

# Community-Based Development in Conflict- Affected Areas of the Philippines

February 2013



**The Asia Foundation**

## Executive Summary

Over the past decade, community-based development (CBD) programs have become among the most common and widely-accepted methods for providing assistance to conflict-affected regions. These trends partly reflect an increased sensitivity to conflict dynamics and a commitment to extend the benefits of development to conflict-affected communities in order to help them rebuild infrastructure and improve livelihoods. In the Philippines, the government has adopted CBD as a core component of its strategy to address internal armed conflict, and nearly all of the major international development partners are implementing some form of CBD programming to support conflict-affected communities.

Community-based development<sup>1</sup> refers to a broad spectrum of development program approaches that channel the benefits of aid directly to the community level and often (though not all cases) prioritize participation and ownership by community members in program implementation. Asian experiences have shown that CBD projects can address a range of challenges in sensitive, conflict-affected environments, including economic deprivation, weak social cohesion, and weak local institutions. While providing basic services and infrastructure, many CBD projects have established processes that allow for increased community-level dialogue and input on project planning and implementation with the intention of generating important social benefits beyond the tangible outputs of the project.

However, despite more than a decade of major CBD programs in conflict-affected areas in the Philippines, the impact of many is unclear. While some recent evidence points to a mixture of modest, positive outcomes, it also shows some worrying trends. A recent

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<sup>1</sup> This broad definition includes community-driven development (CDD), among other models for community-level programs.

study found that the introduction of a CBD project in areas controlled by the New People's Army (CPP/NPA) often led to an increase in violence. However, in areas where the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) is present, the same project had the opposite effect—a reduction in violence. Furthermore, recent evaluations of a few large-scale CBD programs in Indonesia and the Philippines indicate that these programs had mixed or neutral effects on critical issues such as state-society relations and improving local governance.

International development agencies have often made claims that CBD approaches are helping to address the causes of violent conflict in the Philippines but, as yet, there is little evidence to substantiate these claims. Unfortunately, the vast majority of CBD programs have not undertaken systematic monitoring of their social impact, so little is actually known about how CBD projects impact conflict-affected communities. Furthermore, there has been very little comparative analysis of the many approaches to CBD in conflict-affected areas, and the implications for local stakeholders. Every development agency has adopted its own approach to CBD programs, and the result has been a wide spectrum of models, regulations, and requirements.

This study was undertaken to provide some clarity and guidance on CBD in conflict-affected areas. By drawing evidence from a wide set of programs and community experiences, this research aims to inform future programs, and stimulate new thinking and dialogue on how CBD programs can most effectively address the problems of prolonged armed conflicts in the Philippines. The study also provides a theoretical and operational framework to understand local conflict and security conditions, and adapt programs on a community-by-community basis so that they can respond more effectively and reduce risk

of exacerbating violent conflicts.

### ***Conflict dynamics and implications for community-based development***

In recent years, understanding of armed conflict dynamics in the Philippines has improved considerably. As a result, some key assumptions that have driven emphasis on community-level development assistance may need to be revisited. Recent research shows that localized conflict dynamics in the Philippines do not follow a common pattern. Conflict dynamics in one community may stand in stark contrast to neighboring communities, where a different configuration of political actors, family or clan networks, ethnic groups, security forces, and insurgents may result in very different local conflict conditions. By looking at particular dynamics—such as local elite political dynamics, local elite relations with the municipal level of government, presence of armed insurgent groups, ethnic diversity, relations with national government, and threat from criminal or other armed groups—this study has developed a typology of conflict dynamics in the Philippines to analyze the drivers of local stability and draw some implications for community-based development projects.

Development partners have generally assumed that working at the community level insulates their projects from larger, extra-communal conflict dynamics, most notably state-insurgent conflicts. Many development programs in conflict areas are based on macro- or national-level conflict analysis, without serious consideration of local-level dynamics, and differences between sub-regions, and the implications of these for projects. As results from this study show, projects that succeeded in one locality can have very different outcomes in another. In some cases, projects that were intended to support peace efforts or recovery have led to further polarization of the community.

Drawing on the recent World Development Report (WDR) 2011: Conflict, Security and Development, our study investigates how CBD programs are helping to address violence and fragility by (i) restoring confidence at the community level (e.g., improving social cohesion, and restoring confidence in government) and (ii) transforming institutions (e.g., strengthening local mechanisms for problem solving and collective action). These “transformative outcomes” are important elements of the Theories of Change used by most CBD projects. By distinguishing between “development outcomes” (e.g., reduced poverty, improved health and education) and “transformative outcomes”, this study classifies the common theories of change used by development agencies to justify and design CBD programs. Based on the WDR 2011 framework, the key to ending protracted cycles of conflict and fragility in the Philippines is to ensure that CBD programs are having a significant, positive impact on transformative outcomes, in addition to the development outcomes that may improve short-term conditions in the conflict area.

### ***Comparative Review of 15 CBD Projects***

The research team conducted in-depth reviews of 15 community-based development projects (supported by nine international development agencies) in conflict-affected areas of the Philippines. The team conducted interviews in more than 100 locations throughout the country, primarily in Mindanao but also in Luzon and the Visayas.

By including a wide range of projects and providing some comparative analysis, our review offers an opportunity to draw lessons from the strengths, weaknesses, and commonalities of the various approaches and, importantly, to indicate where further analysis is needed to inform new projects.

**Table 1: List of Programs Covered by the Study**

<b>International Funding Agencies</b>	<b>Programs/Projects</b>
Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional para el Desarrollo (AECID)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poder y Prosperidad de la Comunidad Project (PODER)</li> <li>• Convenio</li> </ul>
Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Philippines-Australia Community Assistance Program (PACAP)</li> <li>• Philippines-Australia Local Sustainability Project (PALS)</li> <li>• Basic Education Assistance for Mindanao (BEAM)</li> </ul>
Catholic Relief Services (CRS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expanded Small Farms and Marketing Project (ESFMP)</li> </ul>
European Commission (EC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support to Agrarian Reform in Central Mindanao (STARCM)</li> </ul>
Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Study for Socio-Economic Reconstruction and Development of Conflict-affected Areas in Mindanao (SERD-CAAM)</li> </ul>
The World Bank (WB)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ARMM Social Fund Project (ASFP)</li> <li>• Mindanao Rural Development Program (MRDP)</li> <li>• Mindanao Trust Fund (MTF)</li> <li>• Kapit-bisig Laban sa Kahirapan – Comprehensive and Integrated Delivery of Social Services (KALAHI-CIDSS)</li> </ul>
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Act for Peace Programme (ACT for Peace)</li> </ul>
United States Agency for International Development (USAID)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Growth with Equity in Mindanao: Education Awareness Support Effort (GEM-EASE)</li> </ul>
World Food Programme (WFP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Food for Assets Programme (FFA)</li> </ul>

The findings from this review suggest that there are more differences than similarities in the 15 projects reviewed and that project designs are often influenced by institution-specific contexts and priorities. While direct comparisons are difficult, the review provides some insights into the rationale for differing approaches, and case examples from accounts of project implementation and challenges on the ground. It also provides a summary of design considerations for community-based projects in conflict-affected areas.

### ***Barangay case studies of CBD projects and local context***

The research team also conducted in-depth case studies of 19 barangays in seven provinces to analyze how CBD projects interacted with varying local conditions. The provinces were selected based on the type of armed conflict prevalent in the area, and the armed groups present or nearby. The selection of provinces also gave us the opportunity to compare communal and ethnic configurations at the local level.

Our research shows that when projects interact with the local community context, the outcome is determined by two key factors: (i) project design, and (ii) local conditions that respond to, and shape, the intended process and outcomes of the project. In turn, the local conditions are contingent on local political, communal, and security dynamics, and therefore, it is critical to understand local conditions and adapt a program's design accordingly.

### **Key Findings**

1. *Conflict dynamics in the Philippines are complex, diverse, multi-layered, and localized.* It is critical to understand differences in conflict conditions within local areas, and between different regions. It is also important to understand the specific context down to the barangay level. Barangays in close proximity can have very different conditions (e.g., local elite relations, armed groups and/or ethnic configurations), and these differences can lead to success or failure of a CBD project. Similarly, there are important characteristics that are unique to particular regions, including the nature of armed insurgents in the area.
2. *The combination of local political dynamics and ethnic configuration can have a significant impact on participation and project outcomes.* Barangays with both mixed ethnic configurations and rivalries in local political dynamics tend to have the highest risk and the poorest outcomes for CBD projects. Conversely, barangays with a dominant local elite faction tend to ensure high participation levels when the ethnic configuration is either homogenous or there is a strong majority with a small minority. Accommodating local political dynamics seems to be the best case scenario in any ethnic/communal configuration, as it consistently allows for high participation and strong project outcomes.
3. *Formal conflict analysis is largely incomplete across projects, and does not capture local-level complexity or variation.* Many of the arguments for implementing community-based development projects in conflict-affected areas oversimplify the needs of conflict-affected communities and often overlook the particularities of how communities may be uniquely affected by conflict. Analysis tends to focus on the macro-level conflict factors, such as state-insurgent violence, while ignoring the community-level drivers of conflict. In most cases, projects do not attempt to conduct their own robust analysis of local conflict or map power dynamics at the municipality or barangay level.
4. *The presence of armed insurgent groups has a major influence on CBD projects, but mostly in NPA/ CPP areas.* There is clear evidence that NPA/ CPP groups are actively influencing or undermining projects through a wide variety of tactics and outcomes. There is much less evidence that MILF or MNLF insurgent groups are actively supporting or rejecting the CBD programs in their area, or trying to influence project design or beneficiaries. Furthermore, evidence from NPA areas indicates that high levels of participation may limit the influence of armed insurgent groups.
5. *Over time, CBD (especially the most participatory forms) can help restore community-level confidence and, in some cases, improve prospects for self-reliance, particularly in post-conflict settings.* Undertaking community-based procurement, financial management and quality control can not only provide useful skills to community members, but also help build social capital and cohesion. When done well, participatory forms of CBD have the potential to help reduce intra-community violent conflict by inculcating participatory practices and joint problem solving.

6. The *ability of CBD initiatives to restore confidence is predicated on a longer term commitment of support (3-5 years) to communities*. Short-term efforts (less than 3 years) are unlikely to yield results or to effectively build trust in local institutions.
7. Because CBD projects in the Philippines often represent the first time that development funds have flowed into a conflict-affected community, *CBD efforts have the potential to enhance the reputation of the perceived implementing agency*, including national government agencies and specialized development organizations with a mandate for the conflict-affected areas such as the Bangsamoro Development Agency.
8. *Social cohesion achieved through communities collaborating together via CBD's participatory processes is not always sustainable, especially where pre-existing horizontal conflict jeopardizes any gains in social capital*. In terms of developmental outcomes, *CBD projects face considerable challenges with respect to sustaining their efforts*. Even when community ownership is high, the inability to access technical support or to raise funds for operating costs or maintenance, render many sub-project interventions – both infrastructure and livelihood – inoperable after the project is concluded.
9. There is *little evidence to suggest that CBD approaches have much impact on improving formal governance at local levels* (barangay, municipality or province).
10. *CBD projects should not be judged on their ability to reduce violence, but there is a critical need to monitor violence levels in CBD beneficiary communities*. Although no development partners suggest the direct causality in reducing conflict, there are expectations that CBD can provide much needed services and resources to conflict-affected communities and can help

restore confidence, both of which may contribute to long-term peace objectives.

11. A key objective of many CBD projects is poverty reduction with an underlying assumption that poverty alleviation efforts will help reduce armed conflict. *There is no solid evidence, however, to prove or disprove such causality between poverty and violent conflict*.
12. Most projects reviewed *do not include robust monitoring and evaluation processes*, particularly on transformative outcomes, making it extremely difficult to substantiate the various claims of transformative impact. This is a systemic problem throughout the project cycle, with poor or non-existent baseline data, and anecdotal data collection methods that make it difficult to draw solid conclusions on project impact.

### ***Operational Implications***

CBD will be most effective as a tool to restore confidence and to help begin to transform institutions if it is premised on an acknowledgement that conflict-affected areas in the Philippines are diverse and that CBD interventions must respond to these conditions. Project designs, therefore, must: (i) recognize the unique conflict dynamics of their project areas, (ii) design their projects to creatively adapt in order to constructively address and meet community needs, and (iii) ensure that the projects are accurately defining and measuring the most relevant features of their projects. A key point underlying this message is that there is limited value in aiming to remain conflict-neutral and that all projects that are working directly with communities affected by conflict need to acknowledge and respond to the effects of conflict if they aim to achieve any measure of success.

The paper concludes with four recommendations:

**1. Greater flexibility and adaptation of project designs**

– Community-based projects being implemented in conflict-affected areas need to have mechanisms by which they can both proactively and reactively address local dynamics that can undermine the effectiveness of project implementation. Rigid program designs that require the same structure, procedures, and regulations in every barangay will inevitably lead to project failure or negative outcomes in some cases. Priority areas for greater flexibility include:

- **Counterpart contribution** – Some of the most critical barangays are left out of CBD projects because of their inability to provide counterpart funding. There is a strong argument for waiving the counterpart contribution for the most remote, insurgent-influenced barangays.
- **Site and beneficiary selection** – Targeting and site selection should be flexible enough to adapt to local conflict conditions. Template-driven, rigid targeting protocols should be avoided. Based on local conflict and political analysis, it is possible to determine the lines of division within a municipality or community, and avoid distribution of benefits in a way that exacerbates local tensions.
- **Implementation partners** – A decision to use an external implementing partner must be carefully considered, taking into account the pros and cons in the context of ongoing conflict. Understand the political associations of the implementing partner, and find ways to counter-balance their biases through working through other partners. Rather than seeking a

“neutral” partner, it is best to understand the politics of partner organizations, and provide balanced support through multiple partners.

- **Menu of projects** – Depending on local context, in areas beset by local rivalries there may be value in invoking a closed menu that limits sub-project selection to activities that produce public assets (usually small-scale infrastructure) that benefits as wide a cross section of the community as possible.

**2. Community and sub-regional conflict analysis**

– There is a need for projects working with communities in conflict-affected areas to have a working understanding of the conflict and security dynamics within their target areas – whether this is a formal conflict analysis or an informal mechanism to better understand conflict dynamics. This project demonstrates that analysis of community conflict dynamics can be done at scale in manageable timeframes. While barangay level analysis may be challenging for large scale projects, experience has shown that local conflict analysis is feasible for an extensive sample population.

**3. Evidence Base for Impact**

– There is an urgent need for more robust monitoring and impact analysis of transformative outcomes, such as social cohesion, local institutions, state-society relations, and violence levels. While the majority of CBD programs claim to have some impact on transformative outcomes, and most include a Theory of Change that links their program interventions with peace and security outcomes, monitoring and evaluation efforts for CBD projects in the Philippines provide very little evidence to support these claims. This weak evidence base makes it extremely difficult to estimate the impact of the current CBD projects on peace and security.

**4. Challenges for Large-scale Projects –** While large-scale projects improve economies of scale and efficiencies, there are some particular challenges that increase risk in a conflict-affected area. Unable to provide direct oversight at the community level, large projects have relied on tightly defined procedures and extensive project manuals to mitigate against these risks. While there was some degree of adaptation of project design for projects focused on conflict-affected areas, the larger projects that included conflict and non-conflict areas did not include any special provisions for conflict-affected areas. Similarly, community-level analysis and monitoring may be more challenging for larger projects, particularly those implemented by central government agencies. However, without improved understanding of the local conditions, in all cases, it is unlikely that CBD projects will be able to avoid some of the many pitfalls of operating in conflict areas.

These challenges can be addressed by including sub-project components or “conflict windows” for large-scale projects. These more specialized project components can be customized for conflict conditions, including specialized design and implementation arrangements, local-level conflict monitoring, community facilitator

selection and training, and monitoring of transformative outcome indicators.

### **Report Overview**

Following this Executive Summary, **Section 1** provides a brief background and context for study, followed by an overview of the objectives and research methods. In **Section 2**, the paper provides an analysis of conflict in the Philippines and offers a framework for analyzing the potential impact and limitations of community-based projects in conflict-affected areas in the Philippines. **Section 3** presents the 15 projects selected for study and provides some comparative reviews and analysis of the projects to identify common themes and challenges. **Section 4** presents findings from an analysis of barangay case studies from a selection of communities in order to understand the interactions between local dynamics and CBD project implementation. **Section 5** of the paper offers some key generalizable findings, and in **Section 6** the paper concludes with some recommendations regarding further areas for analysis. The **Annexes** include condensed summaries of the 15 case studies as well as a list of acronyms, maps, an overview of CBD design considerations in conflict-affected areas, and a bibliography.

*This research was conducted with major funding support from the State and Peacebuilding Fund of the World Bank, and additional support from the UK Government’s Department for International Development (DFID). The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of The Asia Foundation or the funders.*