Independent Evaluation: Peacebuilding in Conflict-Affected Mindanao

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

## Investment Summary

| **Investment Name** | Peacebuilding in Conflict-Affected Mindanao |
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| AidWorks reference  | Investment INL343 |
| Original dates: | 1 April 2014 to 30 June 2022  |
| Amended dates: | 1 April 2014 to 30 June 2023  |
| Original value: | Total estimated value: $91,218,457.90Total activity values: $82,838,137 |
| Implementing partner: | World Bank, UNDP, GCERF, The Asia Foundation, International Alert, The Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, Oxfam, The Institute for Autonomy and Governance, Balay Mindanaw, Ayala Foundation, International Crisis Group |
| Country/Region: | Philippines |
| Primary sector: | Peace and Stability |
| Initiative end of program outcomes: | 1. Increased capacity of the government agencies in environmentally fragile and/or conflict-affected areas to effectively deliver conflict-sensitive services, including humanitarian assistance2a. Developed or improved local, non-government mechanisms for conflict resolution at the community level2b. Increased capacity of community leadership to address factors contributing to violent extremism3. Combatants surrender weapons in accordance with the peace agreement and camps are progressively transformed into viable communities4. Inclusive institutions to improve governance in the Bangsamoro are established and/or strengthened |

## Review Summary

The purpose of the independent strategic review was to assess the effectiveness of Australia’s support for peace in Muslim Mindanao under the Peacebuilding in Conflict-Affected Mindanao investment, and its ongoing appropriateness in the political context. The evaluation was also to inform decisions about how future support is programmed and delivered. The review covered the different programs and projects from July 2017 to December 2019.

**Review Team:**

The Strategic Review itself was conducted by a Philippines-based team of independent consultants:

* Fermin Adriano (review team leader)
* Maria Carmen “Ica” Fernandez (governance conflict sensitivity specialist)
* Noor Saada (Bangsamoro peace and development specialist)

The evaluation took place between January and May 2020, with consultations in Manila, Cotabato City, Iligan City, Cagayan de Oro and Zamboanga City.

An additional Peer Review and Conflict Analysis was conducted by another independent consultant, Ian Wadley, during the broader review process. Bernie Pearce, from DFAT’s Fragility and Conflict Branch, also worked to ensure alignment with DFAT review requirements.

**Key messages:**

* Overall, the investment has been effective in achieving its objectives while adjusting to the changing context in the Bangsamoro over the past three years, particularly with passage of the Bangsamoro Organic Law, the establishment of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, and the siege of the city of Marawi.
* DFAT’s flexibility, particularly in the face of an evolving dynamic, was highly praised by NGO and multilateral partners; however, greater coordination across donors is needed, along with more alignment with other DFAT work.
* Greater engagement on gender, disability, and vulnerable sectors is needed to ensure the peace process is successful and inclusive.

## Overall response to the evaluation

DFAT welcomes the evaluation findings and acknowledges the recommendations, several of which have already been implemented. DFAT will consider the key lessons learned in future programming. More detailed responses to each recommendation are included in the table below:

## Response to recommendations

| Recommendation | Response (Agree/Partially Agree/Disagree)  | Action plan/Timeframe |
| --- | --- | --- |
| *Recommendation 1 (Paragraph 33):* ***Strengthen coordination among APP partners, WB, UNDP and their sub-grantees, and across the Australian Mindanao program*** Overlaps in the activities among APP partners, the WB and UNDP have been noted as a result of them addressing the same challenges of the peace process and operating within a limited geographical area. While this can be partially attributed to the fact that a number of projects are jointly implemented or informed by shared studies, coordination can be further enhanced by regular quarterly meetings with APP and flexible peace and stability fund (FPSF) partners, WB, and UNDP. Continuing support to APP and FPSF partners based on their relative comparative strength in the peace process (e.g., IA on conflict monitoring, IAG on constructive and critical analysis of regional issues, CHD in Sulu, TAF on engagement with a wide range of stakeholders, Oxfam on gender equality, Balay Mindanaw on P/CVE activities, and PBSP on private sector engagement). The WB and UNDP can complement the efforts of the APP and FPSF partners by being able to match international insights and experiences of similarly situated countries in other parts of the world with local expertise. | **Partially Agree**: While DFAT has continually strived to ensure regular communication and coordination between partners, we recognise that this can always be improved upon. APP members are in frequent contact: formal DFAT-organised channels (namely twice-yearly partner meetings and an ongoing WhatsApp groups) have spilled over into side discussions between partners and in some case resulted in joint projects. This networking engagement will be expanded to other partners. However, a quarterly meeting between all program partners seems unlikely to be achieved due to logistical constraints (both in terms of sheer number of organisations to be represented, and their locations) – a once-a-year meeting is much more likely to be achieved, as are individual ad hoc meetings on specific topics (for instance, support to Normalisation, or women’s economic empowerment).  | Annual investment partners meeting to be established – most efficient if held in same week as APP all-partners meeting (next due February 2021).First ad-hoc meeting suggested on establishment of BNTF. |
| *Recommendation 2 (Paragraph 34):* ***Better coordination across the Australian Mindanao program is also needed to avoid overlaps in their activities and gain maximum return on Australia’s investment in the Mindanao peace process*** Humanitarian assistance will eventually transition to delivery of traditional socio-economic services once situation normalizes. Peace and governance activities will have to be aligned with sectoral concerns such as education because the latter is the foundation by which good governance can only be sustained in the medium and long-run. It is recommended that a quarterly or bi-annual meeting among the heads and key staff of the various Australian projects should be conducted to improve coordination and information sharing activities. | **Agree:** While the Embassy’s humanitarian, education and peace teams do work closely with each other, smoother and more formal communication and coordination could be achieved.Staff working on Bangsamoro issues have re-established the Bangsamoro Working Group. Political & Economic Section is drafting Bangsamoro Strategy with input from Development Section.  | Draft Bangsamoro strategy by end of 2020.Bangsamoro Working Group to recommence virtual meetings |
| *Recommendation 3 (Paragraph 35):* ***Assist in improving coordination amongst donors, national, regional and local governments involved in the peace process***There are significant overlaps on the ground because of absence an effective coordinating mechanism on donor assistance. Currently, all major donors are offering technical assistance and capacity-building programs to the BARMM government to build its capacity to effectively govern. Also, there is a vacuum on coordination among national, regional and local governments in the delivery of promised assistance to MILF combatants who will be decommissioned and the socio-economic services to be provided to MILF camps and communities. Poor coordination has resulted, at both levels, in confusion among recipients of the assistance and frustration over the slow delivery of promised benefits of the peace process. Being the second biggest donor in the peace process (in terms of grants), Australia can play an important role in improving donor and government coordination by sponsoring a series of forums that address this critical issue. It can partner with the WB and JICA (Japan being the biggest donor) in the conduct of these forums.  | **Agreed:**Donor coordination (or lack thereof) has been an ongoing problem in the Bangsamoro. DFAT convened a donor coordination meeting (on support to Transition and Normalisation) in 2019; a smaller meeting between Australia, Canada, the United States, New Zealand and the EU took place after this review was completed. The Embassy plans to convene another full donor meeting before the end of 2020, while also encouraging the UN to play more of a convening role. | Full donor coordination meeting by end 2020; establish formal timeline for meetings in 2021.  |
| *Recommendation 4 (Paragraph 36):* ***Strengthen implementation of gender sensitive plans and install PWD sensitivity plan in the work program of APP partners*** While significant progress on gender sensitivity has been noted in APP partners work, compared to when they were operating under the Basic Bangsamoro program, there is still room for improvement in implementing their Conflict Sensitive Gender Action Plans (CSGAPs), and how these activities contribute to the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security. As the peace process shifts to implementation, there are opportunities to intensify engagement with non-elite and vulnerable women in the Bangsamoro, including widows, female-headed households, former combatants, and internally-displaced women. On the other hand, there is a notable gap in PWD sensitivity in the works of the APP, multilateral, and other implementing partners, despite initial plans by Oxfam and accessibility guidelines established by IA. Culturally-appropriate parameters on this concern should be built in the work program of APP and multilateral implementing partners to ensure the extent of engagement with PWDs.  | **Agreed:** Under Phase 2 of Australian Partnerships for Peace, partners have continued implementation work around gender sensitivity plans, including integrating them into their M&E programs. Disability elements have also increased somewhat, although they are still constrained by local cultural norms that discourage PWD from identifying as such.  | Ongoing |
| *Recommendation 5 (Paragraph 37):* ***Develop a framework and metrics for P/CVE activities of APP and multilateral implementing partners and link it with larger efforts on this concern*** The Marawi siege and the emergence of VE groups in various parts of Mindanao have triggered serious concern among donors and the government in preventing/countering violent extremist groups. While the concern is warranted, the downside is that significant resources are being poured to address the issue without a framework by which a more effective way of addressing it should be conducted. The recent completion of the National Action Plan on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism, which was supported by DFAT through UNDP, should help inform this framing. Recently, the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) issued a Memorandum Circular providing the guidelines for CSOs and international development organizations on how to engage in P/CVE work. The situation is not being assisted by the fact that most of the existing work on P/CVE, analysing its causes and triggers, are anecdotal in nature. Australia is in a position to continue to assist in addressing this gap, in coordination with other donors, by co-developing a framework and evidence-based metrics for P/CVE engagement within the varying context of the local communities (i.e., island provinces vis-à-vis mainland Mindanao) where the VE groups operate. | **Partially Agreed:** This was a point of disagreement between the review team and the Embassy during the course of the review. P/CVE work is a new and emerging sector that covers a very broad body of work (demonstrated ably in this investment, which at one level can be considered entirely P/CVE). We agree that research on effectiveness is still in its early days but disagree with claims that what is currently known is all anecdotal in nature. We also do not believe that this program alone has the resources or ability to devise a framework for assessing the effectiveness of an entire sector. However, we do believe that supporting the implementation of the NAP will assist in more coordinated and effective use of donor resources, as will our coordination with other donors and across Australian Government agencies.  | Ongoing |
| *Recommendation 6 (Paragraph 38):* ***Assist in restoring and strengthening voices of CSOs, indigenous peoples and other marginalized sectors in policy formulation and decision making within BARMM*** APP partners, UNDP, and their local sub grantees were heavily involved in the advocacy for the passage and ratification of the BOL as part of the coalition of peace builders. Local partners are now complaining that after the BARMM government’s installation, their participation in the policy formulation and decision making in BARMM has been limited. The APP and multilateral partners should continue their support to CSOs, IPs, women, youth, IDPs, and other local stakeholders, to ensure that their views are articulated and able to meaningfully influence decision-making in the region. Strengthening the ranks of this coalition of peace builders will particularly be critical if the BARMM experiment disappoints. | **Agreed:** CSOs, indigenous peoples and other marginalised groups, together with women and youth, are important partners and participants in work under all our programs, and their inclusion will continue in the future.  | Ongoing |
| *Recommendation 7 (Paragraph 39):* ***Formulate a Mindanao Strategy for DFAT engagement across programs and recruitment of a Local Peace and Development Adviser***The increasing investments and attention on Mindanao by the Australian government will necessitate the formulation of Mindanao strategy to guide current and future assistance. Formulating the strategy will also be in line with the OECD Humanitarian-Development-Peacebuilding nexus. Mindanao is one of the best places globally to test case the successful linkage of humanitarian, development and peace building work given that all three streams of assistance will be needed, in varying degrees, in Mindanao’s conflict affected areas and adjoining communities given widespread poverty and vulnerability in the island.*(Paragraph 40):* The expanded coverage of Australian engagement in Mindanao will necessitate the engagement of a Local Peace and Development Adviser in DFAT to assist in the formulation of the Mindanao Strategy for DFAT and in linking with critical stakeholders in the peace process at OPAPP, concerned national government agencies and BARMM. | **Partially Agreed:** DFAT is drafting a Bangsamoro Strategy, rather than a strategy covering the whole of Mindanao, as the BARMM is the focus of Australian engagement. The strategy will draw on input from all sections of the Embassy. It will be a high-level guide for Australian engagement, rather than an implementation plan. **Partially Agreed**: DFAT does not believe an individual advisor is required for the drafting of the Bangsamoro Strategy; however, we will engage an advisor when we begin designing the next phase of the Peace investment in 2022. | Ongoing Early 2022 |
| *Recommendation 8 (Paragraph 41):* ***Improve coordination between DFAT Manila and DFAT Canberra*** The formulation of a Mindanao strategy will require greater inputs from DFAT Canberra to DFAT Manila to assist the latter in addressing additional issues that will result in better coordination of the humanitarian, development and peace building nexus. DFAT Manila will benefit from knowledge of other countries similarly situated like Mindanao which DFAT Canberra has access to. In turn, knowledge of the Mindanao situation and the work of the APP, multilateral, and FPSF implementing partners can be shared by DFAT Manila to DFAT Canberra to improve the latter’s selection procedures on studies and activities that should be funded by DFAT*.* | **Partially Agreed:** There is already a good level of coordination between the Embassyand relevant areas of DFAT in Canberra, including specific thematic areas. There could be scope for engagement with other bilateral desks/posts working on peace and conflict issues.  | Ongoing |
| *Recommendation 9 (Paragraph 42):* ***Technical Advisory support at BARMM and OPAPP levels (embed Senior Advisor)***Senior officials of BARMM acknowledged their technical deficiency in running a government given that for almost four decades they were engaged in a revolutionary struggle. Most donors are offering one-shot technical assistance and capacity-building programs to address the problem, but this is ostensibly not sufficient. The problem is aggravated by the redundancies of nearly 6,000 workers of the previous ARMM government, and whose replacements are currently being vetted. The experience of technical assistance support in other countries (e.g., Indonesia) shows that embedding a senior international adviser (supported by local consultants and staff) in the transitional government will be most effective because of the immersion of the senior adviser to the day-to-day operations of the bureaucracy. It will also be an opportunity to perform “on-the-job” training for middle level managers and support staff in various ministries of BARMM instead of sending them away for training for a period of time. | **Partially agreed:** Embedded advisory support could be of great use to both OPAPP and the BARMM but would require buy-in from both entities. Experience has shown that it is difficult to recruit and embed an international advisor in the BARMM (even outside of the current pandemic). While a fly-in, fly-out model could be considered, this may not be as effective as someone based in the Bangsamoro. Identifying an appropriate specialist will depend entirely on the needs of OPAPP or the BARMM. This is also assistance that may be more usefully offered through the Bangsamoro Normalisation Trust Fund, or in tandem with it following its establishment, or through another multilateral. We will discuss possibilities with the World Bank, OPAPP and the BARMM government. | Ongoing. For discussion with stakeholders early 2021. |
| *Recommendation 10 (Paragraph 43):* ***Training programs and scholarships, particularly among the Bangsamoro youth, should prioritize skills needed in reconstructing and developing the Bangsamoro economy***Training programs and Australian scholarships are heavily skewed towards conflict resolution, peace building, justice, and identity issues. While such expertise and skills are still relevant to this day, their relative importance has declined given that the primordial task now is to reconstruct and develop the Bangsamoro economy. A clear manifestation of this mismatch between skills and jobs is the lack of a Chief Economist in the BARMM government who could help formulate a systematic and data-driven economic blueprint for the Bangsamoro economy. Islamic banking and finance have been a long-held advocacy of the Bangsamoro but there are few financial experts engaged by the BARMM to operate the system in a viable manner. Also, there are only a few graduate degree holders in business administration and management or science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) among the Bangsamoro and yet the BARMM leadership calls for an economic development strategy based on private cooperative and corporate models. It is high time that the selection criteria for fields of specialization for the Bangsamoro youth be changed to prioritize expertise that will be needed for the reconstruction and development of the Bangsamoro economy, and to ensure that these young specialists are able to serve in the region.  | **Partially Agreed:** DFAT agrees with the suggestion that training and scholarships should focus on economic skills development, however, this is not work supported under this investment. Could potentially be considered under the Australia Awards scholarships.  | Ongoing – for consideration ahead of next funding round of the Australia Awards.  |
| *Recommendation 11 (Paragraph 44):* **Assist in shifting support from confidence building measures to socio-economic development.** There was heavy emphasis on confidence-building measures during the protracted peace negotiations between the government and the MILF. Now that this phase is over, DFAT support to the Mindanao Trust Fund or eventually, to the BNTF, should prioritize the provision of sustainable place-based socio-economic services particularly livelihood programs because these ranked highest in their priority needs. Specific gaps identified include sustainable livelihood, bridging opportunities with private sector investment, and ultimately ensuring access to jobs and fixed/increased incomes at household level. Also, the peace process is now at the stage of reconstruction and development of the Bangsamoro economy through effective governance by the BARMM ministries. Balancing ‘soft’ policy interventions such as planning workshops and capacity-building trainings with concrete delivery of socio-economic, governance, and security-related packages is equally crucial for the P/CVE and normalization work streams, as highlighted by the needs of the reintegration of former ‘black-flag’ actors in Basilan and Lanao del Sur. Although the JICA-supported HARVEST facility for agribusiness loans through Landbank has yet to gain the envisioned traction in BARMM, similar innovative facilities to harness private sector investment and innovation should be considered. (At smaller scale, the British Council provided support to selected social enterprises in collaboration with the old DTI-ARMM, although this was discontinued after the transition to the BARMM.) DFAT Manila should be able to closely monitor whether targets for socio-economic services are met, once funding is fully operational, and whether they are producing the results they are meant to achieve.  | **Partially Agree:** DFAT will support a focus on socio-economic development under the BNTF but has also already agreed to include socio-economic programming as a new focus under the flexible fund. This is more an expansion than a shift, as we believe confidence-building measures will continue to be an important part of the work we support. This work includes programming aimed specifically at MILF members and their families in the six acknowledged camps, as well as program supporting amnesties, pardons and other justice mechanisms.  | Ongoing  |
| *Recommendation 12 (Paragraph 45):* **Ensuring geographic balance will be important to support inclusivity and legitimacy.** This entails more place-sensitive programming across mainland and archipelagic BARMM, supporting the integration of new entrants Cotabato City and the 63 barangays in North Cotabato, and fulfilling the CAB provision on development programs for Bangsamoro communities outside the BARMM. This has implications on both security and socioeconomic activities, such as initial discussions for a BASULTA-wide P/CVE ‘BRAVE’ program as a successor to PAVE. | **Agreed:** DFAT strives continuously to ensure that we have good geographic coverage in our programming. Under Phase 2 of APP we will be targeting the new barangays. The investment has also provided support to MILF camps outside of the BARMM, and communities that unsuccessfully voted to join the new region. Programming in the island provinces also remains a priority. In all cases our programs work with local organisations to ensure that interventions are appropriate to the local community and culture.  | Ongoing |
| *Recommendation 13 (Paragraph 46):* **Retain bilateral activities for flexibility** It is expected that once the BNTF is established, a significant portion of Australia’s assistance will go to this Trust Fund. However, it is recommended that funds for bilateral activities should be maintained so that DFAT can exercise flexibility in supporting activities on peace building and governance that will complement delivery of socio-economic services. Too often in the past, the provision of socio-economic assistance is blinded by the imperatives of development ignoring in the process that these projects are just one though an important component of achieving sustainable peace and stability in these conflict-affected communities.  | **Agreed:** It is anticipated thatPhase 2 of Australian Partnerships for Peace will commence before the end of 2020. DFAT has also maintained flexibility to provide shorter-term programming in the region.  | Ongoing |
| *Recommendation 14 (Paragraph 47):* **Adjust operating procedures to COVID-19 social distancing and mobility restrictions, which will entail more localized investments and partnership.** With limited mobility globally and between regions, local expertise, assets, and relationship/supply chains must be strengthened. Service deployment for all ministries will necessarily be area-based. Social distancing requires limiting large public gatherings such as workshops and distribution. Given that internet coverage in the BARMM is spotty, creative means for two-way communication loops such as traditional radio and two-way radio work will be required. | **Agreed:** All partners adjusted their work to the new restrictions in the early days of the pandemic, both through alterations to programming and to ways of working. For APP Phase 2, DFAT requested that partners identify future COVID-related risks and how they planned to manage them, and what impacts they might have on program operations.  | Ongoing |