GROUNDING HOPE

A REVIEW OF BALAY MINDANAW'S PEACEBUILDING AND DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS IN LIANGA, SURIGAO DEL SUR

The Perspectives and Experiences of Local Partners

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ACRONYMS

AFP	Armed Forces of the Philippines
BARC	Barangay Agrarian Reform Committee
BDC	Barangay Development Council
BDP	Barangay Development Plan
BDRRMP	Barangay Disaster Risk Reduction Management Plan
BHW	Barangay Health Worker
BLGU	Barangay Local Government Unit
BMFI	Balay Mindanaw Foundation Incorporated
BPAT	Barangay Peacekeeping Action Team
BPOC	Barangay Peace and Order Committee
CADT	Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title
CALT	Certificate of Ancestral Land Title
CBDRRM	Community-Based Disaster Risk Reduction and Management
CPC	Community Peace Conversation
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DILG	Department of Interior and Local Government
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
IP	Indigenous Peoples
IPRA	Indigenous Peoples Rights Act
IPMR	Indigenous Peoples Mandatory Representative
LDRRMO	Local Disaster Risk Reduction Management Office (Municipal)
LGU	Local Government Unit
LSB	Local Special Body
MDC	Municipal Development Council
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SIADO	Sustainable Integrated Area Development Officer
SIWA	San Isidro Women's Welfare Association
SLP	Sustainable Livelihood Program
TESDA	Technical Education and Skills Development Authority

Civil Society Organization Participants

BWA	Banahao Women's Association
KTK	Kalinaw Tu Kabudagan Women's Organization (Diatagon)
SCWA	St. Christine's Women Association
SIWWA	San Isidro Women's Welfare Association
SPWA	San Pedro Women's Association
	Samahan ng mga Magsasaka sa San Pedro (Association of Farmers in San Pedro)

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INTRODUCTION

Balay Mindanaw Foundation, Inc. (BMFI) began forming partnerships in Surigao del Sur in 2010.

Its area-based operations team—Balay Mindanaw Caraga[1]—currently works with five partner barangays in the municipality of Lianga, which were the focus of this evaluation: Diatagon, St. Christine, San Pedro, Banahao, and San Isidro. This report presents the findings of a review conducted from 13 January to 7 February 2025, assessing the impact of BMFI's integrated efforts in peacebuilding, community development, monitoring, advocacy, capacity-building, and awareness-raising. The evaluation also offered an opportunity to document the journeys, stories of resilience, and reflections on community transformations from local partners.

Representatives from BMFI's civil society partners and barangay local government units (BLGUs) were invited to share their feedback and experiences of working with the organization. The evaluation's objectives were to:

- Assess the strengths of BMFI's partner engagement.
- Capture outcomes and success stories from participants' perspectives.
- Highlight the future priorities and needs of the five partner barangays.
- Identify factors that may be constraining longer-term effectiveness and sustainability.
- Explore ways to strengthen BMFI's peacebuilding and development efforts in Lianga.

About Balay Mindanaw and its programs in Lianga

Balay Mindanaw is a Filipino Mindanao-based and Mindanao-focused non-stock, non-profit organization. It is primarily engaged in promoting equity-based development and sustainable peace. It was registered with the Philippine Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) on May 8, 1996.

Vision

Equity, Development, Peace for Mindanao, for the Philippines and for the World.

Mission Statement

Helping build empowered, sustainable, resilient, and peaceful communities. Helping build peace.

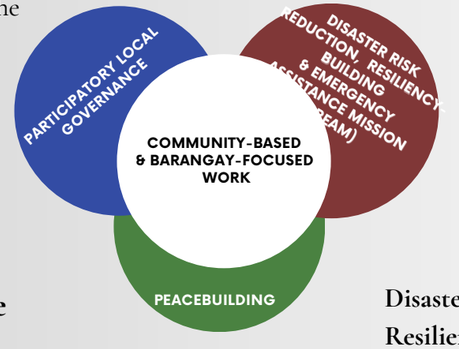
Balay Mindanaw Core Programs

Participatory Local Governance

Community-based Development, Resilience, and Peacebuilding Work

• Strengthening both local civil society and governmental bodies, such as People's Organizations, cooperatives, and Barangay Development Councils.

• Facilitating the formulation and review of Barangay Peace and Development Plans, among other processes.



Peacebuilding

International Center for Peace

ICPeace provides venues of learning, education, research, communications, and media advocacy to provide additional support to peace practitioners of various sectors of society in terms of capacity building.

Engaging & Supporting Peace Processes in Mindanao

Balay Mindanaw engages stakeholders in the promotion of Peace Processes at the local level, including non-state armed groups, through peace dialogues, conversations and consultations.

Disaster Risk Reduction, Resiliency-Building & Emergency Assistance Mission (DREAM)

Our DREAM Program's goal is to help empower communities to become sustainable and resilient to disasters (natural or human-made) that may occur in the future. Our approach is greatly influenced by the many years of community-based work on governance and peacebuilding:

- Emergency Assistance
- Psychosocial Support
- Rebuilding
- Resilience

[1] The Balay Mindanaw Caraga team also works across Agusan del Sur (three barangays) and Agusan del Norte (two barangays) in Surigao del Sur.

Balay Mindanaw officially commenced its peacebuilding work in Surigao del Sur in the last quarter of 2010. The initiative was launched by the Founder, Charlito "Kaloy" Manlupig, alongside other BMFI elders who conducted the critical preliminary visits. These engagements successfully reconnected the team with old allies, introduced them to key local leaders, facilitated initial consultations, and established contacts with various local groups. This groundwork quickly led to the unfolding of partnership engagements in the municipalities of Cagwait and Lianga.

The invitation from then-Mayor Hon. Bonifacio Ondona of Cagwait was a significant entry point. Mayor Ondona also served as the chair of the MaCaSaLTaBayaMi alliance, an organization composed of seven municipalities in Surigao Del Sur: Marihatag, Cagwait, San Agustin, Lianga, Tago, Bayabas, and San Miguel. The alliance was historically conceptualized for the establishment of a provincial agri-industrial center in Cagwait in collaboration with the Regional Development Council (RDC) of Region 11.



Balay Mindanaw committed to an extensive process of listening to Local Government Units (LGUs), People's Organizations (POs), the military, the church, and non-state actors present in the area. It was undeniable that these areas had long been affected by armed conflicts between the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the forces of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP)-New People's Army (NPA)-National Democratic Front (NDF). Recognizing this complex context, BMFI sent a letter expressing its intention to explore a meaningful and principled partnership with the peoples, communities, institutions, and broad stakeholders of Surigao del Sur toward equity, development, and peace. This intention was followed by a process of broad, on-the-ground consultations to understand the situation and determine the potential added value of BMFI's presence.



The exploration quickly bore fruit: two barangays in Cagwait, Tawagan, and Mat-e signified their interest, as did St. Christine and Diatagon in Lianga. The long-term aspiration was to expand these partnerships to encompass the whole of the MaCaSaLTaBayaMi alliance. For the combined Cagwait-Lianga (CaLia) team, BMFI's foundational principles of transparency, inclusivity, and non-partisanship were crucial to facilitating smooth integration into the communities. The Reflecting on Peace Practice (RPP) framework was adopted as the overarching guide for the entire implementation: from situational analysis and planning to implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.

The clarity of Balay Mindanaw's engagement in Lianga and Cagwait continued to sharpen. The meeting with Mayor Boni Ondona on April 29, 2011 became a defining moment, solidifying promising potentials and providing the best strategic options for its community-based work. As the chairperson of MaCaSaLTaBayaMi, Mayor Boni helped define Balay Mindanaw's role as a service provider. Subsequently, The organization and the alliance jointly submitted a concept note to Conflict Sensitive Resource and Asset Management (COSERAM), a joint peacebuilding initiative between the German and Philippine Governments, implemented by GIZ for the conduct of an organizational diagnosis and conflict analysis. To ensure greater visibility and support, the organziation established a sub-office and staff house in the poblacion of Cagwait.





Local Peace Consultations (LPCs) were conducted in the four partner barangays: Tawagan and Mat-e in Cagwait, and St. Christine and Diatagon in Lianga. One of the most significant outcomes was that, for the first time, these barangays were able to formulate, review, and validate their Barangay Development Plans (BDPs) through a participatory, peacebuilding lens. This conflict-sensitive process successfully surfaced critical conflicts, justice, and developmental issues. The peace consultations highlighted three key, observable changes at the personal and institutional levels:

1. Enhanced Understanding of BMFI's Role: The community gained a clearer understanding of Balay Mindanaw's function. Unlike many external organizations that focused primarily on projects and financial assistance, BMFI was positioned as a bridge for resource mobilization and a source of technical assistance through BDPs and community organizing.





2. Deeper Situational Analysis: The community achieved a more profound analysis of their situation and issues. They realized that priority setting should not be limited to infrastructure but must recognize the importance of comprehensive, participatory planning. Considering limited budgets, they emphasized the necessity of "optimal use of resources."



3. *Creation of a Technical Working Group (TWG):* This development paved the way for the transfer of technology from BMFI to the Technical Working Group of the local government unit, which comprised personnel from the Mayor's Office and the Municipal Planning and Development Office (MPDO).

The volatility of the conflict was underscored during the Diatagon LPC in October 2011, when approximately 150 families from the Manobo Tribal Communities in the hinterlands evacuated. The reason cited was the military's plan to put up a detachment and conduct Community Organizing for Peace and Development (COPD), echoing similar evacuations in 2005, 2007, and 2009. In response, a local peace dialogue was immediately organized to convey ideas and clarify issues among the stakeholders. After two sessions, the involved groups successfully produced a signed, win-win agreement. Significantly, it was the first time a Battalion Commander signed such an agreement with the affected community.

The team systematically invested in contact and relationship-building, routinely conducting and attending Municipal Development Council meetings, Barangay Development Council meetings, Sangguniang Bayan (Municipal Legislative Council) and Barangay Council meetings, purok meetings, and People's Organization meetings. Due to these constant visits, meetings, and linkages, a significant degree of trust and confidence has been successfully established among a wide number of stakeholders across the barangay, municipal, provincial, and regional levels.



This foundational work has enabled Balay Mindanaw to fully engage on its mission and vision. It soon laid Key-Result Areas (KRAs) of its community-based team in Caraga using and expanding the community organizing framework COCOBREADD (Collective, Critical and Creative Consciousness-raising, Organizational Development, Coalition Efforts and Advocacy Work, Overcoming Gender-Based Violence and Other Biases, Basic Services and Infrastructure, Resource Tenure Improvement, Economic Self-Reliance Strengthening, Agricultural Development and Environmental Nurturance, Democratic Participation in Governance, Disaster Risk Reduction, Resiliency Building, and Emergency Assistance Mission).

On its tenth year in Surigao Del Sur, Balay Mindanaw determined that the local government, key stakeholders, partners had gained enough capacity to extend its operations in the Municipality of Cagwait should diminish and eventually cease.

At the same time, Balay Mindanaw's work with funders and donors allowed it to expand to other municipalities and cities in Caraga, with various focus and themes. A partnership with Plan International, for example, established Balay Mindanaw's anti-human trafficking work in Surigao City. Partnership with the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders took Balay Mindanaw to Kitcharao, Agusan De Norte, to localize Women, Peace & Security. Balay Mindanaw once had three offices at the same time: Lianga in Surigao Del Sur, Butuan City (regional hub) and Kitcharao in Agusan Del Norte, thereby laying the ground for Balay CaLia to become Balay Mindanaw Caraga.

Balay Mindanaw's work with women, youth, and Indigenous Peoples (IP) sectors expanded naturally as the area and reach also expanded. Partnership with local media also took off with Women, Peace & Security, and eventually to Accountability Journalism with the media institution International Media Support.





METHODOLOGY

The evaluation drew on the methodological orientations of the CDA Collaborative Learning Projects' Reflecting on Peace Practices framework and a storytelling-based evaluation approach. Both emphasize the value of meaningful learning that emerges through listening to the perspectives and experiences of local partners and community members as they reflect on both immediate and long-term impacts of peacebuilding and development efforts (CDA 2008). These are often best conveyed through narrative-based presentations of findings, highlighting participants' testimonies as spoken for themselves.

	Participant type	**No.**
Key Informant Interviews	BLGU officials: captains, councilors (kagawad), Indigenous Peoples Mandatory Representatives (IPMR)	6
	Purok leaders and presidents	2
	People's Organization members (CSOs)	3
	Government personnel in: Lianga Local Municipal Disaster Risk Management Office (LDRRMO), and the Department of the Interior and Local Government's (DILG) Peace and Order Program	2
	Total: Key Informants	13
Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)	Group 1: Women's Association members, BLGU administrative staff	6
	Group 2: Barangay Health Workers (BHW)	5
	Total: FGD participants	11
Gender breakdown: 16 female, 8 male	**Total**	24



Data Collection Methods

Key Informant Interviews: Interviews followed a conversational flow rather than structured set of questions, giving participants the time and flexibility to share in greater depth and detail. Discussions were guided by the following focus areas:

- What participants value about BMFI's approach to partner engagement.
- Personal and organizational benefits, and outcomes from the partnership.
- Feedback on capacity-building workshops, trainings, and seminars:
    - Aspects of design, delivery, and content that participants liked.
    - Memorable activities.
    - Useful knowledge and skills that have contributed to making tasks and responsibilities easier.
- Participant recommendations for improving BMFI's programs:
    - Key issues affecting the community
    - Needs and priorities for the future.
    - Suggestions for addressing gaps or areas requiring greater attention.
- Challenges and barriers faced.
- Hopes and aspirations for their continued partnership with BMFI.

Focus Group Discussions: Focus group discussions covered the same focus areas across four activities.

- Activity 1: Achievements and results (personal and organizational).
- Activity 2: Usefulness and applicability of gained skills and knowledge.
- Activity 3: Challenges and barriers faced.
- Activity 4: Future priorities and the role they envision for BMFI.

Group Discussions with Sustainable Integrated Area Development Officers (SIADOs), Balay Mindanaw Caraga: Two group discussions were conducted with the Balay Mindanaw Caraga team: one focused on how they measure their personal impact and successes as community organizers, the second on the challenges they face. As BMFI's frontline workers "walking side by side with the people," SIADOs offer valuable perspectives drawn from their own experiences which complement and deepen the understanding of those shared by local partners. The researcher was also provided with BMFI's training materials and attended two workshops: Community-Based Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Planning (CBDRRM), and Youth, Peace and Security (YPS).



Lianga's History

Lianga is a second-class coastal municipality located in the province of Surigao del Sur in the Caraga region (Region XIII) of the Philippines. It is situated on the eastern coast of Mindanao, fronting the Philippine Sea and the Pacific Ocean. The municipality is known for the rich marine biodiversity of Lianga Bay.

Geography and Location

Lianga is geographically positioned in the central part of Surigao del Sur.

- Boundaries: It is bordered by the Municipality of San Agustin to the north, the Municipality of Barobo to the south, the Municipality of Prosperidad (Agusan del Sur) to the west, and the Philippine Sea (part of the Pacific Ocean) to the east.
- Land Area: The municipality has a total land area of 161.12 square kilometers (62.21 square miles), which accounts for about 3.27% of Surigao del Sur's total land area.



Demographics

As of the 2020 Census, Lianga had a population of 33,869. This represented 5.27% of the total population of Surigao del Sur and 1.21% of the Caraga region's population.

- Population Density: Based on these figures, the population density is computed at approximately 210 inhabitants per square kilometer.
- The municipality is politically subdivided into 13 barangays.

Economy and Culture

The economy of Lianga is primarily driven by agriculture and fishing. Its location along the fertile Lianga Bay makes it a significant source of marine products. Key agricultural products include rice, coconut, and bananas.

Lianga also celebrates the "Inato Festival" or "Lianga Bay Festival," a cultural celebration that showcases the municipality's local products, crafts, and fishing heritage. Tourist attractions in the area often center on its coastal features, such as Kangkangon Island and Lawis Beach.



Armed Conflict and Civil Society

For decades, Lianga has been a focal point of the long-running communist insurgency in the Philippines. The conflict primarily involves the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), the New People's Army (NPA), and the Indigenous Manobo-Lumad communities, whose ancestral lands in the resource-rich Andap Valley Complex are often at the center of the dispute.

This protracted conflict has created a complex and highly polarized environment, with non-government organizations (NGOs), human rights groups, and church-based organizations playing significant and often controversial roles.

Current Challenges

Despite its rich natural resources, Lianga faces a complex set of interlinked challenges that hinder its development and affect the well-being of its residents.

1. Armed Conflict and Social Displacement

The most pressing issue in Lianga remains the active and ongoing armed conflict in its upland barangays.

2. Environmental Degradation

Lianga is facing critical environmental threats on two fronts:

- Coastal ecosystem destruction: A controversial coastal bypass road project has drawn widespread opposition from residents, fisherfolk, and environmental groups. Critics and marine biologists point out that the project is destroying vital mangrove forests and seagrass beds which serve as critical breeding grounds for marine life. This directly threatens the municipality's reputation as a "seafood town" and undermines the primary livelihood of its coastal communities.
- Upland deforestation: The municipality's forested highlands have seen significant decline. Between 2001 and 2024, Lianga lost a substantial portion of its tree coverage, including a 19% reduction in its humid primary forest. This loss is driven by both logging and the expansion of permanent agriculture.

3. Economic and Infrastructure Hurdles

The municipality's economy is predominantly agricultural and struggles with significant limitations:

- Low economic dynamism: Despite provincial economic growth, Lianga itself ranks very low among Philippine municipalities in economic dynamism (315th) according to the DTI's Cities and Municipalities Competitive Index.
- Poor infrastructure: The same index gives Lianga an extremely low ranking for infrastructure (474th). Poor road conditions, especially connecting the inland farming communities to the town center, limit economic activity and the transport of goods.

4. Political and Ancestral Domain Issues

The conflict is deeply rooted in political and land-use disputes. The Lumad ancestral domain in the Andap Valley Complex is rich in coal and other resources, making it a flashpoint for conflict between Indigenous communities seeking to protect their land, corporate interests in resource extraction, and the various armed groups.

Peacebuilding Stories: Women as Leaders and Agents of Change

Rowena Quezada, Barangay San Pedro



Rowena wears many hats: child development worker, treasurer of the San Pedro Women's Association (SPWA) and Barangay Peace and Order Committee (BPOC), member of Lupong Tagapamayapa[2], and chairperson of both the Farmer's Cooperative and Barangay Agrarian Reform Committee (BARC). Originally from Lianga town, Rowena moved to San Pedro in 2004 after meeting her husband. They now have four children—three daughters and one son. Explaining what drives her to take on so many roles, Rowena says:

"Because of my personal life I wanted to stand on my own. I studied on my own and graduated college within two years. When I moved here, I saw no-one could lead the people, so I stood up. Even if my husband got frustrated because of the constant trainings I'd go to. I have four children, I want them to grow up well, to see what I've done and to follow what I've done."

When Rowena first moved to San Pedro, she was struck by how many people were selling their land at very low prices, largely due to a lack of knowledge about land and property rights laws. Concerned by the uncertainty of land ownership—where people could lose the land they had worked so hard to cultivate—she joined the Farmer's Cooperative and BARC. Rowena's goal was not only to better understand land tenure herself but to support farmers in San Pedro. In 2024, SPWA and four other women's associations hosted a Stakeholders' Forum inviting various government agencies.[3] Alongside 26 other approved proposals, they secured a commitment from the Department of Agricultural Reform to support land title processing in San Pedro.

Reflecting on her achievements, Rowena shares:

"One of the biggest achievements [from OP Kors!] was the confidence it gave me. I felt capable, I became known in the community, people would approach me for help. […] Before when I would mediate, I felt like I couldn't control things, like when one side got angry. I used to feel afraid because I wasn't a barangay official, only a volunteer. But during OP Kors! I learnt the processes, the relevant agencies, how to pay attention to the sides of both parties. After the training I felt like, 'oh that's easy, I know how to mediate, how to solve that problem right away.'"

Over the years, Rowena and her fellow SPWA members have worked to share their knowledge with the broader community on issues such as child protection and VAWC (Violence against Women and Children). Reflecting on a Training of Trainers (ToT) workshop she attended, Rowena highlights one initiative she is especially proud of: a successful project proposal from the Stakeholders' Forum launching the

[2] A community-based dispute resolution body established under the Barangay Justice System (*Katarungang Pambarangay*).

[3] People in Need Philippines, CSO Newsletter 2024, Women-led CSOs unify vision to champion community initiatives for Lianga, SDS.

community awareness campaign "Advocacy for Responsible Parenting and Teenage Pregnancy." SPWA conduct orientations in puroks across San Pedro, mindful of factors preventing participation such as poor road conditions, remoteness and transportation costs. Whether offering guidance to neighbors or supporting women through VAWC cases, Rowena also shares the knowledge and skills she has gained in her role as a mother, "I help my children with their homework, I'm able to help because of what I've learned from Balay Mindanaw. Their term papers are about topics like child rights and similar issues, so I teach them, I was able to share with them how to make proposals." Rowena, and other women like her, are examples of the kind of social change that is woven into the fabric of daily life.



Susan Rivas, *Barangay Diatagon*

Originally from the far-flung Sitio of KM9 in Diatagon, Susan and her family now live in Post 1. They were among many in the Manobo Indigenous community that were displaced in 2010 amid renewed clashes in the area between the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the New People's Army, part of the country's decades-long communist insurgency[4]. The upland sitios of Diatagon and neighboring barangays have long been subjected to militarization and atrocities committed by paramilitary, military and NPA forces, with voluntary and forced recruitment causing deep inter-communal and familial fractures[5].

The displacement experienced by Susan and her family in 2010 is just part of a broader cycle of mass evacuations that the Manobo in Surigao del Sur have endured for over a decade.[6] Through these hardships, Susan has emerged a strong leader: president of Kalinaw Tu Kabudagan (KTK)—an Indigenous women -led CSO—and a member of the Lianga Municipal Development Council. Despite her heavy workload, Susan says, "I want to help my people. It's heavy but I choose it. My workload keeps increasing but I've gotten used to it." Recalling her first invitation by Balay Mindanaw to attend a seminar on gender equality and mental health, Susan says candidly:

> *"At first, I told them, 'Nah, not me, I'm tired of attending seminars!'. But in the end, I decided to go. Sir Bau [the first area manager] was there, we had met before. When I arrived, I was happy, he smiled at me, we laughed."*

On of her reasons for working with Balay Mindanaw, she explains, is that in the past, LGUs could not fully understand the challenges faced by Indigenous Peoples (IPs), adding: "If there was no Balay Mindanaw there would be problems for the IPs. Things are really different for us because we are discriminated against."

Susan highlights the significance of greater civil society participation in local governance for the recognition of KTK:

> *"Aside from just being our partner, Balay Mindanaw are really with us, helping us in organizing, the registration with DOLE [Department of Labor and Employment]. I was also elected as a member of the Municipal Development Council."*

Reflecting on activities that have been most impactful for her as a leader, Susan refers to seminars on the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA), women's empowerment, Women, Peace and Security workshops, strategic planning, and advocacy training. These have helped her raise awareness about women's rights and the rights of her tribe.

Looking ahead to the future, Susan stresses the need for more sustainable livelihood projects and basic infrastructure like portable water filtration systems. Equally important, is the expansion of IPRA awareness campaigns which she feels have not reached enough Indigenous communities.

She hopes that a deeper understanding of IPRA will give people the knowledge and confidence to assert their rights. Still, the uncertainty of life in Diatagon weighs heavily on her mind:

> *"It's been a long time now. In 2015, a high school in the mountains, ALCADEV, was accused of belonging to the NPA. The school director and two datu [tribal leaders] were killed. We used to farm and grow crops in the uplands but we haven't gone back since 2018 because of this constant war. We thought it would be peaceful by now?"*

[4] ACLED 2023, The Communist Insurgency in the Philippines: A 'Protracted People's War' Continues; International Crisis Group, 2011, The Communist Insurgency in the Philippines: Tactics and Talks

[5] Asia Pacific Research Network 2015, 'Uphold Indigenous people's rights, end the militarization of their communities'.

[6]Davao Today 2009, 'Government's Counterinsurgency Campaign drives Mindanao Lumads Homeless'.

For Susan, the meaning of peace is simple: “Peace means no more arguments, in its simplest understanding [...], that there is nothing to worry about.’” Asked what she hopes to see five years from now, what a future with peace looks like, and what it will take to realize this, Susan says, “that the war will end,” adding, “where is Karlos? Because I will go to the Office of the President with him. I will stop the war. We will go together.”

PARTNERSHIP ENGAGEMENT

"What I like about Balay Mindanaw is they don't do anything without the consent of the people. They consult first about what the problems are, what is needed."
— Participant 8, Barangay Kagawad.

One of BMFI's core strengths are the relationships it has built with its local partners. Participants demonstrated a deeply relationship-oriented measure of the organization's impact, expressing confidence in the sincerity of its mission and staff. The most valued qualities mentioned included trustworthiness, transparency, neutrality, approachability, accessibility, continuity, and a consultative approach to community and partner engagement. Though there was overwhelmingly positive feedback from participants, the underlying power dynamics between BMFI and its local partners should be kept in mind. As detailed in this report, participants highlighted critical needs and service gaps that BMFI helps to address, contributing to a significant level of dependency. In light of this, some hesitancy to provide critical or negative feedback may reasonably be anticipated despite participants being informed of the anonymity of interviews.

The approachability of Sustainable Integrated Area Development Officers (SIADOs) is a significant element of BMFI's partner engagement, and participants appreciate that

Approachability and Trust

"they always make time to visit us", including office drop-ins and informal consultations. Outside-of-work socialization also opens up more comfortable spaces for partners to raise their questions or concerns in a less formal environment. These sentiments resonate with how SIADOs described their own measures of success and impact:

— *"If they invite us to events, birthdays, it's an indicator that we've really established a good relationship."*

— *"We have this experience, instead of the BLGU or community members consulting the government, they're more comfortable consulting us. [...] We're having our Barangay Disaster Risk Management Planning Workshop and the barangay invited and consulted us first before the Municipal Disaster Risk Reduction Management Office."* [7]

SIADOs, Group Discussion.

> *When I was elected barangay official in 2010 there was already war in the mountains. Our first impression was that Balay Mindanaw was neutral, they didn't take sides, they would approach the people and the Armed Forces. At that time, the barangay council was directly involved in the conflict so we couldn't really do much. That's when we appreciated Balay Mindanaw because they were able to provide peace dialogues. They were the ones who could truly assist the barangay council in conducting these dialogues. Every time there's an armed conflict in Diatagon, Balay Mindanaw staff—especially the [then] president, Sir Kaloy—is present. That's why we appreciate them as people.*
>
> **— Participant 3, Former Barangay Kagawad.**

[7] Other dynamics may also play a role. In some cases, barangay councils may anticipate a lack of responsiveness from the MLGU without BMFI's support, suggesting a possible lack of confidence in approaching higher-level government units without BMFI's backing or guidance first.

> *I settled here [Diatagon] around 2010 because of my children. My wife was the first to be interviewed by Balay Mindanaw. That's when I saw, well, that's why I joined them, because they weren't involved in illegal activities in the mountains. Their support for our tribe was one of the things that encouraged me. […] They really helped with distributing supplies during the evacuations in 2015 and 2017. From what I see, they're not like those fake people pretending to help but aren't sincere. […] One thing I can guarantee when I invite others to Balay Mindanaw is their goal which is peace.*
>
> **— Participant 1, Indigenous People's Mandatory Representative.**

"We don't just go to the community for work but also to spend time with them. It's beyond work because concerns are shared in informal ways."
— SIADO, Group Discussion.

Small gestures of care and inclusiveness are meaningful to partners and help create a "*sense of the balay.*" Participants shared examples of BMFI providing financial support for transport and accommodation to attend workshops (particularly those far from Lianga), arranging vehicles for CSOs to run errands, and lending equipment such as speakers and projectors for women's associations conducting community awareness campaigns.

"Sometimes we have to stay overnight for seminars, but they consider that we have children. If you use your money, they will cover you. They also sometimes have games with prizes like sacks of rice."
— Participant 8, Barangay Kagawad.

"When we were preparing for the Stakeholders' Forum they helped organize a car so we could deliver invitations to government agencies."
— Women's Association Member, Focus Group Discussion 1.

"When we went to their head office [in Cagayan de Oro City], we got slippers, met their bosses, ate together. We really appreciated seeing, 'this is Balay Mindanaw, this is really what they want to do.'"
— Participant 13, Local Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office (LDRRMO) Head of Office.

"They provide to make participants comfortable, just within the budget, not extra. Especially if participants are IPs, they can't attend if you don't give rice for their families because every day they need to do farming."
— Participant 9, Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) Peace and Order Program Focal Point.

Longevity and Field Office Presence

BMFI's accessibility through its field office in Lianga distinguishes it from organizations based in city centers. The temporary nature of many projects and funding also reinforces perceptions of BMFI as a reliable and consistent partner, with participants making comparisons with other NGOs that have "come and gone," whereas BMFI was described as: "the one that remains", "they always stand by us," "always there for us," and "don't just leave you behind."

> *"There have been a lot of NGOs but as of now, who remains, Balay Mindanaw is the constant. […] Other NGOs will be implementing a project for just three years, at the end of contract it's like 'ok, done.'"*
> — Participant 13, LDRRMO Head of Office.

> *The INGOs we met before were seldom seen in the community. Balay Mindanaw is very visible in the community, actively participates. Unlike other NGOs operating their field offices in Butuan City or Davao, Balay Mindanaw established their offices here. They are accessible, partners can easily approach them.*
>
> **— Participant 9, DILG Peace and Order Program Focal Point.**



BRIDGING CRITICAL GAPS

Three factors underpin BMFI's role as a multi-stakeholder bridge serving as an embedded, community-, and area-based partner in the context of an under-resourced government.

- **Center-periphery disconnects:** Geographical distance and lack of governmental support and engagement.
- **Technical assistance and expertise:** The specialization and professional backgrounds of staff.
- **Resource mobilization:** Assisting LGUs and CSOs in accessing financial support from higher-level LGUs, government agencies, and national and international funding agencies.

Center-periphery dynamics felt at the barangay level are shaped by the challenges of both geographical distance, as well as limited institutional engagement and support from higher levels of government and government agencies. This issue was previously noted in a 2001 assessment of BMFI's advocacy capabilities which highlighted the strengths of the SIADO approach in contrast to "absentee government officials and personnel who often remain detached" (particularly from far-flung areas) while SIADOs "live and fully interact with community members." (Perucho 2001 20),

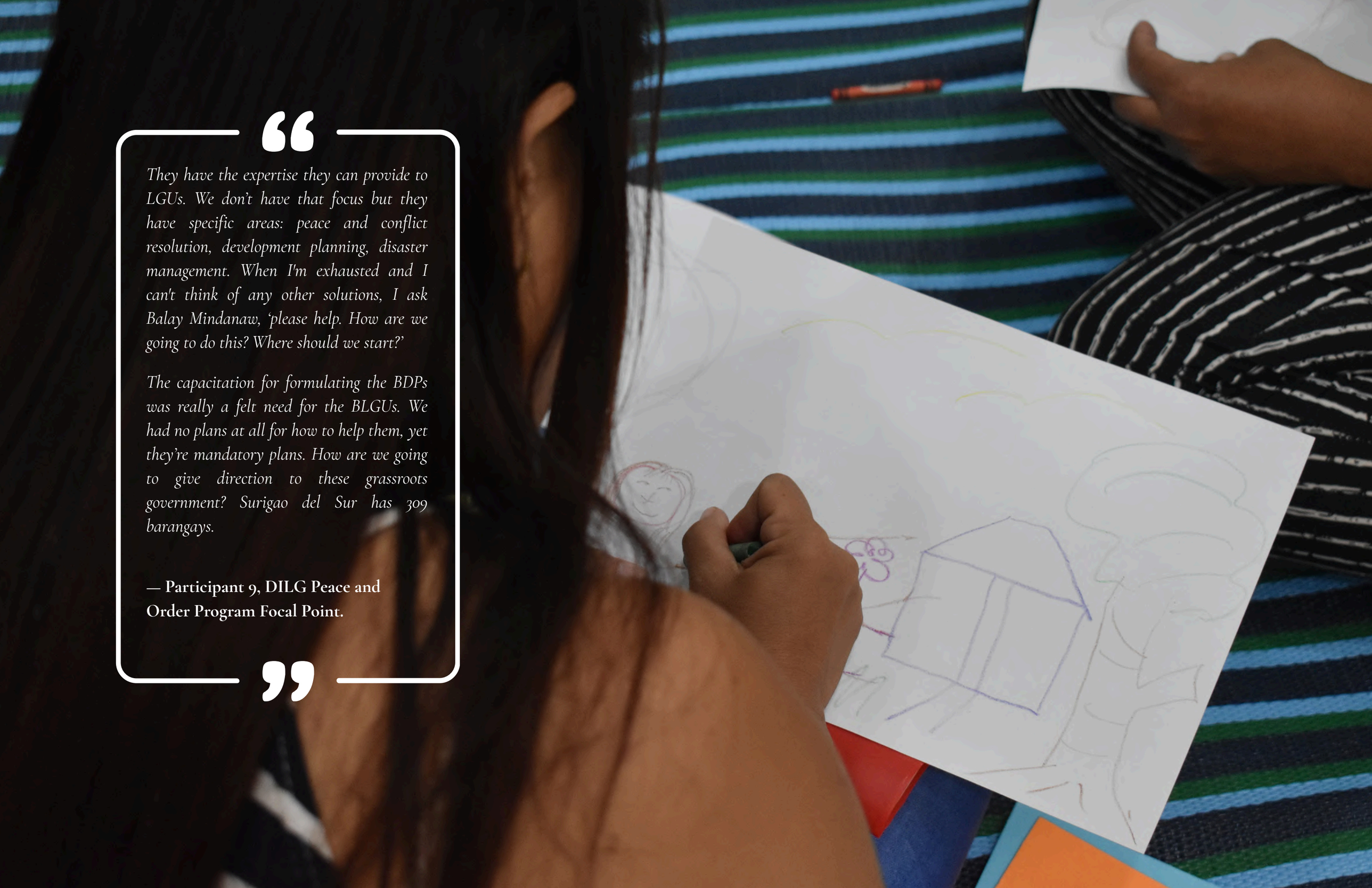
One way BMFI helps bridge these vertical gaps is through its participation and membership in councils and committee meetings spanning barangay, municipal, provincial and regional levels, alongside consistent community outreach and visitations to far-flung areas. Acknowledging their limited resources, representatives from LDRRMO and DILG described BMFI as their "direct line down to the communities," able to relay what is happening on the ground. At the same time, BMFI supports efforts to institutionalize mechanisms that promote greater sectoral and civil society participation in bottom-up governance, increasing the recognition of CSOs in agenda-setting and policy-making spaces. This includes assistance with government registration and accreditation ("without Balay Mindanaw, we wouldn't be recognized") and supporting their efforts to secure seats on councils, Local Special Bodies (LSBs) and committees.

> *Sustained community visits, that's the problem. Once it's far, the government is somewhat not visible to communities. Access and so many other problems.*
> **— Participant 9, DILG Peace and Order Program Focal Point.**
>
> *They can look out for the barangays because we can't look out for all of them. There are so many barangays, so many concerns and issues. And particularly with IPs, they [BMFI] have their trust and confidence because if you always go there then your face becomes familiar.*
> **— Participant 13, LDRRMO Head of Office.**

The specialization and professional backgrounds of BMFI's staff (such as social workers and gender advocates) and their engagement of external experts in orientations and trainings (lawyers, and service providers in psychosocial support, health, and child protection) also fills a critical gap. BLGU participants emphasized their dependence on BMFI's technical assistance in formulating Barangay Development Plans (BDP) and Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Plans (DRRMP). This dependence is understandable given the limited support they typically receive—and do not expect to receive —from higher levels of government:

"They were the ones who helped us with BDPs. No-one else helped. We don't expect help from government."
— Participant 10, Barangay Captain.





They have the expertise they can provide to LGUs. We don't have that focus but they have specific areas: peace and conflict resolution, development planning, disaster management. When I'm exhausted and I can't think of any other solutions, I ask Balay Mindanaw, 'please help. How are we going to do this? Where should we start?'

The capacitation for formulating the BDPs was really a felt need for the BLGUs. We had no plans at all for how to help them, yet they're mandatory plans. How are we going to give direction to these grassroots government? Surigao del Sur has 309 barangays.

— Participant 9, DILG Peace and Order Program Focal Point.



Peacebuilding Stories: BARANGAY DIATAGON: THEN AND NOW

Alex Silvera served three terms as a kagawad in Barangay Diatagon from 2010 to 2023 and now sits on the Lupon Tagapamayapa. Prior to this, he was a Physical Education teacher in Cagayan de Oro City. Reflecting on his time as a kagawad and chairperson of the Committee on Education, Alex speaks on both rewards and challenges:

> "*Especially in those upland schools, teachers had a very limited budget and no travel allowances, yet they had to cover daily expenses of 300 to 500 pesos. The barangay council allocated a budget for volunteer teachers. No-one was willing to teach–the schools were far, roads were badly damaged, they were also afraid of the armed conflict.*"

He recalls the now-closed schools, ALCADEV (Alternative Learning Centre for Agricultural and Livelihood Development) in Sitio Hanaayan, and the TRIFPSS Community Learning Center (Tribal Filipino Program of Surigao del Sur) in Sitio Simowao. These, among many other Indigenous alternative schools, had long faced harassment and accusations of CPP-NPA (Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army) affiliation, including claims that students were being trained in armed combat[8].

Things escalated in September 2015 with the Lianga Massacre in which two Indigenous leaders and the ALCADEV School Director were killed by paramilitary groups and the military. This led to the mass evacuation of around 3,000 people to the Provincial Sports Complex in Tandag City.[9] They remained there for a year until the military provided assurances that detachments would be relocated away from their communities. With ALCADEV and TRIFPSS officially closed in 2021, military-initiated public schools were constructed.[10] School attendance and literacy were major concerns for Alex, noting the understandable hesitance of many parents to enroll their children in government-run schools given all they had experienced. Alex recalls how Balay Mindanaw initially struggled to engage in the upland areas:

> *"At that time, Balay Mindanaw was assisted by barangay officials because they struggled to invite communities to things. The sitio leader called a meeting and barangay officials joined. Back then, whenever outsiders came into the upland areas, the community wouldn't engage with them. [...] Balay Mindanaw couldn't enter easily but after partnering with Barangay Diatagon, we started to introduce them."*

After this, Alex, other barangay officials, chieftains, teachers, and parents attended orientations on child protection and positive parenting as part of an effort to promote school enrollment:

> *"What we did there was we talked to the parents. Some of the children there couldn't read or write, even at the age of 20. There were a lot of good questions from the kids and families. It was a good discussion."*

Alex also mentions that land and resource-based conflicts intensified in Diatagon after the Lianga Bay Logging Company ceased operations in 1991. Many former employees were attempting to claim land in upland areas on the grounds that they had planted the trees —claims strongly opposed by members of the Manobo Indigenous community protecting forestry and their ancestral lands. He recalls Balay Mindanaw's facilitation of workshops on environmental conservation, agri-education, and land dispute resolution, attended by barangay officials and Indigenous leaders. One outcome was the promotion of a community-led tree planting initiative, providing upland residents with tree seedlings and fertilizers, and prioritizing landslide-prone areas for reforestation. Highlighting the impacts of the armed

[8]Philippines News Agency, 2019 'NPA uses alternative schools as 'training ground' for rebels: IPs'.

[9]Davao Today, 2015, 'Advocates renew calls to stop attacks on Lumad Schools'; Human Rights Watch 2015, 'Paramilitaries attack Tribal Villages, Schools: Military Supporting Abusive Forces in Mindanao'.

[10]MindaNews 2020, 'Displaced Manobos fear closure of Lumad school in hinterlands of Surigao del Sur'.

conflict on displacement, Alex describes the BDP and DRRMP planning workshops as a significant turning point in identifying and addressing the urgent needs of Indigenous communities in Diatagon:

> *"For years, the IPs had to keep evacuating the upland areas because of the armed conflict. Through those trainings and seminars about the BDP we really focused on how to serve—or what are the priorities—for the upland areas. And the priority project became the evacuation center."*

When asked about major achievements from the barangay's partnership with Balay Mindanaw, Alex says he can easily list them one-by-one:

> *"Number one, the trainings and seminars. In that first OP Kors! training we discussed the issues in our community and the armed conflict was the first topic discussed. From there we immediately got more ideas and knowledge on how to handle the problem. Second is the BDP, we were taught how to make it. We were happy when officials from the national, regional, provincial levels came and asked, 'may we see your BDP?'. I'm very proud of the BDP because all our history about Diatagon is included in that."*



> *"Number three, I'm proud—even though I'm no longer on the barangay council—that Diatagon was given an evacuation center. Without Balay Mindanaw, that project would not have been realized. Fourth is water assistance so Diatagon could have clean water. And fifth is support for the Kabudagan Women's Association (KTK). And finally, the rescue facility, the generator and supplies for the rescue team from the BDRRMP."*

Even after leaving public office, Alex remains involved in Diatagon's development and takes pride in the lasting impact of the barangay's years of partnership with Balay Mindanaw. For him, the value is clear: empowering communities to tackle the challenges they face —from natural disasters and displacement, to building lasting peace in a place long affected by armed conflict.

CAPACITY-BUILDING WORKSHOPS, TRAININGS AND SEMINARS: IMPACTS AND OUTCOMES

Participants shared their feedback on workshops and trainings they found most valuable and memorable. Discussions centered on: useful skills and knowledge, personal and organizational successes, and positive outcomes.

"What I can say about their facilitation, they really have the knowledge, they're ones who teach their knowledge for the world."
— Participant 10, Barangay Captain.

Most frequently mentioned

Trainings and workshops:

- OP Kors! [Peace-building course]
- Orientation, planning and formulation:
  - Barangay Development Plan (BDP) Disaster Risk Reduction Management Plan (DRMMP)
  - Disaster risk reduction and management (DRRM) trainings and drills
- Proposal and resolution writing
- Strategic planning and advocacy

Topics:

- Violence against Women and Children (VAWC)
- Child protection
- Women's empowerment
- Positive parenting
- Early pregnancy
- Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA)
- Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title (CADT)
- Land laws and rights
- Conflict mediation
- Agri-education and organic farming

<u>Key observations from participants' responses:</u>

- **LGU** participants more frequently discussed the usefulness and outcomes from trainings on BDPs and DRRMPs
- **CSO** participants primarily focused on usefulness and successes from workshops on:
  - Strategic planning and advocacy.
  - Proposal and resolution writing.
- **IP** participants more frequently cited the importance on the topics of:
  - IPRA
  - CADT
  - Human Rights
  - Agri-education and organic farming.
- For participants from all sectors, OP Kors! and trainings on conflict mediation were considered the most impactful for changes in mindsets, as well as knowledge- and skill-building in dealing with community issues and disputes.

<u>Gendered dimensions</u>

- Seminars on VAWC, positive parenting, child protection and early pregnancy were more prominent in discussions with female participants .
- Reflections and success stories shared by female participants demonstrated an emphasis on the importance of knowledge-sharing with the broader community, womens' rights awareness, empowerment, and confidence-building.



Feedback on Content and Delivery

Participants identified several aspects of workshops and trainings they liked, with OP Kors! overwhelmingly the most frequently mentioned .

- **Wide-ranging applicability**: knowledge and skills gained are transferrable to a broad range of responsibilities, issues and situations.
- **Memorable exercises:** problem-tree mapping, scenario-based roleplaying, and post-exercise feedback from facilitators on what was done well and what could be done better.
- **Interactive and visual learning:** hands-on—methods using pen-and-paper, mapping.
- **Mixed-sector participation:** bringing together representatives from different sectors (government, non-government, military) is valuable for hearing and learning from different perspectives and experiences.
- **Clear step-by-step guidance:** structured breakdown of processes is useful for providing clarity on tasks such as conducting mediations, inter-agency coordination, and facilitating meetings or community consultations

"OP Kors! was an eye-opener for me. It makes you competent as a peace worker when you can understand all perspectives—military, non-government organizations, other groups. […] There's no formula for resolving problems, you have to analyze and understand all perspectives. Balay Mindanaw is very good at restoralizing problems. For example, the insurgency is very broad, but we learnt to contextualize the issue because the real problems are land issues and resource-based conflicts between IPs and upland farmers, community resistance, lack of income, displacement, marginalization. […] Comparing before and after OP Kors!, I see that problems will keep reoccurring if LGUs don't respond or confront them, and if we don't discuss how to resolve issues collaboratively and cooperatively."
— Participant 9, DILG Peace and Order Program Focal Point.

The training I admired most was the OP Kors! training we did in Britannia. I learnt how to mediate and handle VAWC and CICL (Child in Conflict with the Law) issues. They explained right and wrong, and how people have different perspectives. One example was an exercise with a drawing. At first it looked like Jesus but on second glance it looked like something else, like a dog. At the end of the training we had a practical application. We were put into groups and acted out situations, switching roles. Someone would play the barangay captain, I would play the person at fault or the one being blamed.
— Women's Association Member, Focus Group Discussion 1.

Personal growth and mindset shifts	Professional skills and organizational development
• Confidence • Empowerment • Existing skills strengthened • Broadened knowledge base • Rights-awareness • Knowledge-sharing with the broader community <u>Approaches to mediation</u> • Active listening • Open-mindedness • Neutrality • Empathy • Patience • Emotional regulation for escalation prevention • 'Win-win' solutions • Speech dialogue method <u>Holistic problem-solving and identifying solutions</u> • Links between conflict and broader problems, root causes, and triggers • Intersection of peace, development, and socio-economic vulnerabilities	<u>Technical skills</u> • Computer literacy • Project proposal formulation and writing • Strategic planning and organizational development • Financial and administrative management <u>Planning and formulation (institutional and capacity-building)</u> • Participatory Rural Appraisals (PRA) • Barangay Development Plans, Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Plans: identifying priorities, and risk and vulnerability assessments • Development of action plans <u>Meeting and dialogue facilitation skills</u> • Conduct of Community Peace Conversations (CPCs) • Community orientations, including advocacy and awareness-raising campaigns • Hosting of Stakeholder Forums • Dispute mediation <u>Governance Literacy</u> • Improved understanding of the roles of government agencies (e.g. differentiating the Department of Environment and Natural Resources and the Department of Agrarian Reform in land dispute cases) for inter-agency coordination, administrative processes, and procedures • Preparation and submission of applications for CADT (Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title) and CATL (Certificate of Ancestral Land Title) <u>Participatory governance for CSOs</u> • CSO accreditation and registration • Participation in Stakeholder Forums • Elected representation in Local Special Bodies, Councils and Committees <u>Conflict analysis and assessment processes</u> • Actor and stakeholder system-mapping • Peace and conflict impact assessment • Driving factors of conflict • Factors for/against peace • Context and situational analysis
Livelihood vocational skills:	
• Agri-education • Organic farming • Product-making (soaps, crafts, textiles)	

Learning Outcomes: Skills and Knowledge Gained







Material Outcomes

When asked about the impact of workshops, participants often pointed to material outcomes as key successes.

Infrastructure	Livelihood projects

• Generator and supplies for search and rescue teams
• Evacuation center
• Water systems and distribution (Sky Hydrant systems, tanks, irrigation)
• Street solar lighting
• Paving of access roads
• Patrol vehicles for CSOs relating to peace and order activities
• Emergency vehicles for hospital transportation (particularly in far-flung areas)
• VAWC barangay office.
	• Community gardens
	• Micro-enterprises:
	  ◦ Rice wholesaling
	  ◦ Charcoal briquettes
	  ◦ Sari-sari stores
	  ◦ Soap-making
	• Water refilling stations
	• Seedlings for farming and reforestation (trees, root crops, fruits).

Small items	
• Laptops and printers (CSOs) • Birthing supply kits and cooking materials (health centers)	

TESTIMONIES OF IMPACT AND CASCADING EFFECTS

Rights and Empowerment

"*The human rights training really helped me. Those laws, the rights of the people, how to solve problems and achieve solutions, that has been a big part in helping me resolve problems. […] But the one about the tribe, that's one of the most important things from the seminars that I remember. It has greatly assisted us, and I can say that we know how to stand on our own, how to explain to people that we don't have to suffer.*"

— Participant 1, Indigenous Peoples Mandatory Representative.

"*Something that was really important to me was how to organize the people and the rights of women. It's not just about being a wife, she can work, whatever she wants. I share so other women can learn, like if the husband hurts her, makes her a servant. There was one time a woman was beaten by her husband and I told her, 'that is a case for VAWC, go to the barangay, go to the VAWC office.' And we took her to the doctor to get checked.*"

— Participant 2, Indigenous Women's Association Leader.

"*What I have seen from our achievements is that the women have become really knowledgeable, especially those who've been oppressed and don't know where to go, what agencies to approach, but they were taught. They are no longer afraid, they realize, 'this is our right as women, my husband cannot force me.'*"

— Participant 12, Women's Association Member.



Positive Parenting and Child Protection

"There was a case in our sitio involving my husband's relative who was beating his son. We called them to talk and explain that what they were doing wasn't right. We learnt in OP Kors! that conflicts don't have to escalate to violence if resolved quickly. That was useful because I was able to advise the father on positive disciplining without violence."

— Women's Association Member, Focus Group Discussion 1.

"These parents came to me because their child wasn't listening. Every night he was arguing with them, even hitting people in the community. As purok secretary and a barangay health worker I was hesitant since it's not really my responsibility, but I told the purok chairman, 'let's try, maybe we can solve it.' We called the child and his mother, and together with a Child Protection Officer we stopped it before escalation to the barangay or the DSWD [Department of Social Welfare and Development]. We explained to the child the consequences if he continued acting this way. Now, thankfully, he's not getting into any more fights."

— Women's Association Member, Focus Group Discussion 1.

"My story relates to VAWC and the OP Kors! training, and the Barangay Council for the Protection of Children. A woman and her live-in partner were put in prison [for child abuse], leaving her two children with a neighbor who didn't have the resources to care for them. He posted on social media searching for their biological father. The father had already been looking for them so he came to the barangay hall and asked for our help. We coordinated with the DSWD, gathered the required documents like the birth certificate to prove paternity, then coordinated with the prison and Bureau of Jail Management and Penology to process the papers and get the mother's consent. The tanods and VAWC office responded really quickly to the case."

— Barangay Secretary, Focus Group Discussion 2.

Health Education and Serving the Community as Barangay Health Workers

"You can't be a BHW [barangay health worker] without training and we're always the first ones to be invited to training by Balay Mindanaw. Our job is to encourage mothers to attend prenatal care, inform our areas about immunization, child nutrition. That's our victory as BHWs, our skills are stronger and we're able to contribute to community development."
— Barangay Health Worker, Focus Group Discussion 2.



"One of my successes as a BHW is serving our community through services. [...] After attending those trainings it was like my mindset to help the barangay was enhanced, the knowledge we need for our health center."
— Barangay Health Worker, Focus Group Discussion 2.

"People think that all BHWs do is blood pressure checks but there are so many other things we need to do like the annual household surveys. We have so many tasks assigned to us and we especially struggle with this annual survey. We need to do house-to-house visits, take all the data. Through trainings we learnt how to do these things, it became easer."
— Barangay Health Worker, Focus Group Discussion 2.

Hosting a Stakeholders' Forum and Facilitating Community Peace Conversations



"We conducted a Community Peace Conversation inviting farmers, BHWs, and Women's Associations to discuss common problems and needs in the community. Balay Mindanaw had provided us with training before on how to do the CPCs, guiding us step-by-step, even things like sending invitations. They helped financially with snacks for attendees and transportation. After the CPC we brought together all the issues and needs that were raised and one resolution was the Women's Association's proposal to build a VAWC office in the barangay. We submitted this in November 2024 so we're still waiting for the approval."

— Women's Association Member, Focus Group Discussion 1.

"For me, the biggest achievement was conducting a Stakeholders' Forum where we linked with government agencies to submit proposals for projects and services we wanted for the barangay. Balay Mindanaw guided us in proposal-making and moral support so we would be confident in facing different heads of offices."

— Women's Association Member, Focus Group Discussion 1.

"We were taught how to write proposals and we were able to purchase a laptop and printer. The financial support [for the Stakeholders' Forum] helped us to book a venue, provide food, the materials, even helping us with transportation to deliver invitations to the agencies. The achievement, the result of those trainings, is that we became stronger, empowered. Our association is now also stable in terms of financial matters and documents. Before, we didn't know what documents we needed to secure registration with DOLE, financial requirements, all those things. And especially in making resolutions, how to secure or make meetings. We underwent all that kind of training."

— Women's Association Member, Focus Group Discussion 1.





Community Education and Advocacy Awareness-Raising

"What I applied from Balay Mindanaw trainings for Kalinaw Tu Kabudagan was conducting community advocacy on IPRA rights, our rights to land. We held sessions in Diatagon Catholic School, KM9, Neptune, and Post 1. They helped us with doing the assessments and gave us moral support because without them we wouldn't have done it, facing so many people made us nervous. The helped us organize materials like tarpaulins and the small things we needed for the activities."
— Women's Association Member, Focus Group Discussion 1.

"One success for me was that Balay Mindanaw helped us to connect with the Ministry of Agriculture so that the San Isidro Women's Association here was able to conduct an organic farming training. And we invited the Ministry to teach and explain farming methods to people here."
— Women's Association Member, Focus Group Discussion 1.

"One achievement for me is the seminar we conducted on early teenage pregnancy at the R. Moreno Integrated School. Balay Mindanaw helped us financially, like to provide snacks to the students, and also in helping to discuss pregnancy to give information to the students. There are so many cases in our area, some get pregnant very young, even at 13."
— Women's Association Member, Focus Group Discussion 1.

Peacebuilding Stories: a Barangay Captain's Vision for Peace and Development

For Agustin Moreno Jr., barangay captain of St. Christine, disaster preparedness is a top priority. As a coastal barangay, St. Christine is highly exposed to the risk of tsunamis. Equally important to him, however, is the goal of improving economic wellbeing—especially in the upland areas—with poor infrastructure exacerbating the community's challenges:

"In the mountains, they're the ones most disadvantaged because of the roads. And IPs are one of the most important but we can't give everything they need, our budget is not large. It's difficult to bring their products down here to the lowlands because the road is difficult and they barely break. Even with selling, sometimes they lose money. Little by little, each year, we're trying to budget for a Farm-to-Market Road going to Sitio Uangan. It's seven kilometers from here."

Although the barangay council continues to lobby for more attainable projects like streetlights, Agustin says the Farm-to-Market Roads remains the long-standing request, with the seven-kilometer stretch to Uangan needing rehabilitation since his previous terms as a kagawad. Reflecting more broadly, Agustin sees peace as fundamental to development as socio-economic inequalities and lack of income generation opportunities also contributes to instability:

"For me, peace is at the center of everything. We need to give it attention, especially in the mountain areas because they are really the ones who need it. For their livelihoods, their families, sometimes farming is their only source of income, and sometimes others get taken advantage of."

Agustin explains how—in the absence of viable alternatives—some turn to illegal means such as logging, particularly of endangered tree species which often results in police confiscation. He acknowledges that frustration with the government and sentiments of socio-economic injustice can drive some individuals to join armed groups. This vulnerability and instability, he adds, is a contributing factor to missed opportunities for tourism and investment:

"Peace is really one of the most important things in a place. Why? Because if there's no peace, visitors will be afraid to come to our area. When they visit, the barangay earns income. But outsiders are afraid to come here because there's no security."



Agustin shares that one of his goals is to encourage upland residents to build on their existing farming skills and enroll in agriculture courses such as those available through the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA). However, he notes the limited availability of places. While educational pathways alone are important, he explains that they must be accompanied by adequate livelihood projects and the material support needed to make them sustainable: "for fishing, we need things like nets and for farming, abaca. They can grow abaca there, and those root crops, the soil in the mountains good. More orientations for farmers would help increase their knowledge." Still, farming is just one part of the challenge, with transportation difficulties and market competition driving prices down. Looking to the future, Agustin hopes that St. Christine's partnership with Balay Mindanaw will continue, in addition to expansion to other barangays:

"I think there are still barangays in Lianga they haven't reached, especially those in the more remote mountainous areas. I hope they can be reached so they can benefit like we have. Like those orientations and workshops that Balay Mindanaw usually does because they haven't experienced them yet. [...] If Balay Mindanaw continues, many more can be helped. And in our mountainous areas for the IPs, they really need the dissemination of more information so their needs can be understood and communicated to the government."

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Key Concerns and Issues Affecting the Community

"*My vision as barangay captain is for the barangay to be peaceful, prosperous and for our dreams to be realized. I hope the proposals for our barangay will be realized. As a public servant that's our investment, we serve the people so we can help in the development of our barangay. [...] We need to achieve peace because without peace, development won't come.*"
— Participant 10, Barangay Captain.

Armed Conflict

"*We have to continue, we have to continue. We cannot say we are 100% peaceful. We have had gains in peace and development efforts, minimal atrocities, but we still always have that kind of problem.*"
— Participant 9, DILG Peace and Order Program Focal Point.

Despite a general sense of improved security and stability in Lianga, participants considered the armed conflict to be a persistent vulnerability for the foreseeable future. Concerns remain particularly the potential of renewed violence and cyclical escalation in hotspot barangays like Diatagon and San Isidro. Participants therefore saw a continued role for BMFI's community-based peacebuilding interventions, such as facilitating local peace dialogues among IPMRs, AFP and NPA leaders, conducting community peace conversations, mobile peace education, offering OP Kors!, and community-policing trainings. Notably, all participants expressed doubt that national-level negotiations would fully resolve conflicts (given the lack of results so far) and that local efforts cannot depend on these. Such perspectives of the armed conflict highlights the importance of Balay Mindanaw's community-based approach to peacebuilding.

"I think the armed conflict will continue to be a problem in the future. There are always changes in leadership, there are different principles, perspectives, ideas. Some compromise and others don't."
— Participant 8, Barangay Kagawad.

Health and social welfare	Child abuse; rape; violent disciplining; substance abuse; teen pregnancy; lack of maternal and infant healthcare services and resources
Conflict; peace and order	Land and resource-related conflicts; debt-related tensions; physical assaults and intimidation; youth delinquency; perceived unfair financial assistance from the government and aid distribution; public disturbances and curfews
Crime	Illegal firearms; drug trafficking; human trafficking; kidnapping; rape
Natural disasters	Inadequate resources and infrastructure for disaster preparedness and management
Economic insecurity	Limited livelihood and income-generation opportunities
Infrastructure	Road quality; inadequate access to clean water and electricity; restricted mobility and inadequate accessibility to remote communities
Armed conflict	Displacement; disproportionate impact on Indigenous communities; recruitment to armed groups due to disenfranchisement with the government and socio-economic inequalities

Common sources and triggers of conflict:

- **Land disputes** (most severe and reoccurring): overlapping boundaries, tenurial instruments, inconsistencies between between pre- and post GIS mapping of boundaries, and CADT-related.
- Limited understandings of **land tenure:** rights, legal frameworks, and owner-tenant arrangements.
- **Property damage**: private gardens and livestock.
- Unpaid **debts** and **loans** within communities, and between members of social enterprise initiatives.
- Inter-familial strains and grievances involving cases of **Intimate Partner Violence** (IPV).
- **Physical altercations:** particularly triggered by alcohol consumption and often connected to **pre-existing grievances**.
- Concerns for **at-risk youth** and **juvenile delinquency** was a highly prominent concern raised by all participants, particularly relating to public disturbances, curfews, crime, and teen pregnancy.
- Observed increases in **human trafficking** linked to social media, **drugs** and **firearms** circulation, **kidnapping**, and **rape**.

Natural disasters were generally ranked as higher-risk concerns for disaster risk reduction and management planning. However, the LDRRMO representative stated that the updating of contingency plans for armed conflict should remain a priority, especially in geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas (GIDA), and for IPs as a disproportionately affected, vulnerable group:

> *"San Isidro, San Pedro, Baucawe, Diatagon, St. Christine, those areas we really need to be concerned for. Last year, we had to suspend class in Baucawe. [...] Though people think the conflict is far away, the fear is still there. That's the concern, the safety of those people."*
> — Participant 13, LDRRMO Head of Office.

Correspondingly, IP participants expressed heightened vulnerability—not only physical security—but also in relation to the impacts on their mobility and agriculture-based livelihoods. Key factors mentioned included military protocols such as 100-meter restriction perimeters, permit requirements for farm access limits on transporting goods to the lowlands, and restrictions preventing civilians from accessing their farms, sometimes for up to two weeks.

— *"It's really a big problem because, of course, people will just run."*

— *"Most of our [Women's Association] members are IPs, they're really affected because their livelihoods are in the mountains. Our source of income are our farms but the soldiers prohibit us to go to there. It's really bitter."*

— *"Because of the army's orientations, people can't go to their fields, so what will they eat?"*

Participants, Focus Group Discussion 1.



> *San Isidro has NPA. We can't say we don't because it's a mountainous area. Their presence is really felt, and so that's one thing we really need to consider. There's always the possibility that they come down.*
> **— Participant 10, Barangay Captain.**

> *Before, Diatagon and St. Christine were hotspots for encounters. Nowadays if anything happens or there's escalation, it's still concentrated in these areas.*
> **— Participant 5, Barangay Captain.**

> *The war can't really be avoided. [...] there's not much anyone can do but the main thing is for all sides to keep talking. [...] For us IPs, the majority of events that happen to us are disasters caused by humans. That's really the biggest, most common problem.*
> **— Participant 1, Indigenous People's Mandatory Representative.**



Priority Areas and Suggestions for the Future

"My suggestion is for Balay Mindanaw to continue consultations with barangay councils and communities, so they can reflect on and support the programs and projects. if I were Balay Mindanaw, I would be ready to listen to suggestions, positive and negative, so that proper solutions can be tailored."
— Barangay Secretary, Focus Group Discussion 2.

Discussions of needs and future priorities largely affirmed the continued relevance of BMFI's current programmatic focuses, centered on three core pillars: **disaster risk reduction and management (DRRM), sustainable livelihoods and economic development; and infrastructure.** Although DRRM was identified as a priority, climate change was only mentioned by two participants.[11] The kinds of engagement, support and activities discussed by participants can be grouped into six broad categories, all of which demonstrate the existing scope of BMFI's programs.

Technical assistance	Planning and formulation of action plans, BDPs, DRRMPs, and project proposals
Community engagement	Community peace conversations, consultations, and dialogues
Resource mobilization	Connecting local partners with funding sources, donors, and government agencies
Community outreach and education	Orientations and information seminars on health, peace education, and DRRM
Skills Development	Capacity-building workshops and trainings
Stakeholder bridging	Linkages between CSOs, LGUs, government agencies, market access, and INGOs.

> *I would ask Balay Mindanaw not to leave us, to continue supporting our barangay because they're always there to assist us, always looking ahead to what's coming next for us. They are the ones who gives us plans. Like before when they gave us the BDP, it was Balay Mindanaw who created that document.*
> **— Participant, Focus Group Discussion 1.**

Participants were invited to provide feedback on BMFI's current activities and support, as well as to identify gaps and areas of improvement. While overall satisfaction was expressed—emphasizing what should be sustained—there was also an urgent call to "scale up" efforts, particularly in relation to infrastructure and basic services. This is unsurprising given that the inadequate government provision of—and limited funding for—basic services is a longstanding issue, described as "dismal" in the 2001 assessment of BMFI (Perucho 2001, 349). This makes the organization's support at the barangay level—and its role as a conduit for advocacy and negotiations with government agencies and LGUs, as well as linkages with non-governmental and international donor funding—all the more crucial.



[11] Also notable was the absence of gender-based and LGBTQIA+ issues from discussions despite (female) participants frequently citing cases of VAWC when sharing examples of applied skills and knowledge.

Infrastructure and Public Works	• Road rehabilitation, access roads in upland areas, and Farm-to-Market Roads • Solar street lighting • Electricity lines to remote puroks • Water filtration, irrigation, piping and tanks. • Weather operations centres • Public lots for rehousing families displaced by disasters, and construction of temporary housing • Rural Health Units and Barangay Health Stations
Materials and Equipment	• Disaster management: radio equipment, relief packs, and generators • Livelihoods: seedlings, fertilizer, farming tools, and fishing nets • Health centres: chairs, medicine, and blood pressure monitors

Community Peace Conversations: These remain a vital part of BMFI's work, with participants seeing them as important spaces for barangays to voice their concerns, discuss issues affecting the community, and for their action plans and proposals to be integrated into the plans and budgets of higher-level LGUs. Additionally, participants—particularly BLGU officials—suggested "scaling up" efforts of **information dissemination** and **orientations** for community members on: peace education, health issues (such as pre-natal care; sexual and reproductive health), disaster risk reduction and management, land tenure, and rising concerns for increases in illegal firearms, substance abuse, and human trafficking.

> *The reason I like CPCs is because it allows us to address each of the problems in the different puroks. But my recommendation for Balay Mindanaw is that they should hold follow-up rounds of CPCs regarding the realization of action plans and proposals. To ensure that those problems not yet addressed can be revisited and dealt with, to find better solutions. This way we can make sure every issue from the puroks are heard and acted upon.*
>
> **— Participant 10, Barangay Captain.**





Institutional and Capability-Building for Barangay Development Plans and Disaster Risk Reduction Management Plans: BMFI's continued guidance in the planning and formulation of BDPs and DRRMPs remains a critical need for partners. Participants consistently highlighted the value of BMFI's support in the process of formulation, as well as tools for identifying and assessing priorities, risks, and vulnerabilities, noting the usefulness of "step-by-step" procedures being explained and practised. This extends beyond planning and documentation, as BMFI is also valued as an intermediary that advocates for, negotiates, and helps secure financial support from LGUs and government agencies, and in pushing for the integration of barangay plans and proposals into municipal budgets. With regard to DRRM, participants recommended expanding skills-training for barangay staff, volunteers and CSOs as first responsders, search and rescue teams, camp management, hazard drills, evacuation, and relief operations.



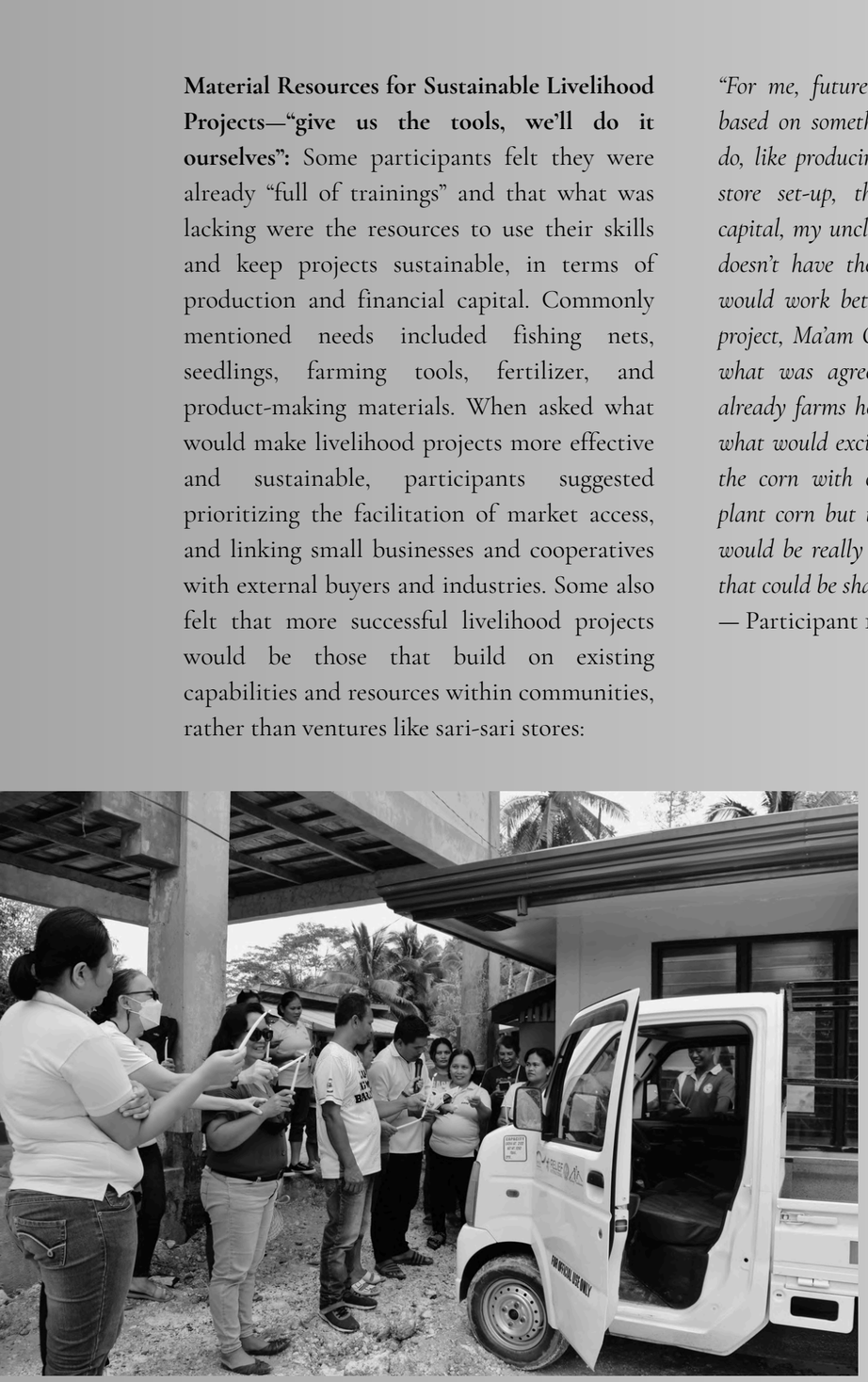
> *Balay Mindanaw is an instrument for me attend trainings and learn.*
> **— Participant 4, Purok Leader.**
>
> *Anything that is available, that's all added knowledge and it's free. Topics that we can get something out of, like for example how to plant things.*
> **— Participant 6, Purok President.**

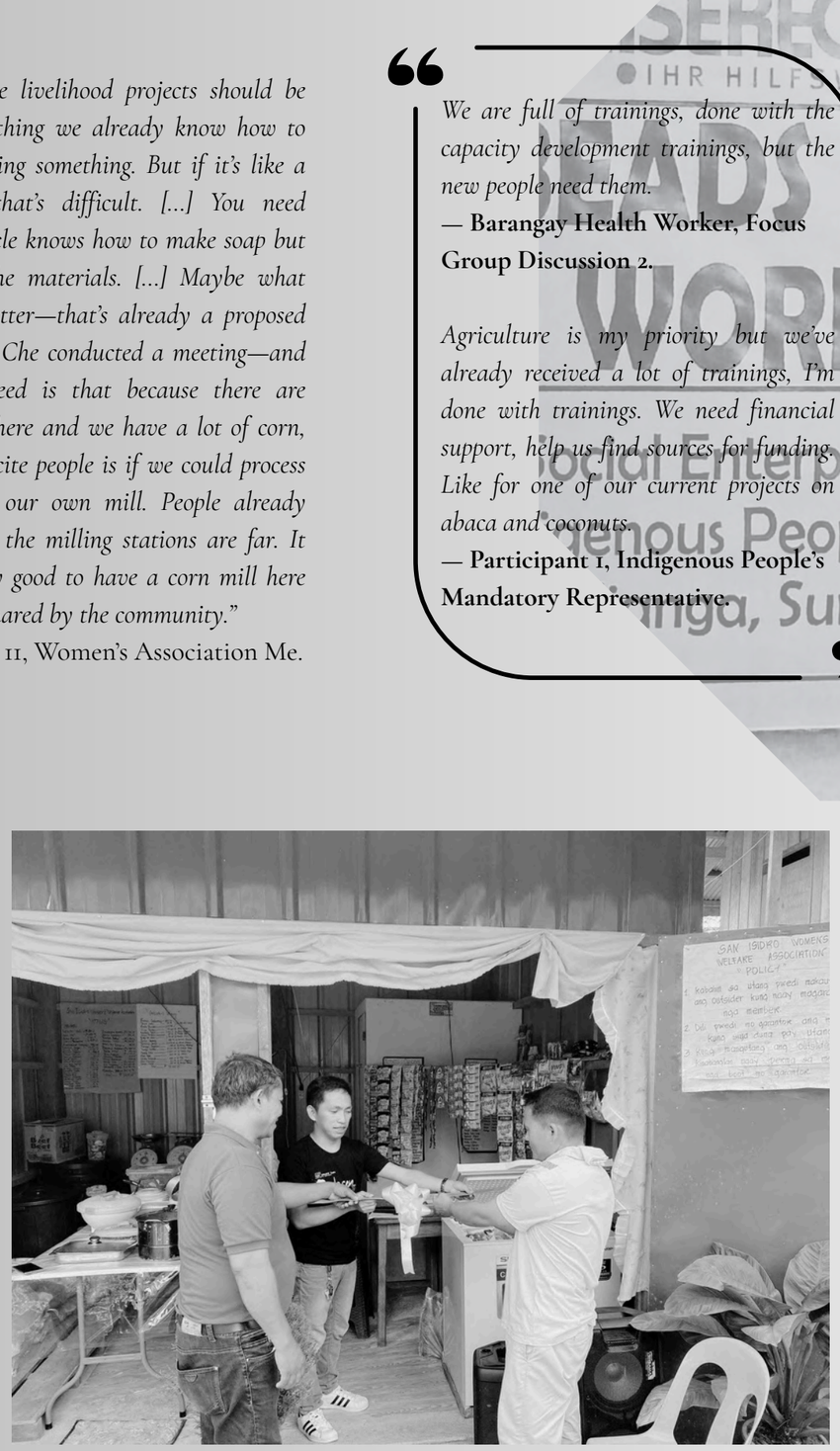
Livelihood Skills Education and "More Knowledge": Participants stressed the importance of livelihood-related vocational education in farming, fishing, and product-making (soaps, textiles and crafts), considering these a vital foundation for income- and revenue generation. They recommended that these trainings be offered to a broader group of people, while some suggested that previous participants could benefit from "refresher courses". It was unclear whether this feedback was based on a perception of limited retention of skills over time, or a lack of opportunities to apply what was learnt.

Material Resources for Sustainable Livelihood Projects—"give us the tools, we'll do it ourselves": Some participants felt they were already "full of trainings" and that what was lacking were the resources to use their skills and keep projects sustainable, in terms of production and financial capital. Commonly mentioned needs included fishing nets, seedlings, farming tools, fertilizer, and product-making materials. When asked what would make livelihood projects more effective and sustainable, participants suggested prioritizing the facilitation of market access, and linking small businesses and cooperatives with external buyers and industries. Some also felt that more successful livelihood projects would be those that build on existing capabilities and resources within communities, rather than ventures like sari-sari stores:

> *"For me, future livelihood projects should be based on something we already know how to do, like producing something. But if it's like a store set-up, that's difficult. [...] You need capital, my uncle knows how to make soap but doesn't have the materials. [...] Maybe what would work better—that's already a proposed project, Ma'am Che conducted a meeting—and what was agreed is that because there are already farms here and we have a lot of corn, what would excite people is if we could process the corn with our own mill. People already plant corn but the milling stations are far. It would be really good to have a corn mill here that could be shared by the community."*
> — Participant 11, Women's Association Me.

> *We are full of trainings, done with the capacity development trainings, but the new people need them.*
> **— Barangay Health Worker, Focus Group Discussion 2.**
>
> *Agriculture is my priority but we've already received a lot of trainings, I'm done with trainings. We need financial support, help us find sources for funding. Like for one of our current projects on abaca and coconuts.*
> **— Participant 1, Indigenous People's Mandatory Representative.**







Greater Attention to Geographically Isolated and Disadvantaged Areas (GIDA) and Flood-Prone Barangays: Limited access to basic services and poor infrastructure were part of a broader sentiment among participants that GIDA areas require more focused attention. While participants recognized the many positive impacts of BMFI's projects, some noted that these are yet to be felt in more remote communities—one participant stating that "beyond Post 1 [Diatagon] there is hardly anything." An additional suggestion made by several participants was for BMFI to direct more attention to flood-prone barangays. The LDRRMO Head of Office, for example, identified the barangays of Ban-as and Payasan as priority areas, advocating for more flood-control projects and early warning system capabilities. However, SIADOs noted that factors such as difficult terrains, accessibility, and weather conditions are barriers to implementation. They also noted the resource limitations of BMFI, and so considering such recommendations would require longer-term programmatic and funding adjustments.



> *— Its challenging to go there to conduct activities. We need to stay there for a couple of days because we don't have satellite offices. SIADO-ing is really about journeying with the community from time to time, but we also accept that we have areas that are far from our base.*
>
> *— We have to see the weather first, sometimes we have to postpone activities and reschedule. [...] Aside from geography, we also have this challenge about communicating with our partners if they don't have Wi-Fi or phone signal. Sometimes the interventions we make in our team is that we literally visit them face-to-face in their areas and it consumes time to travel, also money. So, that's the challenge.*
>
> **SIADOs, Group Discussion.**

— We have a lack of facilities in our health center and one thing we really lack is chairs, blood pressure manuals, and monitors. Other BHWs don't know how to take blood pressure because there's only one monitor. There's only one left, the others are broken, so we need an accurate one, every BHW should have one."

— During immunizations and prenatal checks, lots of patients are just standing.

Participants, Focus Group Discussion 2.

Health services and facilities: BHWs highlighted shortages in prenatal, childbirth and infant health facilities and service provision, particularly in far-flung puroks. Primary issues included broken or insufficient equipment like blood pressure monitors, and inadequate budgets for medicine and vaccines. These participants felt that health-related funding and resource acquisition has been under-prioritized, requiring much more attention in BDPs, barangay project proposals and requests for government assistance. They also expressed frustration that newly graduated nurses and midwives were under-utilized due to a lack of government funding for the further training they require, as well as mentioning safety concerns as a deterrent for working in upland areas:

— "There is a center [KM9, Diatagon] but no-one's on duty, no permanent midwife, no maintenance."

— "It's a tribal area, it's also really scary there, it's not safe. […] a red flag. The midwives might be afraid."

Participants, Focus Group Discussion 1.

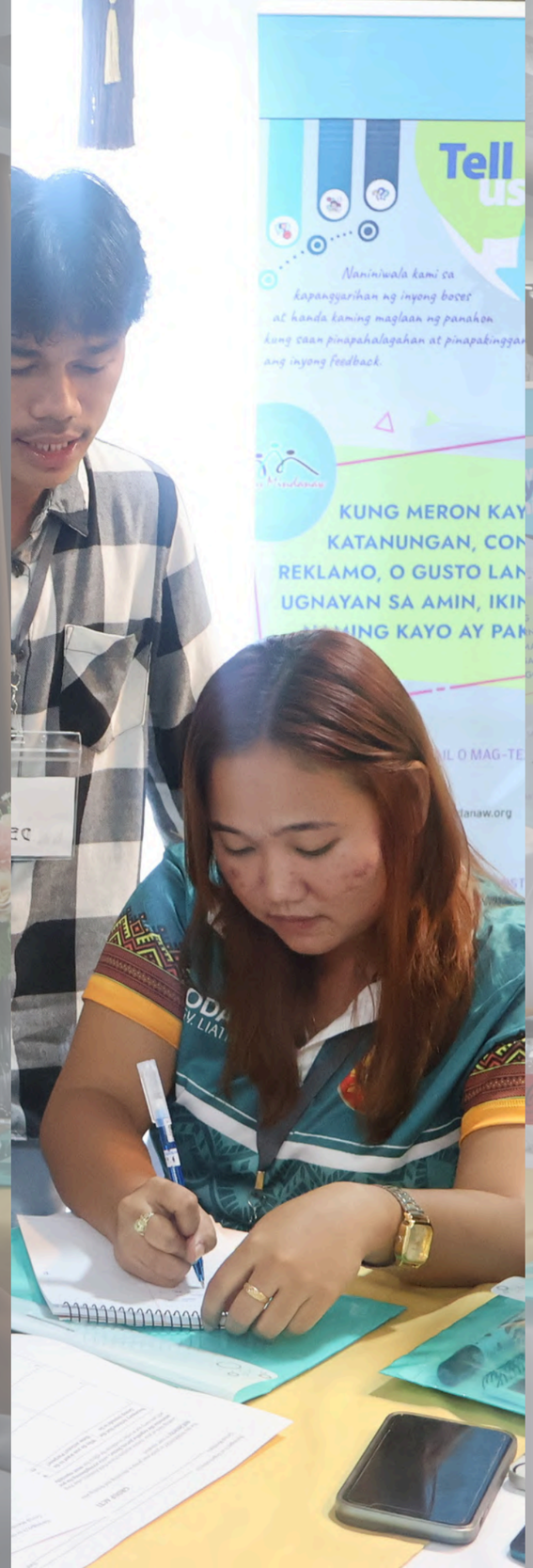
Youth engagement initiatives: Concerns for at-risk youth were reflected in recommendations for BMFI to strengthen youth engagement initiatives. Frustrations were frequently expressed over public disturbances and the impacts on people's sense of security, with some noting that local peace and order ordinances (such as curfews) are largely ineffective. Referring to previous efforts and activities relating to CLJIP (Comprehensive Local Juvenile Intervention Plan), participants who raised this issue consistently shared suggestions of similar interventions including employment pathway projects, youth leadership and mentoring programs, and the creation of recreational activity centers and sports groups aimed at prevention, rehabilitation and reintegration.

— *"One of our concerns is youth, we can't discipline them, they follow bad behavior."*

— *"Fighting, riots, everywhere."*

— *"That's really the biggest problem... theft, throwing stones at passing vehicles."*

Participants, Focus Group Discussion 1.





The youth will only get into trouble if they have nothing to do here.
— Participant, Focus Group Discussion 1.

What we want to be done by Balay Mindanaw in our barangay is an orientation for the out-of-school youth program because we really have a lot who have dropped out... And it's connected because since they don't go to school, they end up getting pregnant early, so also education for early pregnancies.
— Participant, Focus Group Discussion 2.

Indigenous Voices and Neglected Advocacy Concerns: A concern raised by IP participants —though not specifically directed at BMFI— was a lack of recognition by LGUs, despite acknowledged improvements in the past decade. One participant expressed frustration that community outreach by LGU officials is often 'insincere' as they only visit during election periods. Speaking on BMFI's current support, participants recommended greater assistance in securing funding to expand IPRA advocacy awareness campaigns, and in advocating for larger allocations in BDPs, Internal Revenue Allotments (IRA), calamity funds and more substantial relief packs and subsidies. These were described as insufficient not only in quantity but also inadequate in frequency during major events: "the municipality gives us food but it's not enough. it's just a one-time thing."

Though sustainable livelihood projects are a priority for all communities, IP participants emphasized the exacerbated impacts given that farming remains their primary source of subsistence and income, as well as the impacts of the armed conflict. Suggestions included projects for backyard farming and fishponds which could gradually support transitioning from daily subsistence needs to small-income generation for families. As one participant explained: "we can first meet our own needs and then sell to the market. That way won't be dependent, we can meet our own needs."

"Agriculture is important, we won't survive without it. We have schools but agriculture is something the government struggles to address. [...] I know from working in the barangay that although our Internal Revenue Allotment is 11 million pesos, our community's share is only 2.1%. [...] I also recall one time the municipality gave us only two seeds of beans. That could definitely be one of Balay Mindanaw's contributions, to connect us with more LGUs, coordinate with the LGUs. We don't need cash directly."
— Participant 1, Indigenous People's Mandatory Representative.



> *The LGUs are unreliable because they rarely help when it comes to IP issues. [...] It just depends on other people, whoever feels pity.*
> **— Participant 2, Indigenous Women's Association Leader.**
>
> *They know the issues, they're aware, they hear it, but they don't listen. [...] When IPs go down to the barangay hall to make requests the officials act like they care but then not actually do anything. [...] The LGU are lacking, they do not give our best.*
> **— Participant 4, Purok Leader.**

An additional sentiment expressed some by IP participants was that many people outside their communities lack awareness and appreciation of their lived experiences and realities, feeling that there is a need for people to have a "better understanding of their behaviors." They emphasized the value of BMFI's advocacy in maintaining lines of communication between them and LGUs. The same participant who noted that the impact of BMFI's projects were yet to be felt in far-flung areas suggested that staff could spend more time in the upland areas with Manobo communities to "really see and experience what life is like for us day-to-day", a recommendation echoed by another participant who referenced previous invitations extended to BMFI staff.

> *For how Balay Mindanaw can help with peace, one aspect is that communication should not be broken so our stories won't be lost or changed. […] The communication with our people should not be taken away. That's one way to improve Balay Mindanaw. […] For us, the most important thing is mutual respect. Especially in our tribe, we have laws for that. So one thing Balay Mindanaw can continue supporting us with is to maintain what we've already seen from them which is respect and communication.*
>
> *One thing they [Balay Mindanaw] can learn from me is to join us when we go to the communities, to provide information, explain to the communities about IPRA. And then when they [Balay Mindanaw] join closely, they can know what the tribe really is, what the tribe's nature is. That is one thing they get to know.*
>
> **— Participant 1, Indigenous People's Mandatory Representative.**

CONSTRAINTS TO LONG-TERM EFFECTIVENESS AND SUSTAINABILITY

Observations from interviews and focus group discussions pointed to several factors that may be limiting the impact and long-term effectiveness of BMFI's programs.

Partner Dependency

Though demonstrative of the success of BMFI's impact and engagement, discussions revealed long-term dependency. When asked whether they envision a future where their communities could say to BMFI, "we don't need you anymore", all participants stated this was unlikely. This was especially apparent in reference to BDPs and DRRMPs, where many felt they did not have the ability to conduct the assessments, planning and preparation of documents without BMFI. Conversations outside of interviews and focus group discussions further revealed that SIADOs often shoulder significant responsibility in drafting these documents. This not only places a strain on BMFI's human and organizational resources, but also hinders opportunities for BLGUs to gain confidence and take ownership over the process.

"It's better if Balay Mindanaw will always continue their partnership with us, forever."
— Participant 7, Barangay Captain.

> *— Sometimes we're invited outside our partner areas, and they'll say, "you have to transfer to our barangay." It's like that because they want us to be partners.*
>
> *— But we can't because we have limited resources, so we only have five barangays.*
>
> *— There's no forever.*
>
> *— The direct impact as an indicator for us should be when communities will tell us, "you can leave."*
>
> **SIADO Group Discussion.**

Although participants were aware that BMFI relies on external donors and funding, all expressed a desire for its support to continue indefinitely, along with recommendations for expanding partnerships to more barangays:

> "*They could do more. I suggest they partner with more barangays. I think it's time for them to expand. But add more because maybe the current barangays will feel like, 'where are they, why are they in other barangays? We've been left behind.'"*
> — Participant 13, LDRRMO Head of Office.

This also raises questions about how such dependence might perpetuate the previously noted limited engagement and support from higher levels of government, with BMFI effectively functioning as a stop-gap. While this is not a call for drastic programmatic changes, these dynamics suggest a need to reconsider different strategies or shift approaches that would foster greater independence and confidence-building in among BLGUs over time.

Lack of Continuity: Intergenerational Knowledge and Skills Transfer

"Even though there are some who are knowledgeable, it's still inconsistent. It's not like me, I've already learnt but there are the new people who need training. ... Balay Mindanaw are the ones who make the BDP and the books and there's always renewal, renewal, renewal."
— Participant 12, Women's Association Member.

Also relating to partner dependency, capacity-building and skills development trainings appear to lack mechanisms for the continuity of knowledge and skills transfer when there are leadership transitions. Some participants stressed that new BLGU leaders and staff begin their roles without sufficient knowledge or training. While this is not uncommon in any context, the fact that it was explained as the reason for why BMFI will always be needed reflects an ongoing reliance on the organization to continually fill these capacity gaps, rather than developing internal processes for leadership onboarding and role transition support that could complement the trainings provided by BMFI.

> *New people will follow, the barangay council is not permanent. Me now, I've picked up knowledge from Balay Mindanaw. But there will be different people who will sit after my term. If Balay Mindanaw doesn't continue, those people won't be facilitated, capacitated.*
>
> **— Participant 5, Barangay Captain.**



Infrastructure-Focused Mindset and Misconceptions of Balay Mindanaw's Role in Resource Mobilization

SIADOs shared that one indicator of success for them is when communities begin to see development not only as material outcomes such as roads and buildings. However, discussions of future priorities with participants often took the form of a series of requests, with participants frequently using phrases like, "Balay Mindanaw should give..." or "Balay Mindanaw needs to do...". One barangay kagawad also expressed how he had come across this attitude:

"There are those who question, 'What projects have Balay Mindanaw really provided?' because they want big projects, they want to identify it as 'Wow! The project is very expensive, like buildings.' Sometimes they can't appreciate it because they really want to see are those big projects. The secret is that Balay Mindanaw and the barangay council work together for those documents, to make things happen."
— Participant 3, Former Barangay Kagawad.

While infrastructure and material resources are understandably a priority, BMFI's support is also subject to its reliance on external donors and counterpart funding arrangements with government agencies, LGUs, and provincial, regional, and national level administrative bodies. Participants expressed frustration over lengthy approval processes for project proposals, implementation delays even after being approved, gaps in inter-departmental coordination, and only receiving partial funding. For example, only securing enough funding to install a small section of water pipes or road pavement. Although these are beyond BMFI's control, over time the persistence of unmet expectations—alongside BMFI's role in securing funding for barangays —could risk the organization being held accountable when outcomes consistently fall short of meeting community needs and aspirations.

There were also varying levels of understanding regarding BMFI's role in procuring resources. While some participants were able to describe the processes, many expressed uncertainty, simply referring to BMFI as "buying" them things:

"There was one time it was flooding here, I asked Balay Mindanaw if they have a water filtration system. They told me yes. I don't ask how they get it, as long as they give it. [...] Can I ask, Balay Mindanaw doesn't have their own budget for infrastructure, right, they're supposed to be more on capacity building?"
— Participant 13, LDRRMO Head of Office.

"They conducted some CPC, asked us what is important in the barangay, the vehicle is what we received. [...] We don't know how it was processed, what matters is they gave it to us."
— Barangay Health Worker, Focus Group Discussion 2.



It would help if Balay Mindanaw could speed up responding to our needs, sometimes they can't be fast enough. [...] The proposals for garbage segregation and streetlights were proposed a long time ago, around 2022. The garbage segregation is not yet approved but the street-light proposal was approved in 2024. So we just wait.

Water [portable water installation], which we've been requesting for a long time, still hasn't been addressed. [...] They [Balay Mindanaw] always say to us, 'we don't have funds anymore, you really have to stand on your own' but we still have many asking for help.

— Participant 2, Indigenous Women's Association Leader.

What was agreed here was a solar lights project from Banahao to San Isidro. A program of works was submitted to the Governor. An amount was allocated. They said Governor Aiah Pimentel would allocate 50,000 pesos for San Isidro. But it wasn't completed. It was supposed to be done in 2024, but until now nothing has arrived or been done. [...] The money can't be released unless it's through the Program of Works and there has to be an agency counterpart. Even though Ma'am Che did something for it, there was no help from the governor. [...] Maybe Balay Mindanaw can help us really push it through, make it happen.

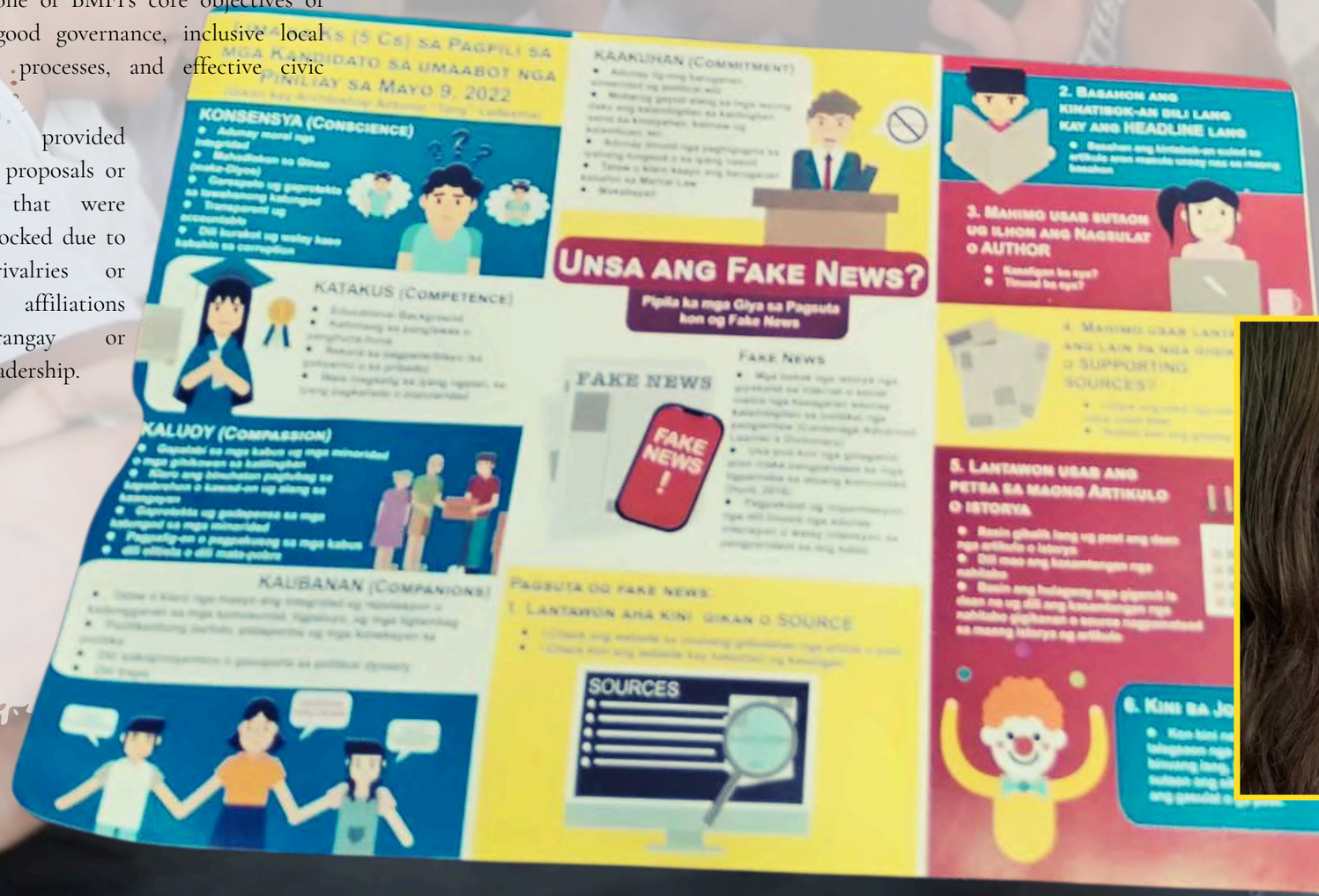
— Participant 11, Women's Association Member.

Barriers to Inclusive Governance: Political Colors and CSO Autonomy

CSO participants identified "political colors" as an obstacle to their organizations' plans, proposals, and accomplishments. This challenge is significant, given its potential to undermine one of BMFI's core objectives of promoting good governance, inclusive local development processes, and effective civic engagement.

Participants provided examples of proposals or resolutions that were stalled or blocked due to political rivalries or conflicting affiliations with barangay or municipal leadership.

"Five of us Women's Associations proposed a resolution to the Sangunniang Bayan to sit as members on a Local Special Body so that we'll be the ones to solve and mediate cases involving women at the municipal level. But because of the upcoming election there seems to be political conflict. Our Sagunniang Bayan knows that some of us aren't in line with them. That's why our resolution is stagnant. There are people who really get used by politicians. It can't be avoided. For example, someone would say, 'Ah, these aren't my people, I won't support them.' That's the life here in the Philippines."
— Participant 12, Women's Association Member.





> *— That's what political colors means.*
>
> *— I'm Team Hugpong, I get Ayuda, she's Team Gugma. They don't. Team Hugpong is really at the top, they're the biggest group in Surigao del Sur. But in our area, it's Team Gugma that's in the municipality, in Lianga. And those in Team Gugma can't directly go to the Governor [of Surigao del Sur] because they're not aligned.*
>
> *— What are the challenges here? They won't help you if you're red or green.*
>
> *— They can't approach for projects, can't ask for help.*
>
> *— What I want is for this to end. Whoever wins [the election], whoever is given aid or benefits, it should be given to all the people. Let go of these political colors.*
>
> **Participants, Focus Group Discussion 1.**

When asked about the impacts of BMFI's activities in his purok, one purok president and Fisherfolk Association member said that he had not really felt any, attributing this largely to not being aligned with the barangay captain:

"When I was first elected, the flow between me and the community was good. But what's happened is the barangay council chose a different person, just appointed by Hugpong. This confused people about which leader to approach, like with Ayuda. The purok chairman is supposed to provide that list of people, but I was surprised because I hadn't submitted one. They went ahead and made their own list. [...] We have this weekly clean-up drive, but the problem is some people don't do it because they say 'those who were given help should do it, not us who don't receive anything.'

When we speak out or ask questions about the BDP at the barangay forum, it's useless, nothing happens. That's why the purok stopped asking. [...] The thing here in Surigao, what really causes divisions is this party-party thing. If you're part of their party, you're their priority. [...] The Fisherfolk Association was given something but it was selectively given. The people that got it were only them from the barangay captain's party, us other members got nothing. [...] There was supposed to be a boat engine from the provincial government but only one person benefited. It should have been given to the group, right? [...] Many people have lost trust because it's always the same, people say, 'only so-and-so gets the benefits.'"



— "The barangay captain will say that he's the reason why this women's group is organized in their barangay."

— "One of our partner barangays has this political dynamic, the women CSOs don't have the capacity or autonomy to decide for their organization. They depend on the decision coming from the barangay captain. And it's very challenging for me as a focal point, how to tell the barangay captain outright regarding this decision-making process. The barangay captain will want to decide, so if you're going to contradict the barangay captain he might be upset. The implications are that it's something that will lower the relationship or it will complicate the relationships with Balay Mindanaw."

— "I have this area, we went to their barangay captain's house to invite him to our paralegal training but he refused because he said that he already knows all about all the paralegals and he said, 'why will I be working with non-government organizations, I'm working for the government.' [...] It's challenging in terms of certain government employees who don't know the local code in the Philippines."

SIADOs, Group Discussion.



BLGU gatekeeping: In response to questions about how BMFI could improve the effectiveness of its programs and engagement, some BLGU participants exhibited attitudes of gatekeeping toward CSO access to funding, project opportunities, and even participation in trainings, citing what they saw as failures of past livelihood projects. Their recommendations included BMFI coordinating more closely with the barangay council so that the council could "screen" and "vet" organizations deemed to be "trustworthy" and "skilled" enough. One LGU participant even proposed that leadership selection of CSOs should be determined by the barangay captain. These recommendations may reflect a broader misunderstanding of institutional boundaries, where civil society is treated as a sector to be managed rather than as independent partners. The extent to which such mindsets extend beyond a few LGU officials warrants further investigation, as it is a barrier to genuine sectoral and non-governmental participation in governance.



"What I mean is that the barangay council is the umbrella, they hold the associations, they manage and give projects to them. So, we should be the ones to validate, check on them because most of the time that's why [social enterprise] businesses fail. [...] I really feel that the money given to them was wasted because those associations Balay Mindanaw helped, especially the ones with charcoal [briquettes], we should have validated them."

— Participant 8, Barangay Kagawad.

Unsustainable Micro-Enterprises: Debt and Mismanagement

Another challenge raised by CSO participants was the financial and operational failure of livelihood projects involving micro-enterprises, particularly sari-sari stores. While some noted that their barangays were relatively fortunate in securing livelihood projects, these enterprises tend to be short-lived, struggling to survive beyond the initial phase of implementation. Issues initially described as a "lack of stock" or "having empty shelves" revealed deeper issues of financial mismanagement such as members borrowing from the enterprise's capital or purchasing stock on credit which they are then unable to repay, ultimately depleting funds and making restocking or recovery unfeasible. These challenges are then compounded by waning interest and declining member involvement over time.

"But now there's nothing anymore, just the cooler, there's nothing inside it. A lack of stock. It's all debt. The members borrowed money or bought stock on credit, then they can't take action [repay for goods bought on credit] because there's still armed conflict in the uplands and they can't access their farms. [...] If I'm going to say it, well, Balay Mindanaw kind of supported us in the beginning. It's just that now the store is in debt, that's why it's stuck, there's not even any rice anymore. What will I do about that? That really is my problem now."
— Participant 2, Indigenous Women's Association Leader.

The 'faltering performance' of cooperatives was an issue identified in the 2001 assessment of BMFI's programs, citing groups being 'short on fresh capital and bereft of people with managerial skills'. It is further noted:

"BMFI is faced with the situation of rescuing, rehabilitating, and reengineering cooperatives in their service areas. BMFI itself is questioning the wisdom of reengineering cooperatives which could take time and deplete limited resources."
— Perucho 2001, 335, 347.

> *Actually, our barangay is really lucky because whatever livelihood programs there are, we do get them. Like PAMANA, we got that, but it stopped. It can't get developed further because there is a lack of management. [...] And the members too, they don't cooperate, they just want to receive money.*
> **— Women's Association Member, Focus Group Discussion 1.**





Balay Mindanaw gave us a store, it was related to DSWD's Sustainable Livelihood Program, PAMANA. The DSWD gave us P300,000 which we used as capital and now only a small amount is left, around P15,000. Balay Mindanaw bought us a refrigerator.

Members just keep taking, like in our rice store, some just take on credit and then don't pay it back. That's why it fails, that's how things go here. [...] The store' is still there but we don't have anything to sell.

We initially had 48 members but some no longer participate. When we have meetings, they don't attend. Especially those who have a big amount of debt or owe other members. [...] That's the problem, they initially join, once there's stock they borrow and then don't pay anymore.

It's really difficult, I don't know how to keep people committed. At the beginning, sure, they show up, especially when there's money involved. But if it's about working to earn, like planting crops and waiting, then no-one wants to be part of it anymore.

— Participant 11, Women's Association Member.

PROGRAM RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are based on: (i) participant discussions of core priorities and concerns, and (ii) the identification of factors that challenge long-term effectiveness and sustainability of BMFI's programs. These recommendations are made with the understanding that organizational, human, and financial resources must be considered, particularly given BMFI's existing broad scope of activities and the already substantial workloads of staff.

Immediate/Short-Term

Integration of mentorship-based leadership succession training into existing programs: As previously identified, one challenge to the long-term sustainability of BMFI's institutional and capacity-building trainings is the limited transfer of knowledge and skills to newly appointed or incoming BLGU officials and staff. This presents an opportunity for BLGUs to take a more active role in establishing internal leadership and mentoring mechanisms that institutionalize professional development, and reducing the reliance on BMFI to continuously bridge capacity gaps. To support this, a mentor-based leadership succession training program could be jointly developed by BMFI and BLGUs, pairing current leaders and staff with new appointees. Practical components may include accompaniment-learning where mentees observe and assist their assigned mentors in daily tasks and responsibilities, thereby gaining direct exposure through experiential training.

Prioritize writing skills development in the formulation of BDPs and DRRMPs: Collaborative document development could be integrated as a complementary component of BDP and DRRMP planning and formulation. Building on the mentorship-based model, this could take the form of writing clinics held after the initial assessment and planning phases. These sessions would bring together BLGU staff, members of technical working groups, and SIADOs in a co-writing process. By guiding participants through the actual drafting of documents—with live editing and peer learning—such sessions would not only improve writing competency but also enhance understandings of how plans are evaluated and funded at higher levels of government. Over time, this has the potential to reduce the dependence on BMFI staff in taking the lead on drafting, hopefully promoting greater confidence and ownership among BLGU officials and staff.

Implementation of monitoring feedback loop mechanisms on the application of skills and knowledge from capacity-building workshops: Building on BMFI's existing pre- and post-training evaluations assessing factors such as what went well, what was observed in the participants, what was challenging, and what can be improved, a more structured and long-term monitoring-/feedback loop could track how effectively participants retain and apply learnt knowledge and skills over time. Follow-up consultations and focus group discussions could be conducted approximately twelve months after initial trainings and workshops. These sessions would incorporate case study analyses, providing participants the opportunity to reflect on their post-training application such as strategies employed, approaches taken, challenges encountered, and results achieved. These would also serve as a chance to revisit and reinforce core training content. Establishing continuity in data collection—from initial assessments through to 12-month follow-ups—would support the development of a more robust evidence base to inform the ongoing refinement and adaptation of delivery and content over time.

Strengthen the monitoring of micro-enterprise progress and follow-up support sessions: Given the persistent challenges surrounding the operational, financial and long-term sustainability of livelihood projects, BMFI could introduce more structured follow-up procedures through its existing social enterprise coaching and mentoring activities. While current action plan monitoring offers a useful foundation, there is a need to go further by integrating regular tracking of business performance indicators and identifying early warning signs of decline. This would enable more timely interventions to help enterprises recover or adapt before problems become entrenched. Regular check-in sessions would offer continued guidance, troubleshoot emerging issues and reinforce accountability—strengthening adaptive support mechanisms and improving the long-term viability of community enterprises.

Long-Term Directions

Sustainable livelihood projects—prioritizing resource continuity and market linkages into project proposals and planning: To strengthen the long-term viability and self-sufficiency of livelihood initiatives, project proposals and action plans should integrate clear strategies to support end-to-end economic activities, from production to market access. These may include:

- Clear plans for replenishing capital, inputs, and equipment to ensure continuity of operations.
- Market access strategies that identify and build relationships with potential buyers, wholesalers or partner businesses to support sustained income.
- Alignment of project design and proposal development with the long-term operational needs of micro-enterprises. Clearly outline how these will be maintained or replenished beyond initial funding. By making these a central focus during planning and design, there can be better anticipation of future constraints and reduce the risk of premature stagnation or failure in projects.

Prioritize advocacy and stakeholder linkages for Indigenous Peoples: Given some IP participants' senses of underrepresentation, BMFI should continue to prioritize their advocacy for IP communities as a marginalized group, strengthening linkages with external stakeholders to support IP rights and development priorities. With the prominence of land- and resource-related conflicts being a key issue in the Caraga region, this would also include sustained efforts toward CADT recognition and related land tenure initiatives.

Expand regional and global engagement opportunities for local partners: Building on existing initiatives, such as BMFI's membership in Action Asia, it would be valuable to pursue additional funding for local partners to participate more regularly in regional and global dialogue platforms and events. Some participants highlighted the value of attending gatherings hosted by networks such as the Action Asia Peace Network, and the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders. Access to these spaces were appreciated as opportunities for fostering knowledge exchange, peer learning, and the sharing of best practices among practitioners in related fields.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The following research areas are proposed with a view to promote the role of BMFI in documenting peacebuilding lessons learnt that can be shared with practitioners, organizations and donors, elevate the stories of partners and communities, and generate an internal evidence-base to inform and ground the organization's policy proposals and advocacy.

Community experiences and perspectives:

- This evaluation focused on individuals directly engaged with BMFI. The next step would be to include general community members in future research to capture a broader and more diverse range of perspectives from those not directly engaged with BMFI or who have not participated in BMFI activities. Their experiences and insights are equally important for identifying indirect impacts, cascade effects, and potentially unrecognized gaps in BMFI's work. Youth, in particular, emerged as a key affected group, frequently mentioned in discussions about concerns and priorities for the future.

Cross-site study of Balay Mindanaw's partner localities:

- A comparative study across other sites where BMFI operates could enrich and broaden understandings of the impacts and effectiveness of its interventions and programs. Site selection could be guided by already-observed successes or challenges identified by staff, with the goal of exploring:
  - Lessons learnt and potentially transferrable best practices.
  - Contextual factors influencing outcomes (socio-economic, political, cultural, environmental, security and conflict-related conditions).
  - Cross-site patterns or variations in effectiveness, sustainability, and partnership dynamics.

LGU-CSO socio-political landscape—dynamics, challenges and opportunities:

- Interviews and FGDs with CSO partners highlighted concerning power dynamics at the barangay and municipal level that may be hindering their civic engagement. with strengthening civil society capacities for good governance and promoting meaningful participation in governance as a core pillar of BMFI's programs, further exploration could help clarify the scope and impact of these government-civil society dynamics, uncover additional contributing factors, and inform more effective approaches and strategies for navigating and addressing such challenges, particularly for CSO partners.

Strengthening Indigenous advocacy and partnerships:

- For IP participants, the evaluation revealed sentiments of frustrations and disappointment that their lived realities and experiences are often overlooked, insufficiently understood, and that more could be done to ensure their voices and needs are heard. An in-depth study combining both an evaluative and exploratory agenda could help identify gaps, improve programming and advocacy efforts, while also amplifying these lived experiences and peacebuilding journeys to a broader audience.

Long-term/continuing challenges of land and resource conflicts:

- As noted by the SIADOs, Caraga is widely known for persistent land and resource conflicts—an issue made more urgent by the reservation of mining sites likely to intensify existing challenges and tensions and create new ones. Key concerns also include struggles over CADTs, CALTs, and Ancestral Domain Sustainable Development and Protection Plans (ADSDPP), especially around cultural preservation and environmental stewardship. Participants consistently identified land conflicts and disputes as the most common and severe challenge they face, with disputes often resurfacing despite initial resolutions. A focused study on land tenure—including oral histories of land use, tenure, and cultivation—would build on BMFI's existing insights from previous and ongoing community consultations and land dispute mediation trainings. This could deepen understandings and wider sharing of community perspectives, inform policy advocacy, supporting more responsive and locally-grounded interventions.