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Converting Capacities for War into Capacities for Peace Training the Military in Conflict Transformation

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Abstract

In the practice of conflict transformation, the military, as the perceived perpetrator in most armed conflicts, is almost always excluded. This paper attempts to explore the advantages of integrating armed forces in the process of conflict transformation through the description of the different approaches in engaging the military in peacebuilding, including the use of various instruments that are appropriate and effective with this particular target group. An experiment of this kind conducted in southern Philippines has shown the positive results of this approach in the cessation of hostilities in its 40-year civil strife between the Muslim insurgents and the Christian government, with a direct impact on the behavior and attitudes of the conflict actors both on intrapersonal and interpersonal levels. Finally, this paper analyzes the future challenges of converting capacities of war, such as the military, into capacities for peace within the context of the peace process.

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INTRODUCTION

“If the army and police have been the agencies of terror, the soldiers and the cops aren’t going to turn overnight into paragons of respect for human rights. Their numbers and their expert management of deadly weapons remain significant facts of life.”¹

The civil strife in the southern Philippines, in the regions of Central and Western Mindanao, has been ongoing for the last forty years. What began to be an issue of land conquest during its colonial era evolved into an ethno-religious conflict, dividing the society between the Muslims and the Christians and complicating the original problem into various conflicts of political, economic and cultural nature.

The Philippine Military, as an instrument for the security, self-defense and preservation of the state, has been ordered to play the primary role in the conflict. Most of the military commanders and their troops come from all over the Philippine islands and are predominantly Christian. They are commanded to quell the “insurgency” and this was mainly achieved through the use of force. The local Muslim communities targeted by this intervention have perceived the presence of the military not only as a form of violent invasion of their homeland but considered them perpetrators of heinous acts of crime against their people, such as killings, torture and burning of their homes and properties. From such acts stem grievances and various rebel groups have formed in the course of the conflict years, such as the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), the MNLF-Reform, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and other rogue groups like the Abu Sayyaf. Forty years of war and the use of violence is far from solving or transforming the conflict.

The military, as a state institution, labeled as the “perpetrator”, the root of mass killings, internal displacement and bombings, is the last suspect to participate in conflict transformation. Its role is clearly defined in a conflict context and the two main concepts that circumscribe it are defense (of its own territory) and deterrence (of potential aggressors)². On the ground, it represents the interest of the government, obeys its directives and serves as its forefront in a civil strife. The military has a capacity for war. Its goal is to maintain peace and order through the use of armed force.

The process of conflict transformation, in its broadest sense, aims to change situations from destructive or violent conflicts to working on conflict with non-violent means, whereby the change affects not only the external environment but also the individual.³ The trainings included in the process target individuals and groups with peace potential, such as those who are already applying non-violent means

¹ Excerpt from Marvin Frankel and Ellen Saideman, *Out of the Shadows of the Night: The Struggle for International Human Rights in the American Journal of International Law*, Vol. 85, no. 2, April 1991.

² Albrecht Schnabel and Hans-Georg Ehrhart, *Security Sector Reform and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding* (UNU, 2005).

³ Dirk Sprenger, “The Training Process: Achieving Social Impact by Training Individuals?”, *Berghof Handbook for Conflict Transformation* (Berlin, 2005).

of conflict transformation in conflict regions; those who aim to become trainers for conflict transformation and “interested third parties” – those indirectly working yet connected to the conflict, such as staff of local and international institutions⁴. These trainees are stakeholders in the peace process and have the potential or are the “local capacities for peace”⁵.

The current practice of trainings in conflict transformation is based on helping *victims*, those who suffered from the atrocities of war, while condemning *perpetrators*, or those who inflicted the atrocities on the victims, rather than initiating reconciliation between the two groups. Most institutions involved in conflict transformation “seek to build on unifiers than dividers in society”⁶. So far, no one has explored the potential of these trainings for the perpetrators as they are classified as a potential for war and not for peace. In a general view, the current practice aims to strengthen the victims and to help them disengage themselves in the cycle of violence and in the end, to deal with the conflict in a non-violent manner in the face of their perpetrators. A question to reckon with in this process is that, what do we do with these perpetrators? In order to attain the goals in conflict transformation, is it enough to learn how to deal with them and accept their existence as a matter-of-fact, or is it more pragmatic to include them in the process and also teach them how to deal with the conflict, moreover, with the victims of the conflict?

The role of the military is two faced: their own perception and the outsider’s point of view. In their own perspective, they see themselves as the enforcers of peace and order; for the outsider, the instigator of violence as one; another is its rather limited contribution to peace. In the international context, the military plays an important role in international peacekeeping missions, while in the local context, its role for peace is limited in the framework of a security sector reform, that is, to establish security in order to build peace⁷.

Taking into consideration these limitations, it can be then concluded that the military is seen as:

- (1) an institution;
- (2) an instrument of the state to achieve its goals;
- (3) a mechanism to establish peace and order.

These specific attributions do not consider the military as a group of individuals and furthermore, human beings, but rather an inanimate object or group of objects. To classify the military as such dehumanizes the individuals that constitute it and their ability to feel, think, make decisions or possess an attitude towards the context in which they are involved. It disregards the capacity of these

⁴ See Beatrix Schmelze, “Training for Conflict Transformation: An Overview of Approaches and Resources”, Berghof Handbook for Conflict Transformation (Berlin, 2006). The classification pertains to a general overview of the usual beneficiaries of conflict transformation workshops.

⁵ See Mary Anderson, Do No Harm: How Aid Can Support Peace – Or War (1999). “Local Capacities for Peace” is a system of society that could limit and end the violence, assert value of peace in the midst of warfare.

⁶ Kevin Clements, “Towards Conflict Transformation and Just Peace,” (Berghof, 2004.)

⁷ Schnabel and Ehrhart, 2005.

individuals to also be gravely affected by the causes and consequences of the conflict. It eliminates the fact that these individuals, while playing the role of a perpetrator, could also become a “victim” in one way or another; that they themselves are also stakeholders of peace and could also become a capacity for peace, if included and guided in the process of conflict transformation.

With this perspective, I come back to the question: what do we do with them? We include them in the process of conflict transformation (primarily, through trainings and workshops) because like all the other stakeholders, they too, have the potential for peace. After all, ideal participants are those who work during and after the training process that might have a positive impact on the conflict situation and who can become “change agents”⁸. This is the new role that is to be explored with the military.

This paper will demonstrate how conflict transformation trainings could convert the military from being a capacity for war to a capacity of peace. For purposes of argument, the approach to the military as a state structure will be described; secondly, the training process used will be illustrated and elaborated; thirdly, the impact of the trainings on intrapersonal and interpersonal levels will be analyzed; fourthly, lessons learned and best practices will be gathered and finally, challenges for the future will be inferred from the onset of the trainings to the present situation of the conflict.

This situation and examples cited are mainly focused on the engagement of the Philippine Military in the conflict transformation activities in Mindanao but some observations and conclusions could be applied to similar cases.

2. THE APPROACH

The behavior of the rebel groups is strongly correlated to the behavior of the military. Where the military has a concentrated presence, acts of violence by the insurgent groups are more frequent. When the military does not make an initiative, neither do the rebel groups. In this context, it is indeed common knowledge that the facilities and structure of the military enables it to have greater firepower and could utilize its air, sea and land forces to achieve its goal. Knowing this potential, the rebel forces respond only when necessary, that is, directly against military action. Given this framework, it is only reasonable that in order to address the conflict in Mindanao, the military, to who the rebel forces are responding, should be approached and be made relevant in the process because if the stimulus could be transformed, then the response follows suit.

To convince the military as an institution to engage in conflict transformation was a challenging task, yet a feasible initiative. Suggesting the notion of joining civil society groups and grassroots communities in the process of conflict transformation has instigated strong resistance from the top decision-makers in the military hierarchy. The immediate reaction was that conflict transformation will produce soldiers,

⁸ Sprenger, 2005.

who will have the ability to “think on their own” and therefore, disobey the military orders. It was constantly argued that the military consists of **warriors** and not **peacebuilders** and thus are not in the capacity to be included in such an initiative. This is the first hurdle in the process but according to practical experience, there are two ways to circumvent this dilemma: the bottom-up and the horizontal approaches.

2.1. The Bottom-Up Approach

The decision-makers in institutions such as the military are usually those who are outside of the conflict context. They are mostly unaware of the current realities on the ground and the ongoing dynamics of the conflict. The interest of the top-level decision-makers of the military is to maintain their function and to sustain their existence. With these premises, the decision-makers are more in favor of continuing the warpath because it is their only means of survival. Global trends show that the greater intensity of the conflict, the higher the spending of the military and therefore, a higher budget will be received for the years of duration of the conflict. There would be a higher need to procure arms and equipment and this is where corruption in the military also is most frequent. Peace time may diminish military spending, thus threatening their meaning, existence and survival as a whole.

Meanwhile, the reality is quite different for those who are sent to the battleground. They are the ones confronted daily by tension and violence and are made responsible for any single atrocity that could happen in their areas of responsibility (AOR). The military unit assigned in conflict areas is most likely to avoid armed confrontation⁹, if given a choice, as it is a risk to their survival (physical, emotional, psychological and professional). By calculating this risk, the military individuals on the ground are most likely to be the one to support peace building initiatives to secure their existence. Hence, they are the more sensible client to approach.

Commanding officers on the ground were then invited to the Mindanao Peacebuilding Institute (MPI)¹⁰ in 2007 to attend courses on peace building and conflict transformation. By being present in these workshops, they were socialized with the civil society and vice-versa. It was an event of mutual transformation between the *perpetrators* and the *victims*, as some of the participants from the civil society in the said workshops were at some time traumatized by the military in the course of the conflict. This was the starting point, where individuals from the civil society and the individuals from the

⁹ Taking into consideration that military units in the form of Divisions (3-4 Brigades), Brigades (3-4 Battalions) and Battalions (ca. 300-500 soldiers) are given a relative autonomy to decide whether to intervene in conflicts within their respective AORs, or not, unless it pertains to an all-out war at a national level, where they all have to abide by a single strategy.

¹⁰ The Mindanao Peacebuilding Institute (MPI) is a series of workshops on various topics of conflict transformation and peace building. Organized by the Catholic Relief Services, the Mennonite Central Committee and the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development, it brings together practitioners from over 35 countries annually in Davao, Philippines.

military began talking about jointly conducting conflict transformation courses in their respective brigades and battalions, which eventually took place in several periods of 2007 and 2008. While the military opened their doors and supplied the participants, the civil society offered personnel and training materials to conduct the trainings.

The ground commanders, seeing that the conflict transformation trainings are beneficial in limiting and ending the violence in their AORs, have recommended at the top-level that these initiatives be sustained and further replicated, that it should be “institutionalized into the regular military training and to reach as much soldiers as possible”¹¹.

2.2. The Horizontal Approach

The Horizontal Approach pertains to an institution-to-institution support mechanism to further encourage conflict transformation trainings. As soon as the military opened their doors, other donor agencies contributed resources to support more of these trainings. Other CSOs also involved the responsible commanding officers in peace forums, interviews and conferences to speak about their experience and for them to be positively and actively involved in other community-based peace building initiatives, as a way to assure them that they are already recognized as peace actors in the conflict scenario.

From the side of the military, the commanding officers, who attended the MPI and opened their doors to the conflict transformation trainings, have encouraged other battalions, brigades and divisions to also do the same. The personnel trained in conflict transformation transferred their newly-acquired values, skills and knowledge to their colleagues from other regions. Soon they also invited the police forces and also replicated the workshops with them¹².

3. THE TRAINING PROCESS

Conflict transformation trainings with individual members or groups from the civil society, as it is with the common practice of some lectures combined with occasional group activities, cannot be readily applied in the military context. Military contingents have a different way of life in their barracks and are usually in constant activity. To achieve training goals with this target group, there needs to be a thorough analysis of the nature and behavior of participants and the application of non-conventional methods that adjust to their capability and lifestyle.

¹¹ From the article “Generals want to institutionalize peace trainings for soldiers,” published in MindaNews 07 November 2007.

¹² As reported by Gen. Pedro Soria II, former commanding officer of the 602nd Brigade of the Philippine Army. He convinced his former classmate from the Philippine Military Academy, who is now the head of the police forces in one of the CARAGA provinces in Mindanao.

3.1. The Training Needs Assessment – An Analysis of Participants

First, the trainer needs to understand that military personnel are highly active and are always on the move. This means that they have little patience for being static, hence to achieve the training goals, the trainer has to adjust to their rhythm: the training has to be dynamic and should include bodily movements and hands-on activities, with less time sitting down.

With the rigid qualifications set in entering military services, including a certain level of educational attainment, it is easy to assume that they can more or less absorb complicated concepts and also speak, read and understand English¹³. Apparently, there is a large discrepancy in educational attainment between the military officers and the enlisted personnel¹⁴. The officers are usually graduates of the Philippine Military Academy, which means they have a college degree; while enlisted personnel need to only have some units of college. Included in the enlisted personnel are former rebel integrees¹⁵, some of which have not even completed basic elementary education. This implicates that some of them may not even know how to read. The trainer must consider these conditions in order to prepare an appropriate workshop module.

The trainer must also try to assess the level of knowledge (or awareness) the military participants have about the conflict context they are in. Most of them, except the commanding officers, are not aware about the history of the conflict, nor its current status. Their awareness on the topic is limited to fighting on the ground. Therefore, the module to be used should not only include the basic concepts of conflict, violence and other related topics; ideally it should also include a basic history of the conflict and the explanation of the status quo, including their role as individuals in the conflict context.

3.2. The Training Modules

In the case of Kadtuntaya Foundation (KFI), one of the NGOs involved in facilitating trainings in conflict transformation with the Philippine Army, two modules were used in training military personnel: the Conflict Transformation (general concepts) and Conflict Management (specialized track), based on the assessment of the needs of the military personnel in their project areas (Maguindanao and North Cotabato, Philippines).

3.2.1. The Conflict Transformation Training

The 3-day module on Conflict Transformation includes the following topics:

¹³ English is one of the two official languages in the Philippines and is included in the mainstream basic education curriculum.

¹⁴ “Enlisted personnel” are lower-ranking military service personnel, who are not classified as officers. The ranks go from Private to Master Sergeant only.

¹⁵ As part of the 1996 peace agreement between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), former MNLF combatants are integrated in the military, hence called “integrees”.

- Introduction of the basic concepts in conflict and violence
- Usage of simple conflict analysis methods such as the conflict mapping and conflict tree (here an input of the basic conflict history and conflict case studies is introduced)
- Causes of Conflict
- Responses to Conflict
- Social Transformation of Conflict (Glasl)
- Critical Issues in Conflict Transformation (Fisher, *Working on Conflict*)
- Concept of Peace (Galtung and Lederach and some local definitions)
- Culture of War and Peace (according to local context)
- Characteristics of a Good Peace Process
- Peace building Approaches (Mindanao Peacebuilding Institute)

This training was conceptualized with the aim of providing a basic understanding of conflict and violence, its causes and effects and how to approach and respond to it. It also introduces to them the process of conflict transformation and to make them aware of their role in the structure and dynamics of the conflict.

3.2.2. The Conflict Management Training

The 3-day module on Conflict Management is a specialized track aimed to train the military personnel on how to deal with the conflict directly, with the use of non-violent means. The topics included in this module are:

- Communication
- Negotiation
- Mediation

The training was conceptualized to provide a step-by-step guide for the military personnel on the prerequisites of an effective mediation, such as the strategic use of communication and negotiation. It was given to military officers, who are expected to decide whether the conflict in their AOR requires an intervention of non-violent means or the use of force.

3.3. Training Methods and Instruments

As described in the analysis of participants (3.1.), the military personnel involved in the conflict transformation trainings have the need to be “on the move” and therefore, a number of methodologies were experimented with in the first few training sessions until the optimal methodologies were finally identified. The best practice so far was the combination of putting 10% theoretical input and 90% hands-on activities. In practical terms, for 1 unit of a training session consisting of 60 minutes per unit, 5-6 minutes will be consumed for a lecture-type presentation of concepts and 50-55 minutes for a group or individual learning activity, where these concepts will apply. This requires converting almost all theoretical knowledge into practice and even further, developing this practice into *games*. A

combination of different methods and pedagogical instruments, such as the use of role-playing and simulation exercises, audiovisual media and visual arts has also proven its effectiveness in learning process of the military participants.

3.3.1. The use of games as a pedagogical method

The military has long recognized the potential for games and simulations to enable the teaching and testing of skills that could not be rehearsed in real-world environments¹⁶. Integrating games in the learning process of conflict transformation encourages participants to immerse themselves in new dimensions of exploring and experimenting with the minimum input they have learned, to think creatively in their given situation and to reflect on their actions and reactions. The use of games in trainings personalizes one's learning experience in group dynamics.

3.3.2. Role-playing and Simulation

The use of role-playing and simulation activities has proven to be very effective in the application of various concepts taught in the training modules. As both methods imitate a real phenomenon and induce different conditions that interplay in the given situation, they give the participants the space to analyze problems, to harness communication skills and to stimulate creative problem-solving skills. These activities promote improvisation of viewpoints and a change of perspective, which contribute greatly in an individual's understanding of his role and that of the others within a particular context.

A simulation in one course at the Mindanao Peacebuilding Institute provided the chance for military officers and civil society individuals to understand each other's roles in their conflict context. The military officials were given civilian roles, such as that of media and NGO workers, while participants from the civil society were given military roles. These roles interplayed in a scenario of "national elections". Each participant internalized the role of the "other", which led to a reflection of one's own role in relation to that "other". The civilians were able to gain a perspective on the role of the military and an understanding why they act or react like that; the same was the experience of the military in the role of the civilians. At the end of the simulation, a feeling of empathy towards the role of the "other" was mutually exchanged by both sides.

The effectiveness of role-playing and simulations are attributed to the defined goals of the exercise such as dealing with the problems involving the participants themselves, realizing the importance of feelings as a source of behavior and encouraging the test of ideas and hypotheses about human behavior in general¹⁷. Understanding the behavior of different parties to a conflict is an integral part in the process of conflict transformation.

¹⁶ See the article of Squire and Jenkins, "Harnessing the Power of Games in Education" (Insight Vol. 3 Vision 5).

¹⁷ Solem, A., "Human Relations Training: A Comparison of Case Study," Personnel Administration. Vol. 23 (1960), pp. 29-37.

3.3.3. Use of audiovisual media

Using audiovisual media such as short films, video clips and still pictures is another effective way to provide input to the participants and also to stimulate reflection on the processes they are currently experiencing while the workshop is ongoing. Ideas are quickly absorbed because audiovisual media connotes entertainment in the first place, learning just as second. With the attitude of the target group towards the audiovisual media as entertainment, it creates a relaxed learning environment for them and does not necessarily distinguish between the literate and the illiterate, between those who received higher education and those who did not. This is the medium where the discomfort brought about by the discrepancy in education among the soldiers is reconciled.

In a workshop held at the 602nd Brigade in Carmen, North Cotabato, simple reading materials were provided for the participants as a guide to the group exercise. On the second day, a group of soldiers approached the facilitator to complain. "We cannot understand what is written here. We only finished third grade," said the leader of the group. The facilitator then scrapped all the reading materials for the next activities and used short documentaries to provide the background for the exercise. The soldiers expressed great enthusiasm in the workshop because watching a documentary film helped them relax during the workshop; at the same time everyone understood what the topic was all about and each was able to contribute productively in the group work that followed the film showing.

3.3.4. Visual arts as a medium of expression

The use of visual arts, particularly the task of drawing images, has become one of the favorite activities of the soldiers. First, it does not require writing down anything, which was a difficulty, especially for those who did not receive higher education. It also does not compel them to explicitly express opinions about a certain issue, which might put them into trouble with their superiors. Drawings and illustrations enable them to send the message across in a manner that is comfortable for them and for the rest of the group. It was a way for them to recognize their own ideas and to process them in a simple, yet meaningful way.

At the end of the workshop, the soldiers were asked for their vision of peace in Mindanao. Surprisingly, their drawings were quite similar: there were farms abundant with crops, schools and hospitals, churches and mosques standing side by side. The soldiers and the rebels are shaking hands in their pictures. This is what peace is all about and this is what they want to achieve, which they could not express otherwise.

3.4 Mixture of Participants

The military has a very hierarchical structure. There is a strong delineation between the officers and the enlisted personnel. When these two are mixed, there is a paralysis of exchange during discussions. The enlisted personnel opt to listen to their officers and not contradict them, which gives the space for the officers to dominate any discussion or group work. In this case, the learning ability of the enlisted

personnel diminishes, while that of the officer flourishes. It is important to know these facts before starting the training and therefore, as a best practice, trainings for officers and for enlisted men should be separated. Additionally, it is relevant for the trainer to give equal treatment to everyone regardless of the status of the participant in the military and to announce beforehand that everyone is expected to participate and contribute.

4. IMPACT OF THE CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION TRAININGS

Conflict is about relationships. If dealt with constructively, conflict improves and preserves relationships; if dealt with negatively, it destroys relationships. The impact of the trainings could be measured through examining the different relationships the military personnel is confronted with: on the basis of intrapersonal relationship (self), of interpersonal relationships in the proximate community and the greater community, where the military is currently engaged in. The assessment of the impact in this section is limited to that of what is immediately seen after the trainings.

4.1. Impact on the Intrapersonal Relationship Level: A Peacebuilder or a Warrior?

The impact on the individual pertains to the change of the soldier participant's point of view regarding his role as a soldier in his given conflict context after the training. During pre-training, the soldier perceived himself as an instrument of war and his mission is to resolve the conflict through the use of violence in the course of warfare. At post-training, he is expected to change his perception as an instrument of peace, with the option to resolve conflict, primarily through non-violent means. If the soldier moves to the direction he is expected after the training, by changing his perception of his role and mission in the conflict he is in, then a positive impact was achieved.

To achieve this change in perception was not easy. Soldiers are mandated to be warriors and all of a sudden, they found themselves participating in conflict transformation workshops. The immediate result: an identity crisis for the trainee. Given their new understanding and new options in transforming conflicts, the trainees started to reflect on their own role. How can one possibly reconcile propagating peace while holding arms? They expressed in the workshops that they would like to see peace on the ground after 40 years of war, yet they are obliged to carry weapons and obey orders from the top level. In the end, they are still part and parcel of a conflict party. How could a series of conflict transformation workshops possibly influence the mission of warriorship?

There were many answers offered by their superiors, who encouraged them to get involved in the workshops. Some opted to look at this dilemma as combining the two concepts of peace and war, "warriors for peace", meaning that they would still fight but for the end state of peace. Some suggested that these trainings are more to help the troops "fight with a clearly defined role and purpose, where their actions are realigned in support of peace processes."¹⁸

¹⁸ Statement from Col. Raynard Ronnie Javier, Commander of the 103rd Infantry Battalion, Philippine Army.

Brigadier General Pedro Soria II, then commander of the 602nd Brigade, related that when his men were fresh from the peace trainings, one of them asked: "What now, Sir? Will we not fight the enemy anymore?"

"Wrong!" he exclaimed. "We will continue to do what we've been doing, what we're mandated to do. But we will fight at the right time, at the right context," Soria told his subordinate.

- Excerpt from Mindanews article "Generals want to institutionalize peace trainings for soldiers".

Despite this confusion about the two contradicting roles they are now confronted with, was there a change of perception at all? The answers are divided. Some see their role still as an instrument of war but with a mission as to achieve peace anyway, only through eliminating the "other". Some see themselves as an instrument of peace, until their superiors tell them to go to war. Others see their role as warriors, but now with an option to solve the conflict through non-violent means. This change in one's own perception within the context of the conflict inflicts a change of attitude towards the adversaries, the external community and how to deal with the conflict itself. A further impact of this attitude change is yet to be seen how one applies this new subjectivity to interpersonal relations in the community level and the surrounding environment.

4.2. Impact on the interpersonal level: proximate community

Proximate community pertains to the community, where the soldier revolves in, specifically his area of responsibility (AOR). The impact on this level could be seen through the change in interpersonal relations with other community members outside of the military and how they are instrumentalized by others in relation to their particular conflict scenario. This includes family relations within that certain community. In the pre-training scenario, they are used as a force that is used by the powers-that-be in political and family feuds. In the post-training scenario, they are expected to gain a critical thinking before entering a conflict situation, to still help resolve the conflict but not as a violent force to reckon with, instead through the use of non-violent means of conflict management (negotiation, mediation).

In the Mindanao context, where violent conflicts have become pluralistic, a simple community conflict could easily be magnified into an intrastate conflict. This is due to the fact that kinship plays a major role in the dynamics of the conflict. When conflict is not resolved among community members, conflict parties turn to their kins, who have connections to either the rebel or the army. The tendency is that if a Muslim is in trouble, they do not go to the state authorities to seek justice; instead they report their troubles to the local rebel commander. A troubled Christian would usually seek refuge from the army, who are mostly from the North and are Christians themselves. This kind of behavior could easily provoke the escalation of conflicts from the community level to the state level, if not properly managed.

In this scenario, if the soldier is able to analyze the conflict situation, he could identify whether he should be involved in the conflict, or not. In the pre-training context, a soldier could get easily involved in these conflicts upon receiving a call or request from one of the conflict parties and could easily provoke the involvement of the state apparatus in what started as a family feud. The commanding officer of the 6th Infantry Battalion related such a dilemma. In a certain conflict situation in his AOR, he received a request from one of his subordinates to send reinforcements to an ongoing clan war. Instead of getting immediately involved, which was a common practice, the commanding officer was able to analyze that the conflict was not of the army's concern as it has a nature of a family feud and responded by offering services of mediation between the parties to the conflict. By doing this, he deterred the use of violence to resolve the conflict and contained its possible escalation in the area and between political clans.

Another army commander¹⁹ has noted that because of the conflict management trainings, there was an improvement of interpersonal relations among his men and they have been experimenting with mediation at the communities they are assigned to.

The examples demonstrate on how conflict transformation trainings have changed the attitude and behavior of the soldiers at an interpersonal level, applying their knowledge and skills in conflict transformation within their proximate community. The application of the said skills and knowledge also has a further impact outside their own areas of responsibility, at the level of the greater community.

Table 1. Impact of the Conflict Transformation Trainings on the Military on different relationship levels

Level of Relationship	Pre-training (status quo)	Post-training (Impact)
Intrapersonal (self)	<i>Role:</i> Instrument of War; <i>Mission:</i> Conflict Resolution by Elimination	<i>Role:</i> Instrument of Peace; <i>Mission:</i> Conflict Resolution primarily by non-violent means
Interpersonal: Proximate Community (family, area of responsibility)	<i>Military as a public utility:</i> Instrumentalized as reinforcement for political and family feuds	<i>Military as members of the community:</i> Instrumentalized to help resolve political and family feuds through mediation
Interpersonal: Greater Community (outside of the AOR; the "enemy" community)	<i>Duty to the state:</i> Capture and kill rebels and other insurgents	<i>Duty to the citizens:</i> use of dialogue as mutual deterrence and a strategy to contain insurgency

4.3. Impact on the interpersonal level: greater community

"Greater community" in this sense is described as the communities surrounding the soldier's area of responsibility, where he is not necessarily involved. This also includes the "enemy" lines: the military's

¹⁹ Lt. Col. Paul Lorenzo, 5th Infantry Battalion, Zamboanga del Sur.

relationship vis-à-vis its adversaries, such as the rebels and other insurgents. In this community, he is confronted with his duties to the state as part of its apparatus, obliged to follow orders and commands from the higher levels of the military. At the same time, he has an obligation to the citizens as the defender of peace and order. In the pre-training scenario, he is only focused on his duty to the state, being its instrument of security. This means going back again to his initial mission of conflict resolution through elimination, hence its manifestation through capturing and killing the “enemy”. In the post-training scenario, he is more aware of his other duty, not only to the state as an institution but to the citizens belonging to the state.

The soldier, now equipped with the faculties of communication and dialogue, could try alternative means of achieving the goal of containing the conflict and deterring the “enemy” from any acts of aggression. Facilitating talks on the ground between the military and soldiers have proven to support greatly the maintenance of a ceasefire. A ceasefire is highly relevant in pursuing negotiations on a higher level towards a peace agreement between the conflicting groups.

An army colonel, who had also undergone a conflict transformation training, narrated on how his newly acquired skills and knowledge in dialogue enabled him to initiate a dialogue with all stakeholders and to solve a kidnapping case within six hours. A German national and his three Filipino companions were kidnapped in his AOR. He instructed his ground commander not to deploy a platoon but instead he talked to the rebel groups and some politicians. Because of a close coordination between the military, the police, the rebel groups, community and religious leaders, the victims of the kidnapping were released immediately. He related that “had the kidnapping happened at a different time, a different situation, with the usual military option of sending a pursuit and blocking team, violence could have erupted, unnecessarily dragging government and rebel forces in clashes they did not start or wish to be involved in.”²⁰ He also started genuinely engaging the rebel leaders in a dialogue, telling them “if you don’t move, we will also not move”, hence deterring unwanted clashes in his own area and the surrounding municipalities.

5. LESSONS LEARNED AND BEST PRACTICES

Widely-known and respected training institutions in peacebuilding, such as the MPI, which can be a venue for dialogue, exchange, networking and alliance-building between among stakeholders of peace and conflict, should be supported by donor agencies. This establishes the primary link between actors to start a collaboration. Contacts should be maintained on a regular basis and venues for dialogue and exchange should be constantly encouraged.

It is important to make a site visit of the training venue and participants should be subjected to an initial assessment to adjust the level of language and material to be used in the trainings. Use of visual aids is a critical point as images make an immediate impact in the learning process especially for those who are

²⁰ Former Colonel now Brigadier General Pedro Soria II, as quoted by Bobby Timonera on his Mindanews article “Generals want to institutionalize peace trainings for soldiers.”

challenged in literacy. Films are also very much appreciated because they represent leisure and therefore, make the participants more receptive to the medium.

“Learning by doing” method is very effective. Reading materials and sit-down lectures should be transformed into activities that are hands-on, involving drawing, sketching, team work, role-playing and active games. Results of the activities should be synthesized and summarized but with an active involvement of the participants in the process. The usual way to motivate participants, who have an active lifestyle like the soldiers, is to initiate “contests” or physical competition. The use of icebreakers and energizers is highly essential to maintain the interest of the group.

Content-wise, more examples of the different community-based conflicts in their area of responsibility should be used and encourage analytical thinking from the participants about these examples. It is helpful to cross-examine conflict analysis results of the military with non-military results (such as those from the workshops of NGOs or other conflict parties) in case the military is not portrayed in the analysis. A background on the conflict history or the context, actors and dynamics of a conflict in the area of responsibility should be included in the basic instruction of the military personnel. NGOs and academics as well could help out in the supply and synthesis of information that could be useful to the military personnel while in the area. Not only could this be informative to the personnel but this knowledge could also be used by them to foster dialogue and understanding in the environment they are currently working in.

When it comes to the selection and organization of the participants, officers and enlisted personnel should not be mixed together. It is better if the participants are of the same ranking to avoid discrimination and discouragement in sharing knowledge and information. It is also desired that civilians be invited in the trainings to foster a richer exchange of ideas and viewpoints regarding the conflict. If it cannot be avoided that participants of different ranks should be mixed, it is recommendable to hold trainings outside of the military camps to encourage a harmonious exchange among the participants. This superficially detaches the trainees from the military hierarchy and could then motivate the individual to fully participate in the training activities.

6. CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE

The trainings in conflict transformation serve only as a basis for the military to become part of the actual process of transforming the conflict. The training is not an end but only the means to achieve something else²¹ and therefore, other interventions are needed to support the military’s stance as peace actors. For peace to become positive and stable in the conflict area, actors from the top-level, mid-level and grassroots communities should also play a role and contribute to conflict transformation.

6.1 Top-Level

While indeed the engagement of the military in conflict transformation is more on a departmental approach for Central Mindanao, embedding all these initiatives and activities at top policy level could only strengthen the positive impact of conflict transformation trainings. It would help to include some concepts of conflict transformation in the basic training and also at the training ground of the future

²¹ See Sprenger, 2005.

officers, which is the Philippine Military Academy. Coordination of peace building efforts from all military divisions in Mindanao would also make a stronger impact in the whole process.

At the same time, there needs to be a sincere commitment from the ruling government to explore the possibilities of a paradigm shift in dealing with the ongoing conflict. No matter how much the military tries to take an alternative response to the conflict, it is a fact that the military is obliged to follow the orders of the ruling government. Hence, the ruling government should also be convinced that the only way to achieve peace on the ground is if they would also consider putting efforts in the process of conflict transformation.

The ongoing war in Central Mindanao is not anymore due to small clashes or minor aggressions from the armed forces that have escalated. This time, it was the lack of political will from both parties to resolve the conflict at the national level. Without this political will, the process of transforming the conflict would not take place and the skills and knowledge derived from the series of trainings would not be applied as the military is constantly ordered to use violence.

6.2 Mid-Level

The military should continue to cooperate with the civil society organizations (CSOs) to help them maintain their role as local capacities for peace and to sustain their efforts in conflict transformation, especially when targeting grassroots communities. The CSOs could provide information, ideas and occasionally, other forms of trainings other than conflict transformation and conflict management. The military also has a promising role in conflict prevention and post-conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation and this could be guided and streamlined through the help of CSOs. Donor agencies could also support the conflict transformation work of the military by providing some funding for continuous training and other initiatives that could support the process, such as joint community work by the CSOs and the military at the grassroots level.

Through the help and initiative of the CSOs, the military should also be encouraged to get involved in forums, conferences and other workshops that talk about the peace process. The CSOs should acknowledge that the military is not merely an instrument of the state, but it is composed of human beings, a part of the community and therefore, also a stakeholder in peace. The military should be constantly engaged in a dialogue with other stakeholders, for their side to be heard and understood and to solicit cooperation from them. If they would be excluded from the activities of the civil society, they would also be excluding themselves from the peace building efforts that the civil society is initiating, instead of them working hand-in-hand towards the common goal of peace.

6.3 Grassroots Level

In order to further encourage the military to continue towards the direction of conflict transformation, grassroots leaders and their respective communities should be informed about military's engagement in the conflict transformation process. This kind of information dissemination could also change the perspective of the communities in dealing with the military. While it does not guarantee the complete elimination of violent outbreaks of conflict, it could mitigate the hostile attitudes on the ground to

promote the role of the military as peace actors. This could also facilitate the work of the military personnel in their application of learned skills and knowledge in conflict management and transformation if they would work in an environment that is less hostile to them.

In the process of implementing activities towards conflict transformation, the military as well should be transparent in what they are doing. Grassroots communities are always suspicious that there is a negative agenda behind the activities of the military, hence, they would pose resistance to any initiative on the ground. The military should continue to initiate and foster dialogue in the communities, particularly among its elected and traditional leaders in order to gain a positive validation from the citizens.

On all levels

There should be a balance among the three levels of society in order to attain the overall goal of conflict transformation, that is, to resolve the conflict at its roots and to eliminate its effects. If one level does not change its attitude towards the conflict, the rest of the spectrum would remain vulnerable to the violent outbreaks of the conflict and therefore, would impede the continuum of the process of transformation.

7. Conclusion

Conflict transformation addresses the wider social and political sources of a conflict and seeks to transform the negative energy of war into positive social and political change.²² For this to take place, it is important that all actors relevant to the conflict are included in the entire process, no exception nor exclusion, no distinction between the victim and the perpetrator. In achieving stable peace, everyone has a stake.

Approaching the military to participate in the process of conflict transformation, as a starting point, was the hardest to overcome; yet it was possible. It speaks for all military structures in the world, where the hierarchy is strong and the rules and norms are rigid. The key point is to have a neutral avenue, where they could be socialized with others, particularly with the civil society. On the other hand, for the civil society to respond positively in this interaction, there needs to be serious efforts in confidence-building. As the military is a prominent actor in a civil strife, there is a recognizable degree of mistrust between the military as a state instrument and its citizens, who suffer from collateral damage. The stigma of being a perpetrator is difficult to remove and the victim-perpetrator relationship between the military and the civil society could still obstruct what could have been a positive outcome of socialization.

It is not enough that the military participates in the trainings for conflict transformation to gain validation in their role as peace actors. There must also be a sincere commitment from the state, to

²² Simon Fisher, et al. Working with Conflict. (New York: 2000).

which the military has a duty to obey, to actively and positively get involved in the transformation of the conflict.

For the military personnel to effectively apply their skills and knowledge in transforming and managing conflicts, they should not only learn it, but remember it. Hence it is important that the training process is modified according to their needs, capabilities and lifestyle, in a way that is enjoyable and convenient for them that it will serve as a pleasant memory. Trainings with the military should not only be goal-oriented but more importantly, process-oriented. It is necessary to have a space to experiment and reflect on human behavior, attitudes, thoughts and feelings. To go through these processes reminds the military personnel that first of all, they are human beings that belong to a society; an instrument of the state only as the second. The “humanization” of this military through this process constructively shapes their relations between themselves and among those in the environment they are working in.

No one should expect the military to abandon their original mandate of defense and deterrence. This is not a realistic goal for conflict transformation trainings. The goal that should be targeted instead is the change of attitudes in the individual, which has immediate manifestations in their interpersonal relations and how they will deal with the conflict they are confronted with. For a soldier to be confident in his role as a capacity for peace and to realize that there are other options to resolve conflicts without the use of violence is not only an example of a result; it is the success story itself.

The fact that the military has started to participate in the conflict transformation process has garnered positive reviews from the civil society and grassroots communities. Five years ago, there were 588 armed clashes recorded in that year; as the military started to engage in conflict transformation, the number has decreased to 7 clashes in 2007. It should continue to decrease, if the peace building efforts would be supported at the policy level. For some time, the military’s change of behavior and attitude towards the conflict has supported the peace process in Mindanao by shifting the focus on top-level negotiations as there is more stability, peace and order on the ground. The Philippine Military’s commitment to conflict transformation makes the Philippines a model for other conflict-affected countries around the world. It has pioneered in this kind of civilian-military cooperation and now serves as a model to others.

Capacities for war like the military could be converted to capacities for peace and would continue to do so, if given the proper support and encouragement; however, the fact cannot be denied that if the structure, wherein that capacity is embedded, is weak and vulnerable, the process could be reversed once again. Sadly, because of the lack of political will of the top-level decision makers, the Philippine Military is again in combat. This only shows that conflict transformation needs a coordination of efforts from all levels of society in order to achieve its goal. At the end of the day, a soldier is obliged to follow orders. Therefore, for a soldier to become an actor of peace, the one who gives the orders should first become one.

Conflict transformation trainings will not put an end to the conflict, but for a soldier be able to reflect for one minute whether to shoot or not makes the difference.

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