Youth, Peace and Security in the *Bangsamoro*: *Gaps, Realities, and Pathways to Influence*

Executive Summary

The Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) is at a pivotal stage in its transition toward inclusive, accountable, and sustainable peace. As the region advances the implementation of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB), strengthens governance institutions, and prepares for its first regular parliamentary elections, ensuring that peace dividends are equitably experienced remains a central challenge. While progress has been made in reducing large-scale violence and establishing institutional foundations, persistent gaps in inclusion, representation, and responsiveness continue to shape the quality and durability of peace.

Youth—comprising approximately 36% of the population—are key stakeholders and partners in sustaining peace and democratic governance. Across the Bangsamoro, young people actively contribute to peacebuilding through civic engagement, community-based initiatives, mediation, and social cohesion efforts. However, a critical gap persists between participation and influence. While youth engagement has expanded in formal processes, it remains largely consultative, with limited impact on decision-making, policy outcomes, and resource allocation. This underscores a broader challenge in translating commitments under the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda into meaningful and sustained youth influence.

The findings highlight that the primary constraint is not the absence of enabling frameworks, but the **implementation gap between policy commitments and lived realities**. Existing instruments—including the National Action Plan on YPS and the BARMM Regional Action Plan—reflect strong normative alignment with global YPS and sustaining peace frameworks. However, implementation remains uneven and insufficiently institutionalized. Youth engagement is often project-based, short-term, and dependent on existing networks, resulting in the exclusion of marginalized constituencies—particularly rural, displaced, and economically constrained youth. Structural and cultural barriers, including limited civic space, hierarchical governance practices, and access mediated through adult gatekeeping, further constrain inclusive participation.

At the same time, youth **experiences of "peace" are shaped by the persistence of intersecting and evolving forms of violence,** including gender-based violence, criminality, and socio-political marginalization. In the context of electoral processes and ongoing political transition, these dynamics heighten risks related to exclusion, disengagement, and erosion of social cohesion—raising critical questions about the inclusivity and legitimacy of peace outcomes.

These challenges are further **compounded by the broader transitional and global context.** While formal peace processes continue to progress, critical gaps remain—particularly in relation to the persistence of private arms and delays in the decommissioning process. Concurrently, global crises are exacerbating local vulnerabilities, contributing to increased polarization, reduced resilience, and heightened risks of radicalization among young people. These dynamics reinforce the need for transition processes that are not only technically effective, but also conflict-sensitive, inclusive, and responsive to local realities.

Importantly, the findings also highlight that youth are already actively contributing to peacebuilding beyond formal mechanisms—through informal, relational, and community-driven initiatives. **These locally led efforts play a critical role in sustaining peace at the grassroots level but remain largely unrecognized and under-supported within formal**

institutional frameworks.

This is evident in the **everyday yet transformative actions undertaken by young people**—such as preventing armed violence within families, promoting ecological integrity, advancing rights-based decision-making in the face of harmful traditions and practices, and fostering acceptance of gender diversity at the community level. These forms of engagement generate immediate and meaningful impact, yet often remain invisible within dominant, project-based definitions of peacebuilding, despite reflecting core dimensions of the broader struggle for peace in the region. As a result, a disconnect persists between how peace is actively practiced by youth and how it is defined, measured, and supported within institutional frameworks.

This disconnect underscores **the need to move beyond top-down policy approaches toward more localized, context-responsive strategies that recognize, resource, and integrate community-based peace efforts into formal systems.**

Addressing these gaps presents a strategic opportunity to strengthen the implementation of the YPS agenda in BARMM. Enhancing participatory and feedback mechanisms across policy and governance processes can improve accountability, inclusivity, and responsiveness. This includes institutionalizing pathways for youth to engage in decision-making, strengthening coordination across stakeholders, and ensuring that youth participation is linked to tangible outcomes. Investing in inclusive processes, expanding civic space, and supporting locally led peacebuilding efforts are critical to bridging the gap between policy and practice.

Ultimately, advancing Youth, Peace and Security in the Bangsamoro **requires a shift from participation to partnership**—where young people are not only engaged, but are recognized as agents of change with the capacity to shape peace and governance outcomes. This entails addressing structural inequalities, expanding access beyond established networks, and embedding inclusive, rights-based approaches within institutions and processes.

The effectiveness of YPS implementation will be measured not by the number of youth reached, but by the extent to which diverse groups of young people—across gender, geographic, socio-economic, and cultural identities—are able to meaningfully influence decisions, contribute to accountable governance, and shape sustainable peace in their communities.

Full Report

Context Setting

The Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) is undergoing a critical period of political transition, shaped by the current challenges besetting the implementation of the peace agreement, evolving governance structures, and the region's preparation for its first regular parliamentary elections. This transition is unfolding within a context shaped by historical grievances, displacement, and ongoing efforts to consolidate peace, stability, and self-governance. While significant progress has been made in reducing large-scale armed violence and in the initial development of BARMM's governance institutions, the region continues to face complex challenges, including localized conflicts, the need to address historical injustices, ensuring adherence to the agreement, and strengthening inclusivity in governance.

Within this landscape, the youth constitute a significant and influential segment of the population, with approximately 36% aged 15–35. Their demographic weight positions them not only as key stakeholders in peacebuilding but also as a critical constituency in shaping the region's political future and testing its democratic foundations particularly in the context of upcoming elections–the first since the creation of the BARMM.

Across the Bangsamoro, young people have long contributed to peace efforts through community engagement, mediation, advocacy, and informal mechanisms that foster social cohesion, often stepping in where formal systems are limited or inaccessible.

However, despite their active role and evolving capacities, a **persistent gap remains between youth presence and youth influence.** While young people are increasingly visible in consultations, programs, and civic spaces, their participation does not consistently translate into meaningful involvement in decision-making processes. This is further shaped by structural inequalities that limit access to opportunities—not only for youth from marginalized, conflict-affected, and geographically isolated communities, but also for those who lack access to or awareness of existing mechanisms for engagement.

These dynamics highlight a broader tension within the Bangsamoro's transition: the need to ensure that emerging governance systems are not only inclusive in principle, but responsive to the lived realities of its diverse and intersecting constituencies. In this context, understanding and evolving how young people experience, navigate, and contribute to peace and security outcomes of the peace process becomes critical.

This consultation was therefore designed to document youth existential perspectives on peace and security in Mindanao, within the Bangsamoro context. By centering youth ideation, aspirations, challenges, engagements, and recommendations, it aims to contribute evidence to support more inclusive, responsive, and accountable peacebuilding processes, and to strengthen the role of young people as active participants in shaping the region's future.

Bangsamoro at a Glance

Status Critical Political Transition Toward Full Autonomy

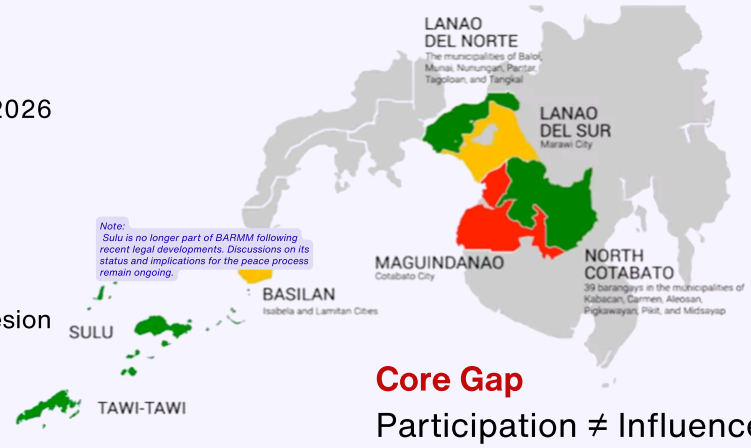
Key Moment First Parliamentary Elections - last quarter of 2026

Youth Demographic 36% of the population (ages 15-35)

Opportunity Existing peace and governance mechanisms provide entry points for inclusive reform

Critical Risk Without meaningful inclusion, gaps may lead to disengagement and weakened social cohesion

Strategic Imperative
Transform participation into shared decision-making and youth influence



Core Gap
Participation ≠ Influence

Existing Frameworks and Mechanisms for Youth, Peace, and Security in the Bangsamoro and the Philippines

Youth participation in peace and security in BARMM operates within a layered architecture of national and regional frameworks anchored on the broader peace process. At its core is the **Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB),** which established the political and normalization tracks that underpin the region's transition to self-governance. The CAB institutionalized principles of participation, representation, and inclusive governance, providing the structural foundation for engagement.

Youth participation is further articulated through policy instruments such as the **National Action Plan on Youth, Peace, and Security (NAP-YPS)**, which aligns with the United Nations Youth, Peace and Security agenda by recognizing youth as partners in peacebuilding across prevention, protection, and governance. At the regional level, the **BARMM Action Plan on YPS** contextualizes these commitments within post-conflict recovery and reconstruction, and local governance.

Institutionally, the Bangsamoro Youth Commission (BYC) serves as the primary mandate-holder in advancing youth development and participation in the BARMM, coordinating programs and strengthening representation in the Bangsamoro government. The Office of the Presidential Adviser on Peace, Reconciliation and Unity (OPAPRU) complements this at the national level by supporting and overseeing peace process implementation and youth engagement in peacebuilding.

The challenge for the youth in BARMM then is likely not the absence of policy direction, but the need for operational depth and meaningful systematic engagement. Aligning institutional intent with youth lived experience is essential to transforming young people from participants in the peace process into co-architects of its outcomes.

Objectives

The consultation provided a space for young people across Mindanao to define, assess, and experience peace and security, with particular attention to BARMM's peace and governance mechanisms, and translate these insights into actionable recommendations aligned with the Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) Framework. It documented youth contributions to

peacebuilding, identified barriers to meaningful participation, surface youth-prioritized issues, and generated recommendations that can inform both national and global peace mechanisms.

Guiding Questions and Analytical Flow

The consultation followed a structured and human-centered analytical progression, beginning with youth ideations of peace and security to establish a conceptual baseline grounded on lived experience. It then explored aspirations to capture peaceful futures young people seek to build, followed by an examination of structural and institutional challenges shaping their participation and framing peace outcomes in the region as it relates to them. Existing engagements were documented to assess how youth currently participate in peace processes, including enabling and constraining factors. This sequence ensured that the resulting recommendations are evidence-based, youth-defined, and aligned with the objectives of the study and the YPS framework.



Methodology

The consultation employed a mixed-methods approach combining surveys and specialized focus group discussions (FGDs), engaging a total of 99 participants across Mindanao. The design intentionally shifted away from traditional hierarchical research models toward collaborative, youth-led spaces that recognize participants as knowledge-holders. Central to the process was a one-and-a-half-day consultation with community-based **young practitioners experienced in policy advocacy, community engagement, and peacebuilding.**

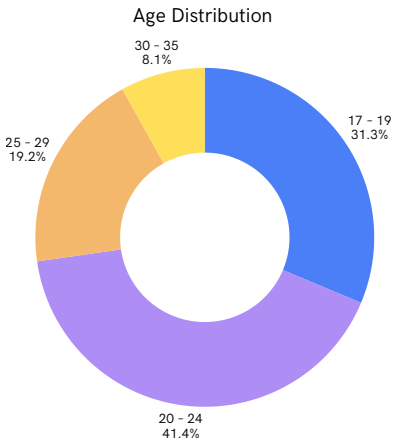
To broaden inclusivity and dimensionalize insights, additional FGDs and surveys were conducted with **students from a private higher education institution** in Davao City *(which typically are socially ascribed as elite and well-resourced socio-politically engaged young citizens)* and **participants from displaced communities** in Marawi *(who are severely under-resourced but socio-politically engaged young leaders),* and a **cohort from a local state university** *(typically socially ascribed as between passive participants to under-resourced but socially-politically engaged young leaders).* This approach enabled the consultation to capture both practitioner insights and community-level perspectives, ensuring a more representative understanding of youth experiences.

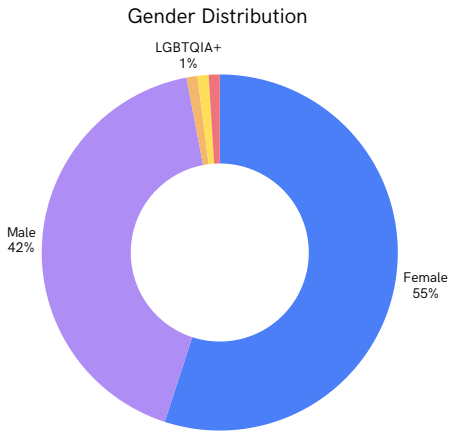
A desk review complemented primary data collection, examining how youth narratives align with existing peace and governance mechanisms. The process also included validation of findings and interpretations with participants to ensure accuracy and accountability.

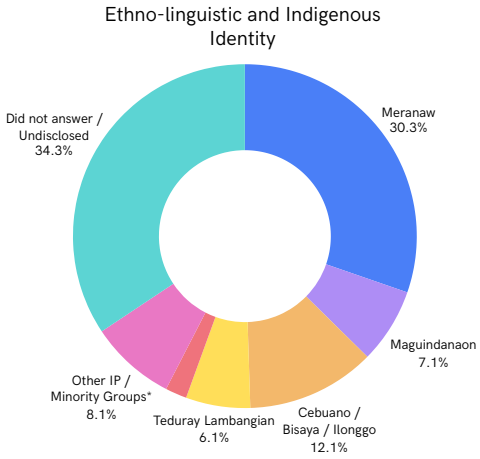
Participants

The consultation engaged 99 participants across three primary groups: students from a private higher education institution in Davao City, youth from the Marawi community *(including a state university cohort),* and experienced youth practitioners. The sample reflects a predominantly young adult demographic, with ages ranging from 17 to 35 and a median age of 21, indicating that the findings are strongly grounded in the perspectives of a younger youth population (school-age and young professionals).

Gender representation was relatively balanced, with a majority identifying as female, followed by male participants, and a small proportion identifying as LGBTQIA+ or opting not to disclose.







The ethno-linguistic composition reflects Mindanao's diversity, with significant representation from Meranaw participants, alongside Maguindanaon, Teduray Lambangian, and various settler-descendant and Indigenous groups. While a portion of participants did not disclose their intersecting identities, the overall sample captures a wide range of cultural and social backgrounds.

This diversity ensures that the findings reflect varied lived experiences across different communities, strengthening the study's relevance to the broader youth population in Mindanao and BARMM.

Summary from Key Questions

IDEATION How do young people define and experience peace and security in their communities, and who do they believe should be responsible for building it? How does this ideal distribution of roles compare with their lived realities of who actually holds power and influence?

The Youth respondents understand peace and security in their communities as a **holistic and lived condition**, where safety is not only the absence of violence but the actualization of dignity, social inclusion, economic stability, cultural recognition, ecological sustainability, and the freedom to meaningfully participate without fear or favor. This reflects the Bangsamoro's transitional context, where the absence of large-scale conflict is intertwined

with expectations for structural transformation and meaningful participation in emerging governance mechanisms.

They view peacebuilding as a **shared responsibility**, ideally co-created by and with youth in government mechanisms, community leaders, civil society, and other institutions, grounded in collaboration, accountability, and representation of diverse and intersecting identities.

However, this ideal sharply contrasts with lived realities, where peacebuilding remains largely based on **adult-permissions, hierarchy, and centralized networks**, with youth positioned as participants rather than decision-makers. While multiple actors are formally involved, authority is unevenly distributed, and youth contributions are often limited to consultative or symbolic roles.

For instance, Indigenous Peoples (IP) youth have designated spaces within governance structures, yet their influence in decision-making remains constrained by identity-based cultural barriers and power dynamics *(youth as a vulnerable beneficiary over an empowered individual with evolving capacities and agency)* that negotiate their roles in formal mechanisms within a spectrum of mere casual observation on broader issues to active participation ONLY in perceived "youth-related" issues and initiatives. One illustrative case is drawn from an Indigenous youth leader appointed to existing mechanisms, who reported constrained roles and limited access to institutional benefits, as reflected in the quote below:

> **"The *ex-officio* ends up having to beg because they don't receive any benefits from the youth institution. So there's no policy change on that. And what are we told? *"That's what our elders in the Central Committee want."*"**
>
> — Young Indigenous Peoples (IP) leader, Bangsamoro

At the same time, youth engagement is often shaped by access to spaces and platforms, as well as by whose voices and definitions of peace are recognized as legitimate. Within and among the youth themselves, participation is often driven by adult-permission: meaning participation is awarded to those whom adults perceive to be worthy of the access and space–which are traditionally marked by criteria that feature potential or actual power, investment value, and interest alignment. Such that only those who excel in adult-approved spaces (school, church, etc.), or those with political linkages or belong to more affluent families, or those who "think like adults" or whose insights align with adult agenda and interests, or if the youth are lucky–those whose insights are a welcome challenge to adult thinking, are often given the space and access to participate.

In practice, patterns of invitation, recognition, and validation influence how participation unfolds and the extent to which youth are able to contribute meaningfully. This has created co-opted spaces and voices that may not be genuinely representative of broader youth contexts.

This creates a fundamental gap: **in their ideation, peace is built *with* youth through shared power, but in practice, it is often built *for* them within systems that restrict their influence**. As a result, the youth continue to actively contribute to peace in informal

and community spaces, as formal mechanisms fail to fully recognize and institutionalize their agency.

ASPIRATION What kind of peace and security do young people want to realize in their communities, and what roles do they envision for themselves and others like them in shaping this future?

The youth envision peace and security as a **transformative, inclusive, and equitable system grounded on shared authority, self-determination, and meaningful participation in the context of their diverse and intersecting identities.**

> **"It feels like we've been discriminated against—being displaced has defined us only as evacuees, and our identity as Meranaw has been erased. Even when we go to other places, once people find out we are Meranaw from Marawi, they just refer to us as "evacuees."**
> — Jamali, 26, a community-based worker from Marawi City

To the youth, they are not just young people–they are also young women in digital spaces engaged in pushing social consciousness narratives forward, or young Moro women in positions of power endeavoring to influence political leaders into progressive thinking that may not readily align with traditional beliefs, or young men questioning the socially ascribed roles imposed upon them that force them into marriages, or young members of LGBTQIA+ communities who would like to be seen as more than the aesthetics designer or entertainer at a peace conference, or young persons in displaced communities trying to access education despite the distance of their transitory shelters from "quality" schools, and more. Identity is power to these young individuals, but they lament that it is these intersecting identities that seem to minimize their ability and opportunity to meaningfully engage.

They imagine leadership shifting from hierarchical, elder-dominated, and adult-oriented models toward **intergenerational governance**, where people like them are recognized as present actors shaping decisions that affect their lives, not just carved-out sectors to engage in narrowing development projects. Meaningful engagement, to them, is therefore defined by the ability and intentional opportunity to influence decisions and ensure that their realities are reflected and seriously considered in governance processes.

The **youth underscore that representation must be understood as both diverse and accountable.** Youth are not a homogeneous group but a constellation of intersecting identities shaped by geography, culture, gender, socio-economic conditions, and lived experiences. While some youth continue to access high-level policy and decision-making spaces, there is a clear expectation that such participation must not become repetitive or exclusive. Instead, those present in these spaces are seen as carrying the responsibility to remain grounded in and advocate for broader community realities, ensuring that engagement translates into genuine representation devoid of adult co-optation.

CHALLENGES What structural, cultural, and institutional factors limit young people's ability to meaningfully participate in or influence peace and security processes, and how do these barriers shape their experiences of inclusion or exclusion?

The youth identify the barriers to meaningful participation in peace and security not as a lack of willingness or capacity, but as **deeply structural, cultural, and institutional constraints that shape who holds power and whose voices are legitimized.**

Decision-making remains concentrated among political elites, elders, and institutional gatekeepers, reinforcing hierarchical systems where youth are expected to comply rather than co-create. Participation is further limited by exclusionary practices such as technical language, elitist norms, and tokenistic engagement, which render peacebuilding spaces inaccessible and detached from everyday realities.

> **We attend meetings and consultations—we're invited to these discussions. But in reality, it ends there. No matter what youth push for, it still doesn't get implemented. Sometimes it really depends on who holds power. If you're not aligned with the Mayor, there's really nothing for the youth. That's what we want to shift.**
> — Young Moro Youth Leader from Marawi

These challenges are compounded by **structural inequalities**—particularly for marginalized, rural, and economically constrained youth—as access to opportunities, resources, and platforms remains uneven. Everyday conditions such as insecurity, financial hardship, and social expectations —including heavy academic demands— further restrict sustained engagement. Even in post-conflict reconstruction, those most affected , such as displaced youth, continue to navigate layered barriers shaped by intersecting identities, including gender, income, religion, and ethnicity, which limit both access to participation and influence in decision-making processes.

At the same time, the **persistence of violence** in the Bangsamoro has not disappeared with the decline of large-scale vertical conflict; rather, it has taken on everyday, lived, and highly visible forms, experienced directly by communities. These include *rido* (clan feuds), rising criminality, gender-based violence, child abuse and exploitation, drug-related insecurity, and structural forms of marginalization. These reflect how violence at the individual and community levels continues to generate insecurity, often linked to weak local justice systems, economic precarity, and the proliferation of small arms, even in the absence of open armed confrontation.

> **"But that's really the reality—whether it's admitted or not, that's what's actually happening. The crime rate is continuously increasing. Especially this month, it's been really alarming. There was a child who was raped in Ramay. Someone was killed. I don't know if it's also because cases of drug addiction are increasing."**
> — Datu, 20 from Marawi City

Beyond these, there are also **politically motivated and structurally embedded forms of violence**, which tend to disproportionately affect marginalized groups, particularly

Indigenous Peoples and other minority communities. In many cases, **IP communities are subjected to targeted killings**, often linked to disputes over ancestral land, resource control, and local political interests. In the lead-up to elections and amid uncertainties in the political transition, such dynamics are often intensified, manifesting in **localized or "vertical" violence**—where power is exercised asymmetrically by those in authority or influence over vulnerable populations.

> **"Peace can also become a tool to kill minorities. Sometimes, 'peace' is used like that. It may be peaceful for you, but for us, is this really peace? So, isn't this kind of peace actually killing minorities?...'During the war, we are displaced. During the peace, we are killed."**
> — RJ, 24, an Indigenous Person from Upi, Maguindanao

Taken together, these conditions shape how young people engage with peacebuilding processes. **Over time, repeated experiences of violence, exclusion, and being unheard—both in formal mechanisms and everyday realities—contribute to disengagement**, not out of apathy, but as a response to systems that either fail to listen and seriously consider their "young" voices or fail to translate their participation into meaningful influence.

While the institutionalization of youth engagement remains critical to sustainable and enduring peace, current structures continue to constrain their participation. In many cases, **engagement is fenced by program-based or institutional priorities that are disconnected from the lived realities of young people,** particularly as they navigate evolving identities, capacities, and forms of agency. This risks narrowing representation and limiting the responsiveness of formal processes against diverse youth perspectives.

Insights from hard-to-reach youth further highlight that even **peacebuilding and community engagement spaces can feel inaccessible**. Limited opportunities, combined with selection patterns that tend to favor highly academic or well-connected individuals, contribute to the perception that these spaces are exclusive—thereby reinforcing existing inequalities in participation and representation. Left unchecked, this emerging practice of adult-approved engagement will evolve into a norm that systematizes dis-inclusion and undermines both impact gained and continuing efforts towards conflict transformation, social cohesion, and preventing violent extremism.

> **"We feel afraid of being judged, struggle with social anxiety, and worry that having different views might lead to conflict—making it hard for us to engage in these spaces."**
> — Young student from a University in Davao City

In this context, the fragility of the peace process—combined with limited ownership of and inclusion in the process—can create vulnerabilities, particularly where young people feel disconnected from decision-making and peacebuilding efforts, and uncertain about their role in shaping the region's future.

> **"I don't know how to frame myself in this, I fear stepping out because I can't see how to fit myself out there."**
> — Ella, 24 Davao City

While not inherent to youth themselves, these conditions may increase susceptibility to alternative narratives that challenge or undermine the peace process. To one youth for example, frustrations resulting from continuing disenfranchisement, breed unrest and social upheavals that **make them vulnerable to radicalization.** To another, the continuing blindness to and sometimes intentional suppression of their unfolding realities in a rapidly changing world foster sentiments that render them disconnected from their communities and the government further undermining social cohesion in a region struggling to prevent violent extremism and realize conflict transformation, transitional justice, and reconciliation.

This risk is further heightened by the current transitional context, where access to private arms persists and the formal decommissioning process of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) remains stalled. Compounding this, ongoing global crises are deepening fractures in social cohesion and contributing to heightened risks of radicalization among young people in the BARMM. Together, these dynamics underscore the urgency of ensuring that transition processes are visibly inclusive, locally grounded, and responsive to diverse youth realities.

Taken together, these dynamics reveal that youth participation in peacebuilding is structurally constrained. While young people are not absent from these spaces, their engagement is often fenced by systems and norms that limit their agency and influence, with access to existing civic engagement spaces remaining deficient. As a result, their contributions remain at the margins of decision-making, reflecting persistent inequalities in power, recognition, and access.

ENGAGEMENTS How are young people currently engaging in peace and security work, across both formal and informal spaces, and what conditions enable or limit the impact of their contributions?

Youth engagement in peace and security emerges as a diverse and layered ecosystem rather than a single category of actors, shaped by varying levels of access, visibility, and influence. This includes institutionally embedded youth who participate in formal governance and policy spaces, community-based youth actors who lead relational and grassroots peacebuilding efforts, and marginalized groups who actively contribute despite limited access to opportunities. Across these groups, youth are engaged in a wide spectrum of activities—from policy consultations and advocacy to humanitarian work, cultural initiatives, digital engagement, and everyday acts of mediation and social cohesion.

However, a **key distinction persists between presence and influence,** with meaningful participation conditioned by the ability, legitimacy, and opportunity to shape decisions, access resources, and deliver tangible outcomes. Youth identify both formal institutional spaces and informal community-based environments as sites of engagement, though they often experience significant agency and impact only in the latter. Participation is further shaped by structural conditions, where opportunities tend to concentrate in an echo chamber of visible institutionally-connected youth, while broader forms of engagement by a diverse set of youth actors remain undervalued or unrecognized.

Within this context, many youth-led peacebuilding efforts remain undervalued and invisible, particularly those that occur in everyday and relational spaces.

> **" I begged my father to surrender to the government because our family was involved—we were considered one of the 'PPAG,' or potential private armed groups. I really pleaded with him to turn over all our weapons, including high-powered firearms and any kind of guns we had, and surrender them to the government."**
> — Pem, 22, a Moro woman based in North Cotabato

Actions such as preventing armed violence within families, pursuing ecological integrity, engendering rights-based decision-making over harmful traditions and practice, or fostering acceptance of gender diversity at the community level demonstrate forms of impact that are immediate and transformative, yet often go unrecognized because they do not align with formal, project-based notions of peacebuilding despite these being thematic underpinnings of the struggle for peace in the region. This further reinforces the gap between how peace is practiced by youth and how it is defined and measured within institutional frameworks.

Below is a visual framework that describes the resource distribution and impact of youth engagement in the Bangsamoro.



RECOMMENDATIONS What changes are needed at the community, institutional, and policy levels to enable young people to move from participation to meaningful influence in peace and security processes?

To enable young people to move from participation to meaningful influence in peace and security processes, changes are needed across community, institutional, and policy levels that **redistribute power, broaden access, and recognize diverse forms of engagement**. Especially in the context of transition, adults need to seriously consider youth ideations of peaceful communities as they may variably differ from those that envelope adult decisions and frame governance for futures. At the community level, this involves strengthening inclusive and safe spaces where youth can organize, lead, and shape local initiatives grounded on their lived realities. At the institutional level, mechanisms must shift from

consultative approaches toward **shared decision-making**, ensuring that youth are not only present but able to influence agendas, policies, and resource allocation, while expanding participation beyond a narrow group of institutionally-connected actors.

> **The context for why we are pushing for political participation is that most decision-makers, even here in Mindanao and in the Bangsamoro, are still controlled by the older generation.**
> — Young Moro woman, Marawi City

At the policy level, frameworks must be better localized, operationalized, and made accessible to a broader and more diverse population of young people—**ensuring that participation is not limited by narrow categories or qualifications.** Expanding engagement is critical not only for inclusion but also for the prevention of violent extremist ideas, recognizing that susceptibility to competing or harmful narratives can affect young people across identities and backgrounds. Consultations further highlight how "hard-to-reach" youth—often grappling with questions of identity and belonging—are particularly vulnerable when excluded from meaningful spaces. Ultimately, widening access can also enhance civic participation and strengthen the political roles of young people through more active exercise of their civic responsibilities.

It is worthy to note that meaningful participation does not only happen in high impact policy dialogue but can also be seen in community engagements and youth-driven activities. Moreover, genuine representation enables recognition of the diverse, often informal, youth-led initiatives at the community level that meaningfully contribute to peacebuilding. These grounded efforts not only respond to local realities but also offer innovative pathways for addressing harmful and deeply-embedded social norms. For instance, one young leader has been actively engaging her community on the issue of early marriage—advocating for young women's right to choose, while framing her position within the teachings of the Qur'an. Her efforts have begun to influence local governance spaces and open opportunities for other young women. Yet, despite these tangible contributions, she continues to face challenges in being recognized by her peers in formal consultations, where such work is not always seen or valued as "peacebuilding."

Across all levels, removing structural barriers—such as financial constraints, limited access to information, and security risks—is essential to make participation sustainable. Ultimately, these changes require a transition from symbolic inclusion to **genuine power-sharing**, where youth are recognized not just as participants, but as co-architects of peace and security processes.

Positioning Existing Mechanisms — Bridging Frameworks and Lived Realities

The findings of the consultations suggest that the challenge in advancing Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) in the Bangsamoro is not the absence of mechanisms, but **the gap between existing frameworks and mechanisms and how they are experienced, accessed, and operationalized by diverse youth constituencies within existing structures**.

At the policy and institutional level, a relatively robust architecture for youth participation in peace and security is written, providing formal pathways for engagement across governance and peacebuilding processes. Beyond government-led efforts, externally supported and programmatic initiatives have further expanded opportunities for youth engagement. However, these efforts are often fragmented and siloed, with participation tending to concentrate among a narrow group of adult-approved youth. Repeated engagements—frequently centered on similar formats—have also contributed to consultation fatigue, at times limiting the depth and authenticity of youth inputs.

Taken together, these dynamics indicate that while youth inclusion is recognized in principle, it often functions in practice as a framework for participation rather than a system for influence.

The National Action Plan on Youth, Peace, and Security (NAP-YPS) and the BARMM Regional Action Plan articulate a strong normative vision of youth as partners in peacebuilding across prevention, participation, and governance. While these frameworks align with global commitments and demonstrate institutional intent, their translation into practice remains uneven. Awareness and access vary across youth constituencies, and engagement continues to focus largely on consultations and "programmed" activities, with limited opportunities to influence decision-making, resource allocation, or implementation outcomes. **While this reflects the early to mid-stage of implementation, it also points to a slower transition from participation toward influence.**

At the same time, the YPS agenda in the Bangsamoro operates largely as a parallel policy framework rather than an embedded component of existing peace mechanisms. Youth participation is recognized across governance structures but remains weakly integrated into key processes such as post-conflict reconstruction, transitional justice, and community-level conflict resolution. **As a result, youth are often engaged within structured, youth-focused spaces, but remain less visible where authority and decision-making power reside.** This is further reflected in limited awareness of YPS mechanisms among young people themselves.

These gaps point to broader challenges in institutional integration and inter-agency coordination, where youth engagement is implemented through parallel or disconnected initiatives. At the same time, youth-led informal peacebuilding—particularly in everyday conflict prevention and social cohesion—remains highly relevant but insufficiently recognized or supported within formal systems. More progressive youth perspectives, including those related to gender and social norms, also continue to encounter cultural and structural barriers that limit their uptake.

These findings present important opportunities to strengthen the implementation of both the NAP-YPS and the BARMM Regional Action Plan. In particular, there is potential to enhance **participatory feedback loop mechanisms** as a form of monitoring across the pillars of the action plans—ensuring that youth engagement is not only continuous, but also responsive, representative, and linked to decision-making processes. Strengthening these feedback systems can help bridge the gap between policy intent and lived experience, while enabling more adaptive and accountable implementation.

Taken together, these dynamics suggest that while the action plans are structurally in place,

their effectiveness will depend on how they evolve—from enabling participation toward facilitating shared authority—and on whether broader governance systems move beyond symbolic inclusion to genuinely enabling youth influence. **Strengthening the integration of peacebuilding approaches, such as peace education, within formal institutions will be critical to ensuring that engagement is sustained, accessible, and embedded in everyday systems.**

Insights for the 2nd Progress Study on YPS

The Philippine experience, particularly in the Bangsamoro, highlights a critical shift in the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda. While significant progress has been made in recognizing and engaging youth in peace processes, the current challenge lies in ensuring that such participation translates into **meaningful influence and structural change**.

From Participation to Influence

Youth are increasingly present across peace processes—participating in consultations, programs, and civic spaces. However, their roles remain largely consultative, with limited influence over decision-making, resource allocation, and policy outcomes.

This reveals a persistent **participation–power gap**, where inclusion does not necessarily translate into authority. Moving forward, the effectiveness of YPS frameworks will depend on their ability to institutionalize youth influence within core governance and peacebuilding systems.

Expanding What Counts as Peacebuilding

Youth contributions to peacebuilding extend far beyond formal programs. Across the Bangsamoro, young people actively build peace through everyday and relational practices—within families, communities, and digital spaces.

Yet these forms of engagement remain largely unrecognized within formal YPS frameworks, which tend to prioritize structured project-based activities. This creates a disconnect between how peace is practiced by youth and how it is defined and supported institutionally, even as these efforts—though often overlooked—play a critical role in driving tangible change within their communities.

Structural Exclusion as a Defining Constraint

A central challenge lies in **deeply entrenched structural exclusions** shaped by patronage, social networks, gatekeeping by authority figures, and norms rooted in culture, tradition, and, at times, religious interpretations. These dynamics determine **who is deemed legitimate to participate, whose voices are heard, and whose perspectives are ultimately acted upon**.

Participation is often mediated by expectations of conformity to dominant norms, reinforcing existing hierarchies and limiting space for diverse or dissenting voices. As a result, inclusion remains uneven and conditional.

Crucially, when young people experience persistent exclusion, marginalization, or lack of recognition within formal systems, it can lead to **disengagement from civic and peace processes**, and in some cases, increase vulnerability to **alternative or oppositional narratives**, including those that will undermine peacebuilding efforts. This underscores that exclusion is not only an issue of equity, but also definite **risk that can derail long-term stability and social cohesion**.

The Risk of Institutionalizing Exclusion

While YPS frameworks in the Philippines provide formal pathways for engagement, they also risk reproducing existing inequalities when structural barriers remain unaddressed. Access to participation spaces is often concentrated among a narrow group of visible or institutionally-connected youth.

This creates bounded spaces of participation, where engagement is expanded but not necessarily diversified. Without deliberate efforts to broaden access and redistribute power, mechanisms intended to promote inclusion may instead reinforce exclusion.

Reframing “Hard-to-Reach” Youth

The notion of “hard-to-reach” youth is challenged by the findings. Many young people are not disengaged, but are structurally excluded due to economic constraints, geographic isolation, social norms, adult-defined qualifications as entry points for peace building spaces, and limited access to information and networks. This emerging form of dis-inclusion in practice can systematically propel disenfranchisement and disillusionment that breed radicalization in a region whose peace and conflict story is riddled with narratives of discrimination, subordination, and marginalization.

This reframing shifts the focus from youth deficits to systemic barriers, underscoring the need for more accessible, grounded, and context-responsive approaches to engagement.

From Programmatic Engagement to Structural Transformation

YPS implementation remains largely program-based, characterized by fragmented initiatives and repeated consultations that do not always translate into influence. This has, in many cases, led to consultation fatigue and perceptions of tokenistic participation.

Addressing this requires a shift from project-based engagement toward **structural transformation**—embedding youth within decision-making systems, aligning mechanisms with lived realities, and ensuring that participation delivers tangible outcomes.

Synthesis

Advancing the YPS agenda in the Bangsamoro, therefore, requires strengthening and institutionalization—not replacing—existing mechanisms. This entails a shift from consultation to co-decision-making, expanding access beyond established networks, and integrating informal and community-based peacebuilding practices into formal systems.

At its core, the YPS agenda is grounded in inclusivity, yet many youth sectors remain detached from it. Structural exclusions shaped by culture, tradition, and, at times, religious

interpretations continue to influence who can participate, whose voices are recognized, and what forms of engagement are valued. As a result, prioritizing certain types of participation or impact can unintentionally reinforce exclusion, shaping which contributions are seen as legitimate while leaving others unrecognized.

When these underlying conditions are not addressed, there is a risk that existing mechanisms may reproduce the very barriers they seek to dismantle—limiting their reach and reinforcing unequal access to influence. Over time, such exclusion can contribute to disengagement from civic and peace processes, and in some contexts, increase vulnerability to alternative narratives that may undermine social cohesion and peacebuilding efforts.

At the same time, while this report underscores the gap between participation and influence as a central challenge, it is important to recognize that youth-led initiatives on the ground are already generating meaningful and tangible impact within their communities. These contributions—whether formal or informal—remain valuable and should be sustained. However, this does not diminish the need to continue advocating for greater influence and shared authority within institutional processes. Advancing community-level impact and pursuing structural inclusion are not mutually exclusive; rather, they must be pursued in tandem.

Ultimately, the effectiveness of these mechanisms will not be measured by their presence, but by their ability to translate policy commitments into lived influence—ensuring that young people, in their diverse and intersecting identities, are not only engaged in peace processes, but are able to meaningfully shape their direction and outcomes.

This report was developed by

Initiatives for International Dialogue
BRIDGING PEOPLES. BUILDING PEACE.

iidnet.org

Contributing Authors:
Jones Janelle Estocapio
Alfred Ari Regino
Johanah Samonte
Gus Miclat

For Inquiries:
janelle.estocapio@iidnet.org