

## Factors that Hinder the Return of the IDPs to their Homes at Marawi's Most Affected Areas

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### ABSTRACT

*This study is designed to investigate the factors hindering the return of the internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Marawi City resulting from the May 2017 Marawi Siege to the most affected area (MAA), revealing the urgent need for holistic solutions that address property ownership, socio-economic challenges, security concerns, administrative hurdles, and psychological trauma. The primary data required in the study were scientifically obtained through the use of the FGD and key informant interview (KII) methods. More specifically, the study findings disclosed that despite the fact that over 86% of Marawi's displaced longing to return home, a multitude of obstacles stand in their way such as inadequate housing, insecure land ownership, limited livelihoods, lingering trauma, and bureaucratic hurdles create a tangled web of challenges. Moreover, the aforementioned findings were further exacerbated by the exclusion of undocumented residents from reconstruction efforts, widening inequalities and stalling progress. To facilitate a smooth return, comprehensive solutions addressing financial constraints, trauma, community rebuilding, and streamlined administrative processes are critical. Only then can Marawi's displaced rebuild their lives and restore their shattered sense of home. Hence, a comprehensive housing plan offering reconstruction support, flexible payment options, and diverse shelter models for non-owners is crucial; exigent empowerment through financial assistance, skills training, and infrastructure development; addressing psychological well-being through culturally sensitive mental health programs; building trust and accountability requires transparency in resource allocation and addressing concerns about bogus beneficiaries and unauthorized demolitions; and collaboration between government agencies, NGOs, and communities empowers IDPs and ensures their voices are heard.*

### KEYWORDS

*IDPs; Most Affected Areas; MRRP Barangays; property-ownership factors; socio-economic factors; security factors; administrative factors; psychological factors.*

### INTRODUCTION

In the aftermath of the armed conflict that engulfed Marawi City in 2017, thousands of families were forced to flee their homes, becoming Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) within their own country. This protracted displacement, now entered in its seventh year, is a complex phenomenon rooted in a myriad of interconnected factors that extend beyond the physical destruction of homes and infrastructure. This study probed into the intricate web of challenges that have hindered the return of IDPs to their homes in Marawi's Most

Affected Areas (MAAs), examining the interplay of political, social, economic, and psychological dimensions that have perpetuated this displacement crisis. In this connection, this thesis was drawn from the concept of 'durable solutions' for IDPs, as advocated by the United Nations Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. Durable solutions emphasize the need to address the root causes of displacement, enabling IDPs to return to their homes in safety and dignity, or to integrate sustainably into new communities if return is not possible or viable. By applying this framework to the specific context of Marawi, this thesis aims to identify the obstacles that have impeded the realization of durable solutions for IDPs in the MAAs.

For over seven years, thousands of families from Marawi's Most Affected Areas (MAA) have been displaced within their own country, a consequence of the armed conflict that erupted on May 23, 2017. This displacement reached its peak on June 14, 2017, with 324,406 individuals or 66,738 families uprooted from their homes (SBN 943, 2020). However, despite the liberation of Marawi City from the clutches of terrorist groups on October 17, 2017, as declared by President Rodrigo Roa Duterte (TFBM, 2019), the issue of displacement persists to this day. The Kathagombalay one-stop-shop program, designed to facilitate the return of families to their repaired or reconstructed homes, has yet to fully address the protracted displacement.

The Task Force Bangon Marawi (2023) reported that 4,916 displaced families have found temporary shelter, while 1,110 have been granted permanent housing. However, the occupants of Transitory Shelters face the constant threat of eviction due to the expiration of land lease contracts between the government and landowners. Eviction notices continue to circulate, even in this 2024.

Moreover, majority of displaced families remain home-based, scattered across various locations. In December 2022, TFBM reported that only 100 families had managed to repair and occupy their homes within the MAAs. Out of the 1,437 building permits approved by the Office of Building Officials (OBO), only 756 houses were undergoing repair at the time. In fact, in February 2023, the number of building permit applications surged to 3,040, but only 1,096 were issued. This highlights the administrative hurdles faced by displaced families seeking to rebuild their lives. In fact, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) records 12,961 property owners in its Marawi social cartography, while TFBM's Internally Displaced Persons Profiling (Kathanor) identified 17,793 families affected by the siege. This discrepancy in numbers emphasized the challenges in accurately assessing the true extent of displacement. Within this context, the BTA-BARMM Special Committee on Marawi conducted an evaluation of the government's efforts towards Marawi rehabilitation in 2021. However, the committee's report primarily focused on guiding the Regional Government's support for Marawi's recovery rather than providing holistic solutions to the root causes of protracted displacement. Similarly, reports and studies conducted by international non-governmental organizations such as UNHCR (2022) and local researchers have focused on the social conditions of displaced persons without delving into the underlying reasons behind their prolonged displacement.

More importantly, the lingering displacement of Marawi residents demands a deeper understanding of the factors that perpetuate this situation. A holistic approach is needed to address the root causes, ensuring that displaced families can finally return home and rebuild their lives. By examining the multifaceted factors that have impeded the return of IDPs to their homes in Marawi, the study provides valuable insights for policymakers, humanitarian organizations, and local communities seeking to address the challenges of displacement and promote sustainable recovery and reconstruction in conflict-affected regions.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a multifaceted approach to data analysis, combining qualitative and quantitative techniques to extract meaningful insights from the gathered information. The qualitative approach utilized thematic analysis, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), and content analysis to explore and establish non-numerical data related to the experiences and perspectives of IDPs. These methods allowed for a deeper understanding of the factors hindering IDP return, the lived experiences of displacement, and the key themes emerging from existing documents.

In addition, descriptive statistics and percentile ranks were used to quantify the socioeconomic profile of IDP respondents and the prevalence of different factors hindering their return. This approach provided a numerical representation of the data, allowing for comparisons and identifying patterns that might not be apparent through qualitative analysis alone. By combining these two approaches, the study gained a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing IDP return, encompassing both the lived experiences of individuals and the broader context of their displacement. This multifaceted approach provided a more holistic and nuanced understanding of the complex issue of IDP return.

Research ethics and protocol were observed in all stages of the research, which include obtaining participants consent and data confidentiality.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study conclude that in terms of the sectoral and gender profile of the respondents, it was revealed in the study that a big majority of the 84 respondents were IDP leaders followed by government respondents and very few CSO respondents. Almost equal number of male and female respondents were also noted.

More specifically, as to the other profile of the IDP leader respondents, the study findings disclosed that majority of them were college graduates but unemployed with a monthly income of less than 9,000 pesos.

For the current status of the IDPs, secondary data showed that majority of the 17,793 displaced families profiled remained displaced, with only 1,210 families officially considered no longer displaced. Of these, 100 families had returned to the Most Affected Area (MAA), while 1,110 had been awarded permanent shelters. A significant number, 11,767 families, remained displaced in their original homes, while 4,916 families occupied transitory shelters with expired land lease contracts.

Various related factors were found to be influential in affecting the return of the IDPs at the MAA in Marawi City such as the nature of property ownership, socio-economic, security, administrative and psychological factors. More specifically, these include the following:

In terms of classification of property ownership, there are individuals who are structures and lots owners, lot owners only, structures owners only-the lot does not belong to them, sharers of structures-they are co-owners of structures, renters, and multi-property owners. Of this classification of IDPs, only the structures and lot owners, lot owners, and sometimes multi-property owners can return in the Most Affected Areas. The rest shall be continually displaced unless they are provided alternative solutions;

In terms of socio-economic, IDPs are financially constraint, lacking of basic utilities and facilities, lacking or having inadequate educational facilities, and without sustainable livelihood;

As for security issues, some IDPs are still scared of the Unexploded Ordnances (UXOs) in MAA, feeling not secure due to absence of neighbors, fear of possible resurgence of

ISIS, fear of military presence and the construction of another military camp, and on-going construction of infrastructures and other physical facilities which serve as another reason why IDPs are not permitted by the government to return yet;

In terms of administrative factors, the Kathagombalay procedures which require documentary evidences suffocate the IDPs. Most of them do not know where to get payment for the required architectural plans and building permits, especially where to secure their papers after its lost during the siege. In addition, they complain of their limited participation on the planning, decision making, and implementation of the Local Government Units programs and activities;

And as for the psychological factors, some IDP participants expressed that they are still traumatic of their experiences during Marawi Siege. They felt that they are not yet able to return back not unless they are emotionally recovered. Likewise, few of them have expressed fear of Ghosts.

Other issues, problems and challenges confronting both the IDPs and the government were also mentioned by the FGD participants and KII respondents such as the alleged participation as beneficiaries of bogus IDPs, unauthorized demolition of IDPs' structures in Daguduban and MRRP barangays, expiration of land lease contracts of the IDPs' temporary shelters, persisting looting at the MAA or Ground Zero, and fear of claim forfeiture on monetary compensation.

Compensation for the affected victims of the Siege are now undertaken by the Marawi Compensation Board. An office created by Republic Act 11696 to facilitate the compensation by the government. However, frustration continues as the pace of awarding of the compensation is admittedly slow and economical-depreciation of awards which defeats its purpose of rehabilitating the lives of the IDPs, especially to the families whose relatives went dead or missing due to the siege. Many of them did not meet the documentary requirements, thus not compensated.

On the contrary, IDP Law was legislated by the Bangsamoro Parliament in September 2024. However, its implementation is the real test as it is applicable only to the Bangsamoro region and enactment of its national legislation counterpart remains an advocacy for prioritization for years.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study identified the underlying factors why the residents of the Marawi's Most Affected Areas remain displaced for more than seven years. This study underscored that despite the initiatives of the government and non-government agencies in providing solutions to the problems of the IDPs, the problems were never addressed. This is due to the complexity of the factors that causes the solutions seems impossible. One factor generates another factors, making the situation complicated. A notable sequential issue is that the government wanted to address displacement, once and for all, yet its Katagombalay processes and unfinished construction of infrastructures are adding to the hinderances of the return of IDPs. In addition, the expected means to reconstruct IDPs' structures is taking so long and there is inadequate housing program for those individuals who cannot return back or affected by other government programs.

In this study, the researcher has realized that there is a need of equal efforts of all actors for the problems to be solved. The government could do so much, even it is assisted by non-government agencies, without the participation and collaboration from the people; especially that data needed to address the root causes of the mentioned factors are scarce, if not limited or absent.

As evident in this study, the government has to be capacitated in order to maximized its role and address recurring problems, issues, and concerns. Implementation of law must be anchor to its purpose not to its technicality. And in addressing problems, both the root must be identified first for the solution to be appropriate and effective.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

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