



A Look at a Distance on Pasawit: Reimagining and Building Social Cohesion in Localizing Peacebuilding

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Tri-People “Pasawit” Food Festival is a vivid cultural event held colorfully on 14 January 2022 in Labungan, Datu Odin Sinsuat Maguindanao province, located in the newly created self-government of Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao. The event was collectively organized by the Consortium of Bangsamoro Civil Society Inc (CBCS) and Confederated Descendants of Rajah Mamalu (CDORM), a network partner of CBCS; with funding of the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) through IC Net, the implementing research organization of JICA project in the BARMM.

The launching of Tri people’s Watch, the hybrid version of peoples monitoring under the civilian protection component of CBCS, was an innovative platform of people’s action and a people’s solution in consolidating the local energy. The Food Festival in Teduray, one of the descendants of Indigenous People, is “Pasawit,” which is part of the Teduray culture, identity, and traditional way of living together to remember their past and thanksgiving to their ancestors with high respect and the nature which nurtures their forest life. The event beautifully combined with the strategic launching of Temulik KetinaneK (Tri -people Peace watch) in bringing together Moros, IPs, and the Settlers, Christian communities, to strengthen their responses to the human insecurities in uncertainties in some part of the BARMM in the passing time of normalization.

The participants from ten selected barangays expressed their pledge for Protecting Human Rights and Building strong Social Cohesion among Moro, IP, and Settlers for meaningful sustainable Peace and inclusive development in the Bangsamoro. The day’s theme was promoting and building a Peace and Social Cohesion platform in the BARMM. And the design of the activity incorporated with the cultural component, which is essential for localizing peacebuilding.

Locating the notion of ‘Social Cohesion’ in the context of Bangsamoro

Bangsamoro is in the transition while confronting multiple challenges- slow normalization due to the traditional social structure, which wields the vested interest on the majority of the powerlessness, and surging armed conflicts in the selected areas in BARMM and the peripheral areas of Bangsamoro people. The current challenge is to ensure the well-being of the tri people. Importantly, creating local protection mechanisms to protect lives and their properties, including the life forests for the IPs- the ancestral domains. The impact of a global pandemic, COVID19, on socio-economic, is enormous, and its impact is still to be evaluated.

Collecting and institutionalizing the Tri people’s solidarity is vital for addressing the current issues of uncertainties. Social cohesion, the element of trust, can only make it happen. And the process of building social cohesion needs the component of culture in connecting the peoples, by inbuilding the culture-identity, including food ecosystem with people’s action-oriented platform, Tri people Watch. These are essentiality of “pasawit,” which is the foundation of the existence remarkably interlink for promoting Tri people Solidarity for Social Cohesion, towards sustainable Peace in the Bangsamoro.



2. Festivals in Mindanao trace the roots and historical memories of the ancestors, landscapes – memory life of our past in the present and in the future. The notion of social bond between the Moros and the IPs has a long history of more than five centuries- the history of Mamalu and Tabunaway social cohesion- the Moro and the Indigenous Peoples close relationship, which is the symbol of faithful in the traditional way of life. When the time came, though the brother departed in different ways, as history informs, Tabunaway embraced Islam and Mamalu remained in their forest by moving to the upper portion of lands while having a historical connection with the lower lands. The significant maker is the order of oneness and inseparable nexus in between and both, collective bond. Family relationships are key, sealed by an unbroken pact, locally known as SAFA. In respecting one’s territory and system of lives- self-governance; inflow and outflow of the circular economy which benefited by both; high respect for each custom and culture and uniting to face the enemies; and everlasting sense of brotherhood and sisterhood for the generations to come.

Mamalu and Tabunaway remained bonded together and lived harmoniously with the blessing of rich resources by feeling and sharing mutual respect. Cohesion between them was genuine and valued. The fundamental purpose of the “pasawit” food festival is to remind and reimage the prevailing bond between the two that is partially lost or has deep friction in the present.

The essence of the “Pasawit” mirrors and symbolizes the rich history of past in challenging times-now, and rebuilds the social interconnection which damaged by the dance of colonizers who shaped and sized the lands for their vested interest with the help of the local elites.

Building social cohesion is not about making a new social order; indeed, reconnecting by re-evaluating the present and accepting and respecting the social order that stabilized the harmonious co-existence in the deep past. The beautiful dance of the children, with the traditional dress and traditional weapons and the echo of rhythm, remind and retaking us of the mountains. The dance steps reminded on the imprint of the lost lands and the invisible faces of their forefathers who harnessed the forest and domain of their ancestral territories. Ancestral land is the domain of the memory life and memory scapes- culture, food, rivers, and the life of forests that guarded everything. And one event, the food festival, “Pasawit,” helps us reimagine building ‘social cohesion and its true meaning in localizing peacebuilding.



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