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Development Initiatives in Armed Conflict Affected Areas in Negros Occidental

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Abstract

A combination of descriptive research and phenomenology attempted to Assess the extent of effectiveness of the social and economic development initiatives undertaken and implemented in areas characterized by armed conflict. Participated by a sample size of 399 residents of communities influenced by Tabara-Paduano Group Revolutionary Proletarian Army Alex Boncayao Brigade, which are found in Northern, Central, and Southern Negros as well as 20 implementers. Social Development initiatives include health, housing, education, and peace and security; whereas economic development initiatives are the livelihood, economic infra support, and basic utilities. When residents are taken as a whole and grouped according to variables, the social and economic development initiatives are assessed as average in terms of the extent of effectiveness and implementers agree, too. When the scores generated by variables are compared, there is found to be no significant difference. The result implies that age, sex, and educational attainment cannot affect the way residents assess these initiatives. Moreover, when the assessment of both initiatives by the implementers are compared, there is no significant difference in the scores when they are grouped according to level. Thus, it is not a significant factor in assessing the effectiveness of social and economic development initiatives. However, there is a significant difference in the scores of implementers when grouped according to an agency, implies that the agency which implementers represent can cause them to assess initiatives differently. The result of the study was the basis for formulating a strategic action plan to sustain development initiatives in the community.

1. Introduction

The 2016 Global Peace Index described the world as more threatening than ever with merely ten countries left that are believed to be conflict-free.

In the Philippines, the whole world is shocked at the numerous deaths as a result of the government's intensifying resolve to put an end to the drug menace. The recently concluded five-month ordeal of the people of Marawi, Lanao del Sur that left the place in ruins and orphaned so many families of soldiers, civilians, and even rebels dampened the image of the nation to the global community.

In the local scene in 2012, the Governor of the Province of Negros Occidental created the Provincial Peace, Integration and Development Unit (Pro-PIDU), by virtue of Executive Order No. 12-016, Series of 2012. He believes that peace could reign supreme and that conflict may be transformed into ardent collaboration in fighting against poverty and injustice. Thus, Negros Occidental was among the nine provinces in the country in 2015, which have been proclaimed as peaceful and being geared up for development. This was made possible because of the productive collaboration between the military and the civilians, who have accepted shared responsibility in confronting threats to public order and safety (Lumaque, 2015) [8].

Recently, however, it cannot be denied that there have been threats from the rebel groups that want to assert their strength and establish their presence. The Negros Occidental Police Provincial Office (NOCPPO) is on red alert after the staging of ambush attacks by the New People's Army in a nearby island (Masculino, 2017) [9]. Armed conflict still affects many towns and cities in the province.

Armed conflict, being synonymous with the war itself, accomplishes nothing but destruction to life, property, and disposition. Structures may be rebuilt, control may be regained, but the damage done to one's thoughts, emotions, and spirit may never be reversed. The Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP), under the wings of the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG), has come up with *Payapa at MasaganangPamayanan*. The PAMANA for short,

recognizes the urgency of putting an end to the ills of armed conflict and assisting the unwilling victims of its occurrence in the community. It is the government's dedicated development program to help the individuals and families in isolated, inaccessible, conflict-laden, and conflict-vulnerable communities deal with their predicament and still manage to hope for a brighter and better tomorrow.

There have been evidences that point out to enhanced conditions of people in areas characterized by armed conflict. Doors to livelihood and employment have been open to them. Basic goods and services have become more reachable. Government programs and projects have been staged to benefit their communities. Peace has started to take shape because National Government Agencies and Local Government Units, among others, have adopted and executed the agenda to attain it. Security from threats and risks has been controlled. PAMANA communities have been trained and empowered to tackle conflict and get involved in peace-building initiatives.

PAMANA has earned the support of the Duterte Administration and is designed to work along the line of the Six-Point Peace and Development Agenda, especially in promoting peace, in working towards enhancement of socio-economic conditions, transforming conflict-vulnerable communities, and in establishing and sustaining a culture of peace. It has been six years since its launching, and it is about time that objective evaluation of its fruits is made to see if it is making any important progress or if there is any gap to fill.

It is the researcher's objective to assess the extent of effectiveness of the social and economic development initiatives undertaken and implemented in areas characterized by armed conflict and see which aspects could be sustained or improved and what more to introduce to benefit the residents as well as the implementers more meaningfully. Since all the initiatives were found effective, though in varying extent, certain initiatives would be sustained and a strategic action plan to enhance the implementation of the development initiatives in armed conflict-affected areas in Negros Occidental is proposed to yield consistently promising outcome.

1.2 Statement of the problem

This study is aimed at assessing the extent of effectiveness of socio-economic development initiatives extended to the communities in areas affected by armed conflict in Negros Occidental.

Specifically, it seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What is the extent of effectiveness of social development initiatives in areas affected by armed conflict in Negros Occidental in terms of
a. Health
b. Housing
c. Education
d. Peace &Security
as assessed by residents when taken as a whole and grouped as to:
a. Sex
b. Age
c. Educational Attainment

2. What is the extent of effectiveness of economic development initiatives in areas affected by armed conflict in Negros Occidental in terms of
a. Livelihood
b. Economic Infra Support
c. Basic Utilities
as assessed by residents when taken as a whole and grouped as to:
a. Sex
b. Age
c. Educational Attainment

3. What is the extent of effectiveness of social development initiatives in areas affected by armed conflict in Negros Occidental in terms of
a. Health
b. Housing
c. Education
d. Peace & Security
as assessed by implementers when taken as a whole and grouped as to:
a. Government Level
b. Agencies

4. What is the extent of effectiveness of economic development initiatives in areas affected by armed conflict in Negros Occidental in terms of
a. Livelihood
b. Economic Infra Support
c. Basic Utilities
as assessed by implementers when taken as a whole and grouped as to:
a. Government Level
b. Agencies

5. Is there a significant difference in the extent of effectiveness of social development initiatives in areas affected by armed conflict in Negros Occidental as assessed by the residents when they are grouped according to variables?

6. Is there a significant difference in the extent of effectiveness of economic development initiatives in areas affected by armed conflict in Negros Occidental as assessed by the residents when they are grouped according to variables?

7. Is there a significant difference in the extent of effectiveness of social development initiatives in areas affected by armed conflict in Negros Occidental as assessed by the implementers when they are grouped according to variables?

8. Is there a significant difference in the extent of effectiveness of economic development initiatives in areas affected by armed conflict in Negros Occidental as assessed by the implementers when they are grouped according to variables?

9. What are the challenges encountered by implementers in extending development initiatives in areas affected by armed conflict in Negros Occidental?

10. What are the lived experiences of residents in the areas affected by armed conflict in Negros Occidental?

Based on the statement of the problem mentioned above, these hypotheses are advanced: There is no significant difference in the extent of effectiveness of social and economic development initiatives in areas affected by armed conflict in Negros Occidental as assessed by the residents and implementers when they are grouped according to variables.

Conflict is bound to happen as two people, with different backgrounds and sets of values, meet and get into a relationship. It is the same case with two nations that strike international relations. This theory further affirms that a

person only responds to a stimulus, he is not absolutely good or absolutely evil. In the case of conflict-affected areas in Negros Occidental, there are residents who are recipients of the initiatives to contribute to their social and economic development. Development is defined as the process of enhancing the quality of all human lives and abilities by raising up people's standard of living, causing them to have higher self-esteem, and allowing them to enjoy a considerable amount of freedom (Todaro and Smith, 2012) [10].

Genuine development is carried out by empowering people. By doing so, local people should not be mere recipients of dole-outs; they should be empowered to make development initiatives more sustainable. If they are organized, they could exert more effort, verbalize their needs, and take action to solve their concerns, not just wait for things to happen to their community (Kotze, 2009) [5]. It is for this reason that implementers of initiatives should think of ways to empower people, not encourage dependence and laziness.

Globally, the thrust is towards Sustainable Development, the kind of progress that responds to the pressing needs of the current populace without jeopardizing the capabilities of the people in the future to address their concerns (Le Blanc *et al*., 2012) [6]. This started during the Earth Summit staged in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. There, member-countries agreed to identify common goals that they could all set out to attain in order to address problems in their respective locales, such as poverty alleviation, that seemed to plague most of them (United Nations, 2012) [11]. Among those recommended were preservation of resources and promotion of renewable energies, encouragement of innovation and creativity, empowerment of the human resources, provision of education and skills training to sustain progress, intensification of governance, integration of objectives, and improvement of access to food and enhancement of food security (Giovannucci *et al*, 2012) [3].

There was the Minimum Basic Needs (MBN) Approach put in place by the government to achieve the purposes outlined in the Social Reform Agenda (SRA). It opened the doors to the collaboration of entities, such as the local government units, national government agencies, non-government organizations, people's organizations, the private sector, and the civil society in the provision of basic needs – an essential foundation for the quality of life to improve finally. The Social Reform Agenda included three intervention techniques: making fundamental human services very accessible, providing amplified opportunities to earn a living, and enabling greater participation of organizations in local governance. It sought to prioritize certain sectors: farmers, fisherfolk, indigenous communities, deprived urban workforce (especially the ones engaged in informal work). Also, the particular groups who are regarded as underprivileged, including women, differently abled, young people, working students, the senior citizens, and victims of adversity (Department of the Interior and Local Government Academy, 1995 cited in Heinonen *et al*., 2000) [4].

For Lewis-Beck and Nadeau (2011) [7], economic development should cause citizens to have increased confidence in government because it can address and lessen poverty, but what at times transpires is that people are getting very dissatisfied with the government because economic development yields the opposite. Acemoglu, Egorov, and Sonin (2015) [1] assert that economic success does not necessarily jive with national stability because there are times when economic productivity is on the rise, but expectations of some are not met at all, resulting to losing faith in government, yielded to an approach that is the best practice of community development.

One significant theory that could be at play to attain the ideal community is conflict transformation. Conflict transformation is not just aimed at resolving the conflict. It does so much more. It seeks to work at identifying and addressing the deep-seated causes of conflict – particularly in the structure and in the society – by challenging unjust aspects and repairing human relations. It is not only a strategy but basically a disposition. It should follow the "3 Cs approach... comprehensive, compassionate and creative" (Galtung, 2009) [2].

2. Methodology
This study was participated in by residents in areas affected by armed conflict in the province of Negros Occidental. Among a total of about 179,971 residents in communities influenced by Revolutionary Proletarian Army in Northern, Central and Southern Negros, 399 residents were chosen using convenience sampling to answer the self-made questionnaire.

The implementers of the initiatives – fifteen from government agencies and five from non-government organizations – were asked to answer the self-made questionnaire. The quantitative data gathered need to be processed using statistical tools to make them more meaningful.

Statistical tools are used in interpreting the quantitative data in this study. To determine the extent of effectiveness of social and economic development initiatives in areas affected by armed conflict in Negros Occidental in terms of health, housing, education, and peace and security as assessed by residents and implementers when taken as a whole and when grouped according to variables, mean was used. To tell if there is a significant difference in the extent of effectiveness of social and economic development initiatives in areas affected by armed conflict in Negros Occidental as assessed by the residents and the implementers when they are grouped according to variables, ANOVA was used to treat the inferential data.

3. Results and discussion
When residents of armed conflict-affected areas are taken as a whole, the social development initiatives are assessed as average in terms of the extent of effectiveness, with only those that promote the health and well-being of the beneficiaries rated as high. When grouped according to age, sex, and educational attainment, the residents rated the extent of effectiveness of the social development initiatives also as average. The same result is yielded when the implementers are asked to rate health, housing, education, and peace and security initiatives as a whole and grouped according to level and agency.

On the other hand, when taken as a whole, the economic development initiatives were assessed by the residents of armed conflict-affected areas as average in terms of the extent of effectiveness. In fact, all three initiatives were said to have the average extent of effectiveness, with basic utilities getting the highest score. The same results are revealed when the residents are grouped according to age, sex, and educational attainment. Moreover, the implementers, both when taken as a whole and grouped

according to variables, agree with the residents that social development initiatives' extent of effectiveness is average; however, they believe that livelihood and income are topmost and basic utilities is the last in the list.

Moreover, when the assessment of both the social and economic development initiatives by the implementers are compared, there is no significant difference in the scores when they are grouped according to level. This means that the level which implementers come from is not a significant factor in assessing the effectiveness of social and economic development initiatives. However, there is a significant difference in the scores of the implementers when grouped according to an agency. This implies that the agency which implementers represent can cause them to assess initiatives differently.

Implementers had a difficult time trying to penetrate the community, especially if the residents do not know them yet. The residents are usually hesitant to accommodate and entertain new, unfamiliar faces as they could pose harm to them. They are needlessly suspicious of strangers. They are distant at first, not wanting to be identified with the "visitor" if ever they turn out to be a dangerous character. Implementers usually establish a contact person or persons in the community before they start to immerse. That way, there is someone who can vouch for their sincere intentions of coming there.

No matter how hesitant and suspicious the residents are, they are at times overtaken by their desire to have a better life, to be entitled to opportunities, and to enjoy assistance. So, a good entry point for implementers usually is to capture that aspect of the residents' thinking. Presenting to them livelihood opportunities or concrete benefits, like dole outs, always work as "eye catcher" and, later, "attention getter."

The topmost source of difficulty for the implementers is bureaucracy, especially at the barangay level. Sometimes, the assistance given to the people do not reach them at all because those who have access in the barangay take hold of the goods and supplies themselves for their personal gain.

There should be a convergence of the services of the agencies involved. It is just like hitting more birds with more stones coming from one source. The source is the common goal to be of help to others. There are many ways to do this as people are willing to help one another just to be of invaluable assistance to others.

Personally, the implementers never want to give up because the intention is there. Once they have made a strong resolve to help others out, especially from the armed conflict-affected communities, they have already prepared themselves for any eventuality – including the challenges and difficulties that go with it. They are willing to forge ahead and keep on doing what they can to reach their goals. However, great consideration is no matter how hard they try and no matter how determined they are to reach out to make a difference in the lives of others, it all depends on the openness of the beneficiaries to accept the assistance and to embrace the opportunities open for them.

Volunteering to be among the implementers of initiatives in armed conflict-affected areas is a choice. Moreover, because it is a personal choice, no one forced them into doing it. Many unimaginable challenges that confronted them, but the hardship could not compare to the sense of fulfillment after an initiative has been carried out and has been proven successful.

4. Conclusions

Social and economic development initiatives are found by both the residents and implementers to have the average extent of effectiveness. Age, sex, and educational attainment do not have significant effects when assessing initiatives.

Generally, health is the initiative that consistently got the highest mean scores – mostly interpreted as the high extent of effectiveness – while housing generated the lowest mean scores; although they are verbally interpreted as the average extent of effectiveness, they happen to be consistently the lowest among the four initiatives. Furthermore, Northern Negros residents gave the highest scores in all initiatives, while Southern Negros consistently yielded the lowest scores.

Generally, in terms of economic development initiatives, basic utilities have the highest mean scores, while livelihood and income garnered the lowest mean scores. Furthermore, Northern Negros residents gave the highest scores in all initiatives, while Southern Negros consistently yielded the lowest scores.

5. Recommendations

Based on the conclusions made, the researcher would like to recommend the following:

For the implementers of health initiatives, it is recommended that a comprehensive health program be drafted to ensure that mortality rate is controlled, treatment and essential medicines for common illnesses are on hand, and endemic diseases are prevented, among others.

For the implementers of housing initiatives, it is recommended that resources should be exhausted like establishing linkages with NHA and organizations like Gawad Kalinga so that house facilities can be made available to the conflict-vulnerable communities.

For the implementers of education initiatives, it is recommended that arrangements be made with TESDA and it is training providers so that skills training and technical-vocational education be made accessible to the communities through the establishment of remote or satellite classrooms in the area.

For the implementers of peace and security initiatives, it is recommended that a training workshop on conflict transformation be customized for the people in the area to enable them to take on an active role in peacebuilding.

For the implementers of livelihood and income initiatives, it is recommended that more opportunities be made available for the residents to earn a living, such as enabling them to earn non-cash income, allowing them access to capitalization for small-scale business at affordable interest rates, and providing them training in non-traditional skills.

For the implementers of economic infra support initiatives, it is recommended that they lobby for well-paved roads leading to far-flung areas as well as for better performances of the cottage industry and tourism sectors.

For the implementers of basic utility initiatives, it is recommended that they foster a good working relationship with the telecommunications sector to consider providing internet access to these areas.

For government and nongovernment agencies, it is recommended that they exhaust all possible means to source out funds that would enable them to initiate more concrete projects and functional programs to benefit the people in armed conflict-affected communities.

For groups hailing from local and national level, it is recommended that they strengthen their linkages with stakeholders who can assist them bring more resources – financial, material, and human – that would make a great difference in the lives of the residents of areas characterized by armed conflict.

For the Province of Negros Occidental, it is recommended that the strategic action plan be studied, discussed thoroughly, enhanced, and implemented as soon as possible so that the people in the armed conflict-affected areas would be given the much-needed assistance in leading more productive and less stressful lives.

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