INGOs and Participative Democracy: Westminster for Democracy (WFD) and its initiatives in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM)

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ABSTRACT

A promise of peace, stabilization and development in Muslim Mindanao was on the horizon when the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) was ratified in 2019. The institutionalization of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) soon followed, establishing an interim government with greater fiscal autonomy and territory. Nevertheless, the BARMM, cognizant of the fragility of its efforts towards peace as well as the further exacerbation by the pandemic, needs to rethink the administration and management of its internal processes. Focusing on outcomes has proven inadequate, rather, a systemic change in mindset must be carried out in order to make headways towards comprehensive development (Stiglitz, 2002). Facilitating partnerships is a concept that is not new to BARMM since being a hotbed of conflict for more than 40 years, many forms of assistance and cooperation have been extended to the region both from governmental and non-governmental international organizations. These partnerships and collaborations played an important role in building the autonomy of their government enjoyed today, and remain instrumental in the continuous road-mapping of a parliament. This paper will discuss how international NGOs (INGOs) and their programs in capacity development strengthen the mechanisms for participation in the BARMM and how such contributes to shaping a democratic parliament. Specifically, it will look into the programs by the UK-funded Westminster for Democracy (WFD) and how its programs are enhancing the receptivity of the BARMM government as well as the voices of the participating constituents.

Keywords: *BARMM, INGOs, Participatory Mechanisms*

INTRODUCTION

A promise of peace, stabilization and development in Muslim Mindanao was on the horizon when the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) was ratified in 2019. The institutionalization of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) soon followed, establishing an interim government with greater fiscal autonomy and territory.

Taking its foundations from the conflict-stricken ARMM, the peace process within the region has been an age-old challenge for the Bangsamoro Region. Nevertheless, BARMM was a game-changing maneuver that spurred a peace process between the Philippine government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). Though the population is predominantly Muslim, the Organic Law that enabled the region's autonomy also helped defined BARMM's identity which encompassed non-Muslims and indigenous peoples. Given the diversity in culture in such a small region, cultural and social capital must be strengthened (Moner & Aceron, 2020), assets that are consequential for any civic community to function. More than the challenges brought by diversity, intra-Moro competition among rival groups in the region also complicates the establishment of a unified Bangsamoro.

The BARMM, cognizant of the fragility of its efforts towards peace as well as the further exacerbation by the pandemic, needs to rethink the administration and management of its internal processes.

Focusing on outcomes has proven inadequate, rather, a systemic change in mindset must be carried out in order to make headways towards comprehensive development (Stiglitz, 2002). This is a particularly great struggle for the Bangsamoro as it continues to chart its path towards autonomous governance.

It is clear from BARMM's vision and missions the method by which it ought to ensure the necessary conditions for enduring peace and sustained socio-economic development to its people: (i) providing services to the community; (ii) ensuring multi-stakeholder participation; and (iii) facilitating appropriate partnerships. The first item, however, cannot simply be attained without the other two and without further collaboration of multi-stakeholder participation.

Multi-stakeholder participation entails a platform where people with differing perspectives, backgrounds, and expertise are gathered; a 'decision-making body comprising of different stakeholders who perceive the same problem, realize their interdependence for solving it, and come together to agree on action strategies for solving the problem' (Steins & Edwards, 1998). Simply speaking, it is a venue for dialogue. Especially for BARMM, which faces the challenge of creating a new system that is inclusive to its constituents, participatory platforms and mechanisms are essential in shaping its future.

Facilitating partnerships is a concept that is not new to BARMM. Being a

hotbed of conflict for more than 40 years, many forms of assistance and cooperation have been extended to the region both from governmental and non-governmental international organizations. These partnerships and collaborations played an important role in building the autonomy of their government enjoyed today, and remains instrumental in the continuous road-mapping of a parliament.

This paper will discuss how international NGOs (INGOs) and their programs in capacity development strengthen the mechanisms for participation in the BARMM and how such contributes to shaping a democratic parliament. Specifically, it will look into the programs by the UK-funded Westminster for Democracy (WFD) and how its programs are enhancing the receptivity of the BARMM government as well as the voices of the participating constituents.

Existing studies and literature on BARMM and ideals of participation will help build the context of this study. The goals of this research shall also be supported by statements from the WFD of its activities as well as pronouncements from the BARMM administration.

Theoretical Framework

Participatory mechanisms are important avenues for democracy. It provides ways for citizens to actively engage in the decision-making process of their government. This is especially important in the context of local governance. Gaventa (2004), argued that conditions for participation must be met from both ends of the spectrum – government institutions and the public. He specified that as much as empowering the public to engage in participatory mechanisms, the government's response and receptivity towards these voices should be improved as well. In the context of strengthening government mechanisms, international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) provide programs that facilitate training and development for government institutions.

This paper will utilize Gaventa's arguments on the need to strengthen both the government and public poles in the spectrum of participation. Specifically, drawing on the assumptions that government receptivity is an important aspect of participation, this paper will explore how INGOs strengthen mechanisms for public participation. Following the cases cited by Gaventa in Indonesia, Brazail, and Uganda, this paper will dwell on look how external influences can add value to the mechanisms of the Bangsamoro government for public participation.

RELATED LITERATURE

Participation.

Public participation refers to the involvement of people in the processes of state activity, essentially providing the people a means of engagement, representation, and security.

Participation allows the government to be responsive and supportive of the actual needs of the people and provides a means of accountability (Marume, Ndudzo, & Chikasha, 2016). It can manifest in the form of elections, representation, party-systems, stakeholder engagement, interest groups, committees, and even mass public opinion (Ibid.).

In historical democratic theory, proponents such as Sidney Verba and Harold Lasswell contextualize participation in society as the mechanism that allows citizens to influence, manage, or control decisions and policies that affect themselves (Verba, 1967) (Lasswell, 1936). Indeed, the 'doctrine of sovereignty' stipulates that the people remain as the supreme authority of any democratic state. Thus, most, if not all, democratic nations have integrated participation in their constitutions and laws. Despite variance in the degree and quality of participation that their respective citizens experience, participation remains a key democratic device in modern states.

Participation in the context of social and policy development provides several benefits for the health of democracy, yielding positive effects on both principals and agents. First, high degrees of participation may improve the quality of outputs and leading to enhanced public trust toward institutions and agencies. Wang & Wart (2007) found that participation, leads to improved information, involvement, and contributions from stakeholders,

resulting in effective and satisfactory administrative performance. This relationship may then develop greater public trust. Second, participation can serve as an agent of empowerment, giving stakeholders and communities the chance to present knowledge and feedback for concerns and complex problems (Bobbio, 2018) (Hisschemoller & Cuppen, 2015). Third, participation can enhance legitimacy in both the decision-making and administrative processes, through inclusive public participation (Nasser, 2017). By addressing the gaps in the policymaking process, such as spatial (affected settlements or communities) sectoral (indigenous peoples, marginalized sectors), gender (women and LGBTQ+ participation), institutions may gain support from often-forgotten stakeholders and yield a smoother and legitimate policy process (Bobbio, 2018).

State of Participation in the Philippines.

The Philippines was one of the countries that sparked the democratic wave of the 80s, with the 1987 constitution outlining the goal of a participatory government with heightened public engagement (Gera, 2016). The creation of the local government code of 1991 was dubbed as the "most ambitious decentralization movement in Asia", asserting community participation and involvement across various sectors of socio-economic development (Castillo, et al., 2001).

Indeed, enshrined in the constitution and various republic acts are laws that reinforce the notion of participatory

governance in the country, such as the party-list representation system in the House of Representatives, which attempts to ensure the representation of the marginalized and underrepresented sectors and groups, such as women, youth, disabled citizens, and urban poor. Republic Act 8371 known as the 1997 Indigenous Peoples Rights Act was established for the protection and security of indigenous peoples, aiming to increase the voices and participation of indigenous groups and tribes in the decision-making process (Prill-Brett, 2007). This is especially important since indigenous groups make up 12% of the country's population (International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, 2022).

In the context of religious participation and participatory governance in Mindanao and the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, the Philippines has continuously attempted to improve the relationships between the government and Muslim minorities through peacebuilding initiatives such as interfaith dialogue and workshops (Tagoranao & Gamon, 2019). The creation of the National Commission on Muslim Filipinos through Republic Act 9997 in 2010 illustrated the Philippines' commitment on inclusive and participatory governance, thus enhancing the participation of Muslim Filipinos in the policymaking process relative to the Muslim faith, traditions, customs', and beliefs (NCMF, 2022). The BARMM itself, a product of peace dialogues and negotiations between the Philippine government and Islamic

groups in Southern Mindanao, is the idealization of the Philippine government's commitment to a peaceful Mindanao and the empowerment of Muslim Filipinos.

Despite the steps taken toward the empowerment of Philippine minorities and the protection of their rights and representations, the Philippines is still considered the 'sick man of Asia', due to its "democratic deficits" or gaps between legislation and the actual state of welfare in the country (Carlos, Lalata, Despi, & Carlos, 2010). The BARMM is no exception to democratic deficits. Some of these gaps that could be identified as areas in need of improvement would be the Shari'a Law and the enhancement of its facilities, practitioners, and system, to improve the public trust on Shari'a courts. Another identified gap would be in the educational system of impoverished Muslim territories (Carlos, Lalata, Despi, & Carlos, 2010). By improving upon the Madrasah Educational System, the BARMM may see the improvements in the socio-economic welfare of Muslim Filipinos through enhanced educational development and capacities of students (Carlos, Lalata, Despi, & Carlos, 2010). Indeed, the dichotomy between democracy and Islam has long been studied by both academic and governmental institutions, and there exists contentious debate on the compatibility between the tenets of Islam and the foundations of democracy (Elbasani, 2015). Regardless, the Philippines must continue to develop its faculties toward true inclusive and

participative governance, especially in the BARMM.

BARMM Institutions.

When Republic Act No. 11054 or the Bangsamoro Organic Law's (BOL) enactment concluded the long-standing struggle in the region, the ex-rebels of the MILF were assigned to head a transitory body or interim government known as the Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA). The BOL vests the BTA with legislative and executive functions. Executive powers are exercised by the interim Chief Minister who was appointed by the President (incumbent: Al Haj Murad Ebrahim). Meanwhile, legislative powers are granted to BTA, also appointed by the President. BARMM has a democratic political system run by a duly elected civilian government. Albeit functions and powers that are not stipulated in the Philippine constitution or a national law to the Bangsamoro shall still be vested in the National Government.

In BARMM's exercise of self-governance, it is free to pursue its own development interests be it political, economic, social, and cultural. In this context, the BTA must navigate a range of governance issues to enable a transition into a working democratic entity which include: a) creating a parliamentary government within a unitary, presidential state; b) form a mixed electoral system that fairly represents diverse group interests; and c) ensure the new inclusivity in the new politics of the region (WFD, n.d.). Due to the region's high level of diversity in

population, it becomes a big challenge to properly represent the sectors in political decision making, moreso for constituents to participate in policy. But as stipulated in Article XVI, Section 2 of the BOL, everyone must have a seat at the table.

Though most literature distinguishes participation from inclusivity and diversity as independent dimensions of public engagement, these concepts are mutually reinforcing. Quick and Feldman (2011) defined participation practices as efforts to increase the input of the public to the programs and policies created by the government. Meanwhile, inclusion entails the continuous creation of a community that is involved in addressing public issues. Therefore, inclusivity may be considered a central feature in allowing meaningful public engagement for peoples of diverse backgrounds. One must factor, however, how well the people are equipped with knowledge and awareness in possessing the characteristics of active participants. To this aim, international and local partners plan to educate the BARMM constituency to create structural reforms for collective action so as to usher social and political change.

Capacity Development.

One of the mechanisms that could enhance social public participation would be the concept of capacity development. CD (Capacity Development) emerged in the 1980s as a leading concept of development studies, encompassing a wide range of social

capabilities to enhance (Lavergne, 2001). CD can refer to tangible types of capacities, such as infrastructure, machineries, resources, education, or health, as well as less tangible dimensions such as social capital, norms, values, traditions, and culture (Lavergne, 2001). CD as an operating concept in praxis may offer substantial contributions for the enrichment of citizen participation. It is identified as an effective tool of community empowerment and allows communities to be sustainable and capable (Cuthill, 2005). CD can be initiated via programs or policies that target communities or sectors of interest, such as the creation of local committees, community-based training or workshops, and the effective implementation of stakeholder consultations for policy processes (Cuthill, 2005).

With regard to the prior discussion on legal avenues of participation (laws, ordinances), CD enhances and complements participation through norm-building and culture change, investing on social capital as its main currency (Ibid.). A case-study on Indonesian citizen participation in public policy process showed that although legally integrated, stakeholder meetings and public gatherings had low levels of attendance from the citizens, across various communities and sectors (Sopanah, 2015). This means that enabling mechanisms through laws may not be enough to yield effective participation. Through capacity development, it would be possible to achieve true participative governance,

with educated, empathetic, and socially empowered citizens.

International Non-Government Organizations (INGOs) and Transnational Advocacy Organizations.

International Non Governmental Organizations frequently utilize CD as tools of community engagement, with the aims of filling the gaps and weaknesses experienced by governmental institutions (Campbell, DiGuiseppe, & Murdie, 2018). INGOs have been observed as effective mobilizing mechanisms to help encourage civic engagement and advocacies in the domestic realm (Campbell, DiGuiseppe, & Murdie, 2018). This is why they are important actors to tap in development agenda for a particular community or country. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in general are identified as important agents of development, through their contributions in policy formulation, humanitarian efforts, and political advocacies (Nikkhah & Redzuan, 2010). Thus, INGOs may represent advocacies and movements that are underrepresented and highlight key socio-economic areas of improvement that may have been overlooked by governments and even local NGOs.

However, there is debate on the effectiveness of INGOs in the area of capacity development. INGOs might sometimes suffer from the "Alien-Hand" syndrome, wherein INGOs may provide unsatisfactory services to the marginalized communities with no

consequence due to the lack of monitoring or means of evaluation from the INGOs donors (Power, Maury, & Maury, 2002). The cited authors also argued that INGOs tend to prevent the communities themselves from leading the development process, ironically going against the advocacies of self-sustenance and empowerment. Other authors have noted that INGOs find it challenging to deal with organizational learning, because it requires humility, openness, and ability to accept error (Edwards, 1997). Other scholars contend on the effectiveness of the methods INGOs tend to utilize, noting the ineffectiveness of "training and technical assistance" programs frequently implemented by international institutions, stressing the need of diversification and innovation for formulating new methods and approaches to community development (James, 2010). James (2010) concludes his article on the vices and virtues of capacity development by INGOs by stating that for INGOs to implement effective capacity development, it requires the acknowledgement of their vices and failures, and to progress toward organizational learning, through the virtues of humility, compassion, and self-control.

Theoretical Literature

Participation, as discussed, is a vital component in any democratic society. Most of the literature about it focuses on how it can further be developed to provide efficient delivery of public service. Gaventa (2004) elaborated that there are certain conditions that must be

met from both the government, and the public side to push for a meaningful participatory mechanism. These conditions may further be explored in three dimensions such as the criteria for who participates, how communication between participants will be facilitated, and how the discussions are linked with policy or public action (Fung, 2006). The interaction among these dimensions highlights the focal point of participatory mechanism utilized.

International organizations also play part in complementing participatory mechanisms in government affairs. Their existence emphasizes a visualized shared participation towards an emerging global order (Watkins, Swidler, & Hannan, 2012). Particularly International Non-governmental Organizations provide capacity building programs to facilitate engagement between the government and the public. Moreover, development INGOs compliment and provide a significant positive relationship with state capacity in democratic societies (Campbell, DiGiuseppe, & Murdie, 2019). This strengthens the literature on INGOs and their positive contribution on democratic societies. INGOs capacity to provide necessary programs for democratic participation emerges from their mandate of contributing to the development of democracies around the world.

INGOs also provide other mechanisms for development. Foreign aids given by these organizations provide development to sectors in need. However, Winters (2010) argued that

accountability mechanisms such as participation from stakeholders does not all the time solve the accountability problem in foreign aid programs. In such a way, government funded organizations play part in developing regional integration and cooperation among states. Such an example is the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH engagement with the Southern African Development Community (SADC) in terms of assessing the challenges and prospects of regional integration in Southern Africa (Dzinesa, Paterson, & Daniel, 2018). It was found out that through the engagements of the GIZ, active participation from non-state, and sub-state actors in the region provided vital success in the implementation of the SADC regional integration agenda.

In communities where conflicts are adamant, INGOs continue to secure their work through ensuring that proper mechanisms are in place. In a case study in Nepal and Peru, INGOs service delivery in times of conflict (2002-2007) includes lowering of their field profiles; sustaining flexible implementation plans; championing transparency, impartiality, neutrality, and community ownership; reinforcing the capacity of handpicked chosen local partners; employing local staff; consolidating cooperation and collaboration among stakeholders; and focusing on indigent and marginalized groups (Byers, 2007).

Nevertheless, there are still some pitfalls in terms of INGOs in conflict areas. A study done in 2010 on the situation in Liberia shows how INGO workshops are construed by local actors, hence resulting into unintended consequences such as contested inclusions, and support for gendered secret societies (Fuest, 2010). These cases show both the adaptability, and susceptibility of INGOs in conflicted areas. Furthermore, it captures the need for a more careful look on how INGOs actually operate and facilitates participation from local stakeholders. It reveals that the more participatory mechanisms in place, the safer it becomes for INGOs to operate and continue their tasks in providing development programs.

Looking at the Philippines, INGOs are also at the forefront of providing capacity building programs. Storey (1998), argued that INGOs facilitate the growth of grass root organizations (GRO) in the post-Marcos Philippines. The growths of INGO involvement in providing capacity building programs are evident in the current setup of participatory engagements particularly in the BARMM. Several INGOs are engaged in training stakeholders to provide efficient delivery of public services.

METHODOLOGY

This paper will utilize a qualitative research method to ensure that the depth of each discussion will be carefully examined. Since this will be a case study, the pronouncements from both the WFD and BARMM will be carefully studied and analyze to provide a vivid illustration of the participatory mechanisms in place. Documents from WFD and BARMM will be analyzed

side by side with secondary sources from journal, and new articles.

This research highly takes the ethical considerations towards its respondents. In order to provide anonymity, the respondent will be designated a code, so as not to disclose their personal details. More so, the respondent will be given a consent form to ensure that their participation it of their own volition. The research will stay open and honest and will ensure that it will leave its participants where it was before (Woliver, 2002).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

UK-led Westminster for Democracy is supporting the transition with a vision of imparting their own expertise in democracy and governance to the BARMM arena. The cooperation takes many forms including: the development of the core functions of the transitional parliament, the institution of a new system of governance, and providing expertise on the development of a political party system.

It has been established how ensuring that the inclusiveness of the new system is imperative in achieving lasting peace for the region. In this regard, the Institute for Autonomy and Governance (IAG) embarked on partnership with WFD to implement a 10-month project on Political Party Building and Development in Bangsamoro. The project is intended to implement the provisions of the BOL while creating a political party system that is inclusive

and democratic. To this aim, they are strengthening the capacities of the new and existing local political parties to prep them to become major players in the policy arena.

Political parties are vital to a healthy functioning democracy. A well-functioning party system ensures that society is meaningfully represented in governance and legislature. According to a report by Balbosa for the Asian Development Bank in 2017, one of the constraints to the effective implementation of development and investment plans is the poor capacity and institutional weakness. Likewise, it can be stemmed from the same why poverty and destabilization continue to persist within the region. In many other reports by government and non-government organizations on their assistance to BARMM, participation of stakeholders in peace-building is frequently mentioned as one of the priorities. One by the European Union on Mindanao Peace and Develop Programme (MINPAD) said that it aims to build and strengthen social cohesion, vertically and horizontally, while ensuring the resilience of social and political systems. Though conspicuously vague, it can be interpreted that some organizations recognize the dichotomy of the government's reception and the public's participation.

The WFD has been an important partner for the BARMM in its transition period. Several of the its projects in the region are aimed towards strengthening both the capacity of the government to facilitate participation, and the public's

knowledge of the mechanisms in place for participation.

Assistance to Civil Society Organizations (CSO)

The WFD assisted a group of CSOs in the Bangsamoro and formed a technical working group to help these organizations engage with parliament (Westminster Foundation for Democracy, 2022). Before the establishment of the BARMM, CSOs have an adversarial tendency towards the then Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao. However, now, the aim of the WFD is to provide these CSOs with the proper training to participate in collaborative engagements with parliament for a better governance of the region.

Women's participation

A two-day Bangsamoro Women Summit was held on March 30-31, 2021 organized by the Bangsamoro Women Commission (BWC), and WFD (Bangsamoro Information Office, 2021). The aim of the summit was to highlight and strengthen the participation of Bangsamoro women in parliament, as well as in other aspects of governance in the region. In a statement by then British Ambassador to the Philippines Daniel Pruce he signaled how gender equality and women's empowerment are the foundation of sound policies and programs. He said:

"In the past year, we have supported a number of different capacity building activities. We facilitated safe spaces for women's dialogues, implemented information campaigns that were geared towards strengthening women's democratic participation, and supported the drafting of Gender and Development legislation to ensure that policies are gender sensitive and gender responsive" (Bangsamoro Information Office, 2021).

It is evident here that the WFD values the participation of women in decision making hence ensuring that proper trainings and capacity development are given to them for their active engagement with the Bangsamoro parliament.

Political Advocacy

Part of the WFD's program in supporting participatory governance in BARMM was through political advocacies, particularly for members of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). A workshop was conducted from August 11-13, 2021 in the town of Isulan, Sultan Kudarat province which aimed at advising the social welfare committee of the MILF on the technical skills needed for formulating an advocacy plan to influence policy and legislation in the Bangsamoro parliament (Westminster Foundation for Democracy, 2021).

Analysis

Gaventa (2004) argued that participatory governance needs to have an end-to-end mechanism, that is the government, and the public should have

the proper capacity and mechanisms to ensure participation. In analyzing the situation in the BARMM, one can see that the efforts of INGOs such as the WFD provide mechanisms in strengthening both the government, and the public in terms of participation. WFD's programs on assistance to CSOs, women empowerment, and political advocacy are some of the mechanisms that provide trainings and development for both the government, and the public. This case compliments the literature on INGOs and its role in democratization, particularly in ensuring public participation in governmental affairs.

Looking back at Gaventa's framework, the case of WFD's programs and assistance in the BARMM reflects how democratic institutions are developed through active participation mechanisms. Specifically in the case of the BARMM, participatory mechanisms have played a huge part for the reintegration of former rebel groups into legitimate government institutions. This suggests that participation highly legitimizes government regimes especially in those are in their transitory period.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Bangsamoro Government and community have high potential in securing a future that is in line with its mission. One of the most significant contributors to its success is ensuring the open communication between the authorities and the people. Through capacity building initiatives by INGOs,

the constituents and government sides of the participation spectrum can both learn how to mainstream healthy practices of democracy. In order to attain such outcomes, INGOs must properly facilitate their programs in such a way that the beneficiaries can have ownership of the fruits of their cooperation.

WFD as an organization is one that is keen on making interventions aimed at strengthening the democracy of the government and its constituent communities. Part of its assistance is working with the upcoming parliament, political parties, as well as civil society groups, both sides of the government and the people. Through their collaboration, transparency and accountability is built for the new parliament to thrive in an actively participated society.

True to Gaventa's (2002) arguments, the existence of public spaces for participation does not equate to equal use of actors of the said spaces, especially in the Bangsamoro. Many social and political factors affect the citizens' level of participation that is why inclusive development planning that is centered in participation. Utimately, borrowing the words of Ramina Rasul, President of the Philippine Center for Islam and Democracy (PCID), "The best development plan, the best peace agreement is nothing but a piece of paper if it is not implemented so that all the stakeholders benefit from it."

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