LINKING SECURITY SECTOR REFORM TO PEACEBUILDING AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE PHILIPPINES: A BEST PRACTICE CASE

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Introduction

Present conditions in the Philippines reinforce the inexorable links between peacebuilding, democratic governance and human development. For decades, the communist insurgency (the longest in Southeast Asia) and Muslim secessionism have perpetuated armed conflict in various areas of the country. Despite considerable gains, the task of instituting a permanent and lasting resolution remains a tremendous challenge. The Philippines is a country where an integrated peacebuilding and development programme – one that is synergetic, participatory and comprehensive – is imperative.

The 2005 Philippine Human Development Report found that the provinces with the lowest scores in the Human Development Index (HDI) are also conflict-ridden areas. While it concurred with the idea that poverty *per se* may not fully explain the resort to conflict, it argued that poor conditions are often the result of deprivation, injustice and the lack of opportunities. This sense of discontent and desperation pushes affected groups to resort to violence. Armed conflict in the Philippines is a costly state of affairs, affecting lives, property, cultural identity, social cohesion and human dignity (HDN 2005).

Furthermore, the relatively poor standing of the Philippines in the 2007 Global Peace Index (GPI) is telling of the need to revise the government's current peace framework.[1] Most members of the country's civil society are pessimistic about the peace processes, especially given that the government remains in favour a military solution to the conflict (Romero 2007). While the government has declared that peace is its foremost priority,[2] there is a perception among members of civil society that it is often sacrificed for other goals such as the counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism. Recent indicators include the prevalence of extra-judicial killings among members of left-leaning social movements and the recent passage of an anti-terrorism law, which may undermine human rights.[3] Indeed, if the government's inconsistent approach towards peacebuilding is to be reformulated, this could be an opportunity to include security sector reform (SSR) in its efforts.

This briefing argues that a comprehensive and synergetic peace framework must be sensitive to the role of the security sector and the impacts of how it performs its functions. To validate this claim, it discusses the case of Bohol, an island province in central Philippines that was able to successfully implement an integrated peacebuilding programme that included a well-defined role for the security sector.

This programme is different from others as it seeks the full cooperation of local provincial, city, and municipal government units, civil society and ordinary citizens. It also lays emphasis on innovative plans and programmes to eradicate the causes of the insurgency such as poverty. This briefing relies on the data gathered from fieldwork in Bohol conducted by the author and other researchers in October 2006.[4] By way of conclusion, it examines the prospects for peacebuilding and SSR in the Philippines.

The Role of the Security Sector in Peacebuilding

Formerly comprising only the armed forces, the security sector has expanded to include all the institutions (whether statutory or not) that have an impact on the provision of security in a given country, such as the police, intelligence services, judicial and penal institutions, and civilian oversight (Hänggi 2003, 2004). SSR seeks a comprehensive and simultaneous transformation of key institutions and groups for them to guarantee the physical security of the people under a democratic and rights-based framework.

SSR makes a major contribution to peacebuilding in conflict-torn societies. The lack of recognition or low regard for the impact of SSR on peace processes has been a major cause of the resilience of armed internal conflict. Many have blamed the security sector for being a source of the conflict and a key obstacle to peacebuilding (Ball 2005). An unprofessional security sector not subject to democratic oversight increases the propensity for violations of human rights and international humanitarian law and is ineffective in fulfilling its responsibilities. Moreover, the implementation of any final settlement between the parties to a conflict requires the involvement and cooperation of the security sector (Greene 2003).

Integrated Peacebuilding: The Case of Bohol

The situation in the province of Bohol [5] offers researchers a clear understanding of the links between peacebuilding and SSR. The provincial government adopted a multi-pronged and well-coordinated peace-building programme that combined military, developmental and governance components. Cognisant of its success, the Philippines government has commended the province's efforts to provide an alternative approach to curbing insurgency. It has also received the attention and support of international actors. In the end, much of the success was attributed to the unparalleled degree of coordination and collaboration between the security sector, local government, civil society organisations and the citizenry.

The past socio-economic profile of Bohol confirmed the relationship between the lack of human development and the prevalence of internal conflict. The combination of scarce employment opportunities, deficient sources of livelihood and poor infrastructure contributed to widespread poverty. Moreover, rampant acts of human rights violations and other atrocities perpetrated by the military for decades were factors that made Bohol a hotbed for communist insurgency. Military intelligence estimated that in 1999, a third of all communities in the province were infiltrated, influenced or threatened by the New People's Army (NPA), the military arm of the Communist Party of the Philippines. Besides the human toll of the violence and the damage to property,[6] the NPA imposed an extortionate 'revolutionary tax' on the people of Bohol, irrespective of their economic class. Until 2004, Bohol was among the 20 poorest of the country's 81 provinces (HDN 2005).

A comparison of the Human Development Index data between 1997 and 2003 shows an improvement in human development and poverty alleviation since the province started implementing its peacebuilding programme. For example, its HDI ranking across all the provinces in the Philippines increased from 55th in 1997 to 41st in 2003. Poverty incidence decreased by 20% during the same period, and per capita income increased by 15%. Moreover, the province became a desired destination for tourists as the security situation improved.

Developing the Peacebuilding Framework

The first steps to establish a peacebuilding framework were taken in 1999 with the

launch of the Bohol Peace Forum as a multisectoral network chaired by the diocesan bishop. It targeted 10 conflict-affected communities for development assistance in 2001. In July 2003, the provincial government and local leaders reactivated the peace forum to revitalise the discussion of the peace agenda with local communities and NGOs and to explore avenues for peace talks with the local units of the NPA (HDN 2005). Known as the 'peace summits', these were led by the Bohol Provincial Peace and Order Council (PPOC).[7] Unlike in other conflict-torn areas in the country, the peace and development framework was conceptualised in a way that was participatory and consultative. The provincial government provided the initiative and took care to avoid a top-down approach.

According to Romeo Teruel, Chief of Staff of the Office of the Provincial Government of Bohol, what makes the island's experience unique among local government peacebuilding initiatives in the Philippines was the political will of the provincial government to utilise the PPOC as the mechanism to mobilise provincial resources and manpower with the cooperation of civil society organisations. This framework is the ultimate guide in directing government agencies, civil society organisations, and core security forces in establishing the peace. Every military camp commander and the military units assigned to Bohol were oriented to the framework.[8]

The provincial government created a 'Poverty Reduction Management Office' to manage and hasten delivery of programmes and projects targeted in priority *barangays*, the smallest administrative divisions at the level of the village, district or ward. Community organisation was implemented strategically in areas most affected by the communist insurgency. The components of the initiative included health, education, social welfare, environmental management, sustainable livelihoods, population management, rural development, governance, and peace and security. A snapshot of the poverty reduction projects also shows components such as agricultural projects that include livestock dispersal, farm-to-market roads and a job placement agency focused on tourism promotion.

The aim is to remove Bohol from the list of the 20 poorest provinces by 2010 and, in line with the Millennium Development Goals, to reduce poverty incidence by half (to an estimated 28%) by 2015 by spurring development efforts in the poorest areas. Major national and donor agencies have coordinated assistance in these selected areas, and local programmes have been undertaken to promote employment, establish scholarships and improve of school and day-care facilities. With the improved peace and development, the number of armed combatants from the NPA declined from 283 in 2001 to 64 in 2004, according to estimates by the provincial government.

The two resources considered significant in the implementation of the peacebuilding programme were adequate finances and relevant information. The funding of the poverty reduction projects initially came from the provincial government's development fund which totalled more than $10 million from 2002 to 2005. This was augmented by international assistance from the Asian Development Bank, Australian Agency for International Development, United Nations Development Programme and the World Bank and amounted to $11 million in 2005.

The local government developed a 'Local Government Poverty Database and Monitoring System' of all municipalities, towns and *barangays* to assess socio-economic conditions and incidents of crime and armed insurgencies. This became the basis for prioritising the areas for poverty reduction interventions as well as to track and monitor improvements. The database also contained statistics on crime and the number of insurgents and armed incidents.

Civil-security sector collaboration

The peacebuilding and development programme was developed in tandem with the counterinsurgency operations led by the military in close coordination with the police. The combat operations employed in Bohol were in compliance with the counter-insurgency approach of the government. The crucial modification from previous counter-insurgency approaches was the emphasis on the secondary role of the armed forces in the post-conflict phase. Unlike before, when the military performed functions that were the responsibility of civilian agencies, the approach aims to build the capacity of local government to provide basic services and implement longer-term development projects. Rather than play the lead role in post-conflict peacebuilding, the security sector now provides temporary support for the immediate needs of the peacebuilding programme.

Despite the lack of awareness of SSR by the relevant stakeholders in Bohol, the data revealed that the principles or the 'seeds' of SSR are manifest in the province's approach in addressing armed conflict. The military contingent assigned to the province was able to accomplish its intended goals on schedule. As a hierarchical institution, the military's effectiveness is greatly influenced by the character and quality of its leadership. Moreover, the collaboration between the military and the police is one of the major principles of SSR. Both security forces must recognise their distinctive responsibilities and regularly coordinate their activities. Also noteworthy is the way the military is oriented to the cultural sensitivities of the people of Bohol province. Lastly, the military-civilian divide is well respected. The military respects the approach adopted and mechanisms employed by the civilian political leadership and supports all of its initiatives. On the other hand, the civilian government yields to the military in all matters pertaining to the operational aspects of combat operations to defeat armed insurgents.

The other post-conflict programmes implemented jointly by the provincial government, the security forces and NGOs were aimed at preventing eruptions and escalation of conflict. Also included were mechanisms intended to give assistance to victims of attacks and hostilities from the insurgents. For example, the PPOC initiated the establishment of 'quick response teams' to attend to the immediate needs of victims of armed conflict. By giving them the necessary assistance at the soonest possible time, this programme helps to regain the confidence of the people in the government as the custodian of its well being.

Another initiative is the dispatch of fact-finding teams to uncover information related to armed encounters between insurgents and the security forces. This multisectoral group, composed of people respected by the local community such as religious leaders and teachers, gathers facts such as the number of casualties, injuries, the instigators of the skirmishes, and whether the citizens or the politicians extended local support. It serves as a third-party account distinct from the narrative of the military or police and the communist insurgents. Related to this is the creation of an independent local monitoring mechanism to enhance respect for human rights and international humanitarian law among both combatants and non-combatants.

Conclusion

Bohol's success story is considered an exception rather than the norm in peacebuilding throughout the Philippines. Three factors can be seen to account for its positive outcome:

First is the leading and catalysing role provided by the civilian sector – both the provincial government and some civil society organisations in the peacebuilding programme. The provincial government gave focus and direction to the implementation of the peace and develop-

ment framework. This allowed the core security forces to concentrate on fulfilling their primary duty of conducting internal security operations. In other provinces, the security sector was burdened with functions that are the preserve of the civilian sector.

Second, the Bohol experience has proved that addressing conflict in a locality will be difficult if programmes are not oriented towards human security. By making the improvement of the living conditions of the local citizens the priority of all peace and development work, it has made armed conflict increasingly costly and violence unworkable as a means of pursuing interests.

Third, a security sector governed by efficiency, effectiveness, democratic principles and respect for human rights makes a vital contribution to any peace-building programme. The core security forces that were assigned in Bohol realised that coordination with the provincial government was pivotal to the success of its counter-insurgency operations. This cooperation was unconventional since relations between the military and local government in some areas of the country were characterised by tension, if not outright hostility.

The greatest challenge facing Bohol's peacebuilding initiative is how to sustain its momentum –how to maintain the framework, the mechanisms and their implementation in the face of leadership changes. The key here is to institutionalise these initiatives, thereby making it politically costly for any reversal of orientation or retreat from existing practices. While some provincial governments have tried to adopt the approach used in Bohol, the scaling-up must be done with caution. Reckless and insensitive duplication of such programmes might prove counter-productive.

The experience of Bohol could inspire not only other local governments, but also the political actors at the macro level. There are a lot of lessons that the national peace stakeholders – government, peace movements, and civil society organisations – could learn from the case of this province. Most noteworthy is how to integrate the reform of the security sector in the peacebuilding framework of the country.

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Endnotes

[1] In a study conducted by the Economist Intelligence Unit and others in 2007, the Philippines ranked 100th out of 121 countries. Details available at www.visionofhumanity.com /introduction/index.php

[2] President Arroyo has promised that a just and lasting resolution to the country's peace processes is to be one of the legacies of her administration.

[3] Reported in the findings of an independent fact-finding commission to investigate the killings of activists and media personnel (Melo Commission 2007) and the Report of the United Nations Special Rapporteur, Philip Alston, on extra-judicial, summary or arbitrary executions.

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[5] Located in the Central Visayas region, Bohol is the Philippines' tenth largest island with a population of about 1.2 million. Besides ecotourism, its main sources of income are agriculture and fisheries, which employ about 30% of the island's labour force.

[6] In 1999, the NPA was involved in16 major skirmishes with the military and attacks on property.

[7] The Local Government Code mandates the creation of a peace and order council (POC) in all local government units (provincial, city and municipal). Led by the local government chief executive, members of a POC are drawn from representatives of national government agencies and offices, the military, police, human rights commission, and representatives of the private sector such as business, church, civic associations groups, media, and other nongovernmental organisations.

[8] Interview with Romeo Teruel, Chief of Staff, Office of the Governor, Province of Bohol, 4 October 2006.

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