

## **Brief Report on the USIP Peacebuilding Project in Mindanao**

In 2013, the Center for Philippine Studies (CPS) obtained a two-year grant from the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) to implement a peacebuilding project in Mindanao in cooperation with the Mindanao State University (it involves three campuses in Marawi, Iligan and Tawi-Tawi). This project attempted to develop positive attitudes toward intergroup understanding among undergraduate students representing Christians, Muslims and Lumads (tribal communities). This project has been successfully completed, with good results.

Entitled “Teaching Enriched History and Bridging Cultures: In Search of Peace in Mindanao, Philippines,” the goals of this project are: (1) Enhance the capacity of history teachers, and (2) Early prevention of conflict among Muslims, Lumads (tribal groups), and Christians at Mindanao State University. This initiative project is directed by Dr. Federico V. Magdalena, with the assistance of three coordinators from MSU (Dr. Faina Ulindang, Dr. Jamail Kamlian, and Dr. Samuel Anonas) to implement it in the three MSU campuses.

The settings of the project are ideal and relevant for peacebuilding initiatives that support the ongoing peace process in Mindanao. MSU is the second largest state university and the only institution that provides public education to minority groups, particularly the Muslims, so as to integrate them to the national body politic. Marawi is predominantly a Muslim area and so is the MSU main campus established there. In contrast, Iligan is predominantly Christian area, and offers a variety of technical courses for all students. Muslim students there are in the minority. Tawi-Tawi is predominantly a Sama community, and the campus has a good mixture of Christian, Muslim and Lumad students (Bajau).

Workshops are held for teachers to enhance their capacity for handling a local history course (Hist 3 - History of Muslims and Lumads in Mindanao). These teachers also developed a teaching manual for the course through the initiative of Prof. Juvanni Caballero and 20 faculty members as editor and contributors. Said history course has been required for graduation in the MSU undergraduate program, and is chosen as the site of engagement between teachers and students. It has been enriched to teach students the virtues of peacemaking so they may serve as bridges of cross-cultural understanding in their own communities. About 8,500 students and 45 teachers have participated in the peacebuilding effort. The project ended in August 30, 2015 and the final report submitted to USIP.

Teacher capacity building was accomplished by holding five workshops (2 of these are forums on research methodology and Focus Group Discussion) in Iligan City, Mindanao for the teachers. During the workshops, they discussed the history of Muslims and Lumads in Mindanao (Hist 3) and revised it accordingly, with a responsive syllabus. Then, they developed a manual with readings enriched with peace concepts in every chapter or module. At the end of the project, this manual was completed and became operational as the text for teaching local history in five MSU campuses, including MSU Naawan and MSU Maigo. The project team hopes that all MSU campuses will eventually adapt this text for the said course, which is mandatory for the undergraduate program.

Each semester, students enrol in this local history course ingested with peace education content to realize goal number two, while at the same time developing favorable attitudes toward multiculturalism, non-violence, inter-ethnic integration and harmony. Changes in attitudes and behaviors as a consequence of exposure to the course have been determined statistically using pretest

and posttest methodology. At the end of the course, we ask: has the introduction of enriched history course to students made a difference?

More specifically, has the revised Hist 3 curriculum produced the desired attitudes and behaviors that lead to a culture of peace?

To answer this, we constructed a questionnaire that contains personal information and deals with six indicators of attitudes, knowledge and behavior supposed to provide the building blocks of a culture of peace:

1. *Social distance* – extent to which individuals display deep affection and favorable attitudes toward members of other ethnic groups. The attitudes involve liking others as friend, neighbor, and wanting to marry one of their kind.
2. *Integration/Intergroup Contact* – variety of interactions, which include quantity of friends from other ethnic groups.
3. *Trust* – degree of trust toward government (local and national), including other group members different from one's own.
4. *Harmony* – frequency of cooperation or extent of working together in solidarity, especially in important group work.
5. *Knowledge* – degree of knowledge of relevant facts (including peace education) about Mindanao history and local culture.
6. *Peace activism* – student involvement in activities that promote the welfare of marginalized groups, especially Lumads and Moros, such as participation in rallies.

During the first year, it is interesting that significant changes in knowledge (of local history) and attitudes (social distance, integration, and trust) did happen among students in Marawi and Iligan but not among students in Taw-Tawi (though their knowledge of local history improved). The lack of a consistent pattern of changes was attributed to teacher factor (some are still adjusting), and course content not delivered uniformly (i.e., the ideal of 30% peace education).

However, starting in the second year, more significant changes occurred. During the first semester, all three campuses showed that students have improved in knowledge, social distance, integration and to some extent harmony (only Tawi-Tawi did not show a significant change). Student activism was low or non-existent, except for MSU Marawi where the students also showed much sympathy for the Bangsamoro struggle.

The second semester showed remarkable improvements for the three campuses in practically all areas (knowledge, social distance, integration, trust, harmony, and activism). However, only MSU Marawi students did not show any significant change in harmony. We interpret these findings to mean that the project has finally achieved its purpose, at least by making students imbibe values and attitudes necessary for multicultural living. However, it is interesting that during this semester, none of the three campuses had sympathized with the Bangsamoro struggle. Part of the reason may have something to do with the tragic Mamasapano incident, when 44 members of the police and 18 MILF warriors were killed as the former were trying to capture a "foreign terrorist" in the area controlled by the rebels.

We also noted that changes in peacebuilding attitudes seem to occur more among students considered to be in the “majority group” in each of the three campus. That is, Maranao students from MSU Marawi, Christian students from Iligan, and Sama students from Tawi-Tawi are more disposed to exhibit significant changes in attitudes and behaviors than other ethnic groups. It seems that “minorities” are somewhat resistant to change. These findings have some implications for policy.

Gender also matters (i.e., females appear more receptive to peacebuilding), though the trend it is not consistent in all campuses.

Overall, results have been reported to be favorable in at least three dimensions of attitudes (integration, social distance, trust) and in developing peace activism among students. Students in the three campuses have benefitted in the project, particularly those in Marawi and Iligan which account for over three-fourths of student participants during the quasi-experiment on peacebuilding.

The project then recommended steps to sustain the project in the future, to continue the offering of enriched history that uses the history manual published as a textbook in all MSU campuses. If possible, all institutions of higher learning in Mindanao should do the same. It is noteworthy to mention here that there is now a bill in Philippine Congress to make the teaching of Muslim history mandatory in practically all levels.

Finally, the project also enabled the participation of some members of the project team in conferences. CPS invited three Mindanao coordinators - Dr. Faina Abaya-Ulindang, Dr. Samuel Anonas and Dr. Jamail Kamlian - to Honolulu in November 2013 and shared their expertise to UH and the Filipino community in a symposium on Mindanao. The project team led by Dr. Federico Magdalena also organized a panel during the 2014 Annual Conference of the Philippine Anthropological Association in Baguio City to present preliminary findings of the study. In 2015, two other members of the project (Prof. Juvanni Caballero and Dr. Mark Anthony Torres) participated in the International Conference on Philippine Studies hosted by CPS in Honolulu.

A detailed, final report is available [HERE](#), or from the author, or the CPS website (<http://emindanao.com>).

This report does not reflect the views of, nor is it endorsed by, the United States Institute of Peace whose financial assistance made the project feasible. Whatever errors this report may contain are the responsibility of the authors and not of USIP.

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