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Toward resolutions and reconciliations: Understanding the elements of peacebuilding in the Philippines

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Toward Resolutions and Reconciliations: Understanding the Elements of Peacebuilding in the Philippines

Adoracion M. Navarro and Janina Sofia H. Jacinto

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Toward Resolutions and Reconciliations:
Understanding the Elements of Peacebuilding in the Philippines

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Abstract

This study examines the ideology-driven armed conflicts in the Philippines and analyzes the peacebuilding elements that have contributed to durable peace across conflict-affected regions. Focusing on separatist movements in Mindanao and communist insurgencies in various places nationwide, the study traces the historical roots of conflict, including grievances related to self-determination, land dispossession, political exclusion, and socioeconomic inequality. It then develops an analytical framework for peacebuilding that synthesizes international peace literature with Philippine experience and institutions. Using qualitative methods, including key informant interviews with government implementing agencies and extensive desktop review of peace agreements, government policies, and program implementation reports, the study analyzes six core elements of peacebuilding in the Philippine context: confidence-building measures, peace agreements or preparatory instruments, socioeconomic development programs, permanent cessation of hostilities, political and legal settlements, and transitional justice and reconciliation.

The analysis applies concepts from incentives compatibility and credible commitment to assess how these elements influence the strategic choices of armed groups, government actors, and communities. Findings show that peacebuilding initiatives are most effective when economic, political, and security incentives are aligned and when state commitments are perceived as credible and sustained over time. Socioeconomic interventions and immediate assistance help reduce the opportunity cost of returning to violence, while inclusive political and legal mechanisms address long-standing grievances. However, uneven implementation, delayed delivery of benefits, and gaps in institutional coordination continue to pose risks to sustaining peace. The study concludes with policy-relevant lessons and recommendations aimed at strengthening the design and implementation of peacebuilding interventions to support long-term stability and reconciliation in the Philippines.

Keywords: peacebuilding, armed conflicts, Mindanao separatism, communist insurgency, incentives and credible commitment, socioeconomic reintegration, peace agreements, cessation of hostilities, political amnesty, transitional justice and reconciliation

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	1
2. History of the major armed conflicts in the Philippines	2
2.1 Separatism in Mindanao	2
2.2 Communist insurgency	4
3. Suggested analytical framework for peacebuilding in the Philippines	7
3.1 Identification of the elements of peacebuilding	7
3.2 Ensuring incentives alignment and credible commitment.....	9
4. Lessons from the implementation of peacebuilding elements	11
4.1 Immediate aid as a confidence-building measure	16
4.2 Socioeconomic development programs	20
4.3 Cessation of hostilities: The MILF and MNLF experience	26
4.4 Grants of amnesty as political and legal settlement	28
4.5 Transitional justice and reconciliation	31
5. Conclusions and Recommendations	33
Bibliography	36

List of Tables

Table 1. Summary of the elements of peacebuilding in major armed conflicts in the Philippines	12
Table 2. Breakdown of ECLIP assistance, as of September 2025.....	18
Table 3. Allocation of budget per project type for FY 2024 and FY 2025 (in PHP).....	20
Table 4. Barangay Development Program Barangay Projects and Distribution of Budget, as of October 2025	25

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***Adoracion M. Navarro
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1. Introduction

In the Philippines, major armed conflicts that have historical roots and ideological foundations can be categorized into two main types: separatist movements in Mindanao and communist insurgencies. Armed groups that emerged assert various grievances—ranging from historical injustices and land dispossession to systemic marginalization and socio-economic inequality. The government has formal peace agenda or peace processes¹ with these armed groups. Though these groups have unique identities, demands, and visions for autonomy or systemic reform, the strategies for forging peace with them converge under some common elements of peacebuilding. A study of elements of peacebuilding common with these armed groups thus offers critical insights into the pursuit of lasting peace in the country.

Furthermore, this study contributes to filling knowledge gaps in existing Philippine peace studies by providing a comprehensive assessment that can inform both policy formulation and conflict resolution strategies. Its exploration of the socio-political and economic underpinnings of the armed conflicts highlights the necessity of responsive peace processes that address systemic inequities and promote inclusive participation. By elucidating the elements of peacebuilding in these conflicts and then integrating an analysis of grievances on self-determination, equitable resource distribution, and historical injustice, the study not only deepens the academic understanding of why conflicts persist but also offer practical recommendations for peacebuilding interventions that are tailored to the Philippine context.

This study generally aimed to investigate what led to the absence of peace in some regions of the Philippines and what works and can work to sustain the peace in these regions. Specifically, it also aimed to: give a historical account of the major armed conflicts in the Philippines and the main causes of these; identify the common elements of peacebuilding in the Philippines based on the assessment of the government programs meant to resolve the armed conflicts; distill lessons from the peacebuilding activities guided by these elements; and offer insights on peacebuilding strategies that work and those that are challenging, and then suggest next steps on the remaining peacebuilding challenges.

The study primarily involved qualitative research and employed key informant interviews and desktop review. Key informants from agencies that are implementing interventions for the former

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¹ The term “peace tables” also appears in government documents as it is being used the Office of the Presidential Adviser on Peace, Reconciliation and Unity to refer to these peace agenda or peace processes.

combatants of the armed groups were interviewed. The desktop review involved examining relevant literature on the armed conflicts and accomplishment reports of the implementing agencies.

The study is organized into five sections, starting with this section on the introduction. Section 2 provides a review of literature on the historical context of the armed conflicts in the Philippines. Section 3 presents a suggested analytical framework for analyzing peacebuilding in the Philippines. Section 4 assesses the implementation of government peace-related interventions. Section 5 concludes and gives policy recommendations.

2. History of the major armed conflicts in the Philippines

Various studies have separately tracked the historical roots of the major conflicts in the Philippines and the armed groups that have fought or continue to fight the government. The discussion below summarizes and synthesizes the literature on the historical background of these groups.

2.1 *Separatism in Mindanao*

Two armed groups evolved in the separatism in Mindanao—(1) the Moro National Liberation Front and (2) the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, with the latter evolving as a break-away group from the former.

2.1.1 The Moro National Liberation Front

The formation of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) is intrinsically linked to long-standing historical injustices, deep-seated sociopolitical grievances, and the aspiration of the Moro people for self-determination. Traditionally, Mindanao was home to a diverse population, including Christians, Muslims, and various ethnic groups; however, during the colonial era, conflicts over land ownership and efforts toward Christianization led to the marginalization of the Moros in their own territories (Seo 2024). Ragandang (2024) traces the legacy of social exclusion, deprivation, and violence against the Moros from the Spanish colonial period through successive Philippine administrations. The events of 1968, particularly the alleged massacre of Moro recruits by the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) during the Jabitah incident (Abunales 2016), served as a catalyst for the establishment of the MNLF in 1972 under the leadership of Nur Misuari, with the movement seeking autonomy to escape former president Ferdinand Marcos Sr.'s policies that they perceived as a continuation of colonial policies (Malan and Solomon 2012; Galeriana and Ragandang 2018).

The core aim of the MNLF was to champion the rights of the Moro people and secure full independence from the Philippine government. Their armed struggle was driven by their quest for self-determination and redress for historical grievances (De Juan and Hasenclever 2015). Over time and as peace negotiations progressed, the group's goals evolved from advocating for complete secession towards seeking greater autonomy, with the latter treated as a pathway toward establishing an independent state (Adam 2013). The MNLF also pressed for fair distribution of

land and the elimination of systematic discrimination against their communities (De Juan and Hasenclever 2015). Furthermore, the movement underscored the importance of cultural recognition and preservation under the national government (Mastura 2010).

Driven by mutual interest in ending bloodshed and pursuing political solutions for autonomy within the constitutional framework of the Philippines, the government and the MNLF held peace talks and entered into peace agreements. Initial efforts to have a peace agreement with the MNLF led to the Tripoli Agreement in 1976, mediated by the Organization of Islamic Conference. The agreement aimed to grant autonomy to predominantly Muslim provinces but faltered due to implementation disputes with the Philippine government. In the post-Marcos regime, the 1987 Philippine Constitution institutionalized the concept of autonomy for Muslim Mindanao, leading to the enactment of Republic Act (RA) No. 6734, the Organic Act for the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), on August 1, 1989. But a plebiscite held to ratify RA 6734 saw only four provinces (Maguindanao, Lanao del Sur, Sulu, and Tawi-Tawi) opt into the ARMM, a result that the MNLF boycotted on the grounds that it fell short of the autonomy promised in the Tripoli Agreement. Renewed negotiations in the early 1990s culminated in the Final Peace Agreement, also known as the Jakarta Accord, signed on September 2, 1996. This accord sought to fully implement the provisions of the 1976 agreement, establish structures for regional autonomy, provide leadership roles for MNLF members in the ARMM, integrate former combatants into national forces, and settle aspects of the insurgency. RA 9054, enacted on March 31, 2001, amended RA 6734 and expanded the ARMM coverage to include Basilan province (except Isabela City) and Marawi City. Voters ratified the expanded coverage on August 14, 2001.

Despite securing a measure of autonomy through the ARMM, the MNLF encountered obstacles in fully realizing its objectives, compounded by internal factionalism which also impeded the overall progress of their demands (Seo 2024).

2.1.2 The Moro Islamic Liberation Front

The 1976 Tripoli Agreement, initially intended to resolve disputes between the MNLF and the Philippine government, resulted in internal fragmentation and instability within the MNLF (Duursma and Fliervoet 2020). In response to growing discontent and opposition, a faction broke away from the MNLF to form the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) (Seo 2024). Officially established by Salamat Hashim in 1984 (OPPAPRU 2016), the MILF garnered significant backing from the Maguindanaoans of Mindanao, who strongly supported its inception (Malan and Solomon 2012). While the MNLF proceeded to negotiate with the government, culminating in the establishment of the ARMM, the MILF nurtured a separate group of followers.

The MILF's policy platform was distinctly grounded in its Islamic identity, which shaped its objectives and demands (Sen 2024). Central to its goals was the establishment of an autonomous state predominantly led by Moros, viewed as a vital step toward achieving self-determination (Ragandang 2024). Furthermore, echoing the priorities of the MNLF, the MILF consistently advocated for fair land distribution and the elimination of systemic discrimination against the Moro people by the Philippine government (De Juan and Hasenclever 2015).

Eventually, peace negotiations between the government and the MILF led to the establishment of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) as a replacement to the ARMM. The transition from the ARMM to BARMM was legally anchored on RA 11054 or the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL), enacted on July 26, 2018 and ratified on through a two-part plebiscite held on January 21, 2019 and February 6, 2019. The first plebiscite was conducted in the ARMM and Cotabato City, where the majority voted in favor of ratifying the BOL and establishing the BARMM. The second plebiscite was conducted in Lanao del Norte province (except Iligan City) and six municipalities in North Cotabato to determine additional areas that would join the new region. Lanao del Norte voted against inclusion and 63 barangays out of the 67 barangays included in the plebiscite in North Cotabato voted in favor of joining BARMM.

Among others, the BOL provides for: (1) the decentralization of governance, granting BARMM increased authority over natural resources and local legislation; (2) power-sharing mechanism between the regional government and the national state; and (3) inclusive governance by safeguarding the rights of indigenous peoples and ensuring the protection of civil and political liberties. The complete integration of former MILF combatants into the mainstream society through what is called a “normalization” process is currently in progress.

2.2 *Communist insurgency*

In the communist insurgency, three armed groups emerged: (1) the Communist Party of the Philippines-National People’s Army-National Democratic Front; (2) the Cordillera People’s Liberation Army (CPLA); and (2) the Rebolusyonyong Partido ng Manggagawa ng Pilipinas/ Revolutionary Proletarian Army/Alex Boncayao Brigade.

2.2.1 Communist Party of the Philippines-New People’s Army-National Democratic Front of the Philippines

The insurgencies led by the Communist Party of the Philippines-National People’s Army-National Democratic Front (CPP-NPA-NDF) have their origins in the early years of Marcos Sr.’s regime. On December 26, 1968, Jose Maria Sison restructured the Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas, which was formed in 1930, and created in its place the CPP along Maoist principles (Buenaventura 2023). Shortly thereafter, on March 29, 1969, the New People’s Army (NPA) was established as the armed wing of the CPP. The NPA undertook operations targeting the Philippine government and its military forces (Holden 2013). In 1973, the National Democratic Front (NDF) was created as the legal and political front of the CPP-NPA, forging alliances with elite groups and factions opposed to the Marcos Sr. regime (Bell and Farahnosh 2015). The grievances driving the movement have centered on socio-economic inequalities, contested land rights, and the lack of adequate political representation for marginalized groups (Holden 2013).

The demands and objectives of the CPP are molded by the belief that the Philippines had evolved into a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society, creating an urgent need for national liberation and social justice (Valila 2022). Meanwhile, the NPA created guerilla fronts and fought government forces allegedly to combat oppression, military abuses, uneven land distribution, and other socio-economic injustices (Holden 2013). The CPP-NPA-NDF stresses the importance of national

sovereignty and adopts an anti-imperialist stance, contending that foreign involvement—particularly from the United States—obstructs the country's ability to achieve self-reliance and equitable growth (Woods 2017). Although the CPP-NPA-NDF claims nationwide membership, the eruption of armed conflicts are limited to certain geographic areas only. Peace talks with the CPP-NPA-NDF were held during the administrations of Corazon Aquino, Fidel Ramos, Gloria Arroyo, Benigno Aquino III, and Rodrigo Duterte but all these failed to deliver a conclusive peace agreement. Preparatory peace instruments signed in the past include the Joint Agreement on Safety and Immunity Guarantees (JASIG) in 1995, which was always invoked whenever peace talks were resumed, and the Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (CARHRIHL) in 1998, which outlines human rights and humanitarian law commitments of both the government and the CPP-NPA-NDF. Both documents were signed under the Ramos administration. As of this writing, formal peace negotiations between the Philippine government and the CPP-NPA-NDF remain stalled, with formal talks having been terminated under the Duterte administration in 2019.

2.2.2 Cordillera People's Liberation Army

Indigenous communities from Apayao, Abra, Kalinga Mountain Province, Benguet, and Ifugao were initially recruited by the CPP-NPA-NDF. However, after the downfall of the Marcos Sr. regime, the recruited groups perceived that the CPP-NPA-NDF's objectives did not serve their local interests. As a result, they disengaged from the CPP-NPA-NDF, leading to the formal establishment of the Cordillera People's Liberation Army (CPLA) by former priest Father Conrado Balweg in April 1986 (International Crisis Group 2013a). The CPLA's opposition to the Philippine government is rooted in grievances over the persistent exploitation and oppressive management of their lands and natural resources. The CPLA resented government-sanctioned projects such as large-scale mining and logging, arguing that these not only encroached on their land rights but also caused significant ecological harm (Carling 2001), while inadequate infrastructure and limited access to services marginalized their communities further (International Crisis Group 2013a).

The fundamental demand of the CPLA was the recognition of ancestral land rights, alongside the promotion of sustainable practices that honor and preserve their cultural heritage. They viewed their environmental efforts as essential for protecting their ancestral territories, biodiversity, and cultural traditions (Santiago 2018). Furthermore, the CPLA advocated for regional autonomy that would empower indigenous groups to manage their own affairs, thereby addressing systemic injustices and mitigating social exclusion (Cordillera Peoples Alliance n.d.). The CPLA consistently emphasized the importance of cultural identity and self-determination for Indigenous communities (OPPAPRU 2016).

Hostilities between the CPLA and government forces ended when the peace deal called Mount Data Peace Accord was signed on September 13, 1986. The accord, locally conducted as a traditional *sipat* (ceasefire) in which peace tokens were exchanged, affirmed to pursue political solutions to the conflict. It paved the way for the issuance of Executive Order (EO) No. 220, series of 1987, creating the Cordillera Administrative Region as a transitional structure toward eventual autonomy. The CPLA's demand for an autonomous region in the Cordillera mountain range was included in the 1987 Philippine Constitution.

The first legislative attempt resulted in the enactment of RA 6766 on October 23, 1989, but it was rejected in a plebiscite held on January 30, 1990 when only the province of Ifugao voted in favor of autonomy. The Supreme Court ruled later that a single province could not constitute an autonomous region. Subsequently, Congress passed RA 8438 on December 22, 1997, but a plebiscite held on March 7, 1998 again failed to secure regional approval despite the Apayao province voting in favor of autonomy. In the years since, efforts toward autonomy repeatedly re-emerge in Congress but a fully autonomous Cordillera region remains an aspiration up to the present.

2.2.3 Rebolusyonaryong Partido ng Manggagawa ng Pilipinas-Revolutionary Proletarian Army-Alex Boncayao Brigade

The Rebolusyonaryong Partido ng Manggagawa ng Pilipinas, Revolutionary Proletarian Army, and Alex Boncayao Brigade are groups that broke away from the CPP-NPA-NDF. The Alex Boncayao Brigade (ABB) initially operated in 1986 as the urban guerilla unit of the NPA but severed ties with it in the early 1990s following an ideological split within the CPP, with factions becoming divided between “reaffirmists”, or those who reaffirmed the ideology of the CPP-NPA-NDF, and the “rejectionists”, or those who broke ranks with the original group. Following the ideological split, a contingent from the Visayas Commission of the NPA formed the Revolutionary Proletarian Army (RPA) in the mid-1990s and joined forces with the ABB. The RPA-ABB alliance then established its political wing, the Rebolusyonaryong Partido ng Manggagawa ng Pilipinas (RPMP) as a revolutionary political party pushing for a more proletarian-centered insurgency (Santos and Santos 2010). These break-away groups concentrated on issues of local governance in their armed resistance (Casuyon and Embornas 2024). Accusing the Marcos Sr. regime of persistent abuses, they adopted more direct and confrontational methods of resistance. Their objectives and demands centered on addressing socio-economic inequalities, promoting agrarian reform, safeguarding land rights, and ensuring social justice while supporting marginalized rural communities. Moreover, they claimed to have fought to empower workers and fortify labor rights and pursued a reduction in dependency on foreign entities by advocating for a self-sufficient economy that leverages local industries and resources to achieve sustainable growth (RPMP 2000). Overall, the RPMP-RPA-ABB emphasized that their struggle was for a robust economy that protects labor and upholds a just society (Felix 2020).

The RPMP-RPA-ABB signed a comprehensive peace agreement with the government on December 6, 2000. Through the years, factions within the RPMP-RPA-ABB still emerged, but former members who reconstituted themselves into a legal socio-political entity called Kapatiran Para sa Progresong Panlipunan, Inc. (Kapatiran) continued cooperating with the government (International Crisis Group 2013b). At present, Kapatiran members are being given government interventions on the basis of the 2000 peace agreement and subsequent implementing mechanisms.

The government interventions related to the peace process with these five groups have varied achievements, which can be better assessed using analytical frameworks from incentives theory in economics.

3. Suggested analytical framework for peacebuilding in the Philippines

This section sets out an analytical framework for identifying the core elements of peacebuilding in the Philippines, grounded in international structure and patterns of domestic interventions. The analytical framework then examines the role of incentives and credible commitments in designing and implementing peacebuilding elements.

3.1 Identification of the elements of peacebuilding

The identification of the elements of peacebuilding in the Philippines' peace agenda can be broadly patterned after the United Nations (UN)' *An Agenda for Peace* (1992 report of UN Secretary-General). The UN 1992 Agenda for Peace sequentially links the following tasks:

- peacemaking, which seeks to end hostilities;
- peacekeeping, which helps maintain peace once a ceasefire or peace agreement is reached; and
- peacebuilding (or post-conflict peacebuilding), which strengthens post-conflict recovery to prevent a return to conflict.

These tasks are also situated within the broader context of preventive diplomacy, and related to overall efforts to uphold the UN Charter principles (UN 1992).

Core components under the first task—peacemaking—include negotiation and mediation, use of UN authority and neutrality to encourage dialogue, involvement of international mechanisms such as the International Court of Justice, arbitration and other peaceful dispute resolution mechanisms, and leveraging international aid or support. The idea is to halt existing conflicts and create conditions conducive to sustainable peace. The second task—peacekeeping, which usually involves the deployment of UN forces with the consent of all relevant parties—has the following core components: monitoring ceasefire agreements, buffering or provision of a neutral presence between former combatants, assistance in demobilization and disarmament, election monitoring, or humanitarian access, and contribution to law and order and protection of civilians. Lastly, post-conflict peacebuilding has the following core components: building or reforming governance institutions (including legal systems and security sectors), reconciliation and societal healing), economic and social development, and capacity building (UN 1992).

Examination of the various government programs meant to build peace with the five major armed groups in conflict with Philippine security forces (as discussed in the previous section), as well as the peace agreements with four of these groups, yields patterns similar with the core components of the three major tasks outlined in the UN 1992 Peace Agenda. For the Philippine setting, this study proposes that the tasks be viewed as generally falling under the broad category of peacebuilding because peacebuilding essentially covers activities meant to immediately halt conflict and maintain ceasefire (peacemaking and peacekeeping under the 1992 UN Peace Agenda) and post-conflict activities that aim to sustain peace (peacebuilding under the 1992 UN Peace Agenda). Moreover, based on examination of peace-related interventions for the five major

non-state armed groups in the Philippines, this study has assessed that the interventions can be categorized into the following elements of peacebuilding:

- confidence-building measures
- peace agreements (or preparatory peace instruments if there is no final peace agreement yet)
- socioeconomic development programs
- permanent cessation of hostilities
- political and legal settlement
- transitional justice and reconciliation

Putting confidence-building measures in place means developing a basic level of trust between the parties involved—the armed rebels and government forces—as well as trust in the negotiation process itself, whether it is formal or informal and whether it involves groups or individuals. In the Philippines, these have taken the form of immediate aid in terms of security guarantees (e.g., halfway houses) for rebels who surrender and economic assistance (e.g., cash support) for former rebels and their families in instances where there is no final peace agreement yet. In cases where negotiation is in the works, confidence-building measures include: temporary ceasefire, temporary release of negotiators, monitoring systems, early-warning and early-response systems, trustworthy communication systems, third-party presence in attempts to negotiate and actual negotiation (e.g., Organization of Islamic Conference in the negotiation with the MNLF, and Norwegian government in the negotiation with the CPP-NPA-NDF), and signing of initial agreements (e.g., agreement to negotiate further, joint monitoring agreement).

Peace agreements in the Philippines include the 1986 Mt. Data Peace Accord with the CPLA, the 1996 Jakarta Accord with the MNLF, the 2014 Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro with the MILF (but with provisions for non-MILF communities), and the 2019 Peace Agreement with the RPMP-RPA-ABB. Peace-related documents that precede final peace agreements are usually framework agreements and agreements to negotiate further.

Socioeconomic development programs are available for the groups with and without peace agreements. The programs specifically tailored as peace interventions include the following: PAyapa at MAsaganang PamayaNAn or PAMANA Program, Camp Transformation Program in MILF Camps, Community Empowerment through Science and Technology, Enhanced Comprehensive Local Integration Program, and Barangay Development Program (for barangays recently freed of influence from communist insurgents). Regular government programs where former rebels can also qualify for support include the following: Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program, Sustainable Livelihood Program, Alternative Learning System, Bantay Gubat (employment as forest guard), Tulong Panghanapbuhay sa Ating Disadvantaged/Displaced Workers, and Scholarship and Educational Assistance Program.

Permanent cessation of hostilities means ceasefire beyond the confidence-building stage. This is part of the final peace agreement and involves also the demobilization of non-state forces and decommissioning of their weapons. In the case of the CPLA, this process has concluded. In the case of the MNLF, hostilities ceased in 1996 but recurred in 2001 and 2013. The 2001 incident took place in Jolo, Sulu when a faction of forces loyal to Nur Misuari launched an armed rebellion

in order to disrupt the ARMM elections. The 2013 incident happened in Zamboanga City, where MNLF fighters led by Misuari laid siege to the city and declared an independent “Bangsamoro Republik”. In the case of the MILF, a ceasefire is currently in place and the former MILF fighters are currently undergoing phased decommissioning as part of the Normalization Program under the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (often shortened to "Normalization Program").

Political and legal settlement in the Philippine setting consist mostly of grants of amnesty for former rebels. Amnesty is usually part of the negotiated peace agreement, but at present, it is also being offered to former rebels from the group without a peace agreement. There are currently four active amnesty proclamations: Presidential Proclamation No. 403 for former RPMP-RPA-ABB fighters, Presidential Proclamation No. 404 for former CPP-NPA-NDF fighters, Presidential Proclamation No. 405 for former MILF fighters, and Presidential Proclamation No. 406 for former MNLF fighters.

Transitional justice and reconciliation involves setting up of truth commissions or truth-seeking bodies, case management (leading to dropping of criminal charges in certain cases), and integration of certain former rebels into the state's security force after training and qualifying procedures (e.g., integration of CPLA forces into the Philippine Army). Prerequisites such as processing of identities and provision of identification certificates for mainstreaming into society (e.g., birth certificate, national ID, Philippine Health Insurance coverage, and tax identification number) are also necessary. Continuing provision of security guarantees and psycho-social assistance are also necessary in some cases.

Note that some of these peacebuilding elements in the Philippines have features similar with some of the core activities in the UN 1992 Agenda for Peace. Unlike in the UN agenda, however, these elements are not necessarily sequential. For instance, political and legal settlement through granting of amnesties to former rebels is being done even for the group that has not yet entered into a final peace agreement with the government.

3.2 Ensuring incentives alignment and credible commitment

This study posits that the theory of incentives compatibility provides a foundation for understanding how peacebuilding elements can be structured to make cooperation the most rational choice for all actors involved. Moreover, the related concept of credible commitment can extend the analysis by examining whether parties can trust that others will uphold their promises over time, thereby addressing the dynamic challenge of sustaining peace once initial incentives have been established.

Economists frame incentives compatibility as a situation where economic agents will act according to a desired rule or outcome only if the payoff structure aligns with their private incentives (Leonid 1973; Myerson 1979). In peacebuilding, this framework can help assess whether each peacebuilding element is designed so that the armed parties, local population, government agencies, and external actors prefer cooperation over conflict because doing so maximizes their utility.

This incentive-compatibility lens applies directly to confidence-building measures, peace agreements, socioeconomic programs, cessation of hostilities, political and legal settlements, and transitional justice and reconciliation as these elements can be designed such that provisions and enforcement mechanisms can shape strategic choices. Peacebuilding elements that embed clear economic and political incentives can align parties' preferences for peace with their self-interest, thereby reducing the temptation to renege. Including economic provisions and institutional frameworks in peace agreements enhances the prospects for sustainable peace by providing material incentives for compliance. Socioeconomic development programs (e.g., employment creation or community reconstruction) alter the cost-benefit calculus for former combatants and civilians by increasing the opportunity cost of returning to violence. Community-based approaches leverage participatory mechanisms to build social capital and interdependence that make cooperation more rewarding than conflict-seeking. A permanent cessation of hostilities can be seen as an incentive-compatible equilibrium when both sides calculate that continued conflict yields lower expected payoffs than upholding a ceasefire verified through monitoring and sanctions. Political and legal settlements can provide credible commitments that reduce fears of marginalization. Transitional justice mechanisms that balance accountability with opportunities for reconciliation can elicit incentives for cooperation; overly punitive approaches risk deterring compliance whereas restorative models that combine truth-telling with guarantees of political inclusion may attract participation.

The theory of credible commitments can also be applied to peacebuilding. In economic theory, credible commitment refers to an actor's ability to commit to a future course of action in a way that is believable to others, hence decreasing strategic ambiguity and preventing renegeing on agreements (Williamson 1983). For instance, a borrower might pledge to maintain financial stability and repay his debt, but if he lacks the ability or incentive to follow through, his creditors will be skeptical.

Applying the theory of credible commitment from economics to peacebuilding yields a useful analytical framework for assessing the design and potential success of key peace process elements. In the context of confidence-building measures, when adversaries perceive that the measures are backed by independent verification or third-party guarantors, the parties are more likely to trust that commitments are real and not temporary tactical moves. Likewise, peace agreements, permanent ceasefires, and political and legal settlements inherently encounter credible commitment problems as parties must believe that the opposing parties will honor terms such as disarmament or legal guarantees. National government budget and institutional mechanisms for socioeconomic development programs contribute to credible commitment by embedding tangible and verifiable proofs of promised interventions. Counterpart support from local governments and success stories from former comrades can further cement such proofs. Finally, credible commitment considerations are critical for transitional justice and reconciliation because if accountability mechanisms are designed with guarantees of fairness and possible future political coexistence, these are more likely to be accepted as commitments to justice rather than instruments of the victor's reprisal.

4. Lessons from the implementation of peacebuilding elements

The summary in Table 1 below highlights the core elements of peacebuilding applied in five major armed conflicts in the Philippines. The summary also identifies government interventions that foster trust, formalize agreements, promote individual well-being, develop communities, nurture political co-existence, and sustain peace. Building on this, key informant interviews were conducted to elicit lessons from implementation of prominent government interventions that are part of these peacebuilding elements.

Table 1. Summary of the elements of peacebuilding in major armed conflicts in the Philippines

Peacebuilding element	Separatism in Mindanao		Communist insurgency		
	MILF	MNLF	CPP-NPA-NDF	RPMP-RPA-ABB	CPLA
Confidence-building measures	concluded	concluded	ongoing through interventions for former rebels (e.g., half-way houses, security guarantees, immediate economic aid) and localized peace engagements	concluded	concluded
Peace agreement	Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro in 2014	Final Peace Agreement (also called the Jakarta Accord) in 1996	uncertain whether there will be a peace agreement document, but preparatory peace instruments were signed (JASIG in 1995, CARHRIHL in 1998, and various joint statements on willingness to negotiate peace)	Government of the Philippines and RPMP-RPA-ABB Peace Agreement in 2000	Mt. Data Peace Accord in 1986

Peacebuilding element	Separatism in Mindanao		Communist insurgency		
	MILF	MNLF	CPP-NPA-NDF	RPMP-RPA-ABB	CPLA
Socioeconomic development programs	ongoing, including socioeconomic transformation of six MILF camps	delivered except the creation of the Bangsamoro Development Assistance Fund (BDAF); renewed commitment to BDAF but operationalizing it is delayed	ongoing Barangay Development Program through the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC)	ongoing barangay development packages in mutually agreed upon areas in Visayas and Mindanao; interventions in partnership with Kapatiran para sa Progresong Panlipunan, Inc. (which consist of former RPMP-RPA-ABB fighters)	concluded; armed group transformed into a socioeconomic organization called Cordillera Forum on Peace and Development, Inc., which received socioeconomic projects for communities
Permanent cessation of hostilities	ceasefire in place; decommissioning of combatants and demobilization of weapons ongoing	ceased in 1996 and recurred in 2001 (Misuari rebellion) and 2013 (Zamboanga siege)	none yet	recently concluded – decommissioning and demobilization in September 2019	concluded

Peacebuilding element	Separatism in Mindanao		Communist insurgency		
	MILF	MNLF	CPP-NPA-NDF	RPMP-RPA-ABB	CPLA
Political and legal settlement	ongoing; political amnesty part of decommissioning; various Presidential Proclamations on amnesty; Bangsamoro Organic Law enacted in 2018; interim regional government in place	ongoing; various Presidential Proclamations on amnesty awarded; MNLF leaders ran in the 1996 Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) election and won; ARMM areas expanded through Republic Act 6734 in 2001; but ARMM was eventually replaced by BARMM	no comprehensive one yet, but the government offers and implements political amnesty through various Presidential Proclamations	comprehensive political amnesty awarded through Presidential Proclamation	comprehensive political amnesty awarded; but Cordillera autonomy lost in two plebiscites (1990 and 1998); the autonomy bill is being re-filed every Congressional session by legislators from the Cordillera Administrative Region

Peacebuilding element	Separatism in Mindanao		Communist insurgency		
	MILF	MNLF	CPP-NPA-NDF	RPMP-RPA-ABB	CPLA
Transitional justice and reconciliation	ongoing; Transitional Justice and Reconciliation Roadmap officially launched on December 9, 2025	ongoing; MNLF members appointed to the Bangsamoro Transition Authority	no comprehensive one yet, but NTF-ELCAC facilitates reintegration of former rebels and their families into mainstream society	concluded the full transformation of members into civilians	some ex-rebels opted to be integrated into the Philippine Army; uncertain fate of the pursuit of autonomy

Notes:

MILF - Moro Islamic Liberation Front

MNLF - Moro National Liberation Front

CPP-NPA-NDF - Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army-National Democratic Front

RPMP/RPA/ABB - *Rebolusyonaryong Partido ng Manggagawa-Pilipinas*/Revolutionary Proletarian Army/Alex Boncayao Brigade

CPLA - Cordillera People's Liberation Army

JASIG - Joint Agreement on Safety and Immunity Guarantees

CARHRIHL - Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law

GPH - Government of the Philippines

NTF-ELCAC - National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict

Source: Authors' compilation

4.1 Immediate aid as a confidence-building measure

An ongoing confidence-building measure for peacebuilding through immediate aid is the Enhanced Comprehensive Local Integration Program. It is a key confidence-building measure of the Philippine government in the peace process with the remaining fighters of the CPP-NPA-NDF. Designed to encourage armed combatants to abandon the insurgency and return to mainstream society, the program provides a tangible expression of the government's goodwill and commitment to reconciliation.

4.1.1 Enhanced Comprehensive Local Integration Program

The Enhanced Comprehensive Local Integration Program (ECLIP), launched in 2018 through Administrative Order (AO) No. 10, was built upon the Comprehensive Local Integration Program initiated in 2011, which in turn has its roots from the National Reconciliation and Development Program in 1986 during the Corazon Aquino administration. Its framework was to promote the reintegration to Philippine society of former rebels from the CPP-NPA-NDF, including what the group calls its "*Militia ng Bayan*" (i.e., "militia of the people", irregular armed units that support the NPA at the community level and typically composed of civilian sympathizers or part-time fighters who assist the NPA in logistics, intelligence, or local security operations).

The ECLIP operationalizes the "whole-of-nation approach" of the inter-agency National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC). Through ECLIP Committees led by local governments and supervised by the NTF-ELCAC, the program delivers a package of assistance that include safety guarantees, relocation and livelihood support, reintegration aid, firearms remuneration (i.e., receipt of cash in exchange for the surrender of firearms to the government), and psychosocial services. The implementing rules and regulations of AO No. 10, series of 2018, created the *Task Force Balik-Loob* as the central coordinating body for the reintegration of former rebels. Based on the Joint Memorandum Circular no. 2018-01 of the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) and the Department of National Defense (DND) the components of assistance are the following:

- **Safety and security guarantees** by the local government unit (LGU) or Philippine National Police (PNP) in partnership with the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP).
- **Relocation Support** for the former rebels and their families
- **Immediate Assistance:** Philippine pesos (PHP) 15,000 for mobilization expenses while ECLIP enrollment is being processed
- **Livelihood Assistance:** PHP50,000 to support income-generating activities
- **Reintegration Assistance:** PHP21,000 for the receiving unit to cover the former rebel's meals, documentation (e.g., birth certificate, IDs), and mobility expenses
- **Firearms Remuneration:** Amount equivalent to double the assessed value of surrendered firearms, to support reintegration activities (e.g., skills training, shelter, legal assistance)

- **PhilHealth Enrollment** under the Payapa at Masaganang Pamayanan Program-sponsored program, valid for one year and renewable depending on fund availability
- **Assistance in securing civil documents and identity documents** such as birth certificates, marriage certificates, postal ID, and voter's ID to restore the former rebel's legal identity
- **Use of Halfway House** while the former rebel's ECLIP enrollment is being processed
- **Healing and Reconciliation Programs** offering psychosocial support to former rebels, their families, and their communities.

Table 2 below shows the breakdown of assistance covering the period of 2016 to September 2025 as reported by the Task Force Balik-Loob.

Table 2. Breakdown of ECLIP assistance, as of September 2025

Breakdown of Assistance Covering the Period 2016 to September 2025										
	Immediate Assistance			Livelihood Assistance		Reintegration		Firearms Remuneration		
Region	Total No. of Beneficiaries	No. of Beneficiaries	Amount of Assistance	No. of Beneficiaries	Amount of Assistance	No. of Beneficiaries	Amount of Assistance	No. of Turned-in FAs	FA Remuneration Amount	Overall Total Amount of Assistance
I	99	99	1,485,000.00	50	2,500,000.00	92	1,932,000.00	33	9,801,804.74	9,801,804.74
II	451	451	6,675,000.00	177	8,850,000.00	441	9,261,000.00	126	10,772,518.00	35,648,518.00
III	632	632	9,480,000.00	387	19,350,000.00	613	12,873,000.00	19	2,164,867.00	43,867,867.00
IV-A	575	575	8,625,000.00	324	16,200,000.00	567	11,907,000.00	114	6,202,456.00	42,934,456.00
IV-B	538	538	8,070,000.00	306	15,300,000.00	461	9,681,000.00	51	4,608,001.40	37,659,001.40
V	510	510	7,650,000.00	295	14,750,000.00	503	10,563,000.00	138	9,321,052.00	42,284,052.00
VI	482	482	7,230,000.00	165	8,250,000.00	480	10,080,000.00	39	1,188,170.00	26,748,170.00
VII	179	179	2,685,000.00	101	5,050,000.00	100	2,100,000.00	16	1,110,031.00	10,945,031.00
VIII	656	656	9,840,000.00	352	17,600,000.00	398	8,358,000.00	102	5,251,840.00	41,049,840.00
IX	293	293	4,395,000.00	242	12,100,000.00	461	9,681,000.00	84	5,126,725.50	31,302,725.50
X	1,640	1,640	24,600,000.00	1,028	51,400,000.00	1,021	21,441,000.00	508	25,102,091.00	122,543,091.00
XI	2,308	2,308	34,620,000.00	1,628	81,400,000.00	2,109	44,289,000.00	438	41,238,042.00	201,547,042.00
XII	1,076	1,076	16,140,000.00	871	43,550,000.00	1,006	21,126,000.00	236	21,420,455.00	102,236,455.00
XIII	1,847	1,847	27,705,000.00	1,228	61,400,000.00	1,858	39,018,000.00	868	54,943,557.00	183,066,557.00
NCR	10	10	150,000.00	6	300,000.00	5	105,000.00	2	303,061.00	858,061.00
CAR	337	337	5,055,000.00	95	4,750,000.00	283	5,943,000.00	117	12,013,495.00	27,761,495.00
BARMM	67	67	1,005,000.00	67	3,350,000.00	67	1,407,000.00	0	0.00	5,762,000.00
TOTAL	11,700	11,700	175,500,000.00	7,322	366,100,000.00	10,465	219,765,000.00	2,918	204,651,166.64	966,016,166.64

Source: Task Force Balik-Loob (2025).

The implementation of ECLIP revealed both strengths and operational challenges. Its inter-agency design enhanced coordination among national and local stakeholders, while the integration of healing, training, and livelihood interventions promoted community acceptance and resilience. However, the 2025 ECLIP National Summit conducted on November 13-14, 2025 highlighted gaps in program delivery, particularly at the municipal and barangay levels. Common issues include the frequent turnover of local focal persons, inconsistent service provision, inadequate convergence among agencies, bottlenecks in the issuance of the veracity check on former rebels through the Joint AFP-PNP Intelligence Committee (JAPIC) certification, and lack of digital monitoring systems to track integration outcomes. These institutional and procedural weaknesses occasionally delayed the release of assistance, risking the long-term sustainability of reintegration efforts. A key insight from the inadequacy of monitoring systems is the risk it poses to the program's integrity and long-term impact. This inadequacy could obscure accountability, especially since duplications and resource leakages would not be easy to spot.

Key lessons from implementation include the need for deeper localization, stronger capacity building, and institutionalization of monitoring and feedback mechanisms. Reintegration must be understood as an ongoing, collective process rather than a one-time intervention. Another major insight from the implementation experience is that security provision—such as the availability and effective operation of halfway houses—is just as critical as the provision of immediate economic aid. For many rebels, feeling safe from retribution or re-engagement pressures is a prerequisite for participating in community reintegration activities. Without credible security guarantees, the value of financial and livelihood assistance is diminished, as fear and uncertainty can undermine confidence in the localized peace process.

Ensuring program sustainability also requires balancing material assistance with psychological safety and social inclusion. The ECLIP experience demonstrates that stable living arrangements, protection from retaliation, and psychosocial healing must accompany livelihood, education, and training support to foster genuine transformation. The program also underscores the importance of aligning economic, security, and governance interventions within an integrated peacebuilding framework. When livelihood, reconciliation, and protection measures are pursued together, reintegration transcends short-term aid and evolves into a pathway toward enduring peace, resilience, and inclusive development.

While much of ECLIP assistance package focuses on immediate support, namely, cash aid, safety guarantees, and livelihood grants, to help former rebels transition from armed struggle to lawful living, its broader framework actually lays the foundation for long-term reintegration. The elements of ECLIP focused on education, skills training, psychosocial support, and community-based livelihood projects are designed to help former combatants rebuild their lives within the bounds of Philippine laws and integrate as productive members of peaceful, resilient communities. These components represent the program's long-term socioeconomic development dimension, which typically accompanies peace agreements. Given the absence of a finalized peace accord with the CPP-NPA-NDF as a group (without discounting the localized peace engagements with subgroups such as guerilla fronts within them)—and the uncertainty of having one—it is appropriate that such socioeconomic initiatives are incorporated into the ECLIP.

4.2 Socioeconomic development programs

Socioeconomic development programs serve as a vital component of peacebuilding by addressing the structural inequalities and livelihood vulnerabilities that often fuel armed conflict. By promoting inclusive economic opportunities, infrastructure development, and social services, these programs help create the material and social conditions necessary for sustainable peace.

4.2.1 Payapa at Masaganang Pamayanan Program

Launched in 2011, the PAYapa at MASaganang PamayaNAn (PAMANA) Program serves as the Philippine government’s flagship peace and development initiative in conflict-affected and vulnerable communities. Implemented by the Office of the Presidential Adviser on Peace, Reconciliation, and Unity (OPAPRU), it complements peace negotiation tracks and forms part of the Philippine Development Plans since 2011. The program addresses the root causes of conflict by improving socioeconomic access, strengthening governance, and empowering communities toward resilience and peace (OPAPRU n.d.).

PAMANA operates through three strategic pillars: (1) policy reform and governance interventions that tackle land, identity, and human rights issues; (2) capacity-building to strengthen institutions and empower local actors; and (3) peace-promoting socioeconomic projects that ensure inclusive, sustainable development. Aligned with national directives—including EO 70, s. 2018, and EO 158, s. 2021 and the current administration’s Five-Point Peace Agenda—PAMANA aims to transform isolated, conflict-affected areas into peaceful, productive communities (OPAPRU n.d.).

From 2011 to 2022, total investment reached PHP56.62 billion, funding infrastructure, livelihood, and social protection initiatives (OPAPRU 2023a). For FY 2024, a total allocation of PhP 1,029,608,710.07 funded 37 projects for priority barangays. For FY 2025, PhP 1,267,735,000.00 has been allotted for the implementation of 58 projects. Furthermore, the PAMANA contributed to Camps Transformation through financial support for major infrastructure projects in 36 priority barangays within the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) camps (OPAPRU 2025a). Table 3 below shows the allocation per project type of the budget for fiscal years 2024 and 2025.

Table 3. Allocation of budget per project type for FY 2024 and FY 2025 (in PHP)

Project Type	FY 2024 Allocation	FY 2025 Allocation
Road	424,608,710.07	571,000,000.00
Water System	180,000,000.00	75,000,000.00
Bridge	185,000,000.00	360,000,000.00
Housing	180,000,000.00	-
Community Infrastructure	45,000,000.00	105,000,000.00
Agri-Productivity Support Project	15,000,000.00	138,000,000.00

The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) is a major implementing partner, anchoring its interventions on community-driven and livelihood-oriented approaches that contribute to poverty reduction and social cohesion.

- a. **Livelihood and Employment Support:** The DSWD-PAMANA’s livelihood grants, skills training, and capacity-building programs provide community associations—including groups of former rebels and their families—with capital and technical skills for income-generating activities. In provinces such as Kalinga, women-led livelihood associations enhanced household resilience and cooperation, thereby fostering trust and reducing vulnerability to renewed conflict.
- b. **Community Social Protection and Development:** Peace education, participatory planning, and social preparation sessions empower residents to design and manage their own peace-promoting projects. These interventions integrate conflict sensitivity into local governance, ensuring that development also strengthens social cohesion.
- c. **Support to Local Government Units:** Collaboration between the DSWD and local government units (LGUs) in building and rehabilitating infrastructure, coupled with joint monitoring and evaluation, improved local governance capacity and service delivery. A key lesson from implementation experience is that local ownership and strong LGU participation enhance accountability and sustainability of peace and development outcomes.
- d. **Support to Former Rebels and Reintegration:** DSWD-PAMANA assists former rebels through livelihood kits, financial literacy training, and psychosocial support. The DSWD reported that in 2024, it provided 5,530 social protection packages Assistance to Individuals in Crisis Situation (AICS), Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps), and community-based services, and distributed 747 reintegration livelihood grants under the Sustainable Livelihood Program. January to June 2025 data show 103 former rebels receiving aid AICS. An important lesson learned from implementation experience is that inclusive reintegration programs—those extending assistance to both former rebels and their host communities—reduce stigma and prevent relapse into violence (DSWD 2025).

In the Cordillera region, PAMANA supported the reintegration of former fighters of the CPLA through the DENR-Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR)’s “Bantay Gubat” (Forest Guard) program. Since July 2013, hundreds of ex-combatants have been employed in forest protection, reforestation, and environmental education. By 2025, 219 Bantay Gubat were active across five provinces (DENR-CAR 2025). Their employment contributed to environmental sustainability and social stability. An important lesson from implementing this intervention is that linking livelihood support with environmental stewardship creates dual benefits—economic security for ex-combatants and ecological resilience for communities.

In Zamboanga Sibugay, the Modified Shelter Assistance Program (MSAP) implemented since 2023 has provided 200 former MNLF members new homes. The MSAP was complemented by cash-for-work schemes during construction (OPAPRU 2025b). This housing initiative supports the MNLF Transformation Program by providing both immediate economic relief and symbolic community rebuilding. A key lesson from implementation is that tangible, visible infrastructure such as housing strengthens trust in government and helps former combatants anchor their civilian identity.

PAMANA also extends to the Kapatiran—the politically transformed organization of RPMP-RPA-ABB. An offshoot of the 2019 Clarificatory Implementing Document, socio-economic support has so far amounted to: PHP43.375 million in Livelihood Settlement Grants for 727 members, PHP7.025 million in Livelihood Reinforcement Grants, and PHP18.175 million in Social Protection Packages. Additionally, 128 Kapatiran members and their next of kin serve as Bantay Gubat, and 100 barangays received Sustainable Livelihood Program grants. The Women in Transformation (WIT) Program benefits 669 women and their families through skills training and entrepreneurship (DSWD-Peace and Development Buong Bansa Mapayapa 2025). An important lesson learned from the programs for the Kapatiran is that gender-responsive approaches and family-inclusive livelihood projects strengthen social reintegration and community stability.

Several cross-cutting key lessons emerge from the regional and sectoral experiences:

- Convergence among agencies (e.g., OPAPRU, DSWD, DENR, LGUs) maximizes resource use and ensures coherence between peacebuilding and development goals. Multi-agency coordination also helps integrate peace perspectives into mainstream governance.
- Community-driven development remains an effective modality in conflict-affected settings because it empowers residents to design and monitor projects, increasing legitimacy and trust in state institutions.
- Economic empowerment is central to peacebuilding. Livelihood and employment initiatives that promote self-reliance directly address grievances linked to poverty and exclusion—the structural roots of conflict.
- Institutional capacity-building and participatory governance reduce dependency and enable local actors to sustain peace dividends beyond project life cycles.
- Gender sensitivity and inclusivity—as seen in women-led cooperatives and the WIT Program—enhance social cohesion by ensuring that peace benefits are widely shared.
- Flexibility and adaptive implementation allow PAMANA to respond effectively to evolving conflict dynamics, shifting local needs, and environmental challenges.

Overall, PAMANA exemplifies a convergent, inclusive, and adaptive approach to peace and development. Through infrastructure, livelihood, and social protection interventions, it bridges policy commitments and grassroots realities, transforming former conflict zones into resilient communities. The lessons from PAMANA’s implementation underscore that peacebuilding

succeeds when it aligns economic incentives, community participation, and institutional reform—ensuring that peace dividends are both tangible and enduring.

4.2.2 MILF Camps Transformation Program

The transformation of six acknowledged MILF camps, namely, Abubakar As-Siddique, Bad'r, Omar, Rajamuda, Bushra, and Bilal camps, is being implemented with guidance from the Camps Transformation Plan (CTP). Implemented jointly by the government, the BARMM regional government, and development partners through the Joint Task Forces on Camps Transformation (JTFCTs), the CTP aims to convert conflict-affected communities into peaceful and self-sustaining settlements. Between 2016 and 2025, over PHP238 million in community infrastructure and support projects were completed across 36 barangays. The program gained momentum through the Camp Abubakar Master Development Plan, which produced housing in Abubakar and Bilal benefiting 420 decommissioned MILF members and their families (OPAPRU 2025a).

Another key accomplishment is the groundbreaking on November 10, 2025 of the first 100 units of the planned 600 resettlement housing units worth PHP400 million across the six camps, funded through the Bangsamoro Government's Special Development Fund. Each 48-square-meter unit provides complete residential amenities, symbolizing state recognition and inclusion of former combatants into civilian life (Bangsamoro Information Office 2025).

Livelihood and human development form the central pillar of the transformation. Since 2015, JTFCTs and the Department of Agriculture have distributed farm inputs, equipment, and boats. In 2017, households and learning facilities across the camps benefited from 3,001 solar power systems. Programs funded by the Mindanao Trust Fund, European Union, and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)—such as DECONFLICT and PROACTIVE—further advanced community infrastructure, education, and livelihood, benefiting tens of thousands. Investments from Spain and Australia supported learning and skills centers serving over 2,000 learners, while the Bangsamoro Normalization Trust Fund financed large-scale infrastructure and farm-to-market roads (OPAPRU 2025a).

Recent initiatives emphasize science- and technology-based livelihoods, including climate-smart farming, goat and poultry production, and value-chain development, integrated into the BARMM-Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Agrarian Reform (MAFAR)'s 2024–2028 investment program and strengthened through OPAPRU-Department of Science and Technology (DOST) partnership (OPAPRU 2025a).

In the camps transformation program, lessons for peacebuilding include the value of multi-level coordination among national government, subnational government, and donor institutions; the integration of livelihood, housing, and infrastructure to reinforce social reintegration; and the importance of gradual normalization to build credibility and trust. The process also demonstrates that peace dividends must be sustained through medium- to long-term development planning and investment programming. The MILF camps transformation program illustrates how localized, participatory, and development-driven normalization can consolidate peace and resilience in post-conflict areas.

4.2.3 Community Empowerment through Science and Technology Program

The DOST's Community Empowerment through Science and Technology (CEST) program is a key government initiative backed by science and technology. It supports conflict-affected and vulnerable communities, including former rebels, by using science and technology to promote sustainable livelihoods and resilience.

Before formally including former rebels, CEST had already established a strong presence in poor and conflict-prone areas, particularly in Eastern Visayas. In 2019, the program assisted 90 groups across 65 communities, delivering interventions in livelihood development, education, health and nutrition, disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation, and environmental protection. As DOST's direct contribution to addressing local communist armed conflict, CEST focused on geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas where communities were most vulnerable to insurgents' recruitment. Through technology transfer and community-based support, the program helped strengthen local capacities and align community development with national peace and development goals (Sabalza 2020).

By 2021, CEST expanded its scope to directly support former rebels. In San Mariano, Isabela, DOST allocated PHP300,000 for former rebels and provided them livelihood training, workshops, and equipment such as portable solar dryers for high-value crops. This effort was reinforced by local government programs and security support from the police and military, ensuring a safe transition to stable livelihoods under the whole-of-nation approach of EO 70, s. 2018 (Edale Jr. 2021).

That same year, CEST's funding increased significantly, with PHP15.8 million allocated to expand interventions across six Eastern Visayas provinces. Projects included food innovation initiatives and iron-fortified rice production aimed at improving nutrition and human capital (Meniano (2021)). Overall, the CEST program demonstrates how technology-based interventions can support peacebuilding, reintegration, and inclusive development in conflict-affected communities.

4.2.4 Barangay Development Program

The Barangay Development Program (BDP), being implemented by the NTF-ELCAC, aims to address the root causes of communist insurgency by channeling state resources directly to formerly conflict-affected barangays. Funded through the Department of Budget and Management's (DBM) Local Government Support Fund, the BDP finances essential infrastructure and social services aligned with the barangay development plans of "cleared communities" (i.e., cleared of insurgents' presence). The barangays should have completed the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP)'s Community Support Program (CSP) and the DILG's Retooled CSP. These prerequisites ensure that projects reflect community-identified priorities and complement local governance structures.

From 2021 to October 2025, the BDP has targeted a total of 4,830 barangays, implemented 7,743 projects with an overall completion rate of 74.27 percent and cumulative funding of PHP36.823 billion (see Table 4). Annual implementation performance varied widely. In 2021, 822 barangays

implemented 2,200 projects with a near-perfect 99.36 percent completion rate and an average allocation of PHP20 million per barangay, totaling PHP16.44 billion. The 2022 cycle achieved 99.94 percent completion (1,708 of 1,709 projects) across 1,406 barangays with a reduced allocation of PHP 4 million each, or PHP5.624 billion in total. However, the 2023 and 2024 cycles showed lower efficiency, with completion rates dropping to 94.96 percent and 69.38 percent respectively, amid decreasing per-barangay funding. Notably, a separate 2024 tranche of 955 projects only achieved 21.05 percent completion, while the 2025 batch—covering 780 barangays with PHP1.95 billion—remains at the pre-procurement stage as of October 2025. These figures highlight inconsistent budgeting and performance across years, raising red flags about the absence of a standardized funding formula and the need for audits to explain wide variations in allocations. A total of 4,506 additional barangays are also programmed for inclusion from FY 2026 to 2028, signaling continued scale-up (NTF-ELCAC 2025).

Table 4. Barangay Development Program Barangay Projects and Distribution of Budget, as of October 2025

Year	Total barangays	Total projects	Completed	%	Approved budget per barangay	Total approved budget
2021	822	2,200	2,195	99.36%	PHP20 million (M)	PHP16.44 billion (B)
2022	1,406	1,709	1,708	99.94%	PHP4 M	PHP5.624 B
2023	958	1,251	1,188	94.96%	PHP6.6 M	PHP6.329 B
2024	864	885	614	69.38%	PHP2.5 M	PHP2.16 B
		955	201	21.05%	PHP5 M	PHP4.32 B
2025	780	743	Under the Pre-procurement Stage		PHP2.5 M	PHP1.95 B
TOTAL	4,830	7,743	5,906	74.27%	n.a.	PHP36.823 B

Note: n.a. – not applicable

Source: NTF-ELCAC (2025).

In terms of physical outputs, written key informant interview response show that program implementation from 2021 to 2024 delivered the following infrastructure accomplishments: 1,691 kilometers of farm-to-market roads; 829 classrooms; and 477 health stations; 1,069 water supply systems (27 Level-1, 629 Level-2, and 413 Level-3 water systems) and eight sanitation facilities; 2,716 on-grid electrification projects; 1,698 on-grid streetlights; 3,436 off-grid electrification systems; and 16,942 off-grid streetlights (NTF-ELCAC 2025). These projects underscore the BDP’s objective of linking peacebuilding with inclusive local development. By ensuring that communities emerging from insurgency receive visible, high-impact infrastructure, the program strengthens state legitimacy and trust, reduces grievances, and fosters conditions for stability.

A key insight for current and future peacebuilding work is that community participation is critical. Projects that directly address local needs in roads, schools, water, and electrification generate stronger ownership and more sustainable peace dividends. However, the wide disparity in per-barangay funding and uneven completion rates point to the need for stronger monitoring,

transparent budgeting, and institutional mechanisms that ensure consistency and accountability across geographic areas.

4.3 Cessation of hostilities: The MILF and MNLF experience

The cessation of hostilities between the government and the MILF stands as one of the most durable achievements in the country's contemporary peacebuilding history. The 1997 Agreement on the General Cessation of Hostilities provided a foundation for negotiation, normalization, and long-term stability. Through well-structured joint mechanisms and community participation, the agreement transformed the landscape of security in the Bangsamoro, significantly reducing the frequency and intensity of armed clashes.

Throughout the years, the Coordinating Committees on the Cessation of Hostilities (CCCHs) and Local Monitoring Teams (LMTs) have been the operational backbone of the ceasefire architecture. These mechanisms ensured compliance, investigated violations, and mediated local disputes, helping prevent isolated tensions from escalating. In high-risk zones, Joint Ceasefire Monitoring Posts (JCMPs) functioned as early-warning and rapid-response centers, while the Ad Hoc Joint Action Group (AHJAG) coordinated government law-enforcement operations near MILF areas in ways that preserved trust and avoided armed confrontation. Such multi-layered mechanisms demonstrated that peace implementation can be effective when jointly managed, inclusive, and transparent.

International oversight further reinforced credibility and impartiality. Since 2004, the International Monitoring Team (IMT)—composed of members from Malaysia, Brunei, Norway, Libya, Japan, and the European Union—monitored compliance and verified incidents through its security and humanitarian-development components. The Civilian Protection Component (CPC) composed of national and international humanitarian organizations complemented this setup by ensuring the safety of noncombatants. Although the IMT's mandate lapsed after Mission 16 in 2022, its nearly two decades of engagement built a confidence framework that continues to underpin normalization efforts.

Under the normalization track, the decommissioning of MILF combatants and weapons became the centerpiece of the transition from armed struggle to democratic participation. The Joint Normalization Committee, the Joint Peace and Security Committee, and the Joint Peace and Security Teams (JPSTs) jointly implemented this transformation. Since 2019, twenty-four JPSTs have been trained and deployed to help preserve stability and secure normalization sites. Through the Independent Decommissioning Body (IDB), 26,145 of the targeted 40,145 combatants and 4,625 of the estimated 7,000 firearms have been decommissioned as of 2023. Each demobilized fighter receives socioeconomic transition support—profiling, identification, PHP100,000 transitional cash assistance, and access to livelihood and community-development programs—administered by the Task Force for Decommissioned Combatants and their Communities (TFDCC) and the DSWD (OPAPRU 2025a).

Parallel to decommissioning, the Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) management program, supported by the UNDP, has retrieved 2,820 firearms. The UNDP's ASPIRE project further incentivized voluntary disarmament by linking it to livelihood assistance, resulting in an additional

770 firearms surrendered, particularly in Basilan and Maguindanao del Norte (OPAPRU 2025a). These programs demonstrate how linking peacebuilding work to tangible economic benefits incentivizes cooperation and reinforces trust.

However, the 2025 announcement by the MILF Central Committee of the postponement of the final decommissioning phase—covering about 14,000 remaining combatants—revealed implementation gaps. The MILF Central Committee cited delays in the delivery of socioeconomic assistance as ground for deferral. In response, the government reaffirmed its commitment to the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro and highlighted that over PHP4 billion are allocated for the normalization program. The OPAPRU urged continued dialogue and transparency, framing the delay not as a setback but as an opportunity to recalibrate commitments and reinforce trust (Presidential Communications Office 2025).

The experience of the MILF must also be understood alongside that of the MNLF, whose earlier peace process with the government underscores the risks of uneven power-sharing arrangements. Following the 1996 Final Peace Agreement, the integration of MNLF fighters into the security services and the establishment of the ARMM were intended to institutionalize self-governance. Yet, by 2001 and again in 2013, factions within the MNLF reignited conflict—first through political contestations over autonomy leadership and later through the so-called “Zamboanga Siege.” These resurgences were rooted largely in dissatisfaction with the perceived erosion of the MNLF’s political role and exclusion from subsequent negotiations with the MILF. The MNLF’s experience thus reveals a core lesson: power-sharing is inherently delicate. Unless governance arrangements ensure inclusive participation and adequate political representation, perceived marginalization can easily translate into renewed insurgency.

The combined experience in the implementation of programs on cessation of hostilities with the MILF and MNLF offers crucial insights for sustaining and deepening peace in the Bangsamoro. First, robust and adaptive joint security mechanisms—such as the CCCHs, LMTs, JCMPs, AHJAG, IMT, and JPSTs—are indispensable for maintaining confidence and preventing relapse. These demonstrate that peace enforcement can succeed when institutionalized through shared authority, local ownership, and international support. Yet, such bodies must remain agile, with mandates readjusted as necessary and resources allocated to ensure consistent field presence.

Second, the linkage between security normalization and socioeconomic transformation must be credible and synchronized. Delays in the delivery of reintegration assistance risk undermining disarmament momentum and the legitimacy of peace institutions. Peacebuilding work must align security milestones with immediate economic benefits and community-level interventions.

Third, the experiences of both the MILF and the MNLF highlight that peace cannot be sustained by security arrangements alone; political inclusion and power-sharing are also important considerations. The fragmentation of the MNLF after 1996 and the later tensions between the MNLF and the MILF underscore how exclusionary or asymmetric governance structures can reignite conflict. Ensuring that all stakeholders see themselves represented in autonomous institutions remains a central peacebuilding challenge.

Finally, effective communication, transparency, and continued partnership are essential to maintaining trust during long transitions. The Bangsamoro experience shows that peacebuilding is iterative, requiring constant recalibration between political, security, and socioeconomic tracks. Enduring peace will depend on maintaining credible commitments and ensuring that every phase of normalization translates into real, shared dividends for all communities in the Bangsamoro.

4.4 Grants of amnesty as political and legal settlement

The creation of the National Amnesty Commission (NAC) marks a pivotal institutional reform in peacebuilding in the Philippines. Mandated under EO 125, s. 2021, the NAC operationalizes the state's amnesty program as part of the broader framework of political and legal settlement with former rebels. By offering qualified members of various armed groups—including the MILF, MNLF, CPP-NPA-NDF, and RPMP-RPA-ABB—a pathway back to lawful and peaceful civilian life, the NAC embodies the government's effort to address the legacies of armed conflict through institutionalized justice and reconciliation.

While the NAC's design emphasizes fairness and transparency through interview-based assessments and sworn denunciations, operational challenges persist. Some cases bypass case conferences, which are critical deliberations particularly for those involving detainees or convicts, thereby missing opportunities for clarification. Despite the amnesty process not being conditional on disarmament, applicants are encouraged to surrender firearms to prevent future liabilities (NAC 2025).

4.4.1 Proclamation No. 403: Amnesty for RPMP-RPA-ABB or Kapatiran

The amnesty for Kapatiran affirms the government's sustained commitment to complete the reintegration of former combatants under previously signed peace agreements. Recognizing amnesty as the capstone of reintegration, the OPAPRU adopted a multi-service caravan approach, directly bringing services and amnesty processing to Kapatiran communities in Visayas and Mindanao. These service caravans, accompanied by safe conduct passes for applicants, symbolize the government's commitment to both access and security. As of November 2025, 89 applications were filed, primarily in Western Visayas areas.

However, several operational challenges emerged: transportation constraints, limited coordination mechanisms, and uneven implementation across Local Amnesty Boards (LABs). To address these, regional validation committees undertook on-the-spot action planning, while OPAPRU reinforced linkages among LAB secretariats and local partners. The lesson from this process is clear—effective amnesty implementation requires localized delivery systems, logistical coordination, and continuous inter-agency cooperation to sustain trust and inclusivity in post-conflict settings (OPAPRU 2025c).

4.4.2 Proclamation No. 404: Amnesty for CPP-NPA-NDF

The amnesty under Proclamation No. 404 extends the offer of reconciliation to members of the CPP-NPA-NDF, despite the absence of a formal peace agreement. This initiative illustrates the government's willingness to promote national unity and prevent recidivism through legal normalization. Data from 2025 show 4,159 applications. This is the highest number of applications among all rebel groups, reflecting the program's attractiveness as a legitimate exit route from insurgency (NAC 2025).

Law enforcement reports, particularly from the AFP and LGUs, indicate that the amnesty process for CPP-NPA-NDF has catalyzed large-scale voluntary demobilization, reducing the operational capacity of insurgent forces. Many beneficiaries have resumed education or found lawful livelihoods, reinforcing the amnesty's preventive role against renewed rebellion. The NTF-ELCAC and ECLIP facilitated structured, batch-based submissions (NAC 2025).

The CPP-NPA-NDF case demonstrates that amnesty can function as a peacebuilding mechanism even without a formal accord, provided that the process guarantees fairness, legal clarity, and reintegration support. It also highlights the importance of institutional continuity, as the amnesty mechanism extends the state's reconciliation agenda beyond the confines of negotiated settlements.

4.4.3 Proclamation No. 405: Amnesty for MILF

For the MILF, amnesty and pardon form part of the Normalization Track of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro. Proclamation No. 1090 (issued in 2021) initially covered MILF-related offenses, later reinforced by Proclamation No. 405 (issued in 2023) under the Marcos administration. The NAC, fully operational since January 2023, now manages the MILF applications, which reached 809 by November 2025 (NAC 2025).

The government issues safe conduct passes and has decentralized intake centers. However, a key issue persists: MILF decommissioning proceeded without integrating amnesty as a core component, leaving a structural gap in the normalization process. Of over 26,000 decommissioned combatants, only 85 have so far applied for amnesty, reflecting limited awareness, weak institutional linkage, and ambivalence toward legal normalization (NAC 2025).

The MILF experience highlights a crucial lesson: legal normalization must be designed as an integral and synchronized pillar of the peace process, rather than a separate, post hoc intervention. Without this, decommissioning risks remaining a security-oriented activity, detached from the broader political and legal reintegration necessary for lasting peace.

4.4.4 Proclamation No. 406: Amnesty for MNLF

Proclamation No. 406 provides amnesty to MNLF members who committed offenses under the Revised Penal Code and special penal laws in pursuit of political beliefs. The amnesty excludes

grave crimes such as terrorism, kidnapping for ransom, rape, drug-related offenses, grave human rights violations, and other acts internationally barred from amnesty. The process requires applicants to admit offenses under oath and surrender their weapons.

However, implementation has been slow and uneven. As of November 2025, only 357 applications have been filed, with concentrations in NCR, Sulu, and Basilan. Many MNLF members struggle to apply due to individualized requirements, limited logistical support, and inadequate coordination between the BARMM government and the NAC. Misconceptions also persist that amnesty is automatic under peace agreements or limited to those with criminal cases (NAC 2025).

The MNLF experience underscores that political reconciliation requires more than legal instruments. It demands institutional guidance, leadership engagement, and financial support. Without these, amnesty risks becoming symbolic rather than transformative.

Across all proclamations, the amnesty program faces recurring bottlenecks. Bureaucratic hurdles, resource shortages, and weak coordination between NAC, LABs, law enforcement, and local actors have slowed processing. Verification of group affiliation remains problematic, especially for those outside formal combatant rosters. Delays in appointing authorized verifiers, limited legal and administrative manpower, and uneven workload distribution exacerbate backlogs.

Security concerns—such as fears of arrest or exposure—discourage participation, particularly among Moro groups with residual distrust toward state institutions. In remote or conflict-affected areas, geographical inaccessibility and limited outreach hinder application. Older members often view amnesty as irrelevant, while others lack awareness of its benefits or confidentiality protections.

If unaddressed, these challenges could undermine the program's credibility and security objectives. Efficient and transparent implementation of the amnesty programs is necessary to strengthen trust in democratic institutions and reinforce the integrity of peacebuilding.

Some of the key lessons from the amnesty programs are as follows:

- **Integration and synchronization** – Amnesty must be embedded in the overall normalization framework, not treated as an administrative afterthought. Its separation from disarmament or decommissioning, as seen in the MILF case, weakens its reintegrative power.
- **Information and trust-building** – Persistent misconceptions among former rebels highlight the need for comprehensive information campaigns. Transparency about qualifications, confidentiality, and legal implications builds confidence in the state's sincerity.
- **Institutional coordination** – The NAC's success hinges on close collaboration with OPAPRU, LGUs, BARMM institutions, AFP, PNP, and justice sector actors. Establishing standardized verification mechanisms and timely communication among agencies prevents backlogs and enhances fairness.

- **Operational capacity** – Sustained funding, technical staff, and logistical support are indispensable. Mobile intake centers, digital application systems, and field NAC offices can ensure access for geographically isolated applicants.
- **Security and protection measures** – Issuing safe conduct passes and ensuring non-arrest guarantees are essential to overcoming fear and enabling participation, particularly in conflict-prone areas.
- **Inclusivity and local participation** – Engaging local governments and community leaders promotes ownership and continuity. Peace caravans demonstrate that localized delivery of national programs increases reach and acceptance.
- **Monitoring and evaluation** – A unified data management system and transparent reporting can strengthen accountability, measure reintegration outcomes, and refine future amnesty frameworks.

In sum, the Philippine amnesty program represents both a legal instrument of reconciliation and a political commitment to national unity. It has contributed to reducing armed activity, facilitating reintegration, and restoring trust between the government and former insurgents. Yet, its ultimate success depends on resolving the operational, institutional, and perceptual barriers that continue to constrain participation. The lessons from the MILF, MNLF, CPP-NPA-NDF, and Kapatiran experiences converge on one key insight: amnesty works best when it is inclusive, well-coordinated, adequately resourced, and firmly anchored in the broader architecture of peacebuilding.

4.5 Transitional justice and reconciliation

Transitional justice and reconciliation constitute a critical dimension of peacebuilding, aiming to address the legacies of past conflicts through mechanisms that promote truth, accountability, reparations, and guarantees of non-recurrence. Beyond formal justice processes, reconciliation also encompasses the reintegration of former combatants into civilian life or state institutions, fostering social cohesion and sustainable peace.

In the case of the MILF, transitional justice and reconciliation is one of the cornerstones of the Bangsamoro peace process. It is designed to confront the deep-rooted historical injustices and structural inequalities that fueled decades of armed conflict. On December 9, 2025, the government and the MILF launched the Transitional Justice and Reconciliation Roadmap at Camp Darapanan in Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao del Norte, fulfilling a key commitment under the Normalization Annex of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro. The roadmap operationalizes a “Dealing with the Past” framework centered on truth, justice, reparations, and guarantees of non-recurrence, and lays out two tracks—one toward establishing institutional mechanisms such as the National Transitional Justice and Reconciliation Commission for the Bangsamoro, and another focused on policy and community-based initiatives addressing human rights violations and land dispossession (OPAPRU 2025d). This initiative demonstrates a crucial lesson for ongoing and future peacebuilding efforts: that durable peace requires not only political and security arrangements but also acknowledgment and redress of past harms to build collective trust and social healing. The participatory, multi-level design of the roadmap underscores the importance of local ownership, sustained state commitment, and inclusive governance in embedding

reconciliation within everyday governance structures. These factors are essential for preventing conflict recurrence and ensuring a peace process that is both just and transformative.

While formal transitional justice mechanisms have been more fully developed under the MILF peace process, MNLF stakeholders have participated in parallel transformation initiatives aimed at reintegrating combatants and their communities into peaceful civilian life. As part of this inclusive transition, fourteen MNLF members were appointed to the interim Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA), with some serving in the Bangsamoro Parliament and in BARMM ministries, reflecting an institutionalized role for MNLF representatives in governance and helping embed reconciliation through political participation rather than continued conflict (OPAPRU 2023b). The appointments to the BTA Parliament also symbolize formal inclusion of MNLF perspectives in the region's transitional governance structures. This integration underscores the importance of political accommodation and shared governance as mechanisms for advancing peace and reconciliation alongside formal transitional justice initiatives.

The peace process with the CPP-NPA-NDF has not established a formal transitional justice and reconciliation mechanism akin to those in the Bangsamoro peace processes; formal peace negotiations were terminated in 2017 and replaced by localized peace engagements. The ECLIP, Balik-Loob programs and amnesty aim to help former combatants transition into mainstream society and contribute to stability and development in their communities. But continued debate exists over the NTF-ELCAC's approach to peace and human rights, underscoring the gap in formal mechanisms for reconciliation with the CPP-NPA-NDF.

The 2000 peace agreement with the RPMP-RPA-ABB set in motion comprehensive reintegration and development commitments, including cessation of conflict, disposition of arms, and socio-economic programs for affected communities. Under the subsequent Clarificatory Implementing Document (CID) agreed in 2019 with Kapatiran, the parties affirmed that the full transformation of members into a civilian organization was a central objective. The CID codified the completion of the transition from armed struggle to legitimate civilian life as part of the final settlement of the 2000 agreement. While transitional justice and reconciliation in the technical sense—such as truth-seeking or victim-centered redress—has not been formally defined for this process, the reintegration and civilian transformation efforts represent substantive steps toward reconciliation and normalization for former RPMP-RPA-ABB combatants.

The peace process with the CPLA included measures that effectively transitioned former combatants into civilian life, including integration opportunities for some ex-rebels into the AFP as part of broader efforts to consolidate peace and development. AO 18, s. 2001, signed by former president Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, mandated the phased integration of CPLA members into the regular force of the AFP. Executive Order No. 49, s. 2011, issued by former president Benigno Aquino III, built on AO 18 by directing government agencies to implement a closure agreement with the CPLA that included the AFP integration component. While armed hostilities ceased and ex-combatants were absorbed into civilian structures, the enduring political aspiration for Cordillera autonomy—a core grievance underlying the CPLA's struggle—has been unresolved and its fate remains uncertain.

Lessons from transitional justice and reconciliation across the Philippine peace processes with the MILF, MNLF, CPP-NPA-NDF, RPMP-RPA-ABB, and CPLA reveal both progress and gaps in addressing the legacies of armed conflict. The MILF peace process demonstrates that reconciliation is most sustainable when grounded in a formal framework of truth, justice, reparations, and non-recurrence, as reflected in the 2025 Transitional Justice and Reconciliation Roadmap. The MNLF process, while less formalized in transitional justice terms, embodies reconciliation through political inclusion, exemplified by the appointment of MNLF members to the BTA. This affirms that shared governance can be a bridge toward healing. Although the CPP-NPA-NDF process lacks a formal transitional justice mechanism, reconciliation there is symbolized through reintegration programs facilitated by the NTF-ELCAC. Similarly, the RPMP-RPA-ABB and CPLA peace processes highlight the value of reintegration and civilian transformation as practical vehicles for reconciliation. The RPMP-RPA-ABB's transition into the civilian organization Kapatiran and the CPLA's integration of ex-rebels into the AFP demonstrate that reconciliation can take tangible form in socioeconomic participation and institutional absorption. Collectively, these experiences underscore that while formal transitional justice mechanisms are ideal for addressing historical grievances, inclusive reintegration and political accommodation are also effective pathways to reconciliation in contexts where formal truth-seeking and redress mechanisms are not in place.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

Peacebuilding success in the Philippines should be assessed not only by the signing of peace agreements but, more fundamentally, by the human and social costs that have been avoided. Decades of armed conflict resulted in an estimated 40,000 fatalities in the CPP-NPA–AFP conflict (Engelbrecht 2024) and about 150,000 deaths in Central and Western Mindanao (Herbert 2019), alongside approximately 3.2 million internally displaced persons between 2008 and 2022 due to conflict and violence (United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees 2025). Against this backdrop, the reduction of armed encounters, the prevention of mass displacement, and the stabilization of conflict-affected communities represent substantial peace dividends. Where peacebuilding elements have been sustained—particularly in the MILF, CPLA, and RPMP-RPA-ABB cases—communities have been spared further loss of life and forced migration, underscoring the high avoided costs of effective peacebuilding.

The comparative analysis of the peace processes and the government interventions shows that peacebuilding in the Philippines is cumulative and iterative. Durable gains emerge when confidence-building measures, socioeconomic development programs, cessation of hostilities, political and legal settlements, and reconciliation processes reinforce one another through aligned incentives and credible commitments. Importantly, steadfast peacebuilding pays off economically. Areas transitioning out of conflict have been provided improved service delivery, infrastructure expansion, livelihood recovery, and renewed local economic activity. These achievements raise the opportunity cost of violence and gradually shift incentives away from armed struggle.

Several cross-cutting lessons emerge from the implementation experience. First, immediate aid and security guarantees are effective confidence-building measures only when paired with clear pathways toward longer-term reintegration and development; short-term assistance without

credible follow-through risks undermining trust. Second, socioeconomic development programs are most effective when they are community-driven, inclusive of both former combatants and host communities, and institutionally embedded within regular government systems rather than treated as ad hoc peace expenditures. Third, cessation of hostilities requires not only technical ceasefire mechanisms but also synchronized delivery of promised socioeconomic and political dividends; delays or asymmetries in implementation weaken compliance incentives. Fourth, amnesty and other political and legal settlements function best when integrated early and visibly into peacebuilding design, rather than introduced as stand-alone or post hoc measures. Fifth, transitional justice and reconciliation efforts that emphasize reintegration, recognition, and social healing—alongside accountability—help transform former armed groups into stakeholders of peace, even in cases where broader political aspirations (such as regional autonomy) remain unresolved. However, reconciliation has often been under-institutionalized, despite its importance in consolidating internal cohesion within former armed groups and strengthening social capital between peace partners. Finally, inadequate monitoring and evaluation weaken coherence and accountability across interrelated peacebuilding programs. Inadequate data systems limit the government’s ability to track reintegration outcomes and measure long-term socioeconomic impact.

In light of these findings, several recommendations are proposed. Peacebuilding interventions should be designed explicitly around incentive compatibility, ensuring that cooperation yields higher and more predictable returns than renewed conflict for all actors involved. This requires tighter synchronization across peacebuilding elements, particularly between security-related measures and socioeconomic delivery. Monitoring, evaluation, and feedback mechanisms must be institutionalized and digitalized to track outcomes beyond outputs, especially for reintegration programs such as ECLIP and barangay-level development interventions.

A special sectoral audit by the Commission on Audit should be undertaken for peacebuilding and reintegration programs, given their multi-agency, interdependent nature and shared objectives. This would enhance fiscal accountability and identify efficiency gaps across programs such as ECLIP, PAMANA, BDP, and normalization-related interventions. Parallel to this, the government should invest in inter-connected databases and results-based monitoring and evaluation systems that track beneficiaries across programs and over time.

Institutionalizing reconciliation ceremonies—particularly those that give women a central role—can also strengthen internal cohesion within former armed groups, promote healing, and expand social capital at the community level. Third-party mechanisms should also be embedded more systematically in both national and local peacebuilding efforts. Even ongoing localized peace engagements would benefit from the presence of neutral facilitators—such as civil society organizations, faith-based groups, academic institutions, or international partners—to enhance transparency, credibility, and trust.

Finally, addressing the persistent peacebuilding setbacks with the CPP-NPA-NDF requires both comparative learning and a conceptual shift. The experience of Thailand shows that the collapse of communist insurgency there was preceded by internal factionalism and ideological shifts, and peace was ultimately achieved by coupling military containment with amnesty and credible promises of political and socioeconomic inclusion (Rooney 2025). This suggests a possible

pathway for the remaining peacebuilding work. Moreover, the Philippine context necessitates applying a conflict transformation model, as articulated by Lederach (1997), which focuses on transforming the relationships and structures that sustain conflict rather than merely suppressing violence. This approach is particularly relevant in rural and indigenous peoples' communities, where grievances are deeply rooted in exclusion and marginalization. By supporting sustained, bottom-up engagement, encouraging dialogue between local and indigenous communities and government institutions, and creating pathways for inclusive political participation beyond elite-driven peace talks, conflict transformation offers a viable way forward for building trust and advancing durable peace with remaining CPP-NPA-NDF elements.

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