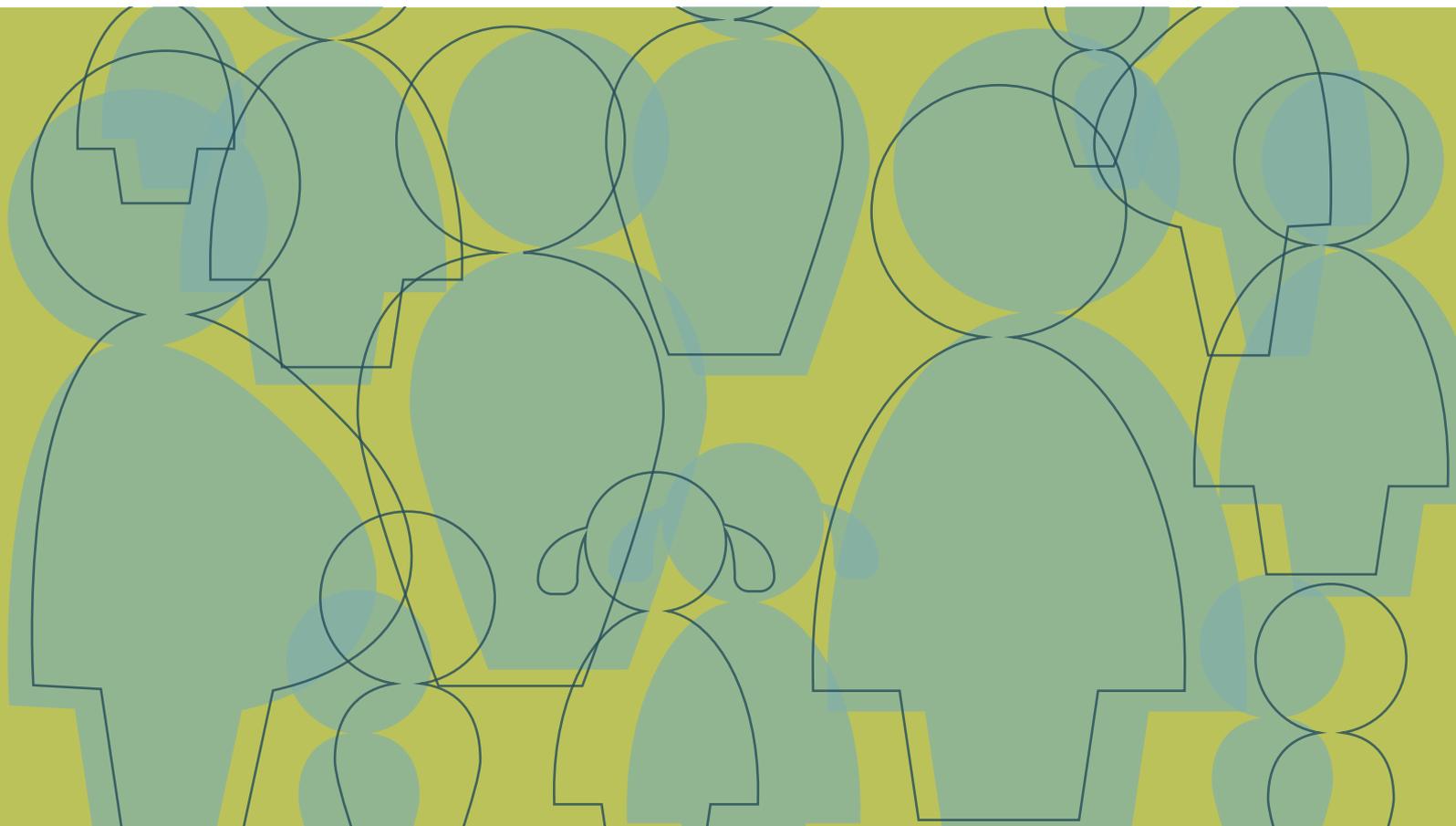


HPG working paper

Inclusion and exclusion in displacement and peacebuilding responses in Mindanao, Philippines: falling through the cracks

Maria Carmen Fernandez^{ID} and Bai Shaima Baraguir^{ID} with John Bryant^{ID}

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About the authors

ORCID numbers are given where available. Please click on the ID icon next to an author’s name in order to access their ORCID listing.

Maria Carmen (Ica) Fernandez^{ID} is an independent researcher and development practitioner (@icafernandez).

Bai Shaima (Bam) Baraguir^{ID} is an independent scholar and peace practitioner.

John Bryant^{ID} is a Senior Research Officer at HPG.

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Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
ARMM	Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao
BARMM	Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao
BARMM-READi	Bangsamoro Rapid Emergency Action on Disaster Incidence
BASULTA	Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi
BCOBARMM	Bangsamoro communities outside BARMM
BIAF	Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces
BIFF	Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters
BIWAB	Bangsamoro Islamic Women's Auxiliary Brigade
BOL	Bangsamoro Organic Law
BTA	Bangsamoro Transition Authority
BTC	Bangsamoro Transition Commission
CAB	Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro
CCA	climate change adaptation
CCT	conditional cash transfer
CDD	community-driven development
CLUP	Comprehensive Land Use Plan
CPP	Communist Party of the Philippines
CSO	civil society organisation
DRRM	disaster risk reduction management
DSWD	Department of Social Welfare and Development
FAC	Family Access Card
GIDA	geographically isolated and disadvantaged area
GPH	Government of the Philippines
HCT	Humanitarian Country Team
HPG	Humanitarian Policy Group
INGO	international non-governmental organisation
IDP	internally displaced person
IP	indigenous people
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham

JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
LGU	local government unit
MAA	Most Affected Area
MHT	Mindanao Humanitarian Team
MILF	Moro Islamic Liberation Front
MNLF	Moro National Liberation Front
MP	member of parliament
MWG	Mindanao Working Group
NCIP	National Commission on Indigenous Peoples
NDFP	National Democratic Front of the Philippines
NDRRMC	National Disaster Risk Reduction and Mitigation Council
NEDA	National Economic and Development Authority
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NHA	National Housing Authority
NMIP	non-Moro indigenous people
NPA	New People's Army
OCD	Office of Civil Defense
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
ODA	official development assistance
PDPFP	Provincial Development and Physical Framework Plan
PHP	Philippine peso
PWD	people with disabilities
TFBM	Task Force Bangon Marawi
UN	United Nations
UNDSS	UN Department for Safety and Security
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Executive summary

The Philippines is among the countries most heavily affected by internal displacement. Most of those forced from their homes live in the southern island of Mindanao, particularly in the area now known as the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), the site of cyclical environmental disasters, intermittent high-intensity armed conflict and various waves of humanitarian response efforts over the past 50 years. While a peace agreement signed in 2012 between the national government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) has led to a general reduction of violence and a new regional political autonomy, threats from various Islamic State-inspired extremist groups, flooding, landslides and earthquakes, and inter-communal conflicts and blood feuds (*rido* or *pagbanta*) continue to displace tens of thousands a year. As of the end of 2021, an estimated 65,918 families (approximately 267,278 individuals) are displaced in Mindanao, of which 37% are currently located in the BARMM (UNHCR, 2021).

This paper draws on interviews with aid practitioners, displaced persons and government officials to explore issues of inclusion and exclusion in the humanitarian and peacebuilding sectors. It uses the case of the BARMM, a region that has protracted forced displacement despite the implementation of peace agreements and post-crisis reconstruction processes. The agreements with the MILF reflect national inclusion policy, acknowledging historical injustices done by a majority-Christian nation-state against a minoritised Muslim and non-Muslim indigenous population. However, deep-seated horizontal, inter-communal fissures and inequalities remain. This raises fundamental questions: why is it that despite all the government and donor initiatives over the last decades, certain groups are still left behind during crises and recovery, and why do they fall through the cracks?

How are inclusion and exclusion understood and manifested?

This study explores several key questions. The first asks how inclusion and exclusion are understood, and how they manifest themselves. The paper finds that different actors have different concepts and frameworks in relation to inclusion and exclusion, at different levels, which has implications on targeting and delivery. This starts with fundamental language differences: with no direct translation for inclusion across the various Bangsamoro vernaculars, words such as *langkap* in the two mainland languages of Maguindanao and Mranaw, *lapay*, *saplag* and *sakup* in Sinug, and *merafeg* or *meamung* in Teduray are used to refer to inclusiveness. All of these terms roughly mean ‘all-encompassing’ – to include or cover everyone (*kasama ang lahat*, in Tagalog/Filipino) – and most have no direct antonyms. This frames a particular interpretation of inclusion: many aid users and practitioners interviewed saw universal coverage as necessary for an inclusive response. While most accepted the notion of prioritisation of those in particular need when resources were scarce, everyone must eventually get support, even those seen as ‘stronger’ or less vulnerable. Justified by concerns such as more targeted aid potentially dividing communities, infringing on the personal and communal dignity of groups such as the elderly,

or spreading ‘defeatist’ attitudes in a conflict-affected society, such a definition does share some commonalities with international humanitarian organisations that are increasingly shifting towards a more nuanced interpretation of inclusion.

There is a general consensus that the concept of inclusion itself is political, and power dynamics play a pivotal role in inclusion and exclusion in the BARMM. While aid is supposed to be objective and non-partisan, this becomes virtually impossible when the primary institutions responsible for aid delivery are products of negotiation, particularly in the midst of the implementation of a peace deal. The peace process shapes how inclusion is perceived and operationalised in humanitarian responses in the BARMM, since the institutions that arose from it are products of political negotiation. Although most humanitarian and development programme guidelines include provisions across gender and ethnolinguistic divides, remaining consistent with Philippine national legislation, political representation is led by the so-called ‘tri-people’ framework of Muslim, Christian ‘settler’ and non-Moro indigenous groups. Quotas and power-sharing are therefore shorthand for inclusion, although in such a system, the less-populated island provinces are neglected, receiving less and poorer quality international and local support.

Who is perceived to be excluded in humanitarian responses?

This representation-based model has impacts at a local level, leading to a prioritisation of managing tensions and maintaining social cohesion, with implications for exclusion. Its success in delivering inclusion is highly dependent on the role of ‘brokers’, including barangay (village) captains, non-governmental organisation (NGO) workers and other intermediaries. Links to both affected communities and higher-level decision makers make such facilitators central in advocating for the needs of the ‘unaddressed populations’ that they represent and to which they often belong. However, the outsize focus on consensus and social equilibrium can lead to the stifling of dissent and further marginalisation of minorities. Although the Philippines scores relatively well on gender-related indicators, there is a pervasive belief that only men can visibly lead; LGBTQI+ people cannot be overtly visible in many places; and people with disabilities (PWDs) are faced with erasure from much of daily life. This system also makes broker roles over-powerful and susceptible to elite capture. The role of class and blood, with members of the *datu* class able to trace their lineages back through centuries, is not always well understood as far as it pertains to access to services and elite capture, but a senior official linked exclusion to a ‘sultanic syndrome’ where local power is used and abused. Overcoming such dynamics requires skilled facilitation by those with knowledge of the region and justifying, in the eyes of some, a role for more ‘objective’ outsiders in provision. Above all, the processes that determine inclusivity are governed by trust and are ‘80% relationships, 20% technical’.

Exclusion in humanitarian responses in the BARMM is also determined by the internationally led aid system and how it operates. Donors continue to favour large, familiar international partner agencies and often pre-select project types and targeted segments of the population, irrespective of need. The norm is for consultation processes to be performed simply for compliance purposes, with genuine accountability instead reserved for donors and contracting international NGOs (INGOs), rather

than affected populations – a relationship that persists despite the majority of funding now coming from central government. For many practitioners, the continued exclusion of internally displaced persons (IDPs) can be ascribed to coordination challenges among both international agencies and national authorities, as well as the reactionary nature of humanitarian initiatives that are blind to structural problems.

When does exclusion occur in a protracted crisis?

A further study question asks when exclusion happens, in a context of multiple crises over a long period of time. The protracted and cyclical nature of crisis events in the BARMM highlights the temporal dimension of inclusion and exclusion, with respondents noting that inclusion is highest during and immediately after crises but tapers quickly over time. One clear implication is that the traditional humanitarian focus on the immediate ‘surge’ phase enforces exclusion dynamics even while targeting the most vulnerable. Since many Bangsamoro IDPs remain transitory years after the event with compounding crises and no clear end to uncertainty, practice must shift to ensure that IDP needs are addressed even after the first six months with adjustments made to respond to increasing perceptions of exclusion over time. This is a particular challenge, owing to both an unreliable data ecosystem, and the label of *bakwit* (evacuee) that carries deep social stigma, leading many to obscure their displaced status. The lack of adequate social, physical and digital infrastructures to support long-term IDPs, let alone ensure accessibility for PWDs, is a major barrier to inclusive service delivery particularly with the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

Going beyond single event-based frameworks will also require better integration with the local government planning and delivery systems of affected communities. This must work to improve upon the many shortcomings and gaps in responses that were recalled by aid users and which were damaging to their longer-term prospects for inclusion. The application of stringent post-disaster guidelines and the liberal use of expropriation, for example, resulted in some IDPs being forbidden to rebuild their homes. A focus on camp-based support often excludes IDPs staying in house-based arrangements on the fringes of urban areas from services. Improving on such outcomes will mean overcoming limited mandates and donor fatigue, as well as increasing the flexibility to iterate. A major part of the work will involve better coordination and collaboration between the Mindanao Humanitarian Team (MHT) and the traditional development and peacebuilding actors.

Does greater localisation and autonomy help inclusion?

The final key question asks whether, given the BARMM’s relative political and fiscal autonomy, a humanitarian and post-conflict response with greater local involvement is a more inclusive one. Generally, respondents agreed that greater localisation and fiscal, legal and cultural autonomy can help increase inclusion by ensuring that aid activities align with what people need. Key examples of effective and inclusive humanitarian initiatives often combine both Western and customary concepts and delivery mechanisms (such as *sadaqah* or charity and various forms of mutual aid, often passed through traditional and kinship-based decision-making structures), two-way information flows, and consistent

community involvement and leadership not only in the design phase but also in ensuring follow-through and sustainability. However, process safeguards will need to be put in place to manage horizontal, inter-communal dynamics that normalise certain groups hoarding more resources and power while letting others fall through the cracks. To be truly inclusive, humanitarian actors together with state officials must be held accountable in closing the loop and ensuring that the commitment to support IDPs to return to their place of origin or dignified resettlement in a place of their choosing is met.

Recommendations

The following recommendations (Table 1) aim to inform future leadership and response to protracted and cyclical, complex crises such as that experienced in the Bangsamoro, and direct policy and practice towards more inclusive humanitarian and development action.

Table 1 Recommendations for the humanitarian response to cyclical, complex crises

General recommendation	Specific recommendations	
	To the Philippine government and donor organisations and INGOs	To the BARMM and local actors in the region
1. Design grounded inclusion policies based on the type of crisis, as well as existing needs and opportunities in specific geographic regions, including social and environmental safeguards for all project types.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Shift towards a basic assumption of universal coverage beyond sector-based targeting. ● Interrogate existing norms and biases related to inclusion and exclusion, while addressing intersectionality of needs, considering age, gender, ethnicity, disability and other factors. ● Review national DRRM policies to differentiate guidelines and protocols for environmental disasters and armed conflict. ● Pass the national IDP law and other pending inclusion policies. ● Revise issuances and protocols creating post-crisis task forces operating in the BARMM and other areas, to ensure greater representation and control by local civilian actors as a default. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Shift towards a basic assumption of universal coverage beyond sector-based targeting. ● Pass the regional IDP law and other pending BTA bills related to the inclusion of more diverse groups and their needs. ● Continue the work of the BTA in retrofitting national policy and mechanisms to ensure that it is fit-for-purpose to the BARMM context, including the legal acknowledgement of traditional and customary practice in accordance with the BOL. This includes empowering hybrid traditional and legal mechanisms such as tri-people councils of elders and bringing in the relevant <i>datu/sultan/bae-a-labi</i> and religious leaders for decision-making, information dissemination and service delivery during and after a crisis. ● Invest in baseline physical, social and digital infrastructure to ensure even service delivery across the region. This can harness resources earmarked for post-peace agreement rehabilitation and reconstruction. ● Initiate consultations to address deep-seated biases and norms that lock in social exclusion.

Table 1 Recommendations for the humanitarian response to cyclical, complex crises (cont.)

General recommendation	Specific recommendations	
	To the Philippine government and donor organisations and INGOs	To the BARMM and local actors in the region
<p>2. Complement events-based crisis assessments and programming with longer-term area-based analysis, including conflict analysis and stakeholder assessments.</p> <p>3. For ongoing displacement events, institute catch-up plans to conclude ‘durable solutions’-based return and resettlement of IDPs.</p> <p>4. Establish sustainable financing measures to support follow-through.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Prioritise multi-year funding streams and ensure sustainability of exit strategies. ● Review inclusion safeguards in other workstreams including the GPH–MILF normalisation process. ● Activate coordination and convergence mechanisms – involving government, donors, civil society and private sector actors – not only for information sharing, reporting and monitoring, but for joined-up programming. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Integrate post-disaster requirements and needs of IDPs in the Bangsamoro Development Plan, Provincial Development and Physical Framework Plans (PDPFPs), and the municipal Comprehensive Land Use Plans (CLUPs) of both affected and host communities, including adequate delivery of shelter, public utilities and social services. ● Activate the Mindanao Working Group and ensure functional integration with the MHT and existing programming of the BARMM under the Block Grant and other local funds. ● Support local governments in the accessing and efficient use of existing resources, particularly Internal Revenue Allotment and disaster financing for the dignified resettlement and return of IDPs.
<p>5. Develop packages for identified sectors, while ensuring balance and ‘dual targeting’.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Review and reassess strategies for tracking and supporting identified groups: women and girls, young men, PWDs, orphans, widows, older people and non-Moro IPs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Implement existing commitments in the CAB and BOL regarding inclusion and support for specific sectors.
<p>6. Partner and collaborate with local actors, while continuously assessing potential ‘blind spots’ that embed existing exclusion in communities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ensure local representation and shared leadership in national decision-making bodies while ensuring diversity in partnerships. ● Bring in local organisations as collaborators and co-applicants in grant applications, not just as programme beneficiaries or subgrantees. ● Invest in capacity-building and organisational development for local grassroots networks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Support locally led and implemented initiatives, with participatory and peer-led design as a given, while ensuring diversity in partnerships. This includes options to ‘rotate’ representation and implementation partnerships to try to manage elite capture and/or other forms of consolidation of power and influence. ● Ensure the localised selection and hiring of personnel, at all levels of response.

Table 1 Recommendations for the humanitarian response to cyclical, complex crises (cont.)

General recommendation	Specific recommendations	
	To the Philippine government and donor organisations and INGOs	To the BARMM and local actors in the region
<p>7. Ensure that extensive social preparation and consultation with local networks are built in across interventions at all stages of the project cycle.</p> <p>8. Invest in communications as a basic inclusion strategy, while ensuring that the core messages and methods being used are themselves inclusive.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Create safe spaces and platforms where the diversity of opinions is allowed and processed. ● Institute grievance redress mechanisms. ● Invest in accessibility support for people with hearing, visual or intellectual impairments and for those who are isolated in their homes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Establish two-way communication and coordination channels using languages and platforms accessible to residents – written in the vernacular, using online/offline platforms such as radio, town hall meetings and other regular gatherings (e.g. Friday <i>khutbah</i> or sermons, neighbourhood small-group check-ins). ● Invest in accessibility support for people with hearing, visual or intellectual impairments and for those who are isolated in their homes.
<p>9. Support decision-making with data. Establish monitoring and evaluation systems across longer timeframes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Implement existing data-related legislation, including full implementation of the Community Based Monitoring System Law. ● Strengthen data practice for post-crisis response, including conducting household surveys and mapping processes while ensuring appropriate levels of disaggregation. ● Enforce interoperability between datasets held by international humanitarian actors, development organisations, local governments and communities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Enforce data reforms in the BARMM across all ministries; work with donors and national agencies to transfer access and data management capacities of key national surveys as well as crisis-specific datasets (Marawi’s Kathanor; various surveys run by the UN system) to the BARMM. ● Invest in training and capacity-building for the better use of data at the local level.
<p>10. Ensure transparency and accountability both for donors and implementers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Implement donor transparency portals for all major humanitarian responses. ● Build in third-party monitoring and citizen accompaniment in all programmes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Effect continuous capacity-building and organisational development related to procurement and service delivery to avoid inefficiency and leakage.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background context

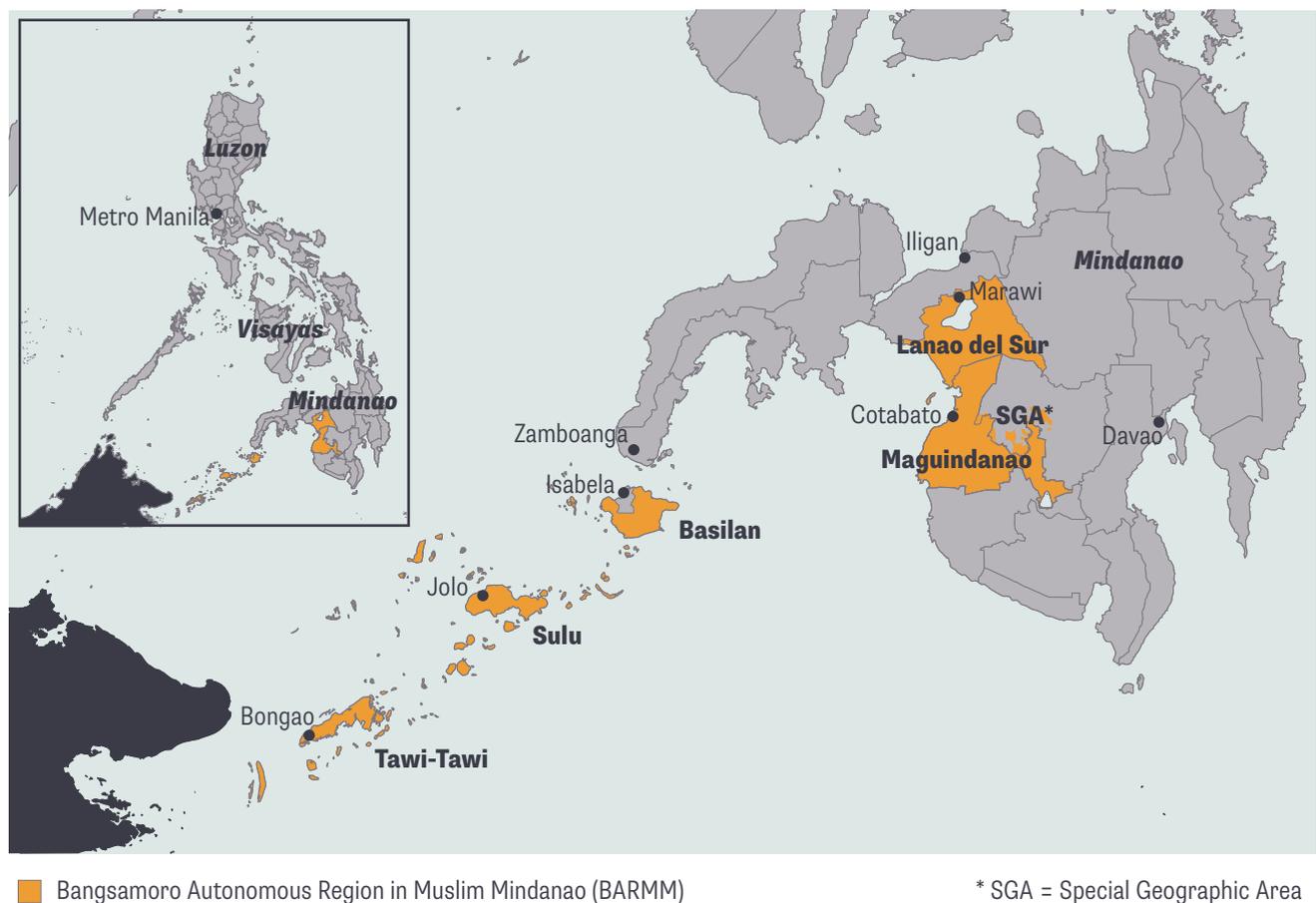
The Philippines is consistently ranked in the top three countries globally in terms of internal displacement due to both environmental hazards and armed conflict.¹ As of 2020, approximately 95% of new conflict displacements in the country occurred in the southern island of Mindanao (IDMC, 2021), particularly in the area now known as the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM, previously the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), or Bangsamoro). This has been the site of intermittent high-intensity armed conflict, cyclical displacements, and various waves of emergency relief and recovery efforts over the past 50 years. This paper explores issues of inclusion and exclusion in the humanitarian and peacebuilding sectors using the case of the BARMM, testing evidence in a region with protracted forced displacement due to environmental hazards and human-induced disasters, where existing peace agreements are being implemented and post-crisis reconstruction is still ongoing.

Bangsamoro comprises the Basilan and Tawi-Tawi islands of the Sulu archipelago as well as the mainland provinces of Maguindanao, Lanao del Sur, its cities of Cotabato and Marawi, and the ‘special geographic area’ formerly belonging to North Cotabato (Figure 1). It is home to a majority-Muslim population within a majority-Christian country: the 2020 Philippine Census of Population and Housing approximates the BARMM’s population at 4.4 million out of 109 million Filipinos nationwide, covering a total of two component cities, 116 municipalities and 2,490 barangays (villages).² Created through a series of peace deals meant to quell secessionist conflict, first with the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) in 1976 and 1996 and then with the breakaway Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in 2012 and 2014, the explicit guarantee in the 1987 Philippine Constitution of an autonomous region in Southern Philippines was intended as a policy of inclusion at the national level. The most recent plebiscite in 2019, triggering the Bangsamoro’s ongoing transition from a regional government to a regional parliament within the unitary Philippine state, ensures increased political and fiscal autonomy for the region including clear commitments regarding locally driven humanitarian assistance and post-conflict

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- 1 IDMC (2021) ranks the Philippines as the second most affected country by internal displacements, after China. The 20-year dataset of extreme climate events recorded by the 2020 Global Climate Risk Index between 1999 and 2019 identifies Myanmar as the second most affected country, followed by the Philippines (4th), Vietnam (6th) and Thailand (9th). The Philippines is categorised by the risk index as a country continuously affected by extreme events.
 - 2 The term Bangsamoro, from *bangsa* (‘nation’) and *Moro* (‘moor’ or Muslim), refers to a geographic area, regional political entity and cultural identity. The 2014 Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) and its enabling law, Republic Act No. 11054, states that ‘those who, at the advent of the Spaniards, were considered natives or original inhabitants of Mindanao and the Sulu archipelago and its adjacent islands including Palawan, and their descendants, whether of mixed or of full blood shall have the right to identify themselves as Bangsamoro by ascription or self-ascription.’ Generally speaking, Bangsamoro applies to the 13 Islamised ethnolinguistic groups of Southern Philippines, although other non-Islamised indigenous groups, or the so-called non-Moro indigenous peoples (IPs), live in the same areas.

rehabilitation and reconstruction. This is in lockstep with a process referred to as ‘normalisation’, featuring the decommissioning of 40,000 combatants of the MILF’s Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces (BIAF) and its Bangsamoro Islamic Women’s Auxiliary Brigade (BIWAB); disarmament of private armed groups; amnesties and pardons; the delivery of socioeconomic packages for affected communities, combatants and their families; and the area development of so-called acknowledged ‘camps’ of the MILF (ICG, 2021: 8).

Figure 1 Study area: BARMM and surrounding areas in Mindanao, Philippines



However, exclusion remains an issue, particularly for the Bangsamoro’s tens of thousands of internally displaced persons (IDPs). While the peace process led to a general reduction of violence between the Armed Forces of the Philippines and non-state armed groups in the region over the last decade, horizontal and inter-communal violence continues amidst the Covid-19 pandemic. Of the 65,918 families (267,278 individuals) recorded as displaced in Mindanao as of 31 December 2021, approximately 34% have been displaced for more than 180 days (UNHCR, 2021).³

³ Prior to the onslaught of Typhoon Rai (Odette) in mid-December 2021, the majority (up to 93%) of IDPs in Mindanao had been displaced for more than 180 days.

The longest-running displacements are due to two major urban conflicts. The first is the 2013 Zamboanga siege. While not physically within the Bangsamoro region, events in the city mostly displaced Muslim families, and the siege was triggered by members of the MNLF protesting purported non-inclusion in the Bangsamoro peace process. The second is the 2017 Marawi City crisis, a five-month long siege between the Philippine military and a coalition of ‘black flag’ groups (inspired by the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS)) attacking the only self-styled ‘Islamic City’ in the country, which led to the displacement of more 300,000 people (Save the Children, 2018). Evacuation centres were cleared at the end of the second year (2018), but up to 95% of IDPs were living in and still remain in home-based arrangements with relatives, with a small fraction currently occupying transitory shelters and newly constructed permanent homes.

Large-scale displacements in Bangsamoro are often bookended by smaller seasonal events triggered by environmental hazards such as flooding, landslides and earthquakes, as well as inter-communal conflicts and blood feuds (*rido* or *pagbanta*), which some regional actors consider a form of human-induced disaster.

Both government and donor surveys establish the severity and frequency of displacements, particularly in the Central Mindanao provinces of Maguindanao and North Cotabato, with increased multidimensional vulnerability for those who return home. Over 40% of families in Central Mindanao were displaced at least once between 2000 and 2010; 1 in 10 were displaced five times or more (Vinck, 2011). Approximately 30% were displaced for more than a year during the same period.

Since the signing of the 2014 peace agreement, the causes of displacement have shifted from rural warfare to urban conflict and to increasingly localised ‘horizontal’ events involving extremist groups, family feuds, as well as land dispossession of non-Moro indigenous peoples (NMIPs) (International Alert Philippines, 2021). Such events in Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi are often deemed ‘too small’ for international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and United Nations (UN) agencies to enter the area. Therefore, IDPs as a result of these events and undocumented workers shuttling between the islands and Sabah, Malaysia (often dubbed *halaw*) are particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change.

These issues have led to a sizable humanitarian and peacebuilding ecosystem in the Bangsamoro, which unlike other contexts is not fully dependent on UN agencies and INGOs, but is embedded in a relatively robust national disaster risk reduction management (DRRM) framework led and implemented by local players. The Philippine Local Government Code and the Disaster Risk Reduction Law highlight the responsibilities of local governments and local special councils from the barangay (village) to the city/municipal and provincial levels as frontline actors for disaster risk reduction and humanitarian response covering both environmental hazards and ‘human-induced’ disasters. Local government resources are set to increase given the 2018 Supreme Court Mandanas ruling, which mandates that the share of national government tax revenue to be transferred to local governments will increase substantially beginning in 2022. Given the glut of peace agreement-mandated fiscal instruments at the BARMM’s

disposal,⁴ it is hoped that increased fiscal autonomy will support improved and more inclusive service delivery, and strengthen avenues for citizen accountability at the city, municipal and provincial levels across the region – assuming the necessary infrastructure and technical readiness.

It is assumed that additional resources and a supposedly improved security context means that there will be less dependence on external aid. However, the BARMM must manage increased expectations as it works through the change management processes of an institutional transition until 2025, as well as an ongoing pandemic, in a country that experiences an average of 20 typhoons per year (DOST-PAGASA, 2022). This feeds into broader discussion around localisation, aid effectiveness and inclusion given the post-peace agreement landscape and the MILF's assertions of the Bangsamoro right to self-determination, including in the humanitarian sector.

1.2 Rationale and methodology

It is against this backdrop that this paper looks at issues of inclusion and exclusion in the humanitarian and peacebuilding sector, using the case of the BARMM. It feeds into a broader cross-context study implemented by the Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG) at ODI, which defines inclusive humanitarian action as 'the ability to reach people most affected by a crisis with the services, assistance and protection they need, while ensuring their effective participation in the planning and execution of the response' (Barbelet and Wake, 2020). By looking at specific applications, the broader research project attempts to understand how the concept of inclusion is understood and operationalised within humanitarian action, why significant gaps persist in policy and practice, and what more inclusive humanitarian responses might look like, while delving into associated concepts such as impartiality, accountability, vulnerability, protection, accessibility and participation.

The study focuses on the experiences of actors in the humanitarian and peacebuilding sectors and affected communities in the Bangsamoro for the following reasons. First, it provides evidence from a geographically and culturally diverse context involving internal displacement related to both armed conflict and environmental hazards, in a manner that can be described as extremely protracted and cyclical. Second, the Philippines is a lower-middle-income country with substantial government investments in DRRM and established partnerships and mechanisms with international humanitarian actors. Third, the BARMM allows for a nuanced inquiry in a subnational conflict area and autonomous region where existing peace agreements are being implemented and there are multiple programmes of post-crisis reconstruction and devolution.

4 These include: 1) an annual Block Grant, equivalent to 5% of the net national internal revenue of the Bureau of Internal Revenue and the Bureau of Customs from the third fiscal year immediately prior to the current fiscal year; 2) a Special Development Fund, where the national government will also allocate PHP 5 billion annually for a period of 10 years, which will be used for the rehabilitation of conflict-affected areas in the Bangsamoro; 3) increased powers over taxation; and 4) the Bangsamoro Normalization Trust Fund, a multi-donor fund administered by the World Bank.

We therefore also address three case-specific sets of questions:

1. Is a humanitarian and post-conflict response with greater local involvement and leadership a more inclusive one? How do these perceptions differ between different humanitarian governance actors?
2. Who is perceived to be marginalised, excluded, vulnerable across these contexts? How does exclusion manifest itself across religious identities, geographical location and patterns of displacement?
3. When does exclusion happen in a context of multiple crises over a protracted period?

A qualitative approach was taken in this study. Filipino independent researcher-practitioners with in-depth engagement in peace and conflict and humanitarian operations in BARMM conducted a literature review and inception interviews. Local conflict and context analysis, and a synthesis of publicly available evaluations and assessments, informed the design of semi-structured interviews with national, regional and local stakeholders.

Due to ongoing Covid-19 restrictions, data collection was conducted remotely via telephone, Zoom or Facebook Messenger with limited face-to-face interviews in Cotabato City, in surrounding municipalities in Maguindanao and North Cotabato, and in Marawi City, Lanao del Sur. Interviews were conducted in English, Tagalog/Filipino, Maguindanaon and Binisaya, as applicable, with some limited translation from Mranaw and Sinug.

A total of 60 in-depth conversations took place between June and November 2021, of which 38 people (or 63% of the total respondents) said that they had personally experienced internal displacement due to armed conflict at least once in their lifetimes. Allowing for multiple roles and stakeholder backgrounds, this sample included:

- three senior national government officials
- six regional officials, including three members of the BARMM parliament
- three representatives of bilateral and multilateral donor agencies
- 10 staff members from UN agencies and INGOs, including Filipinos with crossover experience in government and international crisis response
- 29 representatives from Bangsamoro- and Mindanao-based civil-society organisations (CSOs) and NGOs
- two members of grassroots cooperatives
- one member of the MILF's Social Welfare Committee
- three local government officials, including one barangay captain
- one enthroned traditional leader (sultan)
- one religious leader
- four community social workers
- two members of academia
- six members of NMIP groups
- seven Christian settlers
- three youth leaders in their early 20s
- 35 men and 25 women, of which two identify as LGBTQI+.

Of the 40 respondents who identified as ethnic Bangsamoro, three were from Basilan, eight from Lanao del Sur and Lanao del Norte, 18 from Maguindanao, three from North Cotabato, four were from Sulu, two from Tawi-Tawi and two from the Davao region.

While respondents were sampled across sites and sectors, the team took particular interest in engaging Bangsamoro and non-Bangsamoro Filipino respondents with multiple perspectives: those with exposure or direct involvement in humanitarian operations implemented by international donor/multilateral organisations, national government, local government and civil society. This includes those who are currently classified as IDPs and/or those who were no longer displaced but had experienced armed conflict and displacement in their lifetimes, both as ‘beneficiaries’ of humanitarian aid and as actors in the humanitarian sector. Five respondents are currently IDPs of crisis events that occurred in the past five years. In particular, we sought members of groups perceived to be excluded, particularly ethnic subgroups, women and youth.

1.3 Challenges and limitations

The primary challenge and limitation of this research was the ongoing community quarantine in the Philippines, which was only eased in early November 2021, making it one of the longest and strictest pandemic lockdowns in the world. Limited field interviews were possible in the aforementioned areas, which had lower case rates compared with those in Metro Manila. However, travel to the island provinces (Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi) was prevented by restrictions in the gateway city of Zamboanga.

Remote data collection in the BARMM is difficult because of weak internet and mobile phone connectivity, even in cities. Vaccine roll-out in the Philippines was in its early stages during the first phase of data collection and had limited traction in rural areas in the BARMM. As of November 2021, less than 10% of the BARMM’s residents were fully vaccinated, with the lowest national vaccination rate in the province of Lanao del Sur (Kabagani, 2021). As such, respondents were predominantly based in urban areas (Cotabato, Marawi, and spillover centres in Zamboanga and Iligan City as well as the provincial centres of Jolo, Sulu; Bongao, Tawi-Tawi; and Isabela, Basilan) and with access to mobile phones. This therefore skews the sample towards elites, the middle class, or those with relative power and responsibility in the humanitarian sector.

While care was taken to cover variations in the BARMM experience and use as much of the vernacular languages as possible, resource and time limitations precluded this, not to mention the high ethnolinguistic and geographic diversity in the region. There are 13 Moro ethnolinguistic groups; the 2013 CAB recognises five NMIP groups and the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) lists a further six. Interviews were able to cover respondents from eight of the Moro and NMIP groups, as well as settler residents and representatives from national government, INGOs, UN agencies and donors. The research team attempted to mitigate extant biases by triangulating inputs amongst local community leaders, members of civic groups, or by referring to secondary literature and third-party accounts to make up for missing voices in the primary interviews.

Restrictions on group gatherings also prevented the use of the focus group discussion format to cover a larger set of responses, which meant a focus on in-depth, one-on-one conversations averaging 1.5 hours each. For areas where face-to-face conversations were possible, locally mandated health protocols were applied.

1.4 Structure of the paper

The paper is structured as follows:

- Chapter 2 discusses national policies related to inclusion and humanitarian action in the Philippines; the implications of ‘complex crises’ combining environmental and human-induced hazards; and how these dynamics translate to impacts on inclusion and exclusion at the regional level in the BARMM.
- Chapter 3 looks at how different stakeholders have chosen to define inclusion and exclusion as well as the tools and instruments used to assess, measure and implement these policies. This is done against the backdrop of the gradual evolution of humanitarian and peacebuilding mandates and mechanisms amongst INGOs, UN agencies, local government and non-state organisations in relation to power differentials and social norms on the ground.
- Chapter 4 asks what drives exclusion, whether latent or overt, intentional or unintentional.
- Chapter 5 explores what humanitarian actors in BARMM perceive as best practice in assessing and addressing vulnerabilities and needs, and concludes with recommendations and prospects moving forward.

2 Internal displacement and humanitarian action in the Philippines and the BARMM

This chapter discusses national policies related to inclusion and humanitarian action in the Philippines and how they translate at the regional level in the BARMM, which deals with so-called ‘complex crises’ – the interplay between environmental and human-induced displacements in a politically nuanced setting. In doing so, it focuses on context-specific local dynamics and how this informs the interaction of international and locally led humanitarian mechanisms, covering both longer-term peacebuilding missions as well as event-specific response.

2.1 Inclusion and local humanitarian action in the Philippines

Touted as the first constitutional democracy in Asia, the Philippines has generally been among the first in the world to adopt global compacts and norms related to development and human rights principles. Sector-based and geographically targeted inclusion policies are embedded in the 1987 Philippine Constitution, which commits to ‘promote social justice in all phases of national development’. Stemming from the experiences of various armed conflicts during martial law under the Marcos dictatorship, constitutional guarantees are provided for autonomous regions in Muslim Mindanao in the south and the Cordillera to the north of the archipelago, alongside the protection of the rights of indigenous cultural communities. This, in turn, informs different components of Philippine social policy. In the health sector, targeting begins with the catch-all phrase GIDA, or ‘geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas’, and the state has also legally identified and mandated engagement with ‘basic sectors’.⁵

The same sector-focused language appears in the Philippine Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act, the governing law for how emergency response is delivered in the country. This references and highlights the need to prioritise ‘vulnerable and marginalized groups’, or ‘those that face higher exposure to disaster risk and poverty including, but not limited to, women, children, elderly, differently abled people and ethnic minorities’ (GPH, 2010). Each of these groups identified as vulnerable and marginalised are also covered by specialised national and local legislation. For example, Republic Act No. 7192, otherwise known as the Women in Development and Nation Building Act, ensures an allocation of 5% to 30% of local development funds and official development assistance (ODA) to projects tagged under ‘gender and development’, or those that can be justified as benefitting women in the community, including humanitarian aid.

5 These sectors are: artisanal fisherfolk; farmers and landless rural workers; urban poor; IPs; formal labour and migrant workers; workers in the informal sector; women; children, youth and students; senior citizens; persons with disabilities; non-government organisations; cooperatives; and, most relevant for humanitarian action, victims of disasters and calamities, set out in Republic Act No. 8425 – the Social Reform and Poverty Alleviation Act (GPH, 1998).

Various executive policies also ensure targeted investment for areas and populations identified as conflict-vulnerable. While armed conflict in the archipelago has largely tapered down into low-intensity outbreaks over the past decade, the Philippines remains engaged in five peace tables: with the Communist Party of the Philippines/New People's Army/National Democratic Front of the Philippines (CPP/NPA/NDFP), two smaller 'closure' agreements with breakaway groups in the Cordillera and Negros-Panay, and the two Bangsamoro fronts of the MILF and the MNLF. Although there are partial compacts with the NPA dating back to 1992, only the track with the CPP/NPA/NDFP does not have a formal comprehensive peace agreement. As a result, the Philippines has a nationally mandated system for tracking internal displacement due to both environmental and human-induced disasters, although laws protecting the rights of IDPs are still pending in Congress and in the BARMM Parliament.

Operationalisation and implementation, however, have been inconsistent at best. Part of the challenge is making the country's extensive climate change adaptation (CCA) and DRRM infrastructure work efficiently and effectively, while navigating the relationship between national authorities, local governments and humanitarian organisations during humanitarian responses.

At the national level, humanitarian efforts are led by the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Mitigation Council (NDRRMC, 2020), a 45-member mechanism involving national agencies, sub-agencies, local government, the Philippine Red Cross, and chaired by the Secretary of National Defence.⁶ However, the BARMM is a notable exception, with its own disaster response agency, now called BARMM-READi (Bangsamoro Rapid Emergency Action on Disaster Incidence).

Support from international aid organisations can also be requested by the Philippine government. A Philippine Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) comprised of key UN agencies and international response organisations has been in place since 2010. A devolved Mindanao Humanitarian Team (MHT) has also been put in place, with clusters that coordinate with local governments and the autonomous region. In previous years, the work of the MHT closely intertwined with a now-defunct Mindanao Working Group (MWG) of donors and INGOs accompanying Mindanao peace processes. This work was designed to improve government–development partner coordination related to humanitarian, peacebuilding and development action particularly in the years between the 1996 Final Peace Agreement with the MNLF and the 2014 Comprehensive Agreement of the Bangsamoro with the MILF. With the Philippine HCT signing a Partnership Framework for Sustainable Development in 2018, the role of the UN has been more limited to the Philippine government's targets and indicators, including those that relate to inclusion and exclusion.

Two contrasting trends continue to influence how this humanitarian ecosystem works in the country. The first is the dominance of an environmental-disaster-style approach to crisis response, even in

⁶ The role of the armed forces in Philippine humanitarian response has been consistent since the initial establishment of the original National Disaster Coordinating Council in 1978. This makes for stronger civil–military action, but an overtly securitised approach carries its own risks.

situations of conflict-related displacement. This was reinforced by the response to Typhoon Haiyan;⁷ despite impacting conflict-affected regions, the response and reconstruction largely hewed to a natural disaster approach, such as accelerating the roll-out of local government DRR mechanisms and community-based early warning systems (Walch, 2013). The second trend is a reverse tendency for national government to combine humanitarian operations with counterinsurgency, which only intensified during the Duterte administration as former military officials were appointed to civilian disaster response agencies. In order to sidestep these sensitivities, most international humanitarian actors usually try to cleave to principles of impartiality and objectivity by ignoring the conflict component altogether.

2.2 Context: humanitarian action in the BARMM

Conflict-related displacement, as well as increasingly frequent climate events, present unique challenges in applying the robust Philippine national response mechanisms and frameworks of inclusion in the BARMM. The Bangsamoro conflict traces its history to the forced annexation of various Muslim minority groups by colonial powers with the creation of the Philippine republic at the turn of the century. Tensions intensified in the late 1960s and 1970s under the Marcos dictatorship, leading to multiple waves of hostilities and negotiation with the MNLF and later the MILF. While autonomy for Muslim Mindanao is guaranteed in the 1987 Constitution, major outbreaks of violence and subsequent displacements in the past decades are correlated with milestones and speedbumps in the peace process. Most recently, the 2017 Marawi crisis displaced 300,000 residents as the Philippine military and various ISIS-inspired groups fought an urban conflict for five months in the city. The Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) was passed one year later, after a hard-fought effort by peace advocates to convince Congress that the best way to prevent the spread of violent extremism and future humanitarian crises is the success of peace negotiations with the MILF.

Table 1 provides a simplified timeline of how peace process events – such as the signing of agreements, the creation of transitional mechanisms such as the first and second Bangsamoro Transition Commissions (BTCs) and the establishment of the Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA) – interact with security-related displacements and environmental disasters. This also includes major crises that occurred outside Bangsamoro and Mindanao, but nevertheless affected the capacity of national government and other humanitarian actors to respond to parallel events within the region. Non-BARMM occurrences in Mindanao include Tropical Storm Sendong (Washi) in Cagayan de Oro; Typhoon Pablo (Bopha) in Compostela Valley/Davao Region; and the Cotabato province earthquakes, which largely affected Bangsamoro communities even though they occurred outside the BARMM geographic territory. Similarly, the tally also includes major events such as Typhoon Yolanda (Haiyan) and the Bohol earthquake, both in 2013, which occurred in Visayas and not Mindanao but severely hampered government and international attention and resources for the Zamboanga siege and Lahad Datu standoff response.

7 One of the most powerful storms to make landfall in 2013, Super Typhoon Haiyan (Yolanda) killed over 6,000 people, displaced over 4 million and caused almost \$13 billion in damages (World Bank, 2017: 1)

Table 2 Major displacement events and milestones

Year	Environmental disaster	Security-related displacement	Peace process event
2011	Tropical Storm Sendong (Washi)	–	–
2012	Typhoon Pablo (Bopha)	–	Signing of the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro
2013	Typhoon Yolanda (Haiyan), Bohol earthquake	Lahad Datu standoff, Zamboanga siege	–
2014	Cotabato and Maguindanao floods	–	Signing of the CAB
2015	Cotabato and Maguindanao floods	Mamasapano, anti-Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) operations	–
2016	Maguindanao floods	Butig operations, anti-BIFF and Abu Sayaff Group operations	Beginning of Duterte administration
2017	Typhoon Vinta (Tembin), Cotabato and Maguindanao floods	Marawi siege, displacement in Sulu and Basilan	–
2018	–	–	Passage of the BOL
2019	Cotabato earthquakes	Jolo bombing	Creation of the BARMM and the BTA
2020	Cotabato and Maguindanao floods	Covid-19 pandemic	–
2021	–	–	Extension of BTA mandate until 2025

2.2.1 The humanitarian and peacebuilding nexus in the BARMM

Both the language and the structures of peace negotiations influence how inclusion is framed in humanitarian responses in the region. Representation between and among ethnolinguistic groups and geographic clusters is hardwired into the design of all joint mechanisms, apart from the vertical relation of a Muslim minority within a national Christian-majority country. The so-called ‘tri-people’ framework is one of the most important concepts, referring to an ideal healthy state of horizontal relationships between Muslims, Christian settlers and the non-Moro indigenous communities, also collectively referred to *katawhang lumad*, or *lumad*. As discussed later, the horizontal aspect of representation and inclusion, including between the 13 Moro ethnolinguistic groups as well as political/armed groupings such as the MNLF and the MILF, heavily figure in these considerations.

The region’s post-conflict governance arrangements also frame much of the humanitarian infrastructure. For example, the MILF’s development wing, the Bangsamoro Development Agency, is an unusual institution: it was created not as a government entity but as one staffed by volunteers

and appointees of the revolutionary armed movement. This humanitarian infrastructure is supported by grassroots monitoring networks, which in many ways reflects the local context of community-embedded organisations delivering humanitarian mandates themselves (through the form of mutual aid, charity (*sadaqah*) and almsgiving (*zakat*)). These organisations are then also subgrantees of UN agencies and INGOs, something that helps blur the divides between humanitarian action, peacebuilding and development work.

Understanding community experiences of displacement and accordant humanitarian responses in terms of a longer continuum, instead of focusing on isolated events, changes the way one processes the discourse around inclusion and exclusion. As the BARMM undergoes a transition from an autonomous region to a parliamentary subregional government within the unitary Philippine state, ensuring an effective and inclusive humanitarian response system is a stress-test for this post-conflict settlement. But while particular groups have set numbers of seats reserved in the BTA (including for NMIPs, women, settlers and youth), pressing humanitarian issues remain.

For example, the majority of IDP families have still not been able to return to Marawi more than four years after the 2017 siege. A lack of compensation for rebuilding destroyed homes has rendered up to 50% of the former residents of the Most Affected Area (MAA) permanently displaced, either due to expropriation for new public reconstruction projects, or due to the non-recognition of informal and traditional housing tenure arrangements (Fernandez, 2021). While thousands of temporary shelters have been available since 2018, these spaces are cramped, have limited access to potable water and are built on private land for which the five-year lease runs out in 2022. With increasing climate events, this prolonged involuntary displacement means that Marawi's IDP families have been hit by various multiple environmental shocks, including 2017's Typhoon Vinta (Tembin), which hit host municipalities with landslides and washed out several IDP camps that were built on flood plains. These vulnerabilities intensified with the Covid-19 pandemic, which itself has caused further delays to reconstruction.

While the appointment of members of parliament (MPs) to the BTA in 2019 raised hopes that greater local autonomy and representation could improve conditions, decision-making around rehabilitation and response continues under the control of national-level bodies that have bypassed much of the autonomy of the BARMM.⁸ With many international humanitarian organisations winding down their operations due to dwindling donor interest, remaining efforts include transitional justice, initiatives to prevent or counter violent extremism and infrastructure-heavy projects funded by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Asian Development Bank (ADB), the US Agency for International Development (USAID), or the Australian Government. In the meantime, the BARMM and its local governments face criticism that humanitarian efforts over the pandemic have overly focused on the short term (such as the provision of food aid), instead of much-needed structural reform, raising the question of whether increased political autonomy and accordant localisation can truly translate to effectiveness and inclusion.

⁸ Specifically, Task Force Bangon Marawi (TFBM), a top-down, national government-led interagency mechanism led by the Department of Human Settlements and Urban Development.

3 Defining inclusion in the BARMM

Stakeholders in the BARMM define inclusion in humanitarian response in different ways, owing to the overlapping experiences of protracted displacement and multiple layers of humanitarian and peacebuilding mandates. This chapter outlines the various norms and definitions employed amongst government agencies, UN organisations, civil society networks and INGOs, against the experiences of local communities through conversations with local actors in the BARMM, many of whom have directly experienced forced displacement in their lifetimes, both as humanitarian actors and as ‘beneficiaries’ of humanitarian aid. These definitions of inclusion are embedded not only in the legal and technical instruments used to enforce, assess and measure these policies, but also in the social norms and power differentials that manifest both visibly and invisibly on the ground.

3.1 Sectoral prioritisation and representation-based inclusion

Across all research sites, respondents remarked that defining inclusion was both very easy and extremely difficult. A consensus definition of inclusion in the humanitarian and development sectors exists – connoting a purportedly basic norm and aspiration of providing equal and impartial access to resources and opportunities, while giving particular attention to sectors that may be considered marginalised or excluded. Nevertheless, attempts at inclusion manifest in different ways and with differing levels of success. These variations, which depend on the given framework or context, have led respondents to remark that it is easier to describe who, how, and why people are excluded, rather than to directly identify experiences and indicators of inclusion.

Much of the professional thinking and practice around inclusive programming in the region is distilled in the language of the BOL, which points to legislation and programmes for the vulnerable, primarily ‘women, labor, the youth, the elderly, the differently-abled, and indigenous peoples’ (GPH, 2019). This is further enunciated in the BARMM Administrative Code provisions on the role of the Ministry of Social Services and Development, highlighting its focus on the ‘marginalized and vulnerable sectors’ and the establishment of a new human settlements ministry to address challenges related to ‘lack of shelters, settlements, and livelihoods’ especially for those who are ‘displaced and conflict-affected’ (BTA, 2020).

As such, most policies, and humanitarian and development programme guidelines, in the region normally include provisions related to stakeholder analysis and beneficiary selection and eligibility across gender, geographic and ethnolinguistic divides, covering both intra- and inter-faith relationships between Muslims and Christians, as well as the tri-people framework. A Moro development researcher and teacher described this as ensuring that *‘lahat ng dapat maisama ay naisama* [everyone that needs to be brought in is brought in]’, speaking of a nuanced balance that is ‘inclusive enough’. An international observer, previously a member of the third-party humanitarian monitoring mechanisms, described this in terms of more granular, micro-level consultations, that are context-specific: ‘If out of 10 important local players, one was not consulted, this is enough to make the response go haywire.’ However the range of diversity in the region makes stable arrangements difficult to achieve.

At the regional level, these dynamics are most clearly illustrated in the debates around the composition of the Bangsamoro Parliament and its current caretaker officers. In advance of its first elections in 2025, half of the 80 seats are allocated to regional political parties based on proportional representation; 40% shall come from single-member districts. The remaining 10% will go to sectoral representatives. Two reserved seats are allocated to non-Moro IPs and two for settler communities, while one seat each is given to representatives from traditional leaders, women, youth and *ulama* (Muslim religious leaders and scholars), respectively. The BOL further states that the Bangsamoro government ‘shall ensure the inclusion of women’s agenda and the involvement of women and the youth in the electoral nominating process of the political parties’.⁹ In the meantime, the current appointive BTA still stands, with half of appointed ministers coming from the MILF, and the remainder selected by the national government from former ARMM officials, traditional leaders, MNLF representatives and civil society. Across the board, only 13 women (16.2%) are MPs, with a similar proportion (15%) retained amongst the 33 individuals holding agency portfolios and other key positions in the BTA.

Geographic and ethnolinguistic representation is a sensitive issue, with a historical push-and-pull between Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi, and the mainland groupings of Maguindanao and Lanao. At present, 48% of MPs are from Maguindanao, North Cotabato and Cotabato City, 25% are from Lanao del Sur, and 25% are from the islands, with six (Basilan), nine (Sulu), and five (Tawi-Tawi) MPs respectively. Only two MPs (3%) are from the so-called Bangsamoro communities outside BARMM (BCOBARMM), with one from Lanao del Norte and one from the Davao region, representing the two major sites with MILF-BIAF presence outside the BARMM territory. Two MPs from Maguindanao belong to the Teduray-Lambangian indigenous group. Nine MPs are from the MNLF Sema-Jikiri faction. Only seven MPs belong to the parliament’s Minority Bloc, six of whom are former officials of the defunct ARMM. One Christian settler, a retired military official, holds a cabinet portfolio.

These tensions and debates around geographic and sectoral representation have implications on humanitarian operations. Given the larger population and higher number of displaced IDPs in terms of absolute figures in the mainland provinces, less support from UN agencies and INGOs is available in the island provinces. UN Department for Safety and Security (UNDSS) restrictions also prevent most donors and UN actors from being present in Sulu and Basilan. Tawi-Tawi is perceived to be less ‘dangerous’, but its distance from the Philippine mainland presents a hurdle. It is also perceived as less of a priority due to its status as the rest-and-recreation location and understood neutral ground for armed groups, and despite the influx of so-called *halaw*. One prominent academic relayed several metaphors used by displaced residents in Tawi-Tawi to describe the quality and quantity of aid they receive, which is often substantially diminished by the time it gets to them, either because of the costs of hauling and trucking or by leakage and corruption:

This is what they say. You know, if people in the mainland eat the bread, we just receive the breadcrumbs. If they receive the chicken there... we receive maybe the eggs, sometimes what comes to us are the eggshells already. If it’s logs that are distributed, they only get a toothpick.

This feeling is emblematic of the long-standing beliefs among Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi (BASULTA) residents that they are not part of the regional political project, choosing to call themselves Bangsa Sug (‘the nation of the current’) instead of Bangsamoro. In 2020, all BARMM MPs from the island bloc passed a resolution to ensure ‘inclusive and equitable allocation in all Bangsamoro subregions’, noting the smaller allocations provided to BASULTA communities as compared with, say, Maguindanao, from which the majority of MILF leaders hail.¹⁰ While the BOL allows for the Bangsamoro Parliament to provide socioeconomic and humanitarian assistance to areas outside its political jurisdiction, the dynamics of mixed communities as well as the differences in perspective between the national government and the autonomous region change conditions for Bangsamoro IDPs in places such as Zamboanga, North Cotabato and Lanao del Norte. One former government worker noted that the challenge comes from seeing the BARMM as a political jurisdiction and geographic region instead of the Bangsamoro as a subgroup whose needs and experiences transcend political boundaries.

Beyond geopolitics, social categories comprise an important aspect in further understanding the inclusion issue in the region. Although development language emphasises the need to explicitly identify the vulnerable, there is a pushback against the use of static vulnerability metrics that residents perceive as defeatist, and therefore as impinging on personal and community dignity. Elders are highly respected in the BARMM; they will often remain working in some capacity for as long as possible and are unlikely to acknowledge weakness or age unless there is an incentive to do so (such as special discounts for senior citizens). Bangsamoro society still struggles with the social stigma against people with disabilities (PWD), referred to in Maguindanao as *sadil*. People with disabilities are susceptible to being exploited as beggars, or are hidden away by family members. This is how one respondent describes the situation:

Once you call a person *sadil*, it’s negative. They will be ignored. [...] They feel included if we treat them as being people not because they are PWD. It is a given that we are responsible to protect the PWD but the treatment for them should be the same. We should be sensitive to different needs, but not because they are lacking.

It is for this reason, another respondent shared, that the regional education ministry is reviewing the BARMM Special Education portfolio and is considering renaming it to ‘inclusive education’.

Across the board, respondents noted that the success (or failure) of representation-based inclusion measures is often dependent on the skill of facilitators and power brokers such as barangay captains, NGO workers and other actors with the expertise to navigate this terrain. These skills entail not only effective horizontal intra-communal negotiation on the ground but also access to higher-level

¹⁰ Resolution No. 45 series of 2020 entitled ‘a resolution expressing the strong sense of the BTA to strengthen the 2020 Fiscal Framework of the BARMM through inclusive and equitable allocation in all the Bangsamoro subregions’. This was co-authored with all members of the BASULTA bloc (including issues in relation to geographic equity, referencing long-standing critiques that humanitarian and development aid focuses primarily on the mainland, and Maguindanao specifically).

decision-makers who can provide resources and seats at ‘higher-level’ tables (or in the vernacular Tagalog used by one respondent, *‘kayang lumapit sa kusina [can come closer to the kitchen]’*). In a ‘post’-conflict, post-agreement context, intimate understanding of how the conflict happened and how it was somehow addressed plays a large part in understanding strategies that are not only feasible, but also implementable. As such, the most effective INGOs and UN agency engagements tend to be those that work with local interlocutors and implementing partners with the skill, expertise and social capital to bridge these worlds of affected communities, government, and international humanitarian actors and donor organisations. Several interviewees were such civil society brokers whose roles have largely evolved to not only addressing the needs of ‘unaddressed populations’, but also actively using their positions to further the interests of the groups they belong to and represent – such as women, communities associated with the MNLF, or NMIPs.

While the use of sectoral mapping to guide inclusion is acknowledged as a general best practice, critiques were also raised by respondents that inclusion-as-representation is heavily politicised, noting that too much effort is placed on securing seats at the table without ensuring the quality of participation. Without rigour and process safeguards, representation guidelines can easily devolve into tokenism and post-facto justifications for top-down mandates. Several respondents noted that bringing in representatives doesn’t always mean that these groups can or will push for better inclusion, citing instances of co-optation as well as the manipulation of mechanisms such as the party-list system. The use of brokers is also naturally linked to the consolidation of power amongst elites even within purportedly ‘vulnerable groups’. Various interfaith, intra-Moro, and tri-people dialogue platforms emerged in the BARMM as a matter of necessity during the height of the conflicts between the government of the Philippines (GPH) and the MILF in the early 2000s. They remain active and useful during crisis response situations. However, one former senior government official bemoaned that having fixed seats for representatives of ‘vulnerable sectors’ is not always tenable because once the acute crisis phase is over, multiple representative stakeholder groups emerge: ‘Then you find that there are several associations and they fight over who is the legitimate representative, and who is not.’

Thus, multiple respondents admitted that inclusion policy should entail going beyond the standard representation-based framework of vulnerability. While respondents agreed that certain groups of people – such as children, older people and the sick – should be cared for especially during calamities, most acknowledged the need for a more nuanced approach that addresses peoples’ power and agency, as well as dignity and shame.

Class is a major dimension that is rarely discussed in post-crisis aid activities in the Bangsamoro. This is where questions of intersectionality and relationality come in: how different people will have different needs and agency in different situations (Daigle, 2022: 12). Without such nuance, inclusion policies become virtue-signalling for compliance purposes at best, and disempowering at worst. Even the question of gender, which is significantly mainstreamed in the Philippines, requires constant engagement in contexts where women can be found in positions of leadership as mediators and

peacemakers without necessarily changing inequalities related to property rights or access to resources and opportunities for women, young girls and boys, or LGBTQI+ individuals. In the words of a Cotabato-based development worker:

Is it just because I'm a woman and I'm a hijabi, if I speak in a community consultation and you take a picture of me for your donor report, does that mean that it's already inclusion?

3.2 Local concepts of inclusion and universal coverage

While many aid actors refer to 'universal' and/or Western frameworks of human rights as well as national legislation in defining inclusion, conversations with BARMM government representatives and Moro aid workers refer to distinct local, traditional and customary concepts and practices that often translate differently on the ground. Many respondents speak of the current MILF-led BTA's goal of 'moral governance', and how maximising inclusion and minimising exclusion is a necessary aspect of this agenda.¹¹

It must be stressed that while the BARMM is legally secular and multicultural, the demographics of the population, not to mention the nature of the MILF as an Islamic revolutionary movement, mean that those assessing vulnerability and need in the BARMM will often use the language of religious and ethical precepts related to justice and fairness. Several respondents mentioned how humanitarian aid is an obligation of Islamic faith, quoting multiple Qur'anic and legal injunctions related to *zakat*, *sadaqah*, *waqf* (endowments), and how public and private resources must be managed and redistributed to benefit priority groups such as those in need, the stranded, the displaced and the orphaned, particularly in times of crisis. This in turn is layered with various homegrown concepts and mechanisms present in each of the many ethnolinguistic groups in the region, whether Islamised or otherwise.

These nuances become apparent when the terms 'inclusion' and 'inclusive' are translated in the many Bangsamoro vernaculars. The word *langkap* is used in the two mainland languages of Maguindanao and Mranaw to reference inclusiveness; a secondary word in Maguindanaon (*kaamong*) speaks of specific inclusion, while *langkap* or *langkom* speaks of general inclusion. The words *lapay*, *saplag* and *sakup* are used in Sinug. In Teduray, *merafeg* or *meamong* are preferred. All of these terms roughly mean 'all-encompassing', to include or cover everyone (*kasama ang lahat*, in Tagalog/Filipino). Most of these words, particularly in the mainland Bangsamoro languages, have no direct antonyms; the approximate way to translate 'exclusion' is to add a negating prefix to denote the absence of inclusion (e.g. *enda merafeg*, meaning 'not inclusive'). Thus, inclusive interventions are understood to require universal coverage.¹²

11 Several years after the beginning of the transition, there is still no functional definition of 'moral governance' released that bridges both the Islamic and secular identities of the BARMM, although several technical working groups led by members of the BARMM's Darul Ifta – the region's Islamic advisory council – have been working on this agenda.

12 Previous studies have identified the risks of targeted interventions also exacerbating social divisions in the post-Haiyan response (Ong et al., 2015: 42; Combinido and Ong, 2017).

In cases where on-hand resources are limited, those who are deemed to be the most vulnerable in the community will get the first share, with vulnerability assessed based on urgency and necessity. However, *everyone* must eventually get support, even those seen as ‘stronger’ or less vulnerable.

The intimate link between inclusion, managing tensions and ensuring social cohesion in Bangsamoro communities has led to the dominant use of representation and its associated concepts of quotas, guaranteed seats and power-sharing as shorthand for inclusion. However, a more grounded understanding clarifies that this is tied to a vernacular concept of inclusion as reaching ‘everyone’, or at the very least, enough of the key groups and networks that comprise a multi-stakeholder approximation of ‘everyone’. As described by a veteran community organiser:

All stakeholders should be included. This is what we understand by inclusion. *Lahat ng stakeholders sa community ay ini-invite namin kapag may programme kami. Para di nila masabi na kay datu lang yan. Pag tinatanong bakit hindi mo pinili si ganito, nilalay down ko yung guidelines.* [All of the stakeholders in the community are invited when we have programmes. So they won’t say that it’s just for the *datu* [the traditional leader/elite]. Then when they ask why certain people weren’t picked [as beneficiaries], I lay down the guidelines.] If you can’t come, then your family and blood relations can represent you.

Given this working definition of ‘all sectors of society’, most Bangsamoro interviewees postulate that the dominance of the inclusion-as-representation framework is related to the overlaps between humanitarian aid and the peace agreements in the BARMM, as a firm understanding of social relationships and kinship groups is crucial to operations in the area.

3.3 Data and legibility

The Bangsamoro concepts of inclusive universal coverage contrast with the English term ‘inclusion’ and its antonym ‘exclusion’, which inform the mechanisms used by post-crisis humanitarian institutions to target and prioritise beneficiaries in contexts of high need and finite resources. In practice, 100% universal inclusion is not a design assumption. A review of government, INGO and civil society guidelines highlights how problematising inclusion begins with the issue of legibility. To ensure the fast and efficient delivery of aid, target populations must first be legible and visible to, and accounted for, in official administrative or legally acknowledged protocols and mechanisms. In the words of a senior monitoring and evaluation specialist who has worked with both national government and the UN system:

Inclusion would entail being targeted for services specifically, to know what these groups’ specific needs are. So interventions should be retrofitted to the needs of the vulnerable. If you’re targeted, if the quality support you’re receiving is being measured and evaluated, then you’re included. We can only manage what we can measure, and you can’t include people unless you know who they are, where they are.

However, citizen databases in the Philippines, and the BARMM especially, are notoriously limited and unreliable. The only nationwide household-level database available – the Listahanan or National Targeting System for Poverty Reduction for conditional cash transfers (CCTs) – is limited to the very poorest.¹³ In the absence of standby information, substantial effort must be exercised after every disaster to generate beneficiary lists through barangay captains and municipal leaders.

The same post-conflict conditions that hamper data collection also contribute to varying degrees of exclusion. In the BARMM, a substantial number of residents do not have basic identification documents and birth certificates whether through lack of accessibility to government offices, loss of documents during displacement events, or historical mistrust of government systems, particularly for communities associated with revolutionary forces. This becomes more difficult with bigger displacement events, when communities are scattered over large distances across political boundaries, and/or are not ethnically, culturally and politically homogeneous.

As a result, fuzzy data provides opportunities for elite capture, patronage and corruption. With powers over enumeration and legibility lodged with key local brokers and gatekeepers, this provides a built-in opportunity for the systematic exclusion of those considered ‘outgroups’, often in the form of political opponents or non-voting residents. Legibility is further locked in by documentary requirements and the need for proof of eligibility. During ongoing displacements, the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) uses the Disaster Assistance Family Access Card (FAC) system to identify affected families as eligible to receive relief goods, cash, or to participate in other available emergency programmes over the course of the crisis. Multiple cases have been recorded of IDPs having difficulty in securing FACs, particularly if they are not registered voters in the locality – as is the case for many IDPs from Marawi City, who live and work in the business district but vote in their home municipalities – or have been marked as *kontra-partido* (affiliated with political opponents).

The need for constant enumeration exercises is also linked to debates regarding eligibility. The inclusion–exclusion dichotomy raises fundamental questions: who is eligible (and legible) for aid, and who is not eligible (or legible)? How are these cut-offs decided? Inclusion guidelines also often include ‘negative lists’. For example, the emergency cash aid (known as *ayuda*) provided by the national government during the first wave of the Covid-19 crisis initially excluded CCT beneficiaries. As such, there were cases where ineligible but equally poor residents who had taken money from their local governments were legally compelled to return the cash (amounting to a paltry PHP 1,000 per individual or a maximum PHP 4,000 per family, approximately £14.49 to £57.94) to government after they had received it.¹⁴ One former government official remarked that the cost of targeting, administering or excluding populations from humanitarian aid is often higher than the value of the aid itself.

13 The CCT programme does not cover all poor, just families who had eligible school-age children at the time of enumeration.

14 Assuming £1 = PHP 69.03.

These issues of legibility carry over from the relief phase to broader rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts. In the wake of a national or local declaration of a state of calamity whether due to environmental hazards or armed conflict, the relevant government agencies – particularly the Office of Civil Defense (OCD) and the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) (or their ARMM/BARMM equivalents) – are supposed to conduct a series of needs assessments to account for casualties and the extent of damage, and gather basic information required for relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction activities. As a result, both the government and various donor agencies often have ongoing projects to improve the quality and reach of profiling and data collection for both humanitarian and development purposes. This includes conducting specialised surveys, creating dashboards, training for bureaucrats on data handling, and other elements required to slowly implement existing legislation for community-based household mapping and profiling – all of which have met varying degrees of success.¹⁵

The limits of the current humanitarian data infrastructure are well known to practitioners, who acknowledge that limits are not only embedded in agencies' checklists and guidelines but also often emanate from the mandates and interests of the agencies and funders themselves. Most post-disaster vulnerability assessment tools and indices disproportionately focus on physical infrastructure damages. Social vulnerability modules are often limited to counting the absolute numbers of the dead and missing. Although questions are often included to ensure that a larger proportion of populations deemed vulnerable receive access to services, processed data can often be translated to targets with arbitrary cut-offs, particularly if the agency or funder has limited flexibility. For example, few humanitarian agencies in the Philippines had standby funding for the Covid-19 response. The little available was limited to populations who were already assessed pre-2020 as vulnerable, poor or displaced. It was difficult to realign and redirect resources to the so-called near-poor, as well as urban working-class families who suddenly lost their jobs and were plunged into poverty and food insecurity because of the extended lockdowns and bans on their modes of livelihood (e.g. those with daily-wage roles such as jeepney drivers or service workers).

Some respondents noted that checklists and guidelines could also be easily manipulated post-facto by adjusting indicators and weights, rendering vulnerability indices nearly meaningless. As one INGO worker remarked:

These definitions can be played with, you can say [in your case study] that the most assessed as vulnerable are those people in village X, but the truth is that you don't want to tire yourself out. The [donor system] incentives are for those who are the first to deliver aid, the [first organisation to make the] first press release. So instead of going up the mountain, you can just decide to give it to the people nearest to you [the families you can reach], just by the side of the road. How do you twist the definition [of vulnerability]? You can do it with ease. Words are losing value. And we don't penalise those who do it.

15 See Republic Act No. 11315, or the Community-Based Monitoring System Act.

These limitations can also be traced in the weak link between operations and monitoring and evaluation across the sector. One monitoring and evaluation specialist pointed out that much of UN and donor data disaggregation is often only optimised for reporting requirements around gender, children and PWDs; they rarely influence programming cycles.

Key reforms have been made over the years, albeit slowly. A senior national official shared that in the past decade, experiences in Mindanao (particularly in the BCOBARM) have forced Philippine inclusion policies used by DSWD to evolve. He mentioned two specific changes: ensuring the disaggregation of responses based on ethnicity, and expanding coverage for variations in housing tenurial status. The latter reform, which led to the inclusion of renters and sharers in eligibility guidelines for emergency housing projects, was implemented in the aftermath of Typhoon Sendong (Washi) in 2011, when several informal communities in flood-prone areas and islets around Cagayan de Oro had to be resettled. Existing DSWD and National Housing Authority (NHA) guidelines that only provided NHA housing access to homeowners had to be revised after consultations showed high numbers of ‘sub-households’ in these areas; thus, including renters and sharers was a sticking point for these communities to agree to move elsewhere.

Similarly, disaggregation based on ethnicity was not included in DSWD FAC data prior to 2013, as the general assumption for relief provision and camp management was that displaced populations are generally homogeneous. This assumption had to change during the Zamboanga crisis, which saw the burning of Yakan, Sama and Tausug villages along the shoreline of Zamboanga City. As multiple barangays dominated by Christian and Chavacano families refused to take in evacuees given the conflict context, the DSWD was forced for the first time to host over 100,000 people in a single makeshift evacuation centre, a repurposed sports stadium. Aid workers realised too late that Sama-Badjau, a nomadic sea people, could not mix with other ethnicities whether in the evacuation centre or in inland transitory shelters, and could only thrive in areas adjacent to water. A separate camp by the shoreline had to be constructed for the Sama-Badjau, who also disliked the meat-based meals and canned goods provided in the camps, and preferred fish. The Zamboanga experience also accelerated the implementation of child protection policies and mother-and-child-friendly spaces amidst reports of gender-based violence and several deaths in the grandstand of the stadium.

3.4 ‘Dual targeting’ and ensuring inclusion over time

The issue of ensuring inclusion within the BARMM is one that is heavily nuanced. In a region where poverty is high and most citizens are exposed to multiple kinds of hazard and displacement at any given time, how does one quantify vulnerability, or explicitly say that one set of individuals is more vulnerable than others? Most respondents highlighted that inclusion in a conflict-affected context is intrinsically related to ensuring peace and stability, in that ensuring access to resources is tied to managing or avoiding communal conflict, especially in mixed/tri-people communities. Several examples were given about the pitfalls of humanitarian response programmes that cater to specific groups without balancing access for the rest of the population. One is related to the backlash experienced when livelihood and microcredit programmes are directed purely towards women in an IDP camp in the absence of parallel

opportunities for men and boys. There are two other ongoing issues related to ‘dual targeting’: the balance of support between IDPs and equally impoverished host communities particularly during protracted displacements; and delivering decommissioning programmes for former combatants and their families while acknowledging the effects of conflict on unarmed civilian populations.

These questions go back to the difference between ‘inclusion’ and the vernacular concepts of *langkap*, *lapay* or *merafeg*. The English term speaks of a functional dichotomy between inclusion and exclusion, implying that the need for inclusion arises as a consequence of the existence of exclusion, and that there cannot be one without the other. This contrasts with the vernacular assumption that completeness and universal coverage should be the default. In the words of a social worker from Maguindanao:

The word inclusion connotes discrimination. It is a foreign concept that connotes separation of things. If there is inclusion, then there is exclusion. Does that imply that there is exclusivity in the Bangsamoro? This becomes concerning because everybody wear[s] a different hat and you use different hats depending on the situation. Exclusivity is a matter of perception. It is apparent when you dismiss commonality. As a humanitarian worker, there should be no separation. The requirements of your intervention must be focused on the ‘needs’. We do not look into gender, age, or religion. There is this other term *ilmu pinda... ipinda nenka ginawa nenka sekai mamba* [put yourself in another’s shoes]. To be inclusive is to put yourself in another person’s position.

When asked to explain the implications of ‘different hats depending on the situation’, he spoke of the limits of having fixed definitions of vulnerability or identity as the basis for inclusion, as categories such as ‘woman’, ‘indigenous person’, ‘elderly’ or ‘IDP’ are fluid and must be further nuanced. Part of the issue is the myopic focus on individuals or sectors as the unit of analysis, not the community as a whole; part of it is about class and positionality; another issue, as pointed out by another community facilitator, is the focus on needs-based analysis and not from a rights- or positive resource-based perspective: ‘It’s defeatist. It’s always looking at what we’re lacking, not what we’ve got. Moros do not have a defeatist personality.’

At the same time, looking at ‘commonality’ does not necessarily mean that there is no prioritisation. Respondents explained that the work of the humanitarian sector is to help the community ‘triage’ the sequencing of aid that is based on urgency and necessity, but not to categorically say that certain people are more deserving of access to resources, and others are not. Another senior development worker reflected that exclusion is built into the Western model of aid. Without various forms of community dialogue and negotiation to manage perceptions, humanitarian claims to impartiality just mean that aid workers are encouraged to turn a blind eye to social fissures – therefore exacerbating tensions amongst residents.

Pinagaaway mo ‘tong community sa kakarampot [you make the community fight over a pittance]. You lead them on that this is development. And it creates a lot of misrepresentations and wrong reflections about self. *Dahil di kami nabigyan* [because we weren’t given aid] we’re less than the other group.

Empathy is intrinsic to inclusion. It is connected to managing perceptions, which necessitates multiple forms of negotiation and self-reflexivity. One community facilitator shared his experiences working with a Teduray-Lambangian community that had just returned to its village after several months of forced displacement due to skirmishes between the military and the BIFF, a breakaway group from the MILF that had aligned itself with ISIS. Food aid from the municipality and NGOs had stopped coming and they had not been back on their farms long enough for subsistence crops to grow. When a research project provided small cash honoraria for a limited number of interviewees in that village, the community and the research team jointly decided to pool the cash honoraria plus top-ups to buy rice, enough for the entire cluster of households to receive two kilos of rice for each family, including non-interviewees. This came up to a relatively small amount, but ensured goodwill for all involved. The facilitator said of this:

Pag gutom ang lahat, kailangang paghatian ang kung anong meron [when everyone is hungry, any available resources need to be shared]. Hindi ka pwede basta-basta mag cut-off [you can't just set a cut-off].

Two elements were necessary to make this solution possible: flexibility from the donor to allow the adjustment, but also the fact that the facilitator and research team were also Teduray and understood enough of the community context to enable honest dialogue for problem-solving. In this sense, inclusion also requires a self-reflexive acknowledgement of the position of the aid worker and institution. Several respondents spoke of how Filipino/Bangsamoro culture is heavily family- and clan-centric, and how national guidelines are beginning to acknowledge this aspect of humanitarian assistance and its implications on ground operations. While this tendency of 'wanting to take care of those you know first before others' can translate to elite capture in aid distribution, discussions are ongoing amongst local Red Cross societies to allow medical first responders a three-hour window after disaster onset to take care of their own families before deployment. This can allow humanitarian workers to focus better on response once they know their families are secure.

Another common theme amongst respondents is that definitions of inclusion change across the DRRM cycle, depending on the specific type of emergency (sudden-onset, slow shock or compounded) and the duration of the response. Given the assumption that the ideal is universal coverage, the practical implication is that inclusion must be phased. Several respondents noted that inclusion is easiest during the immediate phase but gets harder as time passes. One aid worker remarked that it's usually most inclusive before organisations come in, because this is when survivors are the only ones responding to each other. An example given was during the first few days of the Marawi crisis, when Muslim residents protected Christians in the battle area, and formerly opposing networks set aside their differences and worked together to rescue trapped people while feeding and housing the displaced. This organic consensus changed with the recovery and the beginnings of the rehabilitation phase. Given that up to 95% of IDPs were initially house-based, not in evacuation centres, tensions began to rise amongst host communities who had limits to how long they were willing to feed and house even the closest relatives. By this time, it became known that the small group of Christians held hostage by the ISIS-inspired groups in the battle area received seed livelihood grants from the government. This did not go down well with some residents who felt slighted that the larger number of IDP residents did not receive the same.

A health worker noted that given the vast number of issues beyond humanitarian actors' control, 100% inclusion is impossible:

You can try to be as inclusive as you can, leave no one behind, but it's more of a vision, an aspiration. It's not going to be a reality. But it should always be an aspiration.

3.5 Power and trust in inclusion and exclusion

Ultimately, there is a general consensus that the concept of inclusion itself is political, and power dynamics play a pivotal role in inclusion and exclusion in the BARMM. 'Representation is still defined by those who hold power,' observed an INGO representative with national government experience. 'It is an exercise of power, to choose who will be represented and who will represent them.'

The majority of respondents relate the links between power, inclusion and exclusion in the aid sector in the BARMM to the functional integration of the humanitarian system with peacebuilding and development mechanisms in the region, and hard-wired models of representation and power-sharing. While aid is supposed to be objective and non-partisan, this becomes virtually impossible when the primary institutions responsible for aid delivery are products of negotiation, particularly this close to the passage of a peace deal. This was seen in the MNLf-led ARMM after the 1996 GPH-MNLf Final Peace Agreement, and now with the current MILF-led BARMM. One current BARMM official tasked with disaster response explained their mandate as the result and implementation of a negotiated political settlement; as a result, their work cannot be seen as separate. At the same time, just because there is an 'end' to the peace process does not mean that displacement events cease. Humanitarian challenges in the BARMM are continuous, he explained, and responses to these challenges are guided by policies that are crafted and implemented by former combatants. While there is a commitment to not discriminate and to cater to everyone, the terms of the agreement mean that for the immediate post-agreement phase, former combatants 'get to say who gets included or not, or prioritised or not, especially within the context of the transition'.

Several respondents related the tension around power and inclusion in terms of the general concept of community-driven development (CDD), which in the BARMM is generally understood as the gold standard as far as inclusion policy in development aid is concerned. However, even the best CDD guidelines tend to treat a given community as a homogeneous unit, largely silent about the power dynamics and negotiations for control that exist at all levels of what could be defined as a 'community'. Several respondents noted that the Bangsamoro is still not a unified entity, and still has trouble with managing diversity as an 'imagined community'.

There's a Japanese saying, 'If a nail sticks down on the floor, hammer it down to smoothen it', meaning when you stand out and are different from the others, you have to be homogenised. In the same light, we must not look at inclusion as assimilation. We have to ask ourselves, when we talk about inclusion and mainstreaming as a concept, which stream did you choose as 'main'? [...] At the same time, do we have a collective imagination, something shared across all populations who have

become Muslim? In Sulu, others will say, we're not Bangsamoro, we're Bangsa Sug. The BARMM is a tapestry of different threads and concepts of identity. So what is a unified polity in this region? It's a challenge for the BARMM leadership [...] It was defined in the BOL but there are still many questions. It's not a shared, collective consciousness. It's something that plays in my mind, where I'm coming from, when I approach how to work with people in certain ministries and the BARMM as a whole.

At all levels, ensuring inclusion (or the perception thereof) is seen as a necessary aspect of taking and maintaining power, feeding a stable social equilibrium by managing perceptions and balancing vertical and horizontal interests. In the BARMM, much of this is dependent on inter- and intra-communal dialogue and negotiation, which in turn is built on a system of trust. This again relates to the role of brokers who are equally trusted by those in power and community representatives alike, but particularly the level of trust amongst the leadership and former combatants and supporters of MILF. Several interviewees explained that, in the context of a community revolutionary context, some insularity is a given. A prominent Moro researcher observed that this is the aspect of inclusion policy in the region that most outsiders have trouble accepting: 'In the BARMM context, it's grounded on trust. Here, relationships matter a lot. It's 80% relationships, 20% technical, and one can never go and impose.'

However, some respondents noted that basing decisions on trust has been used to justify exclusion policies, such as the tendency to only hire personnel within one's own ethnic group or friendship circle. While this arguably ensures that aid workers hailing from a specific area and are able to speak the language can operate better on the ground, it also compartmentalises perspectives. Two middle managers in development organisations said that they encourage hiring staff from outside their tribe to ensure diversity in perspectives and, to some extent, ensure objectivity. 'Sure,' one respondent said, 'the Mranaw can and should speak about Marawi, but they should also be able to operate in the island provinces too.'

4 Falling through the cracks: identifying drivers of exclusion

Efforts towards Bangsamoro inclusion in the Philippine body politic, while incomplete, are generally considered to have made major strides in the past two decades. This is due in no small part to sizeable political, humanitarian and development investments made to support the two major peace agreements with the MNLF and the MILF as well as managing perceived tensions and/or discrimination based on religious identity. However, efforts at the regional and community level are perceived to have been less inclusive.

Given the tension between the technical representation-based definition of inclusion and homegrown concepts of inclusion as universal targeting, this chapter explores perceived drivers of exclusion observed during specific crisis response campaigns as well as longer-term patterns. This raises fundamental questions: why is it that despite all the government and donor initiatives over the past decades, certain groups are still left behind, and why do others fall through the cracks? Discussions with respondents revealed several layers: perceived ‘unintentional’ exclusion; more overt and ‘intentional’ exclusion; as well as the compounding effects of the same population experiencing multiple displacements over time.

4.1 ‘Unintentional’ exclusion

The previous chapter explored how community members, practitioners and policy-makers in the BARMM define and operationalise inclusion in humanitarian action, acknowledging existing fissures across ethnocultural, geographic, political and gender lines. When asked about what drives exclusion, most community-level respondents’ first answer was in relation to the zero-sum model of representation, which entails that inclusion of some sectors is automatically linked to the exclusion of others: ‘*May nakakabenefit din kasi pag may naiiwan* [it’s because there are those who benefit when someone gets left behind]’. However, respondents hailing from the humanitarian sector itself admitted that many barriers to inclusion are structural, not consciously intentional, and therefore less overtly visible. Some are inherent to government and international donor protocols, and others are related to these protocols’ interface with cultural practices and realities at the grassroots level.

4.1.1 Embedded exclusion in the international humanitarian sector

Although the local disaster response and risk-reduction ecosystem has been steadily localising in the years after the passage of the 2010 Philippine DRRM Law, the BARMM remains the most consistently donor-saturated region in the country, with most multilateral and bilateral donors and INGOs having multi-year funding windows for peace, stability and continuing humanitarian

assistance. Some respondents argued that international organisations have been useful as ‘honest brokers’, especially during breakdowns in negotiations between Manila and the MILF. Yet several Moro respondents argued that humanitarian assistance that is overly shaped by international actors often contributes to exclusion:

Di rin masyadong maayos kung masyadong donor-driven ang approach [it also doesn't work too well if the approach is too donor-driven]. Kailangang ma-balance [it has to be balanced].

The points of exclusion within the aid complex are succinctly summarised by a Filipino senior development worker as follows:

Exclusion is integrated into the simple and mundane aspects of humanitarian work, from the language of what you need to say or do to the online donor platforms for submitting proposals. Donors also prefer selecting institutional partners they're familiar with and who can help minimise administrative work and transaction costs. Smaller and local NGOs will not be able to compete and engage. Despite the 2016 Grand Bargain to put more resources directly with local actors, there's limited space or incentives for innovation. The bottom-line still is to fund headquarters, and it's usually too much effort and cost to include CSOs during the design phase.

While exclusion issues are present across the implementing cycle, these issues begin with institutional mandates and funding, for both donors and implementers alike. One UN staff member admitted:

We do our best to adjust, but the source of the money defines the trajectory. Donors pre-select which segment of the population to target, so if there's a pot of funding for women, we'll end up churning out a proposal on gender equality even if it's not necessarily the primary need.

As a result, this creates pre-existing prioritisation that implementing INGOs and their partners have to realign and justify. Respondents noted that this also applies to national government funds, which as of mid-2016 can be subcontracted to UN agencies such as the UN Development Programme and the International Organization for Migration for accelerated implementation.¹⁶ As a result, the UN system's monitoring and evaluation framework in the Philippines and the BARMM is tied to national development targets and its level of disaggregation at the outcome level. The same UN staff member clarified:

You see that in the UNDAF [UN Development Assistance Framework], our outcome indicators come from the Philippine Development Plan. So if the national government doesn't see that as a priority, then we score very low on development effectiveness metrics after Paris and Busan. We have more flexibility at the output level. But for our projects with LGUs [local government units], it's not us identifying who will be receiving. Much of those target groups come from the LGU, and we just deliver. If we could have helped support targeting, great, but it's not always the case. This is something we're trying to help solve now.

16 See the GPH–UN National Acceleration Modality, which the UN system frames as a cost-sharing mechanism.

Pre-identification issues go back to the relative advantages and disadvantages of a representation-based model of inclusion, particularly if project menus and beneficiary categories are fixed. ‘It’s not always with malice,’ qualified the head of one of the oldest NGOs in the Philippines.

It’s a development sector flaw, in our effort to be efficient. We identify a best practice, but by doing so we define the parameters and constraints. When we set parameters, there will always be someone out of scope.

Several examples were given regarding populations who ‘fall through the cracks’. Given the ongoing context of the Covid-19 pandemic, several respondents noted how home-based IDPs (those who have chosen to live with relatives in informal arrangements, not in camps or transitory sites) and urban homeless people are not legible to mainstream testing, isolation, contact tracing or vaccination platforms.

They will be lumped under the general category of indigents – A.5. They’re not frontliners, they will never be said as A.2 since many of them are undocumented. If you say A.3, people with comorbidities, they don’t even know if they’re hypertensive. Neither will they have the capacity to go online. Unless someone intervenes for them or represents them. That’s the only time that they will be given a face that the government can respond to.

Grassroots-level workers, however, were more forthright about their displeasure with pre-packaged programmes, particularly in areas with heavy exposure to donors. As described by a Maguindanaon development worker:

Government and UN, these INGOs, they tend to design projects at the top level, so people are not really involved. We had one experience during a project’s social preparation phase – when the community did the needs assessment, they only gave very basic and uniform answers. When we tried to understand why, the community said, ‘why are you still asking us these questions? There’s a project already, right? You just ask us questions to get the funds and then you leave us behind.’ People feel that they’re just pumped for information and then that’s it. So we asked them again, hold on, what is it that we need to ask you? So that’s where we realised that the questions were wrong. Instead of asking, what do you want from this pre-existing menu, we should be saying, ‘what is it that you really want to do? What resources and capacities do you already have? How do you want to change your community to change your life?’ And this is what they told us: we know the problem. We’re from here. But we’re not included.

Consultations and social preparation (*mashwara*) are a standard requirement in most humanitarian programmes. Respondents uniformly noted that exclusion tends to happen when these activities are only done for compliance, and that participants have little-to-no say in how projects are implemented and no access to feedback mechanisms beyond the pro forma public consultations. ‘Consulting for the

sake of consultation,' observed by one social worker, 'that's not inclusion. But that's usually what we get.' Another social worker said that inclusion is ensuring follow-through across the entire programme cycle, and not just for the consultation phase:

Dapat sa implementation ng project dapat kasama din sila. Natarget mo yung vulnerable sector then may pakiusap siya, gagawin iyon [[People you consulted] must also be part of the implementation of the project. If you target a particular vulnerable sector and they requested you to about something [related to the project], you have to do it.]

Most respondents noted that lack of access to information and miscommunication and/or disinformation are often major sources of exclusion (or the perception thereof).

The degree to which these realignments meet local needs also depends on the skill of organisations to balance these requirements, not to mention often-stringent ODA eligibility preconditions such as formal accreditation, registration and familiarity with financial systems to access resources. The tendency is that INGOs and larger organisations become fund holders and consortium convenors for grassroots organisations and local people's organisations, who take on the role of subgrantees. While this makes donors' lives easier by letting them engage and monitor only one or a handful of institutions instead of several dozen, it has several implications at the field level, creating conditions that can sometimes be more inefficient and exclusionary.

First, funding is consolidated amongst a smaller number of organisations across donors. As such, multiple donors and INGOs tend to work with the same local CSOs and grassroots subgrantees, with the first-level fundholders skimming off large portions of the grants for administrative services while the actual work is consolidated among the same field-level organisations. Because the INGOs have different frameworks and do not always coordinate and harmonise targeting, there have been cases where the same NGOs are targeting the same populations in the same areas with the same project types, but with different project costs and logos.¹⁷

Second, field-level subgrantees are also given short implementing runways due to limited funding cycles. The burden is on grassroots actors to deliver in short contracts, with more time and resources spent on donor reporting requirements instead of delivering and ensuring sustainability of the project itself. As one adviser noted:

Dahil conduit lang sila ng malalaki, they lose identity, at hindi nila natutupad palagi yung kailangang gawin kasi ang pananagutan nila ay sa donor [because the [local NGOs and POs] are only conduits

17 See several donor programme evaluations in recent years. One of the few examples available in the public domain is the 2020 'Strategic review and management response of Australia's support for peacebuilding in conflict-affected Mindanao' (www.dfat.gov.au/publications/development/strategic-review-and-management-response-australias-support-peacebuilding-conflict-affected-mindanao-2020).

of the big [INGOs], they lose identity, and they don't always fulfil what they need to do because their accountability is to the donor [and not to the community]].

This is also related to the earlier issue regarding volume caps for funding, where donors release calls for proposals for large crisis events, but often have no standby resources for smaller recurring and protracted displacements in Sulu or Maguindanao for as little as 25–100 households.

Effective donor control of fund flows results in interventions adhering to pre-existing menus. 'If they don't like your programme, they won't fund it,' remarked one community facilitator from Central Mindanao. 'Development partners will only want to implement their programs, they will impose it.' This level of control over resources persists even after the grant is awarded. One respondent from the second district of Maguindanao shared how their project failed after one foreign donor insisted on shifting activities from the original site to another area – the so-called 'SPMS Box', a military term for the adjoining municipalities of Shariff Aguak, Pagatin (Datu Saudi Ampatuan), Mamasapano and Shariff Saydona Mustapha, where the BIFF and other non-state armed groups operate. 'For media mileage, they said, because that's where they'll be more famous.' Another development facilitator shared that sometimes donor decisions seem arbitrary and disconnected from reality, with no space for argumentation:

When they [donors] see that a project is well implemented, they will say 'go for it and we will include it for the second phase' or that 'we will issue a no-cost extension.' But if you as the implementer observes certain decisions from the donor that are not feasible, the donor will tell you, 'why did you take on this project if you can't do it?' This is unfair because the context is so fluid in these areas. Oftentimes what the donor wants to do is different from the needs on the ground.

These dynamics persist even in the current BARMM transition, where government funds through the Block Grant generally outstrip donor resources. However, several ex-INGO humanitarian workers currently working on the ground noted that certain donors are still acting as if ODA projects are the priority, taking up valuable time and energy:

Donor projects add to government deliverables, and this is something that the ministries are starting to complain about, in my experience. Instead of government ministries being able to do what we need to do and spend our own funds, they add to our burden.

Conversely, another respondent shared that some BARMM ministers have pushed back to some extent, with others choosing to disengage from ODA activities altogether: 'They don't listen. So what Minister [x] said was, go ahead, do it. It's your [country's] money.'

Several respondents also pointed to institutions' tendency to limit their operations to their respective mandates, which can cause turfing issues in the context of cluster-level work. One respondent shared experiences at the level of the MHT, which historically has had success in mainstreaming gender across cash, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), and shelter activities. Yet they noted that this changes when new cluster convenors come in without an understanding of the link between gender,

humanitarian assistance, and peace and security, often shifting back to only protection-oriented gender-based violence work, which is important but should not be the only agenda. In the midst of general jadedness and cynicism around turfing and institutional exclusion, an international livelihoods specialist said she believes that it is possible to maximise inclusion and minimise exclusion in the BARMM by strengthening coordination efforts:

Maximising inclusion and minimising exclusion cannot be achieved by one agency. But we're not good at coordination. People want their own separate plans and they want to do it on their own terms. As a result, different organisations and donors tend to target the same populations with the same programme types.

This was supported by a community facilitator who shared her own experiences at the cluster coordination level:

There are cases where the donors' target isn't what's needed just because of their [pre-existing] narratives of what is inclusive. The best cases are when these differences are fixed during coordination meetings. Prior to those coordination meetings, you really see clashes.

Coordination challenges are also often seen not only amongst international actors, but also within the Philippine DRRM system itself. Under the Philippines DRRM law, the disaster preparedness cluster is co-chaired by the Department of the Interior and Local Government; disaster response is spearheaded by the DSWD; disaster prevention and mitigation is co-chaired by the Department of Science and Technology; and disaster rehabilitation and recovery and the general responsibility for rehabilitation and reconstruction planning is under NEDA. While local governments are ostensibly responsible for integrating all of these efforts, turfing is a constant issue that spills over across all aspects of post-crisis response. In the case of Marawi, for example, there is no one unified rehabilitation plan, as activities for the MAA are overseen by TFBM and its chair, the Department of Human Settlements and Urban Development. NEDA, which legally has the mandate, therefore prepared a Comprehensive Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Plan that covered all areas in Marawi, Butig and Piagapo outside the MAA.

Respondents also interrogated how the concept of objectivity is related to inclusion and exclusion, noting that not all humanitarian initiatives have explicit social and environmental safeguards in place, in the name of impartiality. While being objective and impartial are basic humanitarian tenets, most Filipino and Bangsamoro respondents agreed that impartiality should not be an excuse for turning a blind eye to more structural problems, particularly for protracted and recurring displacements covering the same communities. 'Not everyone asks about who is excluded,' one respondent remarked. 'Some donors do, but other donors do not ask. Not all humanitarian organisations do conflict analysis – some development groups do, but not all.' Another respondent observed:

So many initiatives are reactionary and responsive rather than well planned. The MHT is not asking questions that are important to ask. Ultimately you get used to the system, that's just how

it is. Sometimes it's just a defeatist perspective, because it's hard to get through a very politicised bureaucracy. So the choice is to just not be involved in these conflicts, to ignore the prejudices and preferences because it's so difficult to understand what's going on. After all it's not the UN or INGOs' call, it's the responsibility of the government, of ARMM or BARMM.

Another long-time practitioner commented:

It's been decades but you don't even ask why they were displaced. You just deliver aid, preposition goods without addressing structural problems. They say, 'Oh, that's not humanitarian anymore. That's political. That's security. That's development.' Among emergency responders, what I've noticed after many years is that we no longer ask, why is there displacement in the first place. [...] We talk about building back better, achieving durable solutions. But for many people in the sector, IDPs seem to exist in the vacuum, they're not related in the overall context of development in a place. If we truly feel pity then we should find ways to prevent displacement in the first place. But the truth is, our livelihood depends on displacement. If there's a displacement [event], that means we have jobs.

4.1.2 Policy mismatches between national frameworks and local realities

Exclusion in many cases in the BARMM is related to technical mismatches, with respondents relaying instances of inappropriate aid packages across decades. Identified reasons include general frameworks that are not fit-for-purpose, meaning that conditions in the BARMM are not necessarily captured by national government or INGO diagnostic tools and protocols. Others said that exclusion is a result when financial and administrative decisions are made without understanding logistical and operational conditions on the ground. A common example is how fewer resources are provided to the island provinces because the higher costs of transportation or community facilitators are not foreseen; as such, these are deducted from the core grant. Others however assert that a mainland-heavy ratio is justified:

Daw i pinakamasiken na tu ba i bedtabangan [you help the needy that is closest to you]. You cannot carry all at the same time. The logic is, transportation is lesser. You need to consider the wastage. If there are limited resources, you want to help what is needed. The greatest good for the greatest number.

Part of it has to do with data availability, as the BARMM notoriously has a relatively unreliable statistical base despite the glut of donor-needs assessments and specialised surveys, as well as the increasingly popular use of humanitarian crisis mapping. Others argue that it is not necessarily about the lack of data, but the lack of understanding and full utilisation of data. At the same time, because most of these data-collection processes are funded, administered and owned by different national government agencies and donor agencies using proprietary systems, there have been few cases where information is collated and retained by the BARMM and local government officials for long-term use. This leads to inefficient, repeated data-collection processes, which if led by non-Bangsamoro organisations with limited flexibility and familiarity with the context, may not necessarily be fit-for-purpose and therefore can lead to exclusion.

Examples include the gaps experienced in the 2013 Zamboanga response prior to the move towards the disaggregation of camp management and support packages along ethnic lines: Sendong-era issues with renters and sharers, which remain a point of contention between DSWD and NHA; several cases where national government has delivered the wrong types of food (pork in Muslim communities) or equipment (Plexiglas boats for fishermen in choppy waters, or landlocked areas); as well as a national tendency to install IDPs in resettlement areas that are on flood plains, faultlines, have no water access, or are too far from livelihood sources.

Marawi in particular was unusual in that it was largely untouched by the decades of war and so its IDPs were not the usual rural agricultural workers but also included affluent and middle-income professionals who found it beneath their dignity to line up in evacuation centres for food aid. However, the early-stage choice in Marawi was to deliver the majority of support in evacuation centres despite the fact that at least 95% of IDPs were staying in home-based arrangements with relatives and friends. This cascaded to other aspects of the response and rehabilitation experience, where former owners of destroyed business buildings and stalls in Marawi declined to be included in government listings and the Kathanon biometrics database, with the assumption that their renters would provide a share of whatever support to be provided by TFBM.

In Basilan and Tawi-Tawi, respondents complained about livelihood projects such as poultry, livestock and seedling distribution using materials purchased from the mainland. Because these materials are not suitable for the islands, they invariably fail: 'If it's not based on consultation and consensus, you end up with white elephants.' Even in cases where programming is perceived as acceptably inclusive, the lack of available physical, social and digital infrastructure in the BARMM, which is one of the poorest regions in the country, is a major barrier to accessibility, especially for PWDs and long-term displaced populations. This was particularly felt during the early stage of the Covid-19 pandemic, when limited resources and mobility restrictions, not to mention the lack of mobile signal outside major cities, further deprived IDPs and other 'minorities within the minority' of crucial aid.

Part of it is also the assumption that what applies outside the Bangsamoro also applies in the region, despite it being an autonomous region with cultural practices, norms and perspectives that are different from the rest of the Philippines. Experiences documented during major responses in Zamboanga and Marawi, for example, show how post-crisis housing, land and property decision-making in the Philippines is dominated by the predominant belief in 'no title, no return' policies – meaning that IDPs who cannot show a formally awarded and subdivided Torrens title for the land they previously occupied are often not allowed to return and rebuild their homes. This is despite the fact that there are complex land arrangements in the BARMM due to the interplay of colonial-era land dispossession as well as the multiple waves of displacement since the 1970s, with land conflict being a major trigger of armed conflict in the first place. Some families can trace back their communal land ownership rights using genealogical records (*tarsila* or *silsilah*) that are often unsubdivided given impracticalities.

Similar issues can be seen in the use of national disaster risk and environmental legislation to justify the forced resettlement of people living along shorelines and the establishment of 'no-build zones',

notwithstanding the clans' centuries-long history in the area. These stringent guidelines also pose more difficulty for renters, sharers or those with traditional or informal claims, such as those who resided pre-crisis in the areas either as property owners or as renters but who vote elsewhere. Philippine government policy also states that 'no public funds can be used for private goods' such as the rebuilding of private homes or schools without specialised legislation. In Marawi, the destroyed mosques purportedly could not be paid for by the government due to the principle of the separation of church and state, despite several Catholic churches destroyed during the 2013 Bohol earthquake being reconstructed. However, private donations were secured and at least one former mosque is rumoured to be converted into a museum.

4.1.3 Exclusion and cultural norms

Horizontal, intra-communal dynamics also play a considerable role in why and how people fall through the cracks. While most of the peace process-related inclusion interventions reflect the power imbalance between the central government and the Bangsamoro, others argue that cultural tensions within Mindanao and the Bangsamoro itself are arguably more important. '*Ang exclusion kasi ay hindi na driven by [government] policies [exclusion isn't driven by [government] policy]*,' argued a senior official hailing from Mindanao. 'We don't set out to intentionally exclude people. It's driven by tradition.'

Negative aspects of tradition can manifest as discrimination. In the weeks after the Zamboanga and Marawi crises, many Christian barangays in Zamboanga and Iligan refused to take in IDPs, reportedly in fear of the MNLF and ISIS, but also because of deep-seated mistrust. Even amongst Moros, being *bakwit* – a popular term for 'evacuee' – carries deep social stigma. One Maguindanaon respondent said that uncouth table manners are sometimes described as '*parang bakwit* [like a displaced person]'. Several anecdotes were shared in Lanao and Maguindanao about how people refuse to be called IDPs, only that they merely transferred to another hometown. While intercommunal tensions have ebbed over the years, the general mistrust of outsiders has compounded during the pandemic, with multiple cases of both IDPs and repatriated migrant workers shunned as carriers of disease.

These biases are difficult to shake. Although the Philippines has some of the best gender-related indicators in Asia, the Bangsamoro is still a male-oriented society. In practice, women occupy leadership and mediation roles across all sectors, but there is a deeply ingrained belief that only men can visibly lead. LGBTQI+ individuals are 'tolerated' in more progressive areas but cannot be overtly visible, with these gender roles enforced particularly in relation to Islamic belief.

Similar dynamics underpin the erasure of PWDs from most aspects of daily life in the Bangsamoro. Despite robust national legislation, children with disabilities are often hidden by families in shame because of beliefs that such children are cursed. One social worker shared her experiences in destigmatising PWDs, which is possible with positive incentives and education. She said that these programmes are only possible if PWDs are prioritised by local officials, usually by using the municipal budget. These niche programmes are often discontinued if the mayor changes, and the existing line item shifted to 'easier' programmes. Many INGO representatives admit that these high levels of stigma create barriers for PWDs to participate in the design of or generally access programmes, as they are

not necessarily ‘top-of-mind’ since the majority of the rest of the population is also deprived. One development researcher working with communities preparing for decommissioning relayed how any discussion of post-traumatic stress disorder was considered anathema, and that some people claimed that there are no PWDs among former MILF–BIAF combatants because ‘if they were they would no longer be combatants’.

Elite capture and its relationship to corruption was the most mentioned driver of exclusion across all interviews. However, respondents were divided as to whether it could be categorised as intentional, or an unintentional result of various cultural norms and practices. At the community level, all respondents had experiences of how only relatives and allies of those in power (mostly barangay captains, mayors, *datu* or sultans) are consulted or enumerated as beneficiaries, particularly for livelihood packages. Small infrastructure projects such as water systems, temporary shelters, communal toilets, or tribal halls are often built on land owned by such elites, and turned into private property only for their personal use. Three typical responses from different sites are as follows:

Practically speaking, inclusion policies are not followed because of politics. Sad to say, it’s an abuse of power. If the mayor doesn’t approve the project or the service provider, the project will not be approved.

LGUs play a vital role. There are certain humanitarian interventions that still require a bidding process. But they intervene during the bids. If they cannot get a ‘commission’ from the project, it won’t push through. So the bidders and suppliers are forced to cut deals with the politicians.

There are cases where people should have access to aid but are marginalised by politics. In our culture, only those who are close to politicians will receive help. It’s usually worse at the barangay level. The barangay chairmen themselves will tell you what to give and who to give it to. There are some residents who will complain but they’re afraid of getting in trouble. There’s a culture of silence.

Some justify elite capture in terms of a natural desire to care first for one’s own family and blood relations. Others state that, in the absence of functioning institutions, people in crisis tend to go to the designated community leader for aid, which can range from food assistance to medical and burial costs. This causes the leaders to require fungible sources of cash that the LGU’s internal revenue allotment cannot fully cover – essentially justifying public officials’ use of funds as their own. One government official said:

Walang 100% malinis [there’s no [public function] that’s 100% clean]. It’s embedded in the institutions, with the LGUs. At this point all you can do is neutralise it, as much as you can. *Para walang gulo*, co-existence *na lang ang goal*, *pero* at the same time, you have to deliver [so there’s no trouble, we’re just forced to see co-existence [with the corrupt officials] as the goal, but at the same, you have to deliver].

These practices interact with the issue of class in the Bangsamoro, which is tied to complex notions of wealth, power, lineage and control. Common descriptive terms are ‘datuism’ or the ‘*datu* system’, which

speak of traditional and customary governance structures that can trace their lineage to the advent of Islam in the Philippines in the 16th century, but also refer to other elites whose sources of power include elected office and/or links to various non-state armed groups. As described by one international observer:

The element of class is not always well recognised in the Bangsamoro. Right now when we talk about inclusion and exclusion, we focus on gender, we talk about the island provinces. But what we are dealing with is the concept of datuism, about what happens for those who are living on the mountain when they go against the wishes of the *datu* and the commanders. There is still a kind of elitism that permeates the Bangsamoro on many levels, not just about wealth or political power or arms, but lineage and blood. In terms of authority and such, it's not that officially important. But it takes importance in the interactions people have. And if we're blind to that, we miss out. Lineage and royalty – it's not spoken out loud that it matters, but it does.

A senior national government official accordingly linked exclusion in the Bangsamoro to what he called 'sultanic syndrome':

If somebody is given authority – elected officials, for example – they behave like sultans. They are the overlords of their territory, regardless if it's a barangay or a municipality, or whatever. That's how I observe working with them. A sultan in a specific kingdom rules. His or her wish is the law, *kung ano ang gusto niya iyon ang masusunod* [whatever he or she desires is followed]. *Pero ang mga tao, tulad ng mahihirap* [but [regular] people, such as the poor], cannot go against the wishes of the sultan.

A common example raised by respondents is how NMIPs are less willing to raise their voices in public consultations and to contradict others. Respondents from the Teduray-Lambangian and Dulangan Manobo clarified that, while this causes them to be perceived as weak and uneducated, they prefer to keep the peace and not cause conflict, and are taught to be patient despite prejudices. These differences, as described by a Maguindanaon development worker, allow more outspoken actors to game the system:

There are those who are shy, which is why they don't receive projects and that's what is taken advantage of by others. Interventions are often replicated because the system often rewards those who are loud and assertive. Usually those who submit requests and proposals are those who are like that, constantly, they just change the names of the proposals and the details. The names they use, if you go to certain communities, you find out that the community doesn't receive anything. They're just used [by these people/organisations]. A lot of times, this is done by representatives of peoples' organisations, sometimes there are CSOs who use this style to get funding from donors.

In such cases, national government and INGOs often become arbiters. A common 'best practice' is to have specialised dialogues with IPs and other vulnerable sectors whose voices may be drowned out by local powers. This was described by a senior social welfare ministry official, who shared a local practice of applying social safeguard protocols more commonly used in CDD models, popular in the BARMM since the 1996 peace deal with the MNLF, to disaster response:

This is something we've discussed with the social workers, if we really want inclusivity in our development, we have to ensure that those who cannot speak for themselves publicly are given the opportunity. So if you see that there are differences, we have to take time to consult separately.

He clarified however that this also depends on having competent local community facilitators, as operations in the BARMM have so many nuances that are difficult to capture and process for non-locals, particularly for 'parachuting' personnel who are new to the area. As such, several respondents noted that existing hierarchies in the BARMM aid complex – which often situate foreign donors and aid workers on top, non-Moros from Manila and Davao, then Moro professionals in terms of pay scale and decision-making power – contribute to exclusion in multiple ways:

Exclusion comes in with this kind of hierarchy. During one activity, the foreign consultant gets [PHP] 700,000, but the Moro who does the analysis and the groundwork gets [PHP] 60,000, and it reflects how they view us and treat us. When you look at humanitarian assistance and ODA, they spend so much on personnel fees. Their fees are even bigger than the grants given to the community. But the experience, knowledge and know-how comes from us [Moros]. Why can't we develop and support Moro technical experts? We have a lot. Even those who are hired as heads of orgs, it always has to be an expat, it's very rare that you hire locals. Even among us CSOs, they become arrogant when they partner with the international organisations. Egos get bloated, and we CSOs aren't harmonised.

These reflections, particularly from Bangsamoro aid workers, tend to see-saw between wanting more-localised institutions but also justifying their trust of 'objective' outsiders, foreigners in particular, more than their own neighbours. Some theorise that they feel that BARMM decision-makers can be more honest and open with humanitarian personnel who are not from the region, or from the Philippines. An example is the frank defence of exclusion and elite capture related by a local warlord to an international observer:

They cannot blame us, the authorities, because we have to deal with the Bangsamoro that is not mature. [...] The people need to be mature. They are immature. So they cannot blame us that we're like that.

4.2 Intentional exclusion

Defining intentional exclusion is more contentious than defining unintentional exclusion. Respondents who were displaced due to armed conflict in the past five years expressed a general mistrust of official government figures related to post-event damages, losses and deaths. While most were initially hesitant to speak for fear of retribution, they said that they believe government officials and the security sector have an interest in keeping numbers low: it looks better on press releases and there is less accountability. Several respondents from Marawi shared experiences regarding how their dead and missing relatives have not been counted in the official figures. More than 300 bodies were cross-checked with dental records and DNA samples in 2018 and 2019. Those with positive matches were returned to families for burial; unclaimed bodies were interred in a local mass grave (Fernandez,

2021). Several respondents shared that while some may not have relatives remaining in Marawi City to claim the bodies, the relatives of others may not have come forward for fear that their kin would be tagged as ISIS combatants. In Maguindanao and the island provinces, some residents complained that displacements related to blood feuds (*rido*) are often not recorded or addressed unless the body counts are high, as officials purportedly decline to intervene in ‘personal’ matters.

In the same manner that representation-based inclusion strategies explicitly foreground whose needs need to be prioritised, many humanitarian and development programmes have ‘negative lists’ and ‘blacklists’ of who and what should not be included in principled humanitarian action. From the perspective of donors and aid agencies, this is to prevent humanitarian funds from being used for unlawful or unethical acts. At the ground level, most agree that it is more closely related to maintaining the balance of power. A useful example is the mutually agreed exclusion of MILF-associated areas in government targeting prior to the signing of the 2012 Framework Agreement to avoid the alleged fomentation of counterinsurgency, the stance being that any projects explicitly for MILF communities should be jointly agreed and implemented with the MILF itself.

With the rise of displacements related to ‘black flag’ violent extremism, there is an unspoken policy of ‘othering’ actors (whether Abu Sayyaf, Maute or BIFF) who are perceived to have taken a role in the conflict, including their wives, children and extended relatives. In line with military frameworks of ‘denial of space’ and preventing and countering violent extremism, they are driven out of their old neighbourhoods; their children are not allowed to attend local schools or madaris (religious schools). Several respondents said that this policy of absolute shunning is not viable in the closely knit societies of the Bangsamoro and may further drive people towards violence:

Una, kamaganak natin yan. Asawa nito, relative natin si ganyan, all their family and friends are here. At may punto rin sila [First, they’re our relatives. This person’s wife, this guy, they’re our relatives, all their family and friends are here. And they do have a point.]

In general, there remains a healthy respect for revolutionary armed struggle, as the MILF’s leaders are proud to have fought against national government until recently and are framing the current BARMM government as a new form of jihad. As such the only point of contention is legitimacy: what makes various forms of violence and resistance legitimate?

Aspects of intentional exclusion also emerge in the context of the tri-people framework, where the balance of resources and power amongst Moro, Christian settlers and NMIPs is constantly negotiated. At municipal, barangay and *sitio* (household cluster) level, several barangay captains and local leaders of mixed tri-people communities shared that they need to exert more effort to be inclusive, particularly to constituents of a different faith or tribe. They said that they cannot afford to be blatantly exclusivist when providing humanitarian aid, not when disgruntlement amongst neighbours can exacerbate security threats.

This changes at the regional level and across any aspect of the development complex that involves any peace process actors. As part of the transitional justice and reconciliation aspects of the peace

agreement, it is understood that more power and resources are to be returned to Moros as catch-up for decades of war, with an implicit understanding that less power and fewer resources will be given to Christians – who are still addressed as ‘settlers’ in official regional legislation. This has very different implications for affluent traders and politicians, as opposed to contract farmers whose impoverished parents and grandparents had gone to Mindanao as part of ‘land to the landless’ programmes. Similar arguments are made to differentiate between the MILF and MNLF, also justifying why the MILF should have more power and representation at multiple levels, particularly throughout the present transition. One regional official described it thus: ‘they say “*tapos na ang MNLF, kami naman*” [they say “the MNLF has had its turn, now it’s ours”]’.

Intentional exclusion also comes to the fore when consultation and coordination platforms need to manage competing interests and opposing opinions. Reluctance to rock the boat is a cultural norm in the BARMM, maintaining peace in order to not offend the dignity of others. And yet more overt exclusion comes into play in cases where the power differentials are greater. Social workers and community facilitators shared how they have received physical threats from barangay captains, commanders or other elites wishing to prevent projects from entering their community without their consent (and control).

Even without the dimension of violence, multiple respondents shared how government task forces and councils have the tendency to not include those who disagree. Several NGOs shared how anyone who raises issues will not be accredited or invited to meetings or coordination platforms; in many places, those in power create their own ‘pet’ organisations, cooperatives or NGOs to discourage dissent. One former senior government official admitted that the desire for government councils and platforms to achieve consensus often involves intentional exclusion, which he says is ‘even more critical in the context of BARMM’:

At each stage of consultation, who do you consult with? Who do you recognise as legitimate? Do you even have to select? *Hindi ba pwede na yung* IDP representation, *may diversity?* *Kasi sabi ni gobyerno, gusto ko yung kausap ko, isa lang.* [Isn’t it possible to have diversity in IDP representation? But the government says, I only want to speak to one person, one group.] But what if there is real diversity and disagreement? Do you penalise them by choosing one?

These issues point to several respondents’ discomfort with the predominant definitions of inclusion and exclusion, as they feel it ‘actually highlights differences instead of what we have in common’. In Maguindanao, several respondents related this to the ongoing issue of non-Moro IPs in the BARMM, who are acknowledged to share the same genealogical roots as their Moro counterparts, but chose not to follow Islam. Although national legislation explicitly provides for the delineation of ancestral lands, the Bangsamoro Parliament has yet to pass its own regional IPs code and has prevented the national government from awarding pending ancestral domain certificates. With a steadily rising pattern of displacements and land-related violence after the signing of the peace agreement and increasing development encroachment, the BARMM’s non-Moro IP communities see themselves as a ‘minority within a minority’ whose rights are being erased.

However, others complained that external actors, national government and donors are overly focused on IP issues and by doing so are driving a wedge between communities – between Moros and IPs, and between Islamised IPs and non-Islamised IPs. *‘Hindi lang naman IP and nangangailangan ng inclusion, excluded ba sila? [It’s not only IPs who need inclusion, are they really excluded?]*’ Biases remain, with some field commanders asserting that the power-sharing mandates provided by the peace deal trumps any other claim: *‘Kung gusto nila ng inclusion, de mag hawak rin sila ng armas [if they [IPs] really want inclusion, then they should also take up arms].’*¹⁸

4.3 Compounded exclusion

The relationship between exclusion and time is a common thread across interviews, not only within specific crisis response experiences, but also across respondents’ experiences over the decades. In line with the earlier observation that inclusion is better during the earlier phases of the humanitarian crisis, a regional official hailing from Maguindanao described exclusion effects at the local level:

One week after the calamity, the interventions are rigid. After that, when interventions have subsided, you see that people are starting to fight over resources. There are others who are now looking for opportunities to make money. Local governments also start relying on external actors. Some LGUs have calamity funds that they don’t touch. Instead of being the first responders, they’re the ones relying on DSWD and the NGOs. In our area, the mayor’s office isn’t so bad. But the barangay officials hoard relief goods. Sometimes these people start out as victims and marginalised but eventually they become the oppressor. They lock out those who are not their relatives, who belong to different political parties.

Other respondents pointed at how the humanitarian aid sector disproportionately focuses on the initial surge phase of support without fully plotting out subsequent phases. The lack of follow-ups and follow-throughs, they said, deepens exclusion. One social worker from the marshland area of Maguindanao shared her experiences of a humanitarian programme involving families of suspected ‘black flag’ actors, with a window of school support for young children. Although it was highly commended by the community, the funding NGO decided to stop the programme after one year because they said that they had a new focus for the next cycle. This prevented younger siblings of the first wave of beneficiaries, who were supposed to have been part of the second and third phases, from access to much-needed school materials and allowances.

Ang tanong sa’kin ng mga bata, e kailan kami? Kung gusto natin magprogram na makita natin talaga ung impact sa mga anak ng combatants, tutukan talaga at wag bitiwang. Para magchange talaga ang mind nya. [The children asked me, ‘when is it our turn?’ If we want to programme it in a way that we can really see the impact on the children of combatants, we have to really focus and not let go. So they can really change their minds.]

¹⁸ This is countered by several respondents who pointed to several prominent IP clans who were part of the Bangsamoro armed struggle from the very beginning.

One respondent compared the exclusion effects of short-term programmes to dole-outs given by politicians: 'It's easier to give short-term response like canned goods, rice, but there's no sustainability. No training. No capacitation.' Another community facilitator decried how donors think in terms of linear outcomes: 'if inclusive, multi-year [programming] isn't in their programme, then they shouldn't start at all'. A frank response from a senior Filipino aid worker explains how short deployments are normalised by the system:

We stick to what we're comfortable with. Our reason for being is a new emergency, so we leave behind whatever we started. Just parachute into the new crisis. You'll see that everywhere, the ambulance chasers. They meet up in Aceh, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Nepal, jump to Yolanda, to Marawi, to Myanmar, from one mission to another. They have all of that expertise, but we lose accountability. And what's still asked for is, are there still unmet humanitarian needs? There's no follow-through. We don't complete the cycle. It's always, oh we've given food packs, then when there's a new emergency in a new place, we transfer there. The IDPs get left behind. They're left to fend for themselves. Oh, it's the government that's the duty bearer, we say [so it's okay to leave]. But all the government is doing is infrastructure.

This focus on short-term support is compounded by the focus of the humanitarian system on singular events instead of longer-term patterns (Bennett, 2015; Barbelet and Wake, 2017). What happens when populations are repeatedly displaced for the better part of the past decade or longer? Although the Philippines has several national displacement trackers, apart from those retained by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), these are limited to event-based numbers, they do not profile populations who are displaced multiple times due to different crises. One UN staff member said:

That's the thing, we don't know where they've gone to. We don't have longitudinal cohort data on these populations, let alone information with enough disaggregation. Short of putting trackers on everyone I don't know how that's possible. [...] Based on our current basis for targeting, we're anywhere from three to five years behind.

Affected communities have settled into various coping mechanisms. In Maguindanao, where some families can expect annual disasters, homes are built out of light materials that can be moved or replaced if they are burned or destroyed. No real assets can be safely built up, so conflict areas often have highly mobile micro-businesses. Families are forced to leave their children in urban and peri-urban areas so they can go to school safely, but the adults are forced to return to their farms to eke out a living despite the risks. Moreover, no one has thoroughly addressed these cumulative effects. Two respondents from Tawi-Tawi pointed out how Sama-Badjau families are affected by annual tsunamis and storm surges that easily knock down their homes, but the only housing support available from the government is in the form of low-cost core shelters. Both respondents decried how government officials have refused to alter the minimum amounts and standards, settling for flimsy and cheap materials that require procurement and construction every year. A one-time project using strong traditional housing materials resistant to flooding and water damage would be more efficient, but the decades of wasted resources remain the default.

Part of the issue lies in the enduring artificial divide between humanitarian, peacebuilding and development programming, with the aid sector insisting on an event-based perspective that often ignores the broader geographic context. A senior Filipino development worker presently acting as head-of-base for a major INGO remarked:

Emergency and development actors don't talk to each other. There's a lot of talk about the emergency, development and peacebuilding nexus, especially in terms of durable solutions, but the reality is we're still compartmentalised. There are dichotomies. I just want to understand what is related to me and my mandate. If a community comes to us asking for certain things, my Principals will say, oh we do not fund that because that's no longer [part of] the emergency [response]. That is early recovery and development. Because of that, we've been here for three years, four years in the same site but we only give 'lifesaving interventions'. Sure, we'll give tarpaulins. Jerry kits. Hygiene kits, all for the first three months, sure. What happens next? Where are the concrete solutions until people are able to go home? But if the displacement happens for a longer period, beyond three or six months, we're done. We forget about them. Then they'll blame IDPs now, saying, why aren't you grateful that we helped you?

All respondents stressed how Covid-19 further compounds these protracted displacements. As one of the few countries to not have reopened schools for face-to-face learning by early 2022, deprived communities and IDPs across the Philippines have even less access to information. In Marawi, IDP respondents living in the transitory shelters said that the few assets they were able to retain had to be sold during the lockdowns, mainly for food but also to purchase internet-capable mobile phones for their children. In the island provinces, social workers said that because of limited aid, many residents have been forced to illegally cross the border to Sabah for work and will continue to do so even after being deported multiple times.

Climate change is another creeping concern, causing crop failures and changes in flooding patterns across the region. In some parts of the Ligawasan Marsh of Maguindanao, previously the heartland of the Bangsamoro struggle, formerly fertile farm areas are now inundated, while old fishing grounds have dried up.

Two aid workers noted that the BARMM experience highlights the relationship between disaster vulnerability and the need for asset reform, pointing out several cases where IDPs without secure land tenure are completely wiped out financially after crises, but those who are able to return to land they own can still plant vegetables and get back on their feet after three months. Said one aid worker:

We haven't done much to balance the inequality of opportunity and income, not while everything is still dictated by the powerful players in Mindanao. Asset reform is so difficult to do. You have to be patient and systemic. The aid perspective of just working on a project for a week isn't possible. For me, sustainability of humanitarian response really has to be addressed. Most of it is just temporary. [IDPs] just go back to where they started, but their situation is worse off.

Across these challenges, dynamics around age, gender and disability ensure that access varies further across groups and socioeconomic classes.

5 Implications: towards more inclusive humanitarian action

Experiences in the BARMM provide a rich evidence base for reassessing what inclusion and exclusion mean for humanitarian actors working within a specific set of conditions; in this case, in a subregion experiencing protracted and cyclical internal displacement from both armed conflict and environmental hazards. The Philippines' status as a lower-middle-income country with robust DRRM legislation, as well as the Bangsamoro's increased political and fiscal flexibility emanating from several signed peace agreements, raise important questions regarding the relationships of greater local autonomy, inclusion and exclusion. Given these conditions and the ongoing Bangsamoro transition, this chapter delineates emerging implications for humanitarian, peacebuilding and development actors regarding best practice and potential ways forward beyond sectoral divides.

5.1 Inclusion and localisation

Localisation and the meaningful exercise of the right to self-determination form a major theme amongst Bangsamoro respondents, demanding a constant interrogation of what inclusion means and how it can be achieved in a given context. Transition aside, the Covid-19 crisis magnified existing fissures and disparities, but also forced more localisation. Cross-border travel restrictions prevented foreign and non-Moro personnel from field activities for the better part of two years. Largely left to their own devices, Bangsamoro communities and the organisations and institutions supporting them were forced to reconfigure operations towards more local supply chains, as well as agreements more closely resembling mutual aid rather than traditional humanitarian support projects. Difficulties with online remote coordination highlighted deep disconnections between perspectives emanating from donor capitals and country offices in Manila with realities on the ground. Generally, respondents agreed that greater localisation and autonomy can help increase inclusion by ensuring that aid activities align with what people need. However, certain process safeguards will need to be put in place to manage horizontal, inter-communal dynamics that enable certain groups of particular ages, genders and abilities to hoard more resources and power while letting others fall through the cracks.

Conversations with Bangsamoro residents exposed the disparity between the anglophone concepts of 'inclusion', 'inclusivity' and 'exclusion' and vernacular practice, exposing different functional definitions at different levels. Based on multiple Bangsamoro languages, a homegrown definition of inclusion is closer to universal access and coverage, instead of the focused targeting of specific groups. Existing national and regional official policies hew to sector-based definitions of vulnerability, mandating that certain groups defined as vulnerable will need to have at least a minimum share of support. Local formulations of inclusion take this several steps further. While limited resources should be prioritised based on necessity, inclusion means that everyone should be able to eventually access resources in a manner that is transparent and acceptable to all concerned. Given the ongoing conflict context, social cohesion and consensus are paramount. This means that leaving no one behind and ensuring

that communal resources are fairly distributed in times of common need are not just practical ethical precepts, but have political and security implications.

What are the implications of a framework of inclusion based on universal coverage, not sectoral targeting and prioritisation? Recommendations include longer-term, multi-year programming beyond the surge phase that links to area-based assessments of both needs and opportunities. In order to truly reach all segments of the population, delivery modes need to be adapted to different requirements and preferences. Given the relative lack of physical, social and digital infrastructure in the BARMM compared with that in other regions in the Philippines, both government and donor resources for post-agreement reconstruction should be geared towards putting these basic elements in place. While ‘normalisation’ as defined by the GPH–MILF peace agreement is conceptually tied to the needs of MILF–BIAF and BIWAB combatants and their families, aiding the regional transition to unarmed and productive civilian life means that baseline infrastructure should be available to everyone. Stronger coordination mechanisms are required between the MHT and peacebuilding and development organisations, covering donors, INGOs, national, regional and local government.

To do so, this requires more granular and interoperable longitudinal datasets that are meaningful, which can be used for local decision-making and cross-sector collaboration, and are not solely for justifying decisions made after the fact. A former senior national official described the ideal scenario as such:

If we really want to be inclusive the general principle should be to seek out all citizens. Get a universal dataset, categorise everyone until you narrow down and cover everyone, continuously adding those who previously fell through the cracks. Categorise them and ensure they’re included in services, in representation.

However, these kinds of data-driven efforts to make citizens more legible to the state must be nuanced by realities of intersectionality in the Bangsamoro – standard assumptions of cut-and-dried vulnerability are often broken by how different people have different needs in relation to age, gender, ethnolinguistic group, level of education, ability and socioeconomic class. Realistically, existing platforms and mechanisms are quite rigid and often do not allow these types of qualitative input to be monitored and folded into decision-making. Managing limitations will entail engaging in partnerships with a more diverse set of actors immersed in these lived realities, and who can help humanitarian and development actors adjust accordingly.

Although it is argued that the increased political and fiscal autonomy held by the new Bangsamoro government should automatically translate to increased inclusion, respondents pointed to both latent and overt barriers that prevent this. Most respondents identified how disparities between donor-driven frameworks and ground conditions are a major source of exclusion, as well as a tendency to deploy pre-packaged programmes without local consultation in the name of efficiency. Thus, a more inclusive approach to aid will require more flexibility and willingness to retool frameworks and modules, even those considered as ‘global best practice’ when necessary. One respondent described this as the elephant in the room for most development actors:

Whose framework do we follow? They claim that it's co-design, it's participatory. But if you're already presenting the project and you can't really change anything, that's no longer co-design. You're just giving them an FYI [i.e. simply notifying them].

Respondents agreed that increased inclusion is the result when people are given more power and flexibility to identify solutions to the problems that affect them, and to be part of decision-making and implementation at every step. This includes engaging Bangsamoro service providers and embedding technical consultants who can transfer skills and technology that can be retained and sustained by local communities and actors long after the end of the project. Monitoring and evaluation systems also need to be reconfigured for longer-term reflective engagement, ensuring that all humanitarian interventions are able to 'close the loop'. Releasing public-domain information in the appropriate languages and formats is a consistent request, to ensure that IDPs are able to make informed decisions about their lives. Many residents in the hinterlands do not speak English or Tagalog/Filipino and have limited internet or telecommunications access, often relying on word of mouth or short-wave radio. As such, publicly available information should be empowering, be aware of and strive to overcome 'digital divides' in unequal technology access, and should be able to mitigate possible gatekeeping (Willitts-King et al., 2019).

More fundamentally, this goes back to the question of participatory and peer-led design, where people are given more power and flexibility to identify solutions to the problems that affect them, and to be part of decision-making and implementation at every step. Beyond the passage of key legislation, the dominant top-down model of humanitarian assistance and development – whether implemented by foreign INGOs and donors or local elites – ultimately needs to change. For every critical community facilitator that points to a largely colonially influenced development aid system as a barrier for inclusion, there is someone else who acknowledges that local inefficiency and corruption are valid reasons for donors, INGOs and third-party CSOs to not fully 'let go'.

Nevertheless, an 'inclusive-enough' process is deemed more efficient in the long run despite more time and effort being needed for social preparation, and ensures that miscommunication and disinformation are avoided by providing accurate and timely information to key stakeholders. Across multiple thematic areas and sectors, the balance between inclusion and technical rigour is often found by empowering hybrid traditional and legal mechanisms such as tri-people councils of elders and bringing in traditional leaders such as the *datu*, sultans and *bae-a-labi* (female traditional leaders) as well as religious leaders for decision-making, information dissemination and service delivery during and after a crisis.

In recent years, the Philippines has been investing in integrating a 'peace lens' in humanitarian and development operations, nominally requiring culture- and conflict-sensitivity and conflict analysis modules for post-crisis assessments, among others. However, the extent to which these assessments are truly integrated into design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation is mixed. A localised inclusion policy based on a functional understanding of local conditions means that operations can identify barriers to inclusion, design incentives to minimise exclusion, and respond to needs but

acknowledge existing local resources and opportunities. To do so efficiently means not only ramping up local hires, but encouraging processes that have local actors in the drivers' seats. One respondent stressed that:

Locals should be involved at every step and stage of the process, not just elites. But if you're not displaced, if you don't live here in the IDP shelters, you should not have the final say.

This also acknowledges the importance of 'brokers' – Bangsamoro and other trusted mediators and facilitators – who have a key role in whether inclusive responses happen and can help bridge divides. Nevertheless, safeguards regarding geographic and sectoral equity will still have to be enforced, alongside diversity and transparency and accountability policies, given long-standing issues around elite capture and ethnic divides (Ong et al., 2015). Another humanitarian worker acknowledged that, at this stage of operations in the BARMM, local autonomy should come into play, citing IDPs' calls regarding 'nothing about us without us':

In Bangsamoro, in Marawi – it's more about ownership now, on a fundamental level. It's beyond inclusivity or inclusion. It's not about 'leave no one behind' anymore. They're telling us, if your framework of aid and development is causing more harm than good, leave them behind. Leave them alone. Let them govern themselves.

While it is unlikely that donor aid will completely disappear from the BARMM given the frequency of disasters as well as Mindanao's strategic role in peace and security in Southeast Asia, multiple respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the seemingly outsize role of foreign actors in shaping the humanitarian sector. One respondent contrasted the 'right to self determination' battle cry of the Bangsamoro revolutionary fronts with what they saw as a deep-seated 'culture of dependence', particularly with the reliance on Manila and foreign third-party actors to arbitrate in inter-communal disputes.

Until when do we need to have big brothers and big sisters? We say that we can't even be safe amongst ourselves. There's bad blood between the MILF and the MNLF, and yet we claim we're all brothers. How do we prove it?

Another called for a reimagination of definitions and models of success and failure:

We need to rethink our models of development, what inclusion and exclusion means. This programme, this mandate tells you, this is how you live your life because this is what we say that the kind of water system you should build, this is how you should access your water. How you manage your funds. You're telling the community how they should behave according to your funding mandates and deliverables, and there's no other way. This will go on and on until we put our cards on the table. It's a question of power. But who would even dare to have that conversation?

5.2 Inclusion and participation beyond the humanitarian–peacebuilding–development divide

The protracted and cyclical nature of crisis events in the BARMM highlights the temporal dimension of inclusion and exclusion. One clear implication is that the traditional humanitarian focus on the immediate ‘surge’ phase enforces exclusion dynamics even while targeting the most vulnerable. Given experiences such as Zamboanga and Marawi where IDPs are still in transitory settings years after the event with compounding crises and no clear end to uncertainty, practice must shift to ensure that IDPs needs are addressed even after the first six months with adjustments made to address increasing perceptions of exclusion over time. To be truly inclusive, humanitarian actors together with state officials must be held accountable in closing the loop and ensuring that the commitment to durable solutions – for example, supporting IDPs to return to their place of origin or dignified resettlement in a place of their choosing – is met.

With limited mandates and flexibility to iterate, not to mention donor fatigue, a major part of the work will involve better coordination and collaboration between MHT and the traditional development actors. The humanitarian–development–peacebuilding nexus is something that has been at the forefront of discussions amongst Mindanao-focused organisations since the signing of the CAB in 2014 and the passage of the BOL in 2018. With the shift from negotiations to implementation, organisations with a mediation and dialogue mandate have chosen to do more work with humanitarian and development components instead of withdrawing from the Bangsamoro. In the same light, increasingly high expectations for stability in a post-agreement context underscore respondents’ observations that apart from constant relief and response deployments, humanitarian actors must be able to take a step back and interrogate the triggers of displacement in the first place. At present, no mechanisms exist, as even national and regional officials have historically found it difficult to track ODA being spent in the BARMM, let alone encourage operational collaboration across mandates and institutional dynamics.

Going beyond single event-based frameworks will require better integration with the planning and implementation systems of affected communities, at the barangay, municipal and provincial levels. At the time of writing, few LGUs in the BARMM can integrate the needs of IDPs into their regular plans and programmes, although post-2017 events have ensured a clearer reconstruction perspective in the land use and development plans of Marawi City and Lanao del Sur. Ensuring that these plans will also survive the Philippines’ abbreviated three- and six-year planning horizons despite changes of leadership will be key. This change will be important not only for areas directly experiencing violence and environmental hazards, but also for areas serving as host communities for IDPs.

Operating in a post-agreement context also requires shifting perspectives from the vertical, state versus non-state inclusion–exclusion framework used in the negotiations to manage internal, intra-communal issues. The interviews underscored the tension between inclusion policy and culturally coded practice involving local brokers and gatekeepers, kinship and other relational ties that shape the politics of service delivery in the BARMM. While some expressed an acceptance of a baseline level of exclusion and corruption in the name of cultural practice, others expressed optimism that the transition affords

opportunities for reform that would not otherwise be possible. One respondent said that ‘[Exclusion in the Bangsamoro] is the story of systemic control of resources and power. To change this whole thing cannot be done by one person.’

Although the 1996 GPH-MNLF Final Peace Agreement and the 2014 CAB are inclusion policies addressing the minoritisation of Muslim Mindanao in the Philippine nation-state, the nascent Bangsamoro political identity will be challenged when it comes to consolidating social cohesion while allowing a diversity of perspectives, including non-Muslims and those who would rather identify as Bangsa Sug or non-Moro IP, not Bangsamoro. Others expressed hopes that real inclusion policy will ensure that ‘the oppressed will not become the oppressor’.

Ultimately, ensuring inclusion in a post-agreement context means moving away from merely seeing inclusion as representation, and understanding inclusion as effective service delivery. Exclusion is a product not only of corruption but of a systemic inability to effectively plan, programme, procure, implement, monitor and communicate interventions in a manner that makes sense to affected communities, in all their diversity. Consistent with remarks from some aid actors that ‘inclusion is the new protection’, supporting a functional and efficient Bangsamoro bureaucracy is the next phase of work. This is the opportunity and demand created by the ongoing transition, which mandates the institutionalisation of new platforms, mechanisms and norms across the region.

5.3 Conclusion and recommendations

The context of the Bangsamoro forces at least two frames of reference in assessing why people still ‘fall through the cracks’: experiences in the region writ large, as well as specific post-event responses as those seen in Marawi, Sulu or Zamboanga. While multiple commitments, guidelines and recommendations exist within the aid sector and in Philippine and BARMM regional legislation to improve inclusion and mitigate exclusion, more work will be required to translate discourse to action. The following recommendations aim to inform future leadership and response to protracted and cyclical, complex crises such as those experienced in the Bangsamoro, and shape policy and practice for more inclusive humanitarian and development action (Table 3). Recommendations are structured into two types: 1) broader policy for collaborative action between national government donors, and INGOs; and 2) specific options for local actors in the BARMM. This highlights that proactive collaboration is necessary to achieve inclusive humanitarian action and to avoid the false divide between humanitarian, peacebuilding and development efforts, while respecting local autonomy.

Table 3 Recommendations for the humanitarian response to cyclical, complex crises

General recommendation	Specific recommendations	
	To the Philippine government and donor organisations and INGOs	To the BARMM and local actors in the region
1. Design grounded inclusion policies based on the type of crisis, as well as existing needs and opportunities in specific geographic regions, including social and environmental safeguards for all project types.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Shift towards a basic assumption of universal coverage beyond sector-based targeting. ● Interrogate existing norms and biases related to inclusion and exclusion, while addressing intersectionality of needs, considering age, gender, ethnicity, disability and other factors. ● Review national DRRM policies to differentiate guidelines and protocols for environmental disasters and armed conflict. ● Pass the national IDP law and other pending inclusion policies. ● Revise issuances and protocols creating post-crisis task forces operating in the BARMM and other areas, to ensure greater representation and control by local civilian actors as a default. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Shift towards a basic assumption of universal coverage beyond sector-based targeting. ● Pass the regional IDP law and other pending BTA bills related to the inclusion of more diverse groups and their needs. ● Continue the work of the BTA in retrofitting national policy and mechanisms to ensure that it is fit-for-purpose to the BARMM context, including the legal acknowledgement of traditional and customary practice in accordance with the BOL. This includes empowering hybrid traditional and legal mechanisms such as tri-people councils of elders and bringing in the relevant <i>datu/sultan/bae-a-labi</i> and religious leaders for decision-making, information dissemination and service delivery during and after a crisis. ● Invest in baseline physical, social and digital infrastructure to ensure even service delivery across the region. This can harness resources earmarked for post-peace agreement rehabilitation and reconstruction. ● Initiate consultations to address deep-seated biases and norms that lock in social exclusion.
2. Complement events-based crisis assessments and programming with longer-term area-based analysis, including conflict analysis and stakeholder assessments.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Prioritise multi-year funding streams and ensure sustainability of exit strategies. ● Review inclusion safeguards in other workstreams including the GPH–MILF normalisation process. ● Activate coordination and convergence mechanisms – involving government, donors, civil society and private sector actors – not only for information sharing, reporting and monitoring, but for joined-up programming. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Integrate post-disaster requirements and needs of IDPs in the Bangsamoro Development Plan, Provincial Development and Physical Framework Plans (PDPFPs), and the municipal Comprehensive Land Use Plans (CLUPs) of both affected and host communities, including adequate delivery of shelter, public utilities and social services. ● Activate the Mindanao Working Group and ensure functional integration with the MHT and existing programming of the BARMM under the Block Grant and other local funds. ● Support local governments in the accessing and efficient use of existing resources, particularly Internal Revenue Allotment and disaster financing for the dignified resettlement and return of IDPs.
3. For ongoing displacement events, institute catch-up plans to conclude ‘durable solutions’-based return and resettlement of IDPs.		
4. Establish sustainable financing measures to support follow-through.		
5. Develop packages for identified sectors, while ensuring balance and ‘dual targeting’.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Review and reassess strategies for tracking and supporting identified groups: women and girls, young men, PWDs, orphans, widows, older people and non-Moro IPs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Implement existing commitments in the CAB and BOL regarding inclusion and support for specific sectors.

Table 3 Recommendations for the humanitarian response to cyclical, complex crises (cont.)

General recommendation	Specific recommendations	
	To the Philippine government and donor organisations and INGOs	To the BARMM and local actors in the region
6. Partner and collaborate with local actors, while continuously assessing potential 'blind spots' that embed existing exclusion in communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure local representation and shared leadership in national decision-making bodies while ensuring diversity in partnerships. • Bring in local organisations as collaborators and co-applicants in grant applications, not just as programme beneficiaries or subgrantees. • Invest in capacity-building and organisational development for local grassroots networks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support locally led and implemented initiatives, with participatory and peer-led design as a given, while ensuring diversity in partnerships. This includes options to 'rotate' representation and implementation partnerships to try to manage elite capture and/or other forms of consolidation of power and influence. • Ensure the localised selection and hiring of personnel, at all levels of response.
7. Ensure that extensive social preparation and consultation with local networks are built in across interventions at all stages of the project cycle.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create safe spaces and platforms where the diversity of opinions is allowed and processed. • Institute grievance redress mechanisms. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish two-way communication and coordination channels using languages and platforms accessible to residents – written in the vernacular, using online/offline platforms such as radio, town hall meetings and other regular gatherings (e.g. Friday <i>khutbah</i> or sermons, neighbourhood small-group check-ins).
8. Invest in communications as a basic inclusion strategy, while ensuring that the core messages and methods being used are themselves inclusive.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invest in accessibility support for people with hearing, visual or intellectual impairments and for those who are isolated in their homes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invest in accessibility support for people with hearing, visual or intellectual impairments and for those who are isolated in their homes.
9. Support decision-making with data. Establish monitoring and evaluation systems across longer timeframes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement existing data-related legislation, including full implementation of the Community Based Monitoring System Law. • Strengthen data practice for post-crisis response, including conducting household surveys and mapping processes while ensuring appropriate levels of disaggregation. • Enforce interoperability between datasets held by international humanitarian actors, development organisations, local governments and communities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enforce data reforms in the BARMM across all ministries; work with donors and national agencies to transfer access and data management capacities of key national surveys as well as crisis-specific datasets (Marawi's Kathanon; various surveys run by the UN system) to the BARMM. • Invest in training and capacity-building for the better use of data at the local level.
10. Ensure transparency and accountability both for donors and implementers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement donor transparency portals for all major humanitarian responses. • Build in third-party monitoring and citizen accompaniment in all programmes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effect continuous capacity-building and organisational development related to procurement and service delivery to avoid inefficiency and leakage.

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Humanitarian Policy Group

ODI
203 Blackfriars Road
London SE1 8NJ
United Kingdom

Tel: +44 (0) 20 7922 0300
Fax: +44 (0) 20 7922 0399
Email: hpgadmin@odi.org
Website: odi.org/hpg
