

Meranaw Women's Roles in Peacebuilding

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Abstract: This paper is a qualitative descriptive study that examined the various roles played by Meranaw women in peacebuilding in the Meranaw society. It identified and described the different roles played by Meranaw women across the three phases of the conflict cycle. Specifically, it explores: a. their roles in conflict prevention and early warning; b. their roles in conflict resolution and transformation; and c. their roles in post-conflict recovery and reconstruction. The researcher employed key informant interviews and focus group discussions with Meranaw men and women NGOs, peace advocates, and peacebuilders in Lanao. However, most informants were women. Findings revealed that Meranaw women had been engaged in activities to prevent conflict as well as in conflict resolution and transformation. They participated in peace processes as negotiators and mediators, lobbied for the approval and enforcement of peace agreements, and were engaged in conflict resolution. Findings further revealed that though they were also affected by the 2017 Marawi siege, they have emerged as pivotal figures in the multifaceted process of recovery and reconstruction. Their contributions include providing essential psycho-social support, advocating for IDP-centered rehabilitation, leading rescue efforts, and engaging in long-term community rebuilding. Their actions are foundational to the region's path towards sustainable peace and development. In conclusion, Meranaw women function as active peacebuilders whose contributions span the entire conflict cycle. To achieve sustainable peace in Lanao and the broader Bangsamoro region, their roles and knowledge systems should be institutionalized within formal peace and governance frameworks.

Keywords: Meranaw women, Peacebuilding, Conflict cycle, Women Peace and Security, Bangsamoro.

1. Introduction

Engagement of women in peacebuilding is widely recognized as being essential in achieving sustainable peace. This recognition is affirmed globally through United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security [UNSCR 1325], which calls for the increased participation of women in conflict prevention, peace negotiations, peacekeeping, and post-conflict reconstruction. The same is true for Meranaw women in the two Lanao provinces.

This engagement of Meranaw women in peacebuilding was not only observed during and after the 2017 Marawi Siege, but even before that. In fact, as early as the pre-colonial period, Meranaw women, especially those with traditional titles, were already engaged in community affairs.

However, these significant roles in peacebuilding remain under documented. While UNSCR 1325 emphasizes that

women's experiences and perspectives must inform peace processes, the literature on Meranaw women's contributions is still limited. Existing studies mostly focus on specific aspects of conflict settlement. For instance, Doro (2007) in "Management and Resolution of *Rido* among Meranaw in Baloi, Lanao del Norte" highlighted the role of Meranaw women in settling *rido*. Similarly, Ali et al. (n.d.) in "The Participation of Maranao Women in Settling Disputes and Conflicts" assessed the roles, methods, and limitations of Meranaw women in settling disputes in the two Lanao provinces.

As far as the researcher is concerned, this is the first study to identify and describe Meranaw women's roles in peacebuilding, particularly in conflict prevention and early warning, conflict resolution and transformation, and post-conflict recovery and reconstruction.

This study contributes to the growing literature on women, peace, and security in the Philippine context and responds to the call of UNSCR 1325 to recognize and institutionalize women's participation in all stages of peacebuilding. Through this study, peacebuilding initiatives of Meranaw women are appreciated and given recognition. Furthermore, in this study, ordinary Meranaw women would know how they can contribute, what they can do, and what needs to be done to attain sustainable peace in the Meranaw society.

The researcher believes that, in no other time like today - in the post-conflict Marawi and the start of the BARMM - do Meranaw women need to understand how they can contribute or what they need to do to attain a more lasting peace. Thus, this research would serve as an "eye opener" to help them understand the role of Meranaw women in attaining lasting peace in Meranaw society and the BARMM in general.

2. Related Literature

A. Meranaw

The Meranaw is one of the thirteen Muslim ethnolinguistic groups in the Philippines called Bangsamoro and the second largest Muslim group in the Philippines [7]. Meranaw originally inhabited the two Lanao provinces, Lanao del Sur and Lanao del Norte, in Mindanao, Philippines. Today, they are also found in many parts of the country like Metro Manila, Cebu, Davao, Cagayan de Oro, Zamboanga, Cotabato, etc. [7].

Meranaw means people of the lake, referring to Lake Lanao or Ranao [7]. Traditionally, Ranao or Lanao is composed of

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four principalities, the so-called *Pat a Pengampung ku Lanao* (*Four principalities in Lanao*), namely: *Masiyu*, *Unayan*, *Balui*, and *Bayabaw*. These four principalities are co-equal in power, authority, and prestige, and are bound together into a sort of alliance or confederation governed by *Taritib*. Except for *Balui*, the youngest among the four, each of these principalities is subdivided into *Suko* (districts), which in turn are subdivided into *Inged* (townships). These townships are divided into *Agama* (communities). Each of the *Pengampung* and its subdivisions from *Suko* to *Agama* is headed by a Sultan [8]. Thus, Lanao has established multiple Sultanates, which Tawagon calls "Lanao, the land of one thousand and one sultans [9]. The Sultan is aided by many other traditional leaders, including women leaders.

Under customary law, Meranaw women could be bestowed with *grar* titles that granted them rights equivalent to their male counterparts. Prominent examples include *Potri Maamor*, *Ba'i a Labi*, *Ba'i a Dalomangcob*, *Ba'i an Adel*, *Ba'i a Romapenet*, and *Ba'i a Cabugatan*. Among these, the *Ba'i a Labi* was particularly powerful, participating in policy and decision-making [10]. The rest, though not the same rank as the *Ba'i a Labi*, also assist in community affairs, such as resolving conflicts, upholding Islamic law, and defending women's rights. Their *grar* or title is formally recognized in social gatherings where their names are always mentioned. Thus, as early as the pre-colonial period, Meranaw women already played significant roles in society as leaders.

B. Meranaw Women and Peacebuilding

Traditionally, Meranaw women held a primary role within the home, fulfilling responsibilities as daughters, mothers, aunts, or grandmothers [11]. However, their influence extended beyond the domestic sphere, particularly for adult women holding *grar* (titles), who were often consulted by men on crucial family and community matters due to their respected wisdom. Such women were also entitled to significant wedding considerations, reflecting their family's social standing [11].

The spread of education significantly transformed the position of Meranaw women. Educated women evolved into intelligent and active partners across various aspects of family life, education, religion, community issues, and politics [11]. More recently, they have actively challenged traditional restrictions and broken stereotypes, demonstrating a higher level of involvement in communal issues. Their influence is now notable in politics, *rido* (family feud) resolution, community service planning, and peace process activism [12].

A compelling testament to their evolving roles was observed during the 2017 Marawi Siege. Meranaw women assumed significant leadership responsibilities in search and rescue operations, the management of deceased and missing persons, relief efforts, and the advocacy for and protection of internally displaced persons' (IDPs) rights [13], [14]. As part of initiatives like *Sowara o Miyamagoyag* (Voice of Marawi IDPs) and the Bangon Marawi CSO Platform, women actively contributed to shaping an IDP-centered, culturally and faith-sensitive, inclusive, accountable, and peace-enabling Marawi rehabilitation [13]. Their skills as former traders and

businesswomen proved crucial in navigating the crisis, enabling them to secure supplies, negotiate prices, and engage with military personnel and government officials to ensure their families' survival [14]. This crisis notably fostered greater awareness among women of their roles beyond childcare, leading to the formation of stronger collective forces, such as the United Mothers of Marawi Inc., established by local Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to amplify women's voices and roles [14]. Their active influence is expected to continue shaping Marawi's future, supported by NGOs, international organizations, government, and the commercial sector [13].

C. Muslim Women and Peacebuilding

Islam, founded on principles of fairness and equality, unequivocally emphasizes women's rights and recognizes them as equal partners to men, as evidenced in its foundational texts, the holy Qur'an and the Hadith. Islam grants women autonomy over property, finances, trade, and charitable giving. There is no inherent subordination of one gender to another in Islam; rather, it upholds the rights, dignity, honor, and status of women by ensuring gender equality across all spheres of human life [1]. Women in Islam are considered independent individuals, fully responsible for their religious duties and actions, and are expected to collaborate with men in establishing and maintaining a harmonious society, acquiring the necessary skills for these roles [2].

While a wife's primary emphasis is often on her family and household management, Islam permits her to engage in activities outside the home, provided she upholds chastity, respect, and dignity for the benefit of her family, husband, or community [1]. This includes pursuing suitable careers, engaging in household chores, or fulfilling other family responsibilities. Muslim women are explicitly granted the freedom to participate in social, economic, and political activities, including political gatherings, public protests, and Friday prayers. They are also entitled to self-defense and the protection of their property and national integrity, all within the bounds of Islamic law [1].

Active involvement in community social and political life is expected of Muslim women. As highlighted by Abdulhamid, women are obligated to strive alongside men to establish and maintain a peaceful society, acquiring the skills necessary for this role [2]. This directive is reinforced in the Holy Qur'an, Surah Tawbah verse 71, which states that "The Believers, men and women, are protectors, one of another; they enjoin what is just, and forbid what is evil..." [3]. This verse clearly positions women as equally accountable for societal change through social, political, educational, and economic channels [2].

Beyond personal and familial duties, Muslim women are called to contribute positively to their communities. A commitment to social welfare is integral to living out one's faith in Islam; the religion does not endorse detachment from societal issues [4]. For Muslims, performing good deeds, when done purely for the sake of Allah (SWT), is considered an act of worship, motivating Muslim women to engage in beneficial community activities to gain divine pleasure and reward [4].

Furthermore, Muslim women are expected to be keenly

interested in broader Muslim affairs, transcending concerns limited to their immediate household [4]. This perspective aligns with Islamic teachings that view all Muslims as a unified brotherhood, akin to a single body that experiences pain collectively if any part suffers [4]. This ethos encourages Muslim women to work for the welfare and safety of others, actively seeking opportunities to contribute positively to society, driven by the Qur'anic directive to "do good, that you may prosper" (Surah Hajj, verse 77) [5]. Al Hashimi further emphasizes that Islam mandates both men and women to actively assist the poor and disadvantaged, considering every good deed a form of charity (*sadaqah*), as reinforced by the Prophet (PBUH)'s teachings on giving charity, helping those in desperate need, and refraining from evil [4].

Inherently, Muslim women are called to foster peace. Islam obligates all Muslims, male and female, to reconcile contending parties. The Holy Qur'an, Surah Hujurat verse 9, explicitly states: "If two parties among the Believers fall into a quarrel, make peace between them..." [6]. This mandate extends to Muslim women, requiring them to mediate disputes among their sisters. Notably, among the Meranaw, women play an expanded role, assisting in or even directly settling disputes involving men. Ultimately, a fundamental moral obligation for every Muslim is to strive for justice in the face of oppression and suffering.

3. Methodology

The study made use of a qualitative-descriptive research design. Key informant interviews and FGDs were used in gathering the data; thus, an interview schedule and guide questions were employed. In selecting informants, the researcher used the Exponential Non-Discriminative Snowball Sampling method. This study was conducted in Lanao del Sur and Lanao del Norte, Philippines. The informants of the study are men and women from the two Lanao provinces, but the majority of them are women. Though this study is about Meranaw women, the researcher also interviewed male informants to get their views on the topic. To support the data gathered through interviews and FGD, the researcher also read books and articles from both libraries and the internet.

4. Results and Discussion

A. Roles Played by Meranaw Women in Peacebuilding

Concern for community affairs is innate among Meranaw women. As early as the pre-colonial period, women in Lanao, especially those with *grar* or traditional titles, had been engaged in community affairs. This involvement in peacebuilding continued up to the present. To this day, they remain vitally involved in peacebuilding. The various roles played by Meranaw women in peacebuilding are discussed below.

1) Conflict Prevention and Early Warning

Meranaw women are engaged in conflict prevention and early warning mechanisms. Drawing on their unique societal positioning, capabilities, and profound influence, Meranaw women are instrumental in preventing violent extremism, meticulously monitoring human rights violations, tirelessly

working toward environmental preservation for harmonious living, and diligently addressing pressing community concerns to ensure social tranquility. Their diverse contributions, ranging from grassroots initiatives to advocacy at higher levels, underscore their indispensable role as agents of change, proactively building and sustaining peace in Mindanao.

2) Preventing Violent Extremism

Meranaw women are engaged in preventing violent extremism. A notable example is Padoman Paporo, who implemented the "KASAMA KA SA TAMA" (You are with the Truth) Program to Prevent Violent Extremism in Marawi City [15]. Women hold a strategic role in preventing violent extremism due to their unique positioning, capabilities, and influence within society, often more than they realize. This is evidenced by successful women leaders globally who have made significant strides in this field. As Professor De Dios highlights, women's strategic role stems from two key factors: their strong influence on their children, families, and local communities, and their capacity to be among the first to detect societal changes [16].

3) Human Rights Violation Monitoring in Peacemaking and Peacebuilding

Meranaw women also contribute to peacemaking and peacebuilding through human rights monitoring. Samera Gutoc exemplified this during the 2017 Marawi siege, where she testified before the Philippine Congress to expose human rights abuses committed against the Meranaw people [17]. Another impactful figure is Padoman Paporo, who, prior to the 2017 Marawi conflict, led the Provincial Muslim Women Council in organizing Community-Based Human Rights Monitors across ten pilot barangays in Marawi City [15].

This study reveals that Meranaw women engage in diverse peacebuilding efforts despite often being victims of war themselves. This involvement mirrors global trends, as shown in Olofsson's 2018 study, which observed women in Africa and Western Asia participating in all forms of peacebuilding work [18]. Even though women suffer from and are victimized by war, they also act as agents of change. When constrained by existing gender roles, they leverage their agency within these roles to implement positive change [18].

4) Environmental Preservation and Conservation for Peaceful Living

Before the 2017 Battle of Marawi, the Provincial Muslim Women Council [PMWC], under the leadership of Dr. Padoman Paporo, was actively involved in environmental preservation efforts centered on Lake Lanao. The Council launched various education and advocacy initiatives, including poster-making and essay contests for elementary, high school, and college students in Marawi City to raise awareness on the importance of protecting the lake. To further promote conservation, PMWC installed signage in five strategic areas across Lanao del Sur and Marawi City, and organized a province-wide multi-sectoral stakeholders' forum dedicated to Lake Lanao's preservation. The Council also conducted annual clean-up drives, Phases I to V, along the shores of Lake Lanao, and implemented community programs such as the "*Huwag Magtapon ng Basura*" [Don't Litter] project in Marawi City

and the “*Matanos a Marawi*” [Clean Marawi] campaign. In addition, PMWC organized SIKRA [*Siyap Ko Ranaw* - Protect Lake Lanao] volunteers composed of elementary and high school students who were trained to lead conservation activities. To document and sustain these efforts, the Council published the “*Siyap Ko Ranaw*” newsletter, a bi-annual publication that highlighted PMWC’s projects and activities related to Lake Lanao [15].

5) *Addressing Community Concerns and Plight for Peace*

Meranaw women have also been instrumental in addressing community concerns and hardships to foster peace and progress. Baishora Sabdullah, a media worker, for instance, serves as a crucial link between the government and various institutions, helping to address people's concerns and plight to ensure peace and order prevail. Her primary focus is connecting people and bridging communication gaps between individuals, communities, and the government, utilizing her role as a government media worker to facilitate these connections [19].

Another prominent example is Samera Gutoc. Following her resignation from the Bangsamoro Transition Commission, she actively demonstrated solidarity with local humanitarian organizations assisting internally displaced Bangsamoro communities [17]. She consistently attended meetings of local Bangsamoro civil society groups who prioritized the rescue of remaining civilians caught in the crossfire in Marawi [17].

B. *Conflict Resolution and Transformation*

Beyond their vital contributions to conflict prevention and early warning, Meranaw women also play an indispensable role in the actual resolution and transformation of conflicts. Their engagement in peace processes extends to high-level negotiations and mediation, where their unique perspectives and inherent concern for community well-being often lead to more sustainable outcomes. Furthermore, Meranaw women are deeply involved in grassroots community engagement, facilitating crucial information dissemination, consultations, and dialogues that bridge divides and build understanding. Their strategic lobbying efforts are critical for the approval and enforcement of peace agreements, while their significant contributions to drafting bills and resolutions demonstrate their legislative prowess in shaping a more peaceful society. Ultimately, Meranaw women's active participation in traditional and contemporary conflict resolution mechanisms, including the settlement of family conflicts and their leadership during crises like the Marawi siege, highlights their enduring commitment to fostering lasting peace and unity within their communities.

1) *Participation and Involvement in the Peace Process as Negotiator and Mediator*

Meranaw women have significantly engaged in peace processes. Notably, Dr. Emily Marohombsar of Mindanao State University (MSU) Marawi holds the distinction of being the first Filipino woman involved in a peace process [20]. More recently, Yasmin Busran Lao and Anna Tarhata Sumande Basman, both Meranaw women, participated in the peace process between the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the Government of the Philippines (GPH).

The systematic and representative inclusion of women in peace and security issues is crucial for successful negotiations and for addressing women's specific interests. A study by the International Peace Institute on 182 peace agreements signed between 1989 and 2011 revealed that when women are included in peace processes, the likelihood of a peace agreement lasting 15 years or more increases by 35 percent. Furthermore, women participants in peace processes tend to prioritize reconciliation, economic development, education, and transitional justice over the spoils of war—all essential components for lasting peace [21].

Women's involvement in peace processes is vital because they offer unique perspectives and experiences that men might overlook. Moreover, their inclusion is a foundational step towards addressing women's concerns and enhancing their participation, particularly in political and economic spheres.

2) *Community Engagement, Information Dissemination, Consultations, and Dialogue for Peacemaking and Peacebuilding Work*

Meranaw women are also actively involved in information dissemination, consultations, and dialogue as part of their peacemaking and peacebuilding efforts. For instance, following the passage of the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL), the AlMujadilah Development Foundation (AMDF), a Lanao-based women’s organization for social development, conducted community-level discourses to disseminate information about the BBL. As shared by Sani, AMDF engaged with community members, women, and youth to foster an understanding of the BBL, from the history of the Bangsamoro to the law's specific content [22].

AMDF also initiated community consultations, with the gathered data submitted to relevant agencies for action. They also mobilized consultations regarding the situation in Marawi. As noted by De Dios and Reyes, AMDF facilitated consultations about the Marawi situation with various sectors, including local communities, academia, youth, religious groups, and representatives from international organizations and NGOs. The data collected from these consultations were presented to the Philippine Congress to inform them of the Meranaw people's plight during the 2017 Marawi siege [23].

In their efforts to protect women and girls, AMDF actively engages with communities to counteract child and forced early marriage (CFEM) through discussions and family conversations, raising awareness about CFEM's effects. AMDF also supports provisions of Senator Risa Hontiveros's law pertaining to girls as brides [22].

3) *Lobbying Initiatives for the Approval and Enforcement of Peace Agreements*

Meranaw women are actively engaged in lobbying for the approval and implementation of peace agreements. Over the past four years, Muslim women, in collaboration with women's groups in Manila, have actively advocated for the passage of the BBL [23]. The AMDF, in particular, frequently traveled to Manila to lobby for the passage of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB)-based BBL in both the Senate and Congress [22].

After the 2017 Marawi siege, Padoman Paporo, Noni Lao,

Dayahlyn Matet Tingaraan, and many others were part of a lobbying group that traveled to Manila to advocate for the passage of the Marawi Compensation Bill. Padoman Paporo and Noni Lao are notably the lead conveners of the Bangon Marawi Civil Society Organization (CSO) Platform, a key lobby group for the proposed Marawi Compensation Bill and the Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) Rights Bill [15].

These women actively involved in peacebuilding are not only civic leaders but often also hold traditional titles within Meranaw society. Most peacebuilders mentioned in this study possess "*grar*," or traditional titles. The involvement of these Meranaw women in peacebuilding is widely recognized by the *Datus* (traditional leaders) in Meranaw society. As explained by Jabbar Permiro Mackno, the existence of female counterparts to male traditional titles, such as "*bai*" for "*Sulutan*," signifies their collaborative work for the community's benefit [24]. Peacebuilding, in this context, is a shared responsibility between men and women.

4) *Critical Role of Women in Drafting Bills and Resolutions for Peace*

Meranaw women have significantly contributed to peacebuilding through legislation by drafting bills and resolutions, particularly as members of parliament. Atty. Anna Tarhata S. Basman, for example, seeks to advance the welfare of marginalized communities through legislative action [25]. Her office focuses on three primary thrusts: responsive and accessible Special Education in the Bangsamoro, thriving Islamic Finance in the regional economy, and transparency in Marawi Rehabilitation, alongside her active work in the Bangsamoro Parliament [25]. She is the principal author of the Resolution creating the Special Committee on Marawi and the Resolution calling for the creation of the National Transitional Justice and Reconciliation Commission for the Bangsamoro. She also successfully steered the Committee Report and defended the Bangsamoro Human Rights Commission Act and the Bangsamoro Youth Commission in the plenary [25].

Another example is Member of Parliament (MP) Maisara Dandamun-Latiph, who champions the empowerment of vulnerable sectors, including women, children, youth, and IDPs in Marawi, and advocates for environmental protection as keys to building a just and humane Bangsamoro Society [26]. She actively advocates, lobbies, and drafts bills and resolutions concerning vulnerable sectors, education, Marawi Rehabilitation, the creation of the Ranao Development Authority, and the establishment of an office for Bangsamoro Communities outside the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) [26]. She is the principal author of bills creating the office of the Bangsamoro Director General for Madaris Education within the Ministry of Education to strengthen and institutionalize madrasah education, an act creating the office for Bangsamoro communities outside the Bangsamoro autonomous region, an act creating the Ranao Development Authority, and an act establishing a Bangsamoro economic planning and development structure. She is also the principal author of the resolution calling for the creation of the National Transitional Justice and Reconciliation Commission for the Bangsamoro, a resolution commending the Senate and

House of Representatives for the passage of House Bill No. 8281 ("An Act Providing for the Regulation and Organization of the Islamic Banks"), a resolution creating the Statutory Committee on Bangsamoro Justice in the Bangsamoro Transition Authority, and many others [26].

5) *Engagement in Conflict Resolution*

Meranaw women are actively engaged in conflict resolution, playing a crucial role in settling family conflicts (*rido*) within their communities. Women are respected and honored, and when they assume leadership roles in conflict resolution, involved parties are often more inclined to cooperate than with a male negotiator [27]. For instance, former Governor Princess Tarhata Alonto Lucman was renowned as a more effective and courageous negotiator, successfully resolving more high-profile conflicts than her male successors [28]. Today, there is Rohania Ambol Macarambon. Like Tarhata Lucman, she is also engaged in the settlement of disputes and *rido*. She has also successfully resolved high-profile conflicts, including many murder cases [29]. Aside from the two, there are many other women who are actively engaged in the settlement of disputes and *rido*.

The discussions above reveal the extensive engagement of Meranaw women in diverse peacebuilding endeavors. Despite being victims of war, they have not been deterred from working for their community's benefit. For their constituents, they are actively involved in the social and political life of their community and encourage other women to engage actively in politics. This involvement of Meranaw women in the social and political life of the community is permissible in both Islamic teachings and Meranaw culture.

C. *Post-Conflict Recovery and Reconstruction*

In the challenging aftermath of conflict, the Meranaw women of Marawi City have emerged as pivotal figures in the multifaceted process of recovery and reconstruction. Their contributions span crucial domains, demonstrating remarkable resilience, leadership, and a deep commitment to their community's healing and rebuilding. From providing essential psycho-social support and advocating for IDP-centered rehabilitation to leading rescue efforts and engaging in long-term community rebuilding, their actions are foundational to the region's path towards sustainable peace and development.

1) *Offering a Range of Services for Women and Youth*

Meranaw women are actively involved in providing diverse services for women and youth, including counseling, family conversation sessions, stress and crisis management, and trauma healing. These services complement the essential distribution of "*Ayuda*" (aid) to help victims of conflict and war cope with their difficult situations. For example, during the 2017 Marawi Siege, the AlMujadilah Development Foundation (AMDF), in partnership with Oxfam, provided psycho-social support for mental health through weekly "Family Conversations" focusing on health, recovery, and rehabilitation [22]. Similarly, many Mindanao State University (MSU) constituents, predominantly women, visited evacuation areas during the Marawi conflict to offer trauma healing services [30].

2) *Assisting in Shaping an IDP-Centered, Culture and Faith-Sensitive, Inclusive, Accountable, and Peace-Enabling Marawi Rehabilitation*

Meranaw women have significantly contributed to shaping a more internally displaced persons (IDP)-centered, culture and faith-sensitive, inclusive, accountable, and peace-enabling Marawi Rehabilitation. Padoman Paporo and Noni Lao, for instance, are the lead conveners of the Marawi CSOs Convergence Group. Paporo, who was recognized as a woman advocate for internally displaced persons, has undertaken numerous efforts for the people of Marawi, particularly the IDPs. She served as a resource person in the 2018 Senate hearing on Marawi Rehabilitation, and in four consecutive hearings in the House of Representatives in 2019 where she advocated for the immediate passage of the Marawi Compensation Bill. She also led the distribution of relief assistance to IDPs in the Sagonsongan Temporary Shelters. In 2021, she participated as a resource person in the Senate hearing opposing the appointment of Task Force Bangon Marawi [TFBM] Chair Eduardo del Rosario as Secretary of the Department of Human Settlements and Urban Development [DHSUD] before the Commission on Appointments, as well as in the hearing of the Senate Special Committee on Marawi Rehabilitation and the Senate Committee on Finance regarding the Marawi Compensation Bill. Furthermore, she submitted a manifesto to the Department of National Defense opposing the establishment of a new military camp in Marawi. During Martial Law in Mindanao, she also worked for the establishment of AFP/PNP Hijab Patrollers composed of women uniformed personnel at checkpoints. [15]

Despite being victims of the war themselves, these women have tirelessly worked for the benefit of their constituents. As De Dios and Reyes stated, the women of Marawi were active participants in shaping the Marawi Rehabilitation to be more IDP-centered, culture and faith-sensitive, inclusive, accountable, and peace-enabling, as part of the "*Sowara o Miyamagoyag*" (Voice of Marawi IDPs) and Bangon Marawi CSO Platform [13].

3) *Engaging in Rescue Activities During Conflict and War*

Meranaw women played significant leadership roles in search and rescue operations during the 2017 Marawi siege. Samira Gutoc, a Meranaw woman from Marawi City, established RRT-for Saving Lives, a civil society organization that aided in rescuing war survivors [17]. Olomodin Batugan, a member of the "suicide squads"-group of young Meranaw men from Marawi who help evacuate civilians during the first two days of the 2017 Marawi siege - recounted that Samira Gutoc and many other women remained at the Saduc end of the Banggolo bridge, assisting survivors who made their way out [31]. Samira Gutoc also served as spokesperson for the Ranao Rescue Team (RRT), which led not only rescue efforts but also relief operations during the Marawi siege [17].

4) *Relief Operations During Calamities and War*

Beyond Gutoc's RRT for Saving Lives, other Meranaw women's groups also distributed relief aid to evacuees. The AMDF was notably active in assisting IDPs [22]. Trajano highlighted AMDF's crucial role during the height of the

Marawi conflict in 2017, where this Marawi-based NGO, composed of Muslim women, was at the forefront of providing life-saving aid to an estimated 220,000 civilians affected by the conflict [32]. Their aid workers emphasized that women and children affected by the conflict were particularly vulnerable to sexual harassment and other forms of gender-based violence, even in evacuation centers. Therefore, women aid volunteers and workers were essential on the frontlines of humanitarian relief, as they best understood women's needs [32].

The Provincial Muslim Women Council also conducted relief operations in the Sagonsongan Temporary Shelters (Areas 1–7), Marantao, Ditsaan Ramin in Lanao del Sur, and Baloi, Lanao del Norte, both during and after the Marawi Siege [15].

5) *Health Care Service Delivery and Provision During Conflict and War*

Meranaw women are also engaged in sexual health empowerment. A prime example is AMDF, which believes women should have full control over their bodies, with the decision to become pregnant resting solely with them. As such, they have facilitated health service delivery and even provided equipment and supplies. For instance, when a temporary restraining order was issued by the Supreme Court to the Department of Health against the administration of contraceptive implants, AMDF, not being under the same restraint, provided such supplies and traveled to communities to administer them to women who desired them [22].

6) *Assisting in Rebuilding War-Torn Communities and Sustaining Peace Within New Resettlement Sites*

Meranaw women also contributed in rebuilding communities after the war and in sustaining peace within their new resettlement sites. For example, several Meranaw women, including Anisah Ampuan Bariga, Hanifah Pangcoga, Raihanie Ahmad, Ibralyn Macaraguit, and Norjannah Samsoden, have significantly contributed to UN-Habitat's Rebuilding Marawi Project and the overall rehabilitation efforts in Marawi City [33].

Anisah Ampuan Bariga was among the 109 home-partners who were the first to be awarded permanent houses and lots under the Rebuilding Marawi Project. For over three years before her relocation to Hadiya Village, Anisah was an active member of the Saduc Riverside Homeowners Association (HOA) and led its Construction Finance Committee. In this role, she received training and learned how to canvass and procure shelter materials. Alongside other members of the Construction Committees of HOAs assigned to Hadiya Village, she helped scout for quality construction materials and negotiate lower prices with hardware store owners. While not a typical task for women, especially Maranao women, she proved highly capable, delivering beyond expectations [40]. Anisah is one of many women who contributed to rebuilding communities in Marawi. [33]

Furthermore, Meranaw women are acquiring new skills to aid in community rebuilding. Alaminah Romuros, a participant in the second batch of TESDA's Galing Mason program, joined the program in March 2020. Having learned about Meranaws displaced by the Marawi conflict, she felt compelled to help.

She provides advice and comfort to friends who experienced depression after the hostilities. Currently, she is focused on learning how to build shelters, aspiring to leave a legacy with other women builders for future Maranao women and girls in her community, a legacy she hopes will empower them to realize #GenerationEquality [34].

5. Implications and Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several strategies can be advanced to strengthen and sustain the peacebuilding roles of Meranaw women in Lanao.

1. **Recognition and Institutional Support**
The contributions of Meranaw women peacebuilders must be formally recognized through awards, documentation, and public appreciation. Likewise, the peace and development initiatives of Meranaw women CSOs should be provided with technical, financial, and policy support by government and donor agencies.
2. **Empowerment at the Grassroots Level**
Ordinary Meranaw women in communities should be empowered through access to education, skills training, capacity-building programs, and awareness campaigns. Economic empowerment initiatives such as livelihood programs are also crucial to enable meaningful participation in peacebuilding.
3. **Institutionalization in Conflict Resolution Mechanisms**
To ensure sustained involvement, Meranaw women should be institutionalized as recognized mediators in conflict and *rido* settlement. Their representation in Municipal Peace and Order Councils and other formal peace structures must be promoted and mandated.
4. **Engaging Men as Allies**
Finally, strategies must include men and male leaders as partners. Garnering the support of Meranaw men is essential to legitimize and sustain women's active participation in peacebuilding processes.

Collectively, these recommendations underscore the need to move from acknowledging women's roles to actively integrating them into formal peace and governance frameworks.

6. Conclusion

This qualitative descriptive study explored the multiple roles of Meranaw women in peacebuilding throughout the three stages of the conflict cycle in Lanao. Findings of the study revealed that Meranaw women had been actively engaged in peacebuilding. Within the field of peacebuilding, they are engaged in conflict prevention. For example, they work as advocates and activists for peace, pursue democracy and human rights, and have also been instrumental in addressing community concerns and hardships.

Meranaw women are also engaged in conflict resolution. In fact, they were involved in the peace process not only in the recently concluded peace agreement between the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the Government of the Republic

of the Philippines (GPH) but even before. In fact, the very first woman to join the peace table in the Philippines was Meranaw, Dr. Emily Marohombsar, the former president of the Mindanao State University system. They are also involved in dispute and *rido* (clan feuds) settlements in the two Lanao provinces.

They were also involved in information dissemination, consultations, and dialogue as part of their peacemaking and peacebuilding efforts. They have also significantly contributed to peacebuilding through legislation by drafting bills and resolutions as members of parliament to foster peace and progress. During the 2017 Marawi siege, they played significant leadership roles in search and rescue and in distributing relief aid. Others served as relief aid workers. They also provide diverse services for women and youth, including counseling, family conversation sessions, stress and crisis management, and trauma healing. They also assisted in rebuilding communities after the war and in sustaining peace within their new resettlement sites.

In conclusion, Meranaw women function as active peacebuilders whose contributions span the entire conflict cycle. Their work, rooted in Meranaw and Islamic values, is foundational to the region's path toward sustainable peace and development.

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