



**Mindanao Peacebuilding Institute Foundation, Inc.
Digital Peacebuilding and Digital Rights in Mindanao**

**A project under the Association for Progressive Communication
Southeast Asia Digital Rights Collaborative**

Introduction

This report outlines the outcomes and activities of a project aimed at empowering Mindanao Peacebuilding Institute (MPI) alumni in the effective use of social media and digital communication for conflict resolution and peacebuilding. The project was conducted under the Southeast Asia Digital Rights Collaborative of the Association for Progressive Communication with funding from Luminate.

The project primarily focused on achieving three key objectives:

- Objective 1: Associating Social Media with Conflict in Mindanao
- Objective 2: Increasing Understanding of Digital Rights and Peacebuilding
- Objective 3: Using Social Media to De-Escalate Conflict

The primary focus of this project was to empower grassroots peacebuilders, consisting of MPI alumni, in Mindanao. Initially comprising 15 participants, the project aimed to promote a deeper understanding of digital rights and its relevance to peacebuilding. The participants came from diverse sectors, including academia, community-based, governmental entities, non-governmental organizations, and international non-governmental organizations.

Activities

The project commenced with two online introductory workshops held on January 30, 2023, and February 6, 2023, engaging ten and five participants, respectively. These workshops covered project schedules, participant expectations, and rules, including the sharing of their "digital selves." Additionally, participants delved into methodologies for monitoring social media and conflict, exploring the Ushahidi deployment as the primary monitoring tool, with KoboToolbox suggested as an alternative.

Throughout the project, several communication tools were employed, such as Signal for secure communication, Facebook Messenger for general communication, a Google Group for lengthy emails and communication, and Jitsi Meet for online meetings. The initial practice phase spanned from February 6 to February 28, 2023, during which participants familiarized themselves with the monitoring tool, identifying what worked well and areas requiring improvement.

Touch-base meetings were held to discuss progress and challenges. The first touch-base meeting occurred on March 2, 2023, where participants shared their experiences with the Ushahidi deployment and suggested potential improvements. Social media search tools like Social Searcher, UVRX Social Search, Snitch.name, and Google Social Search were also explored.

A second touch-base meeting on April 13, 2023, allowed participants to reflect on their comfort levels with Ushahidi and KoboToolbox. At that time, participants shared the challenges related to internet connectivity, technical skills, and workload.

The Integration Workshop of the Digital Peacebuilding and Digital Rights in Mindanao was held on 8 May 2023. The workshop was designed to further explore to what extent social media and other online/digital communication exacerbate or contribute to resolving or reducing conflicts in Mindanao and to look at how digital peacebuilding and digital rights play a role in the efforts. The workshop included sessions on the participants understanding of digital peacebuilding, analyzing digital peacebuilding in their local contexts, networking, and an assessment of the project up to that point.

During the Integration Workshop, the participants were presented with a review of the results of the monitoring of social media and conflict in Mindanao. These results can be seen in Appendix A.

Following the Integration Workshop, all the participants joined the Digital Rights Camp from May 9 to May 12, 2023, organized by the Foundation for Media Alternatives. Through a combination of World Café and Open Space, the participants were actively engaged in discussions and sessions related to digital rights and digital security.

On May 25, 2023, an open session was organized during MPI's Annual Peacebuilding Training, allowing project participants to share their experiences and insights with other participants. While not officially part of the project, three project participants received scholarships for the Media Prosumers for Peace course during the Annual Peacebuilding Training, enhancing their digital skills.

In June 2023, the Ushahidi deployment transitioned from private to public, allowing external contributors to submit conflict and social media reports. However, the response was limited, revealing advantages and disadvantages of the Ushahidi platform. Project participation waned as the year progressed, with individuals returning their focus to their own work. A final project closure and reflection session occurred on August 24, 2023.

Assessment

The project significantly contributed to the first objective— **Associating Social Media with Conflict in Mindanao**—as it engaged MPI alumni in actively monitoring social media and conflicts in Mindanao. The success of this endeavor was demonstrated through the project presentation and the personal reflections of the participants during online and in-person sharing sessions, notably the Integration Workshop.

The second objective—**Increasing Understanding of Digital Rights and Peacebuilding**—was also effectively addressed through the Integration Workshop and the Digital Rights Camp, which provided alumni with insights into digital rights and their relationship to peacebuilding. This was evident from the reflections and sharing of participants, as documented in the *Participant's Lessons Learned/Moving Forward* report (see Appendix B).

While the third objective—**Using Social Media to De-Escalate Conflict**—is more long-term in nature, participants shared their aspirations during reflection sessions, indicating their intent to use social media and digital communication to de-escalate conflict in the future.

The project's most significant achievement was enhancing participants' knowledge and awareness of digital rights and their connection to peacebuilding. This was facilitated through learning about and use of online tools, including Ushahidi and KoboToolbox, which were explored and tested during the project. Additionally, secure communication tools like Signal and Jitsi, along with social media monitoring tools like CrowdTangle, played a role in achieving the project's goals. The most crucial takeaway was the learning experience related to digital rights and peacebuilding.

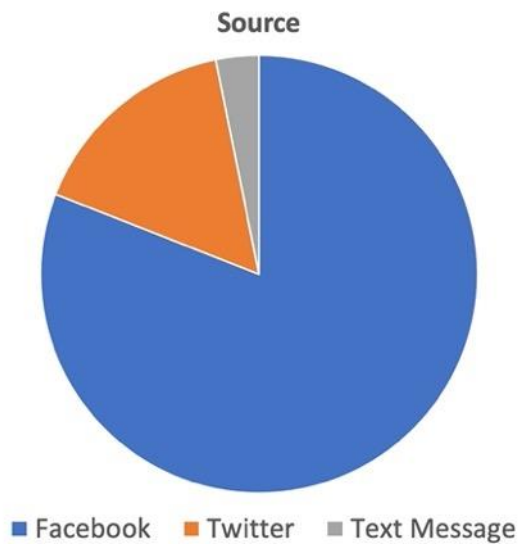
Reflecting on the project, several aspects stood out as highly successful. The participatory research approach employed during the online monitoring of conflict and social media allowed for an organic and collaborative development of the project. Participants' active contributions and adaptability in utilizing various online tools for this purpose fostered deeper engagement and relevance to the context. The physical presence of participants during the Integration Workshop and Digital Rights Camp was another pivotal factor that facilitated dynamic activities, group work, in-depth discussions, and the formation of strong bonds among the participants.

The project encountered some challenges, primarily related to the inability to retain the initial group of 15 participants. While unforeseen circumstances played a role in this, better screening for requirements such as internet connectivity in future projects would be beneficial. The participation level was also influenced by the project's intentional approach of not demanding specific organizational commitments from participants in the first phase. In future phases, MPI is considering involving a limited number of organizations more directly, creating tools specifically tailored to their needs.

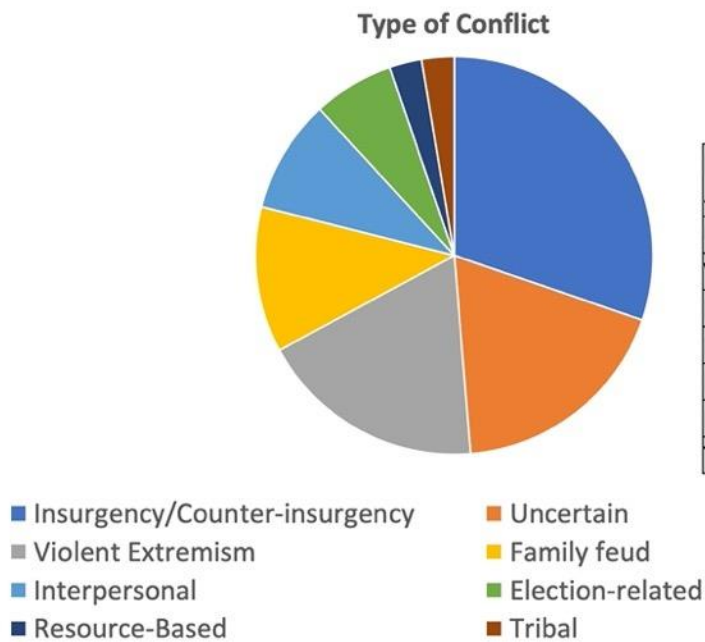
Conclusion

In conclusion, this project successfully empowered grassroots peacebuilders in Mindanao, enhancing their understanding of digital rights and their practical application in peacebuilding efforts. It embraced a participatory approach and capitalized on in-person interactions during Integration Workshops and Digital Rights Camp. Lessons learned from this project will inform future initiatives, enabling a more refined and impactful engagement with grassroots peacebuilders and their organizations.

Monitoring Social Media/Digital Communication and Conflict in Mindanao – A statistical overview

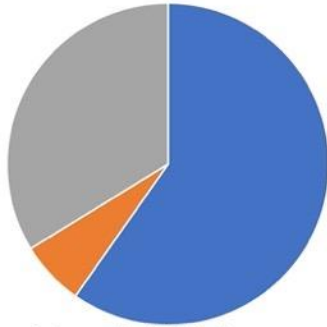


Facebook	51
Twitter	10
Text Message	2



Insurgency/Counter-insurgency	23
Uncertain	14
Violent Extremism	14
Family feud	9
Interpersonal	7
Election-related	5
Resource-Based	2
Tribal	2

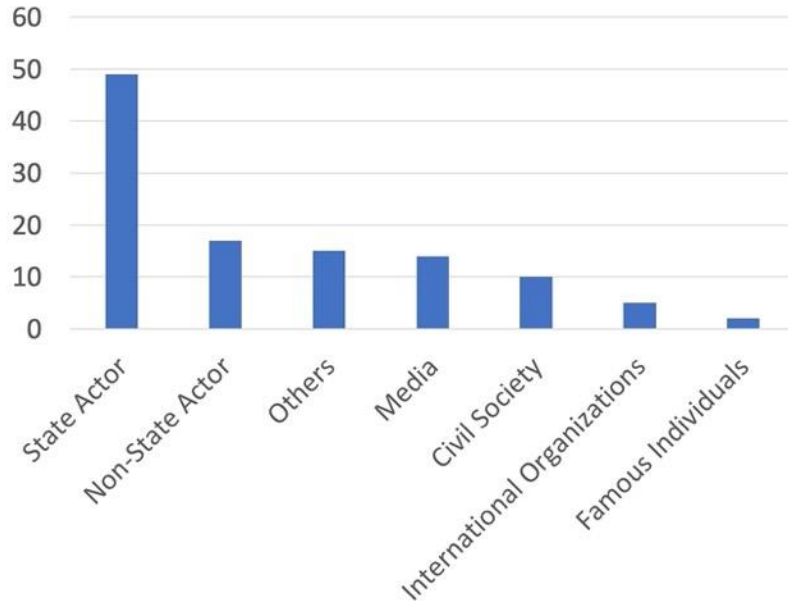
When did the conflict occur?

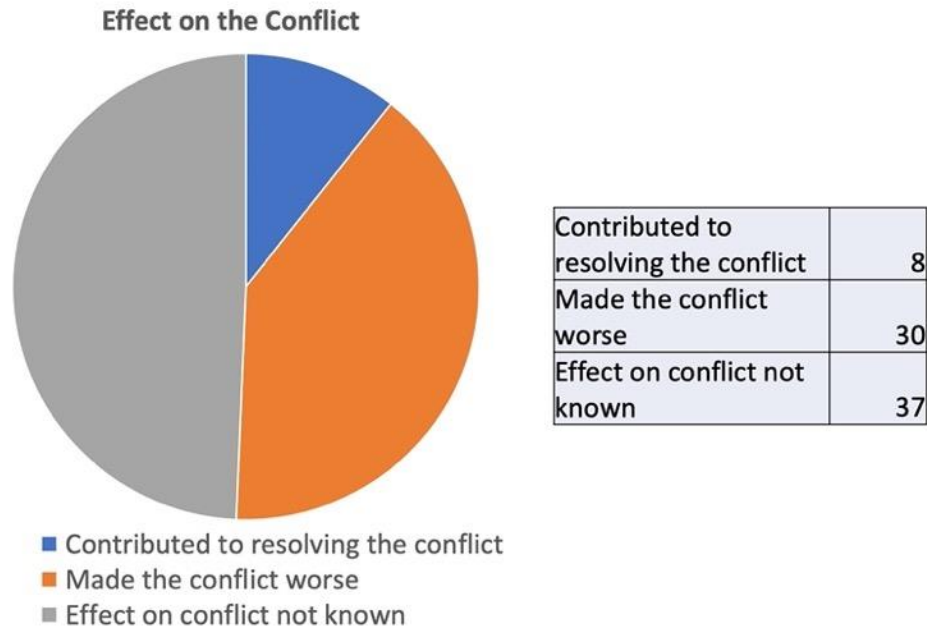


Before	46
After	5
Unsure	26

- Before the social media/digital communications post.
- After the social media/digital communications post.
- Unsure

Actors





Assessment of the Monitoring

In assessing the monitoring process, the participants came to the following conclusions:

1. **Relevance and Significance**
The monitoring tool and process should remain relevant to the needs of stakeholders working directly with conflict, such as organizations like Nonviolent Peaceforce.
2. **Understanding Conflict**
The conflicts are multifaceted and often deeply rooted in history. Attempting to classify conflicts into distinct categories can oversimplify their nature. Determining the type of conflict is often challenging, especially when conflicts have long historical roots. The assessment also raised the question of who can assist in the analysis and categorization of conflicts. Identifying the individuals and organizations on the ground who can provide insights is crucial.
3. **Information Sources**
To get the full story behind a conflict, it is essential to identify primary sources and media outlets that gather information from diverse sources. Challenges arise in handling misinformation, which is prevalent on social media platforms.
4. **Social Media Impact**
The impact of social media on conflict is closely related to how language can contribute to or escalate conflicts. Monitoring social media stimulated the participants' interest in news and community events.
5. **Data Verification and Security**
Fact-checking is essential to ensure the credibility of sources and information. Participants also expressed concerns regarding digital security as monitoring social media may become more vulnerable due to digital footprints and exposure.

6. Collaborative Efforts

Monitoring of social media and conflict could benefit from establishing a multistakeholder validation group involving community members and experts. It was also suggested to consider expanding the project to cover more regions or provinces.

Participant's Lessons Learned/Moving Forward

On August 24, 2023, five of the participants in the Digital Peacebuilding and Digital Rights in Mindanao project came together with Fred Goddard from the Mindanao Peacebuilding Institute (MPI) for a "closure reflection" session on the project. There were two basic questions for the participants: "What did you learn from the project?" and "How do you see using what you learned in the future for yourself and your organization?"

Over the course of the project, participants gained insights into digital peacebuilding, digital rights, and secure communication practices. They planned to integrate this knowledge into their personal, organizational, and advocacy efforts to promote peace, improve communication, and protect digital privacy. Collaboration and capacity-building were central themes in their plans to further their impact.

Learning Highlights:

1. **Network Expansion and Organizational Communications:** Participants expressed they were able to expand their networks and improve organizational communications. This involved gaining new friendships, knowledge, and valuable insights into digital security. This newfound network was especially beneficial for future collaboration and mutual learning. Participants acknowledged the importance of collaborating across different organizations and geographical locations. They envisioned greater collaboration among groups in Mindanao working on peacebuilding, human rights, and digital security.
2. **Mapping Conflict and Resources:** The participants discovered the potential of digital tools in conflict mapping. They shared that it could be beneficial to their work to shift the focus from solely mapping conflict to mapping community resources, such as natural resources and human skills. This mapping approach could be used to empower local communities and facilitate conflict resolution. One participant expressed that it would be a good tool for governments to monitor and intervene in election related conflict.
3. **Digital Rights/Security Awareness:** The project enhanced participants' understanding of digital rights, particularly in the context of peacebuilding. This knowledge deepened their appreciation for online privacy and security, translating to better practices within their organizations and communities. "It was a journey where we are able to appreciate technology but it also reminds us of the effect of it if we do not use it the right way."
4. **Applying Digital Peacebuilding:** Participants found ways to integrate digital peacebuilding concepts into their work. They saw the potential for leveraging technology, especially social media, and digital communication, to promote peace education and conflict resolution among youth.
5. **Spreading Knowledge:** Participants intended to share their new insights with their respective organizations and communities. They aimed to create awareness about digital peacebuilding and digital rights, especially among partners in peace education and conflict transformation initiatives. As one participant expressed, the project helped her to be grounded with her own communities, to be engaged with social issues, and to be digitally literate but locally grounded.
6. **Challenges in Implementation:** Implementing new practices and tools, such as Element for secure communication, presented challenges, especially in organizations with limited digital literacy. Some participants noted the challenge of resistance to adopting new security practices or tools. They encountered reluctance to change from tools like Signal to more secure alternatives like Elements, emphasizing the need for effective change management strategies. Participants recognized the need for training and support to overcome these hurdles.

7. **Visibility and Privacy:** There was a discussion about making their work more visible online while protecting the privacy and security of their partners, especially those in sensitive situations. This required careful consideration of communication tools and strategies.

Future Plans:

1. **Personal Use:** Participants planned to utilize the knowledge gained for personal development and growth. They appreciated the exposure to new concepts and skills related to digital peacebuilding and digital rights.
2. **Educational Integration:** Some participants intended to integrate digital peacebuilding principles into educational settings, such as universities. They saw the potential to incorporate digital peacebuilding into peace education courses to engage students in meaningful ways.
3. **Organizational Integration:** Participants aimed to incorporate digital peacebuilding practices into their organizations' activities. This included implementing secure communication tools, integrating digital security practices, and raising awareness about digital rights.
4. **Advocacy and Storytelling:** Some participants sought to use the knowledge gained to enhance their advocacy efforts. They planned to tell stories from the ground, highlighting conflicts and peacebuilding initiatives, while respecting the privacy and security of individuals involved.
5. **Collaborative Engagement:** Participants envisioned collaborating with like-minded organizations and individuals to further the impact of digital peacebuilding. They wanted to maximize their network to drive positive change in their communities.
6. **Youth and Community Engagement:** Participants aimed to engage youth and community members in discussions around digital peacebuilding and digital rights. They planned to incorporate these topics into ongoing peace education and conflict transformation programs.
7. **Training and Capacity Building:** Recognizing the challenges of resistance to change and limited digital literacy, participants intended to provide training and capacity-building opportunities to facilitate the adoption of secure communication tools.
8. **Expanding Online Presence:** Some participants aimed to increase the online presence of their organizations while safeguarding the privacy and security of their partners. They intended to share stories and engage with audiences through various digital channels.