




Berghof Foundation

I Heard a Story...

Manual for Organising Intergenerational Dialogues about
Fighting for Justice and Peace in Mindanao

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Our thanks go to all the women who shared their stories This publication follows in the footsteps and was inspired by *I Have to Speak. Voices of Female Ex-Combatants from Aceh, Burundi, Mindanao and Nepal*, published by the Berghof Foundation in 2020 and *Asking my Sisters. Intergenerational Voiices of Women from the Moro Islamic Liberation Front in Mindanao*, published by the Berghof Foundation in 2021..

[I Have To Speak – Berghof Foundation \(berghof-foundation.org\)](https://www.berghof-foundation.org)

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This manual was funded by the “Youth for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence in Mindanao” (short YOUCAP) project which is implemented by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development.

The quotes and views set out in this publication are those of the participants and do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the Berghof Foundation, GIZ, and Moro Women Development and Cultural Center (MWDECC).

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Background and introduction to the manual

This manual accompanies the documentation of intergenerational voices of women who were involved in the struggles for social, economic and political equality in Mindanao. These documentaries, in film and in print, give rich opportunity for reflection and discussion - among former female combatants, their children, but also more generally for those supporting a peacebuilding path for communities in the Philippines and beyond. The manual combines the films and storytelling booklet produced with a simple guide of how to organize, structure and harvest dialogues using them with an aim to strengthen peacebuilding action.

Since 2014, the Berghof Foundation has worked to support women in armed conflict settings to assume civilian leadership positions in transition from armed to political struggle and to exercise their rights in shaping peace processes. Working with several resistance and liberation movements in South Asia and beyond, engagement with female leaders in Mindanao has been a constant of this work.

The Muslim Moro population of Mindanao, Philippines, faced discrimination and repression under the Marcos regime from the late 1960s. Several groups took up arms against the Philippine government at that time. Among them were the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) as well as the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF).

Stories of experiences in the armed conflict as well as in post-war transitions to peace and politics have been collected in two books so far: *I Have to Speak* was published in 2020 and compares women's recollections across four countries, with MNLF from Mindanao being one case. *Asking my Sisters*, published in 2021, deepens the exchange between former female fighters of the MILF and their daughters. Furthermore, documentary films of different lengths have been produced alongside the booklets. This manual focuses on working with material from the booklet *Asking my Sisters* and the films *Narratives of Bangsamoro Women: Narratives of Peace* (a short film produced by Ledrolen Manriquez on MILF stories) and *May Our Clamour Reach the Table of our Leaders* (a short film produced by Juan Cruz on MNLF stories).

The booklet and films seek to make heard the voice of several generations of women active in the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in Mindanao, Philippines. These powerful stories of pain and suffering, but also of armed mobilization against injustice, land grabbing and oppression, and in pursuit of religious freedom, self-governance, gender

equity, sustainable development and education, show that female combatants have to be taken seriously for building sustainable peace.

Through participatory research, young female researchers entrusted by the groups designed and conducted video interviews with their peers. They collected stories from war veterans and their daughters who reflected on their reasons for joining the armed struggle, their time as women in war, their experience of gender roles and dynamics in the movement, their lessons learnt from the ongoing peace implementation process, and their aspirations for the future of their country and the coming generations.

The stories, as diverse as they are, emphasize the need to engage with the fate of female ex-combatants, a section of post-war societies that is usually forgotten and under-represented.

The testimonies collected in the booklet *Asking my Sisters* were produced by our partner organisation Moro Women Development and Cultural Center (MWDECC). It received funding from the “Youth for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence in Mindanao” (short YOUCAP) project which is implemented by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development.”. The report is accompanied by a video documentary (*Narratives of Bangsamoro Women: Narratives of Peace*), which was launched in October 2021 through a dialogue seminar to elicit a fruitful inter-generational exchange. Likewise, a dialogue seminar was organised by partners from a previous project, the Kadtabanga Foundation, focusing on a video documentary featuring female ex-combatants and young women on the side of MNLF (*May Our Clamour Reach the Table of our Leaders*). These dialogue seminars provided avenues for the researchers to present and discuss the results back to their community, in order to reflect on the valuable contributions made by female commanders in the last three decades of struggle, as well as the aspirations of their younger peers to pursue a struggle for justice and rights through peaceful social and political activism.

This **manual** accompanies the film(s) and booklet. It **aims** to assist the **dissemination of former female combatants’ knowledge and lessons learnt through dialogue formats. The manual gathers lessons learnt from the process that can be used by LGUs, educational institutions and NGOs, but also to hold intergenerational dialogues in the communities or peer-to-peer briefings with similar actors.**

What is dialogue

Excerpt from Norbert Ropers, Basics of Dialogue Facilitation, Berghof Foundation, 2017 > [LINK](#)

The modern meaning of dialogue has its origin in antiquity and the Middle Ages. The term is now primarily defined as a conversation between two or more people characterised by openness, honesty and genuine listening. Taken from the Greek *diá* and *lógo*, it can be interpreted as the “flow of words” or “meaning” created by more than one person. In contrast to the terms “discussion” and “debate”, which focus primarily on the content of a conversation, the word “dialogue” places equal emphasis on the relationship between the persons involved. Another difference is that “debate” often includes a competitive component to underline the superiority of one opinion, while “dialogue” implies mutual understanding and the aim to identify common ground. In the reality of conversations in and on conflicts, though, the modes of discussion, debate and dialogue will often be mixed and it needs good facilitation skills to make the participants aware of this and help enable them to move between them constructively.

Difference between Debate and Dialogue		
	Debate	Dialogue
Goal/Purpose	The goal is to “win” the argument by affirming one’s own views and discrediting other views.	The goal is to understand different perspectives and learn about other views.
Participants’ approach	People listen to others to find flaws in their arguments.	People listen to others to understand how their experiences shape their belief.
Dealing with others’ views	<p>People critique the experiences of others as distorted and invalid.</p> <p>People appear to be determined not to change their own views on the issue.</p> <p>People speak based on assumption made about others’ positions and motivations.</p> <p>People oppose each other and attempt to prove each other wrong.</p>	<p>People accept the experiences of others as real and valid.</p> <p>People appear to be somewhat open to expanding their understanding of the issue.</p> <p>People speak primarily from their own understanding and experience.</p> <p>People work together toward common understanding.</p>
Role of emotions	Strong emotions like anger are often used to intimidate the other side.	Strong emotions like anger and sadness are appropriate when they convey the intensity of an experience or belief.

Why Dialogue in Conflict Settings is Different

Based on and abbreviated from

Changing the Past in Our Heads. Manual for facilitating listening workshops, Berghof Foundation, 2018 > [LINK](#)

In her talk “The danger of the single story” the Nigerian writer Chimamanda Adichie points out how one-sided and stereotypical narrative representations often stand in the way of perceiving the complex situations in which individuals and societies live, while not at all reflecting their reality. This is true for stories that are told in all communities or societies caught in or emerging from (armed) conflict. The more isolated from each other people or communities live, the stronger “single stories” have developed on all sides, preventing individuals from perceiving each other’s realities. Such “stories” that people tell about the conflicts are at the center of many dialogues that Berghof Foundation seeks to support in order to strengthen the peacebuilding capacities of actors worldwide. The goal of working with stories is to give individuals the opportunity to listen to and reflect on the ways their own communities and people on “the outside” remember the struggles.

It is important to underline that the first step in working with stories is to collect them and respectfully listen to them, as a way to validate especially the experiences, needs and future visions of those too often marginalized in peace processes and peacebuilding.

Next, applying findings from conflict research, we want to briefly show how some narratives are conflict-supporting, and what can be done to transform these narratives into peace supporting ones. (Much of this work has been developed by a Berghof Foundation team working on history dialogues in the conflict between Georgia and Abkhazia, so some examples are preserved from this conflict setting. The setting and narratives in Mindanao and in other conflict settings will naturally be different.)

Conflict-supporting narratives

It is worthwhile to take a closer look at the topics that are usually conveyed with the conflict narratives. They help “make sense” of what is going on and convey knowledge, for example explanations why the society is involved in conflict. Certain aspects and topics are emphasized and take vast space, leaving no room for other content. Many aspects are

completely excluded. On both sides, the capability of grasping and understanding sensitivities and interests of the other side is diminished. If the conflict endures, young generations adopt the conflict narratives already in childhood. These narratives shape their reasoning about why the conflict is going on and their perception of reality.

During (armed) struggle, conflict narratives are needed for society to persist, they help explain why members of the society have to endure the hardship of war. In transition and peace times, though, the conflict narratives can become a persistent obstacle to resolving the conflict.

Even in times when conflict resolution is in the interest of the sides in conflict, the narratives still take effect, hindering confidence-building and rapprochement. Actors who want to change them often meet resistance.

From conflict-supporting to peace-supporting narratives

One vital task in working on conflict-supporting narratives is to successively widen the perception of individuals in a way that gradually comes to integrate contents which are displaced from own conflict narratives but play an important role in peacebuilding and development. Several techniques and principles can help create an open atmosphere and turn a setting where conflict-supporting narratives compete into a setting where dialogue is possible, with participants developing and referring to peace-supporting narratives:

Focus on specific events and individual circumstances. A distinctive feature is the focus on individual experiences. It is much easier to grasp individual experiences and their immediate impact and meaning for a person rather than to evaluate and classify political concepts and their impact on society. It is easier to develop empathy with one person than with a society or state. Hence collecting and discussing individual memories and subjective perceptions, together with the way people frame them in their interviews, is very powerful in dialogue.

Strong local component. People come together in their communities and discuss interview episodes, documentary films or booklet chapters amongst their own first; and with others in a second step. Local discussions of “OWN” narratives are very helpful in fostering critical self-reflection. It is the facilitators’ task to enhance such effects during the discussions.

Room for “negative” feelings, such as anger and disappointment, must be created. Only accepting these feelings can open the space to perceive also positive memories. There is an actual value in sharing, listening to and discussing painful and unpleasant memory content from all conflict sides. By perceiving and addressing own “unpleasant” feelings such as sadness, regret, anger, etc., the view on the conflict is widened. In facilitating such discussion, the task is to create a balance between pleasant and painful contents.

Analysis is central. It is a central goal that the participants learn more about their own narrative, and that they develop a sense of how the events are assessed. It is important that the main question is never “Did that happen?” Instead we ask: “Why does the person tell this story?” “How is the story told?” “What does this event mean to them?” “What do such stories mean for society?”. In the workshops, any exercise is desirable that deepens perceptions or makes participants reflect on the meaning and components of the different narratives.

When Women Talk

Based on:

Evelyn Pauls: Female Fighters Shooting Back. Representation and Filmmaking in Post-Conflict Societies, IJFP 2020 > [LINK](#)

Véronique Dudouet: UNSCR 1325 turns 20: Achievements and Challenges, Berghof Foundation, 2020 > [LINK](#)

In many conflicts around the world, women continue to be excluded from peace efforts and political transitions because of discriminatory laws, social stereotypes or institutional obstacles. Powerful elites often resist the meaningful inclusion of women's voices and gender rights in peace talks, and external partners and donors lack the required resources and political will to enforce these principles.

Moreover, peacebuilding support programmes often follow and perpetuate a restrictive narrative that reduces women to the role of victims. It is very important that we gain a more nuanced understanding of the various ways in which women join and participate in conflicts in order to seize opportunities to translate their war-time agency into constructive contributions to conflict transformation, and ultimately prevent recurring conflict and enable sustainable peace.

Hearing the stories of female combatants as a particular group of women that has challenged traditional gender norms and the victim/peacemaker binary so often used in the conflict transformation field, is an important step to enrich the narratives about conflict and peacebuilding. It contributes to complicating the narratives of women in conflict and post-conflict societies by presenting a more diverse and more personal picture that is painted by female combatants themselves.

When different generations talk

Resource: *Intergenerational Dialogue as a Way to Diagnose and Prevent Violence*, by Paola Silva -> [LINK](#)

The involvement of all generations in dialogues is necessary to be able to have a complete understanding of the situation. Youths and elders have unique experiences and understandings of local risks. The youth are the ones to face every-day aggression and violence from their social environment, and first hand understand where the violence is coming from and who it is targeting. Elders on the other hand are able to bring knowledge and experiences from past efforts to mitigate violence within their communities and promote common social values. There is a challenge in linking the perspectives of these two, very different, groups, and there is a need to even recognize language differences between them. Dialogue encounters, when successful can show that youth have valuable and creative talents when comes to conflict resolution, and elders can sometimes gain new insights from being open minded towards them.

It is also very helpful for different generations to be in the room when one aims to fruitfully discuss narratives. Older participants often have witnessed escalation and war. At the same time, they have lived with the other conflict party before escalation and sometimes have a more balanced view of what happened. Younger participants can ask critical questions and challenge older people's narratives, asking questions and presenting their own views. Being challenged by the younger generation is a strong incentive for war witnesses to question their own beliefs and at the same time be acknowledged for their sacrifices and achievements. However, the process of giving space to each other, and challenging narratives, is one that can take practice. Hence, it should be carefully introduced, and the strength it takes to do so, from both sides, should be acknowledged.

Intergenerational dialogue can strengthen the bonds within communities fractured by violence, reducing mistrust, improving capacities for participants to listen to each other and practice empathy. The participation of youth, who are often overlooked in post-war reconciliation processes, play an important role to allow for healing and truth telling within the community, and ultimately disincentives radicalisation from a group that is disproportionately targeted.

Setting Up

When preparing for the workshop or briefing...

Planning an event well before the conduct of a dialogue is necessary to ensure that the target objectives and outputs will be achieved. These preparation steps should always be observed:

- ≡ Reflect and determine which **objective** you have for the dialogue. Should it inform and persuade local government experts of the specific potential and needs of women? Should it prepare educators to discuss histories with their pupils? Should it bring different generations together to reflect on each's experience and memory of war and peace? Should it share experiences of Moro women with international groups around the world?
- ≡ It is important to determine the **issues** to be addressed in conducting a dialogue.
- ≡ A coordination meeting with concerned **key stakeholders** is necessary to ensure the smooth and hassle-free conduct of the dialogues.
- ≡ Presence of relevant stakeholders during the dialogue will be helpful to achieve the target objectives. They can be a panelist, who will respond to the issues and concerns raised by the participants.
- ≡ In an **intergenerational dialogue**, it will be important that both the older and young generations are well represented.
- ≡ A skilled **facilitator** and a **documenter** must be identified. A facilitator plays a significant role in the dialogue to ensure that the objectives are achieved. The facilitator must understand the subject matter such as the narratives of the female ex-combatants. She must possess the good qualities of an effective facilitator such as a good orator, good listener, negotiator, analytical, moderator, innovative and creative, and has the ability to sustain and focus on the dialogue. A facilitator must be non-judgmental, confident, passionate, empathetic, and trusted by the participants.
- ≡ Identifying **panelists** will help in the achievement of the objectives of the dialogue. There should be a pre-meeting with them to discuss together the issue to be addressed and the target outputs of the dialogue.

- ≡ Identification of possible **leading questions** that will stir conversations must be done prior to dialogue. The developed questions must align with the subject matter and issues to be addressed.
- ≡ **‘Do No Harm’ principles** should be followed: how can a safe environment for all participants be created? What different risks are there? Could the dialogue unintentionally cause tension and conflict?
- ≡ Make sure to provide some appropriate form of **psychosocial support** for the dialogues during which emotions may run high and traumatic memories may be re-lived by former members of armed struggle.

Formats and Sessions

→ This manual is based on intergenerational dialogues held in Mindanao in 2021, and is compiled in a way that can be easily adapted for dialogue sessions with LGUs or educational institutions as well as intergenerational dialogues, dialogues with institutional stakeholders, and peer-to-peer dialogues.

Think about how much time you have to spend together. If you only have one or two hours, focus on sharing the film material and booklet. Pick one or two discussion questions.

Asking my Sisters - MILF short film;

May our clamour reach tables of leaders - MNLF short film

Asking my sisters in Tagalog or English)

If you have more time, you can work in addition with small group discussions and more of the questions; you can also systematically work on recommendations or action plans building on the analysis of the film. For an intergenerational dialogue, one full day is quite sufficient.

→ Create a pleasant and conducive venue and dialogue space:

Basically, the dialogues should be in a conducive venue where the participants can share information freely without barriers or hesitation.

During the height of the Pandemic, there are some restriction and minimum health protocol to be followed

There is need for stationaries such Manila Paper, masking tapes, markers, meta cards for workshops. The number depends on how many participants and what you want them to write down.

If you have the means, offer some light refreshments or a joint meal.

...❖ **For the facilitator of such a dialogue, it is important that they:**

- ≡ are attentive and have the ability to listen, and good articulation to translate questions or statements in a very conflict sensitive manner
- ≡ have skills and ability in conflict resolution for some circumstances where there are tension between individuals or groups
- ≡ observe the 'Do No Harm' principle in facilitating the dialogue
- ≡ apply adult learning principles, e.g.:
 - Do not provide too many inputs and instead let them share their own experiences.
 - Create a conducive space to learning
 - Do not dictate too much how the session should be led, as adults are self-paced and will respond better to being given the space to lead themselves.¹

...❖ **Key questions that you can ask people to discuss during further dialogue sessions, after they have watched the film(s) or heard presentations of/read parts of the booklet:**

After watching the film, please share your impressions and insights.

¹ An approach to teaching adults that is built on the understanding that the way adults think and learn is different to children, and thus how we teach adults should reflect that. For more see: Sally S. Russel (2006) An Overview of Adult-Learning Processes

What challenges have been overcome, what challenges persist?

What lessons do you draw for sustaining the peace process?

What contributions do the younger and older women in the film wish to make to contribute to the peace and prosperity of their communities and the whole of the region? [You may follow on with: Which are relevant overall, which are particular to young or older generations? Which are relevant overall, which are particular to young women or young men?]

What do you learn about the relationships between parents and their children? [If parents and children are present, What did you learn about your parents that surprised you? What did you learn about your children that surprised you?]

When holding workshops with government, education, business, donor representatives: Which of these opportunities can your sector [government, education, business, donor community...] contribute to and benefit from?

What do you wish the older generation knew about the challenges that you face in your everyday life in a conflict-affected area?

What do you wish your parents, aunts, uncles, etc. would ask about, or invite you to talk about?

How do you wish you were included in peacebuilding efforts that are dominated by adults?

What do you wish younger people knew/understood about the challenges you were facing?

How would you like younger people to invite you into peacebuilding processes with your experiences and understanding?

...❖ Smaller groups or specific workshop discussion can focus on the following themes (you can develop more for your own purpose). Quotes from film or booklet can jump start discussions.

A. GENDER EQUALITY

“Everything that has to be done in this world, it cannot be done only by men, there should be women too. (Ms. Anisa “Ling” Gumander, age 68)

B. EDUCATION

“He always emphasised that our education is the only thing he could leave us. (Ms. Johani Ibad, age 25)

C. GOVERNANCE

“Our goal is to show that we need women to fulfill our dreams for good governance in our area. It is difficult to achieve our dreams if men and women do not work together. (Ms. Ummu Wedad Mimbantas, age 65)

D. YOUTH ASPIRATIONS

[Read through the booklet section on youth from Asking my Sisters (copied overleaf).]

Pahmia Sebing-Hamid

Let us develop ourselves. Let us educate our children for them not to go astray because it is our responsibility as parents to guide them in the right path. Especially you, young people, you must study really hard and graduate because there is a saying that 'young people are the hope of the people.'

Alyah E. Salik

We must focus on education and the youth for the future of BARMM. This can be a long-term solution in alleviating poverty.

Ummo Weedad Mimbantas

We need to have programs for young people today on how they can live peacefully because if they are not given attention now, it may be difficult for us to help them in the future. Programs for young people, especially children need to be extended so that we can achieve success in the next generations.

Hasnah Macmod Abdollah

What I want to advise the youth is that no matter what happens, they should never forget BIWAB and all its sacrifices and contributions. Abide by the teachings of Islam and don't forget Jihad.

Alyah E. Salik

If it will not happen during this time, then it might happen in the next generation. Educate the young and let's work together to build our Islamic government.

Anisa "Ling" Gumander

The advice that I can give to the young generation is not to be distracted with the past experiences we had. They have to focus on their future. They have to learn our religion because we already have our own government where we can exercise Islam.

Norjane Hussein Andong

I would advise the youth to go back to our history. Learn the experiences, the sacrifices of our leaders, the true leaders of Jihad; not those opportunists that you just saw now highlighted in the government. Keep in mind our history and take it to your heart.

Closing

What should be done at the end of the workshop, dialogue, exchange?

Before ending the dialogue or workshop, there should be sharing of synthesis or recapitulation of what transpired during the process especially where there was agreement, identified solutions and action point/ways forward to continue engagement with participants.

What follow up will there be (if any)?

Planning or identification of ways forward can be done at the end of the dialogues and workshops. Psychosocial Support can be one follow-up activity.

Reflections

What learnings have there been from dialogues so far?

- ≡ Intergenerational dialogues must be conducted not only with the female ex-combatants and their daughters but also with other leaders and commanders of the MILF and MNLF and their children, especially with those who spend most of their time in the struggle and neglected their families. Some of these children misunderstood their parents. It is our hope that this will be beneficial for the youth in Mindanao in general.
- ≡ Psychosocial Support must be provided for former combatants and their children both men and women. Close relationships between the parents and their children were not established because the parents spent most of their time in performing their responsibilities in the struggle. The fear of their children every time they reported to camps or participated in firefights resulted to trauma to their children that they cannot easily forget and still in their memories.
- ≡ Documentation of the narratives of other women leaders of the MILF who contributed and participated in the struggle of the Bangsamoro must be done. They are those who are involved in the other sectors of the MILF such as the Social Welfare Committee, Political Committee-Women Sector, Medical-Women, Women in Religious Sector, and among others. Some of the women are already old and sickly. They also played important roles and responsibilities in the Bangsamoro struggle and contributed in the establishment of the Bangsamoro government.
- ≡ It was valuable for former combatants to have this interchange with their children, and vice versa, on this topic, because it helped them understand and embrace each other's efforts and struggles, past and present. This openness has a great potential for healing, and is a key element in the foundation for long lasting peace.

Credits and Acknowledgement

Our thanks go to all the women who shared their stories within the dialogues that shape this manual; to the wonderful colleagues from MWDECC, Jehan A. Usop and Baina T. Samayatin, who organized and facilitated them; in Berlin to Beatrix Austin, Veronique Duduouet, Victoria Cochrane-Buchmüller and Carolien Van Hoof and in Manila to Meike Reinhardt for their accompaniment of the journey and valuable help in shaping this manual.

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Disclaimer

The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of the Berghof Foundation or its partners.

Annex

This publication is part of a broader project on intergenerational dialogue facilitation in Muslim Mindanao. For more information on the work done, watch and read the accompanying short film and booklet:

<https://berghof-foundation.org/news/asking-my-sisters-film-and-booklet>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LipZ4vUnjE0>

<https://berghof-foundation.org/library/asking-my-sisters-intergenerational-voices-of-women-from-the-moro-islamic-liberation-front-in-mindanao>

We will be glad to hear about your experience in working with the stories from the booklet and the manual in your workshops and briefings.

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