

**Improving Natural Resource Governance:
A Key to Ensure Peace and Stability in Mindanao, Philippines**

**Cynthia Brady, Oliver Agoncillo, Buenaventura Dolom,
Edward Iblah Lim, Maria Zita Butardo-Toribio**

The Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) arose in the 1960s largely in reaction to centralized government control as well as government-sponsored settlement in Mindanao of Christians from other parts of the Philippines, which disenfranchised Muslims and other indigenous groups from land claims, traditional rights to natural resources and thus from major economic assets in Mindanao. Following decades of conflict, in 1996 the MNLF signed a peace agreement with Government of the Republic of the Philippines. The implementation of the Agreement was supported by international donors, including USAID, which invested in several sectors, including natural resources management, to support the newly created Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) and to foster a lasting peace. The case study focuses on nearly ten years of USAID experience in supporting ARMM communities' efforts to improve governance of forest, coastal and marine resources. Despite flaws in the Agreement and its implementation as well as the combined effects of continuing conflict between the Government and the breakaway Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and other armed groups present in Mindanao, much can be learned from the experience of using governance of natural resources as a critical post-conflict, peace-building and development tool. Moreover, since access to and control over natural resources is at the root of both MNLF and MILF core grievances the case presents lessons learned for conflict prevention and mitigation.

This paper is part of a project to examine experiences in post-conflict peacebuilding, natural resource management, and infrastructure development from Asia and the Pacific. For more information, please visit http://www.eli.org/Program_Areas/SPCSD/index.cfm.

It is also part of a global initiative that identifies lessons learned in managing natural resources to facilitate the transition to peace. For more information, please visit http://www.eli.org/Program_Areas/PCNRM/index.cfm.