

Bottom-up Peacebuilding: Role of Grassroots and Local Actors in the Mindanao Peace Process

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The people of Muslim Mindanao in the southern Philippines overwhelmingly approved, in a plebiscite in 2019, the creation of a new and more autonomous region, raising hopes that the decades-long conflict in Mindanao would soon end. This article asserts that the Mindanao peace process is not just about peace talks between the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, but it should also include the effective participation of grassroots organizations and community-based peace advocates in resolving local conflicts. It evaluates four significant contributions of grassroots-level, local organizations and NGOs to the peace process: (1) combating violent extremism, (2) broadening peacebuilding by local women's organizations, (3) solving local conflicts and *rido* (clan wars), and (4) ceasefire monitoring and civilian protection.

Keywords peacebuilding, Mindanao, bottom-up peacebuilding, conflict resolution, violent extremism, ethnic separatism

Introduction

The Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) was enacted by the Philippine Congress in 2018, creating a self-ruled region for the Bangsamoro Muslims in Mindanao, southern Philippines. Subsequently, in January 2019, a plebiscite established that most people in the Muslim provinces wished to be included in Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) officials and key commanders were appointed as governing authorities in the new region. In September 2019, the normalization process made significant progress with the initial batch of MILF combatants and weapons being decommissioned. This peace process, which came after four decades of armed conflict between the MILF and the Philippine government, was welcomed as a much-needed step to bring about sustainable peace and development in

Mindanao.

The establishment of a new and expanded autonomous region, governed by the MILF leaders and their allies, although significant, does not eradicate the various challenges to sustainable peace in the region. The peacebuilding process continues to be threatened by violent extremism, feuding political clans, and calls for separatism by other rebel groups. Therefore, the conclusion of a peace agreement, and the creation of a new autonomous region, should not be perceived as the end of the peace process.¹

This article asserts that the Mindanao peace process should not be limited only to the main parties in the peace negotiations. Instead, the Mindanao peace process should be regarded as the sum of many parts. Conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts by grassroots organizations and local civil society organizations are all essential for pushing forward the overall peace process. Despite what appears to be delay and ambiguity in the formal peace process, peacebuilding from the grassroots level has remained vibrant, even in the current context that includes the emergence of violent extremist groups. The peace process in Mindanao is being protected by a community-driven approach. This article examines the grassroots actors contributing to the Mindanao peace process in recent years. It addresses the following questions: (1) Who are the grassroots actors and leading local organizations supporting the Mindanao peace process? (2) How do they contribute to peacebuilding? (3) What is the impact of their contributions on the formal Track 1 peacebuilding process? and (4) What are the limitations of their impact on the peace process? This article aims to examine how the most recent activities of grassroots and community actors, including Moro women, can help make the Mindanao peace process more sustainable, culturally relevant, and inclusive. It analyzes the complementarity of bottom-up and horizontal peacebuilding on the one hand with the Track 1 peace process on the other in four key peacebuilding mechanisms: (1) combating violent extremism, (2) broadening peacebuilding by local women's organizations, (3) solving local conflicts and *rido* (clan wars), and (4) ceasefire monitoring and civilian protection.

Peacebuilding Organizations in Mindanao

This article analyzes how Tracks 2 and 3 can support and complement Track 1 of the peace process. Definitions of the three tracks can be summarized as follows:

Track 1 involves the primary actors (government and rebel movement) at the negotiating table including political officials, third-party mediators, and decision-makers both at the national and international levels.

Track 2 includes civil society actors, local government leaders, informal influencers,

think tanks, the private sector, and researchers.

Track 3 is grassroots-driven peace work done by local communities, community-based people's organizations, and individuals within the broader population (Interpeace 2017).

Mindanao is home to an array of civil society actors and grassroots organizations undertaking a range of functions, including supporting socio-economic development, advising public policy, undertaking community-based programs, as well as pursuing peacebuilding efforts. Mindanao has incubated a number of community-based people's organizations that serve very specific localities. While NGOs are usually formed to serve others and provide public goods, people's organizations are commonly grassroots formations whose purpose is to advance the interests of their members. People's organizations are usually made up of volunteers from disadvantaged sectors of society who work towards their own social and economic well-being, as opposed to NGOs that also employ full-time staff. Among the main objectives of NGOs is to support and enhance grassroots and people's organizations (Turner 2011; Abbu 2014).

NGOs and people's organizations often form alliances, or cluster together in "network organizations," to acquire the advantages of scale (Turner 2011, 94). This institutionalized collaboration gives them the ability to have more impact, as opposed to individual NGOs and grassroots organizations which are small and have limited resources and capacity. By forming an alliance or a network, these actors are able to gain more access to policymakers, facilitate collaboration among NGOs, provide leadership, and marshal support from elsewhere. They also become more visible. The largest civil society network in the Philippines is the Caucus of Development NGOs (CODE-NGO), and its regional partner is the Mindanao Caucus of Development NGO Networks (MINCODE), a coalition of twelve network organizations with over 400 individual NGO members (*ibid.*). Another umbrella organization is the Consortium of Bangsamoro Civil Society (CBCS), a solidarity network of Bangsamoro NGOs and other civil society organizations dedicated to campaigning for peace, human rights, good governance, and development in Mindanao (Peace Insight 2016).

Conflict Prevention by Countering Violent Extremism

Grassroots, bottom-up peacebuilding efforts in Mindanao take place amidst the presence of rebel groups advocating for separatism, violent extremist groups, and warring political clans, all posing significant obstacles to peacebuilding. Several local Islamist groups have pledged allegiance to ISIS. These include the Abu Sayyaf Group, the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF), the Maute Group, Ansar al-Khalifah Philippines, and Khilafah Islamiyah Mindanao

(Institute for Autonomy and Governance 2017). The delay in the implementation of prior agreements forged with the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the MILF in the region has been cited as one of the reasons for the emergence of extremist factions. Meanwhile, supporters of the Mindanao peace process have argued that the successful conclusion of the peace process can help prevent violent extremism as it may help minimize motivations to incite violence as the means to establish an Islamic state (Loesch 2017).

The Institute for Autonomy and Governance (IAG) and other organizations are now engaging in efforts to counter pro-ISIS sentiments in Muslim Mindanao. This Mindanao-based public policy center conducts technical assistance, capacity-building training, and research to promote good governance and genuine autonomy in the region. In the context of countering violent extremism, the IAG, in 2017, examined how vulnerable Muslim youth were towards recruitment and radicalization by militant groups. Its overall research question was “How vulnerable are the youth in Muslim Mindanao to radicalization, recruitment, and violent extremist views and beliefs?” (Institute for Autonomy and Governance 2017, 3). IAG held field research activities in the Muslim-majority provinces of Maguindanao, Lanao del Sur, Basilan, and Sulu. The research findings indicated that, while there was no large-scale radicalization of young Muslims, there were a minority of young people in all four provinces who expressed sympathy for extremist groups, believing they were “fighting to defend Islam” and “fighting against oppression” (ibid., 61). Youth respondents also confirmed the presence of recruiters from violent extremist groups in their communities. This research indicated that, in the absence of an effective counter-narrative program and a relevant state policy, Muslim youth remain vulnerable to religious extremist narratives, views, and interpretations by violent extremist groups (ibid.).

This initiative by the IAG supports the conflict resolution and peacebuilding processes in Mindanao. The Institute provides evidence-based research to inform policymakers, the security sector, government agencies, religious authorities, and local communities concerning the rise of violent extremism and the vulnerability of the Muslim youth. Policy-oriented studies, such as those by IAG, are necessary for providing the empirical data to inform the appropriate policy interventions and strategies. According to the IAG report, there is a need for a comprehensive study to examine and determine the underlying root causes that drive radicalization and violent extremism in Muslim Mindanao (ibid.).

The role of local religious leaders is also quite significant in combatting the emergence of extremism. Their role became extremely important during the crisis in Marawi² as they could delegitimize the claims of the pro-ISIS Maute group (Cabato 2017). One of the most important contributors to the peace process is the Bishop-Ulama Conference (BUC) which was established in 1996 and consists of Protestant bishop-pastors, Catholic bishops, and Muslim *ulama*. This institution contributes towards building a region where different religions

co-exist harmoniously. The involvement of BUC highlights the important role of interfaith dialogue in promoting peace and countering violent extremism. Interfaith dialogue advances mutual understanding between people of different religions and facilitates cooperative actions along religious lines (Rasul 2016).

During the conflict in Marawi, in July 2017, the BUC organized the Multi-Sectoral Peace Conference in Cagayan de Oro City, Mindanao. Religious leaders of Mindanao, military officials, local government officials, grassroots actors, and NGOs participated in the conference with the aim of exploring ways to prevent the reigniting of Christian-Muslim tensions and youth recruitment by extremist groups. BUC and its dialogue partners strongly endorsed peace education with Islamic concepts to counter the rise of extremism. They emphasized the key role of the madrasa system in raising young Muslims who shun violent extremism. If given sufficient policy and material support, the madrasas are effective instruments for combating extremist views among Muslim youth (Bangon Marawi Multi-Sectoral Peace Conference 2017). Peace education should, therefore, be promoted even beyond Muslim Mindanao. The Philippine Council for Islam and Democracy developed an Islamic peace education model as early as 2010. A peace education initiative based on Islamic values is likely to receive more support from Muslim religious leaders. Peace advocates emphasize that the inclusion of religious actors, such as BUC, is critical to the success of the peace process (Rasul 2016).

Broadening Peacebuilding by Local Women's Organizations

Another important component of the comprehensive peace process is expanding the role of women in peacebuilding. Women's organizations formed a lobbying group in the Philippine Congress, Women Engaged in Action (We Act 1325), to ensure the inclusion of gendered provisions in the BOL. The network has thirty-six member organizations nationwide, including Mindanao-based organizations such as Nisa ul haqq, UnYPhil Women, Tarbilang Foundation, Balay Mindanaw, and Luoah Sug Bangsamoro (Nario-Galace 2015). Consequently, the peace agreement was hailed for its strong provisions on women's rights as well as on women's political, social, and economic participation. Eight out of the sixteen articles of the BOL contain provisions on women's rights, their roles in governance and development, and protection against violence (Santiago 2015, 12).

Women NGOs' Contributions through Peace Education

Educating the public on Bangsamoro history is another contribution of women's organizations to the Mindanao peace process. Peace advocates and Moro women believe that widespread support for the peace process can only be garnered

by educating Bangsamoro and Filipino people in Bangsamoro history. The Women's Organization Movement in the Bangsamoro (WOMB) is an association of women's organizations that helps the peace process by engaging in peace advocacy. It conducts workshops and trainings to impart strategies of policy advocacy to women's organizations and peace advocates. In this way WOMB also contributes to the achievement of Bangsamoro autonomy (Kinjiyo 2016). Women's organizations have been looking at intensifying their peace education work, believing that it is a potent force in changing mindsets, beliefs, and attitudes. They argue that the majority of Filipinos would support the Mindanao peace process once they completely understand the Bangsamoro history of injustice and suffering (Kinjiyo 2017). It was also suggested that the Bangsamoro narrative be made more evident in basic education and in school textbooks. The public must understand, they hold, that Bangsamoro history has been marked by historical injustice, especially to women, and that the peace process is the right approach for rectifying this injustice (Nario-Galace 2016).

The Role of Women's Organizations in Helping War Evacuees

Another contribution to the peace process by women's organizations is providing assistance to war evacuees. The *Al-Mujadilah* Foundation, a women's NGO based in Marawi, was at the forefront of response at the height of the Marawi conflict in 2017. They provided aid to 220,000 affected civilians, saving many lives in the city. They observed that even in evacuation centers women and children were vulnerable to sexual harassment and gender-based violence. As a result, women volunteers and aid workers were encouraged to be active in aid distribution as they would be more sensitive to women's issues. Apart from providing aid, they also talked to the evacuees for psychosocial support and served as translators for other humanitarian workers who were not Maranao (the local language) speakers (Adel 2017).

The United Youth of the Philippines-Women (Unyphil-women)'s programmatic beneficiaries are the women of Mindanao, particularly those in vulnerable, conflict-affected communities. After the Marawi conflict, Unyphil-women provided much-needed mental health and psychosocial assistance to women and children who were displaced by the conflict, and even to women who were managing the evacuation centers (Oxfam 2018). Such needs could not be addressed by a Track 1 approach, but the involvement of women's organizations like Unyphil-women in providing gendered assistance to internally displaced persons is a significant contribution of local peacebuilding actors.

Community-Based Mediation and Resolving Rido

Rido, or clan wars, are prominent in Muslim Mindanao and they have complicated

the already tense peace process. Therefore, in order to resolve them, community-based efforts towards conflict resolution have become a significant part of peacebuilding in the region. Ethnic Maranaos and Maguindanaons in central Mindanao refer to clan feuds as *rido*, while the Tausugs of the Sulu archipelago call it *pagbanta* (to threaten). *Rido* is an enduring conflict between families and clans that may lead to a spell of reciprocal violence triggered by an insult to the honor of a family (Torres III 2007). Recurring *rido* cases are sparked either by squabbles over land ownership or deep-seated political rivalry among families or clans (Unson 2017b). Recurring violence can last through years, decades, or even generations, claiming thousands of lives, ruining property, and displacing affected communities (Cabalza 2017).

Rido creates demand for weapons, forces people to align with extremist or rebel groups to protect themselves, breeds a culture of violence, and prevents economic development (Abduraji 2017). It tends to intersect with armed rebellion and other forms of armed violence in Mindanao. Many armed confrontations in the past involving rebel groups and the military were actually triggered by a local *rido*. According to *Rido: Clan Feuding and Conflict Management in Mindanao*, nearly 1,300 *rido* cases were recorded between the 1930s and 2005, killing more than 5,500 people in eleven Mindanao provinces (Torres III 2007, 8). Most recently, in June 2020, amid the threat of COVID-19 and despite the realization of the peace agreement, 12,000 residents (mostly women and children) at the border of Maguindanao and Cotabato provinces were displaced due to the *rido* of two families over land disputes. As their villages voted to be part of BARMM governed by the MILF, residents asked why peace remains elusive (Fernandez 2020).

While the Mindanao peace process has been focusing on achieving political settlements with the MILF and MNLF, *rido* as one major security problem in Mindanao has been largely neglected. Since these *rido* cases add another layer to the armed conflict, solving them is an inherent part of the peace process. Many organizations are employing community-based mediation in their bids to resolve *rido*. Tumikang Sama Sama (TSS), which in the Tausug language of the Sulu Province means “Together We Move Forward,” is one such organization. It consists of reputable community mediators who wish to solve *rido*-induced issues in the Sulu province. In 2009 TSS started as a program of the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD Centre). Since then, it has been deeply involved in the Track 3 process. It also regards *rido* as a major source of insecurity in Sulu province (Virola-Gardiola 2012).

TSS has become a vast local, grassroots organization of well-respected community mediators who want to eradicate localized armed conflicts in Sulu Province arising from *rido*. TSS wields a mix of cultural traditions and formal legal mechanisms to address these issues. The organization tackled eighty-two such cases in the Sulu Province from 2010 to 2014, facilitating the

formal settlement of forty-eight of them (Abduraji 2017). TSS conducts shuttle mediation, the initial phase of the mediation process, involving a lot of shuttling back and forth rather than formal negotiations between the parties. Using this mechanism, local mediators consolidate the demands and issues from both sides. It then seeks the active participation of community elders, religious leaders, and village and local officials. Ceasefire agreements among warring parties are also facilitated by TSS, pending the peaceful and final settlement of clan conflicts. The main outcome of TSS initiatives is a peace covenant between the parties. Finally, TSS again convenes the families, after the signing of the covenant, and brings along religious leaders who accentuate the need for unity, forgiveness, and reconciliation (Virola-Gardiola 2012).

Meanwhile, in the Muslim-majority province of Maguindanao, in central Mindanao, towns are known for having the most cases of bloody clan feuds throughout Muslim Mindanao (Unson 2017a). In resolving decades-old rido cases, the provincial government's Maguindanao Task Force on Reconciliation and Unification, and the Regional Reconciliation and Unification Commission-Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, are actively supported by local organizations such as the United Youth for Peace and Development, Confederated Descendants of Rajah Mamalu Inc., and the Tiyakap Kalilintad Inc. These local organizations have a particular focus on monitoring armed conflicts in local communities, protecting civilians, and mitigating violence associated with rido. From 2013 to 2017, they amicably settled eighty rido cases involving Maguindanao clans (Unson 2017b).

The lack of access to prosecutors and criminal courts has contributed to the proliferation of violent rido in Maguindanao. Hence, grassroots peace advocates have acknowledged the need for the extensive involvement of influential religious and traditional leaders (datu and sultan) in settling clan wars. Only traditional leaders who are not related to one of the two parties to the conflict are tapped as mediators, while the facilitation of the settlement is mostly done by Maguindanao's provincial government (Unson 2017a).

Settling clan feuds can protect the overall peace process. However, clan feuds may not be directly managed and mitigated by the official peace negotiations between the government and the Moro rebel groups. In this regard, the role of community-based mediation is as critical as that of the Mindanao peace process in terms of bringing peace, security, and development to the people of Mindanao.

Ceasefire Monitoring and Civilian Protection

Immediately after the start of the peace negotiations between the Philippine government and the MILF in 1997, a ceasefire agreement between the two parties was signed. In 2009 the ceasefire accord was complemented by the Philippine

government-MILF Agreement on the Civilian Protection Component (CPC), establishing a mechanism to protect civilians from hostilities between armed parties. The International Monitoring Team (IMT), set up in 2004, monitors the implementation of the ceasefire agreement and the civilian protection mechanism (Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process 2020). The IMT is composed of representatives from the governments of Japan, Norway, Brunei, Libya, Indonesia, Malaysia and the European Union.³ Monitoring the implementation of the ceasefire pact and the CPC is an essential component of the Mindanao Track 1 peace process.

Assisting the IMT in fulfilling its task are grassroots-based peace organizations such as the Bantay Ceasefire (Ceasefire Watch), Mindanao People's Caucus, the Non-Violent Peace Force, the Mindanao Human Rights Action Centre, and the Muslim Organizations of Government Officials and Professionals. They were invited by the government and the MILF to become part of the civilian protection component (Arnado 2012). Also known as unarmed civilian protection, the role of the civilian protection component entails direct protection of civilians, reduction of localized armed encounters, and ensuring the primacy of local actors (Duncan 2017). While civilian protection work is not new to these NGOs, doing it under the auspices of the IMT and the Track 2 peace process provides them the opportunity to work within a recognized formal Track 1 mechanism and to institutionalize protection work (Arnado 2012).

Formed in 2003, Bantay Ceasefire is a closely networked grassroots movement of NGOs and other civil society actors representing indigenous peoples, as well as Muslim and Christian communities (Colleta 2006). Bantay Ceasefire has become a vital initiative coming from the grassroots communities working to prevent hostilities in their own communities by assisting the ceasefire mechanism, reporting violations of the ceasefire agreement, and by reducing threats to the safety and security of civilian populations (*ibid.*). Volunteers are mostly residents of communities that are perennially affected by armed conflicts. Because they are familiar with the actual situation on the ground, they can easily spot or predict a brewing conflict between the military and the rebels who are expected to observe a ceasefire. They can immediately inform ground commanders of armed parties of a potential encounter and request civil society partners, including religious leaders and respected elders, to conduct a mission to the potential conflict area to try to defuse the situation (Duncan 2017). In every instance that volunteers successfully prevent an armed conflict, they also prevent civilians from becoming internally displaced persons. Bantay Ceasefire is a seminal experience in grassroots-based conflict early warning engagement. It directly involves the actual victims of conflict in early warning work (Miclat 2011).

Meanwhile, the inclusion of two Moro NGOs—the Mindanao Human Rights Action Centre, and the Muslim Organizations of Government Officials and Professionals—in the CPC is an indication of how Moro civil society has been

enhanced in recent years. Long-standing programs and assistance to Moro civil society by donors, both foreign and domestic, have begun to make a difference over the last decade (Rood 2013).

In 2017 Moro civil society significantly contributed to the CPC during the Marawi conflict. Humanitarian relief teams utilized a peace corridor, jointly set up and secured by the Philippine military and the MILF.⁴ The peace corridor was utilized in rescuing civilians trapped in their homes in Marawi. It was also used to safely deliver relief services for the displaced residents. The United Bangsamoro Humanitarian Assistance (UBHA),⁵ a network of Bangsamoro civil society organizations, was the primary group tapped to deliver the urgently needed relief items, including food aid, for the internally displaced civilians using the peace corridor. The creation of UBHA by Moro civil society groups was aimed at consolidating efforts and drawing up strategies to effectively deliver humanitarian assistance to individuals and families affected by the Marawi conflict (Bangsamoro Development Agency 2017).

Limitations of Grassroots Organizations and NGOs

Every peacebuilding actor faces difficulties and barriers as it performs its mission, and grassroots and peacebuilding organizations are no exception. One major challenge to peacebuilding actors is weak security, due to the presence of non-state armed groups, terrorists, and unlicensed weapons. For instance, militant groups have abducted individual members of a peacebuilding network of NGOs, the Mindanao Peaceweavers, several times, which is distressing for the network itself and its members (Garred 2018). In this regard, there are tricky issues which even major networks find it challenging to navigate and that were amplified during these disturbances. These include Muslim-Christian-Indigenous tensions over their minority and special rights, and the issue of ancestral domain within the autonomous region.

Given the volatile security situation in Mindanao, the Philippine military encourages peacebuilding actors, including those with humanitarian operations, to closely coordinate with its units so that they can be given security assistance and also establish meaningful collaboration towards achieving sustainable peace at the grassroots level. The military has generally been considered a humanitarian actor and peacebuilding agent, and it sees itself as an important agent in protecting the formal peace process. In fact, as a matter of policy, the military has provided institutional, operational, and logistical support to the peace process. It has even successfully forged working alliances and collaboration with civilian stakeholders, including peacebuilding NGOs. However, there are some NGOs which are not comfortable working with the military due to the military's negative image on the ground in previous decades (Woon 2015), or that choose

to maintain the humanitarian principle of neutrality.

Powerful local politicians, rebel commanders and warlords in Muslim Mindanao can also limit the trickle-down effectiveness of peacebuilding organizations and networks. Because of weak governance in general, the dominance of powerful local warlords and political clans has been deeply entrenched in the Philippines, including in Mindanao. Consequently, powerful local dynastic politicians, embodying state authority, play a key role in allegedly informal conflict-management mechanisms, covering localized conflicts and clan wars (Adam and Verbrugge 2014). Strangely enough, NGOs sometimes need to have harmonious links with local political clans and warlords, who can afford them protection from violence and allow them to access conflict-afflicted communities (Espesor 2017). Some peacebuilding alliances admitted that the success of their operations came at a price, since their mediation work depended on the approval and support of warlords and political clans (Adam and Verbrugge 2014). With this arrangement, local civil society networks allow the local bosses to influence their operations regarding the manner, location, and intended recipients of their projects (Espesor 2017).

Another challenge that Mindanao NGOs are facing is declining financial support from external funding agencies. Civil society actors admit that, in recent years, the shortage of funds has impeded the operations of Mindanao-based NGO networks (Garred 2018), an unintended consequence of their reliance on external donor agencies. In the case of fostering social cohesion and mutual understanding, for instance, funding shortfalls delay or prevent the face-to-face general assemblies that cultivate a collective understanding of the context and facilitate joint planning and action (ibid.).

Furthermore, women are similarly disadvantaged in their involvement in community-based conflict resolution mechanisms due to prevailing patriarchal socio-political structures in Mindanao. For instance, in Mindanao's conflict-afflicted villages, *lupong tagapamayapa* (peace councils), which are formed to mediate local conflicts, such as *rido*, are led and dominated by men, while women are effectively excluded from participation as either mediators or persons involved in the disputes (Kubota and Takashi 2016). Women's organizations must still face the challenge of the strong influence of cultural beliefs and patriarchal practices that precludes them from addressing peace and security issues specific to women.

Conclusion

The Mindanao peace process is a clear case study of the significance of a bottom-up approach to peacebuilding involving Tracks 2 and 3 actors. It is timely to holistically explore a peacebuilding approach that is initiated by grassroots actors,

most especially by the vulnerable communities themselves. Grassroots actors can contribute to mitigating and resolving those issues that may threaten the sustainability of the overall peace process.

Now that the MILF has begun essentially to govern the newly established BARMM, grassroots and local civil society organizations should directly engage Moro officials and assist them in addressing security issues that still threaten vulnerable communities in Muslim Mindanao. Despite the successful conclusion of the peace talks, Track 2 and 3 actors should continue their peacebuilding initiatives, in close coordination with BARMM officials, who come mostly from the MILF, so as to effectively plug the gaps in top-down peace work.

In this regard, mainstream national and international peace actors supporting the Mindanao peace process must also capacitate local and community-based organizations down to the village level, not only to lead in conflict resolution, but also to spearhead the prevention and mitigation initiatives necessary for reducing the vulnerabilities of their respective communities. While it is still expected that the national government and the MILF will perform the implementation of the peace agreement and the BOL, the role of community-based mediation is as critical as the Mindanao peace process in terms of bringing peace, security, and development to local communities that are affected by localized armed conflicts. The women of Mindanao also play crucial roles in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. The participation of women has broadened the scope of the Mindanao peace process because peacemaking is not only about ending armed hostilities involving war actors, but also about building peace. In this regard women's agency may be actively utilized in the transformation of the political, economic, and social structures that perpetuate injustice and deprivation affecting vulnerable sectors, including women.

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Notes

1. Report of the High-Level Independent Panel on UN Peace Operations on Uniting our Strengths for Peace: Politics, Partnership and People (A/70/95-S/2015/446), June 17, 2015. <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/N1518145.pdf> (accessed June 30, 2020).
2. In May 2017, a large group of Islamic State (ISIS)-inspired militants attacked and occupied for five months the City of Marawi, a Muslim-majority urban area in Mindanao. The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) launched massive ground and air assaults to

flush out the militants, culminating in October 2017 with the killing of the dreaded leaders of the militants, Isnilon Hapilon and Omar Maute, by the special forces of the AFP.

3. Terms of Reference of the International Monitoring Team, February 10, 2011. See: <https://peace.gov.ph/2016/11/terms-reference-international-monitoring-team-imt/> (accessed June 30, 2020).

4. The peace corridor runs from Malabang town to Marawi City in the province of Lanao del Sur, a distance of about seventy kilometers.

5. UBHA is composed of Bangsamoro Development Agency (BDA), City Government of Cotabato, League of Bangsamoro Organizations (LBO), Union of Muslim Youth Organization (UMYO), Mindanao Alliance for Peace (MAP), Consortium of Bangsamoro Civil Society (CBCS), United Youth of the Philippines Women, Inc. (UNYPHIL-Women), Federation of Bangsamoro Civil Society Organization (FBCSO), Bangsamoro Shariah Lawyers League of the Philippines (BSSLPI), Women Organization of Muslim Bangsamoro (WOMB), Tabun Halal, Peoples Coalition for ARMM Reform and Transformation (PCART).

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