

# PHILIPPINES: Youth as Conflict Managers. Peacebuilding of Two Youth-Led Non-Profit Organizations in Mindanao

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**Abstract:** An emerging trend in studies proves how young people are engaged in post-conflict initiatives, yet minimal studies were conducted on how do youth enhance their peacebuilding agency when access to formal training and formal institutions are unavailable. Especially for youth-led organizations in developing and conflict-driven regions, the inaccessibility of proper training and the inability to establish strategic directions is a challenge. This research examined the peacebuilding project management of two youth-led and arts-based peacebuilding organizations in Mindanao. Both organizations have strategies that are developed through experience gained by their key stakeholders. Its goals and peacebuilding programs are inclined to bring impact to its beneficiaries at the individual, interpersonal, and community levels. Especially for non-profit literature, the empirical data from this study contributes particularly to developing and conflict-driven regions where proper training is scarce, that experience-based strategies can be effective in enhancing staff and members' capacity.

**Keywords:** Mindanao, peacebuilding, project management, youth.

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In the recent years, the use of arts as a tool for peacebuilding has become popular especially in the post-conflict areas (personal communication, Potler, 2012), yet for being considered as a "soft" approach (Shank & Schirch, 2008), it is not as popular as compared to conventional approaches such as lectures, meetings, and conferences. In Mindanao, the use of arts such as dance, painting, drama, and games forms part of

the annual Mindanao Week of Peace (MWP) among civil society organizations (CSOs), with the youth and children as common players. As to music, Pruitt's (2011) preliminary analysis from a case study conducted in Northern Ireland shows that music is an alternative way to engage in dialogue for building peace for the fact the music can bring youth together to share meaning. Ragandang and Viloría's (2018) examined how arts-based youth organizations can achieve sustainability despite the unpopular acceptance of arts as a tool in peacebuilding.

A study by Zelizer (2003) on the role of artistic processes in peace-building in Bosnia-Herzegovina revealed that community arts-based processes had become one of the most important components of peacebuilding work in conflict and post-conflict states. He affirmed that the arts-based approach to peacebuilding "can be an especially effective tool to bring together identity groups through sharing common cultural experiences ... and engaging communities in creative projects." If positioned within the larger framework of civil society-based initiatives for peacebuilding, Zelizer (2003) affirmed that arts-based efforts are fitting. Such activities might range from joint economic projects to grassroots mediation and dialogue programs.

With the advice and regular support from their adult advisers, organizations with arts-based approaches towards peacebuilding have always involved the youth. Although the role of youth has been recognized in peacebuilding discourse, there has been limited research on how do youth enhance its peacebuilding agency when access to formal training is unavailable. This is as true as well on studies about the impact that the youth may have on peacebuilding processes (Del Felice & Wisler, 2007).

Various scholars (e.g., Ardizzzone, 2003; Arnold, 2009; Bennett, Karki, & Nepal, 2012; Del Felice & Solheim, 2011; Gillis, 2002; McEvoy-Levy, 2001; Pruitt, 2011; Ragandang & Viloría, 2018; Theis, 2006; Tom, 2014; Ungerleider, 2001) affirm how youth can be agents for managing conflict through various youth-led peacebuilding initiatives. These initiatives may include emergency relief assistance, utilization of social media for positive messaging, interreligious dialogue, seminars on inner peace, and arts-based activities on empathy education (McEvoy-Levy, 2001; McEvoy-Levy, 2012; Radomski, 2010; Schreiter, 2015; Ungerleider, 2012; Silverio, 2010). In Mindanao alone, a rapid appraisal reveals that there are at least 150 individual youth-led peacebuilding organizations.

This paper endeavors to examine the nature of peacebuilding programs as well as strategies in managing these programs. It utilizes the case of two youth-led arts-based (YLAB) non-profit organizations in Mindanao, herein referred to as YLAB A and YLAB B. The importance of studying young peacebuilding can be arranged into three points. One, it is in the lives of the youth where the length of conflict goes as they grow (Gillis, 2002; Smith Ellison & Smith, 2012). Two, youth-based programs will likely fail if youth themselves are not included in the process (Bennett, Karki, & Nepal, 2012; Lopes Cardozo

*et al.*, 2015). Three, resilience is one of the values young peacebuilders earned in the process, while making them more capable of addressing trauma (McEvoy-Levy, 2001).

### **Research Design**

This research is a case study of two arts-based youth-led organizations in Mindanao, the Philippines. Focused group discussions (FGD), interviews, and participant observation were conducted during the fieldwork. The researcher is a member of one organization under study and therefore tries to use the reflective approach in qualitative research. The reflective approach is when the researcher tries to reflect and interpret its own suppositions, trying to differentiate it with the suppositions of others, and by putting his own assumption to objective review (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000).

### **The locale of the Study**

Though programs and projects of YLAB A and YLAB B are implemented in different regions throughout Mindanao, this research is conducted in the northern region of the island. Northern Mindanao is also known as Region X, comprising the provinces of Camiguin, Misamis Oriental, Lanao del Norte, Bukidnon, and Misamis Occidental. Cagayan de Oro City is the regional center. It has a total land area of 2,049,602 hectares. Aside from the fact that these two organizations are founded and grew in Northern Mindanao, the other reason that makes Northern Mindanao as the appropriate locale of this study is that the majority of the organizations' peace-building projects and programs are conducted in this region. Thus, most of its key, primary, and secondary stakeholders are living in this area.

### **Key Informants of the Study**

The informants of this study are mainly the staff and members of YLAB A and YLAB B. For purposes of historical background, former members and other individuals who had been part of the early years of the operation of the organizations are also included.

Moreover, purposely selected stakeholders and partner communities are also part of this study. The maximum variation sampling category of purposive sampling was specifically used in this study, which Dudovskiy (2017) defined as a heterogeneous type of purposive sampling which "selects participants with diverse characteristics in order to ensure the presence of maximum variability in the primary data." An FGD was conducted with these purposely selected recipient communities and stakeholders in which peace-building programs and projects of these two organizations have been conducted.

Also, other stakeholders who had been part and are currently part of the organization are also interviewed for purposes of data triangulation.

## **Data Gathering Method**

Data in this research is gathered through key informant interviews (KII), focus group discussion (FGD), and direct and participant observation. On KII, a semi-structured interview guide helped the researcher conduct the interview in the community. According to Eriksson & Kovalainen (2008), questions in a semi-structured interview guide may differ in wording and order yet are anchored on the main guide research questions and the research's main concerns. Key informants include the organizations' founders and its founding members. Hybels and Weaver (2001) defined an interview as "a series of questions and answers usually exchanged between two people who have the purpose of getting and understanding information about a particular subject or topic." In this research, interviews were conducted for selected members of YLAB A and YLAB B. It was conducted between February 20 and June 15, 2017. The researcher made a thoughtful consideration that only youth members who have substantial years of being a member of the organization will be selected as informants, as the study delves will looking into the experience of the organization in managing peacebuilding programs.

Secondly, FGD was conducted with members from the partner communities and stakeholders. Hybels and Weaver (2001) defined FGD as a forum where ideas are proposed and then modified in response to group feedback. It is a way for everyone to participate and be heard. Using an FGD guide, it was conducted in the places where partner communities and stakeholders reside which include barangays of Puerto and Macasandig in Cagayan de Oro City, municipalities of Villanueva and Tagoloan in Misamis Oriental, and in Malitbog, Bukidnon. Purposely selected because of their involvement in the organizations for over three years, and considering the role they played in managing their peacebuilding programs, respondents were interviewed using a voice recorder gadget.

The third method used is direct and participant observation. Fetterman (1989) stressed that fieldwork is the key activity in all qualitative research designs. Formal data gathering followed upon acquisition of necessary data gathering protocols. Interviews and focused group discussions were scheduled, according to the availability of the informants as well as checking on the weather conditions of the area.

## **Results and Discussion**

This section presents the results and analysis of the study, gathered from the fieldwork.

### ***Peacebuilding Programs of YLAB A and YLAB B***

As youth arts-based peacebuilding organizations, peacebuilding programs of YLAB A and YLAB B are implemented throughout Mindanao, through its young members. It uses arts as a tool anchored on the belief that it can better capture the attention of their prospective beneficiaries, the youth. By using ice breakers, games and movement-based

activities, the program can be fun and entertaining at the same time which in turn makes the participants' time and experience during the activity worthwhile. According to one member of YLAB B,

*Dili gyud mi musugot na boring ang programming kay the director believes that boring your audiences is a mortal sin. So in everything we do, kung murag taas na gani ang lecture, putlon na dayon na sya. Automatic gyud dayon na sya butangan ug usa ka ice breaker or anything na related ra pod sa topic. After all, we are rich in games and movement-based activities. So always, fun is the key. (We really won't allow that the program will be boring because the director believes that boring your audiences is a mortal sin. So, in everything we do, if the lecture takes already takes long, we will immediately cut it. We will automatically give an ice breaker or anything related to the topic. After all, we are rich in games and movement-based activities. So always, fun is the key).*

Parallel to its organizational objectives, the peacebuilding programs of YLAB A and YLAB B are summarized in the table below based on three categories, namely: individual, interpersonal, and community peacebuilding.

**Table 1.** Peacebuilding programs of YLAB A and YLAB B

Types of Peacebuilding Program	YLAB A	YLAB B
Attainment of inner peace	School and Community-based Training-Workshops on Maximizing Youth Potentials through the Arts Safe Space for a Safer Life Program: An Artsville for Street Kids	Workshops on Gender-Sensitivity, Stress, and Anger Management Programming on Empathy Education and Emotional Intelligence
Promotion of positive interpersonal relationship	Young Peacebuilders In Action: An Art Attack Busker's Project Helping our fellow youth: School Supplies and Pre-Loved Books Campaign	Colloquium on Diversity and Youth-based Peacebuilding Understanding the other: School Supplies and Pre-loved Shoes Campaign
Development of a peaceful community	Trash matters: an Eco-Peacebuilding Recycling Project Observance of socio-cultural events (Mindanao Week of Peace, Human Rights Week, Arts month, Earth hour)	Training on Bullying Prevention and Building Safer Spaces Observance of socio-cultural events (Mindanao Week of Peace, Human Rights Week, Anti-bullying month)

*Attainment of inner peace programs of YLAB A and YLAB B*

On one hand, the individual peacebuilding programs of YLAB A include the “Safe Space for a Safer Life Program: An Artsville for Street Kids” and “School and Community-based Training-workshops on Maximizing Youth Potentials through the Arts”. Firstly, the Artsville of YLAB A serves as a home for Cagayan de Oro’s street kids, where at the same time they were able to discover their potentials through the arts-based programs

of the organization conducted in the Artsville. This Artsville project of the organization is their winning entry to the Ten Accomplished Youth Organization (TAYO) Awards in 2010, held in Malacañang Palace, Manila. The founder emphasized that one of the main purposes of this project is to guide these young people who experienced domestic and street violence and who resort to violent strategies to make a living. According to respondent YLAB A2, their first Artsville catered 75 beneficiaries and is located in Nazareth, Cagayan de Oro City through a grant from the British Council. Currently, a new Artsville is under construction in San Martin, Villanueva, Misamis Oriental. Having a safe space for street children such as Artsville supports the theory of Lederach (1997) on “the importance of creating safe and accessible social spaces or relational spaces as part of peacebuilding.”

Secondly, the organization’s training-workshops in schools and community centers aimed at maximizing youth potential through the arts. Depending on the agreement between YLAB A and partner organization, the implementations of these training-workshops are usually held during April and May when students from elementary and secondary levels are on vacation. It usually lasts for eight hours and specifically uses music, painting, and sculpting as arts-based tools in potential maximization. The founder of YLAB A believes that the art is an effective tool to identify and maximize the potentials among young people, and that “arts serve as an entrance door for the young people to know more-not just their talents but their aspirations as well”. Respondent YLAB A-4 explained that throughout the workshop, members of YLAB A monitor the participants by grouping them into small teams and guide them throughout the process. At the end of the workshop, selected participants are asked about their experience. Also, selected parents and partner administrators are also asked about their experiences. Any comments and suggestions of the youth participants, parents, and partners serve as a guiding point of the organization to develop their programs in the future.

Based on the data from YLAB A, it can be gleaned that the lack of a written evaluation tool for individual peacebuilding programs of the organization is not a hindrance for the organization to still evaluate its programs. Unstructured verbal conversations allow them to evaluate their programs. However, this also implies that due to limitations of human memory, some responses from the verbal evaluations can be forgotten. Thus, developing a written evaluation tool is helpful.

On the other hand, the individual peacebuilding programs of YLAB B include the “Workshops on Gender-Sensitivity, Stress and Anger Management” and “Programming on Empathy Education and Emotional Intelligence”. Firstly, the workshops on gender-sensitivity, stress and anger management aimed at addressing gender-based stresses of individuals which usually resulted in anger, thus the absence of inner peace. In these workshops conducted mostly in government agencies throughout Northern Mindanao, a 2016 preliminary study of YLAB B found out that there are a lot of cases when em-

ployees do not experience inner peace in their workplace because of stresses caused by male-female difference, which basically include office orderliness and the manner of approaching an office issue. The Philippine Director added that the increasing request from government agencies for gender-based stress and anger management workshops started upon the establishment of the budget intended for Gender and Development (GAD). These workshops last for 24 hours over the course of three days. PeaceMovers Program Facilitators conduct the workshops, headed by the Philippine Director.

Respondent YLAB B-4 explained that throughout the workshop, PeaceMover Program Facilitators monitor the participants by spreading themselves around the session hall and attends to their needs. At the end of the workshop, a one-page standardized evaluation form is distributed to all involved. Also, selected participants are asked about their experience. Any comments and suggestions of the participants serve as a guiding point of the organization to develop their programs.

Secondly, in support of the provisions of the Department of Education (DepEd) Order Number 55, series of 2013 (also known as the Implementing Rules and Regulations of Antibullying Act of 2013), YLAB B is implementing the year-long programming on empathy education and emotional intelligence since June 2013. This individual-level programming of YLAB B is their winning entry to the Ten Accomplished Youth Organization (TAYO) Awards in 2015, held in Malacañang Palace, Manila. It is guided by a Pre-K-12 workbook that was developed by a group of selected youth members of the organization and was reviewed by adult teachers. The workbook is based on the research-based Pre-K-12 curriculum developed by a Fulbright scholar in Bogota, Colombia, and is now being implemented in schools in New York City, Baltimore, and Washington DC in the United States of America. Since its inception, respondent YLAB B-1 added that such workbooks have undergone two revisions and are being used by Pre-K-12 students from the cities of Iligan, Cagayan de Oro, Davao, and in Midsayap, North Cotabato.

The main objective of the programming is to strengthen the schools' anti-bullying and social-emotional program through capacity building for educators and school leaders to address the emotional health of themselves and their students in order to foster safe and supportive learning environments. According to respondent YLAB B-4, the process and schedule of the programming are as follows:

Each teacher will be given a username and password to access the organization's online hub. The program is five (5) times a week and is good for 20 minutes to be distributed throughout the day. Teachers will lead the daily morning and afternoon empathy rituals with their students. Moreover, workbook activities can be done either during the Homeroom or Values Education period – depending on the school's preference.

According to the Philippine Director of YLAB B, their staff conducts bi-quarterly site visits in the implementing schools. In this site visit, the staff observes classes, talk with the teacher, and gives recommendations to the school administrators. Also, a standardized evaluation tool is administered to students, teachers, and school administrators before and after the year-long programming. The standardized evaluation tool of YLAB B is developed through the help of its mother organization in the United States of America who partnered with the University of Virginia's Curry School of Education. Yet, respondent YLAB B-1 added that the results of this evaluation are rarely integrated into the program development due to the fact that because of manpower scarcity, efficient and timely data collection is hardly practiced.

Based on the data presented above, it can be gleaned that both organizations have individual-level programs; however, evaluating such programs is a challenge. This supports the findings of a commissioned study by Special EU Programmes Body (2010) that in reality, it is challenging to quantitatively measuring the impact of a peacebuilding program. Peacebuilding has no single definition and is often targeted at looking into tangible outcomes such as relationship and behavioral change - changes that are hard to measure quantitatively. In addition, the report stressed that evaluating a peacebuilding program can even be more challenging as it requires long-term monitoring, thus making a short-term evaluation of peacebuilding programs methodologically limited. Also, the report added that it is hard to isolate a peacebuilding program to the social, political, and cultural factors that may influence its failure or success. As a result, developing indicators and measuring outcomes can be considered a common problem across peacebuilding interventions.

*Promotion of positive interpersonal relationship programs of YLAB A and YLAB B*

Beyond the focus of the post-conflict phase, the current definition of peacebuilding substantiates the need to nurture interpersonal relationships towards sustainable peacebuilding. In addition, building positive inter-group and interpersonal relationships is one of the keys to successful peacebuilding (International Platform on Sport & Development 2018). Along these lines, the interpersonal peacebuilding programs of YLAB A and YLAB B aimed at enhancing positive interpersonal relationships among its culturally-diverse stakeholders.

For YLAB A, its interpersonal peacebuilding programs are dubbed as "Young Peacebuilders in Action: An Art Attack Busker's Project" and "Helping our fellow youth: School Supplies and Pre-Loved Books Campaign." The art attach busker's project is one of the organization's summer performances in one of the major public places of Cagayan de Oro City's, where a group of long-haired and tattooed young artists gathers and perform every Friday evening throughout summer. It became one of the city's weekly

attraction for local and foreign spectators while strengthening the bond of these local artists who shared the same interest in the art. It is important to note, however, that before discovering their creative talents and artistic agency, they are previously in the life of drug addiction, extreme poverty, and have been engaged in criminal activities (Lorenzo 2017). In an article written by Lorenzo (2017), he describes the project as follows,

Spread over carpets, hanging over makeshift posts are crafts woven by their hands – dream catchers, necklaces, wrist bands, and feathered accessories. With the lively beat of the drums, some of them dance amidst the dim street lights.

The project lasted for 12 Saturdays in the whole months of April and May 2017, gathering over 1,500 spectators per week, while building interpersonal relationships among its fellow members. Respondent YLAB A-5 added not only at their interpersonal relationship, but such positive engagement among members of the group also radiates to the spectators, especially those who are still in the streets.

In addition, a similar project between YLAB A and YLAB B on interpersonal relationships is the school supplies and pre-loved books and shoes campaign. Staff and active members of the organization collect pre-loved shoes from its partner communities in Cagayan de Oro City and distribute it to recipients living in the hinterland rural areas of Bukidnon, Misamis Oriental, and Camiguin provinces. The Philippine Director of YLAB B emphasized that during the items collection period, “we tell the potential donors that the campaign is one way of building an interpersonal relationship with hinterland-based youth through their pre-loved books and shoes”. In particular, as an empathy-based organization, YLAB B’s main objective of this campaign is to promote empathy and compassion by simple means of sharing pre-loved shoes to less privileged children. As an empathy-based organization, YLAB B’s emphasis on shoes over other items is in line with the common definition of empathy which is “putting yourself to the shoes of others”. During distribution, a short art workshop with the recipient is also conducted.

Lastly, colloquia on diversity and youth-based peacebuilding are another program of YLAB B, which aimed at building interpersonal relationships. Also, in its effort to enrich the peace education component of National Service Training Program (NSTP) program among tertiary schools (as stipulated in Executive Order 570, also known as the Institutionalization of Peace Education program at all levels of education), YLAB B has carefully designed this colloquium that focuses on using arts-based approach to build interpersonal relationships among students from diverse socio-cultural background.

Participants who completed the colloquium receive a certificate of completion which is the prerequisite for their application to become Junior PeaceMovers. As Junior PeaceMovers, they will undergo a 16-hour intensive training that will qualify them

to become Accredited PeaceMovers. Accredited PeaceMovers is part of the YLAB B's global family, shall receive more training opportunities, meet other PeaceMovers from the United States, Colombia, and Germany, plus a chance to travel all over the region.

Comparing the data of two organizations, it can be gleaned that the youth's involvement in interpersonal peacebuilding programs does not only equip them to be effective program organizers but in the process, learns to build positive interpersonal relationships. Along this line, one staff of YLAB B stressed that, "*the more you give updates to people, the more nila ma feel nga part diay sila as tag-iya sa organization and ang ilang commitment ma develop*" (The more you give updates to people, the more they feel that they are part as owner of the organization, which in result develops their commitment).

This particular finding supports the contention of Delgado and Staples (2008) that since the twentieth century, youth-focused models have transformed the traditional roles of young people as consumers, perpetrators, victims, and needy clients, into being agents for society's change. In relation, Checkoway (1998) viewed that youth action is grounded on the fundamental belief that the youth themselves are the best capable of assessing their own issues and needs. Thus, they themselves are their own group's most effective spokespersons. While adults can be a support system, it is the youth who must centrally play a role in making decisions especially on matters concerning them. (Zeldin *et al.*, 2001 as cited by Delgado & Staples, 2008).

#### *Development of peaceful community programs of YLAB A and YLAB B*

Especially in a post-conflict setting, the idea that civil society's engagement can bring more sustainability in peacebuilding is a popularly growing paradigm. As emphasized in a vast amount of practical experience in peacebuilding, it is necessary to engage the local community in organizing local peacebuilding programs, especially due to the context-specific nature of post-conflict settings (Swiss Academy for Development, 2015).

Along these lines, community peacebuilding programs of YLAB A and YLAB B are designed to holistically involve its community stakeholders and tailored to the local socio-cultural context. In particular, YLAB A has two community peacebuilding programs named as "Trash matters: an Eco-Peacebuilding Recycling Project" and "Observance of socio-cultural events: Mindanao Week of Peace, Human Rights Week, Arts month, and Earth hour".

"Trash matters" is an eco-peacebuilding recycling project of YLAB A where plastic bottles are turned into robots. Casiño (personal communication, 2017) recalled that when they started, dreadlocks, tattooed, and longhaired individuals gathered and enjoyed the artist camaraderie in the Artsville. Then they started making junk arts, turning plastic bottles into robots, in addition to weekly free jamming with music, fire dancing, hu-

man beatbox, and magic shows that have become norms at the event while advocating on talent development among young people who have become outcasts in the society. Respondent YLAB A-4 added that the plastic bottles are collected from their partner communities in Northern Mindanao. They then surfed on the internet on how to make it into something creative. They decided to make it into robot-like structures and put it up in the entrance of their Artsville, inviting the attention of by-passers, while building peace with the environment where humanity resides.

Observance of socio-cultural events such as Mindanao Week of Peace, Human Rights Week, Arts month, Anti-bullying month, and Earth hour are community peacebuilding projects common to YLAB A and YLAB B, where both organizations partner with other groups in Mindanao in the implementation. In particular, YLAB A and YLAB B celebrated Mindanao Week of Peace together in December 2015 through a peace concert in Mindanao University of Science and Technology, with the audience from different sectors of Northern Mindanao. In celebrating Earth's hour, both organizations partner with local media groups, private entities, and government offices where their arts-based skills are their contribution to the event.

Lastly, training-workshop on bullying prevention and building safer spaces is the other community peacebuilding project of YLAB B. Especially designed for teachers, school and community leaders, it is a three-day training-workshop that introduces innovative and evidence-based approaches of using creative expression and mindfulness activities to enhance empathetic behavior, create safer spaces, and eventually prevent bullying through social and emotional intelligence. Different methods of interactive work are used which include working in small groups, experiential exercises, arts-based workshops, and role-playing. The ways by which the two organizations engage with their communities are done in simple manners. As stressed by one staff of YLAB 2,

*Mo adto mi sa among mga partner organizations and partner schools ug mo greet sa ilaha like Hi and Hello, Kamusta kamo Ma'am/Sir ... ingun ana lang ka simpol. (We visit our partner organizations and schools and we greet them saying Hi and Hello. How are you Ma'am/Sir...as simple as that).*

The data shows that community engagement is a tool of both organizations in implementing community peacebuilding programs. Reiterating on the organization's theory of change, the Philippine Director of YLAB B stressed that the more the community is engaged in peacebuilding programs, the lesser their tendency to engage in conflict." Theory of Change refers to the "how and why" an aimed change will happen in a particular setting. It is targeted at filling-in gaps by looking into how a particular program can actually fill that gap (The Center for Theory of Change, Inc. 2018). This also supports the findings of World Association for Christian Communication (2016) that when equipped with programs that increased knowledge and understanding among people

about conflict issues, a reduction in conflict incidences in a Ugandan district is experienced. Many conflicts have been reconciled and people are living in greater peace and harmony. There is also an increased willingness of communities to come together and participate in the resolution of conflicts.

### ***Organizational Strategies for Managing Peacebuilding Programs***

As young people are less invited in post-conflict peacebuilding programs, Özerdem and Podder (2015) contended how such practice can be dangerous in long-term peacebuilding success, especially that it is in the youth and children where the length of conflict goes. In Mindanao, there exist youth-led peacebuilding organizations from both academic institutions and nonprofit organizations that actively engaging students and youths on a range of subjects, including peacebuilding (Macalawan, 2015), this include YLAB A and YLAB B. In particular, this section of research looks into the strategies of the two organizations in managing peacebuilding programs.

Following the project management framework of Oladele (2011), the four interconnected stages of peacebuilding project management such as planning and budgeting, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation is discussed in this section.

#### *Strategies on managing planning and budgeting phases of peacebuilding programs*

Firstly, planning and budgeting are foundations of sustainable project management. Along with the planning phase, the budget process is a means by which the organization prepares a clear budget plan. It is a good planning and budgeting practice when key members of the organization, especially those who are really implementing the programs, are invited in the preparation of the plans and budget of the organization. It must be well documented, while clearly stating the responsible person, timelines, and specific objectives. It is also a good planning and budgeting practice when income is first budgeted before being used to defray expenses (Foley, 2010). However according to the respondent YLAB A-1,

*With no staff who can specifically work on the financial and administrative work of the organization, it is very hard for us to maintain an annual budget, among other things. But we are already discussing it that we cannot tolerate this practice. However, in the absence of such, I am happy to say that we exist for almost a decade now, having programs throughout Mindanao. So I can see magic, and I think that magic is having dedicated and selfless people in an organization. Templates and best practices are good, but passion is far more important.*

In the case of YLAB A, the organization's strategies in managing planning and budgeting phases of peacebuilding programs are characterized by the involvement of key stakeholders, facilitated by the Executive Director, and guided by ideas coming from online

posts and personal experience. When they have decided what activities to pursue, they then prepare their budget. Meanwhile, for YLAB B, it involves key and primary stakeholders, guided by a list of activities. Respondent YLAB B-4 added that it commences with centering which is facilitated by any staff or member. Upon the approval of activities, each committee will be asked to prepare a budgetary request per committee. For both organizations, these strategies are being followed across all six peacebuilding programs which are categorized as individual, interpersonal, and community level.

The role of the directors in both organizations is vital in framing the organization's plan and budget, with their advanced experience compared to other members of the team. This directors' role supports the theory of Brosseau (2018) that directors as "thought leaders are the informed opinion leaders and the go-to people in their field of expertise". One of their assets is "trust who moves and inspires people with innovative ideas; turn ideas into reality, and know and show how to replicate their success". This correlates with the contention of Sandu (2013) that trust is one of the important qualities necessary to connect with people from diverse personalities. Thought leaders are making a positive change in their communities while effectively engaging others in the process. They can be revolutionary in approach, not necessarily urging others to follow them, but by providing others a blueprint to follow (Brosseau, 2015).

#### *Strategies on managing the implementation phase of peacebuilding programs*

Secondly, the implementation stage follows after planning and budgeting. Olsen (2017) defines it as the process that turns strategies and plans into actions in order to accomplish strategic objectives and goals. Along this line, the strategies in managing the implementation stage of the peacebuilding project of YLAB A include the utilization of arts-based approaches such as music, painting, and dance. It involves key, primary, and secondary stakeholders, with the presence of mass media to boost community peacebuilding awareness. While for YLAB B, key, primary, and secondary stakeholders are involved, guided by a program flow, and utilizes arts-based tools too. It commences with culturally-sensitive opening rituals (such as ecumenical prayers), uses arts as an approach, and is movement-based in nature.

Respondent YLAB B-3 stressed that programs led by the youth themselves are effective because most of the participants in almost all of their programs are also youth. In this sense, the participants can easily relate to the facilitators. In cases where the participants are teachers, principals, and other professionals, the facilitators can easily catch their attention through fun games and activities, which in turn creates a harmonious atmosphere. On the other hand, YLAB A is also a youth-led organization; thus most of its programs are facilitated by its youth performers, led by their Executive Director. Moreover, another strategy at the implementation stage that YLAB B exercises

are basically following a detailed program flow. This strategy helps the organizers or facilitators be guided by the exact sequence or order of the entire program, especially that the nature of the activities of the organization is game and movement-based. In order to be familiar with the parts of the program, the team conducts a dry-run a day before the program proper so that during the actual program, they will not be confused and everything is in order. Unlike YLAB B, members of YLAB A are less dependent on program flow. During practices prior to the event implementation, a series of performances are already sequenced, thus regular practice helps the performers memorize the sequence of performances.

Further, it was emphasized that in all of the meetings and in all of the programs conducted by YLAB B, they always commence with a centering. According to respondent YLAB B-4, centering is an act wherein every member is asked of his personal feeling or emotion at the moment, and whether he/she is feeling good or not. The team then ends with one deep breathes in and one deep breathes out so as to release any tension within every member or facilitator. Furthermore, the Philippine Director of YLAB B added that one of the most important strategies that they employ is making sure that the programs and activities that they are conducting are fun and entertaining. By using ice breakers, games and movement-based activities, the program can be fun and entertaining at the same time which in turn makes the participants' time and experience during the activity worthwhile.

*Strategies on managing the monitoring phase  
of peacebuilding programs*

Monitoring is the third phase of peacebuilding project management and is considered to be a phase critical for program success. It is a process of regular observation and recording of activities taking place in a project or program through routinely gathering information in all aspects of the project (Bartle, 2011).

Of the six peacebuilding programs of YLAB A, monitoring strategies involve key stakeholders who are conducting unrecorded casual conversations with beneficiaries. In addition, YLAB A respondent YLAB A-4 explained that throughout the workshop, members of YLAB A monitor the participants by grouping them into small teams and guide them throughout the process. At the end of the workshop, selected participants are asked about their experience.

On the other hand, YLAB B engages its key stakeholders using a standardized monitoring guide wherein program facilitators to conduct through site-visits. Additionally, respondent YLAB B-4 explained that in peacebuilding programs of YLAB B, PeaceMover Program Facilitators monitor the participants by spreading themselves around the session hall and attends to their needs. According to the Philippine Director of YLAB B, their staff conducts bi-quarterly site visits in the implementing schools. In this site

visit, the staff observes classes, talk with the teacher, and gives recommendations to the school administrators. Also, a standardized monitoring tool is administered to students, teachers, and school administrators before and after the year-long programming. The standardized monitoring tool of YLAB B is developed through the help of its mother organization in the United States of America who partnered with the University of Virginia's Curry School of Education. Yet, respondent YLAB B-1 added that the results of this monitoring are rarely integrated into the program development due to the fact that because of manpower scarcity, efficient and timely data collection is hardly practiced.

Based on the data above, it shows that YLAB A still needs to develop a standardized written monitoring tool, while YLAB B has a monitoring tool yet the implementation is a challenge. It can be gleaned that there is a need to re-assess the monitoring strategies of both organizations as a recurring pattern of informal and unsystematic monitoring structure is evident in both organizations. However, it is good to note that in the past few years of operations, both organizations able to continue their programs despite monitoring instability. Yet, it is highly possible that with monitoring instruments, it is easier to evaluate a program. As a result, any evaluation results can be used as a basis in developing a program in its next iteration.

#### *Strategies on managing evaluation phase of peacebuilding programs*

Evaluation is the last phase of program management. It is defined as “a systematic and objective assessment of an ongoing or completed project, program or policy, its design, implementation and results” (United Nations office on Drugs and Crimes, 2017). Both organizations consider making a terminal report as an effective strategy of evaluating peacebuilding project. This becomes more essential, especially that a terminal report is necessary for externally-funded programs. In particular, YLAB A makes a terminal report based on colloquy with involved key stakeholders using open-ended questions as an evaluation guide, while YLAB B conducts it involving its key stakeholders using a standardized evaluation guide. It commences with a centering and is participatory in nature.

YLAB B respondent YLAB B-4 added that at the end of the workshop, a one-page standardized evaluation form is distributed to all involved. Also, selected participants are asked about their experience. Any comments and suggestions of the participants serve as a guiding point of the organization to develop their programs. YLAB A, on the other hand, relies on unstructured colloquy with some participants as part of its evaluation process. Respondent YLAB A-2 said that the lack of written evaluation tool for its peacebuilding programs of YLAB A is not a hindrance for the organization to still evaluate its programs. Unstructured verbal conversations allow them to evaluate their programs. However, this also implies that due to limitations of human memory, some

responses from the verbal evaluations can be forgotten. Thus, developing a written evaluation tool is helpful.

Based on the data presented above, it can be gleaned that both organizations have peacebuilding evaluation strategies however; systematizing such strategies is a challenge. This supports the findings of a commissioned study by Special EU Programmes Body (2010) that in reality, doing an evaluation of peacebuilding programs is indeed a challenging task. As a result, developing indicators and measuring outcomes can be considered a common concern across peacebuilding interventions.

Further, an emerging pattern of strategy in all stages of peacebuilding project management is the involvement of its stakeholders from various sectors. The presence of stakeholders is evident in different stages of peacebuilding project management from planning to evaluation phase, key stakeholders, especially the organizational staff, are directly involved. Primary stakeholders are present during the planning, budgeting, and implementation stages. Especially that most of the primary stakeholders are industry-based, their knowledge and experience are essential in the creation of a plan, preparing the budget, and project implementation. The implementation stage has been executed by key, primary, and secondary stakeholders. The role of the secondary stakeholders is vital especially that publication and other positive ripple effects of any peacebuilding efforts can possibly be done through them. Any experience during the implementation stage is documented and is being discussed during the monitoring and evaluation stages. Any best practice and lessons learned will now become essential points to be considered for the next peacebuilding program implementation.

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## **Conclusions**

The proactivity of young people, manifested in their ability to build a peacebuilding organization, supports the claims of McEvoy-Levy (2001), Harland (2011), and Gambone and Arbretton (1997) that the current generation of young people is the new cohort of leaders in peacebuilding and that the preparing them to be leaders at the young age can have long-term implications. Thus, it is necessary to realistically engage young people into community-based programs (McEvoy-Levy, 2001; Harland, 2011; Gambone & Arbretton, 1997). There exists an experience-based motivation that inspired the founders and co-founders of both organizations to start the youth-led arts-based non-profit organizations for peacebuilding in Mindanao, making them real catalysts of building sustainable communities (McEvoy-Levy, 2001; Harland, 2011; Gambone & Arbretton, 1997).

Manifested in its peacebuilding programs, both organizations aimed at contributing to building peace in Mindanao through the arts-based approach. Using the arts as a tool for peacebuilding is not a conventional approach (personal communication with Potler, 2013; Casiño, 2017) to the extent that there are individuals who are not convinced of the efficacy of the program (Potler, 2013). While it has not gained popular acceptance in the present time, its arts-based nature has captured the attention of the youth and is therefore seen as an attractive tool in comparison to the traditional approaches (doing seminar whole day, sitting down the whole day, waiting for lunch and snacks break).

It can also be gleaned that both organizations have individual-level programs; however, evaluating such programs is a challenge. Evaluation is also complicated for the fact that the outcomes from peacebuilding are essentially long-term, which makes short-term monitoring and evaluation difficult. Also, the study added that it is difficult to isolate the impact of specific peacebuilding interventions from the complex political, economic and social contexts in which they are located. As a result, developing indicators and measuring outcomes can be considered a common problem across peacebuilding interventions.

More so, youth's involvement in interpersonal peacebuilding programs does not only equip them to be effective program organizers but in the process, learns to build positive interpersonal relationships. In relation, Checkoway (1998) viewed that youth action is grounded on the fundamental belief that the youth themselves are the best capable of assessing their own issues and needs. Thus, they themselves are their own group's most effective spokespersons.

In the absence of proper training and formal institutions to hone their peacebuilding agency, young peacebuilders rely on experience-based approaches of doing peacebuilding work. It is a trial-and-error method that while can lead to failure sometimes, still gave valuable lessons to the young peacebuilders. With experience serving as a structure to facilitate peacebuilding agency, lessons from such experience ripple down from one person to other members of the organization, thus impacting individual and organizational aspects of peace work.

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