



Voices of Children and Youth in Peace, Reconciliation and Security:

**A perspective of 118 children and youth from the Multi-faith,
Multi-culture and Multi-ethnic context in 3 provinces and city in
Mindanao, Philippines.**

A Research Report

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Executive Summary

The Philippines is one of the most diverse countries in Southeast Asia. It has an estimated population of 92.3 million people based on 2010 census report of the National Statistics Office (NSO) and it composed of 172 ethno-linguistic groups with multi-faith, multi-ethnicity and diverse culture dispersed in all over the country. Embedded into this diversity are deeply rooted biases and prejudices, cultural marginalization, political power struggle and economic injustices. This context of conflict has become increasingly more complex and has triggered frequent military encounters in different parts of the country, particularly in most regions of Mindanao, Western regions of Visayas and Northern and eastern regions of Luzon. In effect, the violence in this context has had a negative impact on behaviours and attitudes of children and youth in affected areas.

Information on children and youth engaged in armed conflict is very limited and difficult to gather, though the 2008 Child Soldiers Global Report¹ estimates that up to 13% of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front fighters in 2005 were children. A 2005 study² by PHILRIGHTS cited that poverty, socio-political & economic injustice, lack of government integrity as manifested by graft and corruption and weak judicial system resulted to poor delivery of basic services prompted the youth and children's involvement in armed groups. Proliferation and use of illegal drugs is another significant issue that affect the lives of the youth.

The Philippine government has expressed a positive view of young people in the country who make up 24% of the total country's population. They are widely perceived as hard-working, friendly, charitable, enthusiastic, loving, patriotic and risk takers, but unwilling to compromise their ideals. Thus, the National Youth Commission (NYC), a government agency that specifically addresses issues surrounding the Filipino youth, was established and founded via Republic Act 8044 or "Youth in Nation-Building Act of 1995". The NYC is the policy-making body on youth affairs. It is responsible for coordinating and implementing programs that will help in the holistic development of the Filipino Youth. Its mandate is enshrined in the 1987 Philippine Constitution, which states:

“The State recognizes the vital role of the youth in nation-building and shall promote and protect their physical, moral, spiritual, intellectual and social well-being. It shall inculcate in the youth patriotism and nationalism; and encourage their involvement in public and civic affairs.” (Art II Sec. 3)

Pursuant to RA 8044, several Non-Government Organizations, Civil Societies, Faith-Based Organizations and Local Government Units are mandated to align their support and efforts in the implementation on the said law. But currently, several issues and concerns that have been confronted by the children and youth despites of programs and laws passed to protect and develop them.

Methodology:

The purpose of this study was to better understand the challenges, positive contributions, impacts on peace processes and children and young people’s ability to prevent conflict in the Philippines in order to feed into the Progress Study on Youth, Peace, and Security. World Vision conducted participatory research through focus group discussions in the city of Ozamis and provinces of Zamboanga del Norte, South Cotabato and Sarangani, Mindanao. Young people’s perspectives and experiences were documented with recommendations for local, national, regional and international institutions for appropriate responses.

In total, 118 children and youth 13-18 years old from diverse faiths, ethnicities, cultures, languages and gender were consulted separately through FGDs. Of these, 19 were members or siblings of gang members in the urban areas of Ozamis City, 48 were youth from indigenous people’s (tribal) communities who are hard to reach, 7 were Maguindanaon Muslim and the rest were Visayan settlers. Two hours were allocated for each FGD for the participants to have ample time to respond the guided questions.

All FGDs were conducted in community public halls as a neutral location and were closely coordinated with local government units. The series of FGDs were completed 15-19 May, 2017. A documenter was hired to capture all ideas of the youth respondents. It is important to note that these FGDs were conducted one week before the siege in Marawi and

the declaration of Martial Law in the entire island. We were not able to capture the perspective of the youth when the siege happened.

For this study, the following research questions were used and where appropriate contextualised based on the context:

- What are the main peace and security challenges that young women and men face, and how do these impact their lives (locally, nationally, regionally or globally)?
- What factors prevent or inhibit the involvement of young women and men in building peace and contributing to security? And what factors could promote and support young people's active involvement in building peace, preventing violence and contributing to positive social cohesion in their communities, societies and institutions?
- What are the peacebuilding and violence prevention activities, initiatives and projects being undertaken by young people, and what is their impact?
- What do young people recommend to enhance the contribution and leadership of young men and women to building sustainable peace and preventing violence? Do they have particular views on how their government, State Institutions, civil society organizations, media or the international community, could help to support these contributions?

All detailed information from each focus group location can be found in the annexes at the end of this report.

Challenges and Issues:

During the focus group discussions, children and youth respondents identified the following significant issues that were commonly highlighted across the regions and provinces. These are serious concerns that negatively impacted their lives:

- Proliferation and use of illegal drugs that are involving children and youth either as users, pushers and/or carriers
- Bullying between tribes, particularly affecting indigenous peoples (tribal)
- Presence of multi-level non-state armed groups that make them more vulnerable to being recruited as combatants
- Socio-economic injustices that benefit only the powerful elites
- Socio-political struggles as manifested by partisan politics, corruption, and power struggles
- Cultural marginalization of the indigenous groups that prompt youth to join non-state armed groups and radical groups

Furthermore, 84% of the youth respondents mentioned that not all government mandated institutions at the local level had a deep grasp on children and youth related laws due to limited knowledge and literacy of leaders, lack of commitment to the needs of young people, poor governance and change in leadership (every 3 years). This was most significantly manifested in hard to reach areas with no technology connection, limited opportunity for capacity building and lack of formal education. For example, each village (barangay) should have a youth task force on youth development based on the Republic Act 10632. Some local leaders noted, “We don’t have detailed knowledge about what is mandated by the said laws”. 14% of young people interviewed said they had received support from the local government unit (LGU) but do not feel very visible to them. It was commonly cited that youth organisations are present for compliance and budget allocation purposes only. They noted they were not invited to meaningfully contribute to youth development and the LGU did not have concrete initiatives or programmes to respond to the needs of the children and youth except sports activities during feast or barangay celebrations.

Opportunities, Promotion and Prevention of Violence

Despite of the multi-faceted challenges children and youth face, the government, through designated agencies, is actively working to engage youth in peace and development initiatives.

Currently, the National Youth Commission is launching "Mindanao 2020" which is a government led peace and development advocacy programme. It is a comprehensive advocacy-training program among the youth on the culture of peace, human rights and the indigenous peoples' right act. It aimed to advance the promotion of peace, racial and cultural tolerance, and respect for the environment, rights of children, youth, women and the indigenous peoples.

Similarly, local government units are mandated to organise a community-based youth organisation for young people to craft their own development and participation plans in governance. This mandate is in compliance with the Republic Act (RA) 8044 and the Child and Youth Welfare Code of the Philippines. It is highlighted in the laws that government agencies should create an atmosphere of peace, understanding, tolerance and universal brotherhood among the youth. In effect, it is meant to provide an opportunity for youth to be more active in peace and development in their own communities.

Aside from the government institutions, there are several non-governmental organisations (NGOs), civil society organisations (CSOs) and faith-based organisations (FBOs) that provided venues and opportunities for children and youth to be empowered and engaged in peace and development. For example, World Vision annually conducts a children and youth peace forum, capacity building on good governance and peacebuilding, and congresses at provincial and national level in partnership with children and youth organisations from the community. It is a venue where they can dialogue with each other, establish friendships, develop tolerance, understand and respect their differences and celebrate similarities. FBOs are also conducting Youth Camps for value formation, teambuilding and relationship building.

Initiatives and activities initiated by the youth:

The effectiveness of programmes and initiatives of the government, NGOs, Civil Society and FBOs are measured by how the children and youth deal with others who are different from them. For this research, it was determined that young Filipinos have incredible capacity to prevent violence, promote peace and transform the lives of others by maximizing their potential, skills and talent. As cited by Jayson, a 16 year old from the Subanen tribe, "*Empowering*

Children as Peacebuilders (ECaP) principles taught me how to become more sensitive to others. Before, I am fan of bullying others, but later I've realized that it's not good attitude if we want to build peace”.

Several activities and initiatives have been initiated by the youth across provinces notwithstanding differences of faith, culture, beliefs, traditions and gender. These endeavours have impacted the lives of many children and youth in their respective communities.

- Children and youth lobbied the local government unit for the formulation of child protection ordinances and children representation in government mandated structures, like; Barangay Council for the Protection of Children BCPC, and Local Council for the Protection of Children (LCPC) in pursuant to Local Government Code Circular 2012-120. As a result, some LGUs have decided to allocate 1% of their internal revenue allotment to child and youth protection and development.
- Children and youth Core Leaders and trainers empowered other community Core Leaders and youth partners on appropriate knowledge, skills and experiences and shared with their respective communities. They shared skills around, culture of peace, Do No Harm, child-focused disaster risk reduction, value-based life skills, advocacy and leadership.
- Children and youth initiated and facilitated workshops, peace forums, dialogues and consultations to consolidate their efforts and plans
- Children and youth conducted Sport Feast for Peace in their communities in coordination with their local government unit for financial and technical support
- They initiated linkages with local government and other institutions for policy and ordinance formulation for children and youth participation and protection
- They facilitated Barangay Children & Youth Associations formation and strengthening to ensure their voices would to be heard.

Children and Youth Overall Recommendations:

As a result of the discussions with children and youth, the following are the overall recommendations for the local government and partner organisations:

- Purposely implement local ordinances, national laws and policies related to children and youth development, participation and protection including free education as mandated by government laws and make them their priorities.
- Strengthen cross-cultural interaction among youth and children and create venues for regular dialogue and learned to listen and put aside their political biases
- Explore opportunities to partner with religious leaders and other sectors in empowering the parents on responsible parenthood to reduce domestic violence among children
- Implement curfew hours for children and youth below 18 years old
- Livelihood assistance for youth to give them more economic opportunities

For National Government Agencies & other Organizations:

- Create a monitoring team to monitor the implementation of government mandated laws and structures supportive of the youth at local level
- Concerned government agencies to conduct orientations to all local government units on children and youth development, participation and protection related laws.
- The government to create employment opportunity and entrepreneurial skills for youth who are belongs to poor families.
- Capacity building opportunities and empowerment of all the youth in leadership, peacebuilding, advocacy, entrepreneurial or livelihood skills, and value-based Life skills

For International Organizations:

- Establish communication mechanism as a flat-form for local and international network of children and youth for exchange learning,
- Explore opportunities for cross-country and cross-cultural inter-action and dialogue among children and youth.
- The United Nations must help end the recruitment of children and youth as child soldiers (a child was referring to New People's Army-Communist guerrilla).

Facilitators Observations

The results of the focus group discussions highlight that children and youth are very observant, idealistic and passionate for change. However, if they are not given proper guidance or support, they often feel that the need to seek out peers and groups that do support and affirm them despite the legitimacy or intentions of these groups. One girl who had joined a gang noted, “My parents are busy and no time for us, so I explored outside to fill-up my emptiness.”

Notably, children and youth that felt empowered to be leaders and peacebuilders in their communities were much more vocal and passionate about sharing their ideas and stories. The following were other common observations across the focus group discussions:

- Youth and children who are not exposed to or involved in any child or youth organisation expressed lower self-esteem, difficulty expressing their thoughts and ideas, and less aware of their surroundings
- All of the children and youth interviewed have shared dreams and aspirations of improving their lives and helping their families
- Based on stories and testimonies, youth who are actively involved in community and church-based youth organisations and activities were more optimistic in managing their difficulties and struggles in life. They seemed to have a different perspective of the things they wanted and dreamed of for their future and the future of their community
- The national agencies and local government units that recognised and supported the efforts of children and youth in peace and development seemed to have more dynamic and active youth organisations
- The government has resources, policies and ordinances to support child and youth in development activities but local government officials have limited capacity on how to mobilize and maximise the potential of youth.

Acronyms:

BCPC	-	Barangay Council for the Protection of Children
CF-DRR	-	Child-Focused Disaster Risk Reduction
CoP	-	Culture of Peace
CSOs	-	Civil Society Organizations
DNH	-	Do No Harm
ECaP	-	Empowering Children as Peacebuilders
FBOs	-	Faith-Based Organizations
FGD	-	Focus Group Discussions
GOs	-	Government organizations
IDPs	-	Internal Displaced Persons
LCPC	-	Local Council for the Protection of Children
NGOs	-	Non-Government Organizations
NSO	-	National Statistics Office
NYC	-	National Youth Commission
RA	-	Republic Act
UN-YPS	-	United Nations-Youth Peace & Security
WVDF	-	World Vision Development Foundation

WV - World Vision

Annexes: Provincial Context & FGD Results

Annex I. Ozamis City

Ozamis City is an urban area in Mindanao known as the “drug den” and home to organized criminals. Political dynasty and political patronage systems are common in the city and high ranking positions like the Mayor, Vice Mayor and some city council positions belong to one family or clan. Prior to the election, political killings occurred and influential politicians used money and guns to bribe voters. High rates of crime were recorded in previous years and it was perceived that snatching, robbery, hold-ups, and carjacking were sources of income for some politicians to finance their election campaigns.

Youth gang members are often used to commit criminal acts by influential figures in the city. During interviews, one young person said, “*We couldn’t file a complaint to the authority since some of the police officers are also involved in some crimes.*” Based on some informal talks, of the staff of one of WV’s partner’s was a victim of robbery but she was unable to file a case because she was threatened.

The city is known to be the home of an organized gang called the “Kuratong Baliling Group,” a group responsible for a high level of robbery, hold-ups (banks & big business establishments), and carjacking in other big cities. It was perceived that the founder and organizer of the gang is also from the city. The majority of the population identify as Christians though the city also hosts some IDPs from neighbouring Muslim majority provinces, Lanao Norte and Lanao Sur.

Background:

A focus group discussion was conducted in partnership with the city government and Kahayag Foundation, a local organisation based in the city. There were a total of 32 youth respondents who were divided into 2 sub-groups. One group for those who were affiliated with gangs and riots and another group who were actively involved in community peace and development activities from different areas.

There were 18 youth respondents composed of 13 boys and 5 girls between 13-19 years old. 90% of respondents were members of different gangs and 10% were siblings of gang members. One respondent said, *“Before becoming a regular member of a gang, we needed to undergo initiation, an adult founder and senior members taught us how to steal goods in the market or malls. Then, they would evaluate us”*. Two of the children were under the custody of City Social Welfare Custodial Centre due to robbery cases as they are still under 18 year old.

The second FGD was done with children and youth between 15-18 years old who were members of youth organisations in areas covered by World Vision. 14 young people participated, of which 7 were boys and 7 were girls. These youth came from different communities covered by WVDF and they were all Christian from different denominations. The group was very open and relaxed as they shared their experiences in their community.

FGD Results:

In the context of Ozamis, strict implementation of war against drugs and criminalities by the current government administration (President Duterte’s administration) is underway. The change in government gave high hopes to some of the people in Ozamis City that a better justice system may be realised. Curfew hours for minors have been implemented and higher police visibility in some areas has been observed. Participants noted a decrease in gang rapes, hold-ups, robberies, drug pushing and gang riots due to the increased police presence. One participant noted, *“No more night life, and no roaming around beyond curfew hours. For us, it’s very effective so children and youth are not be involved in Gangsterism.”*

Due to national government’s mandates on youth development, the local government unit created activities to bring the youth together and participate in productive activities. They initiated community activities involving the youth such as regular coastal clean-up where all

neighbourhood were involved and a sport feast. The activities intended to create venues for the neighbourhood to talk and discuss problems. One youth cited that, “The activity disciplined us not to throw garbage everywhere and learned to love our environment.”

Youth Initiatives and Activities:

Several activities were highlighted by the respondents on where youth are actively involved:

- Youth fellowship, sport feasts, games, youth camp and community service activities are initiated by a church-based youth organisation. Respondents said, “*It became a venue for us to build a circle of friends, prayer groups, share experiences, hear-out our emotions/frustrations and peer counsellors.*” Youth who were very active in the church felt they were more responsible, creative, and self-confident and had stable emotions. They expressed that the church taught them how to become more independent particularly during youth camp.
- In school, school body organisations (SBOs), purposely organised by the School Management Council, help children and youth to actively become involved in the decision making, planning and implementation of their development plans. The SBO officers were democratically elected to bring the voice of all students into the school management board for appropriate action. They are responsible for implementing school activities according to their plans in coordination with the School Management Council.
- 42% of respondents are officers of the Youth Task Force for Youth Development, so they crafted their own policy and developed their plans for community development. They highlighted the following initiatives and facilitated trainings in; Culture of Peace, Do No Harm, Leadership, Values-based life skills. Aside from training, Youth Core Leaders facilitated forums and congresses at the provincial and city levels. They also, facilitated a youth camp in partnership with Christian churches.

More than half of the young people from the first focus group (youth involved in gangs) cited that they have no involvement in any community development activities initiated by the youth

except fraternities and gangs. Most participants in this focus group noted they were out of school prior to joining the gangs. These participants also noted that peer pressure, lack of support from their parents in pursuing their education, poverty, limited opportunities and poor access to services were the primary reasons they felt they could not participate more productively in society.

Issues and Concerns:

In Ozamis City, the proliferation of drugs has impacted the safety of children and youth. Influential politicians and business people are believed to be tied to the drug trade, making the issue more complex. Despite recent measures to reduce drug use and sales, it remains a pervasive issue in the region with conflicts and riots occurring regularly between rival gangs.

Annex 2. Zamboanga del Norte:

Zamboanga del Norte is one of the poorest provinces in the country with a 64.6 poverty index despite sea and land resources. Siayan is one of the poorest municipalities in the province. 85% of the total population is from the Subanen tribe who are heavily dependent on farming through slash and burn.

Culturally, Subanen men are allowed to have multiple wives. Division of labour is shared equally among men and women in Subanen communities. It would not be uncommon for women to work on a farm and men to raise the children or cook meals. Christianity is the primary religion of the people in Siayan with 80% Catholic and the remainder are other Christian denominations.

Political dynamics in Siayan are very strong and the political patronage system is common in the province down to the municipality. It means local government units could only easily access government resources if they were from the same political party as the mayor or governor. Because of this, delivery of basic services can be affected.

The presence of the New People's Army (NPA Communist guerrillas), a non-state armed group in the remote barangays, were noted by children and youth that had been interviewed. Military detachment is also visible in the lowland area of the municipality.

FGD Results:

In Zamoanga del Norte, 29 children and youth between 13-18 years old participated in two focus group discussions. They came from selected barangays in the municipality of Siayan, Zamboanga Norte. The first focus group had 16 youth participants and the second had 13 participants. 72% of the total respondents were from the Subanen tribe (indigenous people) and 28% were Visayan settlers. 16 respondents were from a remote areas and had witnessed and observed the presence of the non-state armed group, New People's Army-Communist guerrillas, in their community. 13 of the participants were from lowland barangays.

The WVDF field staff in partnership with local government unit and community leaders identified the children and youth respondents. The two FGDs were conducted in the training centre of the Municipal Government of Siayan.

Issues and Concerns:

The most common problems and issues identified by the youth respondents were the following:

- Bullying in schools and communities widened the gaps between Subanen and Bisayan settlers. Children and youth noted the Subanen tribe experienced the highest level of bullying despite being the majority. One responded said, *"I always heard from other tribe says that "Subanen are dirty, or no proper hygiene. Sometimes, they used derogatory expression that if one child from other tribe don't wear sleepers or don't change clothes, they will say, you are like Subanen. It's very painful to us, that's why some of us will just hide our identity and our culture/tribe."* -Jeselle a 16 year old from barangay Polayo and a Subanen.
- Poor road access in remote areas that affects school performance of children as they need to walk several kilometres going to school and back home. Poverty also remains high in indigenous communities.
- Not all government mandated institutions at the local level have a deep grasp of the laws and policies for youth development due to limited knowledge about the laws, political dynamics, low educational attainment and change of leadership (every 3 years for local leaders). This is a big challenge for the youth to get support from the LGU.

- Local officials from the Indigenous communities often have limited formal education which affects their decision making and leadership. Each barangay should have a functional Barangay Council for the protection of children and youth and a task force on youth development based on RA 10632 though these are not always in place.
- Presence of armed groups inflict fears among children and youth especially while walking several kilometres to school. Children and youth often encounter non-state armed groups during their commute.

Youth Initiatives and Activities:

The introduction and the training of children and youth in peacebuilding through Empowering Children as Peacebuilders (ECaP), a World Vision programme, and the formation of Barangay Children's Association helped the children and youth become more active in the development of their community. Several initiatives have been undertaken by the children and youth core leaders to promote peace and minimizes bullying:

- Sports for peace activities, which are open to all youth in their respective barangays, provided a venue for respect, dialogue, interactions and making friends. It also helped bridge the gap between Subanen and other tribes.
- Some core youth leaders lead in prayer meetings, bible studies and fellowship with other youth to build trust with each other. Participants involved in these activities noted that those who are active in these types of spiritual activities have also become more active in community activities.
- Youth core leaders lobbied and advocated local government officials to craft ordinances for anti-bullying and to allocate a budget for youth activities. As a result, local ordinances were crafted including penalties for bullying.
- Young people have been advocating for children and youth representation in the government mandated structures, like the Barangay Council for the protection of children and the Barangay Development Council and for them to have roles as youth leaders. As a result of this advocacy work by children and youth, some of the Barangay

Councils approved a child or youth representative to sit during council sessions and for them to present their plans and projects for youth development in their communities.

- The core youth officers lead in both community and church activities including regular meetings and fellowship, barangay general cleaning, advocacy, and Bible study. Participants noted these groups expressed improved cohesion between different tribes, a decrease in bullying and improved tolerance.

Annex 3. Sarangani Province

The Sarangani province is a home to three people groups; Maguindanaon Muslim, Visayan Christian settlers and indigenous people. These ethno-linguistic groups have their own faiths, cultures, traditions, beliefs, and practices that were introduced through colonialism. It was perceived by the participants that the presence of groups like the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the New People's Army (NPA-Communist Group) is attributed to land laws established by American Colonizers. Peasant farmers from the north and central Philippines were encouraged to resettle in other areas of Mindanao including Sarangani Province which has created tensions and displacement of some indigenous groups. Land disputes and issues around ownership have evolved into complex conflicts.

In 1972, the Sarangani Province experienced bloody war between government forces and non-state armed groups, the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), and the New People's Army (NPA), which is attributed to the declaration of Martial Law by President Marcos. Abuses and injustices of people who were in power continued. Since then, a series of peace talks with the non-state armed groups have taken place. In 1976, a peace agreement known as the Tripoli Agreement was reached between

the government and the MNLF. An MNLF faction, however, emerged called MILF which was supported by many of the Maguindanaon Muslim residents in the province.

Currently, the volatile situation in Mindanao is due to the emergence of different non-state armed groups including terrorists groups. The situation in Mindanao has also affected dynamics in Sarangani. Participants perceive many sympathizers reside in Sarangani and that troops move through neighbouring provinces to get to Mindanao. Military detachment in every municipality is visible to ensure security and safety of the civilian.

Despite these challenges, the Sarangani provincial government has worked to make the province more peaceful through the following efforts that could benefit children and youth:

- Institutionalization of the “Kaspala system,” a traditional way of settling disputes,
- Lupong Tagapamayapa (local judicial committee) where the members are equally represented by all tribes in the community
- Establishing peace and development unit in the provincial government
- Massive orientation on the Comprehensive Agreement for Bangsa Moro
- Promoting culture of peace initiatives at the grassroots level
- Showing support for the consultation process of the Bangsa Moro Basic Law

FGD Result:

Two focus group discussions were conducted in the province of Sarangani, one in the municipalities of Maasim and another in Malapatan. Each focus group had 15 participants 12-18 years old. Both municipalities experienced violent conflict during the period of Martial Law declared by President Marcos in May, 2017. 53% of the total respondents were from indigenous tribes, 24% were Christian settlers and 23% were Muslim Maguindanaon. Since the context of the area is very sensitive, WVDF field staff closely coordinated with the local government unit at the municipal and barangay level and consulted with trusted area leaders for safety and security of both respondents and staff.

Adult companions of the respondents were briefed prior to the actual discussions for them to know on what will happen and the purpose of the FGD.

Initiatives and Activities of Youth:

As a result of the focus group discussions with children and youth in both municipalities, the following activities and initiatives were identified by children and youth to be effective in preventing violence and promoting peace:

- Culturally, sports have acted as a unifying activity for children and youth. Youth core leaders who participate work to ensure that each team must have equal representation based on tribe and ethnicity.
- Youth are actively involved in “Bayanihan”, which is a cultural system of helping each other in common activities and projects like coastal clean-up, barangay cleaning and school cleaning. One participant noted, “For us, it is very important because it strengthened our relationship with other tribes and it provides venue for dialogue, friendship and deeper understanding of each culture, as B’laan we felt that we are respected,” - Ivan Loyd, 16 years old a B’laan tribe.
- Celebrations like Tribal day, Christian Feast, and Barangay Foundation day bring people together. Youth lead in most of the activities. During a focus group one girl said, “With this, we showed different cultures and traditions in each tribe, thus it enhanced our understanding on who they are and what are they doing,” - Aira Jane, 14 years old, Bisayan tribe of Lun Padido.

Issues and Concerns:

The most common protection issues that were raised by the respondents that affect their lives are the following:

- Proliferation and use of prohibited drugs (shabu) even in the remote areas
- Gang activity called SUKARAP, a local term meaning gambling, stealing and rape, is common in Malapatan. Gangs are present in different barangays of the municipality and

they openly lead riots at night. These activities put children and the youth in danger, particularly students who have night classes.

- Bullying between and among tribes often leads to arguments and quarrels among youth
- Presence of non-state armed groups
- Family feuds are very common in Maasim and if they are not settled can transform into a community conflict.
- In Maasim, the local government does not actively support children and youth development and participation. Children and youth have no venue for dialogue and inter-action with other youth

On the other hand, most of the respondents from Malapatan mentioned that there are several organizations that encourages them to actively participate in their community development activities such as:

- The Task Force for Youth Development (TFYD) is a government mandated structure for the youth. It is open to all youth notwithstanding difference of faith, ethnicity, gender, belief and culture and most of the youth who are involved help craft plans and programs for youth development in partnership with local government unit. The TFYD has enhanced leadership skills and provided a constructive outlet for young people. The local government unit has openly invited the officers of the TFYD to present their plans for technical or funding support.
- 4H Club is open to all single youth between the ages of 13-29. Annually, they host summer camps at the municipal level that become a venue for games, sharing, learning skills for livelihoods, and establishing relationships.
- The Catholic Youth Ministry (CYM) is a church-based youth organization where youth are trained on basic principles of Christian values and train them on how to teach younger children from their church.

Annex 4. South Cotabato:

Historically, South Cotabato is home to indigenous people called T'boli. T'boli live with other tribes like the Maguindanaon and B'laan. During the re-settlement programme of the American era, culturally mixed Christian migrants from Luzon and Visayas, particularly the Ilongo tribe, came into the province and started cultivating the area and in some cases pushed the indigenous populations into highland areas. Issues of land grabbing, marginalization of the indigenous people, and exploitation emerged because the indigenous people had a different concept of land ownership than the migrant settlers. Indigenous people did not believe in land ownership while migrant settlers came with a western concept of land ownership displacing many from the lowlands.

Geographically, South Cotabato neighbours other provinces that have been affected by war and has been used as a passage between other provinces in the past. It is currently impacted by illicit business activities affiliating certain areas as “drug dens.”

FGD Results:

Two FGDs were conducted separately in two municipalities of Lake Sebu and T'boli with total of 25 respondents. 13 were from Lake Sebu and 12 were from T'boli. 44% of the participants were T'boli, Indigenous people, and 56% were Ilongo, Christian settlers. WVDF field staff

closely coordinated with barangay local government unit as formal protocol since the focus groups involved children and youth. The team ensured that there was an adult companion in each area to ensure the safety and security of all respondents. Some young people travelled long distances to participate, particularly the T'boli youth respondents.

During the focus group discussions, youth and children identified several common activities that have prevented them from participating in criminal gangs, non-state armed groups and other criminality activities:

- The local government unit initiated the re-organization of Pag-asa (Hope) youth organization that helps youth involved in community development and peace initiatives. Pag-asa youth organisation was created to support the barangay cleaning program and tree planting where everyone is encouraged to join. Catherine, a 15 years old, T'boli tribe noted, *“We are very happy because we saw people from two tribes (Ilongo & T'boli) work together, they didn't treat others as different from them.”*
- The school-based youth organisation supports a program called “Kapwa ko, Sagip ko” (my neighbour is my responsibility), where children and youth are partnered with other students as a peer or buddy. One participant noted, *“In a way, it's very helpful for both academic and extra-curricular activities. It builds trust and friendship, thus, if we are in trouble, my buddy is willing to help and comfort me.”*
- WVDF initiated the children in a peacebuilding training of trainers in which helped capacitate other children to become peace advocates and peer counsellors. One participant noted, *“The ECaP (Empowering Children as Peacebuilders programme) training taught us how to become more sensitive to others who are different from us”*- Queene, a 16 year old from the Ilongo tribe.
- The Birthday Bounce-back celebration was another venue where the ECaP trained children and youth exercised their facilitation skills and support for sponsorship activities in the community.

Youth Initiatives and Activities:

The respondents mentioned several youth organisations that encourage them to actively participate in their community development activities and build relationships with those from other ethnicities, faiths, cultures and traditions:

- Youth Core Leaders in the barangay support the strengthening of the Barangay Children Association (BCA) in coordination with WVDF. They worked with children and youth to build their capacities in peacebuilding, value-based leadership, literacy programmes, advocacy and community development activities.
- Participants noted they have facilitated and are actively involved in socio-cultural and spiritual nurturing endeavours in partnership with different Christian churches/denominations. One participant noted, *“Before I don’t care of the people around me, but when I actively involved in my own church, my attitudes changed from selfishness into kindness and humility,”* -Junalyn, a 15 years old from the T’boli tribe.

Issues and Concerns:

Several issues and challenges children and youth are facing are the following:

- Proliferation and use of prohibited drugs
- Young people being addicted to technology rather than using their time in more productive ways
- Limited development opportunities for youth in remote barangays and villages that have resulted in early marriage or school drop-outs in some cases
- Poor delivery of basic services, especially in remote areas
- Poverty leading to limited access to education and low school attendance
- Presence of non-state armed groups in remote areas is a threat to security and safety for children
- Some respondents noted incidents of recruitment of children and youth as combatants for non-state armed groups. One young person said, *“I was once recruited to join the NPA as combatant as they offered a salary and I was almost convinced to join because I am very*

frustrated with our family situation, we are very poor, but, when I attended the ECaP training and actively involved in WV activities, I see hope,” -a 15 year old respondent.

- Tribal war was identified as another security issue affecting indigenous communities particularly in remote areas of the province. This has critically impacted the safety and security of children and youth and their families.