women are transforming the cultural perception that they have to be constrained in domestic spaces.

The experiences of the women advocates also tell us that they play key roles in the conflict. For instance, active women combatants from the Moro Islamic Liberation Front are likewise active social development workers. The former women combatants from the Moro National Liberation front, who were successfully reintegrated into their communities, are also working in various CSO groups advocating various social agenda, primarily peace. We have also seen the vigor of the Bangsamoro young women who are campaigning for unity and peace in their volunteer works.

The conflicts offer myriad opportunities for women as mediators/arbiters at the community levels. Many are also the first responders when there is an armed clash in the locality. Some take on humanitarian roles in crisis and recovery situations. They were also the loudest voices in the struggle to pass the Bangsamoro Basic Law, knocking on doors of legislators and becoming the mouthpieces to disseminate information about the basic law.

Women can transform the conflicts in the Bangsamoro. They have a certain sphere of influence that, when consolidated, can serve as the building blocks to a lasting peace. Ladderized capacity building interventions focused on leadership and women, peace and security is still a felt need.

Gender equality in Islam

Women advocates hesitate handling leadership roles because they thought Islam prohibits women to participate in the public sphere. Further reflections on the matter convinced the advocates that there should be a distinction to what religion tells them and what culture has nurtured through time. According to Islamic jurist Dr. Hamid Barra, Islam is liberating to women and there are provisions in the text of the holy Quran that places women on equal footing with men. It was culture that actually limited what women can and cannot do. For example, across Bangsamoro tribes, there are stark variations of the privileges accorded to women. Among the Maguindanaons, women can marry someone from the other tribes but Maranaos are restricted to stick to their fellow tribemate. In short, it is not haram for women to lead.

Popularization of religious texts supporting gender equality should be encouraged. More advocacies have to be done internally within families, educational systems and religious institutions. Male religious leaders are influential in the Islamic Ummayah and winning them over as gender advocates can certainly make an impact. Creation of fatwas supporting women's leadership is also recommended because modern legal interpretations of Quranic texts encouraged people to examine context and actual situations rather than stick to fundamental understanding of holy provisions.

Building a Bangsamoro women's agenda

Organizing the Bangsamoro women as a bloc is very challenging considering that they represent diverse voices, agenda and interests. Therefore, popular consultations and negotiations are important in building women's agenda. Ownership and participation of everybody spells the success or failure of the advocacy.

The advocates of Maguindanao showcased this example. A group of eight to nine women initially recognized that armed conflicts perpetuates women's poverty in the province. They also identified that the incidence of violence against women in their area is linked to this larger experience of societal violence. Hence,

they crafted an initial action plan that will address women's poverty and VAWC and that end conflicts. However, they recognized that there may be other issues of women aside from these. As such, the women sought support from the provincial government and conducted a provincial-wide women's stakeholders' consultation. When the consultations were done, other issues surfaced like that prevalence of trafficking, adult illiteracy, external migration of young women, and drugs-related problems. In the end, they prioritized one to two agenda for lobbying in the provincial and regional governments.

Their lobbying efforts bore fruit when the provincial government of Maguindanao launched its Rural Women's Transformation Program. This responds to their clamor for economic opportunities and livelihood programs for women in armed conflict areas. The Rural Women's Transformation Program is considered as an achievement of the Maguindanao women advocates.

Negotiations and compromises, therefore, are essentials to building a women's agenda. Working initially in small groups is a good way to begin. It is very important that the core group is strong and that the members possess the needed capacities and support.

UN Women and other development partners in Mindanao may work further into the creation of platforms and venues wherein Bangsamoro women can aggregate their interest. The October 2016 culminating activity wherein 60 women leaders presented their agenda before the ARMM government is a good platform bridging the authorities and the grassroots women leaders. It was an ideal governance engagement where the women and leaders shared accountability in building their communities.

Geographical issues in social services for women in armed conflicts

Women and their families in Maguindanao, North Cotabato and Lanao provinces have better access to services both from government and non-government agencies providing assistance to conflict-affected communities. In times of humanitarian crises, they can be easily reached because of their geographic proximity to Cotabato City, the center of the ARMM.

Meanwhile, access to communities in the island provinces has been a challenge to service providers due to unstable security situation and high cases of kidnappings perpetrated by the ASG. As a result, women in these communities have less access to social services, both in times of crisis and peace.

Access to information and participation is likewise affected by this geographic variable. During the consultations and dialogues on the BBL, it was mostly those in the mainland who were engaged. It was evident that women from Cotabato City, Maguindanao, North Cotabato and Lanao provinces were more advanced on their knowledge about the peace process developments because they were the ones who were reached.

The ARMM government must devise a mechanism for island-provinces to be included in the development processes. One way to do this is to fortify the capacities of the LGUs on women, peace and security so that they themselves will be the first responders when humanitarian situations arise. LGUs should be capacitated more on how to strengthen programming for women, peace and security.

Area-specific recommendations

Cotabato City

Capability Building and Government Assistance for the Internally Displaced

As a catch-basin for internally displaced individuals due to conflicts, many bakwit (local term for the IDPs) women and their families in Cotabato City find themselves in especially difficult circumstances. For survival, they would resort to engaging in transactions where there is fast cash inflow, which sometimes mean illegal activities such as drug peddling, prostitution and trafficking.

To address these, government support and capability building interventions that will empower women are critical.

Maguindanao and North Cotabato

Ensuring Social Protection and Fighting Religious Discrimination

Maguindanao and North Cotabato have been witness to the most violent conflicts between the government and Moro revolutionaries. As a result, many women in these areas are widowed by the wars, thus, aggravating poverty. As such, the local government should look into this gendered dimension of poverty and design more social protection programs focused on women.

North Cotabato also hosts a community of Muslim minorities. The women of these areas believe that by popularizing the history of the Bangsamoro, the province will be more inclusive to them. Thus, inter-faith programs may bridge the gap between the Muslims and non-Muslim women in this areas. The academic institutions are also potential entry points to further the advocacy of popularizing the Bangsamoro history.

Lanao del Sur and Lanao del Norte

Embracing the Bangsamoro and Muslim identity

The Lanao advocates delved on the question of Bangsamoro versus Muslim identity. They have debated on which should come first in fulfilling their duties: as Muslimah or as citizens of the Bangsamoro. They resolved that these two identities should not be in contrast with each other and that they should be mutually reinforcing. Almost all are young women who are struggling to find themselves, build a career and contribute to the flourishing of their communities.

Continuing advocacy should engage the youth in these areas, as recently, they have become fertile grounds of radicalization. The academe remains a strategic venue to raise awareness about their history as a Bangsamoro. Constant information dissemination about developments in the peace process coupled with Islamic values formation are also highly encouraged in these areas.

Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi

Improving governance and GAD mainstreaming

Considering the geographic distance of the three-island provinces from the ARMM, Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi, sometimes are excluded, though unconsciously, from the participatory processes of governance. Sadly, in terms of aid from international development organizations, these areas are avoided because of security issues.

It is highly recommended that the LGUs of these three areas maximize their Women Peace Centers to respond to the needs of the women and men living in areas of armed conflict. Organizing more women's groups may also benefit these areas. The women initially trained by UN Women may serve as the core groups because they already have a certain level of capacity on how to advocate for the agenda on women, peace and security.

Encouraging the proliferation of CSOs in these areas will also be healthy for governance because there will be arms that can extend the work of the government especially to the far-flung barangays. Investments in organizing grassroots women's groups rather than training individuals can shift existing governance dynamics.

Basilan and Sulu women are likened to the women of Maguindanao and North Cotabato as they carried the brunt and cruelties of the wars. Compounding their sufferings are the presence of terrorists and other kidnap-for-ransom gangs in their areas. Consequently, their pressing issue is the severity of violence against women experienced in the home and in their immediate community.

These islands are also hosts to the widows and orphans of war who easily become the recruits and sympathizers of the Abu Sayyaf. The feeling of being left behind coupled by cyclical violence is one of the ingredients in raising would-be extremists.

Hence, there is an evident need for psychosocial trauma healing for women who are survivors of the wars and violence. In addressing the feeling of exclusion that fosters extremism, institutions should focus on peace advocacies in these two areas. Programs on values formation for the youth are highly encouraged to be developed by the LGUs. This can curtail the cycle of violence perpetuated in Basilan and Sulu.

Meanwhile, women from Tawi-Tawi demand accountability from their government leaders in the utilization of the GAD budget to fund women-focused activities.

The LGU should enhance their mainstreaming of GAD in their area. Effective and efficient utilization of the GAD budget can assist in this matter, especially in addressing issues that affect women in this area. Shared accountability can be promoted with the core group of women advocates so that implementation and utilization are ensured.

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UN Women supports United Nations Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to implement these standards. It stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on five priority areas: increasing women's leadership and participation; ending violence against women; engaging women in all aspects of peace and security processes; enhancing women's economic empowerment; and making gender equality central to national development planning and budgeting. UN Women also leads, coordinates and promotes the United Nations system's work in advancing gender equality.



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