

**Mitigating Localized Conflict in Mindanao and Sulu through
Rapid Response of Local Non-State Actors**

QUARTERLY REPORT

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Submitted by



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I. Project Background

In the conflict-affected areas of Mindanao and the Sulu archipelago, violence is a frequent, unpredictable, and often highly localized phenomenon. The region has multiple insurgent movements, including the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), Moro National Liberation front (MNLF), New People's Army (NPA—the armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines), *Rebolusyongaryong Partido ng Manggagawa sa Mindanao* (Revolutionary Party of Workers in Mindanao or RPMM). The presence of these insurgent groups poses a serious threat to stability in the region, and the heavy military presence in the region is a response to this threat. Although the Muslim separatist conflict dominates the media, research supported by The Asia Foundation shows that clan violence (or *rido*) in Mindanao is actually more pertinent in the daily lives of the people. Small-scale, local conflicts stemming from *rido*, political rivalries, or inter-communal tensions complicate an already volatile environment mixed with separatism, banditry, and military involvement.

One of the major challenges in addressing conflict in the southern Philippines is this constant threat of localized violence, and the lack of state and local capacity to intervene at the critical point of escalation. Violent conflict can erupt when there is an incident or unresolved dispute between local actors – clans, political leaders, military units, police, insurgent groups, and criminal networks – that cannot be resolved or mitigated through existing local mediation or state intervention. When armed conflicts flare up between the military and the major insurgent groups, it is usually between local units and is triggered by a local incident or grievance that may have little to do with the larger state-insurgency conflict.

Peace talks with the MILF have been sporadic for some years now, but the cessation of hostilities has largely held. As negotiations with MILF continue, however, the main threat to peace and stability lie in the rupture of the cessation of hostilities. The first danger, much discussed, was the withdrawal of the international team of monitors due to the lack of progress in the peace talks. The second danger lies in the localized outbreak of hostilities that have been discussed, along with their potential for spreading into a more generalized conflict. The ceasefire mechanisms have been designed to maintain peace between the two mainline forces—MILF and the Armed Forces of the Philippines—and are much less effectual with respect to localized conflicts. Both these dangers can be addressed by the strengthening of community-based mechanisms. Should local communities become more effective in mitigating localized conflicts, they are unlikely to spread into more generalized warfare. And, to the extent that self-reliance in maintaining a cessation of hostilities is generated, reliance on foreign monitors is reduced.

Meanwhile, the recently aborted signing of the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD) in August 2008 as a result of a Supreme Court injunction and the subsequent armed encounters involving three MILF base commands in Central Mindanao, Sarangani, and Lanao del Norte, resulted in the dissolution of the GRP Peace Panel, a hiatus in the peace process, and growing displacement of communities as a result of the hostilities. These recent developments provide more reason to mitigate localized violence to prevent its escalation, which will hopefully improve the environment for the reconstituted GRP Peace Panel and the MILF to return to the negotiations table.

II. Goal and Objectives

Goal: To mitigate conflict in Mindanao and the Sulu archipelago by enabling local, non-state actors to quickly and effectively intervene in localized conflicts and crises.

Objective 1: To strengthen the capacity of civil society actors and community-based leaders to manage crises and prevent the escalation of localized conflict.

Objective 2: To improve rapid response mechanisms and interventions for outbreaks of hostilities that may occur between armed combatants.

III. Expected Impact

The program will achieve a number of important outputs, notably: the creation of a core group of capable, community-based leaders with the expertise required to effectively mobilize their communities to respond to crises with effective time sensitive interventions; the creation of a pool-fund system that will allow conflicts to be quickly responded to by trained civil society organizations and community leaders; and more effective implementation of existing local conflict resolution mechanisms.

Project activities will also achieve more far-reaching outcomes, summarized as follows:

- Greater community engagement and cooperation with local and central government among citizens of Mindanao;
- Reduced conflict, greater responsiveness among community groups in responding to conflict when it arises, and accelerated development within the region as the intensity and longevity of conflicts is reduced;
- An improved environment for peace and reconciliation in Mindanao;
- Strengthened capacity of the community to respond to and minimize conflict; and
- Facilitation of a more conducive environment for the GRP and MILF to resume the peace talks.

IV. Approach and Strategy

The Asia Foundation's rapid response project is establishing mechanisms for urgently responding to outbreaks of hostilities in the conflict-affected regions of the southern Philippines, through a network of civil society organizations, and respected community-based leaders. The project utilizes several multi-pronged and context-specific approaches involving a collaborative process of assessment, capacity-building, networking, actual conflict interventions, community reconciliation, and evaluation. Specifically, this approach involves:

- Enhancing the wide range of community-based peace initiatives and indigenous, or alternative conflict resolution mechanisms existing on the ground in managing flare-ups;

- Supporting the efforts of various NGO coalitions and civil society groups in Mindanao and the Sulu archipelago in preventing and deescalating conflicts;
- Enhancing cooperation between NGOs skilled and experienced in ceasefire monitoring and more localized civil society groups;
- Utilizing the Foundation's ability to work with local conflict dynamics and mobilize a wealth of networks on the ground;
- Applying the Foundation's experience in successfully mitigating clan feuding (*rido*) in Mindanao and the success of its 2007 electoral reform program.

The Foundation's experience has shown that, in cases where localized violence is prevalent, local civil society organizations and community-based leaders are the most critical actors for monitoring and responding to outbreaks of hostilities. Working in partnership with these key non-state actors has enabled the Foundation's previous projects to achieve high levels of credibility and respect within Mindanao communities. These non-state actors also derive significant benefit from the Foundation's capacity-building programs and are well placed to deliver enhanced conflict mitigation, resolution, and monitoring services to Mindanao citizens.

The Foundation believes that the only people that can effectively mitigate localized conflict are those that have the credibility and respect within the local community to negotiate with, or on behalf of, the community in times of crisis. When conflict escalates at the local level, there are few local groups or leaders that can intervene to negotiate or mediate between the parties. These local NGOs, community and religious leaders, local government officials, and occasionally members of the security forces stationed in the area are most often the ones that must manage crises related to conflict—movement of internally displaced persons, relief operations, fact-finding inquiries, dispute resolution, and, at the same time, engage with other state actors or policy-makers to avert escalation of hostilities. The problem is that many of these actors require resources and expertise in order to mobilize communities and respond to crises with targeted, time-sensitive interventions. In many cases, local actors that are very well-placed to mediate between combatants lack the skills or networks to effectively manage disputes and crises.

The rapid response program closes these gaps, leading to a more coordinated response to conflicts and effective conflict mitigation by local actors. This is primarily achieved by implementing a two-pronged strategy of capacity-building that helps strengthen civil society actors and community-based leaders to manage crises and prevent escalation of localized conflict; and supporting the mobilization of local actors to rapidly respond and intervene during outbreaks of hostilities and other emergencies. While the first strategy is done through the Foundation's usual grant mechanism, the second approach will involve a rapid response funding process.

V. Accomplishments

The following activities were implemented in the first quarter of 2009:

Objective 1: Strengthen capacity of civil society actors and community-based leaders to manage crises and prevent the escalation of localized conflict.

Partners Meeting on Rapid Response Initiatives

On January 21-22, 2009, The Asia Foundation held a Partners Meeting for non-government organizations (NGOs) involved in rapid response initiatives to mitigate conflict. Key representatives from eight NGOs attended the meeting in Manila to discuss, critique, and coordinate amongst themselves their proposed activities under the rapid response project. The meeting was a follow up to the separate consultations earlier done with partners to thresh out the finer details of the rapid response support and firm up project ideas under rapid response program. The NGOs presented their respective proposals to mitigate conflict in their areas of engagement. The meeting also allowed new partners from Sulu to learn from established NGOs that are longtime partners of the Foundation. Humanitarian response specialist, Ms. Milet Mendoza and Ms. Nenita Quilenderino from the Office of Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process also attended the activity to critique the proposed initiatives. Prof. Octavio Dinampo of Tulung Lupah Sug and Marine Deputy Commandant Brig. General Natalio Ecarma were also present to provide inputs.

Proposed Projects and Areas of Partners under the Rapid Response Program

Organization	Proposed Concept	Proposed Areas*
Integral Development Services, Inc.	Empowering Local Peacekeepers in De-escalating Incidence of Violence in the selected conflict prone municipalities in Lanao del Sur and Maguindanao	Lanao del Sur: Kapatagan & Balabagan Maguindanao: Matanog & Parang
United Youth for Peace Development	Maximizing Community Participation in Mitigating Conflicts in the Conflict-Affected Areas in Mindanao	North Cotabato: Midsayap & Pigcawayan Maguindanao: Northern Kabuntalan & Mother Kabuntalan Lanao del Norte: Tagaloan, Monai Lanao del Sur: Pualas, Lumbatan
Mindanao Tulong Bakwet	Community-Based Disaster Preparedness and Management Project in Maguindanao	Datu Piang & Datu Saudi Ampatuan in Maguindanao
Reconciliatory Initiatives for Development Opportunities, Inc.	Empowering community grassroots leaders in responding conflict and establishing disaster risk management in the selected areas in Lanao Provinces	Lanao Norte & Lanao Sur: 16 municipalities covered by the clans belonging to the Sultan sa Marawi, Bae sa Radapan, Sultan sa

Organization	Proposed Concept	Proposed Areas*
		Madaya.
Ginapaladtaka Foundation (G7)	Strengthen capacity of civil society/community based leaders to prevent escalation of local conflicts	Pikit & Aleosan, North Cotabato
Pakigdait, Inc.	Engaging the Winds of Violence: Towards Implementing a Proactive Program in Addressing Violence and the Series of Killings in Lanao del Norte	Lanao Norte: Kolambogan & Kauswagan
Patikul Core Group & SUGPAT	To be determined	Patikul, & Border Areas of Patikul & Indanan in Sulu
Sakayan Mindanao	To be determined	Maimbung, Parang, Talipao, Indanan and Pata Island in Sulu

The table shows the proposed concepts presented during the Partners Meeting; the proposed areas selected by partners for rapid response activities fall within what the Foundation considers as critical areas. The Foundation's list of critical areas is based on documented incidences of violence after the August 4, 2008 injunction issued by the Supreme Court against the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD). The documentation includes news reports and fact-finding reports of violence after the MOA-AD incident of August 2008.

Mindanao Tulong Bakwet (MTB)

Mindanao Tulong Bakwet is currently implementing the project on community preparedness and management on armed conflict in the municipalities of Datu Piang and Datu Saudi Ampatuan in the Province of Maguindanao. The project aims to develop a Quick Response Team from a pool of volunteers in the two covered municipalities which will be called *Bantay Bakwet*. The project also intends to strengthen the skills of the members of the Quick Response Team, the Municipal Disaster Coordinating Council, and other local humanitarian structures on conflict preparedness; craft and review the Disaster Management Plan and Contingency Plans in the event of an armed conflict; and establish a cluster-based and municipal-based early warning system in the targeted areas. The project was presented to the municipal government officials of Datu Piang and Datu Saudi Ampatuan on March 18 and March 19, 2009, respectively. Training on community preparedness and management of armed conflict among the identified local conflict volunteers/responders will be conducted on April 8-12, 2009 in Davao City.

Ginapaladtaka (G7)

Consultations were conducted in the six conflict affected barangays bordering Pikit and Aleosan¹ in North Cotabato to identify and organize barangay and local sector leaders in the community who will undertake trainings on culture of peace, inter-faith

¹ Barangays Bualan, Pamalian, Kolambig, and Silik in Pikit and barangays Tapodoc and Pagangan in Aleosan.

dialogue, and community-based seminars on disaster/conflict preparedness, risk management process, and ceasefire monitoring. The trainings will help identify and map-out security measures that will assist the communities in times of crisis. It will also enhance and develop cultural sensitive response to urban displacement in the community and equip the barangay officials and local leaders with communication skills, dialogue mediation values, and negotiation skills in conflict resolution process.

Kidnap for Ransom – Roundtable Discussion with Donors and NGOs

On March 6, 2009, a roundtable discussion (RTD) on Kidnapping-for-Ransom (KFR) in Sulu and Basilan was conducted in Makati City which gathered around 30 representatives from select donors and non-government organizations to discuss about the recent spate kidnappings in these provinces and assess how this has affected project activities. An assessment of the security situation in Basilan and Sulu was presented and relevant information such as the observations and lessons learned generated from the kidnap victims and their families was shared. Also discussed were the different categories of the Abu Sayyaf, their history and ideology, and the different leaders of the Abu Sayyaf Group. Strategies, approaches, and security protocols in response to the kidnapping problem were also discussed among the participants. In the discussion, some organizations revealed that they have had to temporarily suspend their operation due to threats encountered by their project implementers. Others are still in the process of deciding whether to undertake a complete pull-out of their project operations in Basilan and Sulu. The Manila RTD was the first leg of a series of roundtable discussions on KFR to be conducted in Basilan, Sulu, and Zamboanga, with the Basilan roundtable scheduled for late April.

Grant Management Seminar

In anticipation of possible partnership under this project, around 32 participants of 18 organizations who are partners of the conflict management program attended the Grant Management Seminar held on March 9-11, 2009 at Davao City. The Grant Management Seminar provides prospective partners an overview of the Foundation's grant-making process and an orientation about USAID standard provisions such as policies and branding guidelines. The seminar also equips prospective partners with the necessary knowledge and skills for better project and financial management, which includes concepts on internal control and accounting system.

Objective 2: To improve rapid response mechanisms and interventions for outbreaks of hostilities that may occur between armed combatants.

- Dialogues to avert the potential massacre of Muslim Internally Displaced Families. More than 200 people from Muslim and Christian communities gathered in a Community Peace Forum in Barangay Bulucaon, Pigcawayan, Cotabato last February 5, 2009 to celebrate a newly-restored peace between their communities. The celebration was a result of a series of consultation dialogues supported by USAID and The Asia Foundation to control internal conflicts and avert a potential massacre of Muslim internally displaced families. Only two months ago, separatist violence nearly shattered community relationships as the fighting near the area created animosities between Muslims and Christians.

Clashes between the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) last December 24, 2008 in Sitio Margues in Barangay Bulacaon, Pigcawayan, North Cotabato, led to the displacement of 47 families largely Muslims with some Christians. The families evacuated to Prado Elementary School at the barangay proper, 3 kilometers away from Sitio Margues. Christians dominate the host community (Bulacaon). Because of the intermittent shelling, animosities grew between Muslim internally displaced persons (IDPs) and the host Christian community. Muslim families at the evacuation centers in Bulacaon proper were threatened by an inflammatory rumor that if somebody is hit by mortars from the position of the MILF, Christians will retaliate by staging a massacre of Muslim evacuees in Prado Elementary School. Amidst memories of such atrocities in the past, the Muslim IDPs moved further away from the evacuation center becoming more isolated from government services. Nevertheless, the threat of a massacre still remained for the IDPs.

In response, UNYPAD organized a responding team composed of barangay officials and conducted a series of dialogues with targeted messaging between the Christian and Muslim civilians and their leaders to control inflammatory rumors and prevent the escalation of violence. The dialogues resulted to a clarification of issues and a resolution to the problem. It also resulted to the development of protocols for both IDPs and host communities in case future hostilities and displacements take place. This intervention culminated in the Community Peace Forum, where a Memorandum of Agreement among the leaders of the Muslim and Christian communities was presented and signed, and witnessed by Congresswoman Emmylou Talino Mendoza of the First District of Cotabato, as well as representatives from the municipal and barangay governments. To complement the gains of the earlier initiative, the project will support UNYPAD to facilitate the return of internally displaced families to their respective places of origin, in some barangays in Pigcawayan, North Cotabato.

- Consultations on alleged forcible closures of evacuation centers. For this reporting period, Mindanao Tulong Bakwet conducted a series of consultations among the internally displaced families in 27 evacuation camps in the Municipality of Datu Piang, Maguindanao in relation to the alleged forcible closures of evacuation sites and the forced return of the IDPs to their communities while on-going military operations in their areas are still on-going. On March 5, 2009, the output of the consultations was presented to the Municipal Peace and Order Council to clarify the issues and generate agreements among various stakeholders. The activity was attended by 42 participants who are representatives of the municipal government headed by Mayor Datu Samer Uy, nineteen of whom are barangay captains, and select members of the Philippine Army. Other humanitarian organizations such as UNICEF, Non-Violent Peace Force, and the World Food Program also attended the presentation. As a result, the issues of force return and forcible closures of evacuation camps were discussed. The municipal government has identified areas where the IDP's could safely relocate and signified the protection of the IDPs in the displacement sites. Currently, some of the IDP's have been leaving the displacement sites to return to their respective areas that have been declared secure by the municipal government and the military.

- Ginapaladtaka (G7) multi-sectoral peace dialogue to address CVO killing. On March 25, 2009, G7 conducted a Multi-Sectoral Peace Dialogue in Brgy. Ginatilan, Pikit, North Cotabato to discuss the atrocities that occurred between Muslims and the Christians due to the alleged harassment against a military outpost that killed and injured two civilian volunteers. Municipal government officials headed by Mayor Datu Sumulong Sultan and Vice-Mayor Don Mangansakan, and the barangay chairman and councilors of the five conflict affected barangays² were gathered to generate information about the nature of the incident and identify possible measures that will be implemented to prevent further escalation of the conflict. Officials from the Philippine National Police, Philippine Army, and key representatives from the academe and non-government organizations, including Dr. Steven Rood, the Asia Foundation's County Representative also attended the activity. The activity helped pacify emerging tensions and provided venue for further consultations and identification of other outlets for collaborations and assistance among the stakeholders in the conflict affected barangays.
- Project meeting with Tribal Coalition of Mindanao. A project meeting was held in Butuan City on March 17, 2009 with Tribal Coalition of Mindanao and some representatives from indigenous groups to discuss their proposal of gathering indigenous peoples from selected ancestral domains in Agusan del Sur to address the tribal conflicts in the area which have resulted to an alarming number of deaths (44 tribe members and their leaders were killed within a span of two years). The meeting was attended by leaders (baes and datos) coming from the Manobo, Manobo Mamanua, Manobo Lapakan, Higaonon, and Banwa-on indigenous groups.

Plans for the Next Quarter

- Sakayan Mindanao will conduct a focus group discussion among the Ulama and religious scholars in the Province of Sulu. The activity aims to identify and map-out capability building needs and strategies to empower the Muslim religious sectors to be more involved in Sulu development which includes managing crises and preventing the escalation of localized conflict. The focus group discussion will be held in May 11, 2009 at Jolo, Sulu.
- To maximize community participation in mitigating conflicts in conflict-affected areas, the United Youth for Peace and Development is proposing to conduct capacity building activities in select municipalities in Maguindanao, North Cotabato, and Lanao del Sur. Among the core activities include the conduct of trainings on basic human rights, community journalism, early warning and conflict prevention, conflict resolution and mediation, and ceasefire monitoring. Currently, the proposal is being reviewed.
- Round table discussions will be conducted in Basilan and Sulu to obtain feedback at the local and community level about their assessment of the security situation in their respective provinces with particular focus on the kidnapping problem. The activity will attempt to present and address issues in

² Balong, Ginatilan, Manaulanan, Lagunde, and Panicupan

relation to the increasing incidence of kidnapping cases in Basilan and Sulu and subsequently identify possible actions needed to minimize or resolve the problem.

- Explore with Peace Advocates of Sultan Kudarat (PASKU) to develop initiatives to address the Kalamansig conflict in Sultan Kudarat.
- A *Kahimunan* or a general assembly of Indigenous Peoples leaders and members will be supported to address the tribal conflicts in Agusan del Sur which have resulted to an alarming number of deaths in their areas.
- A rapid response activity of Sakayan Mindanao Inc. will be supported to facilitate better communication lines between the International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC) Crisis Committee and the MNLF amid the on-going rescue operation of ICRC staff hostaged by the Abu Sayyaf Group in Sulu.

Attachment A: Activity Log

**THE ASIA FOUNDATION
CONFLICT MANAGEMENT PROGRAM
Mitigating Localized Conflict in Mindanao and Sulu
through Rapid Response of Non-State Actors**

BREAKDOWN OF PARTICIPANTS PER ACTIVITY

(January-March 2009)

Date	Event (Training/ Workshop/ Conference/ Large Meeting)	Grantee	Venue	Profile of Participants (e.g. government. CSO, business)	Number of Participants			
					Male	Female	Muslim	Christian
January 12	Coordination meeting	UNYPAD	Barangay Hall, Bulucaon, Pigcawayan, Cotabato	NGO, BLGU, MLGU	11	3	7	7
January 14	Formation of Responding Team	UNYPAD	DJ's Inn, Poblacion, Pigcawayan, Cotabato	NGO, BLGU, MLGU, IDP's, Fishers, Farmers	14	7	3	18
January 16	Community Consultation with Muslim IDP's	UNYPAD	Barangay Matilac Evacuation Center, Pigcawayan, Cotabato	NGO, Muslim IDP's, Fishers, and Farmers	38	17	55	0
January 19	Community Consultation with Christian/Host Community	UNYPAD	Barangay Hall, Bulucaon, Pigcawayan, Cotabato	NGO, Muslim IDP's, Fishers, and Farmers	41	16	6	51
January 27	Community Dialogue	UNYPAD	Hill Park, Midsayap	NGO, Muslim	34	10	19	25

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Date	Event (Training/ Workshop/ Conference/ Large Meeting)	Grantee	Venue	Profile of Participants (e.g. government. CSO, business)	Number of Participants			
					Male	Female	Muslim	Christian
			Cotabato	IDP's, Fishers, and Farmers				
February 5	Community Peace Forum and Signing of Memorandum of Understanding	UNYPAD	Barangay Hall, Bulucaon, Pigcawayan, Cotabato	NGO, Muslim IDP's, Fishers, and Farmers	135	65	107	93
February 12	Evaluation and Assessment	UNYPAD	Tigbawan Resort. Pigcawayan Cotabato	NGO, Muslim IDP's, Fishers, and Farmers	17	6	10	13
March 3	Meeting: Formation of Crisis Interveners Group	G7	Gornes Place, Pikit, Cotabato	Representative s of civil society/non- government organizations	15	4	11	8
March 6	RTD on Kidnappings in Sulu and Basilan	TAF	Representatives from donor agencies	Mandarin Oriental Hotel, Makati City	20	17	1	36
March 7	Focus Group Discussions of the Crisis Interveners Group	G7	Ginatilan Elementary School, Pikit, Cotabato	Representative s of civil society/non- government organizations	48	6	30	24
March 9-11	Grand Management Seminar	TAF	Grand Men Seng Hotel, Davao City	Representative s from non- government organizations and civil society	11	21	10	22

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Date	Event (Training/ Workshop/ Conference/ Large Meeting)	Grantee	Venue	Profile of Participants (e.g. government. CSO, business) organizations	Number of Participants			
					Male	Female	Muslim	Christian
March 16	Staff Meeting	Mindanao Tulong Bakwet	MTB Office, Cotabato City	MTB Project Staff	9	4	11	2
March 17	Project Meeting with Tribal Coalition of Mindanao	TAF	IP leaders, members of TRICOM	Butuan City	42	15	0	57
March 18	Coordination and Consultation Meeting	Mindanao Tulong Bakwet	Mayor, Administrator, Councilor, volunteers, MTB project staff	Municipal Hall, Datu Piang, Maguindanao	20	6	25	1
March 19	Coordination and Consultation Meeting	Mindanao Tulong Bakwet	MODC, Municipal Engineer, Information Officer, Volunteers, MTB staff	Municipal Hall, Datu Saudi Ampatuan, Maguindanao	16	8	24	0
March 25	Multi-Sectoral Peace Dialogue	G7	Municipal Mayor, Vice-Mayor, Municipal Council, Barangay captains, representatives of the academe, and non-government organization	Datu Dalidig Memorial High School, Brgy. Ginatilan, Pikit, North Cotabato	139	87	170	56
March 26	Training on Culture of Peace	G7	Local sectoral leaders, barangay officials	Brgy. Bualan, Pikit, Cotabato	21	17	38	0

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Date	Event (Training/ Workshop/ Conference/ Large Meeting)	Grantee	Venue	Profile of Participants (e.g. government. CSO, business)	Number of Participants			
					Male	Female	Muslim	Christian
March 30	Evaluation and Assessment of the Multi-Sectoral Peace Dialogue	G7	Lagunde Training Center, Pikit, Cotabato	G7 Project Staff	15	2	14	3
March 31	Meeting and Focus Group Discussion among the local sectoral leaders and barangay officials	G7	Brgy. Bualan, Pikit, North Cotabato	G7 Project Staff, local sectoral leaders, barangay officials	22	18	40	0