CASE STUDY

Bangsamoro Young Leaders Program, Philippines

This case study informs a broader initiative by Investing and Partnering with Youth for Peace (IPYP) seeking to explore how youth-led organisations engage with private-sector actors to advance peacebuilding and social cohesion in diverse contexts. Drawing on case studies from across Latin America, Southeast Asia, the Middle East and North Africa, Sweden and the United States, the project identifies common partnership models, enabling factors, challenges and lessons learnt emerging from youth–private sector collaboration. Across the cases, the research highlights the importance of sustainable relationships, locally grounded approaches, trust-building, and moving beyond transactional funding towards genuine co-creation.

This case study focuses on the Bangsamoro Young Leaders Program (BYLP), providing an example of how youth leadership, social entrepreneurship, government support and private sector engagement can be combined to address both peacebuilding and livelihood challenges in conflict-affected communities. The findings are based on a review of programme materials, interviews conducted in 2025 with BYLP and a focus group discussion conducted in December 2025 with 15 participants engaged through BYLP[1].

Context

The Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) in the Philippines has experienced decades of armed conflict and violence, rooted in a complex history of exclusion marginalisation. BARMM is one of the regions in the Philippines with the youngest population, with approximately 50% aged 18 or younger[2]. Yet, young people in the region have limited economic opportunities available to them. In 2023, approximately 23.5% of families[3] lived below the poverty threshold, one of the highest poverty incidence levels in the country despite substantial improvements over recent years.

At the same time, the Philippines has emerged as a regional leader on the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda, becoming the first country in Southeast Asia to adopt a National Action Plan on YPS. This policy environment has helped create greater recognition of young people as key actors in peacebuilding and development. In this context, to promote conflict resolution and recovery and build social cohesion in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), youth leaders and private-sector actors are co-creating a model where social enterprise serves both as a peacebuilding strategy and a pathway to dignified livelihoods.

BYLP and their engagement with the private sector

The Bangsamoro Young Leaders Program (BYLP) is a youth leadership and social entrepreneurship initiative that supports young people from conflict-affected communities across BARMM. The initiative provides seed funding to young change makers alongside hands-on learning opportunities, including exposure visits to successful community enterprises and development initiatives across Mindanao. A central feature is the Learning Circuit, a curated trip across Mindanao during which participants visit advanced farming and entrepreneurship projects, build cross-regional relationships and identify models to replicate in their own communities. This experience has allowed youth peacebuilders to shift their community engagement work towards professional social entrepreneurship projects that advance both economic growth and social cohesion. Participants consistently described the programme as transformative, highlighting that it fostered a strong sense of ownership over their projects and community engagement efforts.

The Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda recognises young people as active agents in peacebuilding, emphasising their role in conflict prevention, resolution and sustaining peace. Since the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 2250 (2015) and its subsequent resolutions, the YPS agenda calls on all relevant actors, including governments, multilateral organisations, and the private sector, to increasingly shape global, regional and national peace efforts, recognising the important role the private sector can play in building and sustaining peace.

Exploring approaches to youth-private partnerships

BYLP operates within a multi-stakeholder ecosystem in which private companies, hybrid organisations (non-profit entities bridging humanitarian and business development), government agencies and youth networks play complementary forms of support. Hybrid organisations such as The Moropreneur Inc. support community-based cooperatives and livelihood enterprises, providing grants and delivering technical and vocational training to youth peacebuilders, including entrepreneurship and enterprise development skills. Corporate partners support fellows in reaching out to trade networks, while foundations such as Ayala Foundation build the capacity of fellows in project management and resource mobilisation. Government institutions provide seed funding to youth entrepreneurship initiatives and advance policies that enable private actors to implement programmes that create tangible income opportunities for youth. This creates a reinforcing cycle: government backs private actors, private actors support youth, and youth-led initiatives generate community impact that strengthens local peacebuilding.

Results

- BYLP curriculum and mentoring have transformed hesitant students into confident leaders capable of managing projects, navigating stakeholders and training others within their communities.
- Youth-led enterprises have generated new income streams for women and youth, proving that small context-sensitive investments can deliver peacebuilding dividends.
- Exhibitions, mentorship relationships, and partnerships with companies connected youth enterprises to consumers and networks well beyond Bangsamoro.
- Fellows consistently credit the supportive and empathetic approach of mentors and partners for strengthening their confidence, leadership skills and sense of ownership, shifting their self-perception from beneficiaries to co-creators.

Key challenges in engaging with private-sector actors

- **Security risks and resistance from local power structures,** including intimidation and threats towards both youth and private-sector representatives affected project implementation when activities were perceived by authorities and local communities as challenging existing interests, traditions or local power dynamics.
- **BYLP experienced operational and administrative hurdles** related to difficulties coordinating activities across remote communities and reconciling grassroots practices with formal financial reporting and audit requirements.
- **Challenges in marketing of products** developed through the youth-led enterprises, as participating young people were responsible for bringing products to market beyond the training, limiting scale and long-term sustainability.
- **Underdeveloped corporate social responsibility** (CSR) resources in the region contribute to private-sector actors lacking understanding for how they can partner with local communities, including youth.

Key lessons looking ahead

The BYLP case study provides several lessons for private-sector actors exploring similar partnerships with youth in fragile and conflict-affected settings to consider:

- Seed funding can be most effective when paired with mentorship opportunities and capacity building in project management and stakeholder engagement.
- Hybrid organisations and community-rooted foundations can be essential bridges between corporations, government and conflict-affected communities.
- Structured learning experiences can help youth adapt innovations from other contexts into locally-relevant enterprises.
- Private-sector actors should engage with local communities to identify where they can add most value throughout the life of a project, from design and funding to evaluation. This could include providing hands-on support during project execution.
- Youth-led enterprises have proven their viability. To expand their reach and long-term sustainability, they often require branding support, market access, distribution channels and connections to broader business networks.
- To strengthen local ownership and relevance, partnerships should be guided by mentors/advisors who are based in the region and grounded in local realities and needs.

At its core, the BYLP case highlights the potential of young people to drive innovation and development when provided with the right support and opportunities. Private-sector actors that invest in youth leadership, local ownership and sustained engagement can help unlock this potential while strengthening community resilience and inclusive growth.

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[1] While researchers reached out to both youth-led organisations and private-sector partners, private-sector actors did not respond to interview requests. Findings therefore reflect the perspectives of youth-led organisations and peacebuilding actors only, which should be noted as a limitation of this study.

[2] According to a 2015 Census-based estimate from a 2017 UNICEF-commissioned Situation Analysis: Children in Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.

[3] Bangsamoro Information Office. BARMM's economic turnaround: No longer poorest region in PH-PSA. Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindana'. (2024) https://bangsamoro.gov.ph/news/latest-news/barmms-economic-turnaround-no-longer-poorest-region-in-ph-psa/

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