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Documentation and Assessment of ERV Response in the 2010 Elections

Masbate Advocates for Peace (MAP)

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Background

Masbate is rife with a culture of silence and impunity—this despite, and maybe due to, a long-standing history of political violence in the area. Corruption and control of the politicians disempowered the people, leaving them powerless and meek. In fact, records of the PNP show that during the 2007 elections, a mere .03% of three hundred forty-eight (348) political killings underwent judicial proceedings. Two months before the 2010 national elections, more than twenty (20) political killings have already been recorded.

Besides the fact that people are not taking action towards holding their politicians accountable for political violence, history shows that those who made attempts to address the situation were penalized. In 2007, for example, the Regional CIDG raided the house of the Ramos Family, in the town of Mobo, on allegations of loose firearms possession. The operation was successful and yet right after the raid, all the members of the CIDG team were relieved and transferred to other places. Apparently, the Ramos family was closely allied with the Espinosas, a long-holding political dynasty in Masbate, and it was Congressman Villafuerte himself who called the Regional Police to ‘reprimand’ them for conducting the raid. This was all revealed to Bishop Joel Baylon by then PNP Director Joel Calderon when he called up a contact from Malacañang to inquire about the incident. Because he was concerned about a former seminarian, Police Officer Briones, who was part of the CIDG team that was relieved from service, he wanted to know the real story. While there was an initial attempt to conceal the truth by talking about ‘standard operating procedures’, Calderon finally admitted that it was Congressman Villafuerte’s phone call which sealed the deal. Father Leo Casas said that this was a clear manifestation of the extent—often extended too much—power politicians have over other branches of the government. He perceived the relief as an effort by then President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo to protect the welfare of his political alliances.

Bishop Joel Baylon and Father Leo Casas continued with their efforts to address the problem of political violence in the province by talking with the newly-installed PNP Director Jesus Versoza. It was in 2009 when they both requested a meeting with him to talk about the situation of elections in Masbate and to request for a Provincial Director that bears an untarnished reputation for being just and non-partisan. Gen. Versoza responded to Bishop Baylon’s request by installing P/SSupt. Eddie Benigay, although he was only installed as an Acting Provincial Director and was not readily accepted by the Governor. On a wider scope, the installation of the Police Regional Director was also hindered by Cong. Villafuerte of Camarines Sur, who was known to have strong alliances with PGMA and is involved in the jueteng industry in the Bicol Region.

Creation Stage

Bishop Joel Baylon was transferred out of Masbate in December 2009. However, Father Leo Casas did not want his initial efforts in laying down a multi-sectoral action group for a peaceful and progressive Masbate to go in vain. In fact, it was a strong inspiration for Father Leo Casas and leaders of different sectors to form the Masbate Peace Advocates (MAP).

Around the same time, majority of the incumbent officials were starting to get busy with the upcoming elections. Most of them were vying for a re-election, while others were running for other local positions. Gen. Versoza then took this opportunity to make the installation of P/SSupt. Eddie Benigay as Masbate Provincial Director and P/CSupt. Cecilio Calleja as Region V Regional Director more official.

Immediately, P/SSupt. Benigay moved to transfer all police officers that were identified with political families to other areas. Checkpoints were strategically located all over Masbate and raids against high-

powered loose firearms were done almost everyday. This was a signal for Father Leo Casas to gather all concerned sectors and organize a multi-sectoral group that would combat election-related violence (ERV). Letting go of their biases against security forces and opting to take a chance with the new set of police officers, Father Leo Casas and representatives of the different sectors sought the help of the newly-installed Special Task Force (STF) Masbate and finally formed MAP.

The idea of a multi-sectoral organization to combat ERV actually originated from then Masbate Bishop Baylon during elections of 2007. Back then, amidst the critical situation of political violence in the province, the Church worked independently in its ERV prevention activities. During the 2004 elections, in fact, Bishop Joel Baylon and Father Leo Casas lobbied with security forces to effectively enact the necessary programs in Masbate. They went to the commanders of the military and the police to have a dialogue and request for assistance to ensure that elections will be peaceful. Alas, they seemed to be barking on the wrong tree as the security forces were partisan and were, instead, even contributing to electoral violence.

They tried again in the 2007 elections to reach out to the security forces with help from other organizations. It was during this time that foundations to build a multi-sectoral organization were slowly being formed, through the Social Action Center of the Diocese and Judge Igmidio Camposano of Gawad Kalinga. Bishop Baylon regularly communicated with representatives of different sectors in the society and encouraged them to assert themselves for the attainment of peace in the province. A group was actually formed and some meetings were held post-elections, but there were no clear objectives set and there were members strongly associated with certain politicians. Eventually, the group was dissolved and membership commitment withered away. Judge Camposano said, “*Nagkatamaran na daw sila dahil tapos na ang eleksyon.*”

Nevertheless, Bishop Baylon continued in his quest to build a multi-sectoral organization in Masbate to seriously work against the on-going political violence in their province. It was a work in progress until Bishop Baylon was transferred out of Masbate in late 2009 and Father Leo Casas took over the reins. MAP was finally established early 2010 and was driven by the two main factors that pushed the different sectors to come together:

- First, the political situation of Masbate that is characterized by a prevailing culture of violence among competing political families. Historically-speaking, ERV has been prevalent since the 1960s because security forces tend to be partisan and political families were never prosecuted. Political violence peaks every election time.
- Second, the economic situation of the whole province being the second poorest in the country, contributes to the prevailing culture of violence during elections.

The group was established 3rd week of January 2010 when heads of different sectors were invited in a meeting at the Social Action Center. Participants, then, engaged in a free-willing discussion about the situation in Masbate with regards to the upcoming elections. There was no fixed agenda during this first meeting but those in attendance were challenged to take action to improve the situation. Their primary concern was to break the prevailing culture of indifference among the people of Masbate.

MAP was composed of the following key member organizations:

DIMASAFI (Diocese of Masbate Social Action Foundation Inc.)

- Under the leadership of Rev. Fr. Leo Casas; the Catholic church component of the organization
- Serves as the main convenor and secretariat of the organization

Masbate Bankers Association

- Represented by Atty. Teofilo Tambago; composed of bankers all throughout Masbate

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- Provides presence and sustenance when they are the hosts during the weekly meeting

Cattle Raisers Association

- Represented by Mr. Gerry Aguilar
- One of the group that was tapped for the efforts of the organization
- Provides presence and representation

Parish Pastoral Council for Responsible Voting (PPCRV)

- Under the leadership of Bro. Conrad Bobit Merdegia
- Under DIMASAFI; serves as the secretariat of the group
- Irregular participation on the group efforts during the election period

Media

- Represented by Mr. Norman Laurio (member of the KBP; NUGP Masbate Chapter Chairman); one-man team in the group effort
- Mr. Laurio has a program in the local radio
- Provides information dissemination about the activities of the group through his program

Rotary Club

- Represented by Dr. Jose Ataat
- Provides presence and representation

Joint Task Force Masbate

- Under the co-leadership of Col. Alvin Tiamwatt and P/SSupt. Victor Deona
- Provides presence and manpower for the implementation of projects

COMELEC

- Represented by Atty. Bert Cañares, Provincial Election Supervisor
- Does not figure prominently in the organization; provides support when invited to activities of the group

Kusog Batan-on

- A parish-based organization (St. Anthony de Padua Cathedral)
- Represents the youth of Masbate; composed of college students and young professionals
- Provides presence to the group

Masbate Business Leaders Inc.

- Represented by Mr. Willie Peliño, President of Osmeña Colleges
- Mr. Peliño is also the President of MAP (in name only; non-functioning; with hopes of strengthening leadership in the future)
- He is Manila-based as he has various business interests in Manila; he was only able to participate in one activity of MAP
- Provides presence to the group

Kiwanis

- Represented by Arch. Al Orlandes
- Provides presence to the group

Gawad Kalinga

- Represented by Judge Igmidio Camposano
- Provides presence and support during activities

Knights of Columbus

- represented by Atty. Teofilo Tambago
- provides presence to the group

Masbate Medical Society

- represented by Dr. Bartolabac
- provides presence to the group

Judge Camposano, however, did not see the members as partner organizations working with MAP. They seem to act only as representatives of different sectors in Masbate and only around half come to regular Wednesday meetings. For instance, while MAP has approximately thirty (30) members, only fifteen (15) attend the meetings religiously. They continue to apply a networking strategy though, to increase their membership base, by having current members invite their acquaintances to MAP's meetings. The Church, for instance, through the leadership of Father Leo Casas, has attained the cooperation of the Masbate Baptist Church and the Maranao Muslim Community in their activities. It has such large influence within and outside the group, and it continues to be the tie that binds the organization together. It was also the Church who first encouraged key persons like Judge Camposano (a member of Couples for Christ) and Atty. Tambago (a member of Knights of Columbus) to join MAP.

No formal vision-mission was established during the first meeting since the group had difficulties reaching a consensus on what these should be. However, they seemed to be working on a vision of '*Katunungan para sa Kauswagan*', meaning 'Peace for Progress', believing that only upon the achievement of peace can their province attain economic development. Due to much discussion and debate in the attempt to formulate a vision-mission, the group decided to suspend its definite conceptualization in anticipation that the group will evolve along the way, especially after the elections. What was important for the group, at that point, was that by organizing themselves, they become an instrument for collective action and a loud voice banging on the doors of complacent political players and/or partisan bureaucrats and government agencies. Although MAP started with an undefined organizational vision-mission, the group decided to pursue a two-pronged strategy, called *Manok Strategy* and *Baka Strategy* as coined by P/Ssupt. Victor Deona, for their ERV responses.

The *Manok Strategy* is a short-term initiative, focused on the 2010 elections. It consists of concrete activities like multi-sectoral fora, dialogues with politicians from opposing parties, peace covenants, and awareness campaigns. These were activities highly coordinated with the STF Masbate that aimed, primarily, to mitigate ERV. In fact, these activities were created to serve as a wake-up call for the people and encourage them to reflect and take action. They need to be aware of what they can contribute to MAP's efforts and to believe that these efforts are never too late to bring about peace and development in Masbate. The *Manok Strategy* also involved small dialogues with politicians to re-educate them about the need for a peaceful elections and make them conscious about their actions through a monitoring

program. It brought a pretty clear message that any untoward action will be dealt with accordingly by the STF Masbate.

The participation of the STF Masbate, via its commanders Col. Alvin Tiamwatt and P/Supt. Victor Deona, was deemed extremely crucial for the success of this endeavour. STF Masbate was created last 25 January 2010 as an AFP-PNP initiative to give special attention to election hotspot areas. They were tasked with the objectives of accounting for loose firearms and dismantling of partisan armed groups (PAGs), wherein they immediately set up police operations, checkpoints in strategic places, patrols and application of search warrants. According to members of the STF, they have no formal association with MAP organizationally, but their attendance to the first meeting of MAP led to a close coordination between the task force and the civil society organization.



Joint AFP-PNP Security Task Force Masbate Launching

Meanwhile, the *Baka Strategy* was created to serve as the group's long-term plan. It aims to engage citizens to be politically active and become agents for change to achieve MAP's working vision. MAP wanted this to be a sustainable effort leading to Masbateños accounting for and checking on their politicians' performance vis-a-vis their programs and platforms. The initial plan was to visit communities and share their advocacy in the hope that the people will express support for the project. MAP intends to look for key players in the community that will mobilize efforts with them towards a more peaceful and progressive Masbate. The organization perceived such initiative as relevant to the call of the times sensing that the situation is ripe enough for ordinary people to get involved. Additionally, MAP also plans to conduct a Summit for Good Governance in December 2010 or Summer of 2011. They plan to invite Masbateños from all over the province so they can provide their insights into how peace and development can be achieved in the province in relation to the institution of good governance.

Organizational Structure and Leadership

MAP has no formal organizational structure. It exists as a group with a collective action. Mr. Willie Peliño of Masbate Business Leaders Inc. serves as the President and Dr. Bartolabac of Masbate Medical Society serves as the Group's Spokesperson. Father Leo Casas, meanwhile, serves as the Head Convenor and the PPCRV under DIMASAFI, headed by Bro. Bobit Merdegia, acts as the Secretariat. Mr. Peliño and Dr. Bartolabac are not too active, however, so much of the leadership is placed under Father Leo Casas and Judge Igmidio Camposano. While decisions are always made collectively based on a consensus or a

majority vote, these two take the lead in formulating decisions and coming up with proposed plans of action when the need is immediate. This is still consulted with other members, however, until a final plan of action is agreed upon. In times when group consultations are not possible, Father Leo Casas makes the final decision.

Group members say they inspire and guide each other in terms of planning for their ERV initiatives. They tend to work on a quorum and pool their ideas together. However, Judge Camposano points to Father Leo Casas, Mr. Willy Peliño and P/SSupt. Deona as key personalities providing directions for MAP's initiatives and DIMASAFI, through Father Leo Casas, takes the lead in planning, agenda-building and implementation of activities. He is assisted by his staff in the Social Action Center and Mr. Willy Peliño as President of MAP when he is available. DIMASAFI, being a Church-based organization, seems to be in the best position to lead in the implementation of MAP's projects and mobilization of public support. It enjoys the trust and respect of the people.

DIMASAFI is also placed with the task of coordinating with MAP members. Media partners within the group, meanwhile, provide the role of communicating with the public. The radio, for instance, has disseminated information swiftly to let people know of projects being implemented or activities to be conducted. Their media partners include DYME, a local AM radio station and Mr. Norman Laurio who hosts a radio program dubbed as *Subyab ng Masbateño*.

The group's major operational expenses are related to the conduct of motorcade activities (i.e., materials for the motorcade, tarps, gasoline and food). They get their funds mostly from 'peace offerings' given by MAP members during their Wednesday meetings, notable of which are those from P/SSupt. Benigay. When these fall short, it is the Social Action Center who takes care of the remaining expenses. Judge Camposano admits that, in fact, "Although it has clear deliverables and short-term goals linked with long-term plans, it cannot claim to have an established funding and accountability process."

For activities that require bigger funding, Fr. Leo Casas and the Diocese solicit from stores and establishments within Masbate whose owners are closely affiliated with the church. The group only gathers funds when they need it and, thankfully, they have been generous in giving donations to MAP. By June, however, Father Leo Casas plans to conceptualize a scheme to make the organization self-sufficient. Currently, he is looking at seeking assistance from big businessmen and notes that "this would prove to be a good test for the group." With regular funding, it is MAP's hope that crafting ERV prevention activities will be easier and that their initiatives will be stronger, more wide-spread and, therefore, more effective.

ERV Responses of MAP

ERV Responses for the 2010 elections were anchored on their *Manok Strategy*. This is an approach that aims to mitigate ERV through fora, dialogues, peace covenants and awareness campaigns. It required active participation from the STF Masbate who holds the capacity to stop illegal activities or control candidates from abusing their power, position, money or fame. The Church, on the other hand, serves as an inspiration for the people to do their part in reporting ERVs or other activities threatening to endanger MAP's vision of a peaceful Masbate.

Dates	Key Activities
Pre-Election Responses	Advocacy Activities Prayer Vigils InfoText Campaign Small Dialogues Loose Firearms Retrieval Candidates' Fora

	Response to Vote-Buying Activities
Election Day Responses	Monitoring that led to Conflict Resolution Activities

Pre-Election Initiatives

Advocacy Activities

To begin with, MAP conducted motorcades and disseminated leaflets on what the organization is all about, what are its advocacies and their contact information for public assistance. Their information dissemination tactics aimed to build the people’s trust in the newly-formed civil society organization. Masbateños positively responded to the information drive resulting to a constant influx of text messages expressing support for MAP’s advocacy. Many also participated in the three prayer vigils MAP conducted apart from the National Day of Prayer. Text hotlines which they call ‘Infotext’ were established for the people to report the presence of PAGs and loose firearms in their areas. According to Judge Camposano, all initiatives done by MAP were successful in instilling greater awareness among the people, especially since this is the first time that a collective effort is being pursued against ERV.



A 60-kilometer peace caravan for “Honest, Orderly and Peaceful Elections” (HOPE) from Masbate City to the municipality of Palanas, third district of the province was conducted last 17 April 2010; more or less thirty-one (31) four-wheeled vehicles and thirty-three (33) motorcycles participated.



At about 7:00 p.m. on 7 May 2010, the Masbate Provincial Office initiated an “Interfaith Prayer Vigil” with a theme: ‘Masbateños Storming HEAVEN with Prayers for H.O.P.E. 2010 and Beyond’; this mass was officiated by Father Leo Casas with much help from the PPCRV-Masbate

Small Dialogues

In collaboration with P/SSupt. Deona, MAP went down to the municipalities to engage local opposing politicians in small dialogues. P/SSupt. Deona would say, “*Alam po namin na may mga tao kayo, kung maaari lamang po buwag na natin sila pagalawin*” and Father Leo Casas claims that these have been, in a way, successful. There were only sporadic cases of ERV in the area, which might have also been due to the installation of additional troops by STF Masbate as demanded for by MAP.

MAP also mediated dialogues between the STF Masbate and the three big political players in the province that resulted in the surrender of loose firearms by Kho, Bravo and Lanete. Although most of the firearms were already old and the surrender seemed to be a ‘*pakitang-tao*’ and ‘*pabango ng pangalan*’ tactic to gain the sympathy of voters, MAP still considers this a big feat.



Joint efforts of the PNP-AFP forces with MAP’s assistance resulted in the handing-over of twenty-four (24) assorted high and low powered firearms from the 2nd District of Masbate; photo shows former Masbate Governor Antonio Kho, husband of incumbent Governor Elisa Kho, handing firearms over to the Secretary of National Defense, Hon. Norberto Gonzales, and AFP Chief-of-Staff Gen. Delfin Natividad Bangit

Peace Caravans

Father Leo Casas says that peace caravans were conducted as part of the Walk for Hope, A Walk for My Home (Masbateños Yearning for Honest, Orderly, and Meaningful Elections) project in the three districts of Masbate. It was an activity that brought so much awareness to the people and gave them

courage to take action. A multi-sectoral forum was also held which was participated in by almost all politicians and generals



A Walk for H.O.P.E. and A Walk for MY HOME” (Masbateños Yearning for an Honest, Orderly and Meaningful Election), held on March 8, 2010 was participated by at least 4,000 attendees from different sectors, including members of MAP

Response Against Vote-Buying Activities

Furthermore, the police and some PPCRV volunteers caught actual transactions of vote buying in the towns of Aroroy and Balod. Sample ballots were being distributed to voters stapled with a one-thousand bill. In other cases, it has been the voters themselves who went to houses of candidates to sell the votes of their community. This is not too difficult to understand since Masbate has a high incidence of poverty and people will readily exchange their votes for food on their stomachs. MAP got frustrated, however, when they found out from regional state prosecutors that there is no existing law against vote buying and noted that this is a worthy area of further attention for the group. Father Leo Casas thought that they can advocate for a law that would prohibit buying of votes since he considered this as a form of electoral violence—it violates human rights by putting a price/buying the rights of the people to a good government. Judge Camposano, meanwhile, feels that their response to vote-buying was limited by MAP’s lack of formal set-up (accompanied by lack of committees and committee members) and that doubts or pessimism still exist among the group. Looking forward, Judge Camposano adds that MAP can create initiatives that will not only respond to vote-buying allegations but will actually prevent it from occurring.

Election Day Initiatives

ERV Pre-emption through Conflict Mitigation

Plans for Election Day involved coordinating with the PNP and volunteering for Election Day monitoring programs of PPCRV and LENTE. Through this, MAP was able to record and respond to the malfunctioning of three PCOS machines in a clustered precinct of Dimasalang. Such incident could have mothballed to an ERV incident since the three *barangays* included in the precinct were known supporters of the opposition party. The incumbent mayor was only leading by a hairline when the PCOS machines malfunctioned—tension escalated easily because of the delayed counting. Fortunately, MAP (Fr. Leo Casas, Judge Camposano, P/Supt. Benigay and other volunteers) arrived to ensure that the brewing tension between involved political camps will not erupt into a violent encounter. The

problem was resolved after two days and although there were heated exchanges between the two political parties, no one entered into physical conflict. The PCOS machines were eventually transported to the municipal hall.

Judge Camposano says that MAP was able to provide a quick response due to its membership in election watchdog groups. One of MAP's key strengths displayed during the elections was the open-mindedness of their members since they were able to suspend their own candidate preferences to uphold MAP's vision.

Surprisingly, but fortunately, ERVIs did not happen in Masbate on Election Day. For future elections, however, Judge Camposano hopes that they will have a larger scope of initiatives, possibly covering more areas in the province, and that they expand their membership base to implement effective monitoring and response activities. This was actually mentioned as one of MAP's internal weaknesses, the lack of formal organization within the group, which they need to address for the improvement of future activities against ERV.

Post-Election Initiatives

Father Leo Casas mentioned two ERVIs during post-election period which involved the shooting of mayoralty candidates. One case is in Dimasalang municipality, where the house of the losing mayoralty candidate was straffed with bullets resulting to the wounding of their security guard. Another case was in Batuhan municipality where the body guard of the winning candidate opened fire on the opposing camp and wounded five persons. As of the moment, no post-election period plans or actual efforts have been implemented although P/Ssupt. Deona suggested a post-election dialogue to continue pre-election dialogues aiming for peace and non-violence in the province. STF Masbate is now closely watching the Khos, a known political clan in Masbate who lost the gubernatorial position last elections, who bears a high tendency for retaliation.

Given that no concrete plans have been made for post-elections, Father Leo admits that MAP became complacent especially when there were no ERVI cases reported during Election Day. This was actually considered an internal weakness, rooted in the fact that MAP has not been formally organized. Although the group's strength is essentially the representation of different sectors of the society and the members' general awareness of the political situation in Masbate, cooperation and commitment of members to the endeavour is most important to sustain the effort.

For instance, he says MAP was not really able to respond to the case of Mayor Lanete, newly-elected mayor of Placer, when he had the electricity and water supply of the municipal police cut. When questioned about such decision, Lanete defended his directives by arguing that the police was partisan during the elections and it was the LGU who constructed the police station anyway. Nevertheless, Father Leo Casas was able to talk to Congressman Lanete, father of the Municipal Mayor, to have the electricity and water supply reconnected. As for the mayor's penalties for conducting such actions, no efforts were made.

MAP is planning to conduct their first meeting after the elections come June 30 or the first week of July to plan for the second phase of their initiatives and to assess their efforts during the recently concluded elections. Now that the *Manok Strategy* is done, the meeting will be an opportunity for the group to come up with specific activities on how to operationalize the *Baka Strategy* this time. So far, they have identified the conduct of a 'Summit for Good Governance' in December 2010 or Summer of 2011 as a future activity that will gather different sectors in Masbate, including Masbateños not residing anymore in the province, for a discussion of the province's direction towards peace, security and development. It also plans to invite newly-elected politicians to remind them of what 'good governance' entails and the responsibility they have over their constituents. Aside from this, MAP also mentioned the need for continuous voters' education for citizens to be empowered with the proper information about

Philippine politics and the electoral system. According to Father Leo Casas, all these will be discussed during the forthcoming meeting.

Strengths and Achievements

The creation of MAP can be considered a breakthrough in local politics, especially for Masbate, since this was the first time that different civil society groups in the province merged towards one concrete goal: addressing ERV. This was also the first time that there emerged a high-level of collaboration between security forces and a civil society organization such as MAP. This in itself is already considered a big achievement especially since Masbate is a province embedded in a culture of silence and impunity. The existence of MAP, then, becomes a flicker of hope for Masbateños who may have given up on the dream of achieving a peaceful Masbate. The fact that the group is being led by a moral figure, Father Leo Casas, whom the public trusts, is also inspiring for citizens who may want to see change but are afraid to move. It might be even more inspiring for citizens to see that there are security forces working closely with the Church who are non-partisan and impartial. Additionally, it might also be a bit daunting on the part of local politicians to see that there are security forces they could not influence and who are, in fact, serious about doing their job in protecting the people.

It is considered a big achievement for MAP to have created a two-pronged strategy for attaining their vision for Masbate. Through the identification of the *Manok Strategy* and the *Baka Strategy*, it became clear to all members that their initiatives will not stop at the 2010 elections and that the real work only starts from there. It is a progressive attitude on the part of MAP that bears significant potential in ensuring the sustainability of their efforts based, not on a micro perspective, but on a large-scale viewpoint of development through peace.

Indeed, STF Masbate's role in the success of MAP's initiatives in the 2010 elections cannot be overlooked. Father Leo Casas and Judge Camposano recognize that their initiatives against private armed groups and loose firearms could not have been taken seriously by concerned politicians if not for the neutrality of the AFP and the PNP. This was, in fact, highlighted as an external opportunity for the group, hoping that the good coordination will carry on and that their support for Masbate's cause will not weaken. The non-partisan stance of STF Masbate was consistent from pre-elections until its post-election initiatives as seen from the installation of increased checkpoints, application of search warrants and effective conflict resolution mechanisms. When merged with MAP's internal strengths, especially the unity and cooperation among members, initiatives against ERV and for long-term peace and development in the province is surely within reach.

MAP's efforts for this 2010 elections have shown direct engagement with both citizenry and political actors and proved to be essential in getting their cooperation for the project to work. The fact that they were able to tap the private sector for both financial and logistical support, coordinate with election watchdogs PPCRV and LENTE for Election Day monitoring and with the media for its information dissemination tactics and advocacy activities shows the need to adopt a holistic approach. Meanwhile, the conduct of candidates' fora and peace caravans encouraging the participation of local politicians is certainly commendable. Their attendance may not automatically lead to an outright dismantling of their PAGs or surrendering of all their loose/illegal firearms but is viewed as a good start towards more effective communication between the government and civil society. Hopefully, it signals a renewed willingness to listen on the part of politicians and a reawakened sense of political activism on the part of Masbateños. All these were made possible through MAP's guidance, dedication and hard work.

Challenges Ahead

The group plans to continue lobbying with the PNP for a sustained effort in maintaining peace and order in the province. They will also continue encouraging the people to actively participate in politics, speak up and report incidents without fear. Of course, this second point depends heavily on the first

point because it is believed that only through an effective and non-partisan police force can the people actually feel comfortable with voicing out their opinions and complaints. Unfortunately, the group is facing external threats related to the pull-out of STF Masbate and a possible installation of a new PNP Provincial Director by the new Governor upon assumption of duty. MAP admits that the future will be uncertain for the group since those dependable security forces, who were instrumental in the success of their past initiatives, bear critical roles in dissolving or controlling private armed groups and preventing the proliferation of and retrieving loose firearms.

Aside from that, much of MAP's efforts focused on pre-election activities and there seemed to be no province-wide plan for mitigating violence on Election Day itself. Meanwhile, post-election procedures are still vague and there have been no plans to implement the *Baka Strategy*. In fact, both Father Leo Casas and Judge Camposano agree that plans are still scattered and there might be a need to formalize the organization first so a clear *Baka Strategy* will be put in place and implemented effectively. Their only planned activity as of the moment, the Summit on Good Governance, hasn't really been discussed yet.

Certainly, MAP will need a lot of funds and cooperation from other citizens, government agencies, non-government organizations and other civil society groups, for these initiatives to work. As mentioned above, fund-raising has been on a per-project basis and were dependent largely on members' own peace offerings. Self-sufficiency is an important factor to look into because MAP may just die, due to lack of financial support, despite being such an effective project with tremendous potential in transforming the society.

Since the group was just informally established January of 2010, there are issues within the internal organization that still need to be addressed. For instance, they mentioned that not all members of MAP are active and devoted in this project. Especially now that the elections are over, their participation to the endeavour may wane even more. They feel the need to formalize the group and provide clear delineation of roles and responsibilities for each member so that they can proceed with actual planning for the implementation of their *Baka Strategy*. They mentioned extending the goals and objectives of MAP from peace to good governance, and this would entail a lot of planning, coordination and cooperation from different sectors of the society. This is where, as they mentioned, a more active participation of COMELEC is needed.

MAP is also concerned about who else can champion the group since, as of now, leadership is largely personality-based. For instance, when Father Leo Casas took a leave after the elections, efforts were stopped and meetings did not push through. Although it may also be an issue of complacency among MAP members, the group which is in its infant stage needs more leaders within that can provide them a sense of direction. It is now a big challenge on the part of MAP's leaders to keep the group going, despite and amidst threats hindering the group's sustainability and development.

Lessons Learned

For the second phase of their initiatives, MAP believes that the civil society should be the prime mover in the efforts towards addressing political violence in the area. It needs to be awakened and be heard loud and clear so that the local government will uphold the rule of law and the national government will enact the necessary laws that will disenable the politicians from power-tripping and using their PAGS, bodyguards, or whatever they call it, for their own personal and political concerns. It is important for civil society to reach out to the politicians, dialogue with them, and maintain a serious stance. Then, it becomes even more important for offices in the LGUs to strengthen their efforts in collaborating and assisting civil society organizations for a more concerted initiative towards social change.

Given that, MAP should continue on its efforts along its *Baka Strategy* since, at the end of the day, it is the citizens' clamour for good governance and political accountability that can turn things around for

Masbate. MAP has already trail-blazed the initial steps and so post-election initiatives should focus on more intense advocacy activities and voters' education, as it is never too early to prepare for the next elections. It will also show Masbateños that MAP is truly dedicated and committed to its vision for Masbate.

The convergence of different sectors in society is highly recognized as a good start and needs to be sustained by more people getting in the group, moving towards putting violence and abuse of political power to an end. Much has yet to be arranged, prepared for and executed to sustain the project, but the fact that the province experienced less violence in the past 2010 elections gives Masbate high hopes that, yes, it can be done.

Lessons Learned

Important insights from the experiences of MAP that are valuable for creating collaborative responses to ERV are the following:

- The multi-sectoral approach seemed effective, especially in terms of MAP's pre-election initiatives, where the media played a significant role in information dissemination, STF Masbate enabled successful peace caravans and dialogues with politicians and the Church's strong influence allowed the public to be involved. The business sector's participation meanwhile contributed in terms of logistic and financial support.
- The participation of security forces in activities of a civil society organization is crucial in the latter's success. Much of the initiatives depend on the security forces' cooperation, willingness and non-partisanship. STF Masbate proved to be a steady partner for MAP, given their impartiality and determination to achieve a peaceful election.
- Funding plays an important role in pushing the civil society organization's initiatives forward. There should be a steady source of income to allow the group to plan for large-scale initiatives, preferably province-wide, and implement them effectively. The group must learn to be self-sufficient in the near future instead of relying constantly on members' donations or irregular solicitations from businessmen.
- It is difficult to sustain a civil society organization and keep it together, given that members have their own personal goals and priorities. When no formal organizational structure has been established, participation and involvement among members will weaken and decline. Especially now that the 2010 elections are finished, and all efforts are now geared towards a long-term goal, some members may lose appreciation for the activities and, eventually, lose sight of the organization's working vision.