



# COMBINING TRADITIONAL, FORMAL AND NGO PEACEBUILDING TO RESOLVE VIOLENT RIDO IN MAGUINDANAO

AN ISLAMIC RELIEF CASE STUDY

## RIDO VIOLENCE IN MAGUINDANAO

In 2012 a comprehensive peace agreement was signed between the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the Government of the Philippines, ending a decades-long war in Mindanao and providing a framework for the establishment of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). However, conflict in Mindanao involves far more armed groups, local elites and militias than the peace agreement covers, so while the war has officially ended, outbreaks of fighting continue.

An important feature of conflict in Mindanao in general, and Maguindanao in particular, is power struggles between clans and Datus – local strongmen who head political dynasties and wield significant economic, political and coercive power through their own militia. These Datus, and the family or clan networks which support them and rely on their patronage, have an extremely long history in Mindanao, as similar political dynasties have throughout the Philippines and Southeast Asia.

It is quite normal in state formation processes for local strongmen living in areas outside state control to enter into arrangements with the state whereby they are granted a high level of autonomy as long as they control a restive population and quash any potential challenges to state authority (North et al. 2009). In the Philippines, colonial powers and post-colonial governments have entered into a multitude of arrangements with local Datus and armed militia in Mindanao, but these arrangements have continually shifted in a complex web of instability. The limits of Datu power were, and still are, continually contested, expanded, limited and negotiated through interactions with other, rival Datus and their militia, armed opposition groups such as the MILF and the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF), and the Philippines state (especially the armed forces).

There is a long history of jostling between the clans and Datus for power over land, people and resources in Mindanao. But since decentralisation and economic



A youth leader in Maguindanao speaking at a youth leaders peace camp. [Photo: Islamic Relief, 2021]



Emergency food distribution in Barangay Masigay by Kalipapa Youth Organisation and Masigay Youth Organisation [Photo: Islamic Relief, 2021]

modernisation, attaining political office is also a path to political-economic control (Adam, et al., 2014). The Barangay (Village) Captain and the Barangay Council hold considerable local power because they determine how the Barangay's Internal Revenue Allotment will be spent and decide on issues such as zoning, building permits and public service contracts, so elections are highly and violently contested. Many of the same people in the Barangay Council are also in the Barangay Peace and Order Committee, often resulting in one clan dominating Barangay governance.

Jostling and violent competition between the clans and Datus for power is termed 'rido'. Rido, or clan feuding, is *"a state of recurring acts of violence carried out to avenge a perceived affront or injustice"* (Torres, 2014, p.4). A clan leader explained to an Islamic Relief researcher that *"If the relatives are involved in the conflict, they are like fighting cocks that will never stop until all the feathers are removed"*. Rido violence has been found by Islamic Relief to be the most worrying and prevalent type of conflict for local inhabitants in Maguindanao, surpassing armed separatist conflict

with the Philippines state. Whilst the threat of conflict and violence from rido remains, peace and stability will continue to be fragile and fractured.

Rido conflicts in Mindanao are often resolved in practice through a combination of traditional and formal conflict resolution practices mediated by a respected elder, another Datu, an armed group commander (which could be either a state or non-state actor) or someone else with significant authority, and resolved through the payment of 'blood money'. The resolution is then legitimated through a public ritual such as a Kanduli peace ceremony, to prevent the disputants from renegeing on the agreement later. It may also be formally accepted by members of the state judiciary or other officials.

This case study examines a recent rido in Maguindanao, shedding light on a clan conflict over political-economic power and its eventual resolution. It also demonstrates how community peacebuilding supported by Islamic Relief interacts with rido resolution.

## THE MASIGAY RIDO

In Barangay Masigay, in the municipality of Datu Piang, clan rule is the predominant form of social and political order, as it is throughout the Maguindanao region of Mindanao. Clans traditionally have offered crucial support to their members, particularly during times of war and unrest. However, these patronage networks have also led to the perpetuation of elites in local politics and fuelled violent rido. The causes of rido in Maguindanao are commonly offenses to honour, land disputes, crimes against women and offenses between families, kinship groups and communities. 'Honour', termed 'maratabat', is extremely important to people's social status and even trivial affronts to someone's honour can cause violent retribution.

In Barangay Masigay, heated competition between Clan A and Clan B over Barangay Youth Council (Sangguniang Kabataan) elections in 2010 and again in 2018 led to accusations of cheating and a refusal by Clan B to accept the results of the 2018 election. One month later, a young man from Clan A drove through the village on his motorbike (owning a motorbike

is a sign of affluence and social status) and as he drove through a puddle he splashed water on to a young man from Clan B who was walking beside the road. No apology was offered and both young men reported the incident to their relatives. Both clans felt that their maratabat was offended. Members of Clan B then confronted Clan A at a carwash, resulting in an armed fight between the two clans. Clan A sought help from the local government to resolve the conflict, believing that it was really about the disputed election, but efforts to seek a truce failed. Five days later another armed fight erupted and several family members from Clan B were shot by gunmen from Clan A, resulting in a 10 month old baby being shot in the leg, a 5-year old girl being shot in the elbow and their father and uncle being shot on their arms. Armed conflict between the two clans lasted for a month, resulting in the destruction of farms, closure of businesses, disruption to schools and the evacuation of 174 villagers to neighbouring areas. Conflict lasted for seven months until it was finally resolved in January 2019 through traditional mediation.



Youth Peace Day celebrations organised by Masigay Youth Organisation to facilitate inter-clan contact between children from different clans [Photo: Islamic Relief, 2021].



**The Conflict Mediator.** Tara Manonggal, a respected elder in the community whose impartiality and integrity engendered trust from the two warring clans, spoke to an Islamic Relief researcher about the mediation process that he employed. [Photo: Islamic Relief, 2021]

### TRADITIONAL MEDIATION

Following local traditions in rido resolution, the Barangay Captain (who is from Clan A) sought assistance from a highly respected elder in the community, called Tara Manonggal, to mediate a resolution to the rido in Barangay Masigay. Tara Manonggal approached the leader of Clan B, who is a member of the Barangay Council, and commenced the mediation process. After several rounds of shuttle mediation followed by face to face meetings, the two clans came to an agreement involving the payment of ‘blood money’ by both sides. Tara Manonggal then brought the matter to the Lupon Tagapamayapa (the Barangay dispute resolution committee) where he is a respected member, and the committee took the matter to the Municipal Mayor together with the Barangay Captain.

### FORMAL SETTLEMENT

At this point the traditional method of conflict resolution intersected with the formal process. The municipal Mayor, who chairs the Municipal Peace and Order Council, formed a task force to conduct further mediation; coordinated with the local MILF Base Command to help resolve the conflict; and formally agreed the financial settlement, or ‘blood money’. Since the financial settlement of 200,000 pesos imposed on

both clans was beyond their means, the Mayor ordered the settlement to be paid out of municipality funds. The affected family was provided with approximately 140,000 pesos settlement, which the family used for the hospital costs of the injured baby. Meanwhile, the local MILF Base Command persuaded both clans to stand down their militia, refrain from further violence and respect the peace agreement.

### RECONCILIATION

The payment of ‘blood money’ in Mindanao is more than monetary compensation for loss or injury to life, it is also a symbolic and spiritual gesture to facilitate forgiveness and healing that is just one part of a broader process of community reconciliation (Torres, 2014). Another significant part of this process is the ‘Kanduli’, which is a Maguindanaon term for a thanksgiving banquet. It originates in the Muslim traditional practice of asking for blessings by preparing foods for guests. It also means “thanksgiving” for every good deed a Muslim brother has done for his brethren. Islamic teachings underpin the Kanduli; for example, the Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) said eating together brings Allah’s blessing upon the ones eating the food, brings unity to the family and promotes togetherness. While eating together,

the Prophet urged his followers to speak of righteous things and things that are permissible.

When a Kanduli is conducted as part of a rido resolution process in Mindanao, the disputing parties eat together as a symbolic and public gesture that proves the conflict between them has finally ended. It also serves as a public commitment to the peace agreement reached.

Islamic Relief has been working on conflict prevention and peacebuilding in Barangay Masigay since 2018 during which time discussions with community stakeholders revealed that relations between the two clans remained strained despite the formal settlement that had been reached. The community remarked that the peace agreement ceremony at the Municipal level had not been attended by the wider community and the traditional Kanduli had not been held, so Islamic Relief helped the community to organize the Kanduli to publicly reconcile the two clans. Community members prepared some traditional Moro delicacies and during the Kanduli the peace agreement was reiterated. The peace agreement stated individual and collective commitments to stop all forms of violent conflict, avoid any actions that may lead to future conflict and work to harmonise relations between the clans. It also stipulated punishments for transgressions of the agreement.

After leaders of each clan reiterated their commitments, a public round of handshaking and hugging between the disputants and the extended families ensued. This was followed by a Midsapa (vow) on the Qur'an and rituals of supplication (du'a) and intention (niah) as prayers that the peace agreement will be sustained. Finally, the peace agreement was formally signed and pledges of commitment made. Witnesses from the MILF, Municipality Chief of Police, municipality government officials, Philippines Armed Forces and Islamic Relief also signed the pledge of commitment.

To add further weight to this public commitment of peace, a local Ulama (Muslim religious leader) pledged that if either clan broke the agreement, he would pray to Allah to give punishment to that person or group. Both parties also agreed that the Municipal

government could punish any transgressor of the agreement.

Following the Kanduli the community reported that they felt much greater peace of mind, businesses reopened and children were able to enjoy their school activities peacefully.

## SUSTAINING PEACE

While the Masigay rido has been settled, Datuism and clan politics continue to play a significant role in matters of social order, power and control in Maguindanao. Sustaining peace in this unstable system is continuous work.

*“Let us prevent rido from happening again because people in the community are the most affected,”* said Ulama Datumalao, a member of the Lupon Tagapamayapa in Barangay Masigay.

The wider community is not powerless in matters of clan violence; community influencers have the potential to shift community perceptions, attitudes and behaviour towards peaceful social relations.



Clan leaders declare their support for the rido settlement [Photo: Islamic Relief, 2021]

## ISLAMIC RELIEF'S SUPPORT TO COMMUNITY PEACEBUILDING

Islamic Relief has implemented a number of initiatives to support communities to sustain peace in Barangay Masigay, together with the barangay government and community Peace and Development Facilitators. While these initiatives do not attempt to transform the deeply entrenched Datu system and its web of connections with conflict and governance in Maguindanao, they help to build broad constituencies that continually work to build peace and overcome mistrustful clan relations and prejudices within the ten barangays covered by the project.

1. **PEACE CONSTITUENCY BUILDING** has involved training a wide array of community peace champions – women, youth, religious leaders, barangay officials, peace and development facilitators – on Islamic concepts of peace and development principles. Barangay Masigay's Youth Organisation (called 'Sigay') adopted these principles and initiated a number of community development activities in 2020 to bring young people from Clan A and Clan B together to work for the betterment of their barangay. They rebuilt the barangay road, established a feeding project and distributed humanitarian relief.

*"I believe that our organization helped stabilize the relationship between the two clans" said Jihad E. Nasser, President of Sigay.*

Sigay was given a Certificate of Recognition by the Municipal Government of Datu Piang for their peace advocacy work.

2. **COMMUNITY PEACE PLANNING** involved planning peace and public safety strategies, as well as community conflict resolution systems. Islamic Relief also supported livelihood skills training to address the socio-economic vulnerabilities that can also drive conflict locally.
3. **COMMUNITY PEACE INITIATIVES** supported by Islamic Relief include Kanduli, Youth Peace Day and Mindanao Week of Peace. During Mindanao Week of Peace, young people in Barangay Masigay

## THEORY OF CHANGE

- Peace will come through transformative attitudinal and behavioural change of a mass of individuals, particularly women and youth, and key institutional partners.
- Peace will emerge through the breaking down of isolation, polarisation, division, prejudice and stereotypes within and amongst groups.
- If we mobilise enough support for peaceful resolution of disputes and for promotion of tolerance, then political leaders will listen and take action.
- If formal and informal institutions within government, civil society and the private sector perform in an effective and responsive way providing reasonable livelihoods, stability and quality of life then the extent of core grievances and conflict would decline.



Peace Champions - Sigay received a Certificate of Recognition from the Datu Piang Municipal Mayor in January 2021 for being active community peace champions [Photo: Islamic Relief, 2021].

## COMMUNITY CONFIDENCE IN LOCAL PEACE

Following the settlement of the Barangay Masigay rido and subsequent work to build and sustain peace, people in the community have pointed to a number of indicators that demonstrate a changed perception of peace and safety:

- One of the original young disputants is now employed as a peacekeeper within the National Guard of the MILF as part of Task Force Etihad. This unit is tasked with defusing tensions that might lead to armed clashes in Maguindanao;
- People can now travel safely through the area where the two clans live and no longer need to take the longer route to reach the market, municipality centre and other barangays;
- There are open lines of communication between the two clan leaders and they reach out to each other whenever misunderstandings occur; and
- Social relations between the two clans have resumed with each inviting the other to community and family gatherings such as weddings.

organized fun activities, such as Zumba and ‘boodle fights’ – a kind of communal eating without cutlery – to bring different clan members together to talk, relax and build positive relationships. Previously young clan members did not socialize with members of other clans, which perpetuated feelings of mistrust and prejudice.

### Islamic Relief’s support to conflict-affected communities, livelihoods and peace in the Philippines was implemented through a Sida-funded Triple Nexus Programme in 2018-2021.

4. **COMMUNITY PEACE DIALOGUES** supported by Islamic Relief have helped wider community stakeholders to discuss rido issues to build trust and harmony within the community. Islamic Relief has also provided skills training to local government unit officials and traditional leaders on dialogue, negotiation and mediation to ensure these valuable skills are enhanced among community leaders.
5. **CONFLICT AND DISASTER RISK REDUCTION PLANNING** supported by Islamic Relief has included not just risks posed to the community by natural disasters, but also risks posed by conflict. In a unique marrying of the two, community risk reduction planning involved reviewing both the Barangay Peace Plan and the Barangay Disaster Risk Reduction Management Plan to plan evacuation facilities and services.



Young people from Masigay Youth Organisation repairing a village road [Photo: Islamic Relief, 2021]



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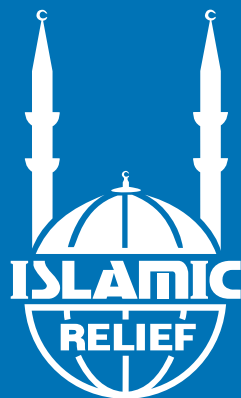
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