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Good Wednesday Group for Peace

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Background

In the face of the darkest moments of Maguindanao's history, in the midst of social trauma and shared grief, one of the many questions that emerged and called for urgent response is this: *What do we do now?* The Armed Forces of the Philippines ventured to give a response. At the forefront, the ranks of the 6th Infantry Division (or 6ID) stationed at Camp Awang, Maguindanao had to be changed under the new leadership of General Anthony Alcantara.

A gradual change in leadership and its ranks meant a change in the thrusts and programs of the 6th ID in the light of the Maguindanao massacre. One of the changes is the internal policy of the Command to establish partnership between 6th ID and civil society organizations (CSO) in dealing with the security situation. The new military contingent emphasized CSOs as important partners in understanding the political context and social dynamics of the area to improve their security plans. As Brigadier General Ariel Bernardo, the Assistant Division Commander of 6th ID said, "6th ID recognizes the role of the civil society organizations (CSO) in the maintenance of peace and security in the communities and as catalysts for change." Such policy guidance fell upon the mandate of the Lt. Col Benjamin Hao heading the 6th ID's Civil Military Office (CMO).

To overcome the initial challenge of building contacts and rapport with important CSOs in the area, General Alcantara linked CMO to Balay Mindanao, a peacebuilding NGO based in Cagayan de Oro City which is more acquainted with the civil society networks in Maguindanao area. Consequently, Balay Mindanao then requested Consortium of Bangsamoro Civil Society (CBCS) as the primary CSO partner for the 6th ID. Balay Mindanao, being the external bridge, facilitated the initial series of consultations between the 6th ID and CSOs under the CBCS umbrella; these meetings later gave birth to an informal multi-sectoral group named Good Wednesday Group for Peace (GWG).

Creation Stage

In any partnership engagements, the first hurdle that must be overcome before any substantive collaboration can be made is gathering the right people for a common cause. It was even more challenging for the new 6th ID contingent to connect with local CSOs given their lack of information and local networks. This is where the importance of Balay Mindanao steps in as the external facilitator since they know the right people to talk to in order to touch base with civil society groups.

Long-standing engagements and personal relations between Balay Mindanao and the AFP paved the way for the expedient relations between the new 6th ID and the Balay Mindanao. Such social capital proved to be useful for early foundation of the GWG. It must be noted that prior to GWG, Balay Mindanao had been working with the Mindanao units of AFP on peacebuilding efforts. Likewise, another social endowment of such collaboration is the close personal relationships between General Alcantara and Mr. Hally Hernandez, the current Director of Balay Mindanao, who were former classmates at Asian Institute of Management.

The first meeting of GWG was held at Mang Gorio Grill, Cotabato City on March 16, 2010. It was the first attempt by the new 6th ID to build bridges with the civil society. The event was named, “A Gathering for Peace in Maguindanao.” The group later on adopted the name, Good Wednesday Group for Peace (GWG), since they meet weekly every Wednesday. While Balay Mindanao acted as the external facilitator, CBCS performed the vital role of referring key NGO and POs under its umbrella to the new 6th ID. The participating organizations and personalities of the first meeting were:

- Consortium for Bangsamoro Civil Society (CBCS) represented by Nash Maulana
- 6th Infantry Division (ID) represented by Cpt. Ruben Guinolbay, Col. Rudy Asto and Lt. Col Benjamin Hao, Lt. Col. Mangintonong Tocalo and Brig. Gen. Ariel Bernardo
- Balay Mindanaw represented by Charlito Manlupig
- German Development Service (DED) represented by Dagmar Blickwede,
- Notre Dame University Peace Center represented by Prof. Rey Danilo Lacson and Essex Giguiento
- Citizens Coalition for ARMM Electoral Reforms, Inc. (C-CARE) represented by Bobby Taguntong, and Norodin “Nholdz” Manalao
- RLA-ARMM represented by Sheahnrazade Datumanong Funtebella
- Suraida Ampatuan, Municipal Councilor of Ampatuan, Maguindanao
- Kadtuntaya Foundation, Inc. (KFI) represented by Abdunasser B. Binsing
- Mindanao Tulong Bakwet (MTB) represented by Razul Ebus
- UNYPAD represented by Anwar K. Emblawa
- Institute for Autonomy and Governance (IAG) represented by Prof. Ilese Mercado

The start of the discussion took off from the context of Maguindanao Massacre and the impending need for collaborative response from both civil society and government. As Brigadier General Bernard added in his opening remarks during the first meeting, *“we accept na nagkamali ang institution along the way and now we can start anew.”* Lt. Col discussed the initial objectives of the gathering which are: (1) to share 6th ID’s perspectives in the CMO environment together with its general CMO plan; (2) to explain 6ID’s initiatives in dealing with the civilian volunteer organizations (CVO); and, (3) to seek ideas and support from the peace-loving citizens of Mindanao. Such objectives were related to the two major tasks of 6th ID under the plan “KAMPANTE”ⁱ which are (1) to facilitate normalcy in the local governance in Maguindanao; and (2) to prevent the CVOs from being influenced by the threat and other lawless armed groups.

As discussed by Lt. Col. Hao, reintegration of the CVOs rather than armed confrontation was the primary major response of the 6th ID on private armies. These efforts were initially carried out by clearing innocent CVOs from being implicated to November 23 incident and correcting the spreading impression that all CVOs communities in the Maguindanao area are generally involved. Reintegration was an important tactic for the military to prevent the demonization of the CVOs. The bigger concern of the military is that the effect of such demonization might isolate CVOs, both innocent or implicated, and eventually drive them to coagulate with lawless elements, private mafias or MILF.



The multi-stakeholder participation among various members of the GWG from the civil society and security sector led to the complementation and synergy of their roles. The heart of this set-up is the engagement between civil society and security sector. Multi-stakeholdership has worked in favor of enhancing ERV prevention measures such as popular education and information sharing.

At the end of the open forum, the participants converged on common concerns for the IDP (internally displaced people), CVO (civilian volunteer organization), and conflict-stricken communities. On the issue of IDPs, the group discussed the historical-structural causes of the recent emergence of IDPs such as the collapse of GRP-MILF agreement and the historical Moro struggle. Meanwhile, on the issue of CVOs, the group argued for the necessity of reintegration plan for the CVOs. They also agree that disarmament is considered as a poorly feasible policy. On the issue of conflict-stricken communities, trust-building was the most important strategy identified. It is from these three issues that the activities of the maturing Good Wednesday Group revolved in the coming weeks. From these common concerns, common actions were drawn out for the group such as (1) context-conflict analysis with the CSOs and the communities, (2) engagement with the International Monitoring Team on the concerns of the communities for civilian protection, (3) awareness-building on GRP-MILF bilateral agreement pertaining to the issue of IDPs and (4) continuing conversation of all stakeholders to formulate workable areas of partnership.

In retrospect, the Maguindanao massacre was the major incident inspiring the formation of specific responses of GWG such as peace dialogues with CVOs and election monitoring. However, the circumstance that the GWG wants to address was not delimited to the problem of election-related violence *per se* but intended further to address the larger state of political violence. As Dagma of CBCS clarified the general concern of the group, “it is really the general security situation where the recent election is concerned with; we are really talking about political violence.”

The first meeting successfully opened spaces for sharing of identity, perspectives and concerns between the military and the CSO on issues of peace and security. As Mr. Ariel Hernandez of Balay Mindanaw remarked at the closing of the first meeting, “*This is, first and foremost, a meeting or conversations of*

the stakeholders after the November 23 incident, and it seems that the distance between the CSOs and the 6ID has really become wide. With the previous leadership of 6ID, even us, Balay Mindanaw, we were not given an opportunity of having a good coordination. It was just fortunate that the present commander is a serious leader and a personal friend of mine. We are also assured that the commander of 6ID is committed to correct the impression against the military based on previous experiences. Now that I personally heard Brig. Gen. Bernardo and Lt. Col. Hao, my confidence on this process has taken to another level. In fact, it did not only become a process of opening spaces but also of providing opportunities for partnerships.”

The succeeding meetings had to contend with trust-building among its members before any deeper dialogues and collaborative activities can be made. During the second meeting last March 24, the commotion raised by some CSO participants as they questioned the taking of their pictures by some military participants manifested the weak trust which the developing GWG had been standing onto.

The question of trust amongst the participants was again brought up during the third meeting last April 4 in the light of the commotion on picture-taking raised from the previous meeting. During the meeting, a military officer asked the CSOs, “*sino ba ang mas malapit sa puso ng mga Moro, is it the AFP or the MILF?*” Sensing that other CSO representatives did not hit the truth in their replies, CBCS Secretary-General Maulana replied, “*tingnan natin ang realidad, during war, sino ba nakikita ng Moro na nanununog ng babay nila, ng bumabari sa kanila, nag-violate ng human rights nila. It is the AFP-PNP. That is why they look at AFP as their enemy and they look at the MILF as their defender. We are yet to see that AFP-PNP are our protectors.*” Such statement seemed to mark a challenge on the part of the new 6th ID.

Organizational Structure and Leadership

The Good Wednesday Group has no formal organizational structure. At its inception, its founding members did not actually intend to establish a formal organization. The collective evolved out from the regular interaction and dialogues among the members. It is a loose network among the different types of CSOs and varying ranks of the military. Although the partnership between the CSOs and military units are mainly mediated between CBCS and the CMO of 6th ID, the leadership of the group is in the form of *collective leadership but shared responsibilities*, in the words of the CBCS Secretary General Maulana.

Every organization in the group is treated as a co-equal body. Consultation and open dialogue are the central decision-making mechanisms of the group. Wednesday meetings are pivotal to the line of activities and future directions of the collective since this is when major reflections and decisions are made. During Wednesday meeting, the group assesses past activities, discusses the agenda and comes up with action points for the succeeding weeks. Any member can propose an agenda at the meeting which are usually the line-up activities of their respective organization.

The CMO (Civil Military Office) of 6th ID acted as the secretariat for the group. They communicated and coordinated to all members the details of Wednesday meetings and relevant projects of each member. Every Wednesday meeting, they shoulder the main task of arranging the venue, inviting the participants and documenting the activity.

The operational expenses of the group were mainly shouldered by the CMO of 6th ID as well. Operational expenses were mainly in the form of payment for the venue and food during meetings. The funding for these meetings came from the established budget item of the CMO. However, during the conduct of collaborative projects, each member of GWG contributed monetarily and non-monetarily based from their assets and capacities. For example, during the peace dialogue project of GWG in Ampatuan Municipality, every member of the GWG had their own respective contributions to the activity such as food, venue, security and transportation.

ERV Responses of GWG

Partnership activities of the GWG evolved out from the complementarities between the respective programs of its member organizations and the collective concern of the GWG. For coming up with collaborative projects, the group strategically taps the expertise and program mandates of its member organizations. The lead member of a certain collaborative project depends on the immediate concern and requirements of an activity. For instance, during election time, CCARE took the lead role in the election monitoring activities of the GWG since this is the primary program mandate of their organization.

The themes of the activities of the GWG varied from pre-election to post-election depending on the calls of the time. During pre-election, GWG focused its projects on peace dialogues and voters education. On Election Day, collaborative efforts were election monitoring and quick responses to election-related violence. For the post-election period, the group is currently refocusing its effort back to their initial concerns for IDPs and CVOs.

Timeline of Key Activities of Good Wednesday Group for Peace

Dates	Key Activities
Pre-election	
Mar 16	First Meeting at Mang Gorio Grill, Cotabato City
Mar 24	Second Wednesday Meeting at
April 14	Third Wednesday Meeting at Connie's Restaurant, Cotabato City
Apr 16	Peace Dialogues with CVO Communities at Northern Kabuntalan Municipality, Maguindanao
Ap	Peace Dialogues with CVO Communities at Mother Kabuntalan Municipality, Maguindanao
	Peace Dialogues with CVO Communities at Shariff Aguak Municipality, Maguindanao
Apr 19	Partnership meeting between CCARE and 6 th ID on election monitoring and voter's education program
April 20	Voter's Education to Community Leaders at Ampatuan Municipality, Maguindano
Election Day	
May 10	Quick Response on Election-related Violence Incidence occurring at high-risk areas such as Bundol and Datu Piang
Post-election	
May 11	Fourth Meeting for post-election assessment
May 19	Fifth Wednesday Meeting at El Comedor Restaurant having PNP representatives as new member
May 21	Judging of the Photo-contest under the theme of peace, security and elections

Pre-election Initiatives

During pre-election, the goal of the 6th ID was to communicate directly to the communities and CVOs the commitment of the military to law enforcement, security and peace. Such goal

complemented the peace-building and voter's education efforts of their CSO partners. Dialogue was the major approach for their communication. Through the collective space of GWG, the 6th ID and the CSOs came up with collaborative arrangements in achieving the desired dialogues wherein the military acted as the security support and political leverage for the CSO while the CSO served as the bridge for the military to connect with the communities.

Peace Dialogue with CVO communities

The peace dialogue with the CVO communities at Northern Kabuntalan area last April 16, 2010 was a major activity of the GWG prior to the election. Baranggay leaders and CVO leaders from seven (7) baranggays of Northern Kabuntalan which include the baranggays Kapimpilan, Tumaginting, Guiawa, Paulino, and Poblacion participated in the dialogue. During the conduct of this activity, CCARE spearheaded the voters' education program while 6th ID provided the security support for the activity.

The message of the CMO officers to the CVOs was that they are neither implicating them to the Maguindanao massacre incident nor disarming them but assuring them of the commitment of the military to the full law enforcement as the election closes in. Such message was drawn from striking a delicate balance between reinforcing the reintegration of the CVOs and deterring them from participating on any ERV activity. The GWG observed that, due to the demonization of CVOs as source of private armies, innocent CVOs might feel isolated and threatened to the point that they might join rebel groups and lawless elements for self-preservation. As Major Ruben Guinolbay argued, "*kung pipilitin natin silang habulin, saan sila pupunta mas labo silang magiging kalaban.*" Such effect of marginalizing innocent CVOs is what the GWG aimed to mitigate during the conduct of these peace dialogues.

Voter's Education with Community Leaders

The voter's education project of Good Wednesday Group at Ampatuan Municipality last April 20, 2010 was created out from the complementing peace agenda of each member of the group for the coming election. The unique collaboration of CSO and military led to new gains for both groups. On one hand, through the security support of the military, CCARE succeeded in reaching these risky areas to deliver their module instructions for automated voting. On the other hand, through the networking and bridging efforts of CCARE and other CSO personalities of the GWG, the military succeeded in communicating directly their message of security and peace to the community leaders.

Every member of the GWG contributed out from their own assets and capacities to the fulfillment of the event. For instance, Councilor Zorayda Ampatuan, a founding member of the group and a councilor of Ampatuan municipality, mobilized some participants and provided the venue and food for the event. CCARE acted as the main facilitator of the education program while designated battalions of the 6th ID provided security for the event. Balay Mindanao also attended the event as an observer.

The purpose of the dialogue was to determine possible problems that the barangays might encounter during elections and develop corresponding mitigation plans. Several baranggay leaders and military officers of battalions designated at the Ampatuan municipality attended the event. After the module on automated voting was presented, to make the voter's education more understandable, Mr. Guialel of CCARE and LT.Col Hao, candidly made some role-playing on automated voting. Mr. Guialel portrayed himself as the BEI who must assist Lt. Col Hao, who is acting as the uninformed voter.

The open dialogue session discussed the security issues perceived by the various participants. There were sharing and validation of insights and perceptions on the security situation of the barangays. Local commanders of the battalions designated at the area claimed for the possibility of failure of elections in some barangay such as Poblacion, Tumikor, Sanyag, and Salman. The specific scenarios

predicted are shooting incidents, bomb threats and snatching of PCOS machine. Barangay leaders were later asked to respond to these observations and to provide their own grounded view.

Resolutions were made at the end of the dialogue session. The group agreed to provide free transportation to residents of far-flung barangays such as Sanyag, Tumikor, and Salman during Election Day when they have to go to their clustered precincts to vote. To improve the security plan of the military, the military suggested information feedbacks from the barangay leaders for any observation of armed elements and violent incidence in their area. Local commanders and the barangay officials shared their contact information with each other for the quick feedback come election time.



One of the voter's education activities of GWG conducted with barangay leaders at the Ampatuan Municipality.



Lt. Col Hao and CCARE's Mr. Guailel candidly played the role of a voter and a election officer respectively to better explain the election process.

Election Day Initiatives

During Election Day where ERV incidences were expected to drastically increase, the plan of the GWG was to provide quick responses on mitigating ERVI from escalating into a crisis. The group prepared several measures to achieve this plan such as establishment of rules of engagement and creation of direct hotlines for quick reporting. During this time, GWG members already have strong expectations with each other as partners in ensuring peaceful election.

Quick Response to PCOS Snatching at Buldon

Last May 9, while PCOS machines were transported to a voting precinct in Buldon municipality, supporters of warring political clan have gotten into a violent conflict leading to snatching and destruction of a PCOS machines. Supporters of one clan were strongly against the delivery of PCOS machine into the precinct because they perceived that the BEI is partisan to their rival clan. On the other hand, supporters of the other clan strongly support the delivery. Such difference in the perception of the BEI's partisanship resulted to a violent confrontation between the two parties leading to snatching and destruction of one PCOS machine.

The incident could have escalated into a violent situation where there are fatalities involved and more PCOS destroyed if not for the quick intervention by GWG. The timing for the mediation and prevention of the GWG members was quick due to the established communication system between CCARE and the 6th ID. During the incident, after directly witnessing the snatching of PCOS, CCARE volunteers immediately reported the incident to their military counterparts at the CMO, Lt. Col Hao and Major Guinolbay. CCARE reported the election-related violent incidence to the 6th ID faster than the other reporters from media, CSOs and military counterparts. Compared to other reporters, validation of the CCARE's information about the Buldon incident by the 6th ID was less demanding since they are familiar with CCARE as a reliable election monitor.

In response to the report of CCARE, the CMO head immediately dispatched 37th IB and Task Group HOPE to the area. Approximately 100 soldiers were dispatched at the area. The deployed soldiers directly intervened to stop further PCOS snatching between the warring supporters while CCARE negotiated to the key leaders of the opposing camp to end the conflict. Because of the quick response of the GWG, the conflict incident ended quickly, security situation was normalized and the voters went back to precinct to cast their ballots.

Quick Response to Bomb Scares at Datu Piang

Similar quick response mechanism happened during election day at Datu Piang where mortar bombing of the peripheral areas of the voting precinct occurred as scare tactics to voters. The bombing incident was first reported to 6th ID by CCARE, faster than the military line and media reporters. After Lt. Col. Hao and Maj. Guinolbay received the information from CCARE and validated the information, they feedbacked the information to Task Group Hope, the Command and the 29th IB for immediate dispatchment. As a response to the report of CCARE, the 6th ID deployed a military tank and about 150-200 hundred soldiers at the area.

Quick Response to Looting of Private Armed Groups at North Uppi

The GWG had also quickly responded to the straffing incident at North Uppi. Private armed groups were seen looting at the proximities of the voting precinct. After witnessing the presence of these armed groups, election monitors of CCARE stationed in the same area directly reported the incident to

the CMO officers through their established hotlines. In response to report, 6th ID deployed 50 soldiers in the area. With the deployment of additional forces in the area, the private armies retreated while some firing some shots. After the retreat of the private armies, the security situation was normalized and the voters returned to the precinct to vote.

Post-election initiatives

Fifth Wednesday Meeting for Post-election Assessment

Post-election assessment was conducted during the fifth Wednesday meeting of the group, held at El Comedor Restaurant on May 19, 2010. CCARE Project Director Norodin Manalao, delivering their press statement about their post-election assessment during the meeting, stated that there are changes during the elections such as substantial decrease in the election-related violence; however, despite the automation, usual problems remain in the conduct of election in ARMM such as patronage, warlordism and fraud. Specific electoral problems pointed out by CCARE are:

- Vote Buying
- Threats leading to isolated failure of elections particularly the intimidation of BEI members by local political candidates
- Slow transmission of election results due to power outages
- Non-use of PCOS machines after problems were discovered during the testing and sealing
- Poor secrecy of the ballot due to widespread joint voting and absence of ballot secrecy folders
- Ballot fraud as observers noted BEI members and voters filling out several ballots
- Persistence of election-related violence

The GWG focused their discussion on clustering policy, BEI security and fraud incidents inside the voting precinct which they identified as major security problem during the Election Day. The group members agreed with each other that the clustering policy caused voters' disenfranchisement as it led to the undesirable crowding of the precinct. To address these problems of clustering, the participants proposed several measures:

- Restriction of 500 voters for PCOS machine under the clustering plan
- Lobbying to both COMELEC and Congress for the improvement of voter-PCOS machine ratio by allocating more funds for the addition PCOS machines
- Given that the voters-PCOS machine ratio (1000 voters to 1 PCOS machine) will be enforced, next clustering plan should identify well the precincts who can accommodate such number.
- Clustering should be conducted one month to two months before the election to inform the people
- Accounting of Rido as a criteria in the clustering plan.

Regarding the issue of BEI, the group agreed with each that they were limited in responding to the security issues of the BEI because the focus and object of their security plan were the voters instead of the BEI. The group recognized the need to better address the security issue of BEI in the next election by making the BEI more confident to the PNP and AFP. An identified stumbling block to this goal, raised by CBCS Secretary General Sammy, is the non-identification of the BEI during pre-election time due to the late revelation of their names by COMELEC. Such timing of the policy disables CSOs and other actors in engaging BEI before elections. Mr. Manalao argued that COMELEC should strongly disqualify partisan BEIs. On the other hand, Maj Tocalo proposed for a reshuffling of teachers throughout the ARMM region during election time.

Pre-shaded ballots was clear case of electoral fraud raised during the open discussion. As Lt. Col. Hao, said, "we have not expected the pre-shaded ballots, manipulated by BEIs and insiders at the precincts. But can we expect strong witnesses?"

As a response to observed cases of fraud, CBCS Secretary General Maulana proposed the filing cases to the perpetrators of such illegal practices. In response to this suggestion, Atty. Alvarado argued that the COMELEC should initiate the investigation since they are the only body mandated to file a case. But for future initiatives, she argued that they should clarify the role of PNP in the the investigation of these irregularities. She further argued that, “as of now, the BEI of COMELEC is the only one mandated to file the case. How can security officers address problems inside the 30-50 radius of the precinct? We are only mandated to work outside the radius.”

Photocontest

The photocontest was the major project of the group after election which is considered as the culmination of their collaborative activities during Election Day. The photocontest aimed to showcase the peace-building and security efforts of the collective during the Election Day. Out of the 600 entries, the group selected the top 10 photos. The first prize is 10,000, 5,000 for second prize and 2 thousand pesos for other winners. GWG judged the event. The awarding and the arrangement of the photo exhibit at the Plaze of the Cotabato City was held on May 25 to 26. Mayor Sema and other COMELEC officers were invited at the event.



To culminate the efforts of the security sector and civil society in securing a peaceful elections for Maguindanao, GWG conducted a photo contest in cooperation with PNP as the new member organization in the collective.

Strengths and Achievements

Overcoming stereotypes, distrust and initial perceptions between civil society and military is a remarkable achievement by the GWG collective. During the formative weeks of the GWG, the collective exhibited low trust in each other due to their initial biases. Negative perception tends to be a critical barrier against trust building and constructive engagement between civil society and the military institutions. As Dagma of CBCS elaborated, *“If we talk a major problem here in this area of impunity and injustice, the current army is undergoing, as you can see in other countries as well when you talk about the reform of the security sector, perception change. This is the major issue why political violence is not as efficiently addressed by different stakeholders of the society because of the mis-perception of the army as not being the protector but being the perpetrator”*.

On the one hand, the CSO counterparts initially perceived the military as the perpetrator of violence; on the other hand, the military tend to perceive CSO as allies of insurgents. Hence two perceptions were acting as double barriers to realize the potentials of cooperation in the early stage of the group. As Major Guinolbay commented, *“it is the first time that there is high level of collaboration with the CSOs. Kung may perception sila sa military, may perception din kami sa kanila. Kapag mayroon na grouping diyan we tend to identify them as left-leaning, ang mga tipo ng branding. The military is afraid of CSO being allied to insurgent groups such as NPA, MILF, may phobia”*.

While recognizing the limited perception of the military on the CSO, Major Guinolbay also observed the limited initial perception of the CSOs about them, *“They [CSOs] never get out of the shell and they are so afraid to get out and see. Mahirap kasi iyong parang may multong na kinakatakutan mo, nang sinabi may multo diyan sa pinto kapag binuksan mo, so they close the door para hindi na nila makita iyong multo, parang may phobia.”* Major Guinolbay, recognizing the difficult task upon them remarked, *“the challenge upon us is to prove to them [CSOs] na nagbago na ang sundalo, kami at ang institusyon. Iyong perception change ang mahirap.”*

But through regular dialogues, both formally and informally, and small but output-based engagements during the election period, both civil society and military members of the collective understood where each is coming from. Collaborative activities provided the avenue for each member to observe each other’s sincerity and commitment to peace-building. The determinative PH test for the collective was during Election Day where the both members can directly observe the impartiality of the collective to political players and the responsiveness of their joint actions to electoral anomalies and violence. The success of their engagements in directly deterring conflict from escalating to an ERV during Election Day has even fuelled the collective esteem of the GWG. By the time Election Day is over, members of the GWG have already reached a comfortable level of trust and camaraderie.

The complementary arrangement of collaboration between CSO and military members of the GWG led to their successful and high-impact prevention initiatives during pre-election. The unique combination of the CSO as bridge to the communities and the military as security and political leverage had a positive effect on the reception of the communities. Such outcome may not be possible under a different set-up. As Mr. Manalao, Project Director of CCARE argued: *“Dati, iba ang tingin ng tao kapag pumasok sa community ang military para makipag-meeting, natatakot at nangangamba. Pero dati rin kung CSO ang pupunta sa community nang mag-isa na wala ang military, wala rin makikinig sa kanila. Kung purely civil society ang pumupunta diyan, so-what-kung-andito-kayo ang reception ng tao, mukhang deadma ang community. Kapag andiyan ang dalawa, mukhang nakikinig ang community.”* To assess the success of the pre-election efforts, one asks, were these peace-building activities able to deter ERV from happening to some extent in the area during election and post-election time? Identified key indicators show that pre-election initiatives of GWG were indeed successful. Firstly, no failure of elections in these areas where peace dialogues and voter’s education are conducted such as municipalities of Northern Kabuntalan, Mother Kabuntalan, Ampatuan and Shariff Aguak. Second, ERV incidences happening in some areas were not attributed to CVOs as the primary actors but to private supporters of politicians.

The quick response mechanisms of GWG on ERV cases during election day shows how civil society-military collaboration works in directly preventing actual ERVI from erupting into a full crisis. Without the presence of the GWG in the said areas and without their system for quick response, the security scenario in these areas could have been compromised. The GWG was in a unique position to provide the maximum and most efficient response to the particular incidences monitored. Likewise, in cases like these where there is strong political rivalry among politicians translating to conflicts amongst the political supporters at the ground level, the 6th ID have proven themselves as non-partisan and committed to their mandate as attested by their CSO partners.

Such commendable ERV response of the GWG for the Election Day is again attributed to the unique collaborative set-up of the group wherein the military relies on the information feeds of the

election monitors of CCARE while CCARE relies on the military for their swift security actions. As seen in the PCOS snatching incident at Buldon, the combination of CCARE as the election monitor and crisis negotiator and the 6th ID as the security force worked well.

The factor that makes the response of the military quick and expedient was not only due to the quick reporting of CCARE but also because the military trusted CCARE volunteers as reliable election monitors compared to other reporters from media and CSOs. The trust that the 6th ID held upon CCARE made the validation of information feedbacks from CCARE faster and thereby making its corresponding military actions more accurate. Another factor is the deployment plan of the 6th ID based on the inputs from their CSO partners. The inputs provided by the CSO partners for the crafting of the deployment plan by the 6th ID led to better anticipation of risk areas and more strategic deployment of troops.

The behavior of the 6th ID was heavily influenced by the earlier challenge posed to them by their CSO partners in terms of proving to their CSO partner that military institution is the genuine protector of the people. As Major Guinolbay shared, the emerging expectations of their CSO partners affected the psyche of their military ranks, *“our fear is if we don’t deliver, all previous talks[in the GWG] will collapse, wala nang saysay ang pinag-uusapan, sasabog iyan. For the first time nga inengage ng civil society ka tapos hindi ka magdeliver, para kami iyong nakasalang noon.”* He further added that CSOs were watching over them and monitoring whether they will deliver on their commitments.

Challenges Ahead

A widely held observation among the GWG members is that the sustainability of the collective heavily relies on the leadership personalities of the CMO and the CSO members of the collective. A clear threat perceived by the group is the upcoming change in the leadership and ranks of the 6th ID. More critically, the reassignment of CMO officer, particularly the reassignment of Lt. Col. Hao to a different site, can definitely ripple down to the weakening and, worse, collapse of the GWG. Changes in the leadership of CSO members may also weaken the collective because it is the current leadership personalities of participating CSO, such as CBCS, CCARE and MTB, which have been acting as the primary link between GWG and its member CSOs. The group is currently making some steps to address this challenge. For instance, the current CMO officers plan to establish a transition program where they can familiarize new contingent of 6th ID to GWG commitment and members. To institutionalize GWG as an initiative of CMO, Major Guinolbay proposed to direct GWG as one of the listed projects in the formal job description of CMO that can be passed onto the next CMO unit.

The collective is also aware that the political violence they addressed during the election period has its structural factors embedded in their locality such as private armies, political clans and loose firearms, and hence it can recur in the future. The collective is aware that there is much to be done after election to make their peace agenda and efforts deeper and sustainable.

However despite this awareness, the group is also undergoing a sort of identity crisis on the framing of their long-term thrusts and post-election activities. To address this framing problem, the group is currently conceptualizing the common grounds and principles as basis for the future actions of the collective; the PNP representatives for instance volunteered to craft the vision-mission and general principles of the group. Since the group is also aware that the security problems they are addressing are only symptomatic of the larger, systemic problem of poverty and political leadership, they further recognize the challenge for the GWG to develop its peace framework that provides systemic and holistic approaches to political reform and development.

Another challenge on the sustainability of the collective is its organizational development. Although the loose, network-like structure of the collective worked in its favor to expand its membership and facilitate trust-building, the collective also realized that there is a need to formalize the

organizational identity of the group to enhance their engagements with other key players and to familiarize their respective organization members to the GWG. As CBCS Secretary General Maulana notes, the challenge of organizational development of GWG is how to balance its formal structuring with sustaining its favorable culture of informality, humour and frankness. The current GWG representatives realized that the existence of the collective should transcend their own personalities; hence, they have to develop the organization in such a way that their respective organizations will continuously engage the collective despite the changes in leadership. Another aspect of the organizational development of the collective is the expansion of its membership to other agencies and organization. From the government side, PNP, PDEA (Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency), and Task Force Tugis have newly engaged the organization. On the side of the civil society, earlier participants of the first meeting have reactivated their participation in the activities of the collective, The sense of ownership among member still needs some improvement; 6th ID's CMO remains to shoulder the major operational expenses of the collective. A PH test of the improvement of ownership in the collective is when other members start shouldering significant operational expenses of the group.

In every engagement between civil society and military, there is always that potential for cooptation. Amidst the celebrated fruits of civil-military engagements of the GWG and the established camaraderie within the collective, the unending challenge for the GWG is for each member organization to observe respect and sensitivity that each of the member organization observe regarding each other's identity, mandates and limitations.

Lessons Learned

The collective is aware that election-related violence has its structural roots; hence there is much to be done after the elections to deepen and sustain their peace agenda and efforts. For the Good Wednesday Group thus, this is only just the beginning – a beginning where foundations are built, friendships are cultivated and successes and failures are shared—a beginning whose fruits, if constantly nurtured, shall help bring peace in Maguindanao, and slowly but surely, help usher Maguindanao out of its dark past. The experiences of Maguindanao's Good Wednesday Group for Peace provides valuable insights on the importance of security sector-civil society engagement for ERV prevention such as:

- Multi-sectoral engagements provide unique arrangements for more innovative and efficient solutions if they are coordinated properly.
- Trust building and perception management among multi-sectoral partnerships are pivotal in ensuring the success and efficiency of ERV prevention initiatives and responses.
- Resource mobilization and organizational development are issues that such initiatives need to address for greater impact and sustainability.
- Sensitivity to contextual factors and the actors involved should be practiced at all instances to ensure that necessary nuances are put in place.
- The military's initiative to employ peaceful and non-threatening means to mitigate election violence should be explored as these has proven to be effective in complementing their security operations.

ⁱ It is a CMO plan which has the following thrusts: to reestablish the general public's trust and confidence on the governments' ability to: (1) address the situation in Maguindanao, and (2) assist in the conduct of an honest, orderly and peaceful election in May 2010 and in order to build a physically and psychologically secured environment conducive to peace and development.

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