Unveiling the Local-Turn in Peacebuilding: Exploring the Roles and Contributions of Bangsamoro Civil Society Organization in Mindanao Peacebuilding

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Abstract
This research addressed the role of Bangsamoro civil society organizations (BMCSOs) and the conditions that allow their participation in Philippine peacebuilding efforts. Using an institutional approach, the researcher collected qualitative data from BMCSO members and other peace actors. Findings reveal that local CSOs contribute to effective and long-term peacebuilding with their knowledge of the conflict context. BMCSOs effectively perform advocacy, socialization, and social cohesion, particularly in steering stakeholders' reactions toward constructive participation, raising awareness of the causes and costs of conflict, and facilitating dialogue. Institutionalizing venues for CSO participation and funding availability promotes robust engagement of BMCSOs in the Bangsamoro region. However, the study also identified challenges such as external co-optation, reliance on external support, and influence of local political agenda. The results emphasized the importance of empowering and assisting BMCSOs, particularly youth CSOs, in overcoming these obstacles and establishing a more inclusive and long-term peace in the region. Collaboration with the state, developing self-reliance, and strategic leadership and management skills were critical strategies for BMCSOs.

Keywords: Bangsamoro Civil Society Organizations, Local Turn to Peacebuilding, Women and Youth CSOs

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1. Introduction

The Bangsamoro Region, located in the southwestern part of Mindanao, Philippines, is primarily populated by Muslims. This region has been marked by prolonged and deadly conflicts between the government and numerous Muslim rebel groups seeking self-determination for five decades. The conflict's origins can be traced to anti-Spanish colonial resistance, American colonial integration, and subsequent campaigns for independence and autonomy (Campo & Judd, 2005).

The recurring pattern of armed conflict and negotiations has had devastating consequences, leading to widespread destruction, loss of lives, financial burdens, limited economic opportunities, food scarcity, and health risks for the affected population. Nonetheless, a ray of hope emerged with the passage of the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) in July 2018. This legislation gave the local Bangsamoro population significant autonomy and a measure of self-governance. As a result, the protracted conflict was temporarily put on hold.

BOL is an essential step toward 'peacemaking' and 'peacekeeping,' as emphasized by Berkovitch and Kadayifci (2002). These are critical measures but a limited commitment to halt hostilities and promote nonviolence. However, achieving durable peace in the context of Mindanao necessitates a comprehensive and all-encompassing approach known as peacebuilding (Lederach, 1997).

Peacebuilding efforts have predominantly followed a liberal approach, driven by the international community's intention to promote liberal values and governance standards (Richmond & Franks, 2009). However, criticisms have emerged, highlighting the failures that result from highly centralized and outsider-driven processes (Bird, 2007; MacGinty & Richmond, 2013; Verkoren et al., 2013; Leeuwen, 2020). In response to these critiques, the 'local turn' has gained momentum, emphasizing the significance of local ownership, agency, and context-based approaches in peacebuilding (Boege, 2011; Paffenholz, 2010). This shift towards local empowerment can also be observed in the Muslim Mindanao context, where different Bangsamoro civil society organizations have grown and prospered.

The roles of civil society in peacebuilding involving actors such as academic institutions, church-based organizations, think tanks, NGOs, networks, and CBOs in the prolonged conflict in Muslim Mindanao have been studied (Tagorda, 2022). However, there needs to be a more comprehensive examination regarding the specific contributions and challenges of Bangsamoro women and youth civil society. Exploring the participation of these Bangsamoro civil society organizations in ongoing conflict resolution efforts can provide valuable insights into their effectiveness and innovative approaches to fostering enduring peace. Recognizing the unique historical and cultural context of civil society in Mindanao is crucial for developing targeted strategies to achieve sustainable peace.

This study examines the roles and contributions of the local civil society organizations (CSOs) in the Bangsamoro region of Mindanao, with a particular focus on their involvement in peacebuilding. It acknowledges the recent trend toward prioritizing peacebuilding at the local level and the subsequent assistance provided to local CSOs over the past two decades. Additionally, it discerns the tactics groups employ to oppose, question, and undermine the limitations enforced by the existing framework for peacebuilding.

1.1 The Local Turn to Peacebuilding and the Role of Civil Society Organizations

In response to the criticisms of liberal peacebuilding, two critiques stood out: the mainstream and radical critiques/approaches. The mainstream critique acknowledges the limitations of liberal peacebuilding but suggests that it can be improved through increased local participation and capacity building (Öjendal et al., 2017). Peace stability can be enhanced by involving local stakeholders directly affected by the conflict and addressing root causes. As intermediaries, local players play a critical role in facilitating peacebuilding activities at the local level and bridging the gap between national and international efforts (Donais, 2012; Mac Ginty, 2011; Mubashir & Vimalaraj, 2016). On the other hand, the radical critique calls for a paradigm shift, highlighting the negative impacts of international intervention and advocating for a more locally-driven approach (Öjendal et al., 2017).

One key player in this approach is the civil society. The importance of local civil society in peacebuilding is widely recognized, as evidenced by its high utilization as partners by both international and local governments. Studies suggest that local civil society engagements can contribute to peacebuilding by increasing the durability of peace, improving cooperation with peacebuilding policies, and potentially serving as intermediaries between international and national levels., (Gizelis, T. (2011), Nilsson, D. (2012); Hellmüller, S. (2013); Donais, T. (2012); Shepherd, L. (2015), Paffenholz (2015). Moreover, they ensure citizen safety, hold conflict actors accountable, raise public awareness, promote a culture of peace, and reduce inter-group violence. Localized engagements and prioritized civic actions tailored to communities' specific contexts and cultural dynamics are crucial for effective peacebuilding.

Paffenholz and Spurk's (2006) extensive empirical research identified seven functions of civil society in peacebuilding: **protection**- ensures the safeguarding of citizens and communities against state despotism and armed actors, while **monitoring** holds governments accountable and supports the protection and advocacy functions. **Advocacy and public communication** involve promoting relevant social and political themes, influencing the public agenda, and advocating for peaceful conflict resolution. **In-group socialization** aims to foster a culture of peace and constructive conflict resolution within societies. **Social cohesion** builds bridges between adversarial groups and helps rebuild trust and social capital. **Intermediation facilitates dialogue** and negotiation between different societal levels, including armed groups, communities, and development agencies. Lastly**, service delivery**, often provided by NGOs and faith-based organizations, is crucial in assisting war-affected populations. By examining these functions and institutional factors, this research seeks to learn more about the contributions and challenges of Bangsamoro civil society organizations in peacebuilding efforts.

1.2 Institutional Factors Shaping Local Civil Society in Peacebuilding: A Framework of Analysis

However, the success of local civil society engagements may vary depending on several institutional elements; as such, the current research employs an **institutional theory** to investigate the influences that impact the engagement of Bangsamoro civil society organizations in peacebuilding. The study underscores the significant role of institutions in shaping their undertakings within the BARMM's sociocultural, political, and economic milieus.

The fundamental assertion of Institutionalism proponents is that 'institutions matter' (Peters, 2005; Schmidt, 2006), mainly through acting as a mediator in changing the actor's behavior and subsequent political consequences (Hay, 2002). These researchers believe that focusing on institutions rather than people is a powerful analytical technique. Institutionalists have differing views on how to define institutions and why they matter. One that captures a general and comprehensive view of this study is provided by North (1990), who defines institutions as "the humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction" or "the rules of the game in a society." This formulation implies several crucial elements. First, institutions are built by humans to control behavior and influence incentives. Second, institutions contain a wide range of de facto and de jure characteristics, including economic, political, and social dimensions. Institutions are essentially political since different sets of institutions result in various resource allocations. North (1990) highlights the role of institutions in molding people's behavior by providing a framework of rules, norms, and expectations that influence people's behaviors and relationships. This perspective emphasizes the importance of institutions in determining diverse societal outcomes, whether social, economic, or political, by affecting individuals' incentives and choices within a specific environment.

This research investigates the impact of sociopolitical, cultural, economic, formal, and informal institutions on the accomplishments and limitations of women and youth BMCSOs in peacebuilding. By evaluating the complex interrelationships across these institutional realms, the study intends to highlight institutions' critical role in shaping and promoting civil society's contributions to peacebuilding in the Bangsamoro region.

The sociopolitical context influences the peacebuilding activities of Bangsamoro Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). It entails investigating the political structures, power dynamics, governance systems, and policies that determine the role and influence of civil society organizations (CSOs) in peacebuilding. This component investigates how CSOs' obligations and possibilities to participate in peacebuilding processes are shaped by legal and regulatory frameworks, political ideologies, and interactions with government institutions.

The cultural environment is another critical institutional factor influencing CSOs' efforts in peacebuilding. Understanding the cultural norms, beliefs, traditions, and identities of the communities with which they work is critical for successful peacebuilding efforts. This section investigates how cultural factors influence CSO' attitudes, behaviors, and relationships with the communities they serve. It investigates how civil society organizations (CSOs) adapt their peacebuilding strategies, messaging, and community involvement approaches to line with cultural values and sensitivity.

Economic context also substantially impacts CSOs' attempts to promote peace in the Bangsamoro region. This component examines the community's economic situation, inequities, resource distribution, and livelihood opportunities. It looks into how economic issues affect CSOs' capacity, resource mobilization, and long-term viability in executing peacebuilding efforts. It also investigates CSOs' economic issues and ideas for addressing economic inequities, promoting sustainable livelihoods, and creating economic possibilities as part of their peacebuilding efforts.

2. Methodology

In this qualitative case study, a comprehensive exploration was conducted to examine the involvement of diverse youth and women civil society organizations (CSOs) in peacebuilding within the complex sociocultural and political context of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao. The primary aim was to gain a deeper understanding of the effectiveness and contributions of these CSOs to peacebuilding and to generate insights that can inform future peacebuilding efforts in the region.

The study utilized a sample that encompassed two categories of CSOs. Firstly, mature CSOs operating for over a decade were selected from the Consortium of Bangsamoro Civil Society groups. These organizations have a long-standing presence and experience in peacebuilding activities. Secondly, newly established CSOs for five years or less were sourced from the Ministry of Peace, Order, and Security list. These organizations represented emerging voices and perspectives in the peacebuilding landscape.

By examining established and newly formed CSOs, the study aimed to capture diverse experiences and practices in peacebuilding. The research delved into the factors that influenced the effectiveness of these CSOs and their contributions to peacebuilding, considering the broader sociocultural and political backdrop in which they operate.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1 Characterizing Bangsamoro Civil Society: Understanding its Nature and Features

Creating civil society organizations (CSOs) in the Bangsamoro region represents the progress and expansion of citizen participation. Notably, the Consortium of Bangsamoro Civil Society has grown from 29 members in 2002 to 179 active and non-active members now. With 307 youth organizations and 536 young groups from both the region and beyond being recognized, the accreditation of several youth and women CSOs reflects growing engagement and participation in the region. Over half of the mapped CSOs in the BARMM are concerned with women's issues, suggesting a rising emphasis on using CSOs to address a wide range of societal concerns.

Resistance to authoritarian administrations, historical and cultural backdrop, political and governance issues, socioeconomic inequities, human rights, and social justice concerns all affected the formation of these CSOs. Battles and wars in the region have significantly impacted the youth, leading to concerns such as drug addiction and illegal activities. However, as indicated by the work of groups such as UNYPAD and THUMA Inc, which have formed to address these issues and foster shared interests among Bangsamoro youth, civil society provides a crucial platform for tackling these challenges.

Bangsamoro women play an essential part in peacebuilding endeavors by realizing that peacebuilding goes beyond battles and discussions. They actively promote long-term efforts and initiatives in their communities that promote peace and reconciliation. Women CSOs, such as Noorus Salam, use nonviolence, mutual tolerance, and respect to advocate for peace and bridge divides among varied groups. These women-led organizations work to develop local CSOs and encourage grassroots engagement in peacebuilding processes. Organizations such as Noorus-Salam, Ummah Fi Salaam-Women, Al Mujadillah Development Foundation,

and UNYPHIL Women have a long track record of success, demonstrating the development and maturity of Bangsamoro civil society.

The formation of diverse CSOs in the Bangsamoro region demonstrates the Bangsamoro civil society's progress and engagement. Various variables impact these groups and play an essential role in tackling youth-related difficulties, boosting peacebuilding efforts, and empowering women in the region's quest for long-term peace and development.

3.2 Empowering Communities, Fostering Peace: The Contributions of Bangsamoro Civil Society Organizations to Peacebuilding

The youth civil society organizations in the Bangsamoro region are actively engaged in peacebuilding efforts. UNYPAD focuses on peacebuilding and community development by participating in peace rallies, unity events, and service delivery activities such as skill and livelihood training programs. TheMoropreneur Inc. contributes to peacebuilding through capacity-building activities, cultural preservation, and women's empowerment initiatives. MAYA advocates for women's rights, gender equality, and the abolition of child, early, and forced marriages, raising awareness and organizing workshops and social activities. UNGAYAN promotes youth human rights, provides training in parliamentary governance, and engages in advocacy activities. Patikul Association's Youth Development works on eradicating violence and promoting positive change through a "culture of peace" training, mentorship, and education for adolescents. Aretes Style empowers internally displaced women by manufacturing hand-woven goods, promoting economic growth and cultural preservation. These organizations collectively address core causes of conflict and contribute to peacebuilding through socioeconomic development, gender equality, social cohesion, advocacy, and community engagement, aligning with the peacebuilding functions identified by Paffenholz and Spurk (2006) of protection, monitoring, advocacy and public communication, in-group socialization, social cohesion, intermediation, and service delivery.

Women civil society organizations in the Bangsamoro region, including Ummah Fi Salam-Women, Noorus Salam, AMDF, and UNYPHIL-WOMEN, play crucial roles in peacebuilding through various activities. Ummah Fi Salam focuses on interfaith communication and women's empowerment, providing capacity-building programs and microfinance support to enhance economic opportunities. Noorus Salam utilizes radio programs to educate communities on reproductive health, family planning, anti-bullying, and preventing violent extremism. They promote peace and tolerance through interfaith activities and dialogue. AMDF is actively involved in ending child marriage through community dialogues, workshops, and public awareness campaigns. They also address reproductive health issues and provide access to healthcare services. UNYPHIL-WOMEN prioritizes youth participation and implements youth-led service projects to create a conducive environment for reconstruction and development. Their activities encompass advocacy, capacity-building, and youth empowerment. These women's civil society organizations collectively contribute to peacebuilding by promoting interfaith dialogue, women's empowerment, reproductive health education, ending harmful practices, supporting livelihoods, and advocating for youth rights. Through their diverse initiatives, they address root causes of conflict, empower marginalized communities, and foster a more inclusive and peaceful society in the Bangsamoro region.

Despite their distinctions, both youth and women peacebuilders engage in advocacy and socialization activities intending to raise awareness and facilitate dialogue on critical social

issues. They all focus on capacity and skill development, allowing individuals to contribute to peacebuilding initiatives actively. Furthermore, both parties understand the importance of social cohesiveness and inclusivity in developing peaceful societies.

One important distinction is their unique areas of specialization. Youth CSOs focus on conflict resolution, mediation, and skill development for young community actors, whereas women peacebuilders focus on interfaith dialogue, youth inclusion, and women's rights. Furthermore, youth CSOs stress peace rallies and unification activities, whereas female peacebuilders frequently participate in service delivery programs tackling diverse social concerns.

Both youth and women CSOs play essential roles in peacebuilding. While their activities and focus areas differ, they are committed to pushing for social change, empowering individuals, and creating social harmony. Their combined efforts contribute to the overarching goal of establishing peaceful and inclusive societies.

3.3 Unraveling Institutional Factors Shaping Engagement in the Bangsamoro Region: Empowering Youth and Women for Peacebuilding

Institutional factors significantly impact women and youth civil society organizations' (CSOs) performance in peacebuilding efforts. Legal and formal institutional frameworks play a crucial role by providing dedicated policies and programs recognizing and supporting youth and women's participation in peacebuilding. This includes youth-focused initiatives within formal peacebuilding institutions and gender-responsive legal frameworks, policies, and institutions that promote women's involvement, such as gender quotas and dedicated gender office.

The performance of women and youth civil society organizations (CSOs) in peacebuilding is also influenced by various political factors and regulatory frameworks. Inclusive political systems that provide opportunities for youth and women's representation and participation in decision-making processes are crucial for empowering these groups and promoting ownership of peacebuilding initiatives. Political environments that support women's political participation and address gender biases and stereotypes enhance the performance of women CSOs. However, implementing specific regulations, such as the Anti-Terrorism Law, raises concerns among CSOs. The labeling of Moro youth as potential terrorists and the fear of being targeted under this law hinders their ability to monitor and report incidents of violence and conflict, limiting their capacity to counter government abuses effectively.

Additionally, the governance institutions and rules within the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) can present challenges. While the BARMM leadership has become more receptive to CSOs, some local government units (LGUs) may treat communities as their fiefdom, demanding material support in exchange for cooperation. Collusion between some local governments and CSOs (bogus?)can hinder practical peacebuilding efforts. Political and regulatory institutions significantly impact the performance of women and youth CSOs, emphasizing the need for inclusive political systems, supportive governance structures, and a conducive legal environment to facilitate effective peacebuilding initiatives.

Moreover, performance of women and youth civil society organizations (CSOs) in peacebuilding is influenced by several sociocultural factors. The patriarchal norms prevalent

in the Bangsamoro region often limit women's leadership roles and disempower young CSO members. Limited access to positions of power and privilege creates a hierarchical structure where those in authority have more influence in policy decision-making. Cultural values, such as the concept of honor and the perception of CSOs as family businesses, further hinder civil society practices and the collective action for change. However, Islamic ideals motivate youth CSO members to challenge oppressive practices and seek knowledge for community betterment. Social and ethnic-cultural divides also impact peacebuilding efforts, requiring a delicate balance between respecting sociocultural identities and promoting gender equality. Understanding these sociocultural factors is crucial for effectively integrating youth and women's voices, addressing power imbalances, and challenging detrimental cultural values within peacebuilding. By navigating and negotiating these complex sociocultural dynamics, CSOs can strive for positive change and foster inclusive and sustainable peace in the Bangsamoro region.

The presence of networks and social capital is also instrumental in supporting the performance of women and youth CSOs. Access to networks that facilitate collaboration, knowledge sharing, and resource mobilization among youth peacebuilders, as well as the development of strong networks and alliances among women peacebuilders, fosters solidarity, support, and collective action for gender equality and peacebuilding.

The internal organizational structure of Bangsamoro youth civil society organizations (CSOs) significantly impacts their engagement in peacebuilding. Challenges include a shallow understanding of peacebuilding, limited coordination and communication among younger organizations, and the influence of careerist NGO leaders. Effective leadership, positive organizational culture, accountability, and knowledge sharing are crucial for peacebuilding. A lack of follow-up methods and adequate financial sources helps sustainability. Funding disparities and organizational capacities further affect the effectiveness of women and youth CSOs. Enhancing capacities for leadership, conflict resolution, advocacy, networking, and organizational management is essential for their peacebuilding efforts.

Institutions, encompassing legal, political, sociocultural, and economic factors, significantly shape the peacebuilding contributions of youth and women CSOs in the Bangsamoro region. These institutional dynamics, including regulatory frameworks, governance structures, cultural norms, and resource distribution, have facilitated and hindered their efforts.

3.4 Navigating the Peacebuilding Landscape in Muslim Mindanao: Unraveling the Rules of Engagement–Exploring the Hybrid Nature of Peacebuilding

The analysis finds a significant disparity between the rhetoric of encouraging local ownership in peacebuilding and its actual execution on the ground. Even with acknowledging the importance of local ownership, some international actors (NGOs) frequently impose their goals and templates, ignoring actual community involvement and agency. This observation aligns with Richmond's (2009), in which he describes how external actors usually bring preconceived peacebuilding models that may not sufficiently reflect local conditions and goals.

Furthermore, the power dynamics between international organizations and local civil society groups (CSOs) have become a primary concern. International organizations wield significant influence and control over local CSOs, particularly those younger and newer. This power

imbalance limits local CSOs' autonomy and decision-making capacity, limiting their ability to own fully and lead the peace-building process.

Due to time and resource constraints, the study underscores the problems that local CSOs have in achieving comprehensive and inclusive local ownership. Donors may have short time frames and withdraw abruptly, challenging prolonged involvement and collaboration with local actors. However, the expanding presence of some international organizations in BARMM is beneficial. As time and resource constraints are addressed, this shift has influenced the problems that local players have in building long-term collaborations with overseas entities.

These findings highlight the need to bridge the rhetorical and practical divides in supporting local ownership in peacebuilding. They emphasize the need to understand and resolve power relations, provide long-term support and autonomy to local CSOs, and enable genuine local participation and decision-making in creating peacebuilding programs.

4. Conclusion

This research emphasizes the essential role of Bangsamoro civil society organizations (BMCSOs) in Bangsamoro peacebuilding initiatives. The study used an institutional approach to investigate several factors influencing the engagement and efficacy of local CSOs in defining and promoting peacebuilding initiatives. Several significant results have emerged, stressing the importance of BMCSOs, the need for institutionalizing their participation, the challenges they confront, and the ways they have developed to overcome these obstacles.

BMCSOs are crucial in orienting stakeholders toward constructive engagement, enhancing understanding of conflict causes and consequences, and facilitating community discussions. Their in-depth knowledge of the conflict context empowers them to advocate for peace, foster socialization, and promote social cohesiveness, thereby contributing significantly to the success of long-term and sustainable peacebuilding initiatives.

The study demonstrates the importance of reshaping power dynamics to achieve genuine local ownership. It emphasizes the importance of recognizing and appreciating the significant progress made in resolving the historical marginalization of women and youth organizations due to international actors' involvement. However, continued and enhanced support in empowering Bangsamoro women and youth, ensuring their active agency and meaningful participation in setting the peacebuilding agenda, is required. This will result in a more equitable and inclusive peacebuilding process, setting the groundwork for long-term peace and prosperity in the Bangsamoro region.

For a genuine local turn in peacebuilding, fostering horizontal hybridity and relinquishing top-down power dynamics is imperative. This shift requires embracing bottom-up approaches that value local knowledge, practices, and customary dispute-resolution mechanisms and recognize the agency of marginalized groups, especially women and youth. In the context of the Bangsamoro region, powerful local actors need to yield space and allow the active participation of women and youth in decision-making processes. Embracing this horizontal hybridity will enable meaningful intergroup dialogues, facilitating the implementation of mechanisms that cater to diverse stakeholders' specific needs and aspirations.

Given local CSOs' obstacles, such as external co-optation, dependency on external support, and the impact of local political agendas, it is critical to empower and assist BMCSOs, particularly youth CSOs. Collaboration with the state, self-reliance, and developing strategic leadership and management skills are critical measures for overcoming these challenges and ensuring that peacebuilding programs are driven and sustained locally.

Furthermore, the study emphasizes the significance of diversity in peacebuilding initiatives. The report advocates for a more inclusive strategy that prioritizes the active engagement of all segments of society through empowering and supporting BMCSOs. This inclusivity includes recognizing and accepting local variety, embracing different points of view, and encouraging cooperation among various groups.

Finally, it is vital to institutionalize venues for CSO engagement, address power disparities, recognize local variety, and adopt bottom-up strategies. These strategies promote inclusivity, empower marginalized groups, and guarantee peacebuilding activities corresponding to the Bangsamoro people's aims and needs. The region can promote long-term peace and establish a revolutionary social climate by implementing these strategies.

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