



## Civil Society Collaboration In The Development Of Islam And Its Implications For Religious Harmony In The Philippines

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### Abstract

Islam in the Philippines faces significant challenges but also holds immense potential for peaceful and productive development. The long history of conflict and struggle within the Muslim community highlights the importance of adaptive and context-sensitive da'wah efforts. The success of Islamic propagation relies on the ability of Muslim communities to engage with the local socio-cultural context, gain support from the government, and foster collaboration with non-Muslim communities. Educated and context-aware local Muslim scholars play a vital role in strengthening Muslim identity and facilitating interfaith dialogue. International funding and networking alleviate local resource constraints, but transparency and accountability in fund management remain essential. Social media platforms have broadened the reach of da'wah, enabling more personalized interactions between preachers and worshippers. Key challenges include government policies, social prejudice, and negative stereotypes. However, collaborative approaches and support from both local and international actors present significant opportunities to enhance Islamic da'wah in the Philippines.

**Keywords:** Islamic Dakwah, Interfaith Dialogue, Muslim Development

### INTRODUCTION

The Philippines is one of the countries that often faces tensions and conflicts between religions, especially in the Mindanao region, a region with the largest Muslim population. Conflicts in the Philippines are often caused by religious and ethnic differences, as well as a long history of discrimination against the Muslim community (Majul: 1999). Amnesty International notes that tensions in the Philippines are exacerbated by a lack of interfaith dialogue and miscommunication,



which often leads to armed conflict and violence, as happened in the Battle of Marawi in 2017 (Amnesty International: 2017).

Some of the conflicts that occur in the Philippines caused by ethnic and religious differences include: the Moro conflict, the conflict between the Philippine government and Moro separatist groups, such as the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). This conflict was mainly triggered by the dissatisfaction of ethnic Moro (Muslim) with the dominance of the Christian-majority central government (Patricio: 2005). The Mindanao conflict involves a dispute between Moro Muslim groups and the Christian community and the central government. One of the most famous incidents was the Jabidah Massacre in 1968, which became one of the main triggers of conflict in Mindanao (Amnesty International: 2017).

Muslims in the Philippines are still lagging behind in all aspects, both those living in Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao. Of the total household population of 108,667,043 in 2020, nearly four-fifths or 85,645,362 people (78.8%) reported Roman Catholicism as their religious affiliation. Islam is the second largest religion with 6,981,710 people (6.4%), and Iglesia ni Cristo with 2,806,524 people (2.6%). As of 2015, these three religions are also the top three religious affiliations in the country. The top ten religious affiliations in 2020 also included Seventh Day Adventist, and Aglipay (0.8% each); Independiente Philippine Iglesia (0.6%); Bible Baptist Church (0.5%); and United Church of Christ in the Philippines, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Church of Christ (0.4%). (PSA: 2020)

Islam is the most dominant religion in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), with 4.49 million adherents or 90.9% of the region's 4.94 million household population. Region IX - Zamboanga Peninsula has 18.2% Muslim population, SOCSKSARGEN has 15.8%, Region X - Northern Mindanao has 8.5%, and Region XI - Davao Region and MIMAROPA Region has 3.5%. Region XIII - Caraga, which is also in Mindanao, recorded an Islamic proportion of only 0.5 percent. Other regions recorded proportions ranging from

0.1 percent in Bicol and Region VI - West Visayas to 1.3 percent in NCR (PSA: 2020)

This sizable Muslim population provides great opportunities for the development of Islam in the country, especially if this population is actively involved in da'wah activities. The involvement of Muslims in da'wah activities is very important to educate others about Islam, increase understanding, and eliminate misunderstandings about the religion. Thus, the Muslim community can play an important role in building and strengthening the Islamic community throughout the Philippines.

Engagement in dialogue with members of other religious communities is important for Muslim communities to foster mutual respect, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence. Muslims participate in interfaith communication initiatives to foster understanding, dialogue, and build bridges of cooperation with people of different religions. In an effort to address this problem, civil society is beginning to play an increasingly important role. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), local communities, and religious leaders work together to create spaces for interfaith dialogue and understanding (Rüland et al. 2009). Amnesty International reports that collaborative programs involving the active participation of civil society have created a space for constructive dialogue. Activities such as workshops, seminars, and social activities are designed to build trust and mutual understanding among different religious groups (Amnesty International: 2017).

One of the tangible results of this initiative is the development of religious infrastructure involving various religious groups. Research from Ateneo de Manila University shows that the construction of mosques and community centers with the participation of various religious groups has a significant positive impact. This infrastructure serves not only as a place of worship, but also as a symbol of togetherness and social integration, which lowers the level of prejudice and discrimination and increases interfaith tolerance and cooperation (Amnesty International: 2017).

In addition to infrastructure, inclusive education programs also play an important role in building interfaith understanding. Data from the Philippine Statistics Authority shows an increase in interfaith understanding among the younger generation. Educational programs run by various NGOs focus on teaching the values of tolerance and respect for religious differences. The younger generation involved in the program shows a more open and tolerant attitude towards other religions, creating hope for a more peaceful and harmonious future (Amnesty International: 2017).

Looking at the significant Muslim population in the Philippines, this study aims to unravel the forms of civil society collaboration in the development of Islam in the Philippines, analyze the implications of such collaboration on religious harmony, and identify challenges and opportunities in the development of Islam in the Philippines. Therefore, the collaboration of civil society in the Philippines in the development of Islam and its implications for religious harmony is interesting to be studied as a comparative material, especially for countries where the majority of the population is not Muslim. With this research, it is hoped that it can contribute to the development of policies and programs that support the strengthening of the Muslim community and religious harmony in the Philippines.

## METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach to gain a deep understanding of civil society collaboration in the development of Islam and its strengthening of religious harmony in the Philippines. A qualitative approach was chosen because it can comprehensively explore the perceptions, experiences, and practices of Muslim communities within a complex social and cultural context. This study was conducted in the Philippines, focusing on the Mindanao region, specifically the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), the region with the largest Muslim population and the center of ethnic Muslim resistance against the government. This resistance is fueled by feelings of marginalization and discrimination experienced by the community despite various government efforts to

resolve the conflict. Research data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with religious leaders, academics, policymakers, and community representatives; field observations to observe the practices, beliefs, and socio-cultural dynamics of Muslim communities; a literature review of scientific articles, books, government reports, and other relevant sources; and an analysis of official documents in the form of government reports, policies, and historical archives related to the development of Islam in the Philippines.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### History and Development of Islam in the Philippines

Islam has a long history in the Philippines, which began long before the Spanish colonization. The southern region, particularly Mindanao and the Sulu Islands, has a significant Muslim population and is a major center of Islamic da'wah. The Moro people, who are predominantly Muslim, have long fought for autonomy and self-determination. Armed conflicts with the Philippine government involving groups such as the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) have colored their modern history. The resolution of this conflict through the peace process has a significant impact on the future of Islamization in the region.

This long history of conflict and struggle has influenced the Muslim community's perspective and attitude towards the government and non-Muslim communities. Distrust and a sense of injustice are still felt by many Muslim communities, which can be an obstacle to the process of da'wah and social integration. However, successful peace efforts, such as the signing of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Moro Nation in 2014, show that dialogue and cooperation can pave the way for a more peaceful and effective spread of Islam.

This peace agreement has created the framework for the establishment of a new autonomous region, the Moro Nation, which gives the Muslim community more control over their own affairs (Interview: 2023). This includes local administration, education, and the application of Islamic law in several aspects of

personal life. This autonomy arrangement is expected to improve the welfare and political participation of the Muslim community in the Philippines, as well as facilitate a more organized and efficient da'wah process.

The influence of the global Islamic community also plays an important role in the development of Islam in the Philippines. International organizations and movements often provide the financial, educational, and logistical support necessary to strengthen local da'wah. For example, aid from Muslim countries such as Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, and Indonesia has helped establish mosques, madrasas, and Islamic education centers in the Philippines (Interview: 2023). This support strengthens local capacity to spread the teachings of Islam and provide services to the Muslim community.

However, this international support also comes with its own challenges. Sometimes, there is a tension between the interpretation of Islam brought from outside and the local traditions that have developed in the Philippines. Scholars and leaders of local communities often have to navigate between maintaining the authenticity of local Islamic traditions and receiving outside help and influence. This requires good diplomatic wisdom and skills to ensure that the Islamization process runs harmoniously without causing internal conflicts.

The Philippine government's attitude towards Islam and Islamic organizations is also very important. Policies that support religious freedom and provide adequate facilities for religious education and practice can facilitate the development of Islam. On the contrary, discriminatory or less supportive policies can hinder da'wah efforts and strengthen social tensions. Governments need to adopt an inclusive approach that respects the rights of the Muslim community and promotes interfaith harmony.

One example of a supportive policy is the implementation of Republic Act No. 9997, which established the National Commission for Filipino Muslims (NCMF). The commission aims to promote the well-being of the Muslim community through various programs and initiatives. The NCMF serves as a liaison between the government and the Muslim community, as well as providing support in the

fields of education, health, and the economy. This initiative reflects the government's efforts to integrate Muslim communities into national life without neglecting their identity and needs.

However, despite efforts like the NCMF, challenges remain. For example, some Muslim-majority areas still face gaps in access to basic services such as education and health. This is often due to poor infrastructure and lack of investment from the central government. To address these issues, closer collaboration between central governments, local governments, and the international community is needed to ensure that all communities have equitable access to resources and opportunities.

The history and development of Islam in the Philippines is greatly influenced by political, social, and economic dynamics. Peace and autonomy efforts, international support, and inclusive government policies can play an important role in strengthening da'wah and the development of Islam. However, this success depends on the Muslim community's ability to adapt to change and take advantage of existing opportunities, while addressing emerging challenges.

The Philippines is the only country in Southeast Asia where the majority of the population is Christian. However, behind this identity, ethnic and religious conflicts have been going on for decades, especially in Mindanao. The second largest island in the Philippines is home to three large groups: Muslims, Christians, and the Lumad indigenous people. Conflict between Muslim separatist groups and the government since 1969 has killed about 160,000 people and displaced two million others.

The peace process in Mindanao, which lasted for a decade, collapsed in 2008. As a result, fighting between the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the government broke out again. This conflict shows a great challenge in building peace in an ethnically and religiously divided region. In this context, this case study focuses on peace efforts inspired by religious values.

Faith-based peacebuilding efforts involve a wide range of parties, including Catholic peacebuilders and the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). Interfaith

forums also play an important role in fostering more positive relationships between different groups. The credibility of religious leaders, their moral commitment to justice, and their willingness to endure in the long term are key factors in the success of these efforts.

Mindanao is a strategic region with an area of one-third of the Philippines' mainland and a population of about 21 million people, or a quarter of the country's total population. Its location at the southern tip of the Philippines makes it close to Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim country, and an important link between the Philippines and the Muslim world.

Spanish colonial influence since the sixteenth century has helped shape the ethnic and religious composition of the Philippines. The colonial government introduced Catholicism which later became the majority in the Philippines. However, colonial policies, including land tenure and the patronage system, created deep prejudice and conflict among different ethnic groups, especially those who refused to convert to Catholicism.

Prior to colonialism, Islam was introduced in some Philippine provinces through trade routes. However, with the entry of Catholicism as the dominant religion during the colonial period, the Muslim community in the Philippines faced various challenges, including economic and social marginalization. This is one of the main triggers of the conflict that has lasted until now.

In recent decades, the situation in Mindanao has become increasingly complex with the emergence of radical groups affiliated with Al-Qaeda, such as the Abu Sayyaf. The presence of this group adds a new layer to the conflict in Mindanao, which is not only local in nature but also has an international dimension.

Despite the great challenges, some successes in peacebuilding have been achieved. Religious actors are increasingly partnering with the government and military to promote peace in Mindanao. For example, the Bishop-Ulema Conference, an interfaith council involving Christians and Muslims, has become an important platform for dialogue and cooperation.



Institutions such as the Mindanao Peacebuilding Institute have also played a significant role in building the capacity of communities to support peace. These efforts include training and education to encourage tolerance and strengthen relationships between different groups. This kind of intervention helps reduce tensions and improve security in some areas.

However, peacebuilding is not always easy. Deep ethnic and religious disparities require a sustained and coordinated approach. One of the keys to success is the commitment of religious and community leaders to build inclusive dialogue and maintain transparency in every process.

These successes have not yet brought complete peace in Mindanao. However, interfaith efforts involving religious actors, governments, and local communities offer hope. With a holistic approach, there is an opportunity to build more harmonious relationships in the region.

Mindanao is a reflection of the challenges and opportunities in building a faith-based peace. Collaboration between religious actors, governments, and local communities shows that although conflicts are difficult to overcome, the path to peace is still possible with mutual cooperation and commitment.

### **The Emergence of Muslim Scholars in the Philippines**

During the 1990s, a movement toward a peaceful settlement of the conflict began to emerge among local religious leaders in the local religion in Mindanao. The most famous initiative is the Conference of Bishops-Scholars, the most famous, established in 1996 as the Bishop-Scholar Conference, signed in support of national peace treaties. The Conference of Bishops-Ulema is made up of Christian and Muslim churches, mosques, schools, and socio-cultural institutions in Mindanao. Socio-cultural institutions in Mindanao were established as a forum to discuss the sources of conflict and peaceful resolution. The forum worked to reach a moral conclusion over the conflict and emphasized the need for reforms to address the divisions between local leaders and between local and national leaders who contribute to the conflict in Mindanao.

The conference had to repeatedly respond to important issues related to the 1997 peace between the MNLF and the government. The agreement was considered a breakthrough at the time, giving MNLF leaders the opportunity to govern several provinces whose population is majority Moro within an autonomous region. However, laws passed by national legislatures later weakened many of the provisions in the treaty. In addition, the leadership of the MNLF failed to be an effective governing force and had a limited positive impact on Moro life in Mindanao.<sup>29</sup> The national government also established the Southern Philippine Peace and Development Council. Most Christians denounced the agreement as it was seen as benefiting the Moro community, as it encouraged religious leaders to calm their respective communities during times of violence to prevent the situation from escalating.

In addition, the emergence of Muslim scholars from non-Arab countries brings diverse perspectives and enriches global Islamic discourse. These scholars are often more sensitive to local contexts and are able to offer interpretations of Islamic teachings that are relevant to local culture and traditions. In the Philippines, Muslim scholars like this play an important role in developing a deeper understanding of Islam and how its teachings can be applied in everyday life.

The Bishops-Cleric Conference has been one of the key actors in realizing peace and development in Mindanao, especially after the halt of the formal peace process. The conference meets two to three times a year, serving as a platform for dialogue for top-level religious leaders to promote interfaith tolerance. As an example for their communities, the conference partners with other faith-based organizations, such as Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and the Philippine Bishops' Conference, to organize interfaith activities involving community religious leaders as well as grassroots organizations.

The Philippine Bishops' Conference also plays an active role by sponsoring various initiatives, such as peacebuilding seminars, peace marches, and educational programs. Some of the key issues discussed at the Bishops-Cleric Conference meeting included the security of Muslims in Christian-majority areas

and vice versa, the elimination of cannabis plantations, the reintegration of former MNLF rebels into civil society, as well as efforts to build a sustainable culture of peace.

In addition, peace education for the younger generation is one of the top priorities. The program is designed to reduce the deep-seated prejudices that have been embedded in society. On the other hand, the conference also seeks to reach out to separatist groups such as the MILF and confront negative portrayals of Muslims in the media, emphasizing shared values and similar religious traditions.

In 2008, President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo asked the Philippine Bishops' Conference to lead the development of a civil society framework for resolving conflicts in Mindanao. This shows recognition of the important role of religious actors in creating peace, not only at the local level but also on a national scale.

This interfaith effort is proof that faith-based institutions are able to transcend social and cultural boundaries. By involving government actors as well as local communities, this initiative is a significant lever in creating positive change. The involvement of organizations such as CRS and clerics through the Bishop-Ulema Conference reflects the importance of a faith-based approach in responding to complex challenges in Mindanao.

These Muslim scholars often received higher education abroad, in countries such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Malaysia. Their experience of studying abroad not only enriches their religious knowledge but also provides them with a global perspective on Islam. When they returned to the Philippines, they brought this knowledge and experience to develop the local Muslim community and promote more effective and relevant da'wah.

The emergence of Muslim scholars in the Philippines has also helped strengthen Muslim identity in the country. With a deep knowledge of the teachings of Islam and the ability to articulate their views in a local context, these scholars can help Muslim communities overcome the challenges they face. They can be a source of inspiration and guidance for the younger generation of Muslims who are

looking for a better understanding of their religion and ways to live in accordance with the teachings of Islam in a diverse society.

Filipino Muslim scholars also serve as a bridge between different cultures and religious traditions. Their ability to mobilize a variety of cultural and linguistic contexts facilitates dialogue and collaboration with scholars, activists, and religious leaders from diverse backgrounds. The interfaith dialogue facilitated by these scholars can help reduce tensions and build a better understanding between Muslim and non-Muslim communities (Interview: 2024).

International funding and support play an important role in strengthening Islamic da'wah in the Philippines. Countries such as Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, and Turkey often provide scholarships, training programs, and financial aid to support the education and capacity building of Filipino Muslim scholars (Interview: 2024). This support not only helps to overcome local resource limitations but also strengthens the international network of Muslim communities in the Philippines.

However, international funding also brings its own challenges. There are concerns that too much reliance on foreign funding could reduce the self-reliance and sustainability of local initiatives. Therefore, it is important for local organizations and scholars to maintain transparency and accountability in the management of these funds. They need to ensure that aid is used effectively and in line with the goals that have been set, as well as develop strategies to increase local resources and community support.

The emergence of local Muslim scholars also has a significant impact in the context of da'wah. With their deep knowledge and contextual understanding, they can convey the teachings of Islam in a way that is more relevant and easily accepted by the local community. This approach not only increases the effectiveness of da'wah but also helps to build trust and respect for cultural diversity in the Philippines.

Muslim scholars also play a role in developing a more comprehensive and relevant Islamic education curriculum. They can work closely with schools and universities to ensure that Islamic teachings are taught in a way that is inclusive and

relevant to the local context (Rodell: 2002). In addition, they can develop training programs for preachers and community leaders to strengthen their capacity to effectively convey the message of Islam.

In the context of Civic Engagement theory, the movement towards peace in Mindanao shows the active involvement of various actors, both individual and collective, in an effort to build harmony. The Bishop-Ulema Conference is a concrete example of how interfaith participation is facilitated to discuss the sources of conflict and seek peaceful resolutions. This activity reflects the existence of formal participation through interfaith dialogue and informal through the involvement of local communities. By involving mosques, churches, schools, and socio-cultural institutions, this conference provides a space for various levels of society to participate in the reconciliation process.

From the perspective of the Level of Organization, the level of sophistication and organizational structure of the Bishop-Ulama Conference is one of the success factors in carrying out its mission. The involvement of faith-based organizations such as Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and the Philippine Bishops' Conference shows the existence of strong relationships between local and international institutions. This collaboration creates a complex but effective network to support interfaith activities, such as peacebuilding seminars, peace marches, and educational programs. This solid organizational structure allows for the sustainability of the program, despite challenges, such as resistance to peace agreements by some groups.

Within the framework of the Practice of Values, the Bishop-Ulema Conference plays an important role in promoting shared values, such as tolerance and inclusion. These values are applied through peace education programs designed to reduce prejudice between Muslim and Christian communities. In addition, efforts to reach out to separatist groups such as the MILF and counteract negative stereotypes about Muslims in the media show a commitment to the implementation of inclusive values. The cross-cultural and religious interactions that occur in

various conference activities create a space for the development of shared values that support social harmony.

Perception of Impact can be seen from the direct and indirect influence generated by the activities of the Bishop-Ulama Conference. For example, success in facilitating interfaith dialogue has helped reduce tensions at the local community level. However, this positive impact is sometimes limited, as can be seen from the difficulties faced by the MNLF leadership in running autonomous government effectively. Nonetheless, these interfaith initiatives inspire and build trust between conflicting communities, creating a foundation for better change in the future.

The Context Dimension describes how the external environment, such as international support and national political dynamics, influences civil society initiatives in Mindanao. Funding and training from countries such as Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, and Turkey make a significant contribution to the capacity building of Muslim scholars and local organizations. However, the reliance on foreign funding also carries risks to the sustainability of local initiatives. Therefore, it is important for stakeholders to integrate local resources in their strategies. In the political context, the Philippine government's recognition of the role of religious actors in the peace process demonstrates the potential for cross-sectoral collaboration to create inclusive and sustainable solutions.

### **Civic Societal Implications For Religious Harmony In The Philippines**

Civil society refers to social and political groups formed on the initiative of the community itself, with the main characteristic being independence (autonomy) from the state. This concept describes a society that is led by fair and wise individuals, and has laws to regulate life together, so as to create a guarantee of security, tranquility, and survival of the community. In addition, civil society is characterized by the characteristics of non-racism and is free from regionalism.

Joint activities occur when various individual interests can be fulfilled without eliminating each other's motivation. It is important to expand the relationship between individuals, families, and communities in order to achieve broader goals.

Associations in society should be based on mutual trust and mutually beneficial relationships. With this approach, civil society is able to create better social wealth. This social wealth is reflected in the loss of dividing barriers, such as ethnicity, religion, and language. Every action of society is oriented towards collective values, although it still respects individual values for things that are personal. With strong *social capital*, an environment will be created that supports the formation of better policies, thereby improving the quality of life of the community as a whole.

In the context of the Philippines, understanding that *civil society* as an ideal social order is very important. This plays a role as a voluntary contribution in countering the tendency of one group to dominate another group on the basis of ideology. Harmonious relations between governments, community organizations, and the business world need to be built on the foundation of mutual trust through social contracts that support the achievement of common goals, especially related to community welfare and security. However, to form an ideal society, coordination between various activities and actions is needed. The main questions are whether society has succeeded in creating an environment and conditions that are adaptive to changes in time, how collective decisions are made, and how negotiations are conducted. All of this requires the formulation of policies, strategies, and coordination efforts between various institutions to be in line with the common goals that have been determined.

### The Complexity of Religious and Cultural Identity

Religious and cultural identities in the Philippines are very diverse, especially in the Mindanao region. The historical interaction between Islam that came in the 14th century, the Catholicism introduced by the Spanish colonizers, and local traditional beliefs created a complicated dynamic. Although many Filipinos now embrace Catholicism, the Muslim community retains its unique identity, which often reflects the struggle against marginalization.

Groups like the Moro and Lumad in Mindanao are not only religiously but also culturally and linguistically distinct. Their identity is often associated with

political and social struggles, which creates a chasm of separation with Christian settlers from other regions. These differences increase the potential for interreligious conflicts, especially when there is an imbalance of power.

In addition, religion is often a symbol of collective identity that reinforces polarization. For example, the Moro use the term "Bangsamoro" to emphasize their national identity that is different from other Filipino societies. Meanwhile, other minority groups, such as Lumad, face challenges in maintaining their local traditions while navigating the social changes brought about by modernization and migration.

However, this complexity of identity also opens up opportunities for cross-cultural dialogue. By understanding the historical roots of these differences, society can begin to build a new, inclusive narrative. Interfaith education can be an important means to teach the younger generation about the importance of diversity.

If managed properly, the diversity of identities in the Philippines can be an asset in creating religious harmony. However, this requires constant efforts to address stereotypes, strengthen interfaith dialogue, and promote social inclusion.

Based on the *diamond model of civil society*, this diversity can be analyzed through five main dimensions. In the *dimension of civic engagement*, the Moro Muslim community and the Lumad indigenous group show significant involvement in maintaining their identity. This participation is often associated with the struggle against marginalization, as reflected in the use of the term "Bangsamoro" as a symbol of collective identity.

From the *level of organization* dimension, these groups have an organized community structure to advocate for their rights, whether in cultural, religious, or political contexts. The existence of community-based organizations shows the importance of *civil society* in supporting minority groups. In the *practice of values dimension*, values such as solidarity and social justice are particularly prominent, although religious polarization also affects the dynamics of relations between groups. Religion, which is part of a collective identity, is often used as a symbol of struggle, but it can also reinforce polarization.



The perception of *impact* dimension shows that power imbalances and marginalization are felt to have a significant impact on these groups. However, initiatives such as cross-cultural dialogue and interfaith education offer hope for overcoming stereotypes and strengthening social inclusion. Meanwhile, in the *external* environment dimension, government policies, modernization, and migration play an important role in shaping the external environment that affects identity dynamics. To create harmony, joint efforts are needed through inclusive policies that support diversity.

### Social and Economic Inequality

Social and economic inequality in the Philippines, especially in Mindanao, is one of the main causes of interreligious tensions. The region has long been one of the poorest areas in the Philippines, and the Muslim and Lumad communities are often at the lowest socio-economic levels. This inequality creates a deep sense of injustice.

The central government's policy of not prioritizing development in Mindanao exacerbates the situation. Christian settlers from the northern region often have better access to government jobs and social services, which creates gaps between religious communities. This reinforces the narrative of injustice experienced by the Muslim and Lumad groups.

This inequality not only has an impact on economic welfare but also interreligious relations. When certain groups feel marginalized, they are more likely to identify with their religion as a symbol of resistance to injustice. This reinforces polarization and inhibits interfaith dialogue.

However, inclusive development programs can be a solution to reduce this inequality. Local autonomy, such as the one granted to the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), provides opportunities for Muslim communities to manage their own resources and improve people's well-being.

Addressing social and economic inequalities is an important step towards creating religious harmony. By ensuring equitable access to resources and opportunities, governments can help reduce interfaith tensions and build trust among different groups.

### **The Role of Religion in Conflict and Peace**

Religion has a dual role in the Philippines, both as a source of conflict and as a tool for peacebuilding. On the one hand, religious narratives are often used to justify violence, as in the conflict between the Moro and the Philippine government. However, on the other hand, religion is also the basis for efforts for reconciliation and interfaith dialogue.

The Bishop-Ulema Conference, for example, showed how religious leaders from different backgrounds can work together to promote tolerance and peace. Initiatives like this show the great potential of religion in uniting societies divided by historical and political differences.

However, challenges remain. Many extremist groups use religion to mobilize support and strengthen the narrative of conflict. This creates additional challenges for religious leaders seeking to promote harmony.

It is important to involve local communities in faith-based peace efforts. When people feel that they have a voice in the reconciliation process, they are more likely to support the initiative. Inclusive religious education can also help reduce prejudice and reinforce the values of tolerance.

By harnessing the potential of religion as a tool of peace, the Philippines can transform the narrative of conflict into a narrative of collaboration. This requires a commitment from all parties to promote dialogue and address the root causes of conflict.

There is a dimension of civic engagement, the Muslim and Lumad communities, often at the lowest socio-economic levels, have limited involvement in wider community activities due to unequal access to resources.

From the *level of organization* dimension, autonomy policies such as the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) show a step forward in strengthening the capacity of local organizations to manage resources and improve the welfare of communities. However, inequality remains a major obstacle, especially when better access to government jobs and social services is more enjoyed by Christian settlers from the north.

The *practice of values* dimension reflects how this inequality affects the values of justice and equality in society. When injustice is felt collectively, religion often becomes a symbol of resistance to marginalization, ultimately reinforcing polarization and deepening the chasm between religions.

In the dimension of *perception of impact*, economic and social inequality is felt as one of the main causes of interreligious tensions, which hinders cross-cultural dialogue. Inclusive development programs, such as those initiated through BARMM, offer solutions to improve this perception by providing more equitable access to resources and opportunities.

Finally, the *external environment* dimension shows how central government policies that do not prioritize development in Mindanao exacerbate the situation. By ensuring inclusive development programs and equitable policies, governments can create an external environment that supports interfaith harmony and reduces social tensions.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis that has been carried out, it can be concluded that the development of Islam in the Philippines faces various challenges but also has great opportunities for development. The long history of conflicts and struggles of the Muslim community, as well as the influence of the global Islamic community, shows that there is great potential for the peaceful and productive development of Islam. The success of da'wah is highly dependent on the ability of Muslim communities to adapt to the local social and cultural context and gain support from the government and non-Muslim communities.

The emergence of educated and sensitive local Muslim scholars to the local context plays an important role in strengthening da'wah and Muslim identity in the Philippines. They serve as a bridge between different cultures and religious traditions, facilitating dialogue and collaboration across religions. International funding and support help address local resource constraints and strengthen international networks of Muslim communities, but transparency and accountability in the management of these funds remain critical to the sustainability of the program.

Muslim people's awareness of the da'wah movement varies depending on their level of involvement in religious and educational activities. The use of social media and online platforms has expanded the reach of da'wah, allowing for more personalized interaction between preachers and worshippers. Da'wah bodies play an important role in promoting interfaith dialogue and community service, helping to build more harmonious relationships between Muslim and non-Muslim communities.

Key challenges in the development of Islam in the Philippines include government attitudes and policies, economic and social challenges, and negative stereotypes and prejudices against the Muslim community. However, with an inclusive and collaborative approach, as well as support from local Muslim scholars and the international community, there is a great opportunity to overcome these challenges and strengthen Islamic da'wah in the Philippines. Islamic NGOs also play a key role in providing quality education, humanitarian aid, and economic empowerment programs.

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