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Field Notes

Fourth Quarter
November 2014

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Hope in a Forgotten Land

By Georgi Engelbrecht, Head of Field Office,
South Central Mindanao Team, Philippines

Many of the conflicts in Mindanao arise over one of the most basic commodities of men: land. Just a few hectares of corn, rice or sweet potato ensure the livelihoods of several families or communities. Land is a gift given from one generation to the next. And in case of the indigenous tribes of the Southern Philippines, land is not only the material expression of the people's lives, but also a token from nature, and thus a precious part of earth itself.

The meaning of the land, and disagreements over how to use it, often intersect with religious and spiritual concerns; dissension among indigenous tribes over these kinds of issues is nothing new. But in the last few decades, given that an armed conflict has been fought in these southern islands between the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), such age-old conflicts can take on an increasingly intense and dangerous tone.

These land conflicts involving indigenous peoples deserve particular attention. Much has been written about the plight of indigenous people in the Philippines, in Mindanao and in other provinces. Most writers agree that the peace agreement might offer a chance to reverse the decades-long history of injustices perpetrated against the native population of the "land of promise". But the road to peace is a long one.



Boys among temporarily displaced families wait as their elders sort out a stressful and confusing situation.

Since a peace agreement, (called the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro), was signed in March 2014, there have been no direct armed encounters between the government and the MILF. But local haggling over land and crops still sometimes triggers violence, and, augmented by 3rd parties, these can gain momentum and spread, potentially endangering the ceasefire and indeed the peace process itself. These disputes are hard to solve and they continue to disrupt people's lives, interrupt the education of young people, displace communities and, of course, cause many deaths.

Nonviolent Peaceforce is well-positioned to give such disputes careful attention. Due to our long history in the region during the past seven years, and to the many relationships our staff has carefully cultivated, our teams can make a big contribution towards defusing these festering disputes.

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Take the case of a barangay (a village) which has certain subdivisions (sitios) being contested by two municipalities on the island of Mindanao. Imagine that the sitio and adjacent areas are home to constellations of the Bangsamoro, the Settlers and the Manobos (an indigenous tribe). Think about the vast land tracks among green hills, hanging gardens and picturesque mixtures of churches and mosques along slopes surrounded by rice fields. And understand that this precious land has, at least on paper, many owners and even more claimants. Remind yourself that the indigenous community has been the most remote and the most marginalized and sometimes even divided among themselves in their allegiances to armed groups and political and legal entities. You might conclude that only a spark is needed to create a volatile situation.

That is what happened at the boundary of the municipalities of Isulan and Esperanza. Conflict broke out between two groups over their border. Armed violence resulted in the displacement of several dozen families.

When this particular fight broke out, NP's South Central Mindanao Team acted quickly to help defuse the situation. Field members visited the displaced community and consulted with the local monitoring team, a component of the structure for monitoring the peace agreement. NP staff joined with the monitoring team to speak to several key players in the conflict, seeking a localized solution. Together, the local monitors and NP staff acted as witnesses to negotiations and

agreements. NP works unobtrusively, sometimes behind the scenes, but maintains a presence until such a situation has clearly calmed down. Once that happens, NP resumes other programmatic work of conducting community-centered orientations on human rights and child protection including a module teaching how to help distressed children. This integrated approach sets NP apart: the teams support where they can, but they leave ownership to the locals.

Weeks after the conflict resolution, the team was surprised to hear warm words from the community. One Manobo leader said that "even the visits, even the mere presence of these people helps. We did not know we have rights. How many times in the past have we been taken for granted by our rulers? We underestimated ourselves. But now we also re-discovered strength and confidence." And another young man added: "When you visit, people still see you. They wonder why this group is visiting. And they understand...NP is monitoring. It doesn't blame. But it listens to voices which have not been heard for a long time."

Civilian peacekeeping may not be a catchy fashion trend. It is a new movement, and is refining itself every day. It's not very flashy, because it's most effective when it works unobtrusively. In the Philippines, NP's field staff are busy every day tamping down small flare-ups in a forgotten conflict in a remote corner of the world, far from the headlines.



Boys among the temporarily displaced families create a toy with materials at hand

Forming a Community Protection Team in Kalthok, South Sudan

By Calista Pearce, Senior Protection Officer

When participants take ownership of the violence reduction concepts and tools that NP shares, adapting them to their own culture and context, it fulfills one of our key principles: encouraging the primacy of local actors. In a recent community protection training the NP Mingkaman team was able to inspire community members to this, and other acts of nonviolent conflict resolution. This could only be achieved through an ongoing process of collaboration with the community.

Throughout the past year, violence has caused many cattle keepers in Jonglei state to move with their herds over the border to Lakes state. Large numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs) have settled in Awerial County in Lakes state, including these cattle keeping groups. There are many causes of tensions between IDP and host communities, and between cattle camps and other settlements. Cattle raiding and revenge fighting are common. There are few structures in place to support nonviolent resolution to conflicts.

These were the considerations that led NP to visit Kalthok payam, part of Awerial County, with the idea of engaging both IDP and host community cattle keeper youth (young men). The youth, often perpetrators of violence, are key actors with the potential to reduce the conflict in their communities.

On the first visit in July NP went to the civic authorities and traditional leaders of Kalthok. The team introduced themselves and the work of Non-violent Peaceforce. A second meeting was arranged at the beginning of August for the purpose of discussing in more detail what the community's protection needs/conflict issues were, and how NP could assist, and making sure that key actors would be in attendance.

Cattle raiding was given as the largest problem. Grievances of unresolved cases were also an issue. The leaders shared about one three-year old case in which fighting resulted in two people being killed. Both the family of those who were killed and the family of the ones who did the killing were unhappy that the government had not yet resolved the case. They lived with the fear of revenge fighting and had difficulty eating together in social gatherings.

NP asked the community leaders, "What can we do to help you with these issues?" The leaders suggested capacity building. It was agreed that NP would conduct a training. Though NP's initial idea had been to target the youth, the leaders were also interested in participating. The training was expanded to include representatives from both groups.

The NP team began preparing for the training. They made another visit to arrange details like venue and tea (an obligatory part of conducting any



Cattle keepers with National Protection Officer Ajang during an initial visit to Kalthok, South Sudan

training in South Sudan). They revised the NP community protection training tools and adapted them to the specific concerns that the community had shared. The national protection officers reviewed the content that they would have to translate from English into Dinka. Finally, the two-day community protection training took place at the start of September.

The training curriculum used participatory methods to equip participants with tools for conflict analysis and reviewed methods of non-violent conflict resolution. After these areas were covered the training then worked through processes that helped the participants think about possible community-led responses to the concerns that they had identified.

The training finished with an evaluation in which the participants let NP know that they were excited about what they had learned. The NP team had had their own ideas about forming a Community Protection Team (CPT) out of the training, but the participants anticipated it, letting NP know that they wanted to form a group. NP supported their initiative and made plans to meet with the group to follow up.

The team went back at the end of the month to meet with the participants who were going to form the CPT and to deliver certificates of participation (another requisite part of any training in South Sudan). The men were full of stories about how they had been using what they had learned and come up with in the training.

A chief at the community level had been empowered by the brainstorming portion of the training, in which the specific case of the kill-

ings of three years ago had been discussed. The chief went to the county commissioner and explained how the delay in resolving the case was giving problems in Kalthok. They were able to bring a lawyer from the state capital to Mingkaman (county capital) in order to get the case resolved. It was decided that reparations would be made to the victims' family in the form of livestock. The two families are now able to eat together at community gatherings.

The group saw potential for expanding their community protection work. They often experience conflict with cattle keepers from the neighboring state of Central Equatoria, in Terekeka County. The group wanted NP to go to Terekeka and train that community so that they would form a CPT that could be their group's counterpart. The Kalthok CPT envisioned being able to work together with a CPT from the other community to discuss matters at their level of influence and when necessary report larger problems to the government authorities in order to prevent violence.

NP was happy to see how quickly the training had had an impact, and excited about the vision for the CPT that the participants shared. It was decided that the CPT would meet every two weeks and they asked for NP to also be there. The NP staff present took the news back to the rest of the team in Mingkaman to figure out how NP could continue to support the Kalthok CPT and decide on next steps. There is much for the Kalthok CPT to do and they are enthusiastic to start contributing to the reduction of violence in their community.



National Protection Officer, Mary, at Kalthok cattle camp.

Training participants take part in experiential learning exercise in Kalthok.



We Are Family

By Doris Mariani, CEO

Doris in Juba at United Nations Mission in South Sudan.



In August, I made my second trip to South Sudan, spending two weeks with our field teams and meeting with international donors. It was heartwarming to hear first-hand from everybody of the high regard with which Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP) is held in South Sudan. This is reflected in the significant expansion of funding from donors and the rapidly enlarging footprint, making us the country's most significant protection agency. Our staff now measures 135 people from 25 countries – our own “United Nations” (UN).

Our program's success is, in very large measure, due to its in-country leadership from Country Director Tiffany Easthom and her senior management team as well as the frontline team leaders and peacekeepers who have worked together to create a remarkable esprit de corps. Under Tiffany's strong yet graceful leadership, NP now has 13 teams across South Sudan, including a new mobile response team. I know courage when I see it, and I saw more courage in the brave, dedicated and determined NP peacekeepers than I have witnessed in many heavily armed forces around the world.

I visited with three of our field teams who worked at the Protection of Civilians (PoC) sites in Juba, Mingkaman and Bor that provide shelter to internally displaced people (IDP). According to the UN High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR), there are 1.53 million refugees and IDPs in South Sudan. I was accompanied by our new Board Director Mukesh Kapila, a documentary film maker Tim Freccia and journalist Peter Moszynski. We want to produce some new videos and share them with you to bring the extraordinary work of our staff one step closer to you.

Almost half of our staff is female and many are in the leadership positions, both in the head office and field sites. While the capital city Juba offers “relative” comforts – our staff has invented a new term they call “Juba Good” -- some field sites are

very basic with tents and bucket showers. It is nothing short of amazing to watch these brilliant, talented, courageous young women in action. Tim the filmmaker was so impressed that he compared them to “Charlie's Angels” but braver-- without guns. (For those who do not know Charlie's Angels, it was an American TV show about three brave women detectives).

I want to end with a note about food. In South Sudan, there are three categories of food: (1) field food --same two-three rather dull things every meal; (2) Juba food – a step up in variety and quality, or in other words, “Juba Good”; and, (3) Flori food – amazing, spicy Sri Lankan food cooked by our Deputy Country Director Florington who came from NP Sri Lanka to NP South Sudan. You see, we have talented men, too, and being Flori's sous chef, I learned a few secrets about cooking. But what I really re-learned and experienced was Flori's warmth and caring for everyone, be it in the kitchen or running our complicated logistics. NP is a family in South Sudan, from Tiffany to Flori to field teams to the housekeeper (who requested a new broom when she heard we were getting a second compound). I am so privileged to be a part of the NP family. Friends, thank you for your continued support.

Board member Mukesh Kapila, CEO Doris Mariani, Journalist Peter Moszynski, and Bor field team.



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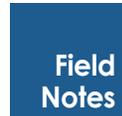
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November 2014
(Fourth Quarter)

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Nonviolent Peaceforce is a global community of people who believe in nonviolent solutions to the world's conflicts. Our supporters come from countries all around the world and have a genuine concern for the flourishing of all of humanity. To help you get to know each other, in each Field Notes we will feature one of our supporters whose personal commitment to peace and protecting others inspires us. We hope you will be inspired too.

Bob Edgerton was first drawn to nonviolence after reading Gandhi's biography in high school. He registered as a conscientious objector at 18 but was never drafted. Becoming a Quaker furthered his commitment to nonviolence. Bob heard about NP through his friend, David Foecke, who invited him and his wife, Elizabeth, to a Nonviolent Peaceforce event. David Foecke and David Berrian had been very active in leading the local Seattle NP support group.

Bob & Elizabeth were both moved by the presentations and inspired to become supporters.

One of Bob's most memorable experiences was in 2005 visiting NP in Sri Lanka with Erika Shatz. This first trip to Asia was an eye-opener for Bob. He comments: "I valued meeting NP field team members and have enjoyed a continuing relationship with them. I also value the non-partisan position NP takes, which allows for making connections with people on all sides of an issue. I also value the international governance and field team participation -- in living together cooperatively amongst many different cultures and integrating themselves with the community. I appreciate their training and professionalism."

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