



# *Strengthening Local Voices*

I am **Pemraida Andoy-Santiago**, President of the Bagoenged Youth Organization (BYO), one of UNYPAD's partner organizations. I am a resident of Barangay Bagoenged in the Municipality of Pagalungan. Since I was four years old, I have experienced multiple displacements due to armed conflicts, mainly caused by rido (clan feuds), political rivalry, and clashes between the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the Philippine Armed Forces. **All I can remember about my childhood is that we were survivors of armed conflicts.** Because of these recurring conflicts, displacement has become a normal part of our lives in the community.

Growing up in such a remote and conflict-affected community where tradition still heavily influences our daily lives, especially in local governance, I believe that engaging in the activities delivered by UNYPAD allowed me to broaden my perspective and deepen my understanding of inclusive, participatory, and consultative governance. I realized that we should be consultative, participative, and inclusive, especially when it comes to governance—that **women should be represented and significantly involved in decision-making processes.**

Another key takeaway for me is the importance of having the knowledge and capacity to articulate our issues and concerns. This is vital in representing the community, especially marginalized sectors, and in effectively advocating for my community's needs. If you don't communicate, people won't know what your problem is, what you are concerned about, or what recommendations you want to put forward. You are, in this sense, unable to adequately represent your sector.

The knowledge I gained from these activities proved to be truly useful. I was able to apply and echo my learnings not only to my fellow BYO members but also to our local leaders in the community. One example is when I shared insights and recommendations from the session on Understanding Moral Governance with our barangay captain. I explained that it would be beneficial if our current governance structure included women, persons with disabilities (PWDs), and elders.

I truly believe that each sector should be able to raise their voice and share their perspectives. Previously, barangay assemblies focused only on updates about completed projects, ongoing activities, or proposed plans. I emphasized to our leaders then that these assemblies should not be one-sided and that they need to include community voices and allow residents to raise their concerns in these spaces. As a result, our local council now includes representation from women, PWDs, and senior citizens.

For me, participating in capacity-building activities benefits not only myself but also the broader community. I help build capacity by sharing and applying what I have learned.

***Pemraida's story illustrates how affected communities can enhance their knowledge and improve their capacity for inclusive governance, advocacy, and peacebuilding through engagement in capacity-building activities.***

*Since the start of the INCLUDE BARMM Project, the United Youth for Peace and Development (UNYPAD) has been actively capacitating and supporting community partners in the municipalities of Pikit, North Cotabato, and Pagalungan, Maguindanao del Sur. This has been done through activities such as the Forum on Transitional Justice in the Bangsamoro; Understanding Moral Governance in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM); and Dialogue between the madaris leaders and BARMM institutions and agencies.*

# *Protecting Ancestral Land*

I am **Timuay Elmer Saglayan**, a tribal leader and spokesperson for Task Force Bantay Kalikasan (TFBK) in Barangay Kuya, South Upi, Maguindanao. I help safeguard the rights of indigenous people and our ancestral domain. In my spare time, I volunteer with the Teduray Lambangian Women's Organization, Inc. (TLWOI).

For years, our community has been plagued by conflicts arising from multiple overlapping land claims. Different people come to our barangay bringing titles to land we believe we have inherited from our ancestors, claiming it as their own. We have no experts in our community to assist or guide us in countering these claims, and our knowledge of land ownership processes is limited. We really need to learn, study, and find others who can help us.

When I was invited to capacity-building activities under the INCLUDE BARMM Project, I eagerly participated to enhance my skills and knowledge, especially in resolving land conflicts in Barangay Kuya. I thought then that because many claim ownership of our land using questionable titles, it is important that we learn how to manage and resolve these conflicts.

I found the activities very helpful, most notably the Land Rights Education sessions, where I learned about different land classifications, which types of land can be titled, how to obtain legal documents, and which agencies to approach. I became familiar with government programs like the Community-Based Forest Management Agreement (CBFMA)--an agreement between the Department of Environment and Natural Resources and the community, represented by the People's Organization, as forest managers.

I found the Legal Rights Education sessions highly beneficial, particularly in understanding the importance of complying with legal requirements for land ownership while harmonizing these with our traditional customs and historical narratives. I have since shared my learnings and applied them as I journey with and represent my community in resolving land disputes. **Because of the legal rights education, I can now guide and advocate for my community properly.**

Now, I help ensure that any land claims are supported by valid legal documents while still adhering to our customary procedures and honoring historical narratives of land ownership. I integrate practical methods, such as marking boundaries with strings, to resolve disputes and ensure clarity on property lines. I believe these sessions will help keep our community safe and better equipped to deal with and resolve land conflicts.

I deeply appreciate the support provided by the project. **As a leader, I now feel confident in guiding others on the correct processes. I make sure that land claims are properly documented and go through both legal and traditional procedures.** I continue to encourage my fellow IPs to secure proper documentation for their lands. These efforts have strengthened our community's ability to protect our ancestral land.





## *Finding Her Voice: Nashiba's Journey to Empowerment*

I am **Nashiba Abdul**, and I live with my husband and eight children in a temporary shelter in Barangay Pantaon, Marawi City, where I cook and sell *amik*, a traditional Maranao delicacy, to support my family.

When fighting broke out in Marawi in 2017, our lives changed overnight. The clashes between the Maute group, an armed group linked to ISIS, and the military forced thousands of families, including mine, to flee. We stayed in an evacuation center for months. Life there was tough. Even when we moved to a transitory shelter, the uncertainty of our future remained. We never imagined that the effects of the conflict would last this long. It is deeply frustrating to be passed over for a permanent shelter simply because we were only renters at the time of the siege. We continue to struggle to make ends meet, send our children to school, and even access potable water. Yet, like many other women in my community, I kept my head down and focused on getting food on the table every day. My voice paled in comparison to my children's hunger.

When I was invited to join IID's activities, I decided to participate out of curiosity, wanting to learn what these sessions had to offer. I joined various activities, including a Workshop on Transitional Justice and Reconciliation; a Gender, Women, Peace and Security Orientation Workshop; and various Legal Coaching and Mentoring Sessions on the Marawi Siege Victims Compensation Act of 2022.

Later on, I became one of the members of SINDAW (Strengthened Initiatives re-Defining Actions of Women), a women, peace and security advocacy platform for internally displaced women in Marawi.

Through my involvement in these activities and as a member of SINDAW, I realized that women can and should speak up for their rights. I am no longer afraid to face others, and **I'm not ashamed anymore to speak up about my rights and to help other women**. I used to be afraid to help other women, but now, when someone is abused by her husband, I help her. Our problems persist, but I have found my voice. I realized, problems don't fix themselves, but neither do I have to fix them by myself. We need to learn to demand our rights.

I applied for compensation and helped fellow IDPs with their applications by sharing my experience with the process. I have become more confident in my skills as an IDP woman leader and now actively participate in SINDAW activities, including consultative meetings with duty-bearers and peer advocates. I engage in lobby missions to speak for my community. I have also started educating my daughter about gender-based violence, hoping that she will never have to experience it herself.

***From a quiet vendor struggling to survive, Nashiba has become a more articulate and confident rights-claimant, a peer support for other women, and an evolving advocate for women, peace and security.***

# *Family Conversations for Peace: A Mother's Story of Change*

Surrounded by the hills and farmlands of Piagapo, Lanao del Sur, lies Barangay Tapocan, where I, **Camalia Ditucalan**, live with my husband and five children. While my husband works, I run a small convenience store and volunteer as a community health worker to support our family. I am also one of the founders of the Tapocan Organization of Women and Youth Solidarity (TOWAYS), a recipient of the Fertilizer and Agro-Supply Livelihood Project funded by the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF) through the INCLUDE BARMM Project, implemented by the Kalimudan sa Ranao Foundation, Inc. (KFI).

I have also participated in several activities under the project, including the Family Conversation, a session designed to strengthen communication, understanding, and relationships within families in the community. Before these activities, we usually had very little time as a family because of work and responsibilities. My husband is a truck driver and is away most of the time, while my children are all in school daily. I was also busy with our store and my role as a community health worker, so we rarely had time together.

When I decided to join the Family Conversation with my 18-year-old son, it was because I wanted to improve our relationship. He is my "stubborn one," and I wanted us to learn how to communicate better with him and deal with our issues as a family. Back then, I would often dismiss his dream of becoming a nurse and insisted that he pursue engineering instead. We frequently clashed over his ambition.

During the Family Conversation, we were encouraged to express what we wanted to tell our family members. Our children are not usually expressive toward us, neither are we to them. So that activity allowed them to say things they could not at home. I will never forget the family commitment session. It was the first time I heard my son tell me that he loved me and that he was doing his best at school for me. It was heartwarming, and I cried tears of joy.

Since then, I have been applying what I learned in my daily life. My children now share what they do in school, something they didn't do before. **We talk more at home, sometimes go out to bond, and I now fully support their ambitions.**

By participating in the Family Conversation, I realized that children also need to be understood and that they have rights, too. I learned the value of mutual respect and that a child's ambition matters and should be supported. The experience taught me that understanding, respect, and open communication are key to a happy family. I do believe that happiness like this extends to the community.

I am grateful for the Family Conversation. It helped me deal with misunderstandings and taught me to respect my children's dreams. The activity has been a huge help to our family. We have become closer and more open with one another.

***The family conversations provided a safe space for families to reconnect, strengthen relationships, and communicate more openly. It helped them gain a deeper understanding of one another and offer mutual support, fostering healthier family dynamics and contributing to social cohesion. These strengthened bonds make families and communities less vulnerable to conflict and feelings of dis-inclusion.***





# *Empowering the Displaced*

I am **Najmah Sangcapan**, an IDP (internally displaced person) leader from Barangay Sagonsongan in Marawi City. I once resided in ground zero, an area in Marawi City that was significantly destroyed during the May 2017 siege—a five-month-long armed encounter between the ISIS-associated Maute group and the government forces. Displaced and with our properties destroyed, I hoped for compensation to help us recover what we lost in the siege.

I have participated in several activities under the INCLUDE BARMM Project, such as Inter-Community Conversations on Land Issues, Information Dissemination on the Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) of the Compensation Bill, Legal Rights Education Trainings, and Legal Clinics. These activities helped us learn about our rights, navigate the complex process, and assert our claims for just compensation.

Before joining these activities, I had not yet applied for compensation and was completely unfamiliar with and intimidated by the process. While interested, I was more overwhelmed to the point of demotivated to file for compensation. After attending the sessions, I learned the application process, how to fill out the forms, and what documents to submit to the Marawi Compensation Board (MCB). **I became more aware of my rights as a claimant and as an IDP, and was prepared to navigate the complex process.** I bravely faced challenges in filing my claims application. I felt infinitely more confident in engaging with the compensation process than I was at the onset.

I encouraged and assisted my fellow IDPs with their applications for compensation. This helped prevent them from believing false information about the Marawi Compensation Act and its process. As a result, some of them have applied for compensation too, while others are now interested in joining the capacity-building activities of the INCLUDE BARMM Project.

***Najma's actions reflect strong rights-seeking, rights-affirming, and rights-claiming behavior grounded in an appreciation for transitional justice and conflict transformation. Her efforts to encourage fellow IDPs show a desire for community recovery and transformation that nurtures reconciliation and peace, and fosters social cohesion and collective healing.***

***Her eagerness to capacitate herself has not only benefited her but has also empowered others to understand their rights, pursue transitional justice and reconciliation, and transform a painful experience into an opportunity to heal, recover, and rebuild.***

# *Educating for Peace*

I am **Saima Maulana, PhD**, a former internally displaced person (IDP) from Mamasapano, a conflict-affected municipality in Maguindanao del Sur. I am now a professor at the College of Education of Mindanao State University (MSU) in Maguindanao, and I currently reside with my family in Datu Odin Sinsuat.

In addition to my role as a professor, I serve as an advisor for The Scribe, the official student publication of MSU Maguindanao, and I am a curriculum committee member responsible for developing the syllabus and module for Peace Education.

I used to struggle with the idea of discussing peace--the concept felt so extrinsic. I believed then that teachers needed to first specialize or at least undergo extensive training to be able to teach it. This changed after I completed the Peace Education Training for teacher-educators from the twelve campuses of the Mindanao State University System (MSUS), organized by the Center for Peace Education of Miriam College (CPE-MC) through the INCLUDE BARM Project. The training, much less intimidating than it sounded before, deepened my understanding of the essential elements of Peace Education.

Before the training, I believed I had no knowledge or skills in Peace Education. But the sessions helped address my anxieties around the concept and simplified it for me. In the end, the sessions helped me understand how to handle students who misbehave and use those moments to teach peace, the importance of dialogue and communication, and how I can integrate Peace Education into my teaching strategies, subjects, and programs. The strategies are not so foreign after all. I became more knowledgeable about the concepts of peace. I used to think that I needed to be an expert or take formal courses to teach it, but the training made me realize that this is not the case.

I realized that **I can embed Peace Education using various media in any subject I teach**. For example, when I instructed my students to do a roleplay on handling bullying, they presented Dr. Marshall's method of anger management. Through the roleplay, the students learned the value of discussing the issue, talking to the persons involved, expressing their feelings, and stating their requests. They were able to explore how both teachers and students can handle, learn, and build better relationships from these situations. I believe this can be used in communities outside the academe, too.

I apply the lessons from the training not only in my classroom but also in my daily life. I now believe that I can manage conflict situations better and use various communication strategies to prevent conflict. I now choose my words carefully, compared to how blunt and imposing I was before. If I want to embody peace, I know that I must always choose to be, in every word, in every action. As a peace educator, this should be evident within myself.

**Since the training, I have become a speaker on the integration of Peace Education at MSU. I help promote Peace Education in the university and aspire to support its integration or mainstreaming across the MSU curriculum as much as possible.** As an advisor for The Scribe, I also hope to integrate what I have learned through peace journalism.

***By capacitating teacher-educators like Saima to integrate Peace Education into their classes and curriculum, students also become more capable of navigating or managing situations that can lead to conflict, and contribute to safer and more peaceful communities.***





## *A Community Leader's Journey in Land Conflict Resolution*

I am **Samsodin Ayob**, a Moro community leader. When people in our communities talk about land issues, I often find myself in the middle of the conversation. As a former *kagawad* (Barangay Councilor) who served from 2018 to 2023, neighbors regularly approached me to ask questions or seek advice. This problem on land goes back many years--when our elders were displaced. When they returned, the land was already occupied.

For decades, overlapping land claims between Moros, Indigenous Peoples, and settlers created tensions in our community. Some Moro families could no longer access their land, while others struggled with disputes arising from transactions that were never formally documented. These unresolved issues worried me. I wanted to learn how we could begin resolving them in a way that would prevent further conflict.

That opportunity came when I joined activities such as community conversations, legal rights education sessions, and legal clinics under the INCLUDE BARMM Project.

The activities helped me make sense of processes that once felt overwhelming and foreign. I learned how land ownership should be documented, how titles are processed, and how disagreements should be handled. I attended because I wanted to know the right procedures. We needed to **learn how to settle things the correct and peaceful way.**

What struck me most was the emphasis on dialogue. I realized that disagreements do not have to lead to conflict. The most important lesson for me is finding ways to talk and understand each other. If we rely only on arguments, nothing will be solved.

These lessons soon became part of my work in the community. As a member of the Moro Core Group and the Moro Community Sectoral Working Group (CSWG), I help bring community concerns to local authorities and work closely with the Indigenous Peoples (IP) CSWG to resolve long-standing issues. **Through continued dialogue and coordination between the two CSWGs, we were able to help peacefully resolve three of the thirteen land-related conflicts identified in our area.** These conversations were not easy, but they showed that when we talk and listen to each other, we can find solutions.

I see myself not only as someone affected by land disputes but also as someone helping shape their resolution. I hope the support continues as long as needed. We want the issues on land to be settled properly. People deserve to restore what was lost and feel secure in their own land.

# *Building Peace through Madaris Education*

In Barangay Buliok, Ligawasan, a municipality in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), I, **Ustadz Muamar Ali**, serve as the *moder* or school head of Madrasah Atta'leymul Islamiyyah, Inc., which currently caters to 164 students. With an enrollment fee of PHP 200.00 (USD 3.39) per student, the school usually receives many enrollees at the start of the school year. However, this number gradually decreases due to various reasons, such as shifting priorities, increasing costs of school materials that households could barely afford as it is, and declining motivation among students who feel that studying Arabic will not lead to job opportunities.

The madrasah also faces challenges with its facilities. We do not have enough books, and many students are forced to sit on the floor due to a shortage of chairs. Some classrooms lack blackboards, while others have ones that are damaged. One reason students are reluctant to study in the madrasah is that it does not look like a proper school. If the school facilities were better, students would be more motivated to learn< I believe. We also struggle with a shortage of teachers due to insufficient funds to pay their salaries. Teaching in the madrasah is more like volunteer work.

These challenges are not unique to Madrasah Atta'leymul Islamiyyah. Many madaris in the region face similar issues, including insufficient funding and inadequate facilities. Recognizing these challenges as well as the importance of madaris education in peacebuilding and conflict transformation, the United Youth for Peace and Development (UNYPAD), through the INCLUDE BARMM Project, has been supporting madaris like ours. We are now registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), which grants us legal recognition and access to funding and resources.

We also engaged in dialogue with the BARMM MBHTE (Ministry of Basic, Higher, and Technical Education), the BTA (Bangsamoro Transition Authority), and the Tarbiyah sector, responsible for Islamic education affairs under the Political Committee of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), to discuss current developments, challenges, and needs. In addition, our partner madaris were provided with essential learning materials, particularly books designed to enhance Arabic language skills and deepen understanding of Islamic teachings and good behavior. These efforts provided **a platform for us to voice our concerns as madaris and fostered understanding and collaboration with related institutions.**

I am hopeful for Madrasah Atta'leymul Islamiyyah. Surely, I believe we will be able to sustain children's access to madaris education.

***The project was able to empower and capacitate partner madaris and ustadzs, enabling them to deliver more structured and effective lessons. This, in turn, improved students' learning experiences and helped prevent madaris from becoming breeding grounds for extremist ideologies. These efforts also further strengthened the resilience of youth and communities against violent extremism and helped address dis-inclusion as they are likely to stay in school.***





# *Empowering a Mother, Strengthening a Family*

I am **Eznairah Camad** from Barangay Tapocan, Piagapo, Lanao del Sur. I dedicate much of my time to looking after my four children, one of whom lives with a disability. With my responsibilities at home, I seldom joined activities outside our household. However, when the Kalimudan sa Ranao Foundation, Inc. (KFI) invited me to participate in sessions under the INCLUDE BARMM Project, I welcomed the chance to learn and connect with others in my community.

One of the activities I attended was the Family Conversation, held in Piagapo in 2024. The session brought together mothers, in-laws, and relatives to talk openly about family relationships and challenges. For me, it became a turning point. I was able to share what I feel about caring for my children. It gave me strength, and I realized I could take care of my children better.

Before the session, I carried the weight of caring for my children on my own. The stress often made me raise my voice. I used to be hard on my kids, but during the Family Conversation, I saw how my behavior affected them. I learned how to talk to them with more patience.

Not long after the session, I began putting the lessons into practice. I listened more, spoke more gently, and tried to be patient even when tired. My daughter-in-law noticed the change right away. She told me I needed to soften my approach, and I realized she was right. **I want my children to learn the right values, not to obey out of fear.**

The activity also brought me closer to my relatives. I now feel more connected to the women in my community because many of them attended the same sessions. We laugh together. If I do not understand something, I just ask them. We support each other.

Through ongoing dialogues, the program continues to reach communities like ours. For me, these spaces opened doors I never imagined. Before, I did not know anything. Now, I feel more confident. I learned so much.

I hope the support continues, not only for myself but for every mother in Barangay Tapocan who longs for a better life. We just want better lives for our children. **These sessions help us grow, understand one another, and care for our families in a more loving way.**

***Through the Family Conversations, families in Piagapo grew more connected, supportive, and united, thereby creating the foundations of a peaceful and secure community.***

# *Empowered to Lead*

I am **Irene Kel**, a youth Indigenous Teduray leader from Sitio Manguda, Barangay Itaw, South Upi, Maguindanao. I am the President of the Clan Manguda Agriculture and Fusaka Inged (CMAFI), a community-based group composed of 25 members working together to strengthen our livelihoods through duck farming, vegetable gardening, and livestock production. A mother of one, I balance my responsibilities at home and in the community, determined to help my people protect our land and build sustainable livelihoods.

Before I became involved in community activities, I had little knowledge of laws protecting Indigenous Peoples (IP), especially those related to ancestral land ownership. In our area, land disputes were common, and many residents were unaware of how to defend their rights when outsiders tried to claim or mortgage parts of our ancestral domain. We didn't really know what to do before. Some people would just sell their land or let others use it without knowing the consequences.

In 2022, our community was displaced for five months due to tension over land ownership. I recall how difficult that period was, when families had limited access to food, sanitation, and livelihoods. We were afraid to go home, but we also didn't want to keep running. The experience made me realize the importance of securing land tenure and preventing future conflicts through knowledge and dialogue. Soon after, my understanding began to change when I joined activities conducted under the INCLUDE BARMM Project. Through the project, I participated in several community dialogues on land conflict resolution, legal rights education sessions, and women's leadership and empowerment activities.

From these activities, I learned about the importance of securing legal documents such as barangay certificates and land validation papers to prevent outsiders from exploiting ancestral lands. I also gained a deeper understanding of women's roles in peacebuilding, realizing that **women can be active defenders of our communities**. Before, I thought only men could handle land issues. Now I know that **women can also speak up, especially when it comes to protecting our rights**.

Since then, I have become an active member of our community. I help organize meetings to discuss land-related problems and encourage my neighbors to resolve disputes through dialogue. I also assist in facilitating community gatherings to address internal issues, such as unauthorized land mortgaging. Through these efforts, my group and I have begun promoting unity and cooperation among residents to strengthen our collective voice.

Now, I lead CMAFI and promote awareness of IP rights within our community. I have advocated for the passage of the Bangsamoro Indigenous Peoples Act (Bangsamoro Autonomy Act No. 64) and the implementation of the Community-Based Forest Management (CBFM) program to strengthen the protection and sustainable management of our ancestral lands.

