

Peacebuilding and Social Work: The Narratives of Community Organizers in Conflict-Affected Areas in Maguindanao

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to determine the challenges experienced by the social workers as community organizers in peacebuilding-related community organizing in armed conflict-affected areas in Maguindanao. It sought to know the peacebuilding initiatives of the community organizers in community organizing and the experiences encountered by the community organizers in peacebuilding-related community organizing and in working with conflict-affected areas. Phenomenological method of qualitative research was used. The participants were community organizers working in Community and Family Services International (CFSI) and Ministry of Social Services and Development (MSSD) - Maguindanao. Purposive sampling was used in identifying the target participants. Findings show that community organizing contributes to promoting peacebuilding in the conflict-affected areas through the programs and services being implemented by the community organizers by conducting Family Development Sessions which fosters family development, promotes healthy family life, responsible parenthood, parent effectiveness, cultural solidarity, and environmental awareness. Peacebuilding does not only revolve around initiatives at the macro level but starting in advocacy in responsible parenthood and parent effectiveness could lead to the prevention of peace-related issues and community problems. It is concluded that the participation of the people is the major challenge encountered by the community organizers. The peace and order situation of the community is also vital in the successful flow of the community organizing process.

KEYWORDS

peacebuilding; social work; community organizing; community organizer; conflict-affected areas

INTRODUCTION

In this world where conflict exists as a common phenomenon, various professions become actively involved in promoting peace in their ways. Peacebuilding and development agenda is inherent in the values and goals of the social work profession being a human service-oriented profession. Social workers play a critical part in advancing peace, human rights, and improvement by supporting the esteem, nobility, and worth of man. Be that as it may, in spite of the fact that the 1980s checked a period of increased proficient concerns with things of war and peace, the writing uncovered that the calling was essentially engaged within the mental, social, and financial impacts of war, and less locked in in progressing a conceptual system to advise a social work approach to positive peace (Kafula, 2016).

Peacebuilding is the development of many forms of relationship which aims to resolve injustice in nonviolent ways and to transform the structural conditions that generate deadly conflict. This includes personal, group and political relationships across ethnic, religious, class, national, and racial boundaries. Peacebuilding can include conflict prevention; conflict management; conflict resolution and transformation, and post-conflict reconciliation. Peacebuilding gets to be vital when it works over the long run and at all levels of society to set up and maintain connections among individuals locally and universally. Vital peacebuilding interfaces individuals and bunches “on the ground” (community and devout bunches, grassroots organizations, etc.) with policymakers and powerbrokers (governments, the Joined together Countries, organizations, banks, etc.) It points not as it were to resolve clashes, but to construct social orders, teach, arrangements, and connections that are superior able to maintain peace and justice (Kroc, 2022).

Social work and peacebuilding can meet possibly when community organizing becomes visible in the process of building sustainable peace and development. The strength of the people in the community will be recognized instead of emphasizing their weaknesses and limitations. It will also recognize the importance of environmental supports and barriers that affect engagement in community life. But in order to realize that, opportunities for working together must be created, and increase the positive consequences of community action.

In the Philippines, church-based programs which functioned as non-government organizations (NGOs) were the first to engage in organizing despite martial law. These include the Urban and Rural Missionaries of the Philippines, Task Force Detainees of the Philippines, Episcopal Commission on Tribal Filipinos, Share and Care Apostolate for Poor Settlers, and PEACE, among others. The Philippine Ecumenical Council for Community Organization (PECCO) continued with the refinement and implementation of the community organizing (CO) approach all over the country, in combination with the Marxist structural analysis and the thinking of Saul Alinsky and Paolo Freire.

The people in Mindanao have been suffering from a long-lasting conflict that has involved stakeholders from the local to the national levels with historically complex causes of conflicts. Thousands of lives were lost, and countless properties and livelihoods were devastated (Osaka, 2008). The conflict in Maguindanao is recurring because of the struggle that the Bangsamoro’s clamor on their rights to self – determination. Many countries have resorted to many initiatives suited to the needs of their people. Some used activism to advocate for the people’s rights to achieve peace and development. The concept of peacebuilding emerged as an actor and plays a role in promoting peace and development in Mindanao and as a mechanism towards peacebuilding, community organizing is used. Kramer and Specht defined community organizing as a process that refers to different strategies of intercession whereby a proficient alter operator makes a difference a community activity framework composed of people, bunches, or organizations to lock in in arranged collective activity to bargain with extraordinary issues inside the majority rule framework of values.

Since conflict is known and prevalent, numerous initiatives exist and are being implemented to achieve a harmonious and peaceful community. Peacebuilding gives importance to community organizing as a mechanism used to effect change in the community. Different agencies, whether government or non-government, used community organizing as their mechanism to integrate into the mainstream of peacebuilding in the community. The role of community organizers is also at its zenith being the primary actors towards providing the services to the people. Community organizers are one of the key actors in promoting peacebuilding. Since they are also service providers, they can easily

access the participation of the people which are essential in peacebuilding and the former's roles are appropriate in promoting peacebuilding in conflict-affected areas.

The study, therefore, aims to understand the experiences and challenges encountered by the social workers in implementing peacebuilding-related activities through community organizing as it can be prevented in other areas that may have similar situations.

This study aimed to determine the challenges experienced by the social workers as community organizers in peacebuilding-related community organizing in armed conflict-affected areas in Maguindanao. It sought to know the peacebuilding initiatives of the community organizers in community organizing and the experiences encountered by the community organizers in peacebuilding-related community organizing and in working with conflict-affected areas.

This study focused on identifying the challenges of the social workers as community organizers in implementing peacebuilding-related initiatives in Maguindanao. The result of this study will benefit the government and non-government organizations in assessing the needs of their service providers in working with the community. It will also help the social workers in understanding further their experiences in peacebuilding-related community organizing activities.

The findings of the study will enlighten the social welfare agencies on the situations being handled by the social workers especially those that are related to peacebuilding and community organizing. The findings could benefit future social workers, especially those that will be working towards peacebuilding.

The study concentrated on the experiences encountered by the social workers in peacebuilding-related community organizing in armed conflict-affected areas in Maguindanao. The challenges experienced by the social workers were also included in this study.

The data were gathered through interviews in the selected government and non-government agencies. The areas covered by the study were limited to the two social welfare agencies implementing peacebuilding-related programs in the community namely, Community and Family Services International and Ministry of Social Services and Development (MSSD) - Maguindanao.

RESEARCH METHODS

The study is a qualitative approach using the phenomenological method which studies the experiences of the community organizers in implementing peacebuilding-related initiatives in conflict-affected areas. The presentation of the data is done in narrative form.

The participants of the study are community organizers working in Community and Family Services International (CFSI) and Ministry of Social Services and Development (MSSD) - Maguindanao.

Community and Family Services International is an international non-profit social work organization which uses the primary methods of social work in the implementation of its programs and services.

Ministry of Social Services and Development (MSSD) - Maguindanao is a government social work agency whose mandate is to provide comprehensive programs and services that could address the social problems and needs of the people – may it be an individual, group, or community.

The information was obtained through interviews and observation. A tape recorder was also used by the researcher. The participants of the study were five community organizers which were selected using purposive sampling.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study yielded that majority of the participants concluded that activities that have major impact on peacebuilding are those under Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) activities as it promotes development in every family it serves. Those activities which contribute to the well-being of the so-called beneficiaries are Family Development Sessions which foster family development, promote healthy family life, responsible parenthood, parent effectiveness, cultural solidarity, environmental awareness, and so on. Other initiatives include reconciliation and settling disputes for community members who have conflict issues. There are also livelihood initiatives that indirectly promote peacebuilding as its presence would prevent some peace-related problems from arising.

The community organizers focus their activities on Values Integration and Values formation geared toward sustainable peace and development family and community. One of the participants has this statement:

“Usually, we, as community organizers put emphasis on Values Integration to be able to build and establish peace in the place. We usually render seminars for values formation to realize that peace starts into themselves.”

- Participant

The barangay local government units organized barangay patrols and other barangay campaigns to combat peace-related issues. Since drug issues are rampant in the communities and nearby, the anti-drug campaign is one of the most consistent programs being implemented as their effect is beyond peace destruction but could lead to more serious community problems.

Community organizers like other humanitarian workers also encounter challenges in working with the people. One community organizer emphasized his difficulty in dealing with the attitudes of the beneficiaries being traditional in the sense that the focus on expecting material assistance is particularized while explaining that people's needs dwell down to a lack of sustainable means of living. But because community organizers do not easily provide material assistance as it is believed to be the root cause of dependency on the part of the people, letting the community people be enlightened on the essence of community organizing is a challenge because people tend to be passive in participating during the process. According to Taha, a community organizer, the participation level of the people versus their expectation to the agency is one major challenge.

Added to that are the existing political gaps and dynamics of the political leaders because of their different ideologies. Another challenge encountered is the effect on the loss of trust and confidence in the service providers because of the past activities done by the previous community organizers assigned in their areas.

Finally, the seasonal and recurring armed conflict and displacements, instability of peace and order in the locality is still given high regard as a challenge in delivering the services to the community because of the dilemma on the need to deliver it versus the risk it may put on the part of the service providers remains unanswered and decisions are mostly put on the immediate supervisors then on the community organizer himself.

In addressing those challenges, proper and close coordination with the officials, assembly meetings with open consultation, dialogue, and conflict management are strengthened with highlighting the importance of communication being a major tool towards sustainable development and long-lasting peace.

Community organizers in non – government agencies agreed that those challenges are being addressed through feedback mechanisms already established within the area prior to implementation. If not, by the people's organization itself with a representative from the implementers of the project/program.

For these challenges to be prevented, maximum transparency and accountability, and adhering to the values of a community organizer being neutral, independent, impartial, and non-partisan is highly needed.

Evaluating and monitoring the project/program will also be helpful with the use of logical framework made by the institutions out of those implemented projects/programs before. Then, those identified challenges that will be reviewed, compared, and analyzed for future reference are the measures that can be undertaken to prevent those challenges as much as possible.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, it is concluded that community organizing contributes in promoting peacebuilding in the Maguindanao through the programs and services being implemented by the community organizers by conducting Family Development Sessions which fosters family development, promotes healthy family life, responsible parenthood, parent effectiveness, cultural solidarity, and environmental awareness. Peacebuilding does not as it were rotate around activities at the large scale level but beginning in backing in dependable parenthood and parent adequacy might lead to the avoidance of peace-related issues and community issues.

It is also concluded that the participation of the people is the major challenge encountered by the community organizers. The peace and order situation of the community is also vital in the successful flow of the community organizing process.

Based on the findings and conclusions drawn from this study, the researcher makes the following recommendations; first, the participation of the community is crucial in peacebuilding and they should not only depend on the service providers in terms of development. The family being the basic unit of society must be strengthened through conducting Values formation, values integration, responsible parenthood seminars, parent effectiveness enhancement, and development in order not to contribute to the conflict issues by starting to promote peace and development in the family. Second, further research about the same study must be conducted on a larger scale of locality to emphasize the contribution of community organizing in peacebuilding. Lastly, research about how peacebuilding is integrated into the community organizing process must be given attention.

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