

comfort ourselves despite the fact that we still do not fully understand the process. Our officials (in the front), told us that we should undergo the process because it was an agreement, and it will answer our longing for peace in our land.)

To wrap up what transpired in the series of Key Informant Interviews among the decommissioned combatants, the researcher had given them assurance that although the interview had been audio recorded, and there were pictures for documentation purpose, their identities will be strictly protected. Conversations that were identified by the researcher as sensitive, and will jeopardize the normalization process were treated as off the record.

Summary of Findings

This study aimed to present a narrative of challenges and opportunities of MILF Decommissioned combatants. Specifically, it sought to gather in depth responses among the participants about the challenges they encountered during the decommissioning process. And what are the opportunities that await the participants after the decommissioning process. Furthermore, to present the policy recommendations drawn out from the study.

This study used the Qualitative-narrative research design, which aimed to present a narrative of real-life challenges and details of opportunities that await the MILF decommissioned combatants.

The Key Informant Interview was conducted in the Municipalities of Sultan Kudarat and Datu Odin Sinsuat, Province of Maguindanao del Norte. The participants of the study were 12 MILF- BIAF Decommissioned combatants. The interview provides in depth understanding of the experiences, motivations, and perspectives of the participants.

Based on the analysis of data, the following findings are drawn:

1. The transformation of decommissioned combatants involves various processes, starting from identifying the combatants to be decommissioned, validation of combatants and weapons. The IDB (International Decommissioning Body) is tasked to conduct verification, registration, validation and inventory of weapons and forces of MILF with the assistance of the VMAT (Verification and Monitoring Assistance Teams).
2. The process of validation includes the establishment of a pre-Assembly and Processing Area (pre-APA). The GPH and MILF established this and jointly conduct a pre-screening and pre-registration of MILF combatants scheduled for decommissioning.
3. The identities of MILF combatants are verified through civil registration and provision and processing of Certificate of Live Births. The Civil registration support initiative was launched in Camp Darapanan, Simuay, Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao Del Norte on June 15, 2022. It is called ALIAS DC (Access to Legal Identity and Social Services for Decommissioned Combatants), the project will not only be implemented among the decommissioned combatants but also includes their family, and members of their communities.
4. Each combatant is validated and duly registered through biometrics by the IDB, with their photos and fingerprints taken and printed in the

Identification Card or the decommissioned combatant's ID issued exclusively by the IDB. The information collected from the registration is properly handled through an IDB database system and is treated with utmost confidentiality and security.

5. After the process of decommissioning, the validated and registered combatants were turned over for the so-called "Social-intake interview under the TFDCC (Task Force for Decommissioned Combatants and their Communities) and the DSWD (Department of Social Welfare and Development). Each successfully decommissioned combatants received 100,000Php as transitional cash assistance with a DSWD-issued ID (biometric system) as part of their transformation to civilian, and productive lives. The cash aid comprises the 80,000Php Bangsamoro Transitory Family Support Package and 20,000Php Livelihood Settlement Grant. The so-called 1 million worth of package are in a form of non-cash benefits such as Study grants/ scholarships, skills training, and social protection based on the result of the Needs assessment conducted.

6. The decommissioned combatants went through a Case Management process of the DSWD to ensure that the transitional cash assistance was properly utilized to help them in their transformation. The OPAPRU (Office of the Presidential Adviser on Peace, Reconciliation and Unity) through DSWD have hired case workers to monitor and manage the status of all decommissioned combatants and assess their cases, in preparation for the implementation of socio-economic programs.

7. The majority of the participants stated that the decommissioning process was a long-drawn-out process. The outstretched and tedious process made them feel impatient.

8. The participants were not fully aware of the entire benefits and livelihood package that they are about to receive.

9. They expressed sadness that the socio-economic package that they are about to receive will take so long. And they feel that they will not be able to fully enjoy it due to old age or poor health conditions.

10. The participants expressed their reluctance to avail of the skills training because they had been misinformed that it requires a specific level of educational attainment and special skills. In which they felt that they do not have, particularly the older ones.

Implications of the Study

The researcher, being born and raised in the Municipality of Datu Odin Sinsuat (then known as Dinaig), Maguindanao del Norte have witnessed the struggle of the bangsamoro people for self-determination. After more than 40 years of struggle, and 17 years of negotiations between the GPH and the MILF, finally the Bangsamoro peace process had been realized. And the bangsamoro people are optimistic in achieving a better quality of life and a peaceful community to live with. This study had given the researcher a once in a lifetime opportunity to engage in meaningful conversations with the decommissioned combatants. And have high hopes that they can turn their challenges into a brighter world of opportunities.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, the researcher had drawn out conclusion that the challenges encountered by the decommissioned combatants during the decommissioning process were multi-dimensional. It encompassed their Psychological, Social, and Physical aspects. The decommissioned combatants went through different processing from verification, registration, validation, profiling, and inventory. All throughout the conduct of these processes, the decommissioned combatants began to feel weary and impatient.

Furthermore, the opportunities that await the decommissioned combatants, generally called Bangsamoro Family Support Package and Livelihood Settlement Grant, were not fully understood by them. They have just initially received the socio-economic cash aid worth 100,000 Pesos. And they are not fully aware as to how and when they will be going to receive the remaining support packages.

Generally speaking, the decommissioned combatants have only availed of the Dressmaking NCII, Organic Concoctions, Extracts Production under the TVET Program. Jointly facilitated by the MBHTE-TESD in partnership with accredited training institutions in the two municipalities where the study was conducted.

The Socio-economic development package, particularly the skills training is not a one-size-fits-all. The decommissioned combatants find difficulty in choosing the right training qualifications that will enhance their basic skills.

Recommendations

On the basis of the summary of findings and conclusions drawn, the following recommendations are being offered.

1. The emotional preparedness of the combatants should be considered at the start of the decommissioning process. To be able to reduce the feeling of reluctance, fear, uncertainty, and frustration.
2. There should be a proper information dissemination of the socio-economic development packages intended for the decommissioned combatants. It can be in a form of orientation, forums or awareness programs in their respective communities. To prevent the decommissioned combatants to feel anxious, impatient and lose their interest in availing the programs and services. Taking into consideration that they are not fully aware of the Bangsamoro Family Support Package and the Livelihood Settlement Grant.
3. It is highly recommended that the skills/livelihood training will be community-based, because most of the decommissioned combatants were working inside their communities. They are mostly farmers, they spend most of their time, planting, feeding or herding their farm animals. and that would be one of the contributory factors on why they cannot fully avail the skills/livelihood trainings. Attending skills training outside of their community, will take most of their time, and will be one of the reason that they will become not fully interested. Furthermore, the skills/livelihood training programs should be tailored-fit to the decommissioned combatant's basic skills and needs.

REFERENCES

Saul Mcleod, PhD. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. May 10, 2023.
simplypsychology.org/maslow.html

Georgi Engelbrecht. The Diplomat Publication. (2021). The Normalization Process in the Bangsamoro Faces Rising

Fusato, Massimo. "Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration of Ex-Combatants." Beyond Intractability. Eds. Guy Burgess and Heidi Burgess. Conflict Information Consortium, University of Colorado, Boulder. Posted July 2003 <<http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/demobilization>>

Anadolu Agency. (2021). Normalization Process in Bangsamoro seeks more time: Chief Minister Murad Ebrahim.

OPAPP. (July 2019). National Agencies Gear up for Normalization Track Implementation. Aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific

Philippine News Agency. (2022, February). Over P601.9 Million Grant for BARMM's Normalization approved. Retrieved from <https://www.pna.gov.ph>

bangsamoro.gov.ph/newsletter. (2021) MBHTE-TESD holds mass graduation for 1,150 trainees. (2021). <https://www.facebook.com/MBHTETESDBARMM>

<https://www.c-r.org>. Historic Agreement paves way to Peace in Mindanao.

<https://doi.org/10.1080>. Journal of Peacebuilding and Development. 2017. Volume 12. Issue 2: Peacebuilding Approaches to Preventing and Transforming Violent Extremism.

<https://bangsamoro.gov.ph> . (2021). OPAPP, TESDA ink MOA for Decommissioned MILF Troops.

<https://peace.gov.ph> . (2020). Decommissioning process for 12,000 MILF combatants completed.

<https://doi.org>. (2007). Social and Legal Studies. Demobilization and reintegration of Ex-combatants: The Irish Case in International Perspective.

<http://www.nova.edu>. (2014). The Qualitative Report 2014 Volume 19, Article 41. Guatemalan Ex-combatant Perspectives on Reintegration: A Grounded Theory.