

## Executive Summary

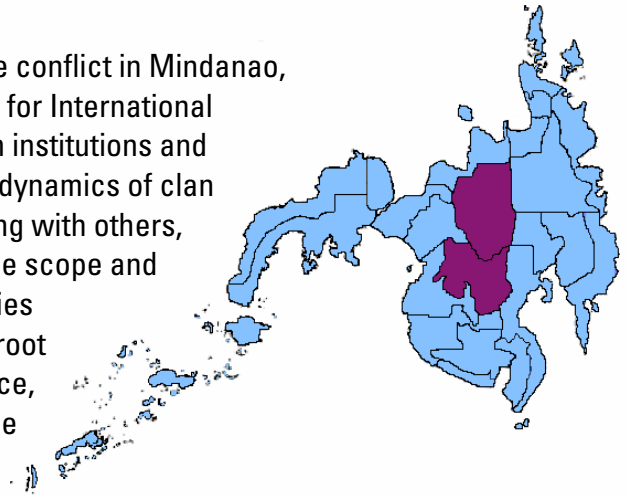
# Understanding Rido in North Cotabato and Bukidnon for Creative Conflict Management and Resolution

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In an effort to create a clearer understanding of the conflict in Mindanao, The Asia Foundation and the United States Agency for International Development supported Mindanao-based research institutions and non-government organizations in investigating the dynamics of clan violence, otherwise known as *rido*. This study, along with others, provides a comprehensive conflict map showing the scope and magnitude of clan conflicts in Mindanao. The studies highlight specific cases of conflict, exploring their root causes and conditions for escalation and recurrence, their interaction with state-related conflicts, and the potential for conflict resolution.



## STUDY OVERVIEW

Relief, rehabilitation, peace and development programs are usually centered on direct victims of armed conflicts. Those indirectly affected have been relatively neglected. This research focuses attention on those communities indirectly affected by war.

Before the 1970s, the Menuvu and the Magindanaon tribes had good relations between themselves. But the growing discontent of the population in Mindanao due to poverty, government neglect and discrimination, and the declaration of Martial Law in 1972 led to an escalation of hostilities between the government and the Moro liberation forces. During the 1970s, violence spread over Mindanao, affecting areas inhabited by the Menuvu and Magindanaon tribes. They became mutually embittered as the years passed by, and thus began the "rido" or violent interethnic conflict between two tribes that used to be good neighbors or "half-brothers." Recently however, both tribes began to feel that they could not bear such a situation any longer. Realizing that they needed to analyze their situation to find a lasting solution to this problem, they agreed to participate in this research.

In general, the project aimed to understand tribal conflicts and their effects in the communities, and to find concrete community-based solutions to these conflicts.

Many people involved in this *rido* have not returned to their villages for quite a long time, as a result of the tribal conflict. Those who returned were frequently displaced again and again at the slightest provocation due to the absence of concrete measures to ensure their safety. Hence they want a permanent kind of resolution that will contribute to peace and development in Mindanao.

This research was inspired and undertaken by the communities themselves, with assistance from the research facilitators. The communities took an active role in their development with this research as a foundation. Such encouraging efforts can be replicated in other communities.

This research was conducted by 13 communities in the provinces of Bukidnon and Cotabato. In Bukidnon, these communities are barangays Angga-an, Omonay, and Tangkulan in the municipality of Damulog, and barangay Cabadiangan in the municipality of Kadingilan. In Cotabato, the barangays were Cadiis, Kimadzil, Liliongan, Macabenban, Malapag, and Sitio High Point in the municipality of Carmen; Simbuhay and Tamped in the municipality of Kabacan; and Kisupaan in the municipality of President Roxas.

The methodology consisted of (1) Participatory Rapid Appraisal to describe the communities; (2) Key Informant Interviews to determine communities' knowledge of violent interethnic conflict and the parties involved; and (3) Focus Group Discussions to further investigate the information taken in the interviews. The data gathered was validated in a "Summit" where representatives of the communities discussed the research findings.

Researchers used the following guide questions: 1) What do you know about interethnic *rido* or violent interethnic conflict in your place? 2) What is this *rido* about? 3) What parties are involved in this conflict? 4) When did this conflict begin? 5) What factors prolonged or aggravated this conflict? 6) What is the relationship of land ownership to this conflict? 7) What is the relationship of ideology to this conflict? 8) What are your traditional methods of resolving such conflicts? 9) What is the possibility of resolving such conflicts? 10) What are your recommendations to solve these problems and achieve true peace?

## **FINDINGS**

### *History and causes of interethnic rido*

The research revealed that the 13 communities have indeed experienced interethnic *rido* or violent interethnic conflict. These communities confirmed that before the 1970s, the

Menuvu and Magindanaon tribes had a harmonious relationship. They traced the origin of conflict in their area to activities of settlers coming from elsewhere in the Philippines who established a militia group called ILAGA, which has come to mean Ilonggo (from the central Philippines) Land Grabbers Association. This militia attacked both Menuvu and Magindanaon, leading to mutual distrust between the two ethnic groups. The ILAGA rampage forced the Menuvu and Magindanaon communities to evacuate their lands. When the war subsided, the displaced groups returned to their lands, only to find out that Bisaya settlers (Ilonggo, Cebuanos and other Christian settlers) had already moved into areas previously occupied by the Menuvu and Magindanaon. Since the settlers were able to acquire land titles to the new areas they occupied, the Menuvu and Magindanaons were forced to relocate to other areas. The resulting shortage of land has led to frequent land disputes between the Menuvu and the Magindanaon. From the 1970s onwards, frequent displacement of the population took place which has continued up to the present time. The massacres, ambushes, harassments, and cattle rustling that sometimes occurred in the disputed areas only served to deepen the prejudices and biases between the Menuvu and the Magindanaon.

#### *The parties involved*

The principal parties directly involved in the recent interethnic *rido* are the Menuvus and the Magindanaons. The Bisayans were indirectly involved. During the research the Bisayan participants were quite silent regarding their involvement in the recent conflicts.

#### *Elements and dynamics prolonging interethnic rido*

Factors prolonging interethnic *rido* include the failure of the government's current justice system; the neglect of the indigenous justice and reconciliation system applicable to both Menuvu and Magindanaon; and the attempts to solve the conflict through violence. The conflict has further escalated when dragged into the bigger wars between the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front since most of the men of the Menuvu communities were recruited into Civilian Armed Forces Geographical Units (CAFGUs) or Civilian Volunteers Organization (CVOs) that served as buffer forces of the AFP.

The spate of violence in North Cotabato and Bukidnon such as harassments, massacres, cattle rustlings and disputes over land claims are commonly blamed by Magindanaon and Menuvu communities on each other. The communities interviewed admitted that there is a failure of communication between the two ethnic groups which they say is a legacy of the 1970s war in Mindanao. The war has damaged the traditional systems of resolving conflicts between the two groups, breeding distrust and perpetuating a cycle of vengeance.

Third party intervention is another factor exacerbating the conflict. This has risen from actions of other stakeholders that have particular interests in the disputed areas. These stakeholders include businesses, politicians, illegal loggers, vigilante and paramilitary groups.

### *Effects of this violence*

The interethnic violence caused the following: (1) an increase and deepening of prejudices between the Menuvu and Magindanaon; (2) permanent displacement of people especially the Magindanaon; (3) an increase in the incidence and gravity of trauma on both sides; (4) neglect of children's schooling; (5) deterioration of livelihoods; (6) decline in income; (7) social disintegration; (8) loss of lives; (9) rampant cattle rustling; and (10) vendetta killings.

At present, around 32% of the total population (29,000) of the communities where this research was conducted are still internally displaced until now. After the conduct of our data gathering, there were already a few internally displaced persons who started to go back to their places of origin.

### *Role of land ownership in this rido*

For the Magindanaon Muslims, land is one of the three principal factors in the triangle that controls their life: God, the people, and the land where they worship. When their land is taken away from them, it is akin to taking away their religion.

For the indigenous people, the Menuvu, life is a circle. Their land, identity, and survival are all inside this circle. If you take away their land, you take away their life, their identity, their culture, their survival. Thus this conflict has very much revolved around the issue of land for both tribes.

Before the 1970s, the Menuvu and Magindanaon formed the majority of the population in the 13 communities studied, and there were only a very few Bisaya settlers. But after the ILAGA rampage displaced the Menuvu and Magindanaon, Bisaya settlers began to occupy the lands left by the earlier inhabitants. The recent settlers were able to acquire legal titles and stewardships to their newly occupied lands with the facilitation and help from both national and local government units. Meanwhile, because of the lack of legal documents to prove ownership of lands, limited knowledge about the present legal system and scarcity of resources, the original residents became constrained in fighting for their rights and sadly accepted the events. The marginalized ethnic groups instead turned their ire on each other, accusing each tribe of being "land squatters." This situation is aggravated by the fact that both Menuvu and Magindanaon are one in their belief (as their elders taught them) that "land is owned by God and cannot be titled or be owned by anybody; man can only administer it."

Presently, there are already seven barangays out of the thirteen where the settlers form the majority. The continuing marginalization of the Menuvu and Magindanaon as a result of the ongoing influx of new settlers has forced the two groups to be confined to a few *sitios* or villages. The resulting shortage of lands has been a constant source of conflict between the Menuvu and Magindanaon.

#### *Relationship of this rido to ideological conflict*

The causes - economics, politics, religion and culture - are all related to one another. Hence the issue of ideology is also related to this conflict. For the Magindanaons, this ideology is right to self-determination. For the Menuvus, this is right to tribal governance, to live their own culture.

Furthermore, the Bisaya settlers through the local government units (municipal and barangay level) persuaded majority of the Menuvu men to enlist as CAFGUs/CVOs, which reinforced the split between the two tribes. It must be noted that most, if not all of the local officials are settlers. Meanwhile, some of the Magindanaon sought the help of Moro insurgents and allied with either the Moro National Liberation Front or the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, which further deepened the animosity between the Magindanaon and Menuvu groups.

#### *Traditional indigenous system of resolving interethnic rido*

The most common traditional systems used by both the Menuvu and Magindanaon in resolving conflicts were through dialogues (*husay*) between elders such as the *Timuays* and the *Datu*. These dialogues lead to peace covenants such as *Diyandi*, *Tempura te Balagen* and *Tamped* which help end larger conflicts.

The *Timuay* and *Datu* systems of *husay* or dialogue can also result in the application of *bangon* for the resolution of heavy cases like murder and other cases of similar weight where the conflict inflicted death on either party. *Bangon* is common to both the Magindanaon and Menuvu. This involves the payment of a tribute (i.e. carabao) to the victim by the offending party; another tribute to the community defiled by the offense; and a third tribute to the family of the victim.

The *pamaras*, *sala*, *sapa* and *bagkes* are traditional mechanisms that are also common to both the Menuvu and Magindanaon. The *pamaras* is a token given which is more symbolic in nature and applicable to lesser offenses like unpaid debts or embarrassment that is perceived to start a serious conflict. It can involve a material offering, a ritual, or feasting (*kandull*). Meanwhile, the *sala* means "penalty." It is imposed on the offender, the degree of which depends on the weight of the offense and on the agreements among

the elders or *Timuay*. To reinforce the above traditional systems, the *sapa* and *bagkes* are conducted. These are supplementary mechanisms or rituals which are practiced to strengthen or finalize a certain agreement or bind community relationships.

There are many conflict resolution mechanisms which the communities still believe to be binding and effective up to the present such as *Diyandi*, *Tamped*, *Tempura te Balagen*, *Daway* and others. These rituals are aimed at stopping a conflict or preventing the recurrence of similar conflicts in the future. These traditional systems have been overshadowed by the government's more formal justice systems such as the barangay justice system which are not acceptable to or well understood by either Menuvu and Maguindanaon.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The communities' recommendations to address this conflict include understanding the traditional justice system, using the art of negotiation, opening honest communication between both tribes, implementing peace agreements, training in conflict resolution and management, building up their Councils of Elders, enabling the timely return of internally displaced persons, construction of rehabilitation houses, signing of agreements, seeking more involvement of local governments, government line agencies, and other concerned authorities, as well as NGOs/POs, and peace advocates.

The challenges are: 1) to deepen our understanding of the Menuvu culture; 2) to understand the traditional justice system and to dovetail this system in the Menuvu culture with that in the Magindanaon culture; 3) to understand the important role of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front as well as the roles of indigenous traditional leaders from both the Menuvu and Magindanaon in conflict resolution; 4) to help in implementing the peace agreements or peace covenants in the communities; 5) to work for the building of stronger peace; 6) to facilitate the clear delineation of both political and tribal boundaries between Cotabato and Bukidnon; 7) to help settle land ownership; 8) to continue efforts toward "education for peace"; and 9) to help in the delivery of basic social services.

We seek ways to effectively implement the communities' recommendations and to confront the foregoing challenges. We have an awareness and education program on the traditional justice system, but there must also be continuing peace education in these communities to facilitate continuing dialogues, to build human infrastructure for new communities, to further strengthen the zones of peace, and empower the Council of Leaders. We support the return of internally displaced persons to their farms and their rehabilitation; but while these individuals remain displaced, emergency food should be given to them.

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