

Institutionalizing Peace and Development in Local Governance

"...The peace we seek is not a mere absence of physical violence; it is tranquil fruit of freedom, social justice and human development 'under the rule of law, truth and love' for one another. It is a state of society marked by respect and reverence for the life and rights of every human being. It is the positive feeling people have about their safety and security as individuals and in their community. It is the gratifying feeling of being in harmony with one's self, family, fellowmen, nature and God; and the empowering feeling of solidarity and oneness" ¹

The protracted peace process in Mindanao is effecting development, not just in the war-torn region, but throughout the Philippines.

In his report on the UNDP 5th Peace Assessment Mission, Philippines, Dr Paul Oquist opined that peace is a very powerful strategy in the Philippines for economic reactivation, poverty reduction, human security and sustainable human development policy

is peace."². The peace dividend would consist of not only an end to the bloodshed, human suffering and destruction caused by the armed conflict but also of appreciable augments in Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Mindanao is one of the principal productive assets of the Philippines. There is also international interest in investment in Mindanao and the country in general. Unrealised production in Mindanao as well as in other areas of armed conflict, its negative multiplier effect nationally in terms of reduced investment and tourism in the Philippines, all add up to billions of dollars in lost GDP over the past three decades. If peace and the attendant dividend were to be achieved in say the next two years, they could coincide with the expected

recovery of the world economy. That could make for quite spectacular economic results in coming years. This in turn could form the financial foundation for the social programs that the country urgently needs, especially in the area of poverty reduction.

Yet peace and development are inextricably linked. One needs only look to the obvious devastating effects of war in conflict-torn areas such as Mindanao - witness the endemic poverty, the lack of investment and infrastructure and the hostile morale in the area, to know that without lasting peace, development cannot begin. And to achieve peace, there must be development. The people of the region, many who have grown up in a culture of conflict, need to be assured of a higher quality of life that peace will bring. Why would a rebel who has fought all his life for his cause, possibly lost his home, or even family and friends to the cause, lay down his arms and enter mainstream society unless he knew that his life would be better under a culture of peace?

And herein lies the problem. If the two are dependent on each other, how do government and non-government organisations start to tackle the complex issue of peace and development. While this dilemma continues to be used as an excuse for inaction, the ongoing suffering, increasing poverty and lawlessness, the malingering peace process continues to affect the nation.

The Local Government Code under Section 116 provides for the creation of Local Peace and Order Councils at the various levels of government, provincial, city and municipal levels. The Council will serve as a coordinating mechanism where local governments, the law enforcement agencies, the prosecution services and similar institutions of government assist in

¹ Jose V. Abueva, "To Help Build a Just, Human and Democratic Society," Inaugural Address delivered on his Investiture as the 15th President of the University of the Philippines, September 1, 1988, p8.

² 5th Peace Assessment Mission, Philippines Report by Dr Paul Oquist, Coordinator PRGP United Nations Development Council, September 2002

the proper enforcement of the laws and the administration of justice.

Taking their cue from the Code, several initiatives have been launched by local government units. Naga City, a hotbed of communist insurgency and rebellion in the Bicol Region, initiated the the “zone of peace, freedom and neutrality” or ZOPFAN in 1989. The ZOPFAN is hinged on the principle that of resolving conflict through constant dialogue so that citizens can live in peace.³

The Peace Zone concept in Naga City, which was first in the Philippines, has been replicated in many areas in Mindanao. One of which is the municipality of Tulan in North Cotabato.

Institutionalising Peace and Development addresses the urgent need to define new approaches to attaining lasting peace and sustainable development in conflict-torn areas such as Mindanao. It examines some of the approaches that have been implemented to attempt to create a culture of peace and prospects for prosperity in these war-ravaged regions, and indirectly for the nation.

The first section of the book presents multi-lateral funded programs managed by international NGO's. This section is comprised of extracts from two program reports, — the UNDP-run program and the UNESCO managed GENPEACE project, both from the Mindanao region.

The second section looks at two projects implemented at a local level. There are few locally initiated programs driving development and peace objectives in areas of need. The cases are in Tuluunan, North Cotabato and in Datu Paglas in Maguindanao.

These two cases show that the problems can be tackled at grass roots level and prove that peace and development is not an issue to be dealt with only from a national perspective. These cases present local innovations, supported by national government with policies and funds and international agencies, but run at a community level and ultimately benefiting the people most at need.

These cases highlight the need for an integrated holistic approach to peace and development. The approaches need to be holistic in terms of cooperation and support from national legislation and funding, LGUs, NGO's, international donor countries, and Community Organisations. The approaches also transform the culture and attitudes of the people, most of who know only conflict and militaristic posturing. These communities need to be encouraged to embrace peace and development as their common goal.