

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT PROGRAM
IN THE PHILIPPINES

AN INTERIM REPORT FROM THE ASIA FOUNDATION
TO UNITED STATES AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT



The Asia Foundation

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT PROGRAM
Towards Transforming Conflicts into Manageable Disputes
USAID-funded project with The Asia Foundation
1 July to 31 December 2004

This semi-annual report covers activities from July 2004 to December 2004 under the Conflict Management in the Philippines (CMP) Program of The Asia Foundation through a grant from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) with grant number AID 492-G-00-03-00026. The total grant amount is \$1,300,000 covering the period beginning October 1, 2003 and ending on September 30, 2006. This semi-annual report is in compliance with the instructions under the Office of Regional Procurement (ORP) No. 18 dated August 19, 2003 and ORP No. 20 dated February 2, 2004.

Background

In late 2002, The Asia Foundation supported a conflict survey in Mindanao on local resident's perceptions of conflict in the region. The results of the survey showed that while the Muslim-Christian conflict in Mindanao dominates the international and local press, clan violence (*rido*) is actually more pertinent in the daily life of the people. Citizens are more concerned about the prevalence of clan conflict and its negative impact on their communities than the conflict between the state and rebel groups in Mindanao. These findings illustrated the complexity of conflicts in Mindanao, and served as a take-off point for the Foundation's thrust towards a deeper understanding of conflict dynamics. Building upon this initial research and drawing upon the Foundation's wealth of experience in peace-building through its governance and legal reform programs, the Foundation's conflict management program was developed.

The Asia Foundation's USAID-funded Conflict Management in the Philippines (CMP) Program aims to address the issues of conflict management using multiple approaches to address two distinct types of conflict affecting the Philippines: **Endemic Clan Conflict** and **Community Conflicts over Natural Resources**. Given that conflict is inherent in the process of change and development, the program's goal is not to eliminate but to transform conflicts into manageable disputes and debates. The CMP Program accomplishes this goal through better knowledge of the dynamics of the specific conflict; enhanced conflict resolution mechanisms; improved communication channels within the affected communities and between government and community groups; and policy-oriented substantive discussions with inputs from key stakeholders.

Addressing Clan Conflict

Mindanao, the largest island grouping in southern Philippines, is a region suffering from poor infrastructure, high poverty incidence, and violence that has claimed the lives of

thousands in the last three decades. The widely-held stereotype is that violence is perpetuated by separatists or other armed groups that have resorted to terrorism to further their political goals. The situation is actually more complex because clan violence, more than violence led by separatists groups, appears to be the major cause of conflict in Mindanao, as attested to by the survey in 2002 supported by The Asia Foundation. Adding to the complexity of the situation is the fact that clan violence interrelates with separatism, banditry, and military involvement. Based on these realities, the Foundation is implementing a Conflict Management Program that focuses on gaining a deeper understanding of specific conflicts in Mindanao which will subsequently help in the design and implementation of strategic interventions to enable communities to address conflict.

To set the stage for a comprehensive investigation of clan conflicts, in March 2004, the Foundation convened a series of meetings with scholars and individuals from academic institutions and NGOs who are experts on Mindanao issues and clan violence. These meetings assessed the state of research on clan conflict, clarified issues surrounding *rido* (clan violence), and set directions for research on the topic. Through the discussions, cases of clan violence and escalation were highlighted and clarifications were made on the nature and stages of *rido* and the various types of clan conflict. The discussion also generated important methodological questions and preliminary research problems were proposed by the participants. This meeting laid the groundwork for systematic research on clan conflict.

Highlights (1 July – 31 December 2004)

- Responding to the recommendations and suggestions put forth by participants of the inaugural meeting, the Foundation convened a follow-up meeting in July 2004, for the 10 institutions who signified interest in studying *rido*. The purpose of the session was to review research priorities and critique draft research proposals. After further refining the methodologies and clarifying the research areas, the participating institutions coordinated their efforts to comprehensively study clan violence.
- The Foundation awarded nine grants from July to December 2004; the grants enabled the partners to conduct diagnostic activities on clan violence in Mindanao. In general, the studies involved the mapping of clan conflicts in selected provinces in Mindanao and conducting a series of in-depth studies on the dynamics of clan violence. (For a complete listing and details of the grants please refer to the Annex.)
- In December 2004, the clan conflict researchers met to update each other on the status of research being done, as well as to discuss the preliminary results of their studies. The group also made initial recommendations for interventions and suggested areas for further investigation. Some preliminary findings which surfaced during the discussions include:

1. *Rido* is more rampant than previously thought. For example, in the study conducted by the Institute of Bangsamoro Studies, the initial data revealed that from 1970 to 2004, there were at least 214 cases of *rido* in the province of Maguindanao alone.
 2. *Rido* is multi-dimensional. There are multi-layered and multi-positioned conflicts. This means that conflicts may not be limited to two groups of clans but could involve several clans forming temporary alliances. And, actors involved in conflicts hold multiple positions. Some of those involved are clan members in control of various fields of power, such as the traditional leadership structures, the local governments, military and paramilitary forces, or the insurgents.
 3. Some of the identified causes of *rido* can range from the most mundane and petty offenses like theft, cattle-rustling, non-payment of debts, to more serious crimes like murder, rape, and adultery. Other sources of conflict include disputes over land inheritance and land boundaries, politics, illegal drugs, robbery, suspicion, and oppression. Many of these offenses, when perceived to be affronts to the family's lineage or dignity (*maratabat*), are sources of *rido*.
- From August 13-17, the United Youth for Peace and Development (UNYPAD) organized an Indigenous Conflict Management Research Training Workshop in Cotabato City. The training, which was in preparation for UNYPAD's research on clan violence, focused on the conduct of focus group discussions, key informant interviews and interpretation of data gathered specifically in the context of indigenous conflict. During the training, the participants also developed instruments to be used for their upcoming research project. The training, conducted by Sentro para sa Ganap na Pamayanan, Inc. (SENTRO), included 20 participants from UNYPAD, the Consortium of Bangsamoro Civil Society, and the Institute of Bangsamoro Studies.

Addressing Community Conflicts over Natural Resources

In the Philippines, natural resources conflicts do not only divided and disrupt communities, they also lead to violent confrontations with government. These conflicts hamper productivity, investment, economic growth, and may in some cases lead to armed insurgency. In responding to community conflicts over natural resources, the Foundation supports environmental NGOs that assist in strengthening the capacity of the national government's resource management departments, promote negotiation coaching among communities, and support conflict management strategies for multiple-stakeholder conflicts.

Highlights

- Under this component, the Foundation awarded seven grants from July to December 2004. The program supported various institutions which organized activities that ranged from forums, conflict assessments, and conflict management trainings, to dialogs that address disputes over natural resources. (For a complete listing and details of the grants, please refer to the Annex).
- On October 18, 2004, the Cebu Uniting for Sustainable Water Foundation (CUSW) convened the “Forum-Workshop on Water Resources Governance and Management” in Cebu. The forum, which highlighted a holistic management of water, aimed toward a better understanding of the integrated water resource management principles. It also provided the venue for CUSW to consult with various stakeholders and organize tripartite partnerships. The forum included 89 participants representing relevant government agencies, local government units, NGOs, media groups, academe, and the private sector.
- On November 11 and 12, 2004, the College of Forestry and Natural Resources of the University of the Philippines in Los Baños, and Tanggol Kalikasan convened the “National Forum on Environmental Justice: Forests and Coastal Resources”. The forum allowed the exchange of ideas, insights and experiences on environmental justice. The 70 participants, were drawn from various environment stakeholders, particularly people’s organizations, government agencies, non-government organizations, local governments, policy researchers, professionals, media, and other environmental advocates from around the country. The forum was organized in partnership with the Environmental Legal Assistance Center (ELAC), Paglilingkod Batas Pangkapatiran Foundation (PBPF), the Center for International Environmental Law (CIEL), and the Ford Foundation, Inc.
- On November 26, 2004, the Foundation hosted a meeting for organizations involved in environment and natural resource management. The meeting provided prospective partners with an orientation on the Foundation’s conflict management program, especially its thrust of addressing community conflicts over natural resources, as well as the Foundation’s grant-making process. The participants discussed a number of possible areas for collaboration. The meeting was attended by 23 representatives from various environmental and resource management organizations in the country.

Strengthening Partnerships, Promoting Linkages and Sustaining Dialogues

As it has for the past 50 years, the Foundation supports activities in the Philippines that strengthen the capacities of its partners, increase their networking opportunities, and promote an atmosphere conducive for dialogues. Such efforts ensure greater opportunities for partners to exchange ideas and collaborate on initiatives. In line with this, the Foundation has supported the following activities:

- On August 10 and 11, the Foundation conducted a Grants Management Seminar for current and prospective partners of the Conflict Management in the Philippines Program. The seminar, held in Davao City, was attended by 33 participants from civil society groups and two representatives from the USAID.
- On September 24, the Foundation, in cooperation with the U.S. Embassy and USAID, sponsored a roundtable discussion on “Conflict Transformation: The Dynamics in Management of Complex Conflicts”. The guest lecturer was Dr. John Davies from the Center for International Development and Conflict Management at the University of Maryland. Twenty-five Filipino peace and conflict specialists representing the academe, NGOs, and Mindanao-based research institutions participated in the discussion held at the Asian Institute of Management Conference Center, Manila.
- The program supported the participation of two civil society representatives from Mindanao in the “South East Asian Conflict Studies Network (SEACSN) Conflict Management Regional Training Workshop” held in Pattaya, Thailand on October 3-8, 2004. The delegates were Don Mustapha Loong, Sulu Provincial Administrator and Yasmin Busran-Lao, Executive Director of the Al-Mujadillah Foundation in Marawi City. The five-day training explored strategies for designing conflict prevention and resolution processes and key skills required to make the processes effective. Each of the training modules contained conceptual information as well as practical activities and role-play. The Filipino delegates subsequently met with Thai civil society partners of the Foundation’s conflict management program in Thailand to share experiences and initiatives in conflict management.
- The Asia Foundation, in cooperation with the Australian Government through the Philippines-Australia Governance Facility, supported Social Weather Stations in designing and conducting a national survey module on the “Participation of Women in Peace, Governance and Development”. The survey generated baseline data for the Mindanao Commission on Women; the data will enable the Commission and its partners to undertake effective advocacy campaigns in three strategic areas: politics and governance, peace and multiculturalism, and development. While the support of AusAid allowed for a general national survey, the program’s support allowed a sample to be focused on the Autonomous Region for Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) that specifically dealt with questions on conflict and conflict management. The more focused survey generated statistically valid generalizations on the specific contributions of Muslim women to peace, development, and governance. It also provided a more meaningful comparison of data between the national survey and the ARMM survey. The module for the ARMM survey was implemented from November 29 to December 5, 2004.

Issues, Insights and Opportunities

Future Prospects in Addressing Community Conflicts Over Natural Resources

After a slow start in the area of addressing community resource conflicts, the momentum has picked up with earlier grants bearing fruit. For instance, SENTRO's project, which focuses on utilizing indigenous methods and processes in resolving conflicts over natural resources, is drawing interest among several indigenous and Moro groups. Some of the participants of project-funded activities of SENTRO have suggested that the project could be expanded to include other communities who experience similar conflicts.

New grants are currently being developed with leading institutions in natural resource and environmental management. Prospective partners include the Environmental Legal Assistance Center, Inc. which has proposed to assist local communities in Cebu, Bohol and Palawan to engage with various stakeholders to address coastal resource management conflicts. Similarly, the Foundation is reviewing a Conservation International proposal to conduct conflict mapping and a series of dialogs with stakeholders leading toward conservation in Tawi-Tawi's Turtle Islands Heritage Protected Area (TIHPA).

The Foundation's initiatives in clan conflict and natural resources conflict are not isolated from each other, in fact the two intersect. This intersection is clearly evident in the clan conflict research on the relationship between *rido* and land disputes in Mindanao. This significantly relates with the work of our partners, such as SENTRO, CO Multiversity and Notre Dame of Jolo College, whose researches focus on addressing community resource conflicts in Mindanao. The initial findings of the research underscore the potential for cross fertilization with other Foundation partners' initiatives in Luzon and Visayas. For instance, program support enabled Manila-based institutions like SENTRO to assist Muslim NGO partners and indigenous people's organizations in Mindanao. Similarly, support from the Foundation has prompted NGOs like CO Multiversity, MEDNET and the Consortium of Bangsamoro Civil Society to engage with the Foundation's partners in Sulu.

Difficulties in Addressing Clan Conflicts

The Foundation's initiative in the area of clan conflicts is quite unique. The research currently being undertaken in this area has generated a great deal of discussion and excitement from scholars and the local communities. The Foundation-organized meetings and roundtable discussions on clan conflict have sparked animated debates on the topic and have gained enthusiastic support from our partners. The Foundation's initiative in scrutinizing the dynamics of conflicts in Mindanao, complemented by the engaged advocacy of our partners, has raised the level of awareness of concerned sectors and stakeholders on the issue of *rido* and other forms of communal conflicts. But while the Foundation's initiative has generated a lot of interest and awareness about *rido*, the road to understanding and addressing this phenomenon is fraught with many dangers and difficulties as currently experienced by some of its partners.

The Foundation's partners working on this coordinated investigation of *rido* have encountered several obstacles in the conduct of their research. For instance, a partner conducting research in Basilan and Sulu was suspected by respondents of gathering intelligence for the U.S. military. This suspicion was apparently caused by the recent outbreak of hostilities between the Philippine military and the Moro National Liberation group loyal to Nur Misuari. Another partner, the Consortium of Bangsamoro Civil Society, which is a Muslim peace network, was similarly suspected of being spies by the Manobo indigenous people. The suspicion is caused by the long years of entangled conflicts in the area which have fueled divisions and distrust among the ethnic groups. Another partner, the Mindanawon Initiatives for Cultural Dialogue, also expressed their helplessness at the overwhelming occurrences of *rido* in the field and felt the need for additional assistance from other institutions and networks, such as the Coordinating Committee on the Cessation of Hostilities (set up by the Philippine government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front as part of the peace process) to address the clan conflicts they encounter in the field. In general, the sensitive nature of clan conflicts has been a constant obstacle for the researchers. The topic's sensitivity has delayed certain aspects of the program, as the Foundation's partners needed ample time to lay the groundwork and thereby earn the trust of key informants and the families involved in *rido*.

Aside from the above-mentioned problems experienced by the Foundation's partners, there is a real danger for the issue of *rido* to be misunderstood or taken out of context. There is a possibility that the data gathered could be used to reinforce the already negative stereotype of Mindanao and Muslims. Another danger is that *rido* can be misperceived by armed elements (like the Philippine military or the insurgents) as actions by their opponents, in turn justifying armed conflict in the area.

Despite these challenges, there are refreshing breakthroughs that promise more opportunities for dialogs and resolution. For instance, the Consortium of Bangsamoro Civil Society's persistence and sincerity in reaching out to the Manobo

during their research has promoted genuine dialogues between Muslim and Manobo communities that have, for a long time, held misconceptions about each other. Similarly, another partner, the United Youth for Peace and Development (UNYPAD), has begun to earn the trust of the families they are studying (families who were involved in *rido*) to the point where the protagonist families themselves are asking for UNYPAD to assist in settling their conflicts. Such initiatives will help guide future interventions.

As the coordinated investigation of clan violence nears completion and the picture of clan conflict dynamics gets clearer, it is expected that the Foundation will move towards more strategic interventions to take advantage of the increasing interest of the NGOs who want to address clan conflicts. In the next reporting period, the clan conflict researchers will publicly present their research findings in a series of public forums slated in May (Davao) and June (Manila). It is hoped that the series of forums will increase public awareness about the issue of clan conflict and generate commitment from government to assist and mobilize stakeholders to pursue concrete actions to address *rido*. Because of the involvement of local partners in the program, extra care has been given to ensure the fair treatment of issues related to clan conflicts. Sensitive and ethical issues were taken into account and discussed thoroughly with partners, and measures were agreed upon to ensure that the issues were adequately addressed. The Foundation's initiatives in understanding clan conflicts and other forms of communal conflicts is a milestone for Philippine Social Sciences, for it not only unravels the complexity of conflict in Mindanao, but also opens more avenues for stakeholders to address such conflicts.