



“You Listen.”

Internally Displaced Persons Speak about a Pilot Project
in Conflict-Affected Central Mindanao
Community and Family Services International (CFSI)
June 2003





CFSI. *Rebuilding Lives.*

Community and Family Services International

Acknowledgements

Standard project reports often say a lot, yet tell us little. We get numbers, achievements, problems encountered, amounts spent, and even lessons learned. All very useful, some of it inspiring. Still, we look for more. Lives changed. Differences made. Situations improved. This is what matters. Truth be told, there is only one way to obtain this type of information. "You listen."

We asked a few people to help us listen and wish to acknowledge-with deep gratitude-their extraordinary efforts.

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“Internally displaced persons are people who have been forced to flee their homes or places of habitual residence as a result of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights, or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border.”

---(Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, United Nations, 1998.)

Introduction

Internally displaced persons (IDPs) are the more than twenty-five million children, women, and men in the world today who have been forced from their homes due to armed conflict or natural disaster. Primary responsibility for the protection and well being of IDPs, as well as their return home or resettlement, rests with national governments. However, the international community, the United Nations system, nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), the affected countries, and -- most importantly -- the people themselves, recognise that international cooperation is often required if IDPs are to be adequately protected and assisted.

The objective of this monograph is to demonstrate the impact of a post-conflict pilot project on internally displaced persons in Central Mindanao, Philippines. The pilot project was implemented from January 2001 through July 2003 by Community and Family Services International (CFSI), an international social development organisation based in the Philippines. Entitled “Promoting the Transition from Conflict to Peace and Development at the Community Level”, the pilot project focused on finding pathways to lasting peace and sustainable development. It engaged with people from the time they were displaced and living in evacuation centers through to return/resettlement. The project was funded by the Post-Conflict Fund of the World Bank.

This monograph recounts the stories of those displaced from their homes and livelihood as a result of armed conflict in Central Mindanao and the pathways taken by the people, supported by CFSI and partners, to achieve sustainable return or resettlement.

The monograph is structured into twelve (12) sections. In each section, the words and stories of internally displaced people are presented alongside a brief description of activities. The first section defines internally displaced persons and describes the aim of the monograph.



The second section provides the context within which the people were displaced. The third section develops further the objective of the study and the methodology utilised. Then follows consideration of what it is like to be displaced and the following section analysing life in the evacuation centers. Section 5 introduces the CFSI pilot project and explores the expectations of participants in the project. Sections six to ten present each component of the project. The next section focuses on the engagement of children and youth in the pilot project. The final two sections explore processes to promote empowerment and finally the views of IDPs on the pathways to peace.

The Context

Recurrent armed conflict in Mindanao, Philippines over the past thirty years has displaced hundreds of thousands of people. In 2000, President Joseph Estrada declared “all-out war” against the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). The war between the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the MILF forced almost 900,000 people to leave their homes and land. Individuals and families saw their lives totally disrupted. Threats to their very survival came from bombs and bullets as well as from disease in over-crowded, unsanitary evacuation centers. Communities were torn apart by internal conflicts. Traditional leaders lost their power to protect their communities and in some places a state of lawlessness occurred. Many families were unable to return to their homes and stayed in evacuation centers or elsewhere for many months, some more than a year and a half.

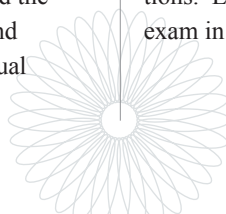


With the change in government in early 2001, came a change of policy. President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo declared a policy of “all-out peace”. Her strategy was peace negotiations and development efforts carried out simultaneously. Military offensives were suspended by both sides of the conflict. Most of the people were able to return to their places of origin in 2001 and 2002, although many found their homes and lands destroyed. Through the assistance of key organisations and agencies, people started to reconstruct their houses, re-establish their livelihood, organise their communities, and rebuild their lives. However, renewed conflict in early 2003 resulted in another round of displacement. Whilst some of the communities that CFSI works with were not directly affected, others were not as fortunate. At present, large numbers of people remain in evacuation centers in Central Mindanao.

The history of conflict in Mindanao is long and the underlying causes are complex. The many structural (and historically based) problems in Mindanao include unequal

distribution of land, tribal land rights claims, tribal warfare, ‘rido’ (family feud), a high degree of poverty, national government neglect, poor governance at the local government level, and religious as well as ethnic and cultural differences. At present, the major conflict is between the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), a separatist organisation fighting for an independent Muslim state.

Mindanao scores poorly on almost all human development indicators. The Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) is one of the least educated and poorest regions in the entire Philippines. Approximately twenty-four percent of elementary school students drop out of school before finishing grade six. At the high school level, around thirteen percent of the enrolment does not graduate. Only four percent of Mindanao examinees pass the Science and Technology examinations. Eighteen percent of teachers passed the licensure exam in 1997, twenty percent in 1998.





Project Aims and Objectives

In January 2001, Community and Family Services International (CFSI) commenced a pilot project in war-affected Central Mindanao entitled “Promoting the Transition from Conflict to Peace and Development at the Community Level”. The project was implemented through 31 July 2003 and funded by the World Bank, specifically, the Post-Conflict Fund.

The objectives were:

1. Make a difference in the lives of Filipinos displaced by armed conflict by working with the affected communities to develop enabling conditions that encourage safe return or settlement, facilitate the process of transition and stabilization, and provide a foundation for peace building and sustainable development.

2. Contribute to the existing knowledge base by developing and testing models that will inform approaches to the transition from conflict to peace.

Project Strategy

The project sought to contribute to the development of participatory methodologies to build/rebuild the trust and reciprocity between people, communities, and institutions affected by violence. It was informed by a participatory paradigm and a human rights perspective within a psychosocial framework. The project strategy included an integrated intervention framework that incorporated differing policy approaches and was intended to permit the creation of synergies with programmes already planned or in progress and based on other policy approaches.

The programme areas were psychosocial, peace building, livelihood assistance, and information. Community organising was the integrating implementation component for the delivery of the programme components. Each programme component was an integral component of the project and contributed to the overall objective of the project.

Project Partners

This pilot project was carried out in close cooperation with the World Bank Office Manila. Primary partners of CFSI included the IDPs and their communities; the Philippine Government’s Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD); the ARMM Department of Social Welfare and Development; provincial and local government units; Mindanao Network for Disaster Response (MNDR); Kadtuntaya Foundation, Inc. (KFI); Mindanao State University-Iligan Institute of Technology (MSU-IIT); Notre Dame University (NDU) in Cotabato City; and La Trobe University in Melbourne, Australia. Other partners included the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Canada Fund, Consuelo Foundation, Save the Children Federation (SCF), and a variety of local, national, and international NGOs as well as academic institutions and other departments of the national and regional governments.

Project Coverage

The pilot project involved at least 6,759 families (33,550 persons) in five municipalities in two provinces. These included the municipalities of Pagalungan and Pagaganwan in the province of Maguindanao and the municipalities of Carmen, Kabacan, and Pikit in the province of North Cotabato. Maguindanao is part of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM).

From January 2001 through June 2002, CFSI worked with IDPs in thirty (30) evacuation centers as well as those who had returned to their communities of origin in fourteen (14) “barangays”-- the smallest territorial and political unit of government -- within the five municipalities. From July 2002 through July 2003, CFSI expanded its coverage to include an additional fourteen (14) barangays in the interior and less accessible areas of Central Mindanao.

Methodology

The overall aim of this study was to identify how the IDPs experienced their involvement in the pilot project and what the outcomes were for them. Specifically, the study sought to understand:

- 1 Who were the IDPs involved in the project?
- 2 What was their experience with the project?
- 3 How has the project affected their lives?
- 4 What difference has the project made to them and their community?

The methodology utilised for this study included a review of project progress reports and interviews with IDP’s. To obtain the personal stories of the IDPs, interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of IDPs drawn from four communities. The communities were selected to represent different levels of involvement in relation to the project and to ensure that the diversity of the communities was represented.

The communities were:

Sitio Tabulon, Barangay General Luna, in the municipality of Carmen, North Cotabato. This community is predominantly Muslim. The community received all the services of the project. The community was not directly affected by the early 2003 conflict.

Sitio Kadingilan, Barangay Dungguan in the municipality of Pagagawan, Maguindanao is a mixed Christian and Muslim community. This community received all project services.

Sitio Galigayanan, Barangay Macabual, in the municipality of Pikit, North Cotabato. This is one of the interior barangays where access was difficult. Project services were limited due to continuing security issues. The community was affected by renewed conflict in February 2003.

Barangay Inug-ug in the municipality of Pagalungan, Maguindanao. This community received all project services. In addition, CFSI worked with this community to establish the Inug-ug Elementary School, a school that emphasizes peace and reconciliation and incorporates the “madrasah” (Islamic school) system into the regular curriculum of the Department of Education. This community was affected by renewed conflict in 2003.

Participants

CFSI Community Organisers nominated the IDPs who voluntarily participated in this study after being fully informed of its purpose as well as specific ethical issues. They were chosen based upon their experience with the project and to ensure the representation of all sectors of the IDP population.

What is it like to be displaced?

In situations of armed conflict, displacement often occurs quickly. This was the case for many families in Mindanao in 2000. Although people were aware that there would be an outbreak of hostilities, they invariably hoped it would not occur. Most of the people in areas affected by the conflict did not have other options for shelter or employment. They work hard for subsistence living on their lands and their survival depends upon how well they care for their land or small businesses. In most of the affected areas, life is difficult even without war. However, as the stories of the people highlight, absence of peace is even more difficult to cope with. Not only does it force people off their lands and away from their livelihood, lives are also in real danger from crossfire and bombings. Bombs destroy lands and crops, kill animals, and blow up houses. Many people wait until the very last moment to leave their lands in the hope that they would not have to leave. Once they leave, they are homeless, have no income, and their connectedness to their home community is lost. They become strangers in their own land, not always welcome by the communities that have to host them when they cannot return home.

It is hard to imagine the feelings of displaced people as they arrive in host communities and seek safety, shelter, and food. The transition from independence to being dependent on the government, NGOs, or individuals is not well understood. Fear, hopelessness, lack of power, and anger are feelings which are expressed by the IDPs people.





Even at ninety-one years of age, Babu clearly remembers the conflicts and displacements she has lived through. The Japanese occupation in the 1940s, the ‘Ilagas’ and ‘Black Shirts’ in the 60s, overlapping with the martial law days of the 70s, and recently the “all-out war” against the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). “Hanggang ngayon, naaalala ko pa ang pangyayaring yun, hindi ko malilimutan, lalo na tuwing makikita ko ang mga peklat . . .” (I still remember those events, I will never forget, I will always see the scars. . .) She vividly recalls how a bullet hit her during the Ilaga war. Babu was with her husband attending to their farm when something suddenly ripped her breast causing a stinging sensation all over her body. It was so quick that she immediately went numb. Her husband tried to carry her, but she refused and told him she could manage as she walked out of the farmland. Catching her dangling breast on one hand and trying to stop the profuse bleeding with the other, she went back home. Medical assistance was not available at that time, so she took care of her wounds herself by applying traditional herbal medicines. Today, she said that every time she hears gunshots,

her wound still aches even though she knows that it healed a long time ago. “May mga sugat na malalim, hindi madaling gumaling.” (Some wounds are so deep, they don’t heal easily), she said with her eyes looking out into the fields.

(Babu, Baranggay General Luna, Carmen North Cotabato)

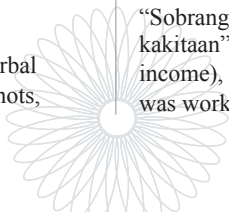
“There was bombing and shelling by the military in our area. I saw houses burning, including my own house. They all turned to ashes after we left. Bombs hit cows, carabaos and other farm animals in the village. I saw animals were wounded. Perhaps they died after we left the community. We had a very long walk then, it was almost seven kilometres from our place to the evacuation center. We were exhausted. Some of the children and young people were very afraid and nervous.”

(Melissa, day care teacher, from Barangay Macabual, Pikit, North Cotabato)

Aida remembers the military operations that sent them packing. It was around 7:00pm and it was dark. There were no warnings. All too suddenly, guns blazed and bombs broke the silence of the night. Aida and her family joined their neighbors as they scrambled for safety and left sitio Galigayanan. “Madilim at nakakatakot” (It was very dark and scary) recalled Aida. “Nasa gitna kami ng bukid, doon kami nagpalipas ng gabi” (We were in the middle of the fields, that is where we spent the night), she added. The following day, they saw tanks roll in and they decided to make their way to Pagalungan. Their journey took three days owing to their efforts to avoid being caught in the crossfire.

(Aida lives with her husband and three children in Barangay Macabual in Pikit, North Cotabato)

Mantel told us that, like the others, he had a bitter experience during the war of 2000. When the military came in to Sitio Langgang, bombs started falling everywhere and all they could do was run for safety. They were not able to bring many things with them, but Mantel did manage to get his two carabaos and used them to ferry their children, during the dark of the night, to the nearest evacuation center in Galakit. All other animals, such as chicken and goats, were left behind and eventually lost. It was almost harvest season then. Regrettably, all farm crops were destroyed and the family’s investments lost. The rice Mantel had been able to bring with him to the evacuation center lasted his family about two weeks. After a while, he and his wife decided they must look for work. They were able to earn an income by cleaning the farm lots of others. They were paid twenty pesos a day, but it was not enough for their subsistence. Mantel, out of desperation, sold his two carabaos for 20,000 pesos each. This amount lasted the family for about five months. “Sobrang dami ng gastusin, wala naman kami halos pagkakitaan” (There were just too many expenses and too little income), said Mantel. What he and his wife did afterwards was work on their farms in the morning and go back to the



evacuation center before night fell. They knew from experience that they could not rely on the relief packets, because they were delivered in an irregular manner. Speaking of those days, Mantel said: “tinataya na namin ang buhay namin kapag bumabalik kami sa bukid, wala kaming ibang magagawa nandun ang kabuhasan namin, natatakot kami pero kailangang tibayan ang loob, napakahirap ng mga panahon na ito” (We risk our lives going to our farms because we had no choice, that is where we have our livelihood, we are very fearful but we have to strengthen our faith, these are tough times).

(Mantel, President of the Parent-Teacher Community Association--PTCA--of the Inug-ug Elementary School in Pagalungan, Maguindanao)

Jasmin and her husband are farmers. Before the war of 2000, they planted rice and corn. She also planted okra, patola, eggplant, and other vegetables which she then sold in the market in Pikit, North Cotabato. Jasmin used to earn about four to five hundred pesos a week and used these funds to send her children to school. Through their meagre income,



they were also able to help a nephew finish a course in agriculture at the University of Southern Mindanao in Kabanacan. “Simple lang ang buhay noon, walang masyadong iniintindi” (Life then was simple and without worry), said Jasmin, “pero nagbago lahat nung dumating ang 2000” (but our fate changed when 2000 came). Jasmin’s family home in Inug-ug was literally right between AFP and MILF detachments. They were in visual contact of both groups of fighters. It was not a pleasant sight, but even then they were hesitant to leave as they had no other place else to go. One dark night, they were awakened by several exploding bombs that seemed to have been dropped all at the same time. She heard helicopters overhead and saw the kitchen of her neighbour blown away. “It was not a time to think”, she said. Jasmin and her family ran towards the Central Elementary School in the heart of Pagalungan to seek refuge, while others went to the Galakit evacuation center. Like the others, Jasmin and her family were not able to bring

anything with them to the evacuation center. “Takot na takot lahat, hindi naming alam kung anong mangyayari sa amin” (Everybody was scared, we had no idea what would happen to us), recalled Jasmin. After several days in the Central Elementary School, Jasmin’s family transferred to the evacuation center in Galakit thinking that it was a much safer refuge because of its close proximity to the highway. When fighting lessened in 2001, Jasmin and her family were able to return to Inug-ug and begin rebuilding their lives. Unfortunately, the heightened military offensives in February of 2003 sent Jasmin and her family back to the Galakit evacuation center. As they were fleeing, she saw the flag of the Inug-ug Elementary School flying with the red side up -- signifying war. Subsequently, the Inug-ug Elementary School was burned. The perpetrator was never identified.

(Jasmin, parent, from Barangay Inug-ug, Pagalungan, Maguindanao)

“Nung nag-bakwit kami, kakapanganak ko lang sa ikalawa ko, mga dalawang buwan pa lang siya...biglang dumating ang military...mga labindalawang tangke...wala kaming nagawa, wala kaming nadala...nilakad namin ang papunta kina kapitán, mga dalawa’t kalahating kilometro papuntang Lanitap...nagkasakit ang anak ko ng diarrhea, pinapainum ko lang ng bayabas na pinakulo...”. (When we evacuated, I had just given birth to my second child, he was about two months old then...without warning, the military arrived...about twelve tanks...we were not able to do anything nor bring anything...we walked down the road to the barangay captain’s house, roughly two and a half kilometres to Lanitap...my child got sick with diarrhea and all I could give him was a drink of boiled guava leaves...).

Tonina, a Muslim woman, had owned a sari-sari store (a small, home-based variety store). She also owned poultry as well as a small lending business in Tabulon, General Luna in Carmen, North Cotabato. In addition, Tonina helped her husband -- who is a farmer -- in the fields. Being a graduate of an agricultural course, she tended to their crops and saw to it that they were in good health. She was the one to decide which insecticide/pesticides and fertilizers would be used. Life then was simple and they did not talk about money because their basic needs were always met. Tonina said she used to be healthy and fat, but did not do the hard work involved in farming as she attended to the other concerns of the family -- the children, the sari-sari store, and the lending business. She said that relationships with other people, particularly Christians, were not a problem then. Christians and Muslims trusted each other and, in fact, Tonina had some business/lending deals with them. They felt safe and they never thought that things would change. “Dati man maganda ang relasyon ng mga Muslim at Christian, meron akong mga kaibigan na Christian at may tiwala man sila sa mga Muslim, pero ngayon iba na.” (The relationships of Muslims and Christians before were good, I had some Christian friends and they trusted the Muslims and me, but now it has changed).

(Tonina, mother of three, from Barangay General Luna, Carmen, North Cotabato)

Life in The Evacuation Centers

When people are displaced, they must find their own way to safety and shelter. In Central Mindanao, the shelter can be a day care center, mosque, gymnasium, school, agricultural warehouse, or makeshift tents at the town plaza or on small patches of idle land. Often, the place labelled as “evacuation center” lacks the necessary facilities to accommodate large numbers of internally displaced persons. Nonetheless, these temporary shelters become “home” for families for a long time. For example, fifty-nine percent (59%) of the families involved in the CFSI pilot project lived in evacuation centers for an average of seventeen (17) months.

The pilot project focused on IDPs living in evacuation centers as well as IDPs temporarily accommodated in the homes of relatives or friends. However, CFSI also assisted communities/barangays hosting the evacuation centers as well as the settlement communities or communities of origin to which the IDPs hoped or were expected to return. Settlement communities were defined as places to which IDPs voluntarily moved for the purpose of establishing a permanent residence as well as barangays that accepted IDPs who voluntarily chose to stay and become permanent residents.

Conditions in the evacuation centers were far from comfortable. IDPs described overcrowding, lack of water and sanitation facilities, and food shortages owing to the intermittent arrival of relief goods. They were also concerned about the physical health of their children and how they were affected by their experience of violence and displacement. Schooling for young people was severely interrupted. Having lost their usual employment, families struggled to gain income from casual activities. Some risked their lives by continued tilling of their lands during the day, whilst returning to the safety of the evacuation center at night.

Men were unable to continue their employment and had little to do at the evacuation centers. Whilst the women tended to the children and family chores, men reported trying to find activities that would give them an income. Achieving success in this regard was highly unlikely for many of the men in the evacuation centers of Central Mindanao.

There were few activities for the youth in the evacuation centers. Displacement meant the end of schooling for many of them. Some lost interest in obtaining an education. Many young women left their families to seek employment as domestics (maids) in other parts of Mindanao. Many young men were unemployed with limited to no recognisable skills.

Who are the people?

CFSI undertook in October 2001 a detailed profiling of the 3,140 families (15,708 persons) in the thirty (30) evacuation centers covered by the pilot project. The results provide a snapshot of the internally displaced.

Females comprised forty-nine percent (49%) of the total population of these evacuation centers whilst fifty-one percent (51%) were males. Over twelve percent (12%) were four years of age or younger; twenty-nine percent (29%) were between five and fourteen years of age; seven percent (7%) were fifteen to seventeen years old; twelve percent (12%) were between 18 and 24 years of age; twenty-nine percent (29%) between twenty-five to forty-nine years old; and eight percent (8%) were fifty or more years of age. Fully eighty-six percent of those surveyed

(86%) were Maguidanaoan. More than eighty-six percent (86%) were Muslim whilst nine percent (9%) were Christian.

Amongst the 3,140 primary respondents of the profiling efforts, eighty-three percent (83%) were married, thirteen percent (13%) widowed, and two percent (2%) single. Seventy-two percent (72%) were farmers. Eighty-four percent (84%) owned the land from which they had been displaced. However, many did not have legal title to that same land.

The primary attitudes expressed by the 3,140 primary respondents were fear, depression, anger, and mixed feelings. However, fifty-nine percent (59%) thought peace was still possible in Mindanao.



Abi and her husband decided to go back to their farms during the day and return to their children in the evacuation center at night, if only to continue earning and yet still be out of harm's way. "Mahirap magpabalik-balik, andun pa ang military, hindi safe...pero kailangan naming mabuhay" (It was difficult to go back and forth, the military were still there and it was not safe...but we had to live...), Abi said. They pawned a



parcel of their land whilst they were in the evacuation center in order to meet their daily needs. In addition, they tried to borrow money from friends and relatives. They were often turned down because people knew that they were displaced and that the chance for repayment was very slim. Finally, Abi and her husband decided to go back home and face the risk of crossfire rather than the difficulties of living in an evacuation center.

(Abi, mother, from Barangay Dungguan in Pagagawan, Maguindanao)

Before the war broke out in 2000, Montasser usually helped his father on their farm on weekends and went to school on

weekdays whilst simultaneously working as a tricycle driver in Kabacan, North Cotabato. Their life then was not "well off", but to Montasser, it was a whole lot better than after the war. "Nakakakain naman kami, nakakapag-tricycle ako, maski papano nakakapageskwela din". (We were able to eat regularly then; I could go out and earn a little with the tricycle and was still able to go to school). Most of the youth like him in his community went to Kabacan occasionally to have a good time and experience the town. They often spent time in Sitio Tabulon and played basketball or talked about life. "Naging sobrang hirap ng buhay nung mag-giyera, lalo na nung andun kami sa Lanitap" (Life became very difficult during the war, especially when we were at the evacuation center). "Mainit, walang makain, delikado ang buhay namin, maski anong oras puwede kami mamatay...". (It was so hot, food was scarce, our lives were in danger, anytime we could die...) "Wala kaming ginagawa sa evacuation, istambay lang, paupo-upo, basta dun lang. Di kami makabalik sa bahay o sa farm dahil matakot man kami sa labanan ng MILF at military. Andun pa sila." (There was nothing to do for us at the evacuation center except to stand by, sit around, and simply stay put. We could not go back to our homes and farms because we were afraid of the encounters between the MILF and the military. They were still there.) Montasser and his young friends as well as neighbours from Sitio Tabulon, Barangay General Luna in Carmen, North Cotabato stayed in the evacuation center for almost two years. He can still remember how bored they were. Some times, he was able to help forage in other people's farms which allowed him to, somehow, escape the miserable life at the evacuation center. "Wala kaming pagkain, di man regular ang relief, di naming alam kung saan kukuha ng makakain, naki-ani na lang kami, mas mabuti naman yun kesa magnakaw," (We had no food, relief was not regular, we had no idea where to get food so we had to forage, at least it was better than robbing), remarked Montasser.

(Montasser, youth leader, from Barangay General Luna in Carmen, North Cotabato)

Life in the evacuation center was far from what the people of Sitio Tabulon were used to. It was crowded, hot and humid, with mosquitoes and insects everywhere. You could always hear children crying and it was never comfortable. Children were jumpy, cranky, and would easily be frightened by a loud noise. People had nothing to eat except the infrequent ration of relief goods and whatever they could forage out of other people's harvest. They could not go back to their farms as they were afraid of military/MILF encounters. After a while, people wanted to go home... but there was nothing left of Sitio Tabulon. Houses were burned down and whatever few belongings they had were gone. Laga's big and beautiful house was reduced to ashes. For more than a year, the evacuation center in Sitio Lanitap served as home for Laga and her two sons. They had no choice.

(from an interview with Laga, a single parent from Barangay General Luna, Carmen, North Cotabato)

The CFSI Pilot Project

“Promoting the Transition from Conflict to Peace and Development at the Community Level” was conceptualised as a post-conflict, reconstruction project. These projects are “...a critical step in the continuum between humanitarian relief and longer-term development assistance.” They require...”all the responsiveness of an emergency operation as well as a vision of how interventions fit into the longer development scheme” (Cullen and Forman, 1998).

CFSI entered the IDP community in 2000 -- before the commencement of the pilot project -- through the provision of training in psychosocial care to professionals in Mindanao and through engagement with government and NGOs in advocating for IDPs. CFSI ensured that the community was familiar with the work of CFSI and that CFSI staff knew the community. Local people were recruited from the community to take the role of community organisers and partnerships were established with international and local NGOs and community leadership groups. Profiling was undertaken in the evacuation centers and communities of origin as a preparation for the full implementation of the project.

The IDPs were introduced to CFSI through different pathways. The first stage of the pilot project focused on community entry and the formation of participation structures. The processes in sequence were: courtesy call or community visit; community leaders meeting; community meeting; community immersion; action committee formation; community profiling/needs assessment; assessment of peace and order situation; and the identification of sumpats (Maguindanaoan term for bridge or link) and volunteers from the community. The sumpats eventually took on a key role in the transitional project.

One of the first activities following entry into the community was the building of small Pulungan Centers (community information centers) to give the IDPs a place to meet as a community and a place where they could discuss common concerns.

Project Components and Activities

Community Organising Component

All of the Community Organisers employed by CFSI came from Central Mindanao. Virtually all of them had themselves been displaced persons at an earlier point in time. Their role was pivotal in the implementation of the project. The key tasks were immersion into the community and the creation of committee structures to enable the full participation of the IDPs. It was through the Community Organisers that the IDPs first came into contact with the pilot project. IDPs spoke with feeling of their appreciation of Community Organisers who would walk two to three hours from the main road to join the community. An early task of the Community Organisers was to form action committees for the other project components: peace education, livelihood, psychosocial, and information.

The IDPs had the opportunity to join a committee to assist in the implementation of the project components. Each IDP could join only one committee and these people became either sumpats or volunteers in their own communities. Each committee worked with the community through community assemblies, many of which were held in the newly established Pulungan Centers. The sumpats were trained by CFSI so that they could effectively carry out their roles. The training increased the capability of the individuals involved as well as the capacity of the community to address different concerns.

In recognition of the volunteer work of the sumpats, one-time livelihood assistance in the form of “Incentives for Community Service” (IFCS) was provided. Seventy (70) sumpats received PHP 1,500 each.

Reminiscing about her time in the evacuation center, Babu recalled CFSI personnel as those who often approached and talked to her. She said that it was something she appreciated, as she was able to talk about what she felt and thought. It was something that made her feel important and made her feel that she also counts as a member of her community, despite her old age. “Nalaman at naramdaman ko na ang sinasabi ko ay mahalaga para sa kanila...” (I learned and felt that what I have to say is also important to them). “Naramdaman ko na gusto nila talagang makatulong kaya sinabi ko lahat ng nakikita kong pangangailangan namin...” (I felt they really cared and wanted to help, so I told them what we needed...) “Maski putol-putol at maiksi ang mga sagot ko, okey lang sa inyo, nakinig pa rin kayo...” (Even though my answers to your questions are short and telegraphic, you do not mind, you listen....)

(Babu Bai, 91 years old, from Barangay General Luna, Carmen, North Cotabato)

In the Galakit evacuation center, Jasmin met CFSI Community Organizers (COs). “They were riding a motorcycle”, she remarked, “They introduced themselves and talked to us; they were easy to get along with”. Since then, the IDPs in the Galakit evacuation centers met with CFSI’s Community Organisers on a regular basis. They started forming different committees in which the IDPs participated. Jasmin and the others saw the potential benefits of talking about their situations, identifying their problems and needs, and planning together for possible solutions. But it was not simple, according to Jasmin. She sometimes saw how difficult it was for the COs, especially when there were conflicting opinions. She appreciated their efforts, especially in hot and rainy days when COs continued to visit and talk to them. Jasmin also talked about the seminars and training that the COs organized for them. Amongst these were the psychosocial caregiver’s training, peacemaker training, and information training.

(Jasmin, parent, from Barangay Inug-ug in Pagalungan, Maguindanao)

“Bilang sumpat marami akong natutunan, gusto ko sanang salihan ang iba pang seminars pero kailangan yung iba naman para matuto din sila...” (As a sumpat, I learned a lot in the seminars; I wanted to join the other seminars but I had to give way to others so that they too may learn), reported Hasan. These included training for Sumpats, Psychosocial Caregivers, Peacemakers, Information Specialists, and other workshops to enhance the community’s capacities to help themselves. Amongst the things Hasan learned were: the consultation



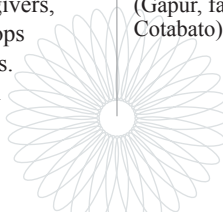
processes, the coordination of activities and meetings, project proposal preparation, and organizing the people towards a common goal. “Ngayon marunong na kami kung paanomalaman ang mga problema at paano magplano ng solusyon” (Now we know how to identify our problems as well as how to plan for solutions), said Hasan.

(Hasan, Secretary of the Kadingilan Association for Peace and Development--KAPED--a people’s organisation in Barangay Dungguan, Pagagawan, Maguindanao)

“Dahil sa mga miting-miting, natuto kami kung ano ang kailangan naming at paano ito makakamit.” (Because of the meetings, we learned what we need and how to meet them). Gapur recalled the numerous meetings and discussions they had with CFSI Community Organizers. He said these discussions helped the community identify its goals and what they want to achieve as a people. It also helped them develop plans and steps on how to achieve these goals. It gave them a vision for their future.

He said the meetings were held at the Pulungan Center, be it formal or informal, and that this is where they usually gather to discuss the events of the day. The Pulungan Center is also where they stay during breaks from farming during the hottest part of the day. There, they discussed everything from the current security situation to everyday life in their community.

(Gapur, farmer, from Barangay General Luna in Carmen, North Cotabato)



Information component

People who are displaced due to armed conflict are frequently unable to obtain information about matters that affect their lives. In addition, they rarely have the chance to express their opinions to key decision makers. Without adequate and accurate information, IDPs do not know whether it is safe to return home, harvest their crops, or travel to their places of work.

Recognising the role of information in empowerment and the ability to make informed decisions, CFSI ensured that the information component was consciously integrated into the project.

As earlier stated, Pulungan Centers were built to provide a place for the delivery and exchange of information. The Pulungan Centers provided a focal point where members of the community could meet and share information with each other and with officials who visited the community. Notices and informational materials were posted at the center. Although literacy was not high in a number of communities, those community members who were literate could ensure that information was shared. In addition, CFSI trained members of the communities to serve as "Information Specialists". They were tasked with ensuring that relevant and critical information was relayed to all. The Pulungan Centers were also used for community meetings and other activities. CFSI also initiated the "Information Caravan", drawing together government agencies and NGO's to travel to a specific Pulungan Center for a full day for the purpose of sharing information about resources and services as well as providing training.

A key activity of the information component was the establishment of a regular radio programme -- "Tinig ng IDPs" (Voices of IDPs). Interviews of IDPs in the community were broadcast over a local radio station, reaching a large audience in Central Mindanao. Hosted by CFSI's Information Specialist, the programme provided the IDPs with the opportunity to speak directly to the wider community of their experiences, needs, issues, and opinions. It tackled a variety of IPD concerns including peace and development in Mindanao. Through the radio programme, the IDPs were able to contribute to public policy debates.



Laga recounted the happy moments they had with CFSI during an 'Information Caravan' where they had some festivities in Sitio Tabulon. CFSI community organizers played basketball with the locals and many parlor games were played. 'Masayang masaya ang mga tao nung araw na iyon, maski sandali nalimutan namin ang aming mga problema'. (The people were very happy that day, and even for a while we seemed to have forgotten our worries).

(Laga is from Barangay General Luna, Carmen, North Cotabato)

Bapa Uyag jubilantly shared his participation in CFSI's radio program "Tinig ng IDPs" (The Voice of the IDPs). He was very thankful to the CFSI Information Officer, for giving him the opportunity to be heard over the radio. As a token of gratitude, Bapa Uyag sent him "pupuyo" -- a local variety of fish. He joyfully expressed his thanks and satisfaction for this experience and told us how glad he was when he heard his voice over the radio. Through it, he was able to share his experiences as well as that of his neighbours to a wider audience. He said not too many people are heard on radio, he was very, very, happy he had that opportunity. He felt like a superstar!

(Bapa Uyag is 69 years old and is the head of the family, from Barangay General Luna, Carmen, North Cotabato)

Go and See Visits

Having left their homes due to crossfire and bombing during the conflict, the IDPs were understandably fearful of returning home. Whilst life at the evacuation centers was extremely difficult, the families felt safe at the very least. They could not be sure that fighting would not recur when they returned home. In addition to fear, there was much uncertainty. The people did not know the state of their houses or their fields. They did not know what remained of community infrastructure. Clearly, there was a need to learn more about the current situation at "home".



Towards this end, CFSI introduced the IDPs to an activity called the “Go and See Visit” (GSV). First used in refugee situations by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the “Go and See Visit” is a brief, organized return to the place of origin for the purpose of later making an informed decision about a permanent return. CFSI organized “Go and See Visits” in Central Mindanao in close consultation with the IDPs, line departments of Government, community leaders, barangays officials, and the combatants. The IDPs, CFSI personnel, and others made the exploratory journey home, travelling by truck, horse, or on foot. Singing songs and carrying banners to announce the purpose of the effort as well as the sentiments of the IDPs, all of these exploratory journeys were carried out safely. After seeing what remained of their homes and paying homage to those who lost their lives, the IDPs returned to the evacuation centers to decide if, and when, to return.

The “Go and See Visit” was a core activity in empowering people to reclaim their lives and make their own decision about returning home or resettling in another area.

As one IDP stated: “Before we conducted the GSV,

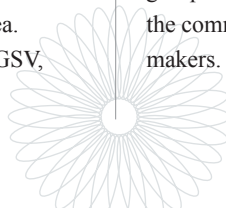
we co-ordinated with the militaries and the LGU’s (local government units) -- this process helped us stop military operations in our area. CFSI’s strong support with the community and close coordination with LGU’s and the militaries strengthened our position in the community. We have learned to communicate with the militaries and LGU’s”.

Visioning Workshops

Visioning workshops were conducted to assist people before and following the “Go and See Visits”. The visioning workshops allowed people to reflect on their feelings following their visits and assisted them to prepare for returning home permanently.

Safe Return Kanduli

Kandulis - (a cultural ritual and religious ceremony of thanksgiving) were held at the places of origin once people returned. Government officials and representatives of other groups were invited to join the Kandulis, hence bringing the communities’ concerns to the attention of key decision makers.



To Laga, the “Go and See Visit” is what really triggered the process for her return to her community of origin. It exposed their problems to authorities and made them see what the people needed in order to be able to go back home. “Nakita nila ang mga kailangan para makabalik kami, bahay kabuhayan, pati irrigation na wala dati ay napag-usapan din...” (They saw what we needed to go back home: houses, livelihood, and even irrigation that were not there before were discussed...). During the “Go and See Visit” to Sitio Tabulon, they were accompanied by representatives of the Department of Social Welfare and Development, National Irrigation Administration, the municipal government, and other NGOs. “Duon kami sa ilalim nung malaking puno, walang natira dito maski ano, maliban sa mga malaki at matandang mga puno.” (We stayed under the shade of a big tree, there was nothing left here except the big old trees). Through the GSV, Sitio Tabulon successfully linked with different agencies for support, assistance, and for their bid to return home. She said, “Kung hindi dahil sa go-and-see andun pa rin kami sa evacuation center” (if not for the ‘go and see’ we would still be in the evacuation center).

(Laga, Barangay General Luna, Carmen, North Cotabato)

Tonina first learned about CFSI at the evacuation center. She attended the meetings organized by CFSI on the “Go and See Visit”. She said that if not for the GSV, it would have been more difficult for them to go back home. “Dahil sa GSV, nagkaroon kami ng pagkagataon na makabalik at makapag-planning para sa bagong pagsimula. Nandun din ang ibang mga grupo, gobyerno, at nakita din nila ang mga problema, at tumulong din sila...sa pamamagitan ng mga miting, nalaman naming ang mga kailangan naming gawin upang makabalik... gumawa kami ng mga committee... sumpat, volunteers, women’s, youth... lahat nagtulungan...” (Because of the “Go and See Visit”, we had the opportunity to go back and plan for a new start. Government and other groups were there as well, and they also saw the problems, and they helped...through the meetings we had, we learned what we needed to do to go back home...we made several committees - for sumpats, volunteers, women, youth - everybody helped...) Tonina said that CFSI assisted them in identifying and linking with agencies and institutions they could tap for resources. They received housing from DSWD, toilets and water pumps from OXFAM, and the National Irrigation Administration (NIA) constructed an irrigation system. Tonina later became a volunteer para-teacher for CFSI’s Adult Literacy and Numeracy Programme in Tabulon. She said that this role allowed her to exercise her educational background as she had some education units when she was in college. But more importantly, this allowed her to help her neighbours become literate.

(Tonina, para-teacher and mother of three, Barangay General Luna, Carmen, North Cotabato)

Livelihood component

When forced to leave their homes due to armed conflict, people leave their source of income. When IDPs arrived in host communities, there was no work available for the men and very little for the women. This meant families had to use their meagre savings and sell any farm animals they had to support their needs until aid from the government or NGOs provided some sort of relief. Moreover, when families returned home they found that their rice fields or coconut trees were destroyed by the fighting. Families needed to establish livelihood possibilities at the evacuation centers as well as upon their return home.

The CFSI pilot project had two livelihood elements: Start-Up Capital Assistance (SUCA) and Livelihood Assistance Upon Return (LAUR).

SUCA was made available to women at evacuation centers to provide them the opportunity to gain an income for their families and to establish some independence. Amounts between fifty to five hundred pesos (PHP50-500) were released to individual women and groups. Projects undertaken included vegetable and rice trading, hairdressing, fish selling, and poultry vending.

The aim of LAUR was to assist families to establish a sustainable income-generating activity immediately upon return to the community of origin. To encourage cooperative efforts, LAUR was made available to groups within the community, rather than to individuals. Activities included duck raising, rice farming, purchase of farm animals, and fishing. The money was released to families through Banks that enabled the beneficiaries to transact in such an institution for the first time. Many had never even been inside a bank before. Training was also provided to beneficiaries by CFSI in relation to management of the LAUR grant. By June 2003, 121 of 147 groups had generated savings from the initial grant.

“Hindi na sila takot na baka hindi ako makabayad, dahil alam nila na meron na kaming source of income.” (They are no longer afraid I will not be able to pay, because they know that we now have a source of income), remarked Abi.

Abi lives in the outskirts of Barangay Dunguan, far from the poblacion -- barangay center -- where most of her neighbours live. She and her family literally live in the heart of their farmland, in the middle of the fields. As such, she is often the



last to know about her neighbours and what is happening in her community. But she goes to the poblacion every now and then to buy goods and to catch up on the local news. When she heard about CFSI's LAUR project, she joined a group that proposed to buy and raise ducks as a start-up livelihood project. The processing took some time, so she and her husband continued with their farming. They had already prepared their land when they realised that nobody was willing to lend them money to buy seeds because of their financial situation. Requests to borrow money from others were unsuccessful.

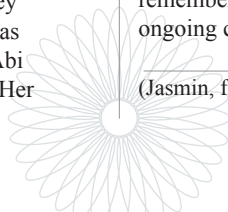
When the LAUR monies were released, Abi was delighted and thought that they could easily venture into duck raising. However, the prices of ducklings had risen considerably. It was clear that the group could not pursue their intended project. Abi went back to CFSI and requested to use her share of the grant to the group -- PHP400 -- to buy watermelon seeds. It turned out that the seeds Abi and her husband bought were of good quality and grew quite nicely. After seventy-five days, Abi and her husband harvested approximately thirty-five thousand pesos (PHP35,000) worth of watermelons! They were ecstatic, the neighbours were surprised, and CFSI was delighted to hear the good news. Out of their earnings, Abi and her husband invested in fifty seedlings of mangoes. Her

husband wanted to buy a carabao but she convinced him out of it arguing that mangoes are better for the long term and that carabaos can die or get lost in case of another fire-fight in the area. They also had their house repaired and purchased a bicycle for the children. Their mangoe trees are now a year old and Abi and her husband are in their third cycle of planting watermelons.

(Abi, mother of seven, from Barangay Dungguan, Pagagawan, Maguindanao)

Back in Inug-ug, Jasmin joined a LAUR group. They proposed to raise geese. From her share of the group grant, she received two small geese which she proudly reported had bred into six geese. She plans to continue breeding geese and building a sustainable flock. After which, Jasmin plans to use her earnings to buy bigger animals, such as goats. In time, she hopes to buy her husband a carabao to replace the one they sold whilst they were at the evacuation center. Her enthusiasm about her plans suddenly died down as she remembered that this dream cannot come true if recent and ongoing conflict requires her family to evacuate once again.

(Jasmin, from Barangay Inug-ug, Pagalungan, Maguindanao)





“Hindi ko malilimutan ang mga seeds at kambing, nakatulong to sa aming panibagong simula nagkaron kami ng income, impaortante sa amin ang income.” (I will never forget the seeds and the goat, it helped us start again. It gave us income, income is very important to us).

When asked about his experience with CFSI, Gapur hesitantly told of his participation in the LAUR project. He said that the LAUR’s intentions were good in the sense that it could provide them with something to start with upon their return. He belongs to a group of farmers who bought seeds of palay (rice) and planted them. But at that time, their project was not a complete success because flooding destroyed most of their crops. They were only able to harvest about a sack of rice each. His wife, however, got a goat. He is still thankful because the LAUR allowed him, his group mates, and his family to start again. He is now back to his regular farming.

(Gapur, farmer, from Barangay General Luna, Carmen, North Cotabato)

Tonina and her husband were also beneficiaries of LAUR. Their project, planting seeds of palay, was not very successful due to the flooding that destroyed most of the crops. But what she and the others liked about the LAUR was the experience with the Land Bank in Kabacan, where LAUR monies were released and where they deposit their savings. None of them had experienced transacting with a bank prior to the LAUR adventure. Banking was an alien concept to them. She told a story of her neighbour and said, “hinuhubad pa nga ni Kaka ang tsinelas, pero yung guard hinabol kami sa loob at sabi wag na daw hubarin, sabi ni Kaka baka madumihan ang sahig kasi napakalinis kaya binitbit na lang niya ang tsinelas...” (Kaka removed his slippers upon entering the bank; the guard ran after him and told him that it was not necessary to remove his slippers, but Kaka didn’t want to dirty the clean floors so he carried his slippers and walked barefoot inside the bank...). Tonina said they liked going to the bank because it is cool, clean, and the people are friendly.

(Tonina, mother of three, from Barangay General Luna, Carmen, North Cotabato)

Peace education and reconciliation

“Good development, or development that addresses inequity, exclusion and indignity, is in itself the best form of conflict prevention.” (Colletta, Lim, & Kelles Viitanen, (2001)).

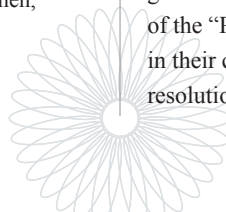
Finding pathways to peace was part of the pilot project. Communities were torn apart by armed conflict. Violence became an everyday part of life and even for community and family disputes, non-violent conflict resolution was seldom practiced.

Peace festivals were an early activity of the project. These festivals were planned by members of the community and celebrated the ability of communities to live in peace. Peace education committees were formed, and volunteer “Peacemakers” were selected and trained.



CFSI’s peace education programme sought to inform people of the antecedents of conflict and provided an analysis of the causes of ongoing conflict. The Peacemakers and Sumpats attended seminars conducted by CFSI in collaboration with the Kadtuntaya Foundation Inc. (KFI). The aim was to enhance the theoretical knowledge and capability of the Peacemakers. Communication skills and alternative forms of conflict resolution were also part of the training.

In forums facilitated by CFSI, the IDPs came together to talk about peace issues in their communities. By design, a number of trained “Peacemakers” were Barangay officials. They were able to identify opportunities in the local government unit meetings to promote ideas of peace. Some of the “Peacemakers” were able to take the role of mediators in their communities and advocated for alternative conflict resolution approaches.



Psychosocial Component

As a Sumpat and Psychosocial Caregiver, Lasumbra helped organize activities for the youth with a peace and reconciliation focus, such as the “Laro para sa Kapayapaan” (Games for Peace). He also organized informal basketball games and used these as an opportunity to help the youth develop a different perspective on interpersonal conflict.

(Lasumbra, substitute teacher and basketball coach, from Barangay Inug-ug, Pagalungan, Maguindanao.)

“Ang peace ang talagang makakatulong sa amin, dahil dito mag-survive kami...” (Peace is what will really help us... because of peace, we will survive...)

(Gapur, farmer, from Barangay General Luna, Carmen, North Cotabato)

The committees that were formed were later integrated into a community organization named Kadingilan Association for Peace and Development (KAPED). “Kaped” in Maguindanao language refers to a “companion”, an apt name for a community whose primary concern is security. KAPED meets at least once a month to discuss problems in the sitio, settle conflicts if there are any, and decide on the use of funds and other donations. The meetings are held at the Pulungan Center, which also serves as a lounging area during hot afternoons. Kaka said that through these meetings, “natutunan ng mga tao na lahat ng yan ay pwedeng maayos, nasa paliwanag yan...” (people learn that everything can be settled and that it’s just a matter of explanation)

(Kaka Marcing, from Barangay Dungguan, Pagagawan, Maguindanao)

Laga spoke of a basketball game that almost became a fiasco. A heated game amongst the youth almost turned into a brawl. Upon learning what had happened, the sitio leader brought the matter to the “ustadz” (religious leader) and it was discussed in the community organization Tabulon Community Association for Development (TICAD). Normally, matters like this were just left hanging. This time around, the parties involved were assisted to patch up their differences. It was subsequently resolved that a fine of P1000 would be meted out for any basketball-related conflicts. Laga attributes this process to the existence of the community organization as well as the trainings on peace and conflict resolution conducted by CFSI. Whilst armed conflict between the MILF and the AFP continues in other parts of Mindanao, Laga is hopeful that peace in her community can be sustained so that socio-economic development can continue. “Paki sabi sa Presidente na isaalang-alang naman kami, isaalang-alang ang peace at ang mga pagbabago at development dito sa amin, umaasa kami na sana makapamuhay na kami na merong peace...” (Please tell the President to consider us seriously, consider the peace, the changes, the development in our community; we hope that we continue to live in peace...).

(Laga, a single parent, from Barangay General Luna, Carmen, North Cotabato)

The psychosocial well-being of those populations served by the pilot project was a central theme of all programme components. In addition, the psychosocial components was a key support to individuals and families as they dealt with the impact of conflict and displacement displacement and endeavoured to reclaim their lives. In addition to training of the newly recruited Community Organisers of CFSI at the commencement of the project, the psychosocial component trained sumpats and others to become “Psychosocial Caregivers”. The sumpats assisted in identifying people, particularly children, who were having difficulty, emotionally, dealing with the situation in Central Mindanao. A survey of psychosocial needs was undertaken. Initially, the focus was on assisting children to cope with the trauma of war and displacement. This led to the establishment of “Harmony Play Centers” for very young children. Parents also highlighted the need for schools to make education more accessible and relevant to their children. When needs were identified, the communities were assisted to approach LGU’s and NGOs to assist in developing responses to those needs. CFSI helped establish a school for 500 out-of-school children and youth in one community and facilitated the establishment of play centers in a twenty-five (25) communities.

Lasumbra’s first involvement with CFSI began when he became a “sumpat”. He underwent sumpat training and introduced CFSI to his community. He helped organize activities and meetings and participated actively. But Lasumbra wanted to do even more for his community. When he learned that CFSI was mobilizing select community volunteers to undergo training in psychosocial care, Lasumbra volunteered and was fortunate to be selected. He was very thankful because he saw it as an opportunity to help IDPs. Lasumbra reported that he learned a lot from the training and was able to apply this as a “psychosocial caregiver” in his own community. Since then, he has talked to many people about different things and everybody calls him “bapa” or “tito” (uncle). The talks are casual and Lasumbra notes that most of the time people just need someone to talk to. Sometimes he gives personal advice; often he just listens.

(Lasumbra, substitute teacher and psychosocial caregiver, from Barangay Inug-ug in Pagalungan, Maguindanao)

Children and Youth - Their Experiences

Children and young people are the major victims of armed conflict and displacement. Like adults, they suffer the trauma of displacement and experience hunger and homelessness. Even more than this, however, war and displacement rob them of their right to education and protection.

The pilot project focused special attention on the impact of war and displacement on children. “Psychosocial Caregivers” assisted parents in helping children cope with their experience as they reported behavioural changes, sleeping difficulties, and nightmares amongst young children.

On return to their communities of origin, parents were assisted with the establishment of the “Harmony Play Centers” for young children. The play centers provided an opportunity for young children to gain access to toys and learning materials. It also provided a safe place for them to receive care if both parents had to work in the fields.

A youth sports festival was organised very early in the life of the pilot project. Young people formed a committee and worked with the CFSI Community Organisers to implement the festival. The aim of the activity was to provide the young people a chance to learn new skills and to promote self-esteem. It also taught them to focus on their community.

Access to education was a key issue for the children and youth. Education is one factor consistently associated with the development of trust and caring relationships and other forms of social capital. When these young people are denied the opportunity to participate in education and other normal developmental activities, it becomes a loss for the communities’ future.

A major initiative of CFSI during the implementation of the pilot project was the development of a sub-project



entitled “Arms are for Hugging: Promoting Education for Peace and Development in Conflict-Affected Mindanao”. This was in response to the community’s repeated reference to the need for a school in Barangay Inug-ug. Community committees were formed to support the establishment of the school. These include School Structure, Operation and Maintenance, Peacemakers, Health and Nutrition, and Sanitation.

The building of the school promoted social capital within the community. Three residents contributed 1.5 hectares of land and other community members donated building materials and labour to build temporary school structures. The Department of Education of the Philippines has given the school full support and recognition. Other international and local NGOs have been mobilised to contribute additional funds, materials, equipment, or structures. Parents were provided with training that would allow them to meet the needs of their children. This included sewing school uniforms, preparing of nutritious school lunches in accordance with the Islamic faith and providing encouragement to their children. Some community volunteers were trained as “Psychosocial Caregivers” whilst others were mobilized and trained as tutors. They were tasked with helping the children successfully complete the academic year. Transport arrangements for those who lived far from the school were also made.

Laga is thankful for the “Harmony Play Center” in Sitio Tabulon. It has facilitated her efforts to help young children overcome the trauma of war and displacement. It has provided a venue for the children to sing, dance, and play once again. “Ngayon, ang isipan ng mga bata ay hindi na sa giyera, mas mahilig na silang maglaro at madaldal at maingay na sila, nagsisimula na ulit silang bumalik sa dati” (the children are no longer pre-occupied with war, they engage more in play and are more expressive now of their feelings, I think they are starting to go back to what they were before...), Laga said. She told a story about a child who was often beaten up by his parents for petty mistakes. Because she learned from CFSI about the Convention on the Rights of the Child, she went to the parents and talked to them about it. They discussed effective and safe ways of disciplining children. She shared her concern about the impact of abuse on a child’s behaviour and future. The parents were embarrassed at first, but having the credibility as the “substitute mother” and recognized psychosocial caregiver, they listened to her. Laga then said that she would not have had the courage to do what she did if she had not participated in the training provided by CFSI on psychosocial care.

(Laga, teacher at the Harmony Play Center in Barangay General Luna, Carmen, North Cotabato)

Through the Tabulon Community Association for Development (TICAD), a youth organization was born and named Tabulon Youth Organization (TYO). Elections were conducted from which Montasser emerged as Chairperson. The TYO has already organised cleanliness and sanitation campaigns. They have also facilitated sports activities such as basketball matches. TYO spearheaded the games during the visit of the CFSI “Information Caravan”. With a proud tone, Montasser narrated that they have now organized an inter-barangay basketball league with six barangays and seventeen teams already registered. Sitio Tabulon and the Tabulon Youth Organization, he said, will be hosting the league. Montasser also joined the Youth Forum held at the University of Southern Mindanao and involving the participation of youth leaders from different barangays and municipalities. He said that it was a very enriching experience that gave him a chance to talk to youth leaders of other communities. Montasser learned about the similarities of their problems and saw how the youth can unite and mobilise to work for improvement. He learned about expressing himself, discussing problems, and planning to address the needs of young people. The participants in the Youth Forum later decided to organize a much larger Youth Assembly which they hope will soon materialise. Montasser’s community is hoping to secure funds to construct a solar dryer -- concrete pavement used to dry palay, the maize/corn, and other farm produce. If successful, they plan to use this as a basketball court as well. Montasser hopes that the children and youth of Tabulon will have better access to education. There are approximately 130 school-aged children and youth in Tabulon, the majority of whom are out-of school, according to Montasser.

(Montasser, youth leader from Barangay General Luna, Carmen, North Cotabato)

The children managed to go to back to school whilst at the evacuation center but studying was difficult because they did not have a proper space for such purposes in the evacuation center. Kaka remembers how difficult it was for a mother like her not to be able to provide for the school needs of her children. She said: “...umiiyak ako kapag humihingi ang mga anak ko para sa mga activities sa school, wala akong maibigay...” (I cry when my children ask me for money for school activities, I can’t give them any...)

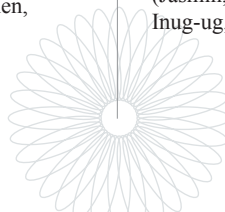
(Kaka,, mother of five, Barangay Dungguan, Pagagawan, Maguindanao)

Jasmin remembered that her eldest was in her first year of college when they were in the Galakit evacuation center. He needed to pay one thousand pesos for a school activity and they had no money to cover it. Her husband went back to Inug-ug and looked for their carabao. Luckily, it was still there and alive. They sold it to cover school expenses and



provide a little extra for their needs at the evacuation center. Her eldest eventually had to stop going to college because they could no longer afford it. Her son decided to leave his community for the capital city of Manila and now works in a Muslim trading company in Quiapo. With regards to the Inug-ug Elementary School, Jasmin noted that the Barangay Council has agreed to utilize barangay funds to construct a new temporary structure to replace the building that was mysteriously burned down. This will significantly improve the situation for the children as well as bring the community closer together. ‘Lalo lang lumakas ang loob at nagkaisa ang mga tao nang masunog ang iskul, kung minsan ang mga trahedyang magtutulak sa atin sa tagumpay...’ (The burning of the school only made the people stronger and more united. It is very difficult to accept, but sometimes tragedies are what we need to make us successful...), she said.

(Jasmin, Sumpat of Inug-ug Elementary School, Barangay Inug-ug, Pagalungan, Maguindanao)





Sustainability - Empowerment and Decision Making in Communities

Leadership in communities displaced by armed conflict is invariably weakened by the process. This means that at a time when leadership is most needed, it is not readily available to the IDPs. CFSI recognised the important role of community leaders and sought to work with them to attain project objectives as well as strengthen the local leadership structures. From the beginning of the pilot project, the Community Organisers of CFSI encouraged community members to discuss issues of concern with local officials. Committees that could aid in the implementation of project components and ensure local structures were formed.

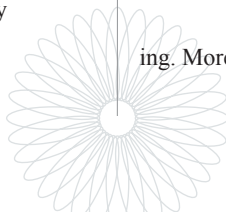
Sometimes, the leadership of communities is linked with combatants. In such situations, the leaders may act to exclude NGOs and others from coming into the area. This happened on occasion during the implementation of the pilot project. CFSI placed a great deal of importance on working through such obstacles, resulting in access to the communities.

CFSI organised, trained, and assisted all of the communities covered by the pilot project to undertake the Minimum Basic Needs (MBN) Survey processes. The aim was to position these communities to assess resources in direct response to unmet needs. This required extraordinary and sustained effort on the part of the CFSI Community Organisers, Sumpats, and others. It resulted in the concerned communities learning more about themselves as well as survey processes.

The results of the MBN Survey were then used by these communities to develop sitio-level Community Development Plans (CDPs). "Sitio Assemblies" were organised to facilitate the making of these plans. These plans were then submitted to their respective Barangay Councils for official action. CFSI efforts to promote the highest possible degree of community participation in these planning processes were aimed at helping the people regain control over their lives. These efforts also promoted the building of social cohesion and social capital.

Some of the Community Development Plans (CDPs) were integrated into -- or became the basis for -- the Barangay Development Plan. The presentation of these plans was an important activity in which community planning and government planning came together. In this process, the community had control in identifying their priorities for public resources and an officially sanctioned mechanism for informing the government of these needs. It also provided the government with a process for directly consulting the people most affected by armed conflict in Central Mindanao.

The whole process of displacement is dis-empowering. Moreover, it places people in situations where they are at





risk of falling into a downward cycle of continuing lack of power and poverty. This is because they have been forced to leave their homes, have no income or employment, are homeless, and when they return home may not be able to return to their usual employment. Individual resilience can only be expected to take people so far. Strong and supportive communities and government policies and programmes are required. Empowerment is one way IDPs can reclaim their lives.

Kaka Marcing mentioned how CFSI helped her speak her mind and voice out her opinion. Her exposure to the meetings and trainings of CFSI trained her to become vocal about the needs of her community. She also learned how to access and tap internal and external resources. As a result, she now talks to many people, including those in the government and the NGO community. “Mahiyain ako noon, pero ngayon kapal-muks na.” (I was shy then, said Kaka Marcing, now I am thick-faced).

(Kaka Marcing, from Barangay Dungguan, Pagagawan, Maguindanao).



Hasan shared, with much enthusiasm, his experience with CFSI on the Minimum Basic Needs (MBN) Survey. He said that through the MBN, the community learned a lot about problems that concern each one of them. “Nalaman naming ang mga pangangailangan, higit sa lahat, nalaman naming na kaya naming tulungan ang aming mga sarili at ang aming kapuwa,” (We learned what we need, and more importantly how we can help ourselves and our neighbours), said Hasan. “Ito ang dahilan kung bakit gumawa pa kami ng hiwalay na committee, bukod dun sa evacuation, na titingin sa aming mga pangangailangan” (This is why we have created, in addition to what we have at the evacuation center, several committees that will attend to the specific needs of the community), added Hasan. The KAPED is now composed of working committees namely: education, water and sanitation, livelihood, infrastructure, peace, women, youth, and health. “Malaking trabaho ang MBN, nakita ko ang sakripisyo ng CFSI para matulungan kami...maski umuulan dumadating sila para tignan kami, para makipag-usap, para makasama kami...bahagi na naming ang CFSI” (The MBN is a lot of work and I’ve seen CFSI’s sacrifices to help the community...even during rainy days they came to check on us, talk to us, and be with us...CFSI is a part of us) remarked Hasan.

(Hasan, Secretary of the Kadingilan Association for Peace and Development (KAPED), Barangay Dungguan, Pagagawan, Maguindanao)





The Future for IDPs - Hopes, Dreams and Ideas for Peace

A lasting peace is the universal hope amongst the IDPs. However, the path to peace may be seen differently amongst the people most affected. For some, it is the withdrawal of the AFP from their lands, whilst for others it is a government victory over the MILF. For all, however, it is the cessation of conflict. The pilot project assisted IDPs to realise that peace is more than the absence of fighting. The project has enabled people to move from the position of seeing peace as coming from major combatants. Strengthening communities is recognised as an important pathway to finding a lasting peace.

The establishment of the school in Inug-ug illustrated the power of strong communities. The school -- developed as a community school and owned by the community -- became a pull factor for others to return home. When the school was burned to the ground in April 2003, sadness and anger enveloped the entire community. Immediately after, community members began to plan and rebuild the school with initial funds coming from the barangay coffers. The perpetrators were never identified, but the community is clear in their resolve to secure the future of their children, and theirs as a people.



The pilot project demonstrated the value of an integrated approach to finding pathways to peace and development. The psychosocial perspective ensured the dynamic interaction between individuals, families, and communities was utilised in fostering sustainable changes within, and for, the community. Moreover, the impact of national and international policies upon the lives of the IDPs was addressed.

The project approach worked within the local service delivery system, thus supporting the perspective that the broader community must be strong if local communities are to be assisted. The partnerships and cooperation between the IDPs, CFSI, other service providers, and the national, regional, and local governments were major factors in the meeting of the project objectives.

It is fitting that the IDPs themselves have the final say. They speak of achieving peace at all levels in their community.





“Pangarap kong mamatay sa sarili kong bayan, yan din ang pangarap ko ngayon at para sa aking ppamilya...ayokong mamatay sa evacuation...” (...I’ve always dreamed of dying in my homeland, and the same is my wish now and for my family... I don’t want to die in the evacuation center...)

Today, Babu and the rest of the community of Sitio Tabulon are back home and working together to rebuild their lives. “Iba na ngayon kesa dati, noon meron kami lahat mula sa maliit na bagay sa pagluto o maski anong gamit sa bahay...ang pagkain madaling hanapin...ngayon kailangan naming magpundar ulit...” (It is not the same now, we used to have everything we need...from small items for cooking to other household needs...food was easy to find...but now we have to build again...). However, Babu is still thankful because she sees that her family and community are now back to planting bananas, rice, and corn.

Like the rest of them, Babu hopes that they won’t be displaced again and that they will stay longer to sustain what they have begun in the place they call home -- home where she hopes to find her family when she finally closes her eyes to the inevitable.

(Babu Bai, 91 years old, Barangay General Luna, Carmen, North Cotabato)



Kaka Marcing remains concerned about the security situation in her community. She Kaka hopes that their lives won’t be disrupted again by conflict. She hopes that a lasting peace will soon be forged between the government and the Bangsamoro people. “Nagsisimula na ulit kaming magkaron ng ugat, sana hinid na kami kailangang mag-bakwit ulit, mahirap, napakahirap...” (We are starting to grow roots again, I hope we do not have to go elsewhere again, its difficult, so difficult)

(Kaka Marcing , mother of five, Barangay Dungguan, Pagagawan, Maguindanao)

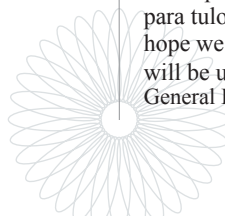
Hasan hopes that the ball will keep rolling. He hopes that the positive changes will not come to a halt because of armed conflict. He also hopes that the top ten priorities they outlined in the Minimum Basic Needs Survey (MBN) will be addressed, perhaps through the ARMM Social Fund. He dreams of eventually obtaining a masters degree, either in education or in medicine, whichever is financially feasible. Lastly, he hopes that he will never have to hear the mortars and the bombings again, that he and his family will never have to scramble in the dead of night in search of a safe refuge. Hasan remembers, and he remembers with pain in his eyes.

(Hasan Baluntang, Secretary of the Kadingilan Association for Peace and Development or KAPED-Barangay Dungguan, Pagagawan, Maguindanao)

“Alam ko kung paano maging desperado, yung walang wala, mahirap pasanin ang bigat...” (I know how it is to be desperate, to have nothing, the burden is too much to bear...). At present, Abi and her husband are looking forward to their children’s futures. They hope that things will be stable and that they won’t have to evacuate again, ever.

(Abi, mother of seven, from barangay Dungguan, Pagagawan, Maguindanao)

“Pare-pareho tayong Pilipino...Sana magkaintindihan na para tuloy-tuloy ang development”. (We are all Filipinos... I hope we begin to understand each other so that development will be unhampered...) --- Montasser, Youth Leader, Barangay General Luna, Carmen, North Cotabato)



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