Mindanao

Mindanao, in the southern Philippines, suffers from poor infrastructure, poverty, and violence that has claimed more than 120,000 lives in the last four decades. The violence and rebellion derive from Christian migration to the region, sectarian clashes, war against Muslim separatist insurgents, clan feuds, and unfulfilled hopes of economic prosperity. For the last decade, there has been a ceasefire agreement with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front that has generally held despite occasional outbreaks of violence, while peace talks culminated in a Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro March 2014.

In Mindanao, The Asia Foundation draws on long-standing relationships and utilizes its on-the-ground presence to help identify partners from the private sector, civil society, and government who will constructively work together toward peace and development.

PEACEBUILDING

In conflict-affected areas of Mindanao, violence is frequent, unpredictable, and highly localized. Violent conflict often erupts when there is an unresolved dispute between local actors—clans, political leaders, military units, police, insurgent groups, and criminal networks—that cannot be mitigated through existing formal structures or state intervention. The Asia Foundation supports Mindanao-based research institutions and nongovernment organizations (NGOs) both in in-depth diagnostic activities and strategic interventions that enable communities to monitor and prevent the escalation of conflicts.

The Asia Foundation and its local partners designed and implemented interventions to address *rido* (the local term for conflicts between clans), and are actively engaged in supporting the settlement of feuds including those that may escalate into larger conflicts and affect the peace process. Over the years, Foundation partners have settled more than 200 *rido* conflicts, which had led to more than 600 fatalities.

The years of experience in addressing local conflicts has enabled the Foundation to publish two editions of the book, *Rido: Clan Feuding and Conflict Management in Mindanao* (2007, 2014). Dissemination of information about clan conflict has reduced the danger of accidental escalation when such violence is mistaken as arising from separatist conflict.

The Foundation's Conflict Management program has expanded its efforts to increase the capacity of Muslim and Christian leaders, as well as local security forces, to address the needs of communities as they prevent conflicts from spreading. Improving relationship between state security actors and the communities is also pursued to enhance confidence and build trust, as both sectors are vital in carrying out peace and development efforts.

The Foundation has significantly increased its support of the formal peace processes involving the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). The Foundation supports forums that bring together key players and experts to analyze aspects of the
peace process in order to inform peace panels and other stakeholders. In 2009, both sides had sufficient confidence in the Foundation to invite it to be part of the International Contact Group formed to help negotiations forward. Now that a Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro has been signed, the Foundation’s Representative is on the Third Party Monitoring Team to oversee effective implementation of that agreement.

In order to promote the incorporation of citizen views in peace negotiations and agreement implementation, the Foundation periodically undertakes opinion surveys—both focused in Mindanao and more general nationwide household samples. Briefings on the results are provided to both the government and the MILF peace negotiators, other government officials, and stake-holders from the private sector and civil society. Findings clearly show that the average Filipino citizen supports resolving Mindanao conflicts through peaceful means, which allows decision-makers some flexibility as they strive to reach and implement agreements.

**IMPROVING LOCAL AND REGIONAL GOVERNANCE**

To establish a solid base for good governance, peace, and development, The Asia Foundation supports programs to improve governance operations both at the local and regional levels throughout the southern Philippines, in partnership with government institutions, the business sector, academic institutions, and civil society organizations.

As the peace process between the government and the MILF progresses, The Asia Foundation supports the transition from the ARMM to the Bangsamoro government. Technical assistance to the Bangsamoro Development Agency on the formulation of the Bangsamoro Development Plan, particularly the governance and security sector plans, has been provided by the Foundation. The Bangsamoro Development Plan serves as the blueprint for the development of the Bangsamoro for a just, peaceful, and prosperous society.

**IMPROVING ELECTIONS**

For decades, elections in Mindanao have been particularly fraught with problems of violence and fraud. In recent elections, beginning in 2007 with synchronized national and local elections, The Asia Foundation helped the Parish Pastoral Council for Responsible Voting (PPCRV) extend its area of coverage beyond predominantly Catholic areas by partnering with networks in Muslim areas, including Muslim NGOs and muftis (religious leaders). Most recently, PPCRV and its partners advocated for (and then monitored) the 2011 re-registration of voters in the ARMM, which resulted in the purging of hundreds of thousands from the voting rolls. In 2013, the Foundation worked with local NGOs and the security sector in forming coalitions that rallied concerted efforts advocating for peaceful elections and preventing violent incidents.

The Foundation’s strong relationship with an expansive network of local partners in Mindanao facilitated the mapping of election hotspots and allowed more responsive interventions that prevented political disputes from escalating into violence. At the local level, the Foundation has worked with NGOs, including religious and community leaders, to form compacts among contending candidates, supported the formation of quick response teams, and the conduct of actual conflict mediation, dialogues, and rapid response to election-related violence incidents. Data from the past three elections in 2007, 2010, and 2013 show a steady decline in election-related violent incidents in the country.

**BOOKS FOR MINDANAO**

The Asia Foundation’s Books for Asia program donates quality educational materials to school recipients across Mindanao region.

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