Complementing Traditional Diplomacy: The Contributions of the Mindanao Solidarity Network (MSN) as a Track II Actor to the Performance of the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP) in Attaining Peace in Mindanao

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Abstract: **The purpose of this study is to explain, prove, and justify the need for the complementarity that exists between the MSN and the OPAPP as diplomatic actors in the peace processes in Mindanao, by identifying the contributions of MSN to the peace process, and by analyzing the strengths, weaknesses opportunities and threats of both organizations in order to generate strategies for better complementarity. Qualitative Research/Descriptive Analysis research design was used in the study. The researchers gathered relevant data through online and library sources and conducted interviews with MSN and OPAPP representatives and officials who are knowledgeable of the topic. Results showed that the MSN plays a significant supporting role to the performance of OPAPP in attaining peace in Mindanao. On the other hand, the OPAPP, by virtue of the principle of the comprehensive peace process, acknowledges that complementarity, not only among tracks, but also among all citizens, is important to achieve peace. Furthermore, the strengths of MSN complement the weaknesses of the OPAPP through check and balance, spearheading events, open dialogue with the communities and active mobilization. In contrast, OPPAP's strengths complement MSN's weaknesses through funding and active collaboration. It can be concluded that the complementarity of MSN and OPAPP, with the former's supportive nature, has a positive impact on the peace processes in Mindanao. It is recommended for the MSN and OPAPP to strengthen their complementary relationship in terms of collaboration, organization, cooperation, and communication in order to attain lasting peace and security in Mindanao, and eventually in the entire country.**

Keywords: **Track II Actor, Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP), Mindanao Solidarity Network (MSN), Peace Process.**

I. INTRODUCTION

The existence of social and geographical fragmentation within the country that complement the presence of diverse ethno-linguistic groups, alongside having a history of revolts, can be instrumental in identifying and understanding the problem of insurgency, which challenge past and present Philippine governments. Since time immemorial, insurgencies have been the toughest barrier for the country to reach its full development potential. Since peace remains as vague as ever, possibilities of having a viable framework to guide actual peace talks through the convergence of actual effective diplomatic track strategies, which would best resolve internal and external conflicts, are yet to be intensified in the country.

II. DISCUSSION

The Peace Process

With the occurrence of numerous struggles that challenge the effectiveness and legitimacy of efforts in conflict resolution, the complex Mindanao problem remains to be the toughest hurdle to peace in the country that is yet to be resolved. Throughout history, religious diversity has been a source of clash between the Philippine government and the people. However, the former manages to display a unified reaction to these clashes by invoking considerations of national unity, sovereignty, territorial integrity, national security, and national interest, as these are fundamentally expressed in the Philippine constitution. These concerns stem out to conflicts that are being addressed by diplomatic actors, up to this day, through peace processes. According to Saunders (2001), "a peace process is a political process in which conflicts are resolved by peaceful means." In the Philippines, conflict resolutions and peace processes are usually done through the efforts of 'track one' actors; these are the government officials, inter-governmental organization representatives, and third-party governments. These groups are common and established interlocutors with armed groups within the bounds of the peace process context (Hottinger, 2005). The prime government agency that is charged with the task of managing and supervising the comprehensive peace processes in the country is the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP). OPAPP is the office mandated to oversee, coordinate, and integrate the implementation of the comprehensive peace process. It was created by virtue of Executive Order (EO) No. 125, signed by former President Fidel Ramos on September 15, 1993, which was further institutionalized by former President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, on February 2001, by defining its policy framework and administrative structure. For the past 30 years up to the present, the GRP has been engaged in peace negotiations with different rebel groups in the country. With the efforts of the OPAPP, the government aims to attain negotiated political settlement that would end arm conflicts and lay the foundations for a just and lasting peace within the country.

Track II Diplomacy

Track two actors are informal intermediaries, usually non-governmental and unofficial groups and individuals, who also play important roles in diplomatic negotiations. These 'track two' actors play an important role in facilitating productive dialogue and problem solving between those who are directly involved in the conflict. The term 'track two' was first termed by US Diplomat Joseph Montville in 1982. Montville (2006) defined track two diplomacy as "an unofficial, informal interaction between members of adversary groups or nations that aims to develop strategies, influence public opinion, and organize human and material resources in ways that might help to resolve their conflict…" Track II Diplomacy is a peacemaking initiative often parallel to and in support to Track I Diplomacy (Santos Jr., n.d.), and adopting this version of Track II definition would be of better use because of its emphasis on Track II diplomacy as activities that tend to influence official policymaking or the socialization of public opinion.

Complementarity of Conflict Resolution Efforts

In a study made by Nan (1999), he stated the need for the "complementarity of conflict resolution efforts." This is because in practice, not all institutions or organizations have the capacity to utilize or apply all forms of diplomacy in resolving conflicts (Nan, 1999). With this, there arose conflict resolution literature that involved joint efforts using different types of diplomacy. One of these literatures is the one synthesizing Lederach's three levels of leadership, types of diplomacy, and how the actors from each type exert influence over the other.
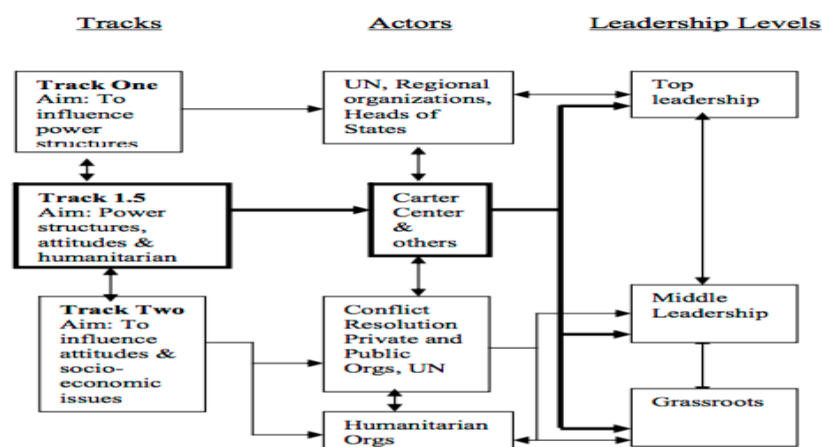

Figure 1. Lederach's Complementarity of Tracks of Diplomacy

Multi-track Diplomacy

Multi-Track Diplomacy is a conceptual way to view the process of international peacemaking as a living system. It looks at the web of interconnected activities, individuals, institutions, and communities that operate together for a common goal: a world at peace. Track One Diplomacy is official government diplomacy whereby communication and interaction is between governments. Track Two Diplomacy is the unofficial interaction and intervention of non-state actors (Diamond and McDonald, 1996).
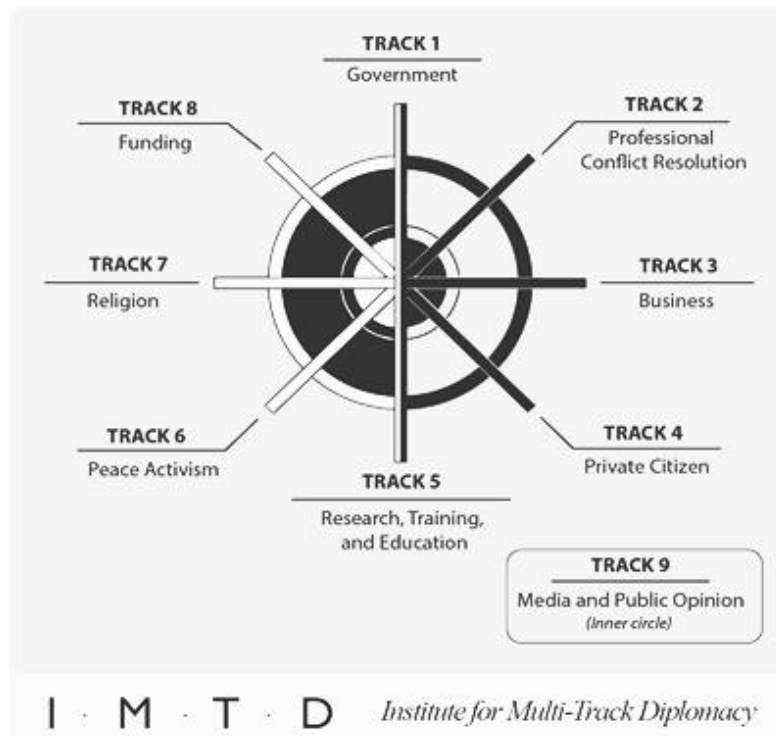

Figure 2. Nine Tracks in the Multi-Track System (Diamond & McDonald, 1996)

Track I and II Distinction

There exists a clear distinction between Track I Diplomacy, being the official track of diplomacy undertaken by the government and other official state representatives, and Track II Diplomacy, being the unofficial track of diplomacy undertaken by unofficial representatives, mostly experts and key members and officials of civil society organizations (Jones, 2015; Teng, 2007; Fedorov, 2016; Delizo, 2016). Despite the clear distinction of the definitions and roles of both tracks, it has been proven that complementarity of these tracks is a positive step in order to advance interest and achieve goals more efficiently and more effectively (Nan, 1999; Lederach, 1997; Busran-Lao, 2003; Hottinger, 2002).

Peace Initiatives in the Philippine Context

In the Philippines, there exist organizations that lead peace initiatives, like the MSN (Gaspar et al., 2002). With the country's existing problem of insurgencies in Mindanao (TRF, 2002; Santos Jr., 2003, Gutierrez et al., 2004), the Philippine government endorsed the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL), which implements the signed peace agreements by building a Bangsamoro ministerial government to replace the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) (Jopson, 2016). Keeping an eye on the peace processes in the country is a special arm of the government, which is the OPAPP. However, in the Philippine context, pressing issues on peace needs more than theories. Enumerating the contributions of these actors and justifying the complementarity of these two tracks of diplomacy in the Philippine setting is important. It is necessary because literature show that track II diplomacy plays an important role in conflict resolution abroad (Naidoo, 2000; Strasser, 2016). Peace processes, which involve resolution of conflict through peaceful means (Sisk, 2001; Ball, 2001), remain to be the strategy applied by track I and track II actors (Saunders, 2001). With the emergence of multilateral diplomacy and multi-track diplomacy (Diamond et al., 1996) come newer ways on how the people can contribute to the resolving of conflict in the society.

Method

This study utilized the qualitative method of research with a sophisticated explanatory and descriptive analysis. A mixture of convenience and stratified purposeful sampling will be utilized in this study (Patton & Cochran, 2002). The initial phase of the research involved an in-depth research on Track I and Track II Diplomacy and their guiding framework on the peace process. This research will come from the secondary sources of data. The second phase of the research was the series of interviews of OPAPP and MSN officials or representatives. For this, there were two (2) sub-phases:

1. First Phase – MSN and its network of NGOs interview

2. Second Phase – OPAPP interview

A SWOT Analysis, following the SWOT Matrix and its general format, was also utilized to assess and to evaluate the OPAPP and MSN as Track I and Track II actors, respectively.

Participants

The respondents that participated in the interview are Filipino citizens who belong to the top officials (Undersecretary to Officer Level) of the organizational structure of the OPAPP and the MSN (including its affiliates) and are working for that particular organization for 10 years or more.

Table 1: The Key Informants of the Study

Organization	Key Informant 1	Key Informant 2
Mindanao Solidarity Network (MSN)	Ms. Rebecca "Karen" Tañada	Ms. Analisa Ugay
Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP)	Asec. Rolando Asuncion	Ms. Lakambini Magdamo

Both Ms. Tañada and Ms. Ugay are convenors of the MSN, which is the primary actor of Track II diplomacy defined in this study. On the other hand, both Asec. Asuncion and Ms. Magdamo are official representatives of OPAPP, which is the primary actor of track I diplomacy defined in this study.

Results

The complementarity of both tracks is proven to exist even in a general aspect, since the official government representatives recognize the active participation and engagement of other actors in the peace process. Since the end goal for both tracks is to attain peace, there are times when actors from both tracks work hand-in-hand in order to host events and activities related to the peace process. Furthermore, the existence of other actors belonging to both tracks showcases the diversity and the inclusivity of the complementarity in the attainment of peace in Mindanao.

MSN Roles and Contributions

MSN is a loose network that was formed in 2003. The MSN was established after the Buliok War in Pikit, Cotabato. They had around 14 to 15 affiliate organizations that time, but those organizations aren't that much active now. However, the researchers were able to identify the key roles and contributions of the MSN to the performance of the OPAPP in attaining peace in Mindanao:

Table 2: MSN Roles and Contributions

MSN ROLES
Convene affiliate organizations for updates
Support the passing of agreements that would end armed conflict
Initiate conversations
Monitor the peace process
Encourage official representatives to push peace initiatives

MSN CONTRIBUTIONS
Observer in the negotiation process
Communication with the MILF and the OPAPP
Public information through campaigns
Serve as facilitators in dialogues
Hold events, activities and forums
Adds a personal touch approach and support to Track I
Mobilization to get public opinion
Analysis of the situations in Mindanao
Listening to voices that feel left out
Maximize use of social media as platforms to seek public support
Serve as hosts to communities or organizations

Analysis of Complementarity based on the SWOT Matrices

The application of the strategies created by the researchers from the SWOT Matrices of both organizations would be of great help in establishing a more efficient, effective, proactive and collaborative MSN and OPAPP. Furthermore, these strategies would also be applicable to other actors that are currently engaging, and those who would want to engage in the peace process, regardless of track. MSN's strengths can definitely overpower their weaknesses and continuous cooperation with other actors, most specially OPAPP, would create more impact and would potentially be of great help to the pushing forward of the implementation of peace agreements. In addition, since both tracks recognize that the peace process isn't just the task of only one track, there is a lot of room for collaboration, organization, cooperation, and communication between MSN and OPAPP. Furthermore, the emergence of newer platforms and avenues, like online media, enables both tracks to expand their constituencies and influence on a larger scale.

III. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Despite the inherent differences and limitations of the OPAPP and the MSN as Track I and Track II actors, the acknowledgement and openness of both tracks on the notion that the peace process is a collaborative effort, makes the peace process more valuable and representative of a whole rather than of only a few. The OPAPP functions by the principles of a comprehensive peace process, which affirms that the road to peace has different paths that involve not only government action but also action contributed by the whole Filipino people as one community. As a Track II actor, MSN offers a wide range of support to the efforts of OPAPP in the peace processes. Organizations like the MSN extend full support in the peace processes despite their limitations as non-state actors. The inclusivity of the peace process makes complementarity between MSN and OPAPP possible and significant. The acknowledgement of the OPAPP that they cannot do it alone is an opening for other organizations like the MSN to fill in important gaps in the peace process through its contributions.

Recommendation

The strengthening of the complementary relationship, in terms of collaboration, organization, cooperation, and communication, of MSN and OPAPP will enable effective conflict prevention and resolution, which in turn assures a step forward in the attainment of lasting peace and security in Mindanao, and eventually in the entire country. The existing complementarity of MSN and OPAPP prove to be significant in the course of pursuing the peace processes in Mindanao. Nonetheless, such relationship has more room for improvement. Hence, the researchers also recommend the following:

- Continuity and sustained effort by the MSN to collaborate, cooperate and communicate with OPAPP and other actors

- Strengthen and expand networks

- MSN should evolve

- Utilize new forms of media

- Maximizing MSN potential to leverage dialogues

- OPAPP should push for more funding/sponsorships

- Further research on the effectiveness of Track II

- Comparative analysis of the complementarity of other tracks of diplomacy

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