

Developing Political Parties in the Bangsamoro

An Assessment of Needs and Opportunities



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The Asia Foundation
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1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

After almost 30 years of intermittent fighting and multiple rounds of negotiations, the Government of the Philippines (GPH) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) are hammering out the details of an agreement intended to end the separatist conflict in Muslim Mindanao. In October 2012 the GPH and the MILF signed a “Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB), which provides for a new autonomous entity in Muslim Mindanao (the “Bangsamoro”) and outlines in general terms the process for establishing it.

In the context of the Philippines’ imperfect democratic politics the quality of politics and governance in the Bangsamoro envisioned in the FAB is highly aspirational – indeed it envisions a transformation of politics and governance. The FAB creates a “ministerial” (parliamentary) form of government whereas the Philippines traditionally has had a presidential system.

According to the FAB, “The electoral system shall allow democratic participation, ensure accountability of public officers primarily to their constituents and encourage formation of genuinely principled political parties.” The enumeration of basic rights in the FAB includes the right of women to meaningful political participation and the right to freedom from religious, ethnic and sectarian harassment. The FAB also includes a commitment to work out a program of transitional justice to “address the legitimate grievances of the Bangsamoro people, correct historical injustices and address human rights violations.”¹

The FAB was signed some 16 years after a prior agreement with the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), the 1996 “Final Peace Agreement.” All elements of the MNLF are disappointed with the implementation of this agreement, including the passage of a revised law for the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, RA8054, which purported to be carrying out the intent of the Agreement. For several years now there has been a “tripartite” review process (involving the MNLF, the GPH, and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation [OIC]). A challenge in making peace in Mindanao lies in how to converge the two streams or arrangements, with the MNLF and the MILF

Looking to the future, the success of the Bangsamoro political entity will depend in large part on the ability of the MILF and the MNLF to engage effectively in competitive and peaceful politics and governance. This will require the transformation of the MILF and the MNLF from armed groups to peaceful political organizations. If there is even a modicum of success it will be beneficial to Muslims in the Philippines and could become a model for political reform elsewhere in the country.

1.1 Objectives

The purpose of this assessment is to evaluate the overall state of political parties and the potential for political party system development in the Bangsamoro region of the Philippines. The findings of this assessment will be used to inform the selection and design of future programs to support party strengthening activities as an integral part of the peace process.

¹ See “Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro” dated 15 October 2012. OPAPP website.

The assessment took place within a complex and evolving political environment involving multiple overlapping conflicts, a peace process, an existing but dysfunctional party system and an evolving political transition. The Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB), while a positive step forward, does not resolve (or even address) every major conflict in the Bangsamoro region. The objectives of the assessment are:

- Assess the political party system to identify what has prevented political parties from developing further, and determine how armed groups can best make the transition to political parties.
- Recommend possible interventions that may be effective in the current environment highlighting appropriate approaches to foster the development of a pluralistic, democratic, competitive and accountable political party systems.
- Recommend appropriate interventions to encourage women and youth engagement in the political arena and linkages to civil society.

1.2 Methodology

The methodology for the assessment included literature review and interviews with key informants. The fieldwork for the assessment was conducted by a four-person team in Manila and Cotabato City from June 20 to July 4, 2013. More than 35 separate interviews were conducted with representatives of the MILF, MNLF, political parties and CSOs, local and national government officials, academics, diplomats, donors, international NGOs and other stakeholders and experts.

An important limitation on the methodology was the understandable opaqueness of the MILF. The team met with several representatives of the MILF, but given the sensitivity of the issue of the MILF's political transformation while negotiations with the GPH are ongoing, these meetings yielded limited and fairly general information about the MILF's plans and needs.

1.3 Analytical Framework

Although democracy can be described in a number of ways, for this paper we used the simplest and most fundamental definition of democracy—*citizen control of government*—as the foundation of our analytical lens; and defined the purpose of parties in a democracy as: *the media or channels through which citizens express their interests and aspirations in government*. How well or poorly parties fulfill this function is defined as *quality of representation*.

Using this analytical framework, if political parties fail to serve as a channel for citizen interest, democracy (i.e. citizen control of government) is not established. From this perspective parties are not an end in themselves, and should not be viewed as the sole or principal beneficiaries of political party assistance programs. Rather, it is ordinary citizens who are the ultimate potential beneficiaries of party assistance programs, and the purpose or overall goal of party assistance programs should be to: *increase or improve parties' ability to accurately represent in government the wishes and interests of their constituents*.

2 THE CONTEXT: THE SEARCH FOR PEACE AND AUTONOMY IN THE BANGSAMORO

2.1 The Current Legal Framework of Governance in the Region

Much of the proposed Bangsamoro region is currently included in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), a group of primarily Muslim provinces in the southern Philippines. In response to demands for independence from people in the historically separate and culturally different region the Philippine government established the ARMM in 1989, to provide limited autonomy for the Moro (Muslim) people. Only the ARMM has a regional level of governance; all other regional structures in the Philippines are purely administrative. Unfortunately, given financial and political dominance by Manila, very little power was devolved to the regional government, and the central government continued to direct the bulk of resources through the existing structure of elected provincial governors and municipal and city mayors (as is the case in the rest of the Philippines).

Essentially, formal governance in the ARMM is the same as formal governance in the rest of the Philippines, except with an overlay of additional and relatively powerless regional governance. For example, in an effort to quell unrest in the south the Philippine government in 2011 provided a stimulus package for the five ARMM provinces, but rather than channeling this funding through the ARMM, the money was disbursed directly from Manila to provincial governors.²

The limited autonomy provided by the ARMM, even after its 2001 revision in response to the 1996 Final Peace Agreement reached between the government and the Moro National Liberation Front, failed to satisfy the aspirations of the Moro people, and armed resistance continued. By 2011 there was common consensus, shared even by President Aquino, that the ARMM was a “*failed experiment*”.

2.2 Politics and Governance in the Bangsamoro: The Power of Culture and Clans

To a considerable extent, political parties are creatures of the social and political systems within which they develop and function.³ Before thinking about the dynamics of parties and party-building in the Bangsamoro it is useful to examine the prevailing political context.

Geographic and language divides. Although the Bangsamoro region is perceived as united by its majority Muslim population in an otherwise predominantly Christian country, internally it is divided by ethnicity and language. The areas constituting the Bangsamoro are separated by seas and mountains. Although Lanao and Maguindanao are contiguous, the road linking Marawi City, Malabang and Cotabato City was upgraded only during the administration of Governor Pangandaman. The inter-island transportation system is not very good, and there is no means of transport that connects directly Maguindanao or Lanao with Sulu or Tawi-Tawi. People of Tawi-Tawi for example find it convenient to go to Manila rather than to Marawi City.

Members of each of the ethnic groups in Muslim Mindanao speak their own language. Iranun, Maranao and Magindanaon are mutually intelligible to members of these groups, and Tau-Sug is

² Interview with a senior ARMM official.

³ Of course, parties are also important actors on the system and their actions can either reinforce it or change it.

widely understood in Sulu, Tawi-Tawi and Basilan, but language barriers pose a problem in inter-Moro communication. The problems of mobility and communication have prevented the establishment of region-wide parties in the past, and are likely to be an impediment to future Bangsamoro-centric party development.

Formal and informal sources of power. In the Bangsamoro the formal governance structure is relatively weak, and has in large measure been coopted by informal traditional governance. The formal structure of government in the Bangsamoro provides a malleable institutional framework over-laying a thick mixture of informal social and cultural practices, heavily influenced by family and economic interests.

Historically the people of the Bangsamoro were governed by a hereditary aristocracy though an essentially feudal system, with the responsibilities of patrons and clients well-understood and accepted. That feudal system has evolved and adapted in response to the modern world and pressures from the central government. In examining the current political and economic structures of the Bangsamoro we see the traditional indigenous system of governance reacting to stress and pressure from the formal local governance structure, the central (national) government, and the changing expectations of a population with increased access to information and diminished acceptance of traditional governance.

All clientelistic systems are based on networks held together by personal relationships, be it family, “fictive kinship” (such as membership in fraternities, or other associations), or more transient transactional relations. In some traditional aristocratic families (the *datu*), rank is more or less determined by relationship to head of family, with membership in a ruling family bringing both privilege and responsibility. In other instances, “new men” are generated by war, economic growth, or trust relationships with a powerful outsider (particularly from the capital).

As in many traditional societies that lack effective rule of law, personal relationships (rather than contracts or laws) provide the trust required for society to function. Trust relationships are in the first place based on blood; first the immediate family and then the extended family (referred to as the ‘*clan*’ in the Bangsamoro).⁴ Beyond the clan relationships are based on patronage, with patrons offering safety and security in return for loyalty and support.

Traditional leaders. The traditional nobility in Muslim Mindanao, known as *datu*, historically exercised great power over their subjects. Although today the *datu* have lost most of their formal powers, they still command respect and play a significant role in politics, especially in rural areas.⁵ The *datu* who possess the most power are those who own large tracts of land or who have occupied elective or appointive positions in government. The poor and uneducated *datu*, even if by blood they are at the upper strata, are now at the margin of power. Those *datu* who have or

⁴ This is complicated by bilateral kinship, where relations are theoretically equally strong with both the paternal and maternal clans. This leads to an abundance of potential relationships, with a subsequent role for choice, chance, or contingency in how blood relations map onto political networks.

⁵ See Denmartin A. Kahalan, “The Role of the Tausug Traditional Leaders in the Election of Provincial Officials as Perceived by the Community,” master’s thesis presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School, Mindanao State University Maguindanao, 1999, p. 147; and Maguid T. Makalingkang, “The Role of the Maguindanaon Traditional Leaders in the Election of Provincial Officials as Perceived by the Community,” master’s thesis, Mindanao State University Marawi, 1989.

aspire to political positions often use their hereditary status to strengthen their claim on power for themselves and their clan.

The clan system. Prominent families, some of whom are members of the hereditary aristocracy and others who have risen to political power by amassing economic or military resources, dominate the political and economic landscape of the Bangsamoro. According to a practicing politician with roots in civil society, the biggest challenge in the Bangsamoro is the *personality and clan based political system*. When questioned about the relevance of clans in the new Bangsamoro, most of our respondents felt they would still be very influential. A representative from OPAPP said: *Clans will still be there in the new structure*.

The clans and families may be thought of as political machines whose objective is to maximize access to patronage resources. Consequently, they deploy numerous members of the family to stand as candidates in several levels of election, and switch parties easily to align with actual or potential winners. This strategy spreads risk and helps ensure that the loss of one election doesn't permanently cut off the family from patronage resources required to compete effectively in future elections.

While insurgents are often blamed for the violence in the region, much of the violence is between clans, and actually a contest for political power and economic resources. Although most of the violence is inter-clan, there is also conflict within clans; between brothers, fathers, mothers and children.

Religious leaders: Ulama and Ustadz. Filipino Muslims are predominantly Sunni. Over the last 25 years many Filipino Muslims have become more connected to the *ummah* and more devout in their practice of Islam. This is a result of both outward and inward flows of people and ideas: in recent decades hundreds of thousands of Filipinos have worked in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere in the Middle East and South Asia. During the 1980s and 1990s there was an increase in Saudi funding of mosques, schools, and scholarships in the Philippines.⁶

At the local level, *ulama* and *ustadz* are the principal conveyors and arbiters of Islamic doctrine and practice. *Ulama* (singular *Alim*), Muslim scholars trained in Islamic fundamentals and jurisprudence, are respected as the interpreters of Islam's doctrines and laws. *Ustadz* are religious teachers in Islamic schools or *madaris*. Together, the *ulama* and *ustadz* are seen as the guarantors of continuity in the spiritual and intellectual history of the Islamic community. The *ulama* hold considerable influence with the MILF. Some of the members of the MILF's Central Committee are *ulama*, and some serve as MILF battalion commanders.

⁶ Jennifer Keister: "A Cross-sectional analysis of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), and the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG)." According to Keister (pg 37-38): "...many mosques and some *madaris* in Mindanao are actually built with foreign money. In many cases, members of the Islamic diaspora (often in the Middle East) bequeath part of their estate to building mosques or *madaris* elsewhere in the Muslim world—often in places to which they themselves have no personal connection. Instead, such donations are filtered through their local imams, who in turn reach out to their personal networks to place the funding. Historically, some such investments were facilitated by traditional Moro elites.

2.3 Political Economy Analysis

Pervasive poverty and insecurity are an important influence on political development in Muslim Mindanao. Impoverished voters are far more dependent on the relative security and rudimentary social safety net provided by the traditional patron-client system than wealthier citizens would be, and are consequently more accepting of the system despite its flaws, and more susceptible to vote buying at election time. The insecurity and political violence related to the conflict contributes to the persistence of traditional coping mechanisms (i.e. the patron/client relationship), by making voters feel vulnerable and in need of the promise of physical security provided by a strong patron.

The Bangsamoro is the poorest region in the Philippines, with the highest unemployment. Remote both geographically and culturally from Metro Manila, the economic heart of the Philippines, the existing economy is primarily agricultural. Constraints to economic development in the Bangsamoro are significant and include widespread corruption, poor governance, and insecurity caused by clan violence (RIDO) and the ongoing separatist conflict.

Patronage. The key driver in the political economy of the region is competition over access to and control of the resources needed to sustain clans and their patronage networks. Although the Bangsamoro is viewed as the most backward region of the Philippines, clientelistic behavior permeates government throughout the country. Consequently, the highest level in the hierarchy of the Bangsamoro is actually Malacañang in Manila. The Presidency in the Philippines has considerable discretion over transfers from the central government to the regions beyond those automatically sent to local governments, and congressionally mandated national government programs. Disbursement of these added, discretionary resources is highly politicized (according to an interview with a World Bank official). Evidence of the importance of a relationship with Malacañang in gaining access to transfers is provided by the mass defection of elected officials to the President's party after each national election (after the last election 40% of elected officials shifted their allegiance to the President's party).

Resources from Manila are the first step in a patronage chain that extends through provincial officials down to officials at the lowest levels of local government, and to ordinary citizens. Competition for elected positions is so fierce because these positions provide access to patronage resources through corruption. Political campaigns tend to focus on the candidate or party's ability to deliver patronage, with messages highlighting their history and record of delivering the goods in the past, or the relationships they have that will allow them to deliver in the future. Small gifts for voters, or the provision of some public good like a road or a school, are both immediate benefits and suggestions from politicians that if they are elected similar benefits will be provided in the future.

Economic opportunities in the Bangsamoro. While the patron/client system provides voters with some level of social and physical security it is too inefficient to facilitate economic development or growth. Interestingly, the ARMM government is largely excluded from central government transfers to the region, which are usually channeled through provincial governors who are accountable to the central government in Manila. Lack of control of these resources has been perceived as the primary reason for the failure of the ARMM experiment.

Many of our informants felt the establishment of the Bangsamoro could provide opportunities for governance reform that could spur significant economic development. These expectations were based on both local governance reform, and the potential opportunities provided by an enhanced level of autonomy or independence from central government control.

According to a representative of an international organization with long involvement in the Bangsamoro, at the local or regional level: *“A key point of reform is interrupting the revenue flow that supports politicians’ participation in the client system in politics. If the new regional government controls tightly the purse strings, that will affect political dynamics in the region.”* Two key objectives will be de-politicizing transfers from the central government to reduce patronage opportunities, and raising resources locally to address local priorities (raising and expending resources at the local level is believed to improve governance because the process is more transparent and consequently politicians are more accountable).

Some independence or autonomy from the central government should allow the Bangsamoro to pursue economic policy options tailored for the region, rather than the generic (or Manila-centric) policy generated at the national level. In fact, the decentralization aspect of the creation of the Bangsamoro was seen by some in Manila as a potential model for similar reforms in other parts of the country. In a meeting with a representative of the Liberal Party we were told, *“the Bangsamoro can be a good model for the rest of the country if it succeeds. It can be an example for implementation of a federal system in the Philippines.”*

The Institute for Bangsamoro Studies is the de facto think tank for the MILF, and during several meetings they outlined ideas for taking advantage of autonomy and flexibility provided by the establishment of the Bangsamoro to spur economic development. According to one informant, *“People feel this is their own transition and they are excited. To make this work we (i.e. MILF) have to demonstrate to people the establishment of the Bangsamoro will bring peace dividends and improvements in health education etc. Inter-island trade needs to be promoted, not inhibited by security concerns.”*

Economic development can be stimulated through the provision of roads, power to the islands, inter-island transport, and serving as a gateway for imports and exports from and to Malaysia and Indonesia. Currently development plans cover all of Mindanao. We want to do analysis of how we can improve communication and transport in the new Bangsamoro region. We want to formalize trade between Tawi Tawi and Sabah, which would improve the local economy, and also increase revenue to the government.

2.4 External influences

Although the region is home to both an autonomous entity and several armed separatist movements, its politics are heavily influenced by (non-Muslim) power holders in Manila. To win an election in the ARMM, candidates always seek the endorsement of Malacañang palace. This is because access to government resources is assured if the regional government is an ally of the administration. And although the ARMM government is autonomous, it is dependent upon the national allocations for its operations. Candidates not only compete for voters’ preference, but

also compete to win the endorsement of the national ruling political party.⁷

Since the establishment of the ARMM the influence of Christians in politics in Muslim Mindanao has diminished. This is because the number of Christian voters in the region is small. As a result, Christian politicians from other regions are not interested to meddle in the ARMM politics. Support from Muslims from other countries is mainly for religious, education and humanitarian services. They have not shown interest in supporting political activities. International funding agencies and international NGOs have not had programs in Muslim Mindanao that support political party building and other political activities. The focus of their programs is to provide economic support.

2.5 Post-conflict politics.

Finally, it also is important to keep in mind that the political context in conflict-affected or post-conflict settings typically is very different from non-conflict settings. Some of the important differences typically include: (a) the existence of deep social cleavages, tensions and mistrust, (b) insecure and vulnerable populations that can be easily influenced or intimidated; (c) a residual proclivity to use violence to influence politics, (d) the existence of a peace agreement that serves as an important reference point for future political developments (to the extent that a peace agreement calls for significant political changes, then it creates uncertainty and a degree of instability), and (e) the presence of international actors (e.g. in the form of peacekeeping troops, monitors, transitional administrations and aid agencies).

3 THE PEACE PROCESS AND CREATION OF THE BANGSAMORO

3.1 The Peace Process

One of the primary factors affecting the potential development of effective and democratic government in the Bangsamoro region is the ultimate outcome of the peace process. Currently that process is concerned with setting up the major structural elements of the new relationship between the Bangsamoro and the national government, with processes relating to democracy and good governance relegated to the work of the Transition Commission drafting a Basic Law, and the MILF-led Bangsamoro Transition Authority that will guide the run-up to the May 2016 regular elections.

Historically, inadequate attention to post-conflict governance and democracy issues during peace processes has in many instances resulted in less than democratic governance and led to increased instability over time. We discussed the Peace Process with many stakeholders in the region and in Manila, and opinions varied widely. Some were enthusiastic and optimistic, some cautious and realistic, some pessimistic of prospects for peace, and a significant minority felt the entire process a cynical and insincere and duplicitous political ploy.

⁷ Rood, 2012. "Interlocking Autonomy: Manila and Muslim Mindanao" in Michelle Ann Miller (ed.) *Autonomy and Armed Separatism. Case Studies from South and Southeast Asia* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2012)

An influential MILF military commander was optimistic that the Peace Process would be successful and that the Bangsamoro would be established. He said that he and others in the MILF are developing plans to transform the MILF into a political organization. He felt that regardless of hiccups along the way, peaceful political engagement was the future of the MILF. According to the commander there is *“Not much danger of renewal of armed conflict.”*

In a meeting with a Liberal Party representative optimism was expressed: *“We are excited about the framework agreement, and our party is contemplating endorsing a Muslim as deputy speaker of the house.”*⁸ *We hope to strengthen our party in the ARMM over the next few years.”*

Several respondents felt that the Bangsamoro would be fragile unless there was constitutional reform. According to a MILF member of the Peace Panel; *“Winning (the election) is not everything it is more important to the MILF to entrench democracy, and to do that we need to entrench the Bangsamoro in the constitution. The biggest challenge to peace in the Bangsamoro is the Philippine government. The biggest question is if they can resolve their internal disagreements.”* The government’s position is that they are negotiating (as per instruction of President Aquino) “within the flexibilities of the constitution” and that no constitutional change is necessary. (President Aquino, for his part, has said the same with regard to calls to change economic provisions of the constitution: no need, so no change within his term.) The Bangsamoro Transition Commission, as well as drafting a Basic Law to be transmitted to Congress, is charged with recommending constitutional change “if needed.”

Some civil society representatives worried about the government’s commitment to the process; *“A lot of people are skeptical of the government’s sincerity now. When people start losing hope, it’s not good. That delay in restarting the talks led to doubts in the sincerity of the government, and has created pessimism. We believe that even if the Bangsamoro basic law is passed, without constitutional amendments we doubt it will last. Government (Congress and the Supreme Court) is almost universally viewed as the most likely spoiler of the peace process. Naturally, expressed skepticism waxes and wanes with progress in the peace talks.”*

Most worrying was that our most cynical and pessimistic assessment of the process came from an analyst with long experience in Mindanao peace and governance processes *“Amendment of the constitution for the Bangsamoro will not pass Congress. The government is playing a game. We can play the game because the Bangsamoro will never be united. The bureaucracy in the ARMM will campaign against the framework agreement. The government will sign an agreement but when that agreement is turned down by Congress the government will just say that we have no control over Congress.”*

The analyst felt that government insincerity and failure to provide adequate autonomy and guarantees would lead to a powerless entity similar to the ARMM, and that this outcome would have little political consequence, as leadership in the region was divided and could be co-opted through traditional patronage. In contrast to this view, most respondents in the region (but not the military commander of the MILF) felt a failure of the process would lead to a resumption of the armed struggle.

⁸ Congressman Pangalisan Balingdon of Lanao del Sur, in ARMM.

3.2 Outline of the Proposed Bangsamoro Government

The actual structure of the Bangsamoro will remain unknown until the Basic Law is released. The following description is based on the plans and best guesses of participants and stakeholders in the discussions surrounding the development of the Basic Law.

The proposed Bangsamoro will be governed by a “ministerial” form of government. By “ministerial” they mean parliamentary, but the word “parliament” is avoided as it is perceived to have connotations of national government, and the Government of the Philippines wants to make clear that the Bangsamoro will be subsidiary to the national government, not independent. The Moro National Liberation Front had also sought a parliamentary system, but was unsuccessful. The MILF sees a parliamentary system as being preferable for at least two reasons: first, it should lower the cost of running for election and second, it will allow for an easier change of leadership. Government negotiators were also familiar with the desire for parliamentary systems during previous discussion of Autonomous Regions under Article X of the 1987 Constitution, and were willing to concede it this time.

The most immediate impact of the adoption of the ministerial form of government will be a strengthening of the role of political parties. In a presidential system a person can become president based solely on their individual popularity (as we have seen recently in both the Philippines and Indonesia), but in a parliamentary system the executive function is exercised by the leadership of the strongest *party*, and party (rather than individual) elections are believed to promote political competition with relatively more emphasis on platform and ideology than individual charisma and patronage. According to a representative of the International Crisis Group (ICG); *“this could serve as an antidote to the feudal system.”*

The ICG representative also thought that the adoption of the ministerial form of government could *“desynchronize national and regional elections” and that patronage and the politicization of fiscal transfers would be reduced with regional parties rather than national parties competing at the regional level.*

Because representatives also have an executive function, adoption of the ministerial form of government may also have some influence on candidate selection. For example to compete effectively parties will need to put forward credible candidates to run various ministries (i.e. Agriculture, Education, Industry, etc.). This will put a premium on expertise, and possibly diminish the influence of dynasty and patronage inherent in the current local government.

Improvements in representation and democracy, and therefore governance, are also expected. According to a representative from Akbayan, *“the hope is that the ministerial form of government will be more decentralized, and that people will have more voice at the province level and municipal level in the new government. People will have more influence on their daily life through the regional level rather than the national level.”*

It is anticipated that congressional districts will be modified so that their borders are contiguous with the new Bangsamoro region (i.e. congressional districts will not cross regional borders). Having a clearly defined region should lead to the creation of a caucus of Bangsamoro representatives in the Congress, which should improve representation for the region at the

national level, but some were skeptical. According to an ARMM executive, *“there are currently eight regular congressmen from the Bangsamoro, but I have never heard any of them stand up in Congress and speak for the Moro people. Mostly we have pork barrel politics.”*

Although there is optimism that establishment of the Bangsamoro could have a positive impact on the lives of ordinary citizens, there are also significant concerns. An informant from OPAPP asked what inclusivity means in a ministerial form of government, and worried that marginalized communities from the outer islands might be left out of the process, but also reported that the transition commission is looking at the possibility of a reserved seats to help represent marginalized communities.

Finally, traditional politics is unlikely to disappear overnight, and most respondents felt that traditional politicians would still be very influential in the new government. All of the parties and potential parties we interviewed acknowledged family and clan would still be important and powerful, but most felt that the system could be used to bring gradual reform. A typical comment came from an Akbayan representative in Cotabato, *“surely the new political architecture will incorporate traditional political structures, but also there should be some change, maybe 50% traditional and 50% new. The traditional families will be there, but they will be more focused on regional issues. Also, newer and younger family members will bring a new perspective.”*

3.3 Gender Considerations in the Bangsamoro

Importantly, the FAB includes a provision granting the “right of women to meaningful political participation.” In our brief assessment we were unable to examine this issue in detail, but initial impressions suggest significant social and cultural constraints on the participation and advancement of women in political parties. Although we do see women in senior political roles, in almost every case they seem to be involved in politics as nominees or representatives of a family or clan, rather than because of individual interest or merit. For example, a party-list leader and former NGO worker told us in an interview *“I am in politics because of my husband.”*

What on the surface appears a significant level of female representation may in fact be merely the visual expression of dynastic political culture, and it is certainly possible that reforms aimed at diminishing the influence of feudalism could result in fewer women representatives. While this would be a consideration everywhere in the Philippines still grappling with the persistence of traditional political culture, a representative of the ICG thought constraints on women’s participation might be particularly acute in the Bangsamoro if the eventual government of the region is heavily Islamist. She also reported that some women contacts are concerned about some MILF *ulama* and their interpretation of *sharia* law.

4 THE NATIONAL AND REGIONAL PARTY SYSTEMS IN THE BANGSAMORO

4.1 Typology of the Party System

The party system in the Bangsamoro can be described as a combination of *traditional local notable* and *clientistic* systems. Traditional local notable systems evolve from previous, often hereditary, power structures. They can be aristocracy, clan or tribal-based, and the personal power of individuals is tied to a specific locality. They tend to be more rural than urban, but can

ally with urban parties or factions when interests align. Representatives are elected based on customary or traditional deference to authority. Local notables tend to form alliances of convenience to protect and increase their privilege and power.

A clientistic party is a confederation of notables, either traditional in rural areas or liberal-professional or economic elites in urban areas. They tend to be paternalistic, and rely for electoral mobilization on an exchange of favors or overt coercion. Campaign activities are based on quasi-feudal hierarchical chains of interpersonal relationships, with relatively durable patterns of loyalty linked with the exchange of services and obligations. As societies modernize and deference for traditional authority breaks down, local notable parties often evolve into clientistic parties.

Although most parties can be described as *cadre* and *electoral* parties, there is at least one mass-based party in the region (Akbayan), although even this party is heavily integrated into and influenced by the clan system and family loyalties. For example, the two seats that Akbayan gained in the region during the last elections were both won by traditional local politicians who were recruited into the party (i.e. switched party allegiance).

Although the clans are predominant everywhere, there exists strong and growing frustration with the system. An ARMM executive told us: *“The political party system doesn’t work anymore. Parties should be founded on the needs and aspirations of the people, not clans and dynasties. The party list system doesn’t work either because the seats can be bought. The party list seats are intended to be non-partisan and to provide representation for marginalized populations, but now elites and dynasties use money and influence to capture the seats.”*

4.2 National Parties

The major parties in the Philippines are the Liberal Party, the NP and the UNA, and the most organized are the Liberal Party and Akbayan. Akbayan is relatively small (and focused on local positions) but is significant because a) it is part of the ruling coalition, b) it represents an effort to build a party from the grass roots up and c) it has a focus on Mindanao. This section focuses on 1) the LP because it currently is the dominant party in western Mindanao and 2) Akbayan, because of its presence in Western Mindanao.

4.2.1 Akbayan

Organization and Structure of the Party – Akbayan was organized in January 1998, and went on to win one party-list congressional seat in the 1998 elections. In 2001 Akbayan won two seats, and in 2003 three seats. According to a representative of the party, 2007 was a low point due to GMA repression. In response, in 2010 they went into close coalition with Liberal Party to oppose GMA. Although founded to compete for party-list seats in the national Congress, Akbayan also competes in local elections, and currently has 54,000 members.

According to representatives of the party, Akbayan is a *multi-sectoral national party representing workers, marginalized voters, gay people, etc.* Although Akbayan is a non-communist leftist party, many of its founders were members of the Communist Party of the Philippines during the Marcos era. It is well-organized, with the basic unit being the *chapter* at village or barangay level. At the municipal level the unit is the *section*, which is made up of at least six chapters. At

the constituency level the unit is a *division*, which consists of at least three sections. To govern the party a general Congress is held every three years to set broad policy. Organizational governance is guided by a National Council meeting twice a year, with day-to-day operations managed by an Executive Committee and full-time Secretariat.

The Executive Committee (or the Chair of the Committee) at the division level is responsible for candidate selection. During the last party Congress in May 2012 Akbayan revised its bylaws to mandate establishment of a Moro commission specifically to help the party address the concerns of the Bangsamoro region. According to an Akbayan representative *“We do not think the ministerial form of government will require it any change in our organization or our campaigning approach. It will help us because under the ministerial form of government small parties will have more opportunities to win. The most important reforms are on [campaign] finance.”*

Campaigns in the Bangsamoro – Akbayan officials were remarkably realistic in their approach to campaigns: *“Local elections are a different ball game. You have to be cunning, and you may have to do things that you do not want to do. It is hard to fight someone who has a gun with a rose in your hand.”* They recognized that to be successful in the region they would need, at least to some extent, to work within the existing system: *“To be successful we must work both inside and outside the clan system. What is important is the Akbayan brand of governance. We have technical assistance for local officials and help with campaigns, but you cannot be an angel in local elections.”*

Platform Development – Akbayan feel they are already strong in coalition building and inclusiveness, and see their primary focus or constituency as the most marginalized in society. To develop a platform and campaign they ask each chapter to identify a local issue to run on. A participatory development planning process is used to assess voter priorities (although another informant told us they have no set procedure or a methodology for assessing voter preferences). The national level then provides technical assistance to articulate the local issue in an effective campaign plan (*We help make it sexy.*) Although village elections are supposedly non-partisan, Akbayan does plan to participate in the local elections in October through their chapters.

4.2.2 *Liberal Party*

Organization and Structure of the Party – The oldest party in the Philippines, Liberal Party representatives claim classical liberalism as a guiding ideology. Historically an elite-based cadre party, according to one party official the LP is currently making efforts to transform itself into a more mass-based party: *We now have ordinary people as members of the party, and our IT department will create eight feedback mechanisms to help listen to the people. We hope to see the end of patronage politics. We want to compete.*

As the ruling party at the national level, the Liberal Party becomes almost automatically the ruling party in the Bangsamoro region, as typically 40% of traditional politicians will switch allegiance to whichever party wins the national elections to gain greater influence in Manila and access to patronage resources. This party-switching is often referred to by the receiving party as *recruitment*. New recruits to the LP are given basic training in the tenets of classical liberalism.

According to a party representative: *“we started out in the ARMM by recruiting incumbent*

officials.” For example, the current governor of the ARMM is a recent convert to the Liberal Party.

An official in the ARMM government disagreed with this approach to party building, saying that *instead of building on the masses, the LP is building on the elected*. He felt that by recruiting incumbent traditional politicians they were missing a golden opportunity to build a strong party in the region. An LP congressman from a constituency just outside the Bangsamoro thought there was a lot of turnover in the last elections because of the strength of the president, but that to be successful in the future the LP: *does not need to rely on money or goons, just to provide good governance. We need a good party system to ensure the success of the Bangsamoro after the current president leaves office.*

Campaigns in the Bangsamoro – According to an LP congressman in a district just outside the proposed Bangsamoro: “The biggest challenge for the LP in Bangsamoro is to implement their projects (i.e. campaign promises) so they can build a record to run on in the election. Another representative mentioned: “*We have three activists per region who will network with existing organizations to help us understand the needs of the people.*”

Platform Development – According to the LP congressman the LP’s national platform is already decided, and they will compete in Bangsamoro primarily on that, with a little extra on for local interests, but the platform will be almost the same. This presents a challenge, at least in initial elections, when voters are likely to be focused on Bangsamoro-specific policy, and will possibly provide an increased opportunity for new or existing local parties.

Coalition with the MILF – Several people, including an incumbent LP Congressman and an official from the President’s office, told us there was a possibility for the LP to go in coalition with the MILF for Bangsamoro elections, but none of the MILF representatives we met thought this a realistic possibility.

4.3 Party list parties

Under the Philippine constitution, 20 percent (currently 57) Congressional seats are reserved for the representatives of “sectoral” groups elected through party-list elections. In practice the “parties” that form and compete for party-list seats include genuine political parties, parties formed to represent particular regional, economic and professional interests, and parties formed to enable political families to secure seats in the Congress. The electoral constituency is national and the law allows one party to win a maximum of three seats. In 2013, 123 groups competed for party-list seats, it took about 235,000 votes to win a seat, and 41 party-list parties won seats.

Several Mindanao-based “parties” have contested for party-list seats in the Philippine Congress. Two explicitly claim to represent the “Bangsamoro” people: Anak Mindanao (AMIN) and Suara Bangsamoro. AMIN is essentially an electoral vehicle for the Hataman family; Suara Bangsamoro is affiliated with the left. A third, ALIM, which purports to represent indigenous people, appears to be an electoral vehicle for the Tomawis family in Lanao del Sur. There is not a single party list party that claims to represent Muslim Filipinos across the country.

4.3.1 AMIN (*Anak Mindanao*)

AMIN was founded in 1997. In 2004 Mujiv S. Hataman from Basilan was elected; in 2013 his wife was elected. According to its website, AMIN is “a Party characterized by Tri-people (Moro, Lumad, Filipino), multi-sectoral (peasants, youth, urban poor, professionals, labor, fisher folks, etc.), and multi-formation (POs, federations, Coops, NGOs and individuals), organized to respond to the growing sentiments of the Mindanao peoples in affecting positive change in the country, particularly in Mindanao.” As Mujiv Hataman was winning the region-wide governorship, AMIN took some 34% of the total party list vote in the ARMM.

4.3.2 *Suara Bangsamoro*

Suara, is the Maguindanao word for “voice.” It is intended to be the political representation in the Bangsamoro of the leftist Bayan Muna party. According to its website, Suara Bangsamoro “aims to uphold the Moro people’s right to self-determination, promote a politics of self-reliance, bring about a “progressive and healthy interaction” between the Moro and Filipino peoples, forge a just peace not only in Mindanao but throughout the Philippines, embark on a policy of “genuine industrialization and land reform” as the path toward eradicating the Moro people’s poverty; create international solidarity against foreign aggression, domination, exploitation, and oppression; and protect the Moro people and their homeland. Suara has been represented by Zaynab Ampatuan, Amirah Ali Lidasan but in recent years has styled itself more as a non-government organization than as a contender for party list seats.

4.3.3 ALIF (*Ang Laban ng Indiginong Filipino*)

Ang Laban ng Indiginong Filipino (ALIF) claims to represent indigenous people. Acmad Tomawis, a longtime official who served various positions from OIC mayor of Marawi, executive director of the Office of Muslim Affairs and assemblyman of the ARMM, sits as the ALIF representative. Its top two nominees, Abdul and Agakhan Tomawis, are both sons of the group’s incumbent Rep. Acmad Tomawis, a multi-millionaire with a declared net worth of P18.56 million (2012 SALN). Acmad’s brother is Jerry Tomawis, who was caught up in a pyramid scheme controversy, and the party failed to win a seat in the 2013 May elections.

4.4 Islamic parties

There have been several initiatives to establish explicitly Islamic parties. As of 2010, there were five Muslim political parties registered and accredited by the Commission on Elections. Ompia, IPP and Ummah all were founded by Islamic leaders and were intended to appeal to Filipino Muslims. Two more, the People’s Consultative Party and the Muslim Reform Party are inactive; the current status of the Ummah Party and the Islamic Party of the Philippines (IPP) is unclear. The two most active parties have been the Ompia Party and the Islamic Party of the Philippines (IPP). Very little has been written about them, but we do know that both of which were formed in the late 1980s (following the fall of Marcos and the restoration of democracy), had some initial success, and since have largely languished. They are mentioned here principally to show that there is a historical precedent for Islamic political parties.

Muslim Political Parties (As of 2010)		
Political Party	Constituency	Headquarters

Ompia Party	Regions IX and XII	Marawi City
Muslim Reform Party	Lanao del Sur and Lanao del Norte	Marawi City
People's Consultative Party (Mushawara)	Lanao del Sur, Lanao del Norte, Maguindanao, Basilan, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, Zamboanga del Sur	Marawi City
Ummah Party	Lanao del Sur, Lanao del Norte, Marawi City and Iligan City	Marawi City
Islamic Party of the Philippines (IPP)	Island of Mindanao, Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi	Sultan Kudarat, Shariff Kabunsuan
Source: Comelec 2010		

4.4.1 *Ompia Party in Lanao*

The Ompia (reform) party was established by the *ulama* in Lanao del Sur in 1986. The founding president of Ompia Party was Dr. Mahid Mutilan (graduate of Al Azhar Univeristy), who was also the president of the Ulama League of the Philippines. According to Eric Gutierrez, Muslim clerics formed Ompia in response to Lanao politics dominated by Muslim strongmen and warlords who symbolize a highly personalized, patrimonial form of politics, where the perquisites of public office are treated as personal property and corruption is common.⁹

According to Gutierrez, it had a strong anti-corruption platform and was critical of traditional strongmen and warlords.¹⁰ Ompia-supported candidates won in Lanao del Sur's first district and later Mahid Mutilan was elected provincial governor of Lanao del Sur. It also won a few seats in the ARMM assembly. There were two Ompiah-affiliated candidates in the May 2013 ARMM elections and several local government candidates in Lanao del Sur. Most got only a tiny portion of the vote.

4.4.2 *The IPP in Maguindanao*

The Maguindanao-based IPP was organized in early 1987 at a meeting of the *ulama* called by Zacaria Candao, then acting governor of the province and closely associated with the MILF. The founder of the IPP was Ustaz Ebrahim Abdulrahman. Lanang Ali, the secretary-general of the party, was also legal counsel for the MILF, having succeeded Candao in that position. Given Candao's association with the party, it represented something of a hybrid between a religious party and a traditional electoral vehicle. According to Eric Gutierrez: While the IPP is often dismissed as simply a political vehicle for Candao, it cannot be denied that the party's leadership has shown the way in "blending" the religious and political spheres. IPP leaders, says Candao, "conduct their politics according to the teachings of Islam." Most members are known to be devout and pious Muslims. Even Candao's reputation as a local strongman has been mitigated by IPP's adherence to an Islamic Code of Conduct based on the Quran."¹¹

According to Thomas McKenna, the IPP sought to combine Islamic populism with political pluralism. According to McKenna, "The populist Islamic appeals of Candao and the IPP were as

⁹ Gutierrez, *Rebels, Warlords and Ulama*, pg 148.

¹⁰ Ibid, pg 148.

¹¹ Eric Gutierrez, *Rebels Warlords and Ulama*, pg 149.

alien to the *datu* elite as they were threatening.”¹² According to McKenna, the published “program of government” of the IPP included the establishment of meaningful autonomy in the “Bangsamoro Homeland,” the eradication of “all forms of evil in government and society,” and the equitable distribution of wealth by preventing the “concentration of wealth in a privileged few hands.” The program also contained a statement of belief that “Islam offers a complete basis for the resolution of all human problems including socio-economic ones.”¹³

The IPP contested the 1987 congressional elections and surprised the traditional Muslim elite when the politically unknown non-*datu* candidate they put forward for the congressional district that included Cotabato City outpolled a number of established *datu* politicians to place a close second behind the winning candidate... The strong showing of the IPP prompted the major *datu* families—including some who had been bitter enemies—to unite to an unprecedented degree to defeat Candao and the IPP in the January 1988 provincial elections.

In at least three of its features, the 1988 electoral campaign for governor of Maguindanao Province was without precedent in Cotabato. It was the first electoral struggle between two clearly distinguished and ideologically opposed Muslim elite groups for the leadership of the province. Also, for the first time ever, Islamic discourse figured prominently in political appeals made to voters. As a consequence, religious disputes, such as that about the proper role of the *ulama*, were finally contested in public political debates. And third, because of the new national political atmosphere and the loss of exclusive control of the province by the *datu* elite, it was, in all likelihood, the most genuinely democratic election ever conducted in Muslim Cotabato.

4.5 Potential Future Parties – MILF and MNLF

Absent the Basic Law, it is too soon to know what the future of political parties will look like in the Bangsamoro. But it does seem likely that key drivers of party development include: 1) what the MILF and to a lesser extent, the MNLF do with regard to forming political parties, 2) what other, non-MI or MN political leaders choose to do, and 3) the actions of national parties in the run up to the 2016 elections. Given the centrality of the MILF and MNLF as armed actors, this section focuses on them.

The transition from armed group to democratic political party is one of the most important and difficult challenges in peace processes. Since armies are organized from the top down, and rely on discipline and unquestioned obedience to orders for battlefield success, it is unsurprising they often are unfertile ground for the growth of democratic and participatory political parties. Nevertheless, the success of the peace process and the creation of a stable, just and democratic society in the Bangsamoro may be entirely dependent on the success of this transition. Whatever their other merits might be, both the MNLF and the MILF, by claiming to represent the Bangsamoro people but not becoming political parties, have had the effect of stunting the development of other political parties.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Thomas McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels*, pg 247. McKenna provides a fascinating account of the IPP’s campaigns for the 1998 Gubernatorial election (which Candao won) and Cotabato City municipal elections (where IPP fared less well.)

At a key time in the political development of the ARMM, MNLF Chairman Nur Misuari opted to bolster his power by entering an alliance with President Ramos and other power holders in Manila¹⁴ rather than undertaking the harder (and riskier) work of transforming the MNLF into a political party. The time that the MNLF governed the ARMM represented an opportunity to break the patronage relationships between the clans and power holders in Manila; but the MNLF was instead engulfed by the system, and after nine years of rule both its unity and its credibility had been seriously damaged.

Throughout the period of MNLF rule the MILF maintained the position that it was a revolutionary organization seeking a fundamental redefinition of the relationship between the Bangsamoro people and the Philippine state. For the MILF, the implication of this stance was that a political agreement with the GRP must precede engagement in politics and governance (and therefore forming a political party). Now that such an agreement is in progress the MILF seems much more open to party development, but its failure to pursue politics in the past, while simultaneously claiming to represent the interests and aspirations of the Bangsamoro people, has delayed normal political development.

4.5.1 MILF

Organization and structure of the MILF – The Moro Islamic Liberation Front, like many revolutionary organizations, has essentially a system of “democratic centralism.” Their armed fronts and local communities are organized in numerous ways, with committees for political, security, and social affairs. There is a Chair, a 1st and 2nd Vice Chair. Founding Chairman Salamat Hashim introduced the practice of consultative leadership which is being practiced until now under the leadership of Hadji Murad. Consensual decision-making sometimes means that discussions and decisions can take a long time -- it took almost a year before an openly-defiant commander, Ameril Umbra Kato, was finally expelled from the MILF.

Intention to Form a Party – It was the impression of the team that the MILF does intend to develop a political arm to compete in elections. It appears very likely that the MILF will transform itself into a non-partisan social movement (like Muhammadiyah and Nadhatul Ulama in Indonesia) with an associated but separate political party. It is not surprising they have decided on this course, as it is commonly believed in both the region and Manila that the MNLF made a serious mistake in not setting up a political party. For example, in a meeting with representatives of the Liberal Party we heard “*The MNLF failed in trying to set up a party; that should not happen to the MILF. They should learn from the experience of the MNLF.*”

An MILF member of the Peace Panel expanded on the MILF view on intention to form a party and party building: *With or without a peace agreement we will put up a party. It's a formal organization, and will make us more powerful. There is almost a consensus within the MILF that we will organize a separate political party and the MILF will become a social movement similar to Muhammadiyah in Indonesia. Party support and party-building should go on concurrently, as it is now clear the struggle is moving away from military and towards democratic. We are transitioning from the bullet to the ballot. Changing all our frame of mind is very difficult and*

¹⁴ Donors who provided economic support to the ARMM and MNLF without encouraging the political transformation of the MNLF also bear some responsibility.

cannot happen overnight. We need to work on it. Currently the political landscape of the Bangsamoro is dominated by traditional leaders, so we need to change the frame of mind of the people.

A leading MILF commander told us they had been given their mandate by the central committee, and had already started activities to build a political party. *We will do platform development at a later date. We still have not decided yet if we will transform the MILF into a political party or create a social movement and a party.* The political party study group consists of the chief of staff, and a total of 10 people. According to an analyst at the Institute for Bangsamoro Studies, *asking the chief of staff of the army to chair of the party study group is a smart move, as when shifting from army to party the military is hard to get on board. The MILF will have two separate organizations, a political party and a social movement.*

Potential for Formal or Informal Coalition Between MNLF and MILF – There seems little possibility of a coalition between MILF and MNLF (particularly given the internal difficulties of the MNLF, outlined below), but some interlocutors felt that if MILF sets up a party there is a possibility some MNLF cadre will join it as members or candidates.

Challenges for MILF – According to a local representative of Akbayan, *The major problems that will be faced by the MILF include threats from entrenched political families and businesses. Some political warlords have their own armies. Critical will be the preparedness of their supporters. They will be excited, but elections are very different from what they are doing now. We know how difficult the transition can be when you have been in the field for decades (we were formerly Maoists). Now the MILF will have to prove they can govern and are inclusive, are independent of families and clans, and that the Bangsamoro is better than the ARMM.*

A representative of the Liberal Party told us: *We need more democratic competition in the Bangsamoro, and the MILF cannot win elections in the islands of Basilan, Sulu, and Tawi-Tawi. One reason we are willing to help the MILF is because we are worried that if the MILF do not win the elections they may pull out of the peace process. This would also reflect poorly on the President, who has invested a lot of political capital in the peace process.*

When asked about the challenges facing the MILF, and representative from OPAPP said: *Although the armed groups in the ARMM complicate things, the MILF can campaign everywhere in the Bangsamoro. When they compete they will already have some credibility, due to their leadership in the peace process. Their campaigns will to some extent be family based.*

An MILF representative told us: *Challenges are expected in reconciling the ministerial form of government with the presidential system. Challenges are traditional politicians, rotten to the core. We must engage in reforming the mindset of the people, much as we have to adapt from army to politics. Maybe some traditional politicians will join us. One incumbent is my relative, and some of others in the MILF have relatives in politics who may join us. But it is also hard if they maintain their present status. Instead of us reforming them, they may change us!*

Reconciling those within the party who desire a more Islamic party (and government) with the secularists will also be a challenge. An ARMM official predicted *The MILF will set up a secular*

party probably; but MILF members said the decision had not yet been made. There is already a Sharia system in the region, but it deals only with family not criminal. The Bangsamoro will have its own justice system. Sharia will only be available to Muslims.

4.5.2 MNLF

Structure and organization: The Moro National Liberation Front, headed by founding Chair Nur Misuari, held together until the signing of the 1976 Tripoli Agreement (for autonomy) – at which point it started to fractionate. Vice-Chair Salamat Hashim criticized Misuari’s leadership and eventually (in 1984) formally established the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. President Marcos actively coopted MNLF members so that a majority of the initial cadre participated in his faux autonomous regions IX and XII.

The current splintered configuration stems from the 1996 Final Peace Agreement and its implementation. Concern over Misuari’s performance as governor (1996-2001) led an Executive Council of 15 to propose to him that he become “chairman emeritus;” when he rejected the idea they eventually formally convened themselves to elect Muslimin Sema as Chair of the MNLF. Other groupings also emerged at this time, so that any notion of a united MNLF is dubious. Add to that more-or-less autonomous State Revolutionary Commands in communities across the island region, and the MNLF might be abstractly described as polycephalous.

Intention to Form a Party – Founding Chair Misuari, after the 1996 Final Peace Agreement, decided that the MNLF will not organize a political party to take part in elections – he preferred to rely on his own personal charisma and leave the MNLF as a revolutionary front. The involvement of Misuari faction of the MNLF in the recent Zamboanga siege dims the possibility for the MNLF to form a political party at least in the near future. Muslimin Sema is seen as more of political pragmatist than Nur, but to date has also expressed doubts about the utility of an MNLF political party. Other MNLF leaders have varying opinions.

The MNLF is organized around 43 State Revolutionary Committees. Of these 13 have expressed interest in forming a political party, and are known as “*the Coalition of the Willing*.” According to one informant from the government, the MNLF is planning to have a political party, although she doesn’t seem optimistic about their prospects (*the MNLF is not very popular, but might get seats through the party list*). An ARMM executive thought MNLF should have a party, *although the MNLF doesn’t have a natural party wing, and there is dissension between its leaders, they should at least put forward a party to articulate the aspirations of the people, but also they should have one to compete*.

According to an NGO leader with ties to the MNLF, “*the chairman [Nur Misuari] is not very interested in building a political party but the vice chairman and others have started to realize that need to organize the State Revolutionary Committees politically. We raised this issue [of party building] with the chairman in 2007 and he was positive for a while, but there was no follow-up. Now we’re doing massive consultation and dialogue with the 13 State Committees in the “Coalition of the Willing.” Unfortunately the majority of ground commanders react negatively; they cannot connect their current condition with the peace talks. We are nervous about participation in elections, as we are not really sure if we can win, and we damage our reputation if we lose. Still, we think 70% to 80% of the population could vote for the MNLF, as the MILF is only strong in Mindanao.*”

A representative of Akbayan felt that if MNLF was going to compete successfully they would need to make a decision about party formation soon, *“high level leaders have to decide if they will have one or two or no political party, and then communicate that to the people on the ground. If that decision is not made, people will be reluctant to join in an MNLF party. They need clear guidance.”*

Developing a Party – According to an ARMM executive, *to start a party they should have a basic orientation, and build a network. To be successful the party should not be built from the top down (no parties here are organized from the bottom up). An MNLF party could win seats in the Jolo area. Personally I am more interested in a political advocacy organization, a party as a movement. A Bangsamoro people’s party could deliver votes.*

The *Coalition of the Willing* plans to stand candidates for the barangay elections in October. Since these are non-party elections the candidates will run independently. They believe that younger cadre are more open to political participation and they expect most of their candidates to be about 40 years old. But this new political approach seems still constrained by the old social structure, as revealed in the following comment from a senior member of the Coalition, *to bring new blood into the political process we are preparing a political orientation for the sons and nephews of commanders.* Regarding a potential partner for party-building training for the MNLF, She also noted; *we have an NGO and are willing to do a project for training of MNLF candidates for the Barangay elections in October.*

5 POTENTIAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR DONOR ASSISTANCE

5.1 Suggestions from stakeholders

Our conversations with key stakeholders yielded a number of program-relevant insights and recommendations:

- It is important not to conflate traditional politics with traditional leaders and to be aware of overlapping roles. Traditional and informal local and religious leaders (i.e. local notables not involved in the formal political structure personally or through proxies) may be influential, well regarded and trusted at the ground level. Often, local leaders are the first line for conflict resolution between clans. They should be consulted and included in the peace and democratic development processes.
- A representative from OPAPP thought it would be important to provide the MILF with information about election systems and channels of representation (interest articulation): *the most important thing is that the Basic Law is good and inclusive. There has been a pattern of political entitlement in the peace agreements.* She also thought, *it will be important to look at the generational divisions in Bangsamoro society. There is more space for a change in younger professionals. People who were trained outside and adapt what they know to local conditions will be the most appropriate providers of technical assistance.*

- The Liberal Party and Akbayan should be included in issue identification efforts (i.e. research to determine voter preferences and priorities), but will require (and accept) little in the way of organizational development assistance. Likewise Akbayan told us, *we can do organizing, but need assistance with agenda setting and strategy development. Agenda agreed by leaders should be based on consultations at the ground level. If we can have access to a pool of resources, that would be good.*
- One of our most interesting findings was the willingness of some parties to help the MILF and MNLF form new parties that would essentially be competitors. Probably many in the Liberal Party see their reputation to some degree as dependent on the success of the Peace Process, so are willing to cede local advantage for national prestige. In contrast, Akbayan's willingness to help is ideological: *we're not present in the entire ARMM, but still an effective party. Most parties base their success on money. We base our own success on the ground support. Akbayan is both a party and a movement. Because we are a movement we can help other parties (MILF and others), because their success can advance our ideology.*

5.2 Program Options for Donors

The Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB) and, prospectively, the passage of the Basic Law represent a significant opportunity for peace and improved politics and governance in the Bangsamoro. Donors should support efforts to realize the goals outlined in the FAB. At the same time, donors need to proceed carefully and strategically. The situation in Muslim Mindanao is complex, fluid and still volatile. Supporting political transformation is an inherently difficult and long term endeavor. And support for political party building runs the risk of being perceived as being partisan and/or foreign intervention in domestic politics.

Therefore, assistance should be guided by the following key principles:

- 1) Do No Harm. It must be remembered that the Bangsamoro region is complex and potentially volatile. Donors must be sure that they understand the evolving context, closely monitor the impact of their interventions and guard against potential unintended consequences.
- 2) Donor support for efforts to develop political parties must be balanced, inclusive and non-partisan assistance.
- 3) Donor support for party building should focus on organizational development and not on shaping party platforms and policies.
- 4) Donors should be transparent about the forms of support provided for party building.

The assessment team sees three areas where donor assistance, if carefully designed and implemented, could have positive impact:

- 1) Assisting groups seeking to transform from armed movements to political parties.
- 2) Assisting all political organizations in the Bangsamoro to understand the new political system.

- 3) Assisting all political organizations in the Bangsamoro to better understand and be more responsive to citizens' needs.

The needs of political parties and potential political parties in the new Bangsamoro vary, with established parties needing little assistance to compete effectively, and new parties needing assistance on everything. This means that the size of programs with different parties is likely to vary considerably, but this should not be a problem for perceptions of bias, as established parties recognize they have fewer urgent needs than the new parties.

Although a possible starting point would be separate streams of activities for organizations and parties which are mutually compatible, during the course of our interviews it became apparent that in at least some cases it made sense for the different streams to work together, and that in all cases close coordination was advisable.

Although the focus is party-building, it is clear that a successful transition will require both party building and governance skill building. Assistance should not be static, but should be tailored to evolving needs and emerging priorities.

5.2.1 Public Opinion Survey

A regional survey could examine public attitudes towards the transition and expectations for existing and emerging political parties. By clearly articulating voter concerns and priorities such a survey could also help new parties craft responsive and attractive political platform, helping ensure improved governance and a successful and stable transition. Although their mandate is somewhat constrained, a World Bank official told us they would be willing to support research aimed at “*understanding what it takes to promote stability and a successful transition*”.

5.2.2 Outreach on the Political Implications of the Basic Law.

Support the efforts of the IBS, IAG and perhaps the BLA to hold a series of meetings to explore the implications of the Basic Law for electoral politics and governance.

5.2.3 Study Tour

To assist the MILF (and possibly MNLF) in the development of a new party the Foundation could arrange a structured study tour for relevant officials. Drawing on Asia Foundation country offices for organizational assistance, each stop in the tour would include targeted presentations and lectures highlighting relevant experiences and practical considerations in party formation and development.

In East Timor the group could meet with senior veterans of FRETILIN to learn about their transition from liberation movement to democratic political party. In Jakarta there are representatives of PAN, PKS, and PD on party formation, and the role of Islam in political parties. The third and last stop on the tour could be in Aceh, where they could meet with GAM officials to learn about their independence struggle, and how they transitioned in the post-autonomy period.

5.2.4 MILF Party Development

The Interim Committee for Establishment of Bangsamoro Political Party will soon submit its report to the MILF Central Committee. At that time we will know the official stand of the MILF on the issue of political party building. If the decision is for the MILF to organize a political

party, TAF may work with IBS to undertake a party building needs assessment for the MILF. That assessment would provide the basis for provision of TA and trainers to the MILF as needed.

5.2.5 MNLF Party Development

Given the fractious nature of the current configuration of the MNLF, a unified approach to party development for MNLF cadres is infeasible. However, a number of members of the MNLF have expressed interest in being included in party-strengthening activities so that they better understand the issues involved in shifting into political contestation, and perhaps learn skills. It would be essential to utilize networks and considerable effort to include all varieties of MNLF, so as not to be accused of taking sides or dividing the movement.

5.2.6 Women's Political Participation

As noted earlier in this report, the FAB includes as a “basic right” the “right of women to meaningful political participation.” A number of women from all stakeholder organizations have expressed an interest in increased political participation; consulting them about possibilities being considered would help bolster a more gendered effort. The MNLF women's group might be an appropriate initial entry for party-building activities in the near term. This project might still go forward through a focus on a Bangsamoro Women's Party (or some other party) for the national party-list elections, which would at least begin the process of organizing and capacity-building, helping to ensure that if a late decision was taken on party formation they would have the base and tools needed to participate. And women naturally will be encouraged and capacitated to take part in the party-building exercises of all streams.

5.2.7 Regional Analysis

The current representative of ICG has resigned and consequently there will be no ICG reports on the region for at least a year. Donors might consider a grant to another group or other mechanisms to fill this analytical void.

5.2.8 Political Consultants

In many instances in recent years wealthy politicians in Asia have hired western political consultants, and it can be argued that these consultants have had a large and positive effect on democratic representation by developing campaigns that are responsive to voter concerns and priorities, and leading to a change in voter expectations from all candidates. Through a partnership with Australian political parties, TAF could provide similar consultants to new parties to help them identify key target groups, and develop effective messages and campaigns for the Bangsamoro. Each consultant would work with only one party, so would be a trusted member of the campaign team.

END