



Climate Change, Human Insecurity and Instability:  
A Preliminary Inquiry on the Climate Change, Conflict,  
and Human Mobility Nexus in BARMM



**Introduction**

This participatory action research is an exploratory investigation into the possible existence of a nexus or interconnection of the manifestations and impacts of climate change, conflict and the movement of peoples in the communities of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM).

The research demonstrates the Bangsamoro people's understanding of climate change and its various manifestations and patterns. Furthermore, it identifies the correlation between conflict and climate change impacts on peoples' movement by studying the major factors that drive conflicts in certain communities and forced displacement of the population from their places of origin. This research also determines the impact of climate change on people's livelihoods, the existing natural resources, and the coping strategies of communities. By contributing to the growing knowledge and evidence on this nexus, this research also provides some recommendations that can contribute to the development of better policies and appropriate response mechanisms to tackle the effects and impact of climate change and conflict dynamics in BARMM.

The research has been conducted by IOM in collaboration with the Mindanao People's Caucus (MPC).

**Methodology**

The research obtained information from three key sources: existing literature, focus group discussions (FGD) and key informant interviews (KII). The FGDs were participated by community members from various sectors including women, youth, and indigenous peoples in Maguindanao, Lanao del Sur, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, Basilan and Special Geographic Areas (SGA) while the KIIs were conducted with key officials and personnel of the BARMM government, national government agencies, academe, and climate activists and representatives of civil society organizations (CSO).

**List of Key Informant Interviews**

- Municipal Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Officers
- Provincial Disaster Risk Reduction Management Officer
- Bangsamoro Transition Authority Minister
- Ministry of Environment, Natural Resources and Energy Minister
- MENRE Director for Environment Management Services
- Director - Peace Security Reconciliation Office
- Tarbilang Foundation Executive Director
- OPPAP Regional Officer
- MSU-IIT Professor - Institute on Oceanography and Environmental Science
- Moro Historian - MSU IIT Professor
- Community Coordinator - Philippine Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative
- Executive Director - Ecosystems Work for Essential Benefits
- Local Chief Executive - Basilan
- Local Youth Development Officer and Provincial Environmental Officer - Sulu

Area of Study	Male	Female	Total
Municipality of Pagalungan	8	8	16
SGA/63 BAARMM Expansion Areas-Pikit	17	0	17
Lamitan City, Basilan Province	12	7	19
Municipality of Indanan, Sulu	11	3	14
Municipality of Jolo, Sulu	5	11	16
Municipality of Bonggao, Tawi-Tawi	7	16	23
Municipality of Datu Mastura	14	11	25
Province of Lanao Del Sur	5	8	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>143</b>





### Key Findings

The research found various manifestations of climate change that have been increasingly experienced in BARMM in recent years. These include flooding, landslides, sea level rise, rising sea water temperature, drought, and siltation. Resulting from the rise in temperature particularly impacts the existing land areas wherein marshlands are becoming arable farmlands and/or residential areas. The changes in topography interlink with existing conflicts and contribute to the emergence of new conflicts. Some of the climate-conflict nexus that the research has seen so far include:

1. Resource-based conflicts such as competition in fishing grounds, coastal resources and arable lands are emerging after disasters happen. This conflict overlaps with currently on-going clan feuds.
2. The dynamics of armed conflict, especially in the MILF-controlled communities which are undergoing decommissioning and normalization processes, have noticeably changed. There have been recorded movements in existing boundaries and the positioning of armed groups in new territories due to flooding, erosion, and changes in river directions.
3. Conflicts over land boundaries are escalating, especially in mainland Maguindanao and SGA, since floods have shrunk areas and marshlands are converted into new territories. This has cultivated a more hostile environment for the conflicting parties in the region, which has severely affected and displaced civilians.
4. The competition for ownership and control of coastal resources was evident in Lanao Del Sur, where two powerful political clans waged a rido over the control of black sand in a coastal barangay in the Municipality of Malabang as soon as they found its economic potential. This conflict triggered the displacement of an entire barangay who fled for their safety and permanently relocated to Marawi City. Moreover, communities living along the coast also experienced strong typhoons.
5. In the areas in Lanao Del Sur, the LGU Marawi lamented over being unable to protect their natural resources as some areas were declared NIPAS and should be managed by a national office. However, the ongoing conflict in Lanao Del Sur deters the national office representatives from checking the illegal activities in the protected areas.
6. The experience of BARMM communities often include displacement as caused by a combination of both conflict (political rivalry that led to inter-generational rido) and the consequences of climate change and environmental degradation (barangay submerged in flood waters for a long time). Displaced residents are extremely unlikely to be able to return home and forced to resettle in hostile communities (barangays in which the constituents are supporters of the rival political camp). Consequently, residents of areas affected by climate change impacts have less capacity to adapt to a hostile environment and vice versa.





There are also emerging gaps contributing to the nexus that have been examined from the interviews and FGDs. This includes gaps in knowledge, governance, socio-economic conditions and crosscutting issues in BARMM.

- **Knowledge Gaps**

Local communities in the BARMM, especially the farmers and fishermen, have a very low level of knowledge and awareness of climate change. This stems from the very limited access to comprehensive information about this global phenomenon, thus, they could hardly articulate what is climate change, much more its compounding impacts on their livelihood and current vulnerabilities due to prolonged armed conflicts. Furthermore, the ministries are similarly new to the climate change, conflict, and human mobility nexus which are clearly reflected in the designs of the programs and projects.

- **Governance Gaps**

- A. Climate adaptation strategies in the region are currently piecemeal, sporadic and reactive only when disaster arises rather than the long-term mitigation and adaptation mechanisms. There are existing plans such as the DRRM and LCCAPs, however most if not all are “copy-paste” plans of other LGUs and are not context-specific and responsive to the needs of the communities. All provinces, municipalities, and barangays have specific natural hazard zones and histories of conflicts and displacement which were not taken into consideration in the development of these mandatory plans. The problem is that nuances such as histories of conflict in the community and the geographic location making the community vulnerable to environmental degradation would not be considered in some stages of creating the MDRRMs, POPSP, and LCCAPs. This gap in the planning has an implication on the financial assistance needed by the LGUs or the budget required for developing conflict and climate change-sensitive establishments and mechanisms in the communities.
- B. It is still apparent that BARMM ministries work in silos with most of the approaches and programs being fragmented and redundant in addressing conflict, environmental hazards, and displacement.
- C. The communities said that they often have difficulties in participating in local government discussions, thus the government often misses out on locally-based adaptation and mitigation practices of the community.
- D. BARMM ministries relevant to the climate-conflict risks do not fully reinforce their mandates mostly due to lack of capacity and budgets.

- **Socio-economic Impact**

- A. Climactic changes such as rainfall unpredictability, perennial flooding, drought, and heavy rains have discouraged many farmers from planting their produce, eventually pushing them to explore alternatives. Migration and change of livelihoods are common adaptation practices. Most of the women work abroad and the men engage in local enterprising or illegal activities such as drug selling, joining private armies of families engaged in rido, gun-for-hire, and working in construction sites in Luzon.
- B. These farmers and fisherfolk rely on traders for sustenance while waiting for their harvest.
- C. Ex-MNLF combatants turned seaweed farmers have a high tendency of joining armed groups to alleviate their families from poverty especially if they experience crop failures which will lead to difficulties in sustaining the daily needs of their families.

- **Crosscutting issues: women and youth**

When disaster or conflict occurs or is common in their community, the women consider migration as their main alternative livelihood. Most women interviewed, especially the Muslims, usually choose the Middle East as their destination. Most of them find it hard to find employment opportunities in the region. Moreover, there is an increasing demand for Filipina Muslim nannies and workers who understand the Muslim employers’ religion, culture, and food preferences. Similarly, these women also encourage their daughters to work abroad. Often, they are the ones who look for recruiters to help process and alter legal documents to suit the standard age requirement for working abroad. Most of these women are or have known a neighbor, who has been subjected to illegal recruitment.



## Recommendations

### 1. Enact a legislation that can establish a regional mechanism that will focus on the climate-conflict nexus in BARMM.

With the aim to harmonize all regional and local initiatives, and develop long-term plans to address conflict and climate risks, the Parliament is encouraged to enact a comprehensive legislation to tackle the issues at hand. The legislation can provide the regional government with a framework to take a holistic approach to ensure complete protection of the vulnerable sectors from the impacts of conflicts and climate change. This legislation should also enable the regional government to establish a dedicated body or office to implement policies and coordinate, monitor, and evaluate programs, projects, and activities relating to conflict, climate change adaptation, and mitigation strategies.

Given the complexity of disaster risks facing the BARMM region, the office must ensure that the LGU programs, activities, and projects are tailored to the specific conflict situation and environmental hazards facing the provinces and municipalities. In this sense, LGUs should be required to develop plans anchored on local context, with the regional government providing technical and, as much as possible, mobilizing resources to realize the plan. This includes harmonizing mandatory local plans such as DRRMPs, LCCAPs and POPS.

### 2. Strengthen enforcement of existing laws regarding the use and control of natural resources.

The climate change impacts and man-made activities have drastically altered the topography of some areas in the BARMM region, particularly in communities along the rivers, the marsh, and the coastal areas. Strong typhoons changed several forms and features of land areas in mainland Maguindanao where land bodies have surfaced and are now habituated or used for agricultural purposes. This unique phenomenon may not have triggered conflicts now but has the potential to create tension as residents compete over possession of this piece of land resources.

From the case studies, most of the conflicts in mainland Maguindanao resulted from multiple land-titling and defining of land boundaries changed over time resulting from conflict-climate disasters. The study recommends addressing the ancestral domain claims of the indigenous peoples in the region so that ancestral domain areas, primarily located in the upland communities, will be managed appropriately by the indigenous cultural communities with appropriate government support. This includes strengthening the enforcement of the mandates of BARMM MENRE, MAFAR, and MIPA, which are the agencies with mandates relevant to land tenure and management.

MAFAR should also vigorously exercise its policing function by organizing the Bantay-Dagat and preventing large-scale fishing companies' encroachment in the municipal waters. The issue of investors putting up large-scale "pondohan" is to the disadvantage of small-scale seaweed farmers who sometimes experience harvest failure due to invading "ice-ice" fungus to their seaweeds. The fungus infestation forces them to plant seedlings elsewhere, even reaching the further seas because huge private seaweed farm owners already occupied the municipal waters. Having to go further into the sea made access to essential social services more difficult, encouraging them to borrow money from traders for basic survival needs while waiting for harvest time. MAFAR must support small fisherfolks so that they will not resort to abusive/illegal fishing practices and fall victim to traders who coerce them into solely selling their harvests to them.

### 3. BARMM government should contribute in pushing for the enactment of the Internally Displaced Persons Bill.

Most of the IDPs are still in evacuation sites and resettlement communities. They cannot go back because of the ongoing skirmishes in their communities. However, their situation is more difficult because it is challenging to access government support. There were IDPs, especially those who were twice displaced by conflict and natural calamities, who shared during the FGD that they were disowned by their barangay LGUs, saying that they were not residents of the area. This gap in responding to calamities calls for reviewing the LGUs' mandate to support the IDPs in the communities.



The IDP bill has been in congress for at least 13 years and it will need the support of BARMM which has the most number of IDPs resulting from both conflict-climate disasters in the country. The IDP Bill will ensure the protection of the rights and welfare of the IDPs. It has to be reviewed with consideration to the context of BARMM; hence responding to the emergency needs of displaced communities should not only focus on the provision of their daily survival but must have a strategic impact on their lives. It will have to include the development and/or enforcement of durable solutions.

#### 4. Mainstream gender-sensitive planning in all aspects of climate change and conflict adaptation and mitigation mechanisms.

Especially in the BARMM region, where climate vulnerability is already felt, and women's participation in agriculture and other economic activities is high, gender integration across policy processes is critical to ensure effective climate change adaptation interventions, conflict mitigation, and addressing displacement. In line with this, creating gender-sensitive indicators to monitor and evaluate gender mainstreaming in all action plans is highly suggested.

From the FGDs, women's migration became a common adaptation mechanism. Women are most vulnerable to human trafficking, labor violation, and prostitution in times of calamities. The Ministry of Labor and Employment (MOLE) should install an office specifically to address the concern of safe migration for both men and women who decide to work abroad, ensuring they will not fall victim to illegal recruiters. Migration should be an informed, secure, and accessible option for people.

Since women are more vulnerable to illegal recruitment and exploitation during and after disasters, women should be given the option and assistance to develop their source of income without resulting in illegal means or having to leave their families to work abroad.

#### 5. Conduct massive education and training for farmers and users of the natural resources.

There is a need to conduct massive education and training for farmers and users of natural resources taking into account the importance of sustainable agriculture, ensuring biodiversity, protection, and conservation of the natural resources, including the remaining forest cover and forest protected areas through reforestation, tree-planting initiatives in partnership with MENRE and other relevant BARMM ministries. Furthermore, these ministries can assist in creating viable local economies, especially in fisheries and agricultural sectors, using conflict and climate-change-sensitive approaches.

#### 6. Embed climate change prevention and mitigation in peacebuilding and post-conflict rebuilding programs and projects.

It is recommended for the international humanitarian and development organizations to embed in their peacebuilding and post-conflict programs and projects the issue of climate-related risks. The planned regional office can help oversee the ways by which organizations integrate conflict and climate change adaptation and mitigation mechanisms into the programs and projects. At the same time, the regional office will help the organizations create specific indicators and goals, comprehensively defining the interconnectedness of conflict, climate change, and displacement.





## Conclusion

**Complex and context-specific.** This is how the research defines the climate change, conflict, and human mobility nexus in the Bangsamoro region. Climate change impacts no doubt posit an important threat to the region as increased pressure on land and marine resources and the ongoing deadly conflicts forced thousands out of their homes to seek momentary or even permanent refuge in nearby towns, regions, and other countries.

At the center of this nexus is the Bangsamoro government walking a tightrope in this critical period of transition and leadership, and the Bangsamoro people who are yet to feel the benefit of peace and the improvement in their living conditions.

BARMM is a region abundant in natural resources, but also home to nine active volcanoes, flood plains and mountains, and several of its municipalities are dangerously located in hazard-prone areas. In terms of the impact of climate change, BARMM has some of the highest risk indicators in the Philippines. For the past decades, areas in BARMM Region were hit by natural disasters like typhoons, flashfloods and landslides which were not experienced by the region before.

Combined with long-running and armed conflicts, population growth, and high poverty incidence, there is no doubt the nexus will take a serious toll, expand to even more intricate adverse impacts, and may increase its presence in the coming years and decades.

The research explored the ways by which climate change impacts can create conflict and may trigger new conflict typologies. There are two dynamics by which conflicts were observed to develop from: **1) simple scarcity conflict and, 2) group conflict.**

The first type of conflict, and the most prevalent form, was seen to emerge from the appearance of new land areas that lead to contention over new tenurable farmlands in mainland Maguindanao or more accessible resources in the Bangsamoro region. Most importantly, the changes in the region's land topography changed the dynamic of conflicts, expanding its scope and intensifying its impact on the affected communities. Furthermore, the environmental degradation observed makes food supplies increasingly tight. For instance, the traders in the Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi island provinces have used people's basic survival needs to intimidate the seaweed farmers into selling their produce to them alone. Changes in sea temperature, storm surge, and sea level rise have also forced seaweed farmers to go further into the seas where it is more dangerous to farm and where access to social services is limited.

“

*“The sooner the Bangsamoro people, its government and the humanitarian actors recognize the urgency of addressing the climate and conflict interlinking crises, the sooner these stakeholders can invest in sustainable and lasting peace in the region.”*

”



The second conflict takes form in antagonizing group identities, and which is caused or triggered by migration or displacement either by natural calamities, conflict, and permanent environmental degradation. As enemy groups or clans are propelled together under circumstances of deprivation, stress over resources both natural and government provisions, and shrinking land areas, hostilities between groups increase. Hostilities may take form in discriminating against outside groups (for example, residents who identified themselves as supporters of a political clan lost in the past election) and/or chance encounters of enemy groups competing over territories and expanding their forces.

Heavily affected by the interlinking forces of conflict and climate-change are the small-time farmers and fisherfolks who are forced to leave their farmlands, homes, coastal communities, and migrate to other places seeing no hope in engaging in agriculture and fishery.

Evidently, these issues call for a thoroughgoing review of the Bangsamoro development roadmap, especially considering governance and peacebuilding. This critical review will need to strengthen the BARMM government’s partnership with civil society organizations and other grassroots organizations.

All the corroborating evidence from the research leaves with no choice but to address the nexus, and to address it now. There are available and ongoing development of technologies and data that can somehow anticipate and prepare for conflict and climate-sensitive mitigation and adaptation mechanisms. The sooner the Bangsamoro people, its government and the humanitarian actors recognize the urgency of addressing the climate and conflict interlinking crises, the sooner these stakeholders can invest in sustainable and lasting peace in the region.

