Mindanao

The Asia Foundation

Mindanao, in the southern Philippines, suffers from poor infrastructure, poverty, and violence that has claimed more than 120,000 lives in the last four decades. The violence and rebellion derive from Christian migration to the region, sectarian clashes, war against Muslim separatist insurgents, clan feuds, and unfulfilled hopes of economic prosperity. For the last decade there has been a ceasefire agreement with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front that has generally held despite occasional outbreaks of violence, while peacetalks culminated in a Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro in October 2012.

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

PEACEBUILDING

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

The Asia Foundation and its local partners designed and implemented interventions to address *rido* (the local term for conflicts between clans), and are actively engaged in supporting the settlement of feuds. By October 2012, Foundation partners had settled a total of 204 *rido* conflicts, which had left 604 dead and 231 injured (see http://ridomap.com/). The Foundation also supported communities' capacity to rapidly respond to outbreaks of hostilities that may escalate into larger conflicts. The Foundation's Conflict Mitigation Program has expanded its efforts to increase the capacity of Muslim and Christian leaders, as well as local security forces, to address the needs of communities as they prevent conflicts from spreading.

The Foundation has significantly increased its support of the formal peace processes involving the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). The Foundation supports forums that bring together key players and experts to analyze aspects of the peace process in order to inform peace panels and other stakeholders. Flexible response to requests for support to the Coordinating Committees on the Cessation of Hostilities, or to technical working groups in the formal negotiations, are indicators of why both sides had sufficient confidence in the Foundation to invite it to be part of the International Contact Group formed in late 2009 to help negotiations forward. Now that a Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro has been signed, the Foundation will work with all parties to promote an inclusive and effective implementation of that agreement.

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The Foundation is part of the International Contact Group for peacetalks between the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front.

The Foundation supports programs to improve local government operations throughout the Southern Philippines.

Foundation partners have helped settle 204 clan feuds.

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

IMPROVING LOCAL AND REGIONAL GOVERNANCE

To establish a solid base for good governance, peace, and development, The Asia Foundation supports programs to improve governance operations both at the local and regional levels throughout the southern Philippines, in partnership with government institutions, the business sector, academic institutions, and civil society organizations. The Foundation has strengthened management of fiscal resources of 45 local government units (LGUs), and made delivery of services more efficient, customer-focused, and transparent in 16 LGUs throughout Mindanao. It has supported civil society efforts to monitor the local budget process in 17 cities and five provinces, monitor the implementation of national government projects funded through the Transition Investment Support Program for ARMM (Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao), and built the capacity of ARMM regional government to gather location-specific information regarding projects in the region.

IMPROVING ELECTIONS

For decades, elections in Mindanao have been particularly fraught with problems of violence and fraud. In recent elections, including the May 2010 synchronized national and local elections, The Asia Foundation helped the Parish Pastoral Council for Responsible Voting (PPCRV) extend its area of coverage beyond predominantly Catholic areas by partnering with networks in Muslim areas, including Muslim NGOs and *muftis* (religious leaders). Most recently, PPCRV and its partners advocated for (and then monitored) the re-registration of voters in the ARMM, which resulted in the purging of hundreds of thousands from the voting rolls. The Foundation continues to partner with the Bangkok-based Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL) and Mindanao-based organizations to bring election observers to Mindanao.

The Foundation's strong relationship with an expansive network of local partners in Mindanao facilitated the mapping of election hotspots and allowed more responsive interventions that prevented political disputes from escalating into violence. At the local level, the Foundation has worked with NGOs, including religious and community leaders, to form compacts among contending candidates, supported the formation of quick response teams, and the conduct of actual conflict mediation, dialogues, and rapid response to election-related violence incidents. Through the projects supported, 15 conflicts related to political disputes that could have triggered violence in the 2010 election were formally resolved in selected areas in Lanao del Sur and Lanao del Norte. There was also, for the first time, a zero incidence of election-related deaths in Sulu and in the Iranun areas of Lanao and Maguindanao.

BOOKS FOR MINDANAO

In order to provide local communities with access to reading materials, The Asia Foundation's Books for Mindanao program contributes more than 50,000 books per year to Mindanao. American publishers donate new, high-quality books through the Foundation's Books for Asia program. Special distributions have recently covered all schools in Iligan City, Cotabato City, Island Garden City of Samal, General Santos City, and the province of South Cotabato.

In the Philippines, The Asia Foundation programs are also funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development, the Australian Agency for International Development, the World Bank, and the United Kingdom's Department for International Development.

The Asia Foundation is a private, nonprofit, nongovernmental organization. Through its programs, the Foundation builds leadership, improves policies, and strengthens institutions to foster greater openness and shared prosperity in the Asia-Pacific region. It is funded by contributions from corporations, foundations, individuals, and governmental organizations in the U.S., Europe, Canada, Australia, and Asia, and an annual appropriation from the U.S. Congress.

The Asia Foundation

HEADQUARTERS
465 California Street,
9th Floor
San Francisco, CA 94104 USA
Tel: (415) 982-4640
Fax: (415) 392-8863
info@asiafound.org

WASHINGTON, DC
1779 Massachusetts Ave., NW
Suite 815
Washington, D.C. 20036 USA
Tel: (202) 588-9420
Fax: (202) 588-9409
info@asiafound-dc.org

PHILIPPINES
P.O. Box 7072
Domestic Airport Post Office
Pasay City, Metro Manila
Philippines
Tel: + 63 (2) 851-1466
Fax: + 63 (2) 853-0474
tafphil@asiafound.org

www.asiafoundation.org