## Differences between Programming Paradigms in Conflict Settings

### 1. Programming Paradigms in Conflict Settings

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Programming Paradigms</th>
<th>Level of Understanding of the Conflict</th>
<th>Programming Approach</th>
<th>Capacity Implications</th>
<th>Guiding Principles for Programming</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Traditional Development Programming</td>
<td>Typically no concerted attempt to understand the conflict.</td>
<td>Continue with sectoral programming without addressing the potential positive or negative impact on the conflict context. Program’s key goals are sectoral.</td>
<td>Funding and staffing remains the same.</td>
<td>None for programming in a conflict setting; thus, there is a real risk of exacerbating conflict and doing harm.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Conflict-Sensitive Programming</td>
<td>Adequate understanding of the conflict to ensure that the program, at a minimum, does not exacerbate the situation and, ideally, reduces dividers and supports existing connectors.</td>
<td>Continue with sectoral programming but ensure, at a minimum, that it does not exacerbate the conflict context. Program’s key goals are to minimize negative and maximize positive impacts of programming on the conflict, as well as on sectoral goals.</td>
<td>Funding and staffing levels will remain roughly the same, though new expertise may be required, depending on the issues. Staff need to be trained in basic conflict analysis, mainstreaming and sensitivity.</td>
<td>Do No Harm (Mary Anderson) Conflict Sensitivity (International Alert)</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Direct Conflict Programming (also sometimes called Peacebuilding Programming)</td>
<td>Deeper understanding of the key drivers of conflict and dynamics among factors and key actors to ensure program relevance.</td>
<td>Conduct a stand-alone peacebuilding program. Program’s core aim is to reduce the key drivers of violent conflict and contribute to societal-level peace (Peace Writ Large). e.g., by expanding the work into new issue areas or new geographic areas.</td>
<td>Increased resources needed to support training for staff and key partners and for implicit/explicit peacebuilding efforts. New expertise will be required, including conflict assessment, skills, sensitivity, program design and evaluation. Possible need for conflict specialist.</td>
<td>Do No Harm (Mary Anderson) Conflict Sensitivity (International Alert) Peace Writ Large Criteria of Effectiveness (CDA Inc.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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1 Adapted in part from Dr. Nike Carstarphen, ACT 2004, and in part from Peter Woodrow and Diana Chigas, “A Distinction with a Difference: Conflict Sensitivity and Peacebuilding.” CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, 2010, p. 10. The text in italics comes from Woodrow and Chigas.

**Understanding the Mindanao Conflict**

The origins of the Mindanao conflict can be traced back to the 16th century when the native Moro population of the island resisted invading Spanish forces. This conflict between the capital in Manila and Moro Mindanao has continued for over 400 years, albeit in intermittent fashion. At present, the Mindanao subnational conflict area covers about 10% of Philippine territory, and is home to about 6% of the national population. The conflict is concentrated in the Muslim-dominated regions of Mindanao, which is the southernmost island of the Philippine archipelago, and has a population of 5.5 million, a third of whom have been affected by violence.

After more than 10 years of negotiations, the Philippine Government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) signed a breakthrough agreement—the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB)—on 15 October 2012. Negotiations continued into 2013 as joint technical working groups developed detailed agreements on difficult issues such as power and wealth sharing, ‘normalization’ (i.e., security, development, and cultural changes to allow citizens of all communities to move on and live a normal life), and the drafting of legislation that will govern the new autonomous Bangsamoro region. However, observers of the negotiations remain optimistic that the two parties can overcome their differences.

The conflict in the Moro areas has evolved over the past 44 years—from an ethno-nationalist struggle between an aggrieved minority and the central government, to a highly fragmented conflict with multiple overlapping causes of violence. While ‘state-minority’ contestation has traditionally been viewed as the dominant form of contestation in Moro areas, inter-elite competition is the major source of contestation and violence across Mindanao. Local-level conflict can escalate into state-minority conflict. In a number of cases, clan conflicts (or *rido*) have instigated state-insurgent violence. Conflict dynamics vary considerably from one community to another, and even within the same province, depending on the configuration of local elite political networks, and the presence or absence of insurgent groups.
Mindanao has also shown highly uneven development, with the conflict areas having the lowest levels of growth. Conflict-affected areas of Mindanao have the highest poverty levels and the lowest levels of human development in the Philippines. The human and financial costs of the conflict have been enormous. Conservative official estimates indicate that more than 120,000 lives have been lost in the Moro conflict, with an economic cost estimated at US$2-3 billion.

**Transforming the Conflict**

While the transition in Mindanao from conflict to peace has accelerated since the signing of the FAB in October 2012, the roadmap to a lasting peace is anything but clear, and reaching a durable peace may take a generation.

One of the fundamental challenges in Mindanao is the widespread lack of confidence in the transition from conflict to stability. Most people believe that violence will continue for years, though the FAB is widely seen as a key component in ‘jumpstarting’ the process of attaining durable solutions to the conflict. Furthermore, there must be changes in political dynamics between national and local elites. These have long been viewed as an effort to divide the Moro population, and have frequently undermined the credibility of government peace efforts.

Although it is recognized that *rido* is the primary cause of instability in many conflict localities, most conflict prevention measures are geared toward addressing state-minority contestation. In order to make the best use of international aid, a deep understanding of the drivers of inter-elite and inter-communal competition is needed as it varies greatly across Mindanao’s regions, provinces and municipalities.

The FAB provides a critically-needed mandate to reform several key institutions and government structures. The Transition Commission (TC) has been designed to support reforms that will be driven primarily by Moro leaders, and should help to strengthen the legitimacy of institutions that come out of this process. It is particularly important to show quick progress in reforming security and justice institutions in conflict areas.

**Aid and Development Programs**

International development actors have been extremely active in the Moro regions of Mindanao. With an open invitation from the government to fund programs in the subnational conflict area and work directly on peace and conflict issues, the environment for aid programs is remarkably different from Aceh and southern Thailand. Mindanao has seen consistently high levels of funding, with a proliferation of projects and aid organizations working in the conflict area.

The significant build-up of aid programs has led to fragmentation and duplication. In conflict-affected barangays, multiple projects are often concentrated in very small areas, often with similar objectives but entirely different donor requirements and procedures.
Gender and Conflict in Mindanao


Introduction: Gender in Conflict Zones

It has been more than a decade since the U.N. Security Council adopted Resolution 1325, which called upon the international community to actively consider the needs of women and girls in conflict situations, and incorporate them into peace-building and conflict resolution activities. In that time, there has been considerably greater understanding and recognition of women’s varying roles in both conflict and peace-building, as well as of the different impacts of conflict on men and women. There is now strong support for the view that -- through their social contributions as citizens, educators, economic actors, mothers, community mediators and leaders of civil society groups -- women hold a vital responsibility for shaping peace.

Yet, for all the rhetorical progress in acknowledging the importance of incorporating gender into conflict mitigation and resolution programming, efforts remain limited. To the degree that such efforts have been undertaken, they often remain confined to a Women In Development-style approach, expanding women’s participation into pre-figured, ostensibly gender-neutral programs. This is far from adequate, as this approach frequently fails to incorporate women stakeholders’ input into fundamental program design, or to consider how enhancing the quality of women’s participation might improve outcomes.

Moreover, "incorporating gender" requires one to go beyond simply considering women's roles to more broadly analyzing the different needs, experiences, and capacities of men and women, boys and girls. We posit that conflict programming will be maximally effective in both reducing conflict and promoting sustainable, equitable peace when a comprehensive gender analysis is utilized. Such an analysis begins with the understanding that both women and men are embedded within dynamic cultural systems that give meaning and power to their lives. An analysis of the gendered dynamics of power in conflict contexts is fundamental to identifying opportunities and barriers to effective participation of men and women when designing and implementing programs, as well as carefully assessing and tracking the gendered impacts of conflict and peace-building. To date, very few programs incorporate such a comprehensive effort.

This study was commissioned by The Asia Foundation’s Women’s Empowerment Program in Washington, D.C. and The Asia Foundation Philippines office in Manila. It is a preliminary attempt to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the complex gender dynamics of conflict by looking at the Philippines as a case study.

Gender Dynamics in the Conflict Zone

While the crisis in Mindanao has generated a vast amount of analysis, women’s experiences are generally neglected when exploring potential responses. In keeping with the widespread view that the actions of armed combatants and formal “Track One” peace processes are, respectively,
the primary drivers of conflict and peace, expert accounts of the Mindanao conflict often assume it to be an arena defined and occupied almost solely by men, or one in which gender has little relevance to the key issues at stake. Analyses that stress needs for identity and recognition, or economic security on the part of Mindanaans likewise tend to ignore gender, assuming a homogenous Islamic or ethnic identity to provide the core of social meaning in conflict-affected regions of Mindanao. Even when analyses acknowledge the connections between local disputes and regional and national conflict, women are often viewed largely in passive terms, such as when they become the pretext for clan conflict in cases of adultery or elopement or sexual harassment, with these perceived insults to women provoking the pride and rage of men.

Mindanao’s women do not see themselves as passive observers to the conflict, however, as the island’s vibrant civil society sector makes clear. Yet women face numerous challenges in organizing effectively. Women’s groups in the region have often fragmented along religious, ideological and class lines, and some groups have faced pressure to subordinate discussions of their core gender issues to claims of nationalist or religious identity.¹ Competition around scarce donor funds also exacerbates divisions. In short, we must approach the issue of gender and conflict in Mindanao with the understanding that neither women nor men can be viewed as a monolithic bloc, and that achieving an effective and sustainable peace will only succeed if it is highly attuned to local gender and power dynamics.

The Impact of the Conflict on Gender Dynamics in Mindanao

Gender and Mobility

Conflict-related shifts in mobility were cited in every focus group discussion as a major concern for communities. When violence flares, people in local communities may be trapped in their homes, unable to access employment, education, healthcare, or markets. As conflict intensifies, people may become refugees, forced to leave their lands and livelihoods to seek safety. Substantial numbers of those interviewed endured repeated cycles of fleeing for refuge and returning to their lands. Even in the absence of physical violence, conflict shifts people’s social interactions, such as with the introduction of checkpoints that limit their movements, or when borders between safe and dangerous areas become difficult to determine. At the same time, places that were once deemed to offer security, including homes and ancestral lands, become rife with new uncertainties as conflict extends past the formal political domain and touches the lives of kin and neighbors. Conflict creates new forms of risk, vulnerability, and fear.

Restrictions in mobility as a result of conflict are highly gender-specific. During rido conflict (periodic outbursts of retaliatory family and clan violence), men are especially vulnerable as the primary targets for revenge, and it is common for them to respond by drastically limiting their social movements to avoid attacks. Women are far less frequently targeted for rido killings, which means that they often must go out to undertake the activities traditionally performed by men. Similarly, in cases of conflict between armed combatant groups, men run the risk of being mistaken for combatants by state forces, or of being pressured to join insurgent groups, leading them to restrict their travels outside of the home and to rely upon women’s greater ability to move in public spaces.
For Mindanaoan men, this restriction of mobility often creates a deep sense of social and political paralysis. Men in conflict-affected regions of Mindanao expressed feeling as if they were being “sandwiched” between rival combatant groups, or compared themselves to a kind of local bread (bibingka) that is toasted on both sides. The severe curtailment of men’s mobility has serious impacts on multiple aspects of social life, from local economies and political processes to men’s relationships with women in their families and communities. With men subject to suspicion as potential combatants or under direct physical threat, women are often required to take on new livelihood or leadership responsibilities outside of the home. Common tasks include tending fields and livestock, bringing goods to market, escorting children to school, searching out wage labor, or working to help identify and resolve community concerns. In cases of armed violence between rival combatant groups, women also may take on the roles of emergency medics and rescue agents, risking crossfire or interrogation by armed forces to retrieve the dead and wounded. Since women are seen as less likely to be physical threats, they may also be tasked with negotiating with occupying forces for access to subsistence needs during conflict.

In discussions, women emphasized both the opportunities and the burdens of their travel and work outside of the home. They referenced the pride and satisfaction they felt at their capacities, as well as exhaustion from performing a “double role” in the absence of male support. Women also acknowledged that while they were indeed less likely than men to be mistaken for partisans or combatants, it was still dangerous for them to travel in conflict zones, where they risk getting caught in crossfire or face the threat of sexual violence or intimidation (although rape has generally not been deployed as a weapon of war in conflict-affected regions of Mindanao). Women are occupying new space in Mindanao and performing new roles, but are often severely challenged in the process.

**Economic Burdens**

Conflict economies do not distribute wealth equally, and field research demonstrated just how violence has impoverished the majority of people in conflict-affected areas, while allowing a privileged few to amass substantial wealth. Political and economic influence is often secured at the point of a gun, marginalizing those Mindanaoans who do not align themselves with local power brokers or combatant groups, and encouraging corruption and banditry. Rural communities, and Muslim-majority communities whose residents are most prone to being suspected of separatist activities, often experience these effects most deeply, further exacerbating economic inequalities along existing urban-rural and Christian-Muslim divides.

Without exception, all those interviewed in conflict-affected areas stressed the direct links between conflict and increased economic hardship for their families and communities. When the threat of violence traps people in their homes, they can no longer access jobs or markets. Economic activity becomes subject to new risks and insecurities, as when investments in homes, livestock or trade goods are lost due to the need to evacuate, or when crops fail due to the inaccessibility of fields during firefight or security blockades. The factors necessary for lasting economic growth – roads, the free flow of goods and information, educational opportunities and healthcare – are often absent during armed conflict, deeply exacerbating community vulnerabilities.
As conflict has sharpened class inequalities in Mindanao, it has also intensified gender divisions. For example, in an agricultural community in Cotabato, where armed conflict between the Philippines Armed Forces and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front has been a regular occurrence, women were forced to tend to fields and livestock alone in addition to their traditional duties of caring for homes and families. In a community in Lanao, where rido conflicts extend back generations, women described how long-standing limitations on men’s mobility have led to a clear gap between the educational status of women and men. Some men have been forced to drop out of school as early as the primary grades, leaving them unable to qualify for anything but low-skilled manual labor, and placing a larger burden of income generation on women. As protracted conflict lingers, such gender divisions may harden from temporary expediencies into social realities that are difficult to reverse.

In cases of rido conflict, women also identified men’s perceived need to violently defend life and honor as an additional strain on household economies. When a family is involved in rido, men feel they must arm themselves with guns, purchase ammunition, and, if possible, ensure the family has transportation ready in case they need to flee. One NGO worker involved in rido resolution in Lanao province explained that in her experience, families affected by rido would prefer to “let their houses fall apart in order to buy a car,” anticipating the need to suddenly transport family and possessions to safety. For families whose limited income already places them near or below the poverty line, preparing for rido may mean sacrificing food, healthcare, and school fees. Indeed, men in this community acknowledged that their need to buy bullets was a source of regular family conflict, as women struggled to make ends meet after a reduction in their already strained household budgets.

The intimate links between poverty and conflict – what Susan Rice provocatively called a “doom spiral” in which poverty and insecurity work to reinforce each other – clearly have strong gender dimensions that are crucial to recognize. As many international organizations and scholars are now recognizing, the drastic social shifts that mark conflict may paradoxically create spaces for women’s power and creativity to emerge as they take up new socioeconomic roles. However, few local programs or support structures exist to help women with these challenges. In the absence of skills training, access to capital, psychosocial support, dependable childcare or healthcare, guarantees of physical security while working, or opportunities for men to also contribute their share, women overwhelmingly tended to view their economic contributions during conflict less as examples of empowerment and more as an exhausting strain. Women’s empowerment, in this case, clearly cannot be measured solely in terms of economic participation, much less the limited tabulation of income, but needs to be seen in a broader social light that acknowledges the multiple determinants of women’s well-being.

Here it is important to recognize that women’s “agency,” in the sense of the ability to make choices and changes in one’s situation, does not always easily translate into women’s empowerment. The creativity and resilience displaced women demonstrate constitute absolutely vital resources for community well-being. Yet many of the active choices women are able to make during conflict may amplify their personal vulnerability, as when a young woman decides to risk becoming a migrant worker abroad rather than remain in the desperate confines of a refugee camp, or when a mother damages her own health by feeding her children rather than herself. Programs that use languages of agency and participation to shift increased burdens of responsibility onto women in the absence of essential structural and societal changes – such as
providing income-generating opportunities, ensuring healthy and safe living conditions, and reducing the burden of care that women maintain in the home as they take on added economic, leadership and organizational roles outside the home – not only risk failure at achieving their stated goals but of increasing women’s disempowerment.

**Young Women and Girls**

While recognizing the specific gender effects of conflict is vital to the design of more effective programming, it is also crucial to recognize that women are not a monolithic category. Women’s concerns vary substantially based on geography, ethnicity, religion, and class. Generational differences are among the most important determinants of women’s experience, yet attention to the specific needs of young women and girls is often sorely lacking when designing programs. Where specific efforts are undertaken to empower youth, those initiatives frequently fail to acknowledge the importance of gender. Yet when the needs of young women are ignored, their disempowerment may have effects that linger for generations.

One of the most serious challenges youth face is in acquiring the tools needed to transform their futures, particularly related to education. The elementary school completion rate in ARMM stands at a dismal 34.76%, the lowest of any province in the country and a full 50% below the rates in metropolitan Manila. Moreover, in many areas girls are less likely to participate in schooling compared to boys. In ARMM, schooling is often interrupted when schools close due to conflict, families are displaced, or conflict-related poverty pushes children into employment or early marriage. Women explained during interviews that even when their children were able to return to school, the effects of long displacements or emotional disturbances often disrupted educational progress. For a generation of youth, limited educational attainment risks becoming a barrier to their future participation in civic and economic life.

Young women and girls suffer disproportionately from the negative physical and psychological impacts of conflict. Armed violence and the increased poverty and isolation that accompany it interrupt the provision of basic medical services, including vaccinations, preventative care and, for young women, reproductive healthcare. Meanwhile, children, like the elderly, are most vulnerable to the diseases, including diarrheal illness, pneumonia, and dengue hemorrhagic fever, common among the displaced living in crowded and unsanitary conditions. Developmentally, young people may have less resilience to these physical and emotional stressors of conflict. While comprehensive recent assessments of the health impacts of conflict in Mindanao on young people are lacking, a 2004 University of the Philippines study found that an alarming 94% of 1,200 children surveyed demonstrated symptoms of trauma, while a 2006 UNICEF report described a host of psychological disturbances to be found among children, including deep anxiety, feelings of vengeance and anger, confusion and lack of self-confidence, hopelessness in the future, and a persistent sense of loss.5

While little quantitative data is available on how gender shapes the psychosocial effects of conflict on young people in Mindanao, field research offered young women a space to express their serious concerns. They spoke especially forcefully about how their physical and emotional security has been threatened by conflict. The presence of armed men in their communities, and the extreme power disparities between combatant forces and local residents or the displaced, often left women anxious and fearful of going out, and they spoke of sleeping with cell phones.
under their pillows in case of an attack during the night. Many young women stressed their desire to help bring peace to their communities by contributing to the work of non-governmental organizations or through informal means. However, some young women were adamant that the only hope they had was to find a way to leave Mindanao entirely.

These psychosocial impacts of conflict risk being ignored, in large part because psychosocial work is often seen as less urgent than addressing macro-level political structures in peace-building or meeting physical needs such as providing food and shelter. Recognition of the magnitude of mental health problems in Mindanao has also been hampered by stereotypes of Mindanaoans as a “tough” or “warlike” people for whom violence has become normal. Indeed, the head of the Philippine government’s Social and Welfare Department stated in 2008 that “Some [IDPs] need some counseling, most do not. A lot of them are used to it. It’s not the first time this has happened.” Yet research in other settings has shown that people do not become “used to” violence; rather, repeated exposure to traumas may produce chronic or complex post-traumatic stress disorder that impacts social functioning.

The Nexus of Gender Role Transformations and Cultural Values

In the literature on gender and conflict, in-depth examinations of the relationships between masculinity and conflict have been relatively rare. Young men, in particular, are often subject to stereotypes that they are biologically prone to violence, while women are stereotyped as either natural peacemakers or passive victims. Applying a nuanced gender analysis of needs, interests, and opportunities helps move beyond these stereotypes and aid in identification of effective policies and programs to cut the cycle of conflict and resolve long-standing feelings of injustice.

Transforming Women’s Roles

When clan or ethnic identity is perceived to be under attack, ideas about how to define one’s group and the limits of permissible behavior can become more rigid and conservative, thus limiting the space for dialogue on how gender patterns might be able to shift in contemporary Mindanao. Scripts for “appropriate womanhood” may become more central to these identity definitions, circumscribing women's roles. According to The Asia Foundation’s sponsored 2008 research on rido, as many as 20% of clan conflicts are triggered by incidents involving perceived slights against women and the honor of their families. Cases of elopement or romantic involvement across religious or ethnic lines were frequently cited as providing a rationale for revenge killings. Many young women expressed unease at the restrictions this created on possible marriage partners and worried that they would be torn between their own choices and concerns about triggering potential violence. By intensifying cultural values of clan and ethnic identity, and tying them to women’s propriety, rido conflict not only risks harming women by the threat of physical violence, but of intensifying systems of structural violence. Rido, in other words, positions women as a highly charged site for social identity formation.

In a number of local conflict resolution cases, the fundamental rights of women were a distinct afterthought to efforts to contain conflict. For example, in one case, a young woman’s complaints to her family of being sexually molested by an older relative were “resolved” by her forced return to her abuser. In another case, advertised by a local NGO as a success story for its alternative dispute resolution program, a young Muslim woman and a young Christian man
elope, to the great distress of the woman’s family. When violent clan conflict threatened to break out between the families, a resolution was brokered, concluding in the young woman being returned to her family, convicted of *jinnah* under Islamic law, and sentenced to a beating of 100 lashes. While this resolution ensured “peace” in a limited sense, it could certainly not be described as just. When these tensions were raised in an interview with the NGO, the response was: “We need to respect their culture.” In such cases, women become the grounds on which to enact increasingly homogenous versions of identity, at the same time as they speak of broader gendered tensions between conflict resolution and human rights approaches.

The highly charged environment of conflict makes it difficult to openly discuss cultural patterns and how these may be impacting women. For Philippines peace-building or human rights activists working in Mindanao, strong tensions around issues of Christian/Muslim religious difference and discrimination mean that questions of how a conflict-related resurgence of identity politics may be affecting the choices available to women are difficult to raise, with few safe spaces in which to begin the dialogue. For example, some rebel leaders explicitly eschew discussions of gender, claiming that the issues central to their struggle are those of sovereignty, economic and political marginalization, and Bangsamoro identity. Meanwhile, one Manila-based government official active in peace negotiations with the MILF stated during an interview, “It is my perception that women are not equal in Islam, so if we push a gender agenda, we might offend the Muslims we are negotiating with.” Such well-meaning “respect,” while laudable, also serves to marginalize the voices of Muslim women advocates for gender justice, and suppresses a vital and overdue dialogue that is important for women’s peace and development.

**Transforming Men's Roles**

During field research in Mindanao, complex links between conflict and concepts of masculinity emerged. Interviews with both men and women illustrated how the structural constraints and opportunities that have accompanied conflict have had a substantial effect on shaping male social roles. The presence of armed conflict in communities, coupled with heightened surveillance by both the military and separatist forces of men suspected of combat or collaboration, decreases men’s physical and social mobility. These restrictions on men’s ability to engage in their communities lead directly to educational gaps, underemployment, and an inability to participate fully in civil society. For many men, the best opportunity to break free of these restrictive structures lies in the relative power, safety, and autonomy that accompanies participation in armed combatant groups, and the possibility of attaining greater wealth. Even for those men who stay on the path of peace, the effects of these gendered constraints may persist long after the immediate danger of violent conflict subsides. Powerlessness, poverty, and lasting psychosocial difficulties mar hopes for individual opportunities, and ultimately, risk a lasting peace.

Although Mindanaoan men are often described by both outsiders and themselves as highly invested in local cultural values of honor and family/ethnic pride that demand violent defense against perceived slights, field research painted a more complex portrait. Like women, men in Mindanao’s conflict zones openly acknowledged high levels of psychological distress due to violence and the persistent stressors of poverty, ill health, insecurity, and fear. Few described violent conflict as natural, pleasurable, desirable, or inevitable; instead, they talked about how conflict severely disrupted their lives. Unlike women, however, men tended to describe their experiences using a culturally-coded masculine language of dignity and honor, referencing the
ways conflict had in fact made it more difficult for them to live up to idealized images. For some of these men, joining in violence seems to offer a chance to regain social prestige and dignity.

In discussing their experiences, men often described how the increased poverty and immobility they faced due to conflict made them increasingly vulnerable to economic exploitation, which in turn intensified their sense of having their ethnic and religious identity violated. This sense of injustice sometimes led them to consider taking on combat roles. For example, in a majority-Muslim community in Lanao del Sur that has repeatedly been caught in the crossfire between the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, men reported that their inability to properly tend their fields meant their harvests had decreased. Non-Muslim moneylenders have taken advantage of their predicament, charging them high rates of interest – up to 300% -- for agricultural loans. Men used words like “degraded” and “hopeless” to describe their situation, stating that their sense of themselves as an oppressed Moro Muslim minority had been heightened within this constant cycle of conflict and debt, especially given Islam’s prohibition of the charging of interest on loans.

This sense of being trapped by structures outside of their control had a clear resonance, with men describing anguished feelings of frustration and anger at not being able to fulfill what they saw as their male responsibility to provide for, and protect, their families. “We already feel like ‘wanted men’,” one man explained, “so, why not fight for our families rather than wait to be shot?”

Meanwhile, discussions with women in the same community provided insight into other repercussions of these dynamics: increased levels of domestic violence as some men turn their rage and distress on women, and a rise in the prevalence of polygamy, as unemployed men “spend their time sending text messages to girlfriends,” or pursuing new wives as symbols of virility and influence. In the absence of clear strategies for nonviolent social and economic change, the frustration of men’s need for a socially-accepted sense of dignity may clearly act as a conduit for new recruits to violence.

**Women’s Role in Peace-building**
It has become increasingly clear over the past decades that women across the globe may direct the forces of war, serve as combatants, offer their political and social backing to armed conflict, or serve in symbolic roles as “mothers of the nation” who sacrifice their children to armed struggle.\(^1\) By mitigating the negative impacts of conflict on communities through their creativity and resilience, women can become essential to the continuation of war, lending it political legitimacy alongside pragmatic support.\(^2\) At the same time, women have a unique perspective on the human costs of conflict and often have an intimate view of the disproportionate impact of armed conflict on children. While it is often assumed that women tend to be silenced due to unequal gender relations, and that the absence of women’s voices is intensified in situations of conflict, the shifting landscapes prompted by conflict may actually provide new opportunities for women to speak and act.\(^3\) Having suffered so much in war can push women to assert the necessity of non-violence.

A dozen women in a rural community in Cotabato gathered to tell their stories. Since 2003, their village had been a site of frequent armed conflict between the military and the MILF. In 2007, the situation worsened dramatically when the military set up a local base in their village, radically limiting residents’ mobility. Men had to ask for permission from the soldiers to go to their fields or to fish in the nearby lake, and women’s access to markets was often blocked. As the conflict grew more and more heated, the military instituted a total blackout in the village, and banned residents from traveling. Finally, one woman in her fifties decided she could no longer stand seeing her family and neighbors suffer. “Nobody in the barangay had rice,” she explained. “Everyone told me that to try to mediate with the army would be suicide, but I was desperate.” Drawing upon the skills she had used as a mediator of community disputes, she went to both the mayor of the village and the leader of the local Armed Forces battalion to request that the women be allowed to travel in and out of the village. “A man couldn’t have done what I did,” she explained. “He might have been hurt, or gotten angry. But I was able to act as the conscience of the soldiers and the mayor, to remind them, as a mother, of what was right.”

The devastating effects of conflict on women in Mindanao are undeniable. But in considering women’s current and potential contributions to peace-building in Mindanao, there are also reasons for optimism. The Philippines has a long and rich history of civil society activism, and in Mindanao, there has been a long-standing acknowledgment of women’s power and potential. In part as a result of conflict, women in Mindanao are not secluded in a closed-off domestic sphere. Their words may compel social respect, and they may rise to important leadership positions. But perhaps most importantly for the prospect of peace, women across the social spectrum in Mindanao often draw upon long-standing traditions of women’s participation in community conflict resolution and mediation. While such empowerment of Muslim women is far from universal and is often strongly linked to class, education and family prestige, it provides a strong counter to predominant stereotypes.

One of the most striking findings of field research was the gap between what elite Filipino actors assumed women in Mindanao to be capable of as active mediators of conflict and what local women themselves described as their roles and abilities. Manila-based NGO staff, academics and government personnel acknowledged that Mindanao women could play important roles in working for peace, but they clearly distinguished between what they considered to be women’s
inability to participate in Track One negotiations or serve a key role in the resolution of major rido conflict versus their roles as mediators of small-scale disputes. As one metropolitan activist explained, “Women can resolve conflicts when someone’s goat eats a neighbor’s vegetables, but it’s hard to imagine women being taken seriously at the negotiating table with the MILF.” Many activists expressed the idea that gender-balanced participation in formal peace talks was not only impossible given the “conservative” stance of the MILF on gender issues, but that pushing for women’s inclusion in Track One or even potential Track Two peace processes was, in some ways, premature. Under this reasoning, what was first needed was a peace agreement that would put an end to the armed conflict, while women’s roles were seen as a secondary issue that could be dealt with later, along with other development issues like poverty, public health and rebuilding infrastructure.

However, both women and men in Mindanao itself voiced the idea that women could provide Track One processes with useful insights and contributions. Indeed, many of those interviewed believed that women possessed effective communication styles and a degree of empathy that could potentially make them effective negotiators. While Muslim respondents tended to believe that men had ultimate leadership responsibility for the formal peace process, they saw no reason for women to be excluded and every reason for their voices to be added to the cohort of those devoting themselves to conflict resolution at the national and regional levels.

Women in Mindanao also shared stories of what they had already accomplished as mediators and peace-builders. Their stories, spanning cases of the resolution of small-scale, community-level conflict, to negotiating with warring factions and the Army, point to their under-utilized potential in conflict mitigation programming. During clan conflict, women may negotiate directly with representatives of conflicting parties, or, more often, they may follow a behind-the-scenes approach, complementing the work of official, publicly recognized mediators. When talking with men, women can often raise inflammatory topics, including issues of family honor and offenses against women that other men often cannot. Women also stressed that in resolving conflict, they used language that “cooled,” rather than inflamed the situation, and tried to spend more time listening to people’s complaints than talking themselves. During clan conflict, women are also the ones responsible for organizing the kanduri feast that publicly signals that a resolution to conflict has been reached which, if not prepared properly, can risk renewing tensions.

While most of the women interviewed agreed that conflict resolution practice requires certain valued personality traits, they emphasized that mediation skills can be learned and honed. Traditionally, women learned how to mediate conflict from their mothers and grandmothers, and from listening to stories of conflicts that had been resolved. Now, however, they recognized that conflict itself had become more complex in Mindanao, with armed groups multiplying and local disputes intersecting with rivalries between warring factions. For women active within NGO-sponsored peace-building networks, the opportunity to hear from other women about how they had addressed unique situations was an important one. While skills training in peace work could not, they felt, replace the character and commitment needed to resolve conflict, they highly valued the opportunity to learn new methods of mitigating and mediating conflict, and to gain resources and support for their work.


Rajasingham-Senanayake describes a similar situation for women in Sri Lanka, writing that “…conflict has opened up new spaces for women’s agency and leadership within changing family and community structures, even as it has destroyed others and placed a double burden on many.” See Darini Rajasingham-Senanayake 2006. “Between Tamil and Muslim: Women Mediating Multiple Identities in a New War.” In Gender, Conflict and Migration, Navrita Chadha Behera, ed., New York: Sage Publications.


Jinnah is defined as illicit sex between two people who are not married.


The Mindanao Case: Ensuring a Gender-Sensitive Conflict Assessment

The following are excerpts from an email message you just received from a colleague at USAID/Philippines, where you have just taken up a new position. Your first assignment at post is to help ensure that an upcoming conflict assessment in Mindanao is gender-sensitive. Your colleague on the assessment planning team has thoughtfully provided some materials she thinks might help you.

Hi, and welcome to Manila! Everyone on the conflict assessment team is excited for your input, especially given the gender and conflict training we heard you just completed. To recap our earlier conversation about this, we’re having a team meeting later this afternoon and we’re hoping you can give us ideas about the following:

1) Who should we make sure we’re talking to in the field to ensure we’re getting a gender perspective? What groups of people should we make sure to engage?
2) What kinds of questions should we be asking to get at relevant gender issues?
3) Is there any other information (other assessments, demographic or economic data, etc.) the staff can help you find? What additional materials would be helpful for you to have?

I also pulled together a couple of resources that you’ll find interesting. I know you have a copy of the CDCS on your desk, but I’ve highlighted some sections that I thought would be especially interesting for you to review:

Highlighted excerpts from USAID Philippines Country Development Cooperation Strategy 2012-2016:

On Mindanao and conflict:

Prosperity and stability in the Philippines are further undermined by armed conflict and the threat of international terrorism. Conflict occurs throughout the country, but the most conflict and terrorism-threatened area is Mindanao – the Philippine’s largest, and potentially most productive region. While violence remains scattered and relatively low-level, its persistence discourages investment, drains government resources and poses a continuing risk of connections to international terrorism.

The Mission’s previous, large Mindanao program (nearly 60% of the budget) emphasized investments in economic infrastructure, agricultural development, education, and direct service provision covering the entire island. The much smaller Mindanao program (DO2) in the new strategy represents only about 10% of the Mission’s budget and concentrates on strengthening local governance and civic engagement to reduce conflict and violence in just six areas that pose the greatest risk of international terrorism.

Development Objective 2…focuses…on improving governance and civic engagement as part of a carefully crafted strategy to improve peace and stability in six conflict-affected areas of Mindanao that pose a particular risk for international terrorism….
are not just the poorest of the poor, but also have the lowest literacy rates and worst health indicators in the Philippines. Weak governance – often the lack of any effective governance at all – remains the primary problem. Corruption, poor accountability, lack of transparency, large expanses of ungoverned space, inadequate social services and limited economic opportunity are all manifestations of weak governance and all contribute to conflict and instability, providing fertile ground for terrorist organizations.

Other USG members of the Mindanao Working Group are also mounting programs in these six conflict-affected areas. The Department of Justice is building the capacity of police to provide citizen security. The Department of Defense, through the Joint Special Operations Task Force – Philippines (JSOTF-P), is strengthening the ability of the Philippine military to combat terrorists. But, as shown through MWG assessments, these six areas continue to be safe havens for terrorists largely because local governance is ineffective and corrupt and is viewed as such by its citizens. Local governments are unable to effectively deliver services or protect their citizens who have little sense of civic responsibility or community loyalty in return.

To improve peace and stability in these six conflict-affected areas of Mindanao, USAID will focus on strengthening local governance and its capacity to deliver services. It will also seek to increase civic engagement and promote civic mindedness, with a particular focus on youth and on improving the capacity of the next generation of leaders. Through the combination of these interventions, USAID will improve local governance, increase the legitimacy of elected officials, enhance political stability and reduce conflict, while also strengthening citizens’ sense of community responsibility. In so doing, USAID will also support the implementation of the Philippine National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, which seeks to protect women’s lives in conflict situations and empower women to participate more fully in peace and development efforts.

On gender:

The Philippines, on the whole, has performed remarkably well in empowering women and responding to gender concerns. Filipino women are among the world’s most active participants in political and economic decision-making. The country’s female literacy rate of about 96 percent is exceeded in Asia only by that of Japan (World Bank 2008). More Filipino females are enrolled in higher education than men. According to the 2011 World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap Report, the Philippines ranks eighth of 135 countries worldwide on gender parity, higher than any other country in Asia. Indeed, the Philippines ranks first for gender parity in both education and health, and is the only country in Asia (and one of only eight in the world) to have closed the gender gap in these areas.

That said, gender-related issues remain critically important to development in the Philippines….Gender assessments conducted by USAID/Philippines and other donors have identified other persistent gender concerns. In conflict-affected areas of Mindanao, for example, the participation of women, particularly Muslim and indigenous women, in economic and political decision-making is low. Women and children in conflict-affected areas of Mindanao are also more vulnerable to physical and sexual abuse. Gender issues in health
include the limited involvement of men in family planning and continued gender inequality in household and family decision-making. In the justice arena, there is clear and persistent gender bias in the treatment of female lawyers, judges, litigants and gender-crime witnesses (although the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court and the Secretary of Justice are both women). There is also little participation of women in infrastructure project planning and, as a result, much community infrastructure remains poorly or inappropriately designed to meet women’s needs. In education, gender issues are more double-edged. While males are generally more disadvantaged – and have far higher elementary school drop-out rates than women – women face problems too, particularly in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao, which has the country’s highest rate of female illiteracy (USAID/Philippines, Gender Action Plans).

*I also thought you’d be really interested in this article about the participation of women in the Mindanao peace process:*

**Filipino Women Take Lead in Resolving Mindanao Conflict**  
*From The Guardian, Wednesday 13 February 2013 09.54 EST*

The idea that a woman can mediate successfully between armed groups of hostile men, and that one of these groups comprises hardline, sharia-touting Islamists, might seem far-fetched to traditional western societies. But not so in the Philippines, where not one but two women have taken the lead in resolving the long-running Muslim insurgency in Mindanao.

Teresita Quintos Deles, below, a former teacher, women’s rights advocate and anti-poverty tsar known popularly as ‘Ging’, was re-appointed presidential adviser on the peace process by President Benigno Aquino in July, 2010. Since then, her steady and patient hand has guided the combatants of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and their government interlocutors towards a historic peace deal that both sides now regard as all but inevitable.

If one word sums up Deles’s approach, it is "inclusive". Interviewed in her office in Manila, she speaks eloquently of the need to ensure that all those affected by the agreement, high and low, have ownership of the process. "As in all peace processes, there is a symbiotic relationship between the people on the ground and the negotiators," she said. "Both parties are expected to deliver on that belief. We are creating a virtuous cycle, it is building. So we are hopeful we will get there."

In a speech in Davao City on 4 February, Deles showed a very humane understanding of reconstruction and development issues in the Bangsamoro region, whose long-term resolution will be crucial if the peace deal is to stick. "We all know that the areas [covered by the pact] remain the most underdeveloped communities in the country. Almost all indicators, from health to education to maternal and infant mortality and women’s participation, are lowest [there] …

"Government is committed to the rehabilitation and reconstruction of conflict-affected areas and to fast-track socio-economic development … This will be accomplished in a large part by empowering the Bangsamoro themselves [to] transform their own communities," she said.
"As the fighters see these developments on the ground – that the peace is real, the land can now be cultivated and crops can grow to full harvest, there is livelihood for me and a market for my products, my children can go to school, there are functional health facilities when a member of my family falls sick – then it will be a matter not just of me giving up something but of a better life I will be gaining for my family and my community, especially our children."

Encouraged by this outlook, activists in the National Rural Women Coalition, backed by Oxfam, are working to ensure the peace deal recognises indigenous women's roles, said secretary-general Daryl Leyesa. Village women traditionally acted as arbiters of domestic and community disputes, for example, and this function must be allowed to continue under the new dispensation, she said.

Deles works closely with Miriam Coronel Ferrer, professor of politics at the University of the Philippines who was one of 27 Filipinas among 1,000 women listed for the Nobel peace prize in 2005. Last year Ferrer became the first woman chair of the government's negotiating team. Ferrer was leading "a line-up of other ground-breaking women on the peace table", Deles said.

The Islamists' leaders had initially balked at dealing with women, but that gradually changed, Deles said. "Some in the MILF had some kind of difficulty. There was uncertainty they would work with a lady chair. Yet now they have increased women in their delegation, including a woman lawyer." Deles allows herself a wry smile. "There is no tokenism here. It is about merit. Women are always tested harder than men but we have passed so far."

*Looking forward to hearing your thoughts!*