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STRENGTHENING CAPACITIES OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN CARAGA AND BARMM FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE



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01 Women-led CSOs unify vision to champion community initiatives for Lianga, SDS

Five women-led Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) collaborated to host a stakeholders' forum in Lianga, Surigao del Sur. The aim was to present 67 project proposals to 20 stakeholders, addressing the diverse needs of citizens in their respective barangays and municipality.

These CSOs, including the Kalinaw Tu Kabudagan Women's Organization (KTK), Banahao Women's Association (BWA), San Isidro Women's Welfare Association (SIWWA), San Pedro Women's Association (SPWA), and St. Christine's Women Association (SCWA), merged their efforts after thorough deliberation on what projects to conduct within their organizations. They recognized the value of pooling resources to ensure a comprehensive presentation of

proposals and to garner the attention of target stakeholders.

Rowena Quezada, treasurer of SPWA, explained that the stakeholders' forum was chosen as the ideal platform to showcase and advocate for the proposed projects, which were collectively identified by the civil society organizations within the community.

Before the forum, these organizations engaged in consultations with other CSOs through the 'Community Peace Conversation' (CPC), discussing concerns and issues affecting their communities. This approach allowed for the integration of various perspectives and ensured a comprehensive representation of community needs.

LAWANUN WOMEN ADVOCATES FOR MALNUTRITION PREVENTION

A World Food Programme case study in 2023 revealed that approximately 49% of individuals in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) experience chronic malnutrition, with 49% of children under five affected by stunting, marking the highest prevalence in the country. Chronic malnutrition, characterized by physical

and cognitive growth delays, is primarily identified through stunting, referring to the inability to reach expected height for age. Recognizing the urgent need for action, the Lawanun Women's Producers Cooperative (LWPC) launched an awareness campaign on malnutrition prevention in Lumbatan municipality, Lanao del Sur, BARMM.

"We recognized the need to conduct a malnutrition prevention campaign in our community, as we observed many children showing signs of malnutrition, particularly in remote mountainous areas where access to proper nutrition is limited. Parents lack knowledge about providing adequate nutrition for their children," explained Malica L. Duca, secretary of the cooperative.

According to UNICEF Philippines, malnutrition has been a persistent issue in Lanao del Sur due to poverty, remote location, and limited access to essential health and nutrition services. These geographic obstacles hinder families from accessing timely healthcare and support. Additionally, traditional customs and a lack of awareness and cultural beliefs significantly impact dietary preferences.

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“*We recognized the need to conduct a malnutrition prevention campaign in our community, as we observed many children showing signs of malnutrition, particularly in remote mountainous areas where access to proper nutrition is limited. Parents lack knowledge about providing adequate nutrition for their children.*



"It is very common for mothers here to provide easy and cheap food like instant noodles and canned food for the children. We thought that providing any food as long as the children can eat is already okay," says Rohainie Abdulrahman, a participant in the awareness campaign.

LWPC gathered recent data from the municipal Rural Health Unit (RHU) to pinpoint barangays with the most severe malnutrition cases, deliberately selecting six barangays with a high rate of malnutrition. These are far-flung areas with difficult access due to poor roads. The group devised activities that included door-to-door data collection of children's body mass index (BMI) information, which was subsequently submitted to the RHU. The collected data will also serve as a monitoring tool for identifying children needing proper nutrition interventions.

LWPC conducted a 3-day awareness campaign in six target barangays, inviting a speaker from the RHU to cover topics such as the importance of a balanced diet, proper hygiene, breastfeeding for infants, and ensuring immunization of children.

"As a mother, it's crucial to monitor children's weight to ensure it's appropriate for their age. Additionally, I learned that malnutrition affects not only thin children but also overweight ones. We should really encourage our children to consume vegetables and fruits, not just rice," shared a campaign participant.

Adhering to their advocacy as health workers, LWPC members, who are also volunteer rural health workers, pursued a campaign aimed at preventing malnutrition, aligning closely with their mission. "During one of our trainings in this project, we were enlightened to focus on an advocacy issue, and we chose to advocate for children's nutrition. Now, we are integrating our learning and are fully committed to this cause, particularly since the majority of us are barangay health workers. The capacity-building training provided by the project greatly assisted us in crafting our proposal and planning for this initiative," says Isnihayah L. Hadji Carim, a member of the LWPC.

Despite the considerable challenge of addressing malnutrition in the area, the LWPC recognizes the necessity of seeking assistance and support from the LGUs to sustain their initiatives.

With the help of MARADECA, the LWPC has become a member of the municipal Peace and Order Council, a local special body (LSB) of Lumbatan, and has applied for membership in the Local Health Board. Membership in LSBs ensures pathways for advancing community interests and integrating people's needs and recommendations in local development plans.

"We are striving to become more proactive in connecting with the LGUs to raise concerns and advocate for the community. We aim to continue monitoring these children and pursue further projects connected to our advocacy," says Duca.

CAPACITY BUILDING OF CSOS



Our selected 34 Civil Society Organizations underwent tailored capacity-building training to enhance their organizational, advocacy, and governance skills.

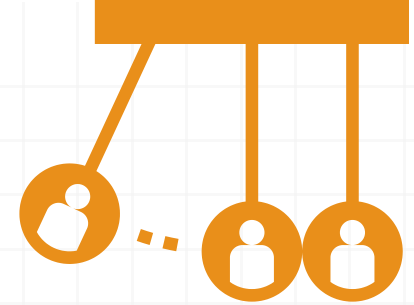


Balay Mindanaw Foundation Inc. (BMFI) and the Maranao People Development Center Inc. (MARADECA) facilitated various training sessions, mentoring, and coaching for these CSOs.

MARANAO CSO AS ALLIES IN PROMOTING WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN LANA DEL SUR

Gender roles are influenced by cultural and religious traditions and can vary among different communities and ethnic groups. The Maranaos, a predominantly Muslim ethnic group in Mindanao, traditionally see women as primary caregivers and homemakers responsible for managing household affairs. While women's roles in Muslim areas are evolving due to modernization, education, and women's empowerment advocacies, traditional gender roles persist in some communities. The Marantao Women's Dressmaking Service Cooperative (MWSDSC) recognizes that awareness campaigns in remote areas can increase acceptance of women's rights and help stop gender-based violence.

PROJECT UPDATE:



34 CSOs After 17 Months

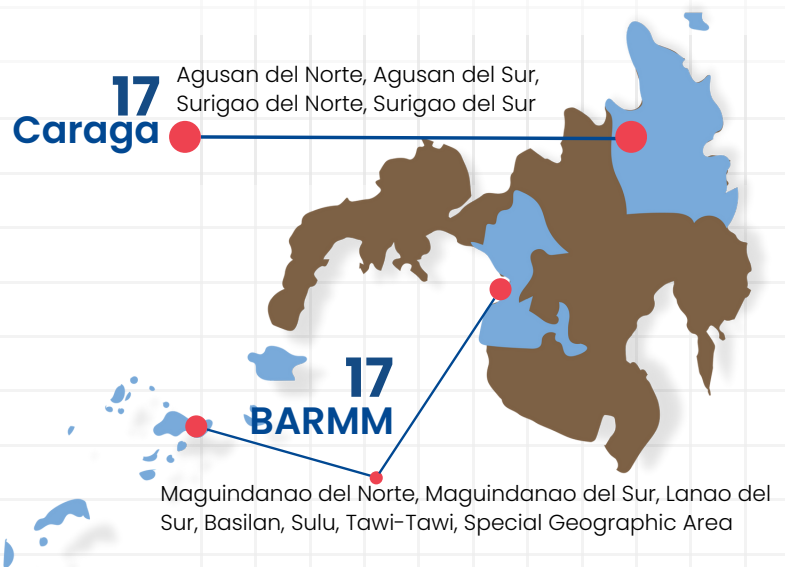
Funded by the European Union and implemented by People in Need Philippines, Balay Mindanaw Foundation Inc., and Maranao People Development Center Inc., the Strengthening Capacities of Civil Society in Caraga and BARMM for Good Governance project works with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and CSO Networks in the Caraga and BARMM regions to strengthen their role in public decision-making at the local, regional, and national levels through:

 **tailored technical assistance**
 **joint initiatives with LGUs**
 **access to financial support**



30 CSOs 4 CSO networks

are supported by the project



OCA & SAP

Conducted participatory assessment using the **organizational capacity assessment tool (OCAT)** and the development/revision of **Strategic Action Plans (SAP)**.



6 capacity building needs:

- Influencing the public sphere
- Resource Mobilization
- Skills and capacities needed in the organization
- Communication plan and strategies
- Projects, Activities, and Services
- Organizational Management - Finance and Admin



34 OCA conducted

34 SAP formulated

Tailored technical assistance



8 training/workshops conducted

279 CSO members attended

- 
- Organizational Management
 - Financial Management
 - Resource Mobilization
 - Monitoring and Evaluation
 - Advocacy, Networking, Lobbying
 - Communications
 - Strategic Planning
 - Advocacy Workshop

CSO registration and LSB accreditation/membership



Before the project, only 26 out of 34 CSOs were registered with government accrediting bodies. Some CSOs were not registered, while others were still in the early stages.

25

Registration to government accrediting bodies

34

As part of the technical assistance, CSOs were helped to register with government accrediting bodies. Now, all 34 CSOs are registered.

Before the project, only 18 out of 34 CSOs were members of or accredited to local special bodies.

18

Membership/accreditation to local special bodies

26

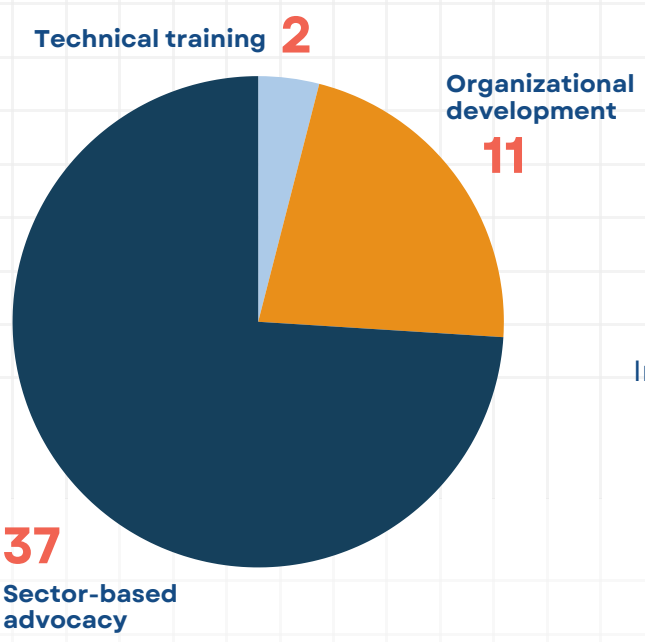
CSOs were also assisted in becoming members of local special bodies or being accredited by the Sangguniang Bayan.

Financial support

Financial Support to Third Parties 1

50 Projects/activities supported
 18 BARMM | 32 Caraga

P4,782,860
 Total amount granted



Target groups:



Advocacy:

- Agriculture
- Indigenous People's rights
- Children's rights and education
- Multi-sectoral (women empowerment, children's education, environment)
- Economic needs
- Conflict resolution and peace
- Environment
- Out-of-school youth concerns
- Health and nutrition
- Reproductive health
- Internal displacement
- Women empowerment

"In the planning phase, we conducted a CPC inviting representatives from different CSOs in our respective barangays to incorporate their ideas into the agenda. We collectively identified community issues and needs and came up with several proposals and projects focused on social aspects, economic/livelihood initiatives, infrastructure development, and advocacy campaigns," said Amalyn O. Plaza, chairperson of SCWA.

Championing Advocacies to Address Community Issues

As part of their project initiatives, the five women CSOs conducted advocacy campaigns addressing critical issues in their communities, such as teenage pregnancy, responsible parenthood, Indigenous Peoples' (IP) rights, and organic farming.



We remain committed to collaborating with various stakeholders for the development and peace of our barangay.

Lorna Mapula, San Isidro Women's Welfare Association

In barangays Banahao, St. Christine, and San Pedro in Lianga, teenage pregnancy became a pressing concern due to the surge in cases over the last three years, according to the Rural Health Unit. In response, these three women CSOs conducted awareness campaigns focusing on reproductive health and responsible parenting, aiming to empower teenagers and parents with knowledge on positive choices and create informed and supportive communities. They partnered with local authorities, healthcare professionals, and schools to strengthen their efforts.



"We prioritized addressing teenage pregnancy and responsible parenting because Lianga has one of the highest rates of teenage pregnancy in the Caraga region and we even ranked as the highest in HIV cases in Surigao del Sur province," said Plaza.

Meanwhile, in barangay Diatagon, where Kalinaw Tu Kabudagan is based, the IP community continues to face discrimination due to lack of knowledge about IP laws. In response, KTK

decided to conduct an awareness campaign targeting schools and households. "As an IP women CSO, our goal is to deepen the IP community's understanding of our law so we can assert our rights confidently. The Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA) has not been widely disseminated among the IPs.

Through an awareness campaign targeting schools and households, we aim to inform more IPs about IPRA, particularly the youth and those who may not fully understand it yet," said Susan M. Rivas, KTK chairperson.

Lianga also faces significant malnutrition concerns. According to the 2022 Regional Nutrition Situation report by the Department of Health National Nutrition Council, Lianga ranks among the top seven municipalities in Caraga on the prevalence of underweight children and among the top six on the prevalence of stunting cases. In response, the San Isidro Welfare's Association recognized the need to establish an organic and communal garden in their barangay to help alleviate malnutrition.

Building Partnerships and Securing Support

The initiative led by the women's CSOs received praise from stakeholders at the national, regional, provincial, municipal, and barangay levels. The forum became an avenue for stakeholders to showcase their programs and services, with a commitment of support to the CSOs and their proposed projects.

The Office of the Vice President committed P150,000 to all five CSOs for their proposed livelihood projects. An additional P500,000 will be given to Banahao Women's Association and San Isidro Women's Welfare Association for their proposed livelihood projects.

National government agencies have committed to training and campaign programs in agriculture, gender awareness, and entrepreneurship. Others also committed to providing equipment, medicines and medical supplies, road concreting, services like mass weddings, free birth registration, and provision of health insurance for barangay volunteers, and more.

Among the 67 proposed projects of the CSOs, 39% or 26 of them secured the government's commitment right on the spot. All the other proposals will be reviewed and evaluated by concerned stakeholders.

"We will continue lobbying for our advocacy and projects by actively participating in the barangay and municipal development councils. We remain committed to collaborating with various stakeholders for the development and peace of our barangay," Mapula said.

Present stakeholders in the forum included the barangay and municipal local government units and offices of Lianga, the Office of the Vice President, the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources, Department of Agriculture, Department of Agrarian Reform, Department of Health, Department of Labor and Employment, Department of Public Works and Highways, Department of Social Welfare and Development, Department of Trade and Industry, North Eastern Mindanao State University, Philippine Coconut Authority, Philippine National Police, and the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority, among others.



According to Nashiba P. Macabando, Chairperson of the cooperative, gender-based violence (GBV) is a problem in the Maranao community. 2022 data from the Philippine National Police (PNP)-Marantao revealed that only two cases were officially reported in the area, while many others go unreported due to cultural norms and a lack of awareness about women's rights.

To address the problem, the group conducted an awareness campaign on gender equality funded under the Financial Support to Third Parties (FSTP), a key component of the Strengthening Capacities of Civil Society in Caraga and BARMM for Good Governance project. The association aims to promote understanding of women's rights to prevent gender-based violence.

"Women want to speak up but are hindered by traditions and shame. With the FSTP, we saw an opportunity to campaign about women's rights to

help eradicate gender-based violence, especially in remote areas," Macabando said.

The Marantao Women partnered with the local government unit (LGU) of Marantao and the PNP to undergo gender awareness training. They participated in a seminar-workshop focused on gender sensitivity, violence against women and children, the Bawal Bastos Law (Safe Streets and Public Spaces Act), and referral pathways. Following the training, they conducted an awareness campaign in areas that many agencies had not yet reached.

"We discovered that many agencies have not reached several areas due to distance and other circumstances. We mapped out these areas and diversified our target audiences to include women, youth, mixed groups, and even farmers, who are predominantly men, to cover all sectors," said Asliah P. Abdullah, bookkeeper of MWDSC.

Far-aliah Ampuan, a participant in the campaign, mentioned that the program provided an excellent platform for

women to learn about their legal rights. She noted that it became a safe space for women to speak up and interact since most of the topics and examples were relatable to them.

The campaign proved to be highly effective. I found the discussion on referral pathways particularly valuable as it broadened our understanding of who to approach for reporting, especially if one feels uncomfortable with official channels. The speakers highlighted that we could go to our Ulama (scholars of Islamic doctrine and law) or Datu (Indigenous People chieftain). They provided us with new knowledge while ensuring alignment with our Maranao and Muslim traditions, which deeply respect our culture," Ampuan shared.

MWDSC drafted a resolution requesting the support of the LGU to conduct additional gender awareness campaigns in the remote areas of Lanao del Sur. The resolution was submitted to Marantao's LGU, which enabled the association to gain accreditation in the municipality's Local Special Body and be invited to the LGU's gender and development planning.

"We never knew that as dressmakers, we could also become advocates, especially for a cause that focuses on women's empowerment. With the partnership that we have with the LGU and the PNP, we hope that we can continue what we have started," Nashiba said.

TWO DIFFERENT PATHS, ONE SHARED GOAL: CIVIL SOCIETIES IN MAGUINDANAO, PHILIPPINES

In the heart of Maguindanao, a region challenged by militants, two Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) have emerged as beacons of hope. Tiyakap Kalilintad Inc. (TKI) and Teduray Day School Project (TDSP) share stories of empowerment and transformation through the "Strengthening Capacities of Civil Society in Caraga and BARMM for Good Governance" project.

TKI, born to address the unmet needs of internally displaced persons (IDPs) during conflict, focuses on voicing concerns and addressing grassroots issues. Reflecting on TKI's origins, Aflal Piang, TKI's Team Leader, shares, "We came up with the idea of organizing to help evacuees."



Established in 1982, TDSP responds to challenges faced by youths in mountainous areas. Noli Acosta, TDSP's Coordinator, notes, "We were mainly established to support the youth in their education by sponsoring them through our funding donors." Evolving from child-focused initiatives to community-based programs, TDSP sponsors students, supports health initiatives and livelihood activities, and advocates for child protection.

There are 34 CSOs that received technical assistance, joint initiatives with Local Government Units, and financial support to strengthen their capabilities through the "Strengthening Capacities of Civil Society in Caraga and BARMM for Good Governance" (CSO4GG) project.

"This project is an opportunity to enhance and develop our organization more to be a better ally of the people and government in the community," says Aflal Piang.

Through an intensive 3-day Strategic Plan and Advocacy Workshop under BMFI, 17



This project is an opportunity to enhance and develop our organization more to be a better ally of the people and government in the community.

Aflal Piang, Tiyakap Kalilintad Inc.



CSOs, including TKI and TDSP, received guidance in revising and updating their strategic plans and advocacy programs. The workshop has been particularly valuable, guiding them in revising and updating their old strategic plans.

"In this training, we have been guided on how to revise and update our Strategic Plan. It has been beneficial for us as this [the plan] was established 7 years ago and has not been updated, even though we have new programs," Acosta shared.

With the updated Plan serving as the basis for implementing projects in the "Financial Support to Third Parties," TKI and TDSP commit to their original purpose in the spirit of community empowerment and change in Maguindanao.

TKI will focus on enhancing the capabilities of local peace monitors and community leaders in conflict-prone areas. They will review and promote a Code of Conduct, provide orientation on peacebuilding fundamentals, and foster empathy for vulnerable groups. Trained members are expected to transmit timely and detailed protection alerts, addressing issues such as peace and security, displacement, and Grave Child Rights Violations (GCRVs). The project ensures that local authorities receive alerts promptly for appropriate action, ultimately aiming to establish a comprehensive database based on shared ground information.

TDSP dedicates itself to enhancing other organizations' capacity by emphasizing quality programs for children. They propose to strengthen the technical abilities of community partners like parents, teachers, community associations, the Social Governance Council, and the Barangay Council for the Protection of Children in organizational management. This will involve incorporating mechanisms to protect children within the framework of governance, ensuring these organizations are better equipped to provide high-quality services for the well-being of children in their communities.

The interconnected stories of TKI and TDSP showcase the transformative impact CSOs can have on communities when united by a shared commitment to service. Through collaboration and continuous improvement, these organizations stand as testaments to the strength and potential for positive change in Maguindanao.

The ongoing project serves as a bridge, fostering collaboration and enhancing their capabilities for the greater good. Aflal Piang notes, "While we are still here, we will continue to address the community's needs, especially with supportive actors helping us achieve our goals. In Islam, this is one of our forms of charity."