

An Ethical Development Framework for the Future of the Bangsamoro

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Abstract

This paper aims to provide an ethical perspective for the Bangsamoro as it pursues sustainable peace and development. While it agrees as crucial the need to address cultural as well as the historical injustices, the Bangsamoro requires a development framework that will enable it to be fully integrated in societal culture and the international community. Principled governance and democratic inclusion are viewed as critical to maintain the integrity of the region. But the problem of the Bangsamoro is not just political. It must prepare itself, as it does right now, towards a shared future where it can respond to the realities of a neoliberal economic order. It is argued that a human-centered approach to development is important to sustain the peace and social cohesion in the region.

Keywords: Bangsamoro; Peace Building; Nation-Building; Democratic Governance; Human Centered Development Framework

Introduction

The dialectical explanation of the Bangsamoro problem points to the harsh reality of domination in Philippine society. According to Iris Marion Young, politics results to the “systematic inequalities between groups of

people”.¹ The structural injustice in Philippine society, which is apparent in the massive poverty experienced by the Bangsamoro people, reveals the oppression people suffer because their future is dictated by those who are in positions of power. This is made manifest in the political injustices that the Bangsamoro people have been subjected to. The extremely poor in the Bangsamoro are being condemned to a life of political exploitation and economic alienation. For instance, this is true due to the fact that in the Philippines, the statistics show, that “of those that are able to enter school, completion rates are lowest in the ARMM area, with only 37% of students entering the elementary grade making it to sixth grade, versus 53% for the whole of Mindanao and 66% for the rest of the country.”² This research, a reflection by ethics and development advocates from different institutions in Mindanao, intends to evaluate the peacebuilding in the Bangsamoro. It utilizes the human-centered development approach as framework,

Interactional and Institutional Justice

According to Thomas Pogge, persons “interpret their moral values in their own favor and tend to select, represent and connect the facts so as to facilitate the desired concrete judgments.”³ Most people are motivated by their self-interests. Selfish interests undermine the welfare of others in society. Pogge terms such “causal factors” that contribute to the reality of poverty.⁴ In the case of the Bangsamoro, such causal factors are historical in nature. Muslim Mindanao has been excluded from Philippine society since the Spanish period.⁵ Such is a result of a system of governance that is centralized, and as a consequence, ignores the needs and aspirations of Muslim Filipinos and Indigenous Peoples (Lumads) in the place. Such did not happen overnight. It is caused by colonialism and the perpetuation of elite rule that has pushed minority groups into the margins of society.

¹ Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 65.

² Amina Rasul, *Broken Peace: Assessing the 1996 GRP-MILF Final Peace Agreement*. (Makati: Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2007), 81.

³ Thomas Pogge, *World Poverty and Human Rights*. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008), 4.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Christopher Ryan Maboloc, “Situating the Mindanao Agenda in the Radical Politics of President Duterte.” *IQRA: Journal of Al Qalam Institute* Volume 4 (2017): 5.

Pogge makes a distinction between “an interactional approach and institutional approach to social justice.”⁶ Ryan Urbano explains that “in the interactional approach, the agents are individuals, groups, collectivities and corporations.”⁷ On the other hand, in the institutional approach, “the agents are the states or social organizations.”⁸ What this means is that there are injustices, latent and obvious, that are prevalent in society that cause difficulties in the lives of people. When it comes to the problem of peace, the oppression is largely embedded in the societal norms and practices. As a result, people are unable to pursue the good life. People cannot find the opportunities that will allow them to live most fully as human beings. In this regard, there is a strong connection between the reality of oppression and how one draws the types of responsibility that social institutions must recognize. Socio-political cohesion is not possible without accountability, a functioning institution, and inclusiveness. The peacebuilding process, in this way, involves identifying the obvious problem, pursuing dialogue, and realizing the goal of establishing a just and equal society.

The problem of historical exclusion is the root cause of the injustice in the Bangsamoro. The reality of injustice has three levels. First, there is the injustice against the human person. For Amartya Sen, non-interference rights connote the negative rights or freedoms of people. Securing the total well-being of individuals requires defending their political, economic, as well as cultural rights. It is important to look into structural impediments. The second level is collective. It includes the need to protect one’s family from harm. The absence of decent living conditions has a huge impact on the state of the family. Children can be susceptible to violence, abuse, and exploitation. The third level is societal. Institutions often fail to deliver the good life to the general population because of the weakness of the political culture. Democratic inclusion is critical in society’s pursuit of human well-being. Human poverty, according to Sen, is a matter of policy failures. The

⁶ Ryan Urbano, “Global Poverty as a Moral Problem: Thomas Pogge on Global Justice and Human Rights.” Master’s Thesis. (Sweden: Linköping University, 2008), 27.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

same is apparent in the reality of famines, which is not about the absence of food, but the lack of access of people to the resource.⁹ In the same way, poverty is the about the inability of people to enjoy those goods that they have been deprived of.

People's choices matter in this regard, and the kind of government they choose is critical. But in order to achieve such a just condition where people can make better choices, dialogue is important to sustain the peace building process. Such dialogue is based on the sense of solidarity of the people. The moral aim is for the people to choose a peaceful co-existence. The problem, however, is that the state-centric approach of the Philippine Government is about satisfying the political power players in the region who can cause problems later if their demands are not met. The framework of the peacebuilding process in the Bangsamoro is anchored in the idea of resource redistribution. However, the same can be limited as a perspective. Muslim Filipinos want an equitable share of national wealth. It can also be said that Indigenous Peoples, or collectively known as Lumads, have been deprived of their fair share. In terms of opportunities, the IPs are excluded by the dominant culture, which relegates them to a living condition that is wanting when it comes to the comforts that modern society can provide, although not necessarily less in terms of meaning and purpose.

The problem is that the socio-economic system favors some people on the basis of connections with those who are in positions of power. This patronage system can threaten the efforts of the Bangsamoro to be able to provide, for example, quality education to its population. According to one peace advocate who requested not to be identified, the peace situation in the region is artificial. What this means is that those who are in positions of authority continue to take advantage of their position. He says that the reality of corruption is still rampant. To be realistic about the peace process means that one cannot deny the problem of bad governance that has stifled the Bangsamoro for years.

But peace-building measures are not just meant to keep the absence of violence. The reason why peace must be sustained is for people to live

⁹ Amartya Sen, *Poverty and Famines*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 1-2.

decent and dignified lives “with and for others in a just society”. A decade after the 2013 Zamboanga Siege, a visit to the city, however, can present a different situation. Things have returned to normal. Business is booming in the most multicultural area of the Bangsamoro. Both Christians and Muslims have thrived in the city, and are trying to get back on their feet through a shared future that is defined by trust and mutual understanding. If the peace building efforts of the national government and the other local stakeholders must be sustained, a human-centered framework is needed in order to ensure democratic inclusion and equitable progress for the people in the region.

The Bangsamoro Government: Issues and Concerns

The Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao or BARMM, is in a transition mode. This means that at present, before the general elections are held in which the electorate in the region will choose the members of their parliament, it is under the control of the interim type of authority that was put in place by Malacañang by virtue of a law, the Bangsamoro Organic Law. Such is important to maintain the balance of power in the region. However, there is no way of telling past 2025. There is always a big question as to check and balance. Principled governance as the guiding perspective among political leaders in the Bangsamoro is an ideal that still needs to be realized. It is the same in the greater scheme of Philippine society. Philippine institutions can be characterized in terms of their intrinsic weakness rather than their strength. The same weakness has impacted Muslim Filipinos.

Indeed, Muslims, Christians, and Lumads expect that the BARMM will be able to help them all realize their aspirations and dreams for their children. People desire economic progress in the region. The office of the Chief Minister, people tell us, is putting everything together for the whole region. However, a grassroots level type of democracy maybe critical for the success of the BARMM. The participation of all stakeholders means that their sentiments are heard. If done right, their officials will be able to serve and protect public interest, and not the desire for control by political families and powerful clans. The BARMM’s main enemy right now is the influence of dynasties which can undermine the effort to sustain peace in the region.

Now, when it comes to ethical governance, there are two important principles – accountability and transparency. Institutions must adhere to these principles to ensure that the same will become part of the system. Moral governance is an important aspect in an authentic democracy. A moral society produces good citizens. A change of perspective among the youth in the region, for instance, is happening. In times past, the youth see violent extremist leaders as their role models. But this has changed given the presence of social cooperation in the Bangsamoro. When it comes to a Western prototype of democracy, the American experiments in Iraq and Afghanistan have failed. It is for this reason that a pluralistic approach to social connectivity must commence. Indeed, the Bangsamoro region has a unique culture. The Bangsamoro is not only for Muslims. It is for others as well, all inhabitants of Mindanao. Mindanao matters to the country. The progress of Mindanao is a common battle-cry of every Filipino. In this regard, the Bangsamoro should not be seen as an isolated political entity. Rather, it must be fully integrated into the national economy and must be able to take advantage of the East Asian Growth Area (EAGA) in which it can find opportunities for international trade and commerce.

One's mindset is important when we speak of the idea of openness, transparency, and accountability. There is a great need to open the minds of the people on the principles of democratic governance. In fact, there are biases and prejudices in the Bangsamoro. As such, the old ways remain in the consciousness of people. It is a long journey for peace educators. Peace education is needed to change the minds of radical people. But more than that, society must respond to the causes of the injustice. BARMM is led by former Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) leaders. The 2014 Peace Agreement is a good compromise after decades of war. It is the leadership of the BARMM that must unite its diverse people into a common vision. Without unity among the Muslims, Christians and Lumads, the system can create another chaotic order. Every stakeholder must have one's own place in the system, and must be given liberty and platform to be able to share one's ideas and personal vision. This is why understanding the BARMM and assessing its future must go beyond statist approaches that tend to limit state building to formal venues.

Beyond economics and the political question, another crucial issue is BARMM's integration into societal Philippine culture. The Bangsamoro

history is not about the war between Christians and Muslims.¹⁰ The pursuit of peace also includes mainstream issues, including gender equality. The presence of women in the bureaucracy of BARMM is limited, according to one informant. BARMM should be able to overcome a masculine and patriarchal culture so that it can open to women the chance and opportunity to be able to participate in the state building initiatives. The presence of indigenous women in BARMM offices, in this way, needs to be increased. The BARMM recognizes the Lumads based on the BOL. The BOL serves as legal basis for the peace-building efforts and initiatives in the region. The inclusion of all Lumads in the peace-building process is crucial if the Bangsamoro is to truly succeed as a pluralist society where people share a common interest in the pursuit of peace and justice.

Power Structures and Powerful Interests

When it comes the development of society, policy makers look into the power structures. Injustice is structural.¹¹ The Bangsamoro region is not different. What is obvious is the presence of economic inequalities. Political oppression has been the reality when it comes to the Mindanao situation, but the aspect of cultural discrimination should not be ignored. When it comes to IPs, they are in the margins, Lumads are powerless. They also feel harassed and utterly discriminated. It is important, in this sense, to have legal mechanisms in the Bangsamoro that can empower IPs. The Indigenous Peoples's Rights Act (IPRA Law) appears meaningless in the BARMM, says one informant. This is a challenge for leaders. People say that the IPRA Law is only good on paper. There are powerful interests at play. Some complain that there are more or bigger allocations for Muslims in BARMM than Lumads or Christians. Political clans remain influential in the decision-making processes. As a result, the state building process is threatened by dominant interests that can undermine the common good.

The IPRA Law is clear about protecting the rights of IPs, including their holistic way of life. One has to recognize the different perspectives and unique cultures of people. In Lake Sebu, one can witness the growth

¹⁰ Abinales, Patricio. *Orthodoxy and History in the Muslim-Mindanao Narrative*. (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University, 2010), 2.

¹¹ Christopher Ryan Maboloc, "What is Structural Injustice?" *Philosophia: Philosophical Quarterly of Israel* Volume 47, Number 4 (2019), 1190.

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of the place as a tourist spot. However, such a type of development can be misleading because resort facilities are actually owned by rich politicians and businessmen. The Subanens in the Bangsamoro feel excluded from the societal culture. There is bias against them. As a result, they do not see themselves as a part of the Bangsamoro. The Bangsamoro, thus, makes manifest the struggle of the Lumads against oppression. The IPs want to protect their ancestral domain. Indeed, a difficult issue when it comes to societal integration is land. History is at work here. When the Americans introduced the Torrens System, Lumads were displaced from their land. In fact, many Christians migrants from Luzon took away from them their homes.¹² Land for the Lumad is sacred. In this sense, the displacement also means being taken away from a sacred way of life in which the Lumads have lived in harmony with nature and the Divine.

Philippine society recognizes the various ethnic peoples and their identities in the Bangsamoro. This should not mean, however, that there cannot be a common interest that will unite a people. When we talk about peace, we are into that realm where we see each other as human beings. The basic thing when it comes to peace is the freedoms of people. This means that as a human being, one can pursue a kind of life that “one has reason to value.”¹³ If the government gives people the opportunity to find good or decent work, then there is no reason for them to rebel against their own government. The conflict or violence, however, are not only due to a lack of resources and opportunities. In some instances, there are people who cling on to violence due to their extremist views and wrong ideologies that make them blindly obedient.

Democratic Governance in the Bangsamoro

Modern democracy is rooted in the idea of inclusion.¹⁴ This means that “democracy in itself” is not a guarantee for the achievement of our desired ends. The basic point is that the political system must ensure that all people enjoy their rights and entitlements. Being a citizen, it must be

¹² Karl Gaspar, *Handumanan: Digging for the Indigenous Wellspring*. (Manila: Claretian, 2021), 358.

¹³ Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 15-16.

¹⁴ Christopher Ryan Maboloc, “Difference and Inclusive Democracy: Iris Marion Young’s Critique of the Rawlsian Theory of Justice.” *Social Ethics Society Journal of Applied Philosophy* Volume 15, Number 1 (2015): 22.

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recalled during Aristotle's time, is not something automatic. One must be responsible. This requires people making meaningful contributions to the agora of public discussion. It can be argued that ultimately, democracy is not just a simple question of representation. The same should be true for the Bangsamoro region. The element of discourse takes a more crucial role in terms of securing democratic social arrangements. This is why inclusion is important. In addition, the rule of the majority simply means politics is a matter of numbers, thus diluting the essence and value of democracy as the ultimate expression of human freedom. This is the same reason why Manila is labeled as imperial. For the longest time, Mindanao has been a victim of historical injustice and economic exclusion.

The state-centric approach of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) in the past failed because it prioritized the political interests of the politicians, not the people on the ground. There was also incompetence at all levels. People lacked the power to demand what they think is good for their own welfare. Democracy can only be built from the bottom-up because a top-down approach will only mean that those at the top will protect their interests. Democracy must begin from the grassroots so that the system of government is reflective of the concerns, issues, and aspirations of the powerless in society. Democracy, in this respect, ensures that the system of government will give the people, Muslims, Christians and Lumads, the ability to express themselves so that their concerns are heard by the top authorities. The substantive meaning of democracy means that the freedoms of people are respected, their rights are protected, and their wellbeing is promoted.

Civil society has a role to play to realize social and political justice. It is also important to reform the electoral system. But people must also improve in terms of their choices. Political maturity is critical if a society is to become truly democratic. This means that society must be governed by the rule of law and not by the interests of powerful and influential clans. Some leaders who are in power have abused their position because of the weakness of civil society. The civil society in the region must take the cudgels in terms of leading, designing, and maintaining the discourse on legitimate social, economic and political issues. In a country where the whole political culture is weak and the state apparatus is unresponsive, the legitimacy of all democratic decisions cannot be found in voting alone. Members in Congress, who belong to the ruling class while representing

the poor in society, blindly obey party decisions.¹⁵ Moral principles and the value of the common good have only become secondary. In order to improve the check and balance in the state, civil society must seek real transparency in government affairs. The function of civil society is to become the true voice of the oppressed and marginalized.

Bangsamoro and the Struggle for Nation-Building

Nation-building has three aspects: It rests on power, history, and culture. Power is the ultimate aim in every struggle. Power, however, is not about total control. It is about the truth. For this reason, any moral government must recognize the fact that people have a real sense of their history and a unique identity. The type of disrespect people suffer from is a result of a hegemonic relationship. Some people consider themselves as superior. They regard the minority as inferior when it comes to knowledge and culture. People in high society often see themselves as well educated whereas those in the margins are judged as “illiterate”. As a result, they underestimate the ability and competence of minority groups in the area of governance. This is a result of a “colonial mentality” in which a “white man” sees as his burden the task of “civilizing the natives”.

The bias against Muslims and Lumads has undermined the unity of Philippine society. The BOL recognizes the uniqueness of the region, in terms of the needs of the people and their rich culture. Respecting culture and respecting their language are important in terms of educating the next generation. The Bangsamoro is different, and societal culture should be able to recognize the important value of diversity. Societal culture refers to the broader context of social integration.¹⁶ The problem stems from the fact that Philippine education is rooted in a colonial perspective. Manila, for the most part in our history, did not know nor value anything about the Bangsamoro. The mindset of the people in the capital is that Mindanao is “war-torn”. They see Mindanao as the battleground of a bloody “religious war” between Christians and Muslims.¹⁷ In this way, some Filipinos have

¹⁵ See Shiela Coronel, Yvonne Chua, Boomba Cruz & Luz Rimban. *The Rule-makers: How the wealthy and well-born dominate the Congress*. (Quezon City: Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, 2004).

¹⁶ Will Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 311.

¹⁷ Peter Kreutzer, *Political Clans and Violence in Southern Philippines*. (Frankfurt, Germany: Peace Research Institute Frankfurt, 2005), 5.

simply taken over the position of our former colonial masters in terms of the demeaning ways which have denied a people of their sense of identity. Why is such a thing happening? Taken seriously, it is a question of elitism. A group of human beings think of themselves highly, and see their fellows as their inferior.

In Philippine history, for instance, our textbooks in basic education usually showcase the heroes of the Philippine Revolution, but authors talk less about nor include the heroic exploits of Sultan Kudarat or Lapu-Lapu. There is even an attempt by others to undermine the exploits of Lapu-Lapu as a hero. It is settled, for instance, that Lapu-Lapu did not kill Magellan.¹⁸ Accounts on what truly happened to Magellan “come from Pigafetta but as to what happened to Lapu-Lapu before and after the Battle of Mactan, nobody knows,” according to a Cebu historian.¹⁹ However, the main point should not be missed. While it is the case that Magellan did come to the Philippines in search of spice, imagine a situation in which Lapu-Lapu and his men did not resist their foreign visitors. Such a submission to a foreign invader would have meant that Lapu-Lapu accepted to be subservient to a foreign master. So, if we consider the context where Magellan came from, which is Spain and Portugal being at that time imperial powers, without of course Lapu-Lapu realizing or knowing the same for obvious reasons, then there is no argument that it is deserved that the chieftain is recognized as the first Filipino hero.

Culture is a somewhat a legitimizer of violence. Violence can be found in religion and ideology. There is a need to change the mind or the way of thinking of the people. Some beliefs must be transformed. But the Bangsamoro is resilient.²⁰ This can be observed at the height of the Marawi Siege in 2017. However, social cohesion remains an issue for the region. The Christians in Cotabato, for instance, often feel that they are not well-

¹⁸ See Ador Vincent Mayol, “Lapu-Lapu: Hero behind the Myth.” Philippine Daily Inquirer. April 25, 2021. <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1423340/lapulapu-hero-behind-the-myth>

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Godiva Eviota-Rivera, Rogelio Bayod, Aurora Lynn Racmat, & Omera Serad, “Narratives of Resilience and Solidarity during the Marawi Crisis: Preserving Marawi’s Culture of Peace.” *Social Ethics Society Journal of Applied Philosophy* Volume 9 (2023): 12-13.

represented because they do not have a reserved seat in the Parliament. But it is the case that Christians must understand that Muslim Filipinos have been oppressed for a long time. If a nation must be strong, then people in the margins must be given the chance to decide their future and design their fate in a duly elected democracy. There are leaders who are against BARMM. In Cotabato City, such is that case with former Mayor Cynthia Guiani. In Maguindanao, there are some political families who are against the BARMM. The conflict and antagonism are a reality in every modern democracy. The political task is not to put an end to contestation. Rather, it is to be able to build a just society based on social cohesion and dialogue where people are free to express their dissent and disagreement.

The Mindanao issue is a problem of inclusion. Difference politics can look into power structures that undermine the ability of people to make autonomous choices.²¹ The threat against one's freedom comes from the insecurity brought forth by a state-centric approach to peace making that seems to exclude other people. This present threat is rooted in the reality of domination which excludes people. But while this is the case in the Bangsamoro, Johann Galtung argues that "conflict cannot be eliminated, but violence can be avoided."²² Mistrust is present in the Bangsamoro. But the people in the region should let go of their biases. People must embrace the idea of a shared future and a common vision despite the differences. Indeed, the true threat to peace-building and peaceful co-existence is the prejudice of people against each other.

A Development Framework for the Bangsamoro

The Grand Mosque of Cotabato City is a magnificent structure. Sublime and beautiful, it is the second largest mosque in the Philippines. Located in a quiet landscape of mountains and a river, the mosque was a gift from Sultan Bolkiah of Brunei Darussalam. It is a true testament to the resilience of a people and the unique story of the Bangsamoro. Indeed, the Bangsamoro is the heart and soul of Mindanao's history and culture. The Bangsamoro region is at a crosspoint in its history. Enjoying the fruits of a peace agreement, the BOL's current implementation is meant to provide its people – Muslims, Christians, and Lumad, an opportunity to chart the

²¹ Maboloc, "Difference and Inclusive Democracy," 7-8.

²² Johann Galtung. "Violence, Peace and Peace Research." *Journal of Peace Research* 6:3 (1969):167-69.

course of their history and realize equitable development for themselves. The question is, will the Bangsamoro open itself to a global system where neoliberal policies and capital-driven economic progress define the way of life of a society?

The development theorist Winston Nagan thinks that, “an economic theory that does not acknowledge the salience of human capital for rational and efficient economic development is a type of theory that is misguided and dangerous.”²³ The economic development in the Bangsamoro region depends on the sustainability of the peacebuilding initiatives of the various stakeholders. Mindanao has suffered from years of neglect and political exclusion. Muslim Mindanao is one of the poorest regions in the country. The same is a result of an oppressive kind of politics that has been in place since the Philippine Commonwealth through President Manuel Quezon’s traditional brand of politics.²⁴ An ethical framework for the Bangsamoro can be helpful in terms of ensuring equitable and inclusive growth. What this would require is going beyond the state-centric approach to progress. Putting money and resources into programs and projects is never enough. It is important that the development should trickle down to the households. This means providing jobs and opportunities, including ensuring quality education and healthcare.

The big political question in the Bangsamoro is being addressed by means of a devolved type of regional autonomy. The Bangsamoro gets an automatic appropriation from the national budget that it can use to fund its many programs, except for defense purposes or the purchase of firearms. The type of autonomy that it now enjoys is an answer to the Manila-centric type of governance that has hampered the growth of the different regions of the country. Economic and political elites have concentrated power in their hands. One of its consequences of such has been a Muslim rebellion

²³ Winston Nagan, “The Concept, Basis and Implications of Human Centered Development.” *Cadmus* 3:1 (October 2016): 27.

²⁴ Alfred McCoy, “Quezon’s Commonwealth: The Emergence of Philippine Authoritarianism.” *Philippine Colonial Democracy*. Edited by Ruby Paredes. (New Haven: Yale Center for International and Areas Studies. 1988), 114.

that has claimed the lives of more than 150,000.²⁵ Development, however, is a question of social and political justice, and not just of wealth sharing. The focus of the ARMM was too much on the whims of its leaders and their patronage-based relationship with those in Malacañang. The leaders chosen by the ruling political party before the dismantling of the ARMM prioritized the motives of the party, not the people. Human development must be about the people, their aspirations and hopes, and the creation of opportunities for them to attain a life worth living.

The economic and global framework of the peacebuilding process in the Bangsamoro should be able to address the “problem of prejudice” against Muslims and Lumads. This is because if development will not be equal, the people in the region might go back to that feeling of being left behind. In which case, it is a “question of dynamism” in terms of how the region can truly exploit the economic realities of globalization because the Bangsamoro does not exist in a vacuum. It has to deal with the realities of consumerism and the hegemonic nature of the global economy which is driven by China and the West. Nagan continues to say that “a realistic look at the true social process of humanity will disclose that human beings are energized to interact with each other in the pursuit of desired needs and values.”²⁶ If his observation is correct, then the region must open itself to foreign investments and accept that it is a part of a global community. In which case, the design of its society must be rooted in the universal respect for human dignity.

The future of the Bangsamoro and its people is at stake in the 2025 elections. But before that, it is important to promote a human-centered perspective that should govern the development of the region. The human-centered approach to development is anchored in making ordinary people the main drivers of growth. Such means empowering Muslims, Christians and Lumads together in their search for a better life. Democratic inclusion is integral for the real success of the Bangsamoro. More than satisfying the whims and caprices of political factions and influential clans and families

²⁵ Salah Jubair, *The Long Road to Peace*, (Davao City: Institute of Peace Studies, 2007), 9

²⁶ Nagan, “The Concept, Basis and Implications of Human Centered Development,” 28.

who are right now preparing for the 2025 general elections, the people as the real stakeholders must have a greater say in terms of the future of the Bangsamoro. In terms of the human-centered approach to development and growth, this means recognizing the importance of a model of human progress that seeks the cultural integration of the Bangsamoro in the global arena:

In operationalizing the idea of sustainable development, as well as in pursuing human progress on the development goals, practitioners and scholars alike have advocated for the importance of accepting diversities and multiple systems. Rather than singular solutions, they espouse a plurality of strategies, institutional organizations, modes, and scales that are responsive to their respective local cultures, communities and contexts.²⁷

The Bangsamoro has to develop its brand and make itself attractive to foreign investors if it must create its own economic niche without being overly dependent on the funding coming from the national government. It must be able to create economic opportunities and develop trade relations with other countries, especially the East Asian Growth Area (EAGA). But the future of the Bangsamoro is positive. There is hope. Such will require investing in the next generation. This positive approach to peace, which is anchored in the establishment of just and equal institutions, will be critical in order to create a truly dynamic community and a flourishing economy. An ethical development framework for the whole Bangsamoro, in this regard, should be founded in people empowerment, not on political power play. Nevertheless, the autonomous government in the Bangsamoro region and its leaders have done big things in order to sustain the peacebuilding process. But to secure peace in the long term, such will require addressing the questions of social justice, and pursuing a type of growth rooted in fair

²⁷ UNESCO, "Advancing a Human Centered Approach to Development." March 13, 2012.

https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/policy/untaskteam_undf/groupb_unesco_humancentred_approach.pdf

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opportunity and mutual respect, both truly meant to respond to decades of socio-political oppression and cultural domination.

Conclusion:

This study has attempted to provide an ethical perspective when it comes to the Bangsamoro problem. The authors discussed and considered the issues and the relevant solutions thereunto. The Mindanao problem is a result of historical injustices. The causal elements have been examined in this paper. There are individual causes as well as institutional reasons why the Bangsamoro is entrenched in underdevelopment. Corruption has been rampant which makes one think that progress is unattainable. With the idea of a principled governance, it is hoped that democratic inclusion will enable the people to overcome the problems of the past. But it is argued by the authors that beyond the political reality in the Bangsamoro, notwithstanding the negative biases and prejudices against both Muslims and Lumads, the region must secure its future by means of an ethical and human-centered development framework. The same will be critical as the Bangsamoro transitions into the future. If peace must be sustained, then the people must be truly empowered in terms of deciding their own fate as they chart their way into societal integration in the global community.

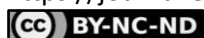
N.B. This paper is dedicated to the late Dr. Ryan Urbano, a true scholar and a real friend.

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