

The Effectiveness of Insider Mediation for Sustainable Peace: A Case Study in Mindanao, the Philippines

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Abstract : Conflict and violence have prevailed over the last four decades in conflict-affected areas in Muslim Mindanao, despite the signing of several peace agreements between the Philippine government and Islamic separatist insurgents (the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)), and peacebuilding activities on the ground. In the meantime, the peace talks had been facilitated and mediated by international actors such as the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and its member countries such as Indonesia, and Malaysia, and Japan. In 2014, both the Government of the Philippines (GPH) and the MILF finally reached a Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CAB) in 2014 under the Aquino III administration, though a Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) based on the CAB was not enacted at the Catholic-majority of the Philippine Congress. After a long process of deliberations at the Congress, Republic Act 11054, known as the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL), was enacted in 2018 under the Duterte administration. In the beginning, President Duterte adopted an 'inclusive approach' that involves the MILF, all factions of the MNLF, non-Islamized indigenous peoples, and other influential clan leaders to align all peace processes under a single Bangsamoro peace process. A notable difference from past administrations, there is an explicit recognition of all agreements and legislations based on the rights of each stakeholder. This created a new identity as 'Bangsamoro', the residents of Muslim Mindanao, enhancing political legitimacy. Besides, it should be noted an important role of 'insider mediators' -a platform for the Bangsamoro from diverse sectors attempting to work within their respective organizations in Moro society. Give the above background, this paper aims at probing the effectiveness of insider mediation as one of the alternative approaches for mediation in the peace process. For the objectives, this research uses qualitative methods such as process-tracing and semi-structured interviews from diverse groups of stakeholders at from the state to the regional level, including the government officials involved in peace process under the Presidential Office, rebels (MILF and MNLF), civil society organizations involved in lobbying and facilitating peace process, especially in the legislative process. The key outcomes and findings are that the Insider Mediators Group, formed in 2016, had taken on a significant role in facilitating the achievement of a wider consensus among stakeholders on major Moro issues such as BBL's passing during the last administration to call for unity among the Bangsamoro. Most of its members are well-educated professionals affiliated with the MILF, the MNLF, and influential clans. One of the group's biggest achievements has been the lobbying and provision of legal advice to legislators who were not necessarily knowledgeable about the peace process during the deliberation of the bicameral conference of the BBL, which eventually led to its passage. It can be concluded that in the long run, strengthening vertical and horizontal relations between the Moro society and the State and among the Moro peoples that can be viewed as a means to sustainable peace.

Keywords : insider mediation, Mindanao, peace process, Moro Islamic liberation front

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