



Capacities for Peace: The Philippines

The European Union funded Capacities for Peace project, implemented by Conciliation Resources, Saferworld and their partners, supported local actors to enhance the effectiveness of early warning and early action in conflict-affected contexts. In the Philippines, Conciliation Resources worked with partners to revive and influence the peace process between the Government of the Philippines (GPH) and the National Democratic Front Philippines (NDFP).

The project focused on three areas affected by conflict: the Cordillera and Bicol regions of Luzon (Philippines' largest island), and the Davao region of Mindanao (the second largest and southernmost major island). Conciliation Resources worked with Sulong CARHRIHL, a network of 59 member organisations that monitors the implementation of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law – the only substantive agreement reached between the two parties.

In response to jointly identified needs, the project activities strengthened the local organisations that comprise the network and improved their contributions to peacebuilding processes. It improved relationships between military and state authorities and local communities.

The activities formed part of Conciliation Resources' ongoing programme of work with the negotiating teams from both parties and the Norwegian facilitators to encourage the resumption of talks.

Achievements

- Skills in mediating local disputes and analysing conflict dynamics were developed. Participants reported being able to better mediate disputes between landlords and farmers, carry out conflict analysis and interact with the military.
- Relationships, communication and coordination among the Sulong CARHRIHL network have significantly improved. As a result of the project, participants feel more connected to and supported by the network.
- An agreement was reached on a 'roadmap for peace' as a result of the training in Davao. This involved collating the experiences of different indigenous communities.
- Members of the Citizens' Alliance for Just Peace, a nationwide coalition of civil society networks advocating for peace, improved relations despite significant political differences.
- Some participants from indigenous communities, who had come to the meetings in Davao bearing arms, were persuaded in the course of the workshop not to carry weapons. They also committed to convincing others in their community not to do so.

Insights

There is value in bringing together those engaged in peacebuilding and human rights.

In a conflict setting, there can be tensions between those seeking justice and those seeking peace. Bringing the two perspectives together helped to reconcile some of the differences, to find common ground and look differently at the approaches of the various groups.

A balance must be achieved between external approaches and communities' own approaches to peacebuilding, respecting both indigenous culture and non-violence. This was achieved by indigenous people themselves facilitating conversations and introducing different frameworks for understanding conflict.

Working closely with partners and supporting networks and alliances provides the space for ideas, understanding and analysis to be developed and shared more extensively among different communities. Our partners in the Philippines – those with the specific knowledge of the context and stakeholders – led on designing the workshops.



Above: Participants discuss conflict dynamics in a Capacities for Peace conference in Manila, Philippines. © Conciliation Resources/Charlotte Melly
Front page: Boys play football in Bogotá, Colombia. © Conciliation Resources/Charlotte Melly

Relationships built and biases overcome

Several Capacities for Peace workshops were organised in cooperation with the Armed Forces of the Philippines. They involved community representatives and military officers jointly analysing the conflict. Sulong CARHRIHL designed these workshops with the Armed Forces' Human Rights Office. They introduced a number of analysis tools for participants to evaluate the context, including the main risks of violence and opportunities for building peace.

As a result, the relationship between the army and local communities improved in Bicol. Fewer abuses were committed by the army against the civilian population. Participants in the Davao activities also confirmed the relationship improved.

“There was a lot of enthusiasm among those who attended and the activities contributed to improving our relationship with the communities and breaking a cycle of misunderstanding and mistrust.”

Col. José Antonio Carlos Motril,
Armed Forces of the Philippines

The workshops helped the military representatives overcome some of their prejudices against civil society organisations, which they suspected of 'pro-left' tendencies. In the Province of Sorsogon in Bicol, a monitoring mechanism was set up between the army and the community as a result of the relationship

established through the project. This in turn led to collaboration between the community, Sulong CARHRIHL and the army on the investigation of particular human rights abuses.

Local peace pact

Following the Capacities for Peace activity in Davao in Mindanao, a peace pact was agreed by leaders (Datus) of the Dibabawon tribe, the Local Government Unit, the New People's Army (the armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines) and legal organisations associated with the left movement. The pact, which is based on the indigenous peoples' traditional customary laws, sets out rules on armed groups' respect for the indigenous people's ancestral domain (including a commitment not to carry out any military operations on the land). The pact led to a local de facto ceasefire between the indigenous peoples and the New People's Army, which began in August 2014.

“The peace pact between the Dibabawon tribe, the local government and the rebels endures amidst increased tensions elsewhere in the region over these past months.”

Joeven Reyes, Executive Director,
Sulong CARHRIHL

Lessons from the Capacities for Peace project have been published by Conciliation Resources and Saferworld in 'Effective local action: from early warning to peacebuilding', February 2016.

