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COMMUNITY MEDIATION PRACTICES IN THE BANGSAMORO AUTONOMOUS REGION IN MUSLIM MINDANAO

Rapid baseline study



RAPID BASELINE STUDY: COMMUNITY MEDIATION PRACTICES IN THE BANGSAMORO AUTONOMOUS REGION IN MUSLIM MINDANAO

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BACKGROUND

The Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) is home to a wide range of community mediation practices that reflect the region's cultural, religious and institutional diversity. Mediation has long been a vital mechanism for resolving disputes in the Bangsamoro, where conflicts often stem from overlapping claims to land and resources, family and clan rivalries, political competition, and, in some cases, armed violence. In particular, *rido* (clan feuds) remains one of the most complex and persistent forms of conflict, often escalating into cycles of violence that affect not only the disputing parties but entire communities.

It is often a misconception that the Bangsamoro, and therefore, Muslim Filipinos in Mindanao, are not subject to Philippine laws. However, any regional laws addressing issues unique to the Bangsamoro and its constituents must be consistent with Philippine laws. Because people may find formal judicial mechanisms slow or untrustworthy, community mediation practices thrive and continue to be preferred.

In the Bangsamoro, mediation draws on multiple traditions and authorities. Customary and tribal systems, guided by Councils of Elders and lineage-based authority, continue to have legitimacy in many Indigenous and Moro communities. Religious leaders, including *ulama* and local *imams*, play an important role in shaping decisions through moral and spiritual guidance, including the issuance of *fatwas*. At the same time, state-linked mechanisms such as the *Lupong Tagapamayapa* (community-based arbitration) under *barangay* (local government) structures operate either alongside or in tandem with these traditional systems. This coexistence reflects the Bangsamoro's unique tri-justice system framework, which recognises civil, *Shari'ah*, and tribal/customary law including the Timuay justice and governance system among the Indigenous peoples (*Tëduray*).

Given the complex structure of judicial mechanisms and mediation practices in the Bangsamoro, this rapid baseline study aimed to document and analyse community mediation practices in the region, focusing on their cultural fit, inclusivity, and connection to formal justice mechanisms. Specifically, this study:

- Identifies the types of disputes most commonly addressed through community mediation;
- Maps the practices, strengths, and gaps of different mediation approaches;
- Highlights opportunities for strengthening links between community mediation and formal justice institutions.

The findings of this study are intended to inform donor programming and policy discussions on access to justice and peacebuilding in the Bangsamoro. By identifying both strengths and gaps in current practices, the study points to potential ways to institutionalise effective community mediation mechanisms, ensuring their cultural relevance, and enhancing gender and inclusion dimensions. It serves as a practical tool for policymakers, practitioners and advocates to strengthen peacebuilding advocacy in conflict-affected and transitional contexts.

This study is exploratory rather than comprehensive, reflecting the limited timeline and small number of focus group discussions and key informant interviews conducted. It provides an initial overview of the variety of mediation practices in the Bangsamoro, shaped by the diversity of Moro ethnic groups and the presence of non-Moro Indigenous Peoples in the region. The findings serve as a baseline reference for future, more in-depth research and immediate programming considerations.



Focus group discussion with women's organisations affiliated with the Social Welfare Committee of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. © Conciliation Resources 2025

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This rapid baseline study drew on a combination of focus group discussions, key informant interviews, and document reviews to provide an initial overview of community mediation practices in the Bangsamoro. The approach is exploratory rather than comprehensive, capturing broad patterns, perceptions, and challenges rather than a statistically representative mapping of the entire region.

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Focus group discussions were conducted with:

- Community-based mediators in Maguindanao del Sur (16 participants);
- Women's organisations affiliated with the Social

Welfare Committee¹ of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (10 participants);

- A collective mediation body in the Iranun areas of Maguindanao del Norte (13 participants); and
- Civil society organisations in Zamboanga Peninsula, Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi (11 participants)

(See [Annex B](#) for details).

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

Key informant interviews were conducted with representatives of selected Bangsamoro ministries, leaders of civil society and sectoral organisations (including women's, traditional leaders' and Indigenous Peoples' groups). These interviews provided deeper

¹ The Social Welfare Committee of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front comprises women that operate across regional, provincial, municipal, and barangay levels, supporting the Moro Islamic Liberation Front through fundraising for combat, promoting Islamic teachings, fostering mutual support among members, and providing emergency aid, including water, food, and medical care, to injured combatants during active conflict.

insights into conflict mediation and resolution practices, the role of formal institutions in supporting community-level mechanisms, and perspectives on the risks and opportunities of integrating traditional, religious, and state-based approaches to conflict resolution (See [Annex C](#) for details).

DOCUMENT REVIEW

Secondary data, including policy documents and previous research on conflict mediation and resolution in the Bangsamoro, were reviewed to contextualise the findings of the focus group discussions and key informant interviews. This review situated the study within the broader framework of the tri-justice system (civil, *Shari'ah*, and customary law) and ongoing peace and development initiatives in the Bangsamoro.

PARTICIPANTS, DATA COLLECTION TOOLS AND ANALYSIS

A semi-structured discussion guide was used in each focus group discussion and key informant interview to ensure consistency while allowing participants to share their experiences in their own words. The core themes included experiences and practices of mediation, cultural fit, types of disputes and resolution processes, challenges and needed support, and gender and inclusion.

In total, 76 people participated in the study, including civil society leaders, religious figures, women mediators, and Indigenous leaders engaged in mediation or conflict resolution processes. Male mediators comprised the majority, reflecting prevailing cultural patterns of authority. The focus group discussions and key informant interviews provided valuable insights into the important — though often less visible — roles of women mediators.

Notes from the focus group discussions and key informant interviews were synthesised, guided by the study's areas of inquiry. The document review triangulated insights from the focus group discussions and key informant interviews. The analysis also compared mediator groups — male-led organisations, reconciliation councils, women's organisations, and mediators in urban or displacement-affected settings — highlighting shared features and distinctive practices of these groups.

LIMITATIONS

While this study provides valuable insights into community-based mediation practices in the Bangsamoro, it has several limitations. We only considered selected areas in Lanao, Maguindanao, parts of the Zamboanga Peninsula and the island provinces of Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi. The findings do not reflect regional interactions or spillover effects from adjacent territories.

The findings primarily reflect community-level experiences, with minimal insight into how state institutions and local governments interact with or support traditional mediation practices. This is a broad overview rather than a comprehensive evaluation of the effectiveness, compliance, or sustainability of mediation processes.

The sensitivity of discussing *rido*, political interference, and other high-risk disputes may have influenced the depth of disclosure by some of the participants. Additionally, local political contexts may have shaped the willingness of mediators and community members to speak openly, particularly on the enforcement and neutrality of mediation efforts.

These limitations suggest caution in generalising the findings of this study. However, they also highlight the need for further, region-wide studies that expand geographical coverage, include more diverse participants, and assess mediation outcomes over time.

KEY FINDINGS

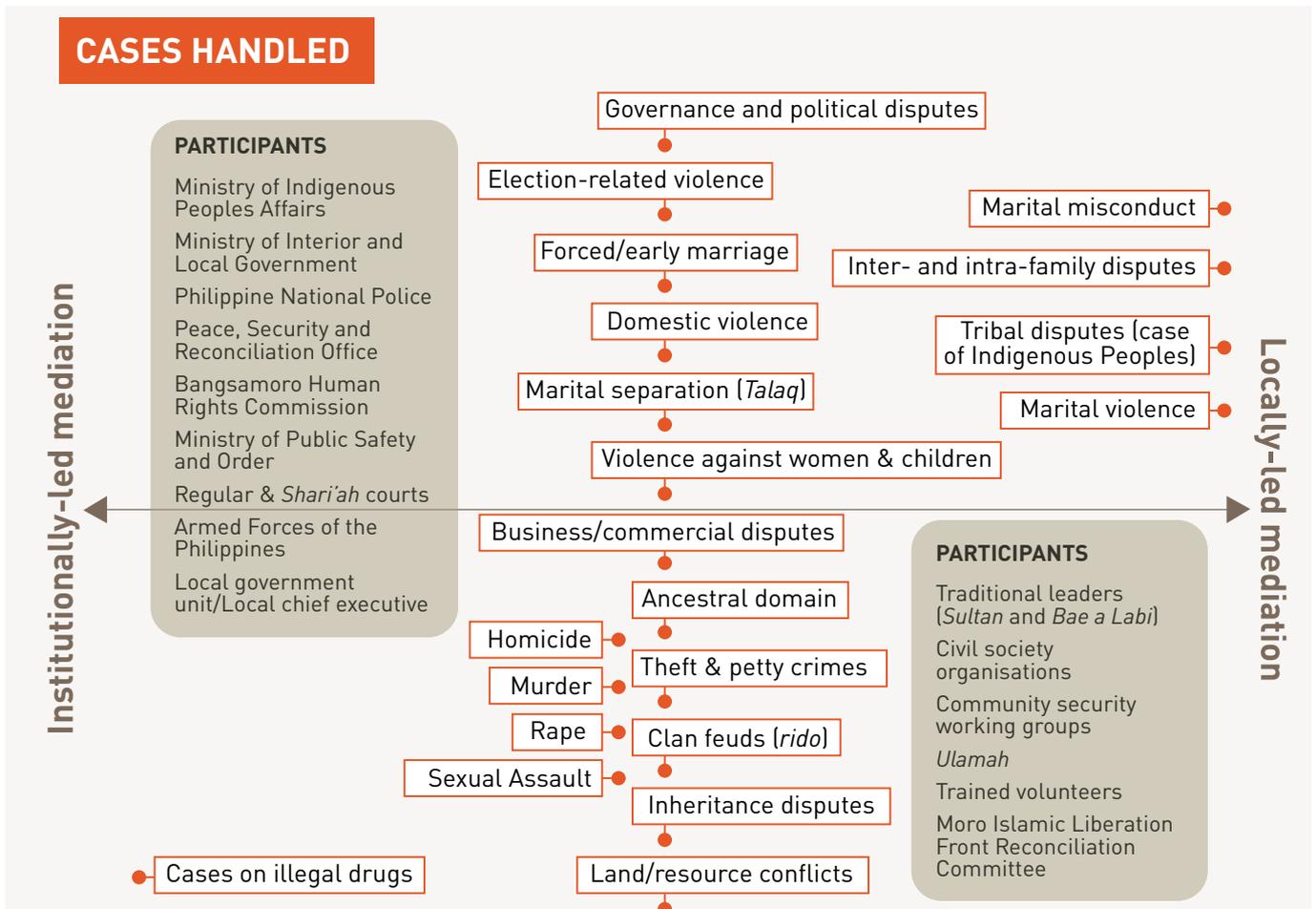
INQUIRIES AND CASES HANDLED BY COMMUNITY MEDIATORS

Mediators address a wide spectrum of conflict cases that reflect the complex social, cultural, and interpersonal dynamics within communities. Resolving clan feuds or *rido* is one of the most common perceptions of the role of mediators in the community. During the focus group discussions, participants shared that many of those who seek the help of mediators are themselves involved or have relatives involved in *rido*. This type of conflict is complex in nature. Multiple studies have examined *rido* in the Bangsamoro; however, they continue to uncover further complexities that require more sensitive navigation.² Studies on *rido* have consistently demonstrated that the phenomenon is far more complex than simple retaliatory violence, layered with deep-seated social, political, and cultural issues that demand highly sensitive, context-specific

approaches to mediation. While often described as recurring hostilities between families and kinship groups, research indicates *rido* is closely linked to honour (*maratabat*), land disputes, and political rivalries. Given their complexity, local government units, through their Peace and Order Councils, will often assist local mediators, especially when requested.

The key informant interviews and focus group discussions revealed overlaps of jurisdiction between institutionalised mediation mechanisms and those resolved by local mediators. Nevertheless, affected parties and their families tended to prefer local mediators, due to a perception of relative non-partisanship, expediency and affordability.

Below is a visual representation of cases handled by community mediators, those exclusively dealt with by formal government institutions, and those shared between them:



² Torres, Wilfredo, *Clan Feuding and Conflict Management in Mindanao*, 2014

The study shows that community mediators resolve most marital violence and misconduct before they are elevated to formal judicial mechanisms. Here, participants clarified that marital misconduct includes cases of marital affairs, mishandling marital properties, lack of support to the wife, and similar circumstances. In addition, local mediators commonly attend to inter-family and intra-family disputes, especially during the initial eruption of conflict. Cases range from divorce and separation of property without a court judgment, to rivalries between relatives. Intra-family conflict in the study areas, particularly in Lanao del Sur, arises from inheritance, management of family businesses, and from competition for political seats. Family and marital disputes also encompass early or forced marriages and gender-based violence.

Among the respondents from Indigenous communities in the Bangsamoro, particularly in South Upi, local mediation resolves inter-tribal and intra-tribal conflicts. The Indigenous Peoples or the Tëduray-Lambangian tribe in South Upi emphasised that they have their own *Timuay* justice system – a traditional self-governing system focused on restoring peace, community harmony and protecting ancestral domains. This system was recognised in 2002 by the Philippine government, however, it has not been fully applied in the Bangsamoro, as the region does not follow the national *Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act* law. Instead, under the current peace agreement, the Bangsamoro Transition Authority is responsible for drafting its own unique laws to govern Indigenous rights within the region.

Local mediators have also attended to land and resource-related disputes, often involving clans, extended families, or armed groups from the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and Moro National Liberation Front, and Indigenous Peoples on ancestral domains. However, government mediation mechanisms may take jurisdiction in serious conflicts. Likewise, local mediation handles conflicts over local leadership, elections, or election-related violence brought about by political rivalry, including governance-related and commercial disputes, before they escalate to formal judicial proceedings. Patronage and political warlordism create an environment conducive to clan feuds among and between kinship groups.³ Therefore, family members who are relatives of both rival parties often serve as local mediators in this type of conflict.

Subject to the rules on Alternative Dispute Resolution as implemented by the courts, theft and petty crimes are mostly mediated locally rather than filed as formal criminal charges. Minor offences, conflicts arising from livelihood competition and neighbourhood disagreements are all referred to community mediators for resolution.

Importantly, the diagram on page 7 shows that there are serious crimes that local mediators will not decide, passing them to the proper government agencies. Among them are cases of the possession and use of prohibited drugs. Mediators will help resolve exceptional cases of rape, sexual assault, homicide and murder by following *Shari'ah* rulings outside court proceedings.⁴ These practices sometimes result in a forced marriage between the victim and the perpetrator, a marriage between members of rival families, or payment of blood money (*diyyah*) as a form of amicable settlement. While the law prohibits civil settlements in these serious crimes, mediators sometimes work with authorities to manage conflict or provide interim conflict management support to prevent escalation within the community.

CAPACITIES AND PRACTICES ADOPTED BY MEDIATORS

Community mediation practices in the Bangsamoro are deeply rooted in customary, religious, and hybrid frameworks, reflecting local social, political and cultural realities. These practices are inseparable from the lived experiences, historical structures, and local governance systems that define the community life. Traditional leaders such as *Datus*, *Sultans*, *Bae a Labis*, and members of the Council of Elders hold authority that is recognised by the community and is associated with their moral integrity, genealogical knowledge, and proven conflict resolution track records. This signifies a reliance on customary principles such as *tarsila* (genealogy), *taritib* (community rules), and *igma* (consensus), particularly in areas prone to *rido* or clan feuding. Organisations like Reconciliatory Initiatives for Development Opportunities emphasise volunteer-based mediation combining Indigenous approaches with Islamic principles, for resolutions that are culturally legitimate and morally authoritative.

The resolution process used by mediators in the Bangsamoro region typically follows multiple interconnected steps. Information gathering is a critical first phase, involving interviews with conflicting parties, case profiling, and conflict mapping to understand the root causes and history of disputes. Mediators often conduct thorough investigations, sometimes spending weeks or months building trust with parties before formal dialogue begins. Dialogue facilitation takes the form of shuttle diplomacy, multiparty discussions, or community meetings, often guided by Indigenous, religious, or local government authorities. In some communities, like in the Lanao del Sur provinces, consensus-building is central to mediation, and traditional frameworks.

³ *Southern Philippines: Tackling Clan Politics in the Bangsamoro*, International Crisis Group, 14 April 2020

⁴ Focus group discussions responses mentioned that some local mediators are constrained to resort to extrajudicial resolution of serious and public crimes as necessitated by influential and armed intervenors.

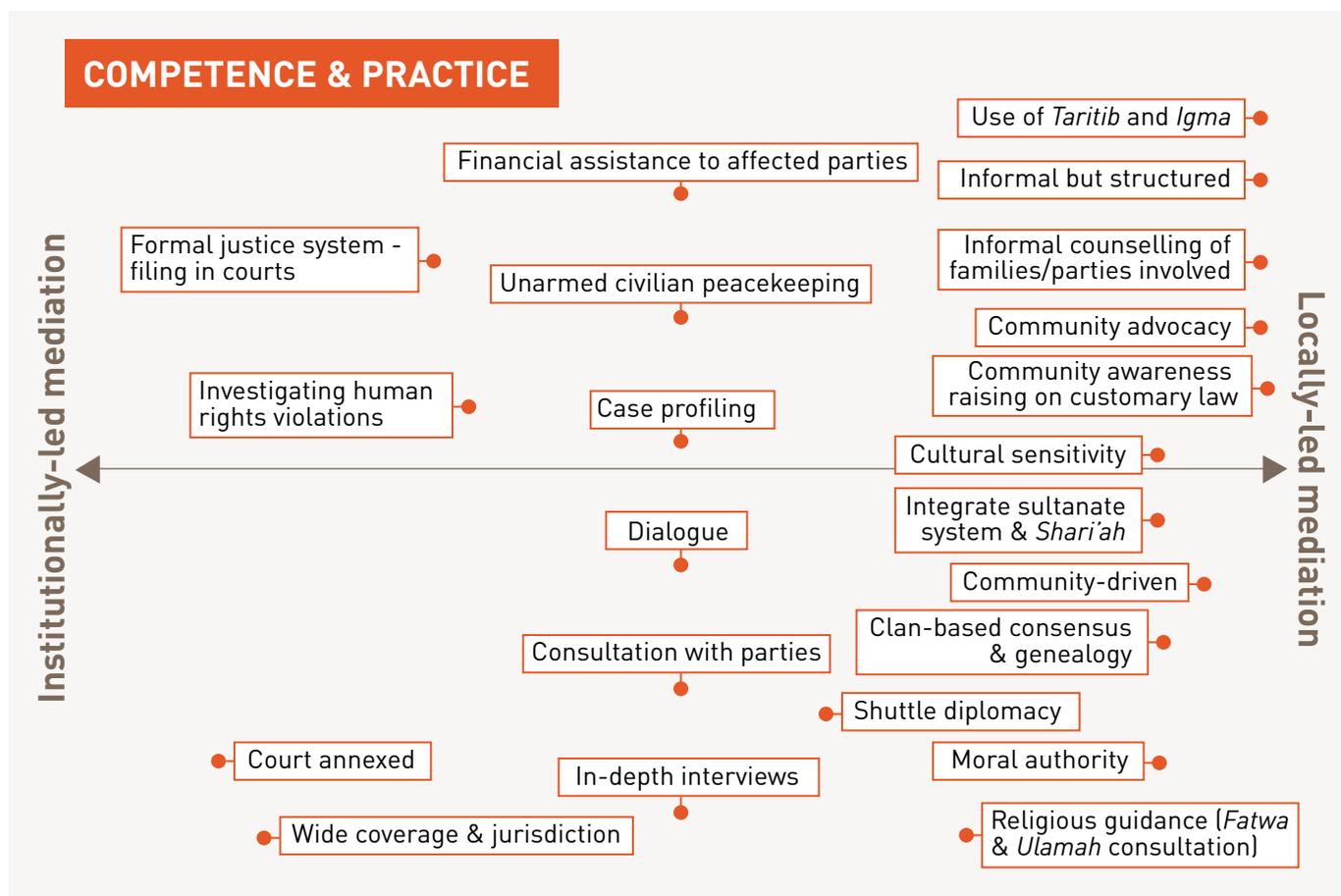
Effective mediation in this context requires mediators to have a deep understanding of clan leadership, genealogy, and the historical context of relationships within and across families in the region. The legitimacy of traditional leaders is further reinforced by the voluntary nature of their service, the authority granted by community endorsement, and the safeguarding of family honour (*maratabat*) through successful conflict resolution. By aligning mediation strategies with these cultural realities, traditional and hybrid mechanisms provide more sustainable and respected resolutions than externally imposed approaches, which may fail to account for these nuances.

In Maguindanao, including areas in the Zamboanga Peninsula, there are also mechanisms that provide a culturally legitimate foundation for mediation, ensuring that interventions are socially recognised and respected within the community. In the Iranun municipalities, for example, customary laws have been codified to systematically organise handling, managing, and resolving conflicts. These codifications, which categorise offenses and detail corresponding punishments, often draw from both religious guidance and cultural norms.

The diagram below compares the strengths and practices of community mediation and formal mechanisms, as defined by key informant interview and focus group discussion participants:

Local mediation is effective because of its sensitivity to the context and flexible approach. This includes adoption of hybrid systems combining customary, religious, and local governance mechanisms where formal local governance justice systems such as the *Lupong Tagapamayapa* embed or collaborate with community-driven mediation processes. Having religious guidance such as *fatwas* and the involvement of *ulama* (religious scholars) providing moral authority, particularly in cases of family and intra-clan disputes, is a peculiar aspect of community mediation in the Bangsamoro. The approach integrates Islamic principles (*Shari'ah*) and incorporates Islamic jurisprudence to mediation processes that are community-driven, informal but structured and clan-based consensus.

In the context of the ongoing transition in the Bangsamoro, local mediators and peace advocates increasingly engage with the established Philippine government and Moro Islamic Liberation Front (GPH-MILF) security mechanisms – the Ad-Hoc Joint Action Group, Coordinating Committees on Cessation of Hostilities, and Joint Peace and Security Teams – to manage community-level conflicts and, in effect, support the peace process. Such interventions are strengthened by organisations like the Iranun Reconciliation Council, which integrates members of armed groups such as the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, members of the state security sector such as the military, religious and traditional leaders, and women



to ensure broader acceptance and effectiveness. Institutional support by government bodies – such as the Ministry of Public Order and Safety and the Peace, Security, and Reconciliation Office under the Office of Chief Minister – is essential in managing disputes. This support facilitates the adoption of shared practices on information gathering and triangulation, case profiling and conducting in-depth interviews. Responses during the focus group discussions highlighted the sensitivity of providing blood money to an affected party, particularly if it is sourced from government funds. In most cases, local mediators have to source funds from local executives, family and philanthropists to pay for the *diyyah*.

The study points to an increasing, albeit limited, role for women in conflict mediation. Women may provide informal pre- and post-conflict counselling in marital disputes, in cases of violence against women and children, and even cases of rape and sexual assault.

Another practice among the local mediators, more particularly in Lanao areas, is fostering collaboration between civil society, local government, state security forces (police and military) and traditional leaders such as *Datus* and *Bae a Labis*, where formal and informal systems are bridged through *kapasadan* or peace covenant, effectively mitigating election-related conflicts.

Strengthening communities is equally essential in local mediation. Through civic education and community fora, religious sector engagement and culturally-sensitive communication, dialogue becomes more effective and resilient against political manipulation that would favour any one of the conflicting parties.

CHALLENGES FACED BY MEDIATORS

Mediators in the Bangsamoro face several challenges that complicate and sometimes endanger their work. Disputes — particularly *rido*, land conflicts, and politically influenced cases — are often prolonged, complex, and risky for the parties involved and the mediators themselves. This limits their effectiveness and sustainability. Security risks are also pronounced. Mediators handling *rido*, land disputes, or cases with strong political overtones often face threats, intimidation, or direct violence. These risks are compounded by the volatile nature of some conflicts, where retaliation or escalation can occur rapidly if disputes are not managed carefully.

Many dispute settlements rely entirely on voluntary compliance, making enforcement difficult when conflicting parties or political actors refuse to honour agreements. Political interference remains widespread, with local politicians sometimes attempting to sway outcomes in favour of affiliated families, undermining the mediators' neutrality and the credibility of

the resolution process. Institutional gaps further exacerbate these challenges. Traditional leaders often lack formal recognition from government structures and have limited opportunities to influence policies or coordinate with Bangsamoro institutions.

A concern is the absence of sustainable livelihood support for *Sultans*, *Bae a Labis*, and volunteer mediators, which limits their ability to operate independently and maintain impartiality in the mediation process. Support from the Ministry of Public Order and Safety is limited to select cases and prioritised interventions, making it insufficient to sustain mediation efforts over prolonged or complex disputes. Without reliable financial backing, mediators are frequently compelled to seek assistance from local politicians, which can introduce conflicts of interest and compromise the neutrality and credibility of the resolution process. Such dependency can undermine neutrality and compromise the integrity of the mediation efforts. Informants recommended providing long-term, reliable financial support to mediators, enabling them to sustain their voluntary work without external pressure and ensuring the continuity of culturally legitimate conflict resolution mechanisms.

Resource constraints for mediators persist. Across focus group discussions and key informant interviews, respondents reported lacking essential tools like transportation, communication devices, recording equipment, and financial support. Many mediators, including traditional leaders, rely on personal resources and community donations to carry out their duties. This affects not only operational capacity but also the perceived reliability of mediation efforts when resources are insufficient to support case follow-ups or field engagement.

Declining cultural knowledge poses long-term challenges. Oral traditions, customary laws, and historical practices that guide mediation and dispute resolution — such as *Tarsila*, *Taritib*, and *Igma*, which are prominent mediation tools used in Lanao provinces — are at risk of being lost without specific support for documentation and preservation of their application.

Finally, the underrepresentation of women, young people, people with disabilities, and Indigenous Peoples in mediation leadership limits the diversity of perspectives considered during dispute resolution. This points to cultural norms that still consider dispute resolution a male domain and reinforces traditional hierarchies that may inadvertently marginalise vulnerable or less powerful groups. Consequently, conflicts involving gender-based violence, early/forced marriage, or the needs of people with disabilities and Indigenous Peoples, may not receive the nuanced attention they require.

Across the Bangsamoro, women, young people, people with disabilities, and Indigenous Peoples are underrepresented in mediation leadership, although

efforts are being made to increase their engagement. People with disabilities and young people are absent from formal mediation roles, with limited engagement even in existing informal structures. The Non-Violent Peaceforce notes the importance of including vulnerable groups including people with disabilities and elderly people in mediation efforts, but concrete mechanisms for their participation remain undeveloped across the region. This represents a critical gap in ensuring fully inclusive mediation processes that reflect the perspectives of all community members.

Women mediators play significant roles particularly in family, marital, and gender-based disputes, offering culturally sensitive interventions that combine counselling with dispute resolution. In the Lanao provinces, *Bae a Labis* are influential in mediating marital disputes and supporting community awareness initiatives that highlight women's roles in traditional governance and conflict resolution. In Maguindanao, women's involvement in conflict mediation is often limited to secondary roles, particularly in *rido* resolution or in engaging with other women involved in disputes. Initiatives like the Women Insider Mediators – Rapid Action and Mobilization Platform, launched by the Bangsamoro Women's Commission in March 2021, have sought to strengthen women's leadership in community mediation by promoting dialogue and peaceful resolution of conflicts at the local level. Overall, gender-responsive and inclusive practices exist but are inconsistent across the Bangsamoro region.

OPPORTUNITIES TO COLLABORATE WITH STATE INSTITUTIONS

Community mediation in the Bangsamoro depends on collaboration among multiple parties to sustain its impact and ensure long-term effectiveness. The linkages to formal justice systems vary. Some mediators coordinate with local government units, police, or courts, while others operate independently, relying entirely on the legitimacy of traditional authority figures. In Lanao, the Sultanate system remains the first point of contact for most disputes, with families seeking assistance from *Sultans*, *Bae a Labis*, or Elders before approaching the government institutions.

Policy recognition and institutional support were repeatedly emphasised as pressing needs. Traditional mediation practices, rooted in customary law, religious guidance, and hybrid arrangements, have not yet been formally incorporated into Bangsamoro policies, leaving many mediators without legal or structural recognition. Traditional leaders often lack avenues to influence policy or advocate for the legitimacy of their mediation practices. Establishing networks or platforms for policy advocacy could provide these leaders with opportunities to engage decision-makers, promote the inclusion

of traditional approaches, and ensure that mediation processes are culturally aligned and respected within the broader governance frameworks.

Based on the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro, an asymmetrical, rather than uniform, relationship exists between the Philippine government and the Bangsamoro, allowing for greater regional autonomy. This framework empowers the Bangsamoro to craft its own policies and legislation, enabling the creation of culturally appropriate and respected mediation structures for conflict resolution. To formalise this, the *Bangsamoro Autonomy Act No. 13* was signed in 2019, enacting the Bangsamoro Administrative Code, which defines the mandate and functions of the Ministry of Public Order and Safety. As a ministry, it is responsible for public safety, peacebuilding and security. It coordinates with law enforcement agencies, local government units and Moro Islamic Liberation Front peace mechanisms to manage conflict through initiatives such as the Digital Rido Profiling System. Parliament Bill No. 159 proposes the "*People's Alternative System in Addressing Disputes (PASAD) Act*," which seeks to institutionalise alternative dispute resolution mechanisms in the Bangsamoro.⁵ In May 2024, the Bangsamoro Attorney General's Office has presented to the Bangsamoro Parliament's Committee on Bangsamoro Justice System the Bangsamoro Tri-Justice System Legal Framework. This aims to harmonise the regular, *Shari'ah*, traditional and tribal justice systems to ensure that Bangsamoro's diverse legal traditions uphold fairness, are accessible for all and strengthen local conflict resolution through a cohesive structure.⁶

Mediators emphasised the importance of integrating advanced mediation techniques, negotiation skills, gender-sensitive practices, and community engagement strategies into government mechanisms. Capacity development is needed not only to strengthen technical proficiency but also to ensure that mediators can navigate complex disputes. Access to adequate resources and logistical support is equally important.

Raising awareness and strengthening educational initiatives were highlighted as essential for preserving cultural knowledge and enhancing the community's understanding of traditional mediation practices. Documented customs should be integrated into school curricula, promoted through community campaigns, and widely disseminated to foster respect for Indigenous conflict resolution systems. Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, such as tracking behavioural, relational, attitudinal, and knowledge outcomes, have been suggested to assess the effectiveness of these initiatives and ensure that the intended cultural values and social norms are upheld over time.

5 www.parliament.bangsamoro.gov.ph

6 *Healing the Bangsamoro: A Culturally-rooted Path to Ending Youth Violence*, Dumama-Alba, Sha Elijah, August 2025



Norhanie Taha Mamasabulod, a member of the Community Security Working Group with a disability in Pagalungan, North Cotabato travels by boat to do community mediation work.
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LESSONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Community-based mediation in the Bangsamoro operates at the intersection of culture, institutional structures and social cohesion. Community mediators handle and manage diverse conflict cases ranging from family or marital disputes (including inheritance issues, marital abandonment or separation, early or forced marriages, and gender-based violence) to land conflict or resource-related disputes involving clans, armed groups such as the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and Moro National Liberation Front and Indigenous Peoples in ancestral domains. They are also involved in cases of politically-sensitive disputes linked to local leadership, which are heightened during election periods. Minor offences, such as neighbourhood disagreements or misunderstandings, theft, or competition over livelihood resources, are typically addressed through the *barangay* justice system, although traditional leaders may assist to prevent the case from escalating into a major conflict.

LESSON 1

Conflict resolution process in the Bangsamoro typically follows multiple interconnected steps, anchored in cultural relevance and sensitivity.

Community-based mediation practices are founded on culture and traditions, which vary across communities. In Lanao, the sultanate system dominates in which *Sultans* and *Bae a Labis* hold primary authority over resolving *rido* and other cases of conflict that can morph into *rido*, such as those involving women. These structures derive legitimacy from genealogical knowledge through the act of *Salsila* and from communal recognition. Often, their mediation practices are relational, prioritising win-win outcomes that prevent escalation, and with women playing a central role in family, marital, and gender-related disputes.

By contrast, Maguindanao uses increasingly hybridised mediation arrangements in which customary, religious,

security, and local government actors co-handle cases. This hybridisation is no longer merely practice: it is now being embedded into local governance infrastructure. For instance, the Iranun Reconciliation Council operates as an intra-municipal conflict mediation body formally recognised by Iranun municipal local government units, where traditional leaders are integrated into, or designated to work alongside, the Lupong Tagapamayapa. The codification of Iranun customary laws, which includes the categorisation of offenses and corresponding sanctions, further demonstrates deliberate efforts to formalise cultural knowledge while preserving community legitimacy. These institutional efforts reflect a pragmatic response to the reality that conflict actors, including *barangay* officials, security forces, and community intermediaries are themselves part of extended clan networks. In this context, formal enforcement alone is insufficient; hybrid mediation structures have become the operational mechanism for maintaining compliance, preventing escalation, and bridging gaps between statutory law and lived social orders.

Moreover, in other areas in Maguindanao, regional authorities now enable hybrid systems. The Bangsamoro government, through the Ministry of Public Order and Safety, has begun to formally organise conflict mediators to assist in resolving highly localised cases, particularly those involving Moro Islamic Liberation Front local commanders. A key example is the Bangsamoro Local Administrative Conflict and Peace Advisory Structure (BLACPAS), which evolved from an ad-hoc committee under the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and was formally recognised in 2024. BLACPAS primarily handles land-based conflicts and *rido*, and its members, many of them former Moro Islamic Liberation Front combatants, bring operational knowledge, relational access, and credibility with communities that have historically not engaged with formal state processes. This arrangement illustrates a distinct regional-level hybridisation pathway: customary authority, former combatant networks, and state bureaucratic authority are now operating as a coordinated conflict management mechanism under the Ministry of Public Order and Safety, convening to fill mediation gaps in Moro Islamic Liberation Front-dominant territories where local government unit-based structures are weaker or lack clan access.

In parallel, women-led mediation organisations, such as the Salindaw Women's Organization and Segay na mga Babae, provide culturally appropriate leadership in mediating early marriage, family disputes, and violence against women and children. Women's interventions in community mediation complement the authority of male traditional actors and illustrate that hybridisation is not only vertical – comprising customary and state institutions – but also horizontal, integrating non-traditional social actors into formalised mediation mechanisms.

In the Zamboanga Peninsula, hybrid and culturally grounded mediation practices similarly integrate community trust, Islamic principles through *Shari'ah*, and formal governance mechanisms. Local mediators also address social injustices by providing basic community needs such as access to water, housing, and other social services to prevent conflict escalation. Election-related conflicts and other forms of rivalry rooted in political competition are addressed through community empowerment and engagement, often guided by Islamic jurisprudence. These hybrid practices combine religious, community, and government actors, providing flexibility in mediation while requiring careful coordination to maintain neutrality and credibility.

Despite these strengths, community-based mediation faces persistent challenges. Enforcement of agreements is tenuous due to reliance on voluntary compliance of conflicting parties. Political interference by local actors, particularly in electoral or resource-linked disputes can compromise neutrality. Resource limitations, including a lack of transportation, communication tools, and documentation equipment continue to constrain mediators' ability to sustain engagement. Reliance on voluntary service exposes practitioners to livelihood and security risks. Traditional leaders and volunteer mediators generally operate without formal recognition from Bangsamoro institutions, limiting their influence on policy and integration with formal justice systems. Declining transmission of cultural knowledge threatens Indigenous practices such as *Tarsila*, *Taritib*, and *Igma*, particularly in Lanao, where oral norms remain prevalent in conflict mediation processes. Underrepresentation of women and Indigenous Peoples in conflict mediation bodies also reduces inclusivity, leaving sensitive cases relating to gender vulnerable to insufficient attention.

Potential ways forward

- Conduct an in-depth longitudinal study or a continuing research and database formation on diverse community mediation practices would support data-driven legislations for the institutionalisation and instrumentalisation for their harmony, including analyses of their effectiveness, compliance, and long-term social cohesion. This may explore the socio-political dynamics of *rido* resolution, hybrid mediation frameworks, and integration of formal justice systems.
- Codify customary laws on mediation across different areas to provide wider documentation of existing practices.
- Introduce monitoring and evaluation frameworks for mediation programmes, tracking behavioural, relational, attitudinal, and knowledge outcomes to help scale-up and inform policy decisions.

LESSON 2

There is a lack of platforms for support and learning exchange on mutually reinforcing measures for mediation.

Analysis indicates that collaboration is key to continuity and legitimacy. Networks involving traditional leaders, women's groups, religious institutions such as the Bangsamoro Darul-Ifta', NGOs, and local government units strengthen compliance in conflict settlements, trust, and long-term effectiveness. Hybrid systems bridging informal and formal justice mechanisms improve social acceptance, while shared protocols and capacity-sharing initiatives help preserve Indigenous knowledge and strengthen mediator skills. Examples of successful models of culturally grounded, socially recognised mediation include organisations like Reconciliatory Initiatives for Development Opportunities in Lanao, which integrates the Sultanate system with *Shari'ah* law and volunteer mediators, and the Iranun Reconciliation Council in the Iranun corridor of Maguindanao, which brings together former armed groups, religious leaders, and women. In the Bangsamoro, the proposed *PASAD Act* is still pending approval and is currently undergoing community consultation across different provinces. This legislation is aimed at integrating traditional and hybrid mediation practices into Bangsamoro policies to ensure the formal recognition of traditional and community mediators.

Effective mediation is more than dispute settlement; it functions as a mechanism for community cohesion, cultural preservation and agency. However, without structured support, these systems risk being marginalised or co-opted by political and external actors. Thus, continuous capacity-sharing initiatives on gender roles and inclusion, customary traditions, creative and systems thinking, positive alternative messaging and navigating political dimensions are still relevant and necessary.

Capacity- and knowledge-sharing are essential. Mediators require advanced training in negotiation, mediation, gender-sensitive approaches, and community engagement, tailored to regional contexts. Programmes should also expand participation of women, young people, people with disabilities, and Indigenous Peoples in leadership roles to ensure diverse perspectives are incorporated into conflict mediation processes. Workshops and collaborative learning can also strengthen hybrid frameworks and ensure consistent application of customary and religious norms across regions.

Potential ways forward

- Establish a Community of Practice on community mediation to boost skills development and accelerate learning among mediators. This platform may introduce better use of technology and innovation

through connecting individuals with shared interests. This may create a repository for effective practice and provide social support system among the community mediators.

- Replicate existing initiatives like the Community Security Working Group in other areas to establish diverse networks supporting locally-led practices of conflict resolution. These initiatives provide Early Warning Early Response and policy advocacy.
- Provide incentives and training certifications for continuing learning for community mediators, as recognition of their effective practices and a pathway towards integration and into local government unit-led mechanisms.

LESSON 3

Providing sustainable financial, livelihood and logistical support to mediators may reduce dependency on political actors and improve impartiality and independence.

Resource and livelihood support must be addressed. Sustainable financial and logistical support reduces mediators' dependence on political actors, ensuring impartiality and independence. Providing essential tools such as transportation, communication devices, and documentation equipment is necessary for field operations, especially in geographically remote areas.

Institutional recognition and policy support on this aspect are critical. Traditional and hybrid mediation practices must be formally acknowledged within Bangsamoro policies and incorporate measures to help them generate independent resources to support their logistical costs. Mediators require less earmarked and more flexible funding to allow for adaptive, rapid-response mediation efforts. With the peculiarities in the Bangsamoro, piloting programs for strengthening community-based mediation, with tailored interventions in Lanao (Sultanate-based), Maguindanao, Special Geographic Areas and the Zamboanga Peninsula (hybrid systems) would inform foundational knowledge and encourage broader understanding of the logistics and costs involved during pre-negotiation, negotiation and implementation of peace covenants.

Potential ways forward

- Establish and access community mediation centres or hubs at strategic sites in the Bangsamoro to address the need for equipment, and other necessities for operations and documentation.
- Support livelihood training programs for community mediators and traditional/tribal mediators to strengthen their resolve and commitment to their volunteer work and advocacy.



Residents in BARMM during the pilot testing of the national election, a common conflict trigger in the region.
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ANNEXES

ANNEX A: PROFILE OF MEDIATORS AND ORGANISATIONS

The study engaged 56 informants across multiple areas in the Bangsamoro region, including civil society leaders, religious authorities, women mediators and Indigenous leaders. The participant profile reflected cultural patterns of authority, with male mediators being more prevalent, particularly in *rido* cases involving land conflicts and political disputes. Women mediators, although fewer in number, played pivotal roles in addressing family conflicts, early marriage, and gender-based violence, often combining advocacy, counselling, and informal mediation to resolve disputes. The key organisations represented in the study varied in terms of scope, coverage, and mediation approaches. Together, these mediators and organisations reflect a diverse ecosystem of conflict resolution in the Bangsamoro, combining formal, customary, and community-driven approaches adapted to the region's unique cultural, political, and social contexts.

The BLACPAS, initially established in 2010 as an ad-hoc committee under the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and formally recognised in 2024, primarily handles land conflicts, *rido*, and war-related disputes in areas such as municipalities of Raja Buayan, Datu Abdula Sangki, Sultan Sa Barongis, and Ampatuan. Its members are often former Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces, and its approach relied on interviews, reconciliation, narrative reporting, and sharing resolutions with the involved parties.

Women-led organisations, including the Salindaw Women's Organization, Segay na mga Babae, and Lingantangan Organization, focus on family disputes, early marriage, and violence against women and children. These organisations mainly operated in Datu Salibo, Shariff Saydona Mustapha, and Datu Saudi in Maguindanao del Sur. They employed informal mediation techniques, counselling, and community advocacy, earning the trust and confidence of the communities they served.

The Iranun Reconciliation Council, established in 2017, covers five municipalities in the Iranun Corridor: Buldon, Barira, Matanog, Parang, and Sultan Mastura. Composed of Moro Islamic Liberation Front, Moro National Liberation Front, AFP, religious leaders, and women representatives, the Iranun Reconciliation Council specialises in handling *rido*, land disputes, marital issues, and politically sensitive *rido* cases. Their

conflict resolution approach combines dialogue, case profiling, and community awareness-raising about customary laws, emphasising both procedural rigour and cultural sensitivity.

Reconciliatory Initiatives for Development Opportunities extends mediation services across Lanao del Sur and selected municipalities in Lanao del Norte to resolve conflicts between clans. By integrating the Sultanate system, *Shari'ah* law, and volunteer mediators, Reconciliatory Initiatives for Development Opportunities addresses clan feuds (*rido*), inheritance disputes, land conflicts, and marital cases. The organisation's practice is deeply rooted in M'ranao cultural norms, prioritising clan-based consensus and genealogy, and offering win-win solutions that blend Indigenous and Islamic principles.

The Nonviolent Peaceforce, operating in Cotabato City since 2007, focuses on unarmed civilian peacekeeping and conflict mediation, particularly in land disputes and politically motivated conflicts. The Nonviolent Peaceforce's approach emphasises shuttle diplomacy, dialogue facilitation, and addressing the root causes of violence, such as the proliferation of firearms, rather than relying solely on formal justice mechanisms.

Policy, technical, and community support are also provided by government-linked and institutional organisations. The Bangsamoro Women's Commission offers gender-focused policy support and knowledge sharing, bridging the gap between formal and community-based dispute resolution. The Bangsamoro Human Rights Commission provides legal aid, financial assistance, and investigative services for human rights violations, ensuring protection for vulnerable individuals. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples Affairs (MIPA) and Indigenous Peoples organisations, such as the Teduray Lambangian Women's Organization, facilitated conflict resolution based on customary laws, particularly in ancestral domains, using dialogue, consensus, and culturally grounded penalties to resolve disputes efficiently.

ANNEX B: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION RESPONDENTS AND THEIR GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION

Community-based mediators in Maguindanao del Sur.

The focus group discussion was conducted in Shariff Aguak, Maguindanao del Sur on 19 August 2025, with representatives from three community-based organisations who are local mediators operating in different municipalities across the province, supported by the Ministry of Public Order and Safety. A total of 16 male mediators participated in the focus group discussion. These mediators are engaged in addressing local disputes, particularly *rido* cases, in the Province of Maguindanao del Sur. The table below summarises the geographic areas covered by each organisation:

Organisation	Area of coverage (Maguindanao del Sur Province)
Bangsamoro Local Adhoc Committee on Peace and Solidarity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ampatuan • Rajah Buayan • Sultan sa Barongis • Datu Abdullah Sangki
Bangsamoro United Forces Mediators Authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Datu Piang • Datu Salibo • Datu Saudi Ampatuan • Mamasapano • Talayan
Magungaya Organization for Peace and Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Datu Anggal Midtimbang • Guindulungan • Talayan • Talitay

Women’s organisations in Maguindanao del Sur

A focus group discussion was held on 19 August 2025 in Datu Salibo, Maguindanao del Sur with women’s organisations based in selected towns of Maguindanao del Sur, affiliated with the Social Welfare Committee of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. These organisations mediate family-based and community-level disputes and bring gender perspectives into local mediation practices. Ten women mediators participated in the discussion, representing the following organisations:

- Lingantangan Organization Kapagisa-isa – operating in communities in Shariff Saydona Mustapha
- Salindaw Women’s Organization – based in Datu Salibo
- Segay na mga Babay – covering Datu Saudi Ampatuan

Collective mediation body in the Iranun areas of Maguindanao del Norte

A focus group discussion was held on 20 August 2025 in Parang, Maguindanao with 13 members of the Iranun Reconciliation Council, a collective mediation body actively engaged in resolving *rido* and other disputes across Iranun municipalities. Formally organised in 2017 with support from the the Ministry of Public Order and Safety, the Iranun Reconciliation Council operates in the Iranun corridor, covering the municipalities of Buldon, Barira, Matanog, Parang, and Sultan Mastura.

Civil society organisations are engaged in conflict resolution in the Zamboanga Peninsula

On 25 August 2025, a focus group discussion was conducted in Zamboanga City with 11 participants from the Tawi-Tawi Darul-Ifta’ and several civil society organisations implementing mediation and conflict resolution initiatives in the Zamboanga Peninsula. The participating organisations included:

- Integrated Resource Development for Tri-People
- Lupa Sug Advocators for Peace and Development
- Philippine Council for Evangelical Churches
- Peace Connect Youth Advocate
- Claret Samal Foundation, Inc.
- Tawi-Tawi Family Life Foundation, Inc.

ANNEX C: KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW RESPONDENTS AND THEIR AFFILIATIONS

Key informant interviews were conducted from 16–24 September 2025 with representatives of selected Bangsamoro ministries, as well as leaders of civil society and sectoral organisations (including women’s, traditional leaders’ and Indigenous Peoples’ groups). These interviews complemented the focus group discussions by providing deeper insights into conflict mediation and resolution practices, the role of formal institutions in supporting community-level mechanisms, and perspectives on the risks and opportunities of integrating traditional, religious, and state-based approaches to conflict resolution. The key informant interviews also helped surface issues not always captured in group settings, such as the security risks faced by mediators, the negotiation of justice in serious crime cases, and the tokenistic versus substantive role of women in *rido* settlements. The table below summarises the number of participants and their affiliations:

Number of respondent/s	Agency/organisation	Type
1	Bangsamoro Attorney General’s Office	BARMM
1	Statutory Committees Support Service of the Plenary and Committee Affairs	BARMM
2	Ministry of Public Order and Safety - Alternative Dispute Resolution Division	BARMM
2	Moro National Liberation Front	Former Combatant Group
1	Moro Islamic Liberation Front	Former Combatant Group
1	Municipal Government of South Upi	Local Government Unit
4	Community security working groups	Locally-led network
2	Office of MP Froilyn Mendoza	BARMM
2	United Youth for Peace and Development	Civil society
1	Consortium of Bangsamoro Civil Society	Civil society
1	Shariah district court	Judicial
1	Bangsamoro Human Rights Commission	BARMM
3	Teduray Lambangian Women’s Organization	Civil society
1	Bangsamoro Women Commission	BARMM
1	Ministry of Indigenous Peoples Affairs	BARMM
1	Reconciliation Initiatives for Development Opportunities	Civil Society and Traditional leader (Sultanate)
1	Non-violent Peace Force	International non-governmental organisation
1	Darul Ifta	Religious
1	Federation of Women Royalty of Lanao	Traditional women leader/s

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