

GENP (EACEBUILDER)

BAPYPS

A Bangsamoro blueprint for unity, intergenerational peace and sustainable progress

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The Bangsamoro Action Plan on Youth, Peace and Security (BAPYPS) is more than just policy. It offers hope for the Bangsamoro autonomous region in the south of the Philippines because it is a blueprint in which youth, elders and leaders walk together to heal divisions, sustain peace and build prosperity across generations. The BAPYPS's adaptation of the global YPS agenda to local and political realities holds important lessons for other contexts.

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1. From a regional debate to a local covenant

The global Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda – born from youth-led advocacy and formalised in the UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2250 – insists on a simple truth: young people are not only affected by conflict; they are essential actors in preventing it and building peace.

In Southeast Asia, this message has rippled unevenly. Youth activism is alive and inventive across the region, from civic movements to community mediation efforts. Yet, institutional pathways for youth to meaningfully shape peace and security remain limited, producing what analysts describe as a paradox: youth visibility without

youth authority (Yague & Berents, 2025).

It is also worth noting that while young people are celebrated rhetorically, formal mechanisms for sustained youth engagement and localisation such as the adoption of National Action Plans (NAPs) and YPS mainstreaming in the grassroots communities through support of youth-led organisations are often missing – a constraint that weakens resilience in fragile settings. The Philippines has responded to this reality with a national legislative architecture: the Philippine NAP on YPS (2023-2033), a multi-stakeholder, youth-led blueprint designed to translate UNSCR 2250 into national

policy and programmes (OPAPRU, 2022). This is an important milestone as it recognises that youth must be partners in every stage of peace work, from prevention to re-integration.

Yet, within the archipelago, Mindanao – and the Bangsamoro in particular – presents a distinctive set of histories, institutions and vulnerabilities that required a local response. Autonomy under the Bangsamoro political settlement, the legacy of the Marawi Siege, persistent clan conflicts (*rido*) and distinct socio-economic realities made it clear to youth and local leaders alike that a one-size-fits-all NAP would not be enough to ensure the meaningful inclusion of youth in peace and security efforts.

2. BAPYPS: Addressing the gap between policy and lived realities

When you stand in a displaced persons' camp, policy language feels distant. You measure safety not by a plan's title but by whether your children have food, a roof over their heads or a classroom. With my experiences as an internally displaced person during the peak of war between the Moro revolutionary group and the Armed Forces of the Philippines in 2007-2008, I learned how policy and practice diverge – and how dangerous that gap can be. I saw firsthand how government commitments to civilian protection, humanitarian relief and peace processes often failed to reach communities on

Thus, localising YPS was crucial: it was not merely organisational, but an act of political and social necessity.

The Bangsamoro Action Plan on Youth, Peace and Security (BAPYPS) 2023-2028 is the region's answer – a document co-created with young people, designed to fit Bangsamoro's governance architecture and social fabric. This article argues that the meaningful implementation of the YPS agenda depends on how well it is adapted to local political and social realities. The Bangsamoro experience illustrates that context matters.

the ground. Policies promising safety, access to services and respect for human rights existed on paper, yet in evacuation sites, families endured hunger, insecurity and uncertainty. The promises of peace negotiations did little to shield children and youth from trauma or to prevent entire villages from being uprooted overnight.

The BAPYPS matters because it directly addresses the gap between policy commitments and the lived realities of young people in conflict-affected communities. Grounded in the five pillars of the

global YPS agenda – participation, protection, prevention, partnership and disengagement and reintegration – the plan does not merely replicate international language. Instead, it reinterprets these pillars through Bangsamoro’s political history, social structures and everyday insecurities (Bangsamoro Youth Commission & UNDP, 2023). The BAPYPS action points respond directly to concerns raised by young people from the five provinces that constitute the Bangsamoro region: Basilan, Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi and the Special Geographic Areas of North Cotabato. This localisation is not symbolic. It gives the plan moral legitimacy among youth who have often felt excluded from formal

polycymaking, while also making implementation more feasible for local institutions that must translate policy into practice. The consultation process that shaped the BAPYPS was rigorous and far from perfunctory. Thousands of young people, alongside community leaders, civil society organisations and government agencies, were engaged across the region. This breadth mattered because it surfaced the diverse yet interconnected insecurities faced by Bangsamoro youth. Their lived experiences directly informed the plan’s priorities. In this way, the BAPYPS moves beyond abstraction: it turns youth narratives into policy direction and policy direction into locally meaningful action

3. How local stories shaped the plan

Abstract policy priorities become real only when they are tied to human voices. Some examples from the consultation files and provincial policy briefs demonstrate the lived realities of young people in the Bangsamoro region that the BAPYPS builds upon.

In Basilan, a young woman noted: *“We need a school with a stable internet connection. Without it, we are invisible.”* That plea became the basis for a BAPYPS sub-action on connectivity and equitable education in remote *barangays* or villages. In a hearing in Lanao del Sur, a former student from Marawi whispered: *“Sometimes peace is not*

having to explain why you flinch at fireworks.” That moment crystallised the plan’s commitment to trauma-informed psychosocial support and community healing.

In Maguindanao, a young man whose family had endured repeated *rido* or clan feuds (referring to continuous cycles of violence and retaliation between families) told us, *“I want to inherit land, not quarrels.”* His words reinforced the urgency of youth-led and culturally-grounded conflict mediation mechanisms.

These anecdotes are the evidentiary base of the BAPYPS. They serve as a reminder

that, at its best, policy is a formal expression of what communities consider necessary to live in dignity.

4. The intergenerational covenant

In many peacebuilding contexts, including the Bangsamoro, youth participation has long been framed through an intergenerational divide: elders are seen as custodians of authority and tradition, while young people are cast primarily as bearers of frustration and risk. This framing has often limited youth engagement to consultative or symbolic roles, rather than positioning young people as partners in shaping policy.

One structural reason why intergenerational collaboration remains rare is that decision-making spaces are frequently hierarchical, age-based and risk-averse. Elders may fear that opening these spaces could undermine cultural authority or social cohesion, while institutions often perceive youth participation as unpredictable or lacking experience. At the same time, young people can be skeptical of formal processes that have historically excluded them or failed to deliver meaningful change. These dynamics create mutual distrust and reinforce parallel, rather than collaborative, approaches to peacebuilding.

Overcoming these barriers is crucial for advancing the YPS agenda. YPS is not only about empowering young people; it is about transforming governance systems so that

youth perspectives inform decisions that affect collective security and social stability. Without intergenerational buy-in, youth-led initiatives struggle to gain legitimacy. Without youth leadership, peacebuilding risks becoming detached from the realities of those who will inherit its consequences.

The BAPYPS sought to address this challenge by deliberately embedding intergenerational collaboration into its governance and implementation structures. Rather than treating youth engagement as an add-on, the process institutionalised shared decision-making across generations. The Technical Working Group that guided the plan's development brought youth leaders into sustained dialogue with religious leaders, local government officials and ministry representatives. These exchanges were not ceremonial. Youth advocates pressed for urgent and action-oriented commitments; elders emphasised cultural grounding and long-term social cohesion; bureaucrats assessed feasibility and alignment with existing systems.

The resulting plan reflects the productive tension of those conversations. It combines immediate, youth-driven priorities with mechanisms designed to endure beyond

political cycles. More importantly, the Technical Working Group remains a living structure rather than a one-off consultative body. It embodies an institutional practice of intergenerational trust that continues into implementation.

This practice matters for three reasons. First, it anchors youth leadership in social legitimacy by linking it to respected community and institutional actors. Second, it strengthens accountability through overlapping family, cultural and bureaucratic relationships that are particularly influential

in the Bangsamoro context. Third, it offers a counter-narrative to youth engagement models that remain tokenistic. Youth are not invited to comment on pre-determined policies; they are co-authors of decisions that shape peace and security. In this sense, the Bangsamoro experience offers a transferable lesson for ASEAN and beyond: meaningful YPS implementation requires intergenerational partnership as a system, not as a gesture.

5. The BAPYPS response to layered insecurities

The BAPYPS is deliberately cross-sectoral because youth insecurity is multilayered and interconnected. It responds to this complexity by localising key pillars of the YPS agenda: prevention, protection and disengagement and reintegration (United Nations Security Council, 2015).

Prevention focuses on addressing the structural and social conditions that increase young people's vulnerability to violence before harm occurs. In communities where economic desperation intersects with political grievance, recruitment into violent groups can become a tragically rational choice. The BAPYPS therefore prioritises anticipatory socioeconomic interventions, including targeted livelihood support for at

risk youth, access to technical and higher education and digital literacy initiatives to counter online radicalisation. By addressing root causes rather than symptoms, prevention under BAPYPS weakens recruitment drivers while strengthening long-term community resilience.

Protection centres on safeguarding the rights, dignity and safety of young people in situations of conflict, disaster and insecurity. In the Bangsamoro, this is not about militarisation, but about everyday safety: ensuring that adolescents can walk to school without fear, that survivors of violence can access justice and that emergency responses include youth-friendly services.

The BAPYPS embeds protection principles into local disaster risk reduction and conflict response mechanisms so that youth-specific vulnerabilities are systematically addressed rather than treated as an afterthought.

Disengagement and reintegration efforts aim to support young people's safe exit from violence and their meaningful return to civilian, social and economic life. While post-conflict programming often focuses narrowly on former combatants, the BAPYPS adopts a broader lens. Reintegration is approached as a community-based process in which families, religious leaders

and youth organisations co-design pathways for education, vocational training and psychosocial support. Crucially, the plan recognises that reintegration must be economically viable. Youth reintegration initiatives linked to BAPYPS implementation – including cooperative-based livelihood models piloted in the identified major camps of the Moro revolutionary groups that are transitioning into communities – have demonstrated tangible alternatives to violence and contributed to social reintegration beyond individual beneficiaries.

6. From localisation to linkage within national and regional architectures

Localisation carries risks when it becomes isolated from national and global frameworks. The BAPYPS therefore intentionally links up with national and international policy instruments. It aligns with the Philippine NAP-YPS to ensure policy coherence and to leverage national resources and international partnerships for scale. At the same time, it maintains autonomous elements that reflect the political arrangements of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao. This balancing act is

crucial: it allows Bangsamoro to be both local and connected, responsive and resourced. Regionally, Bangsamoro's experience holds lessons for ASEAN. The region needs mechanisms that move beyond visibility to power sharing. If ASEAN member states want youth to participate meaningfully in security work, they must invest in localisation, finance youth initiatives and create institutional pathways for intergenerational decision-making – these are exactly the features that the BAPYPS embeds.

7. The operational tracks of the plan

A plan on a shelf is no plan at all. Putting BAPYPS into practice requires three operational tracks:

1) **Mainstreaming:** The BAPYPS must be integrated into ministry mandates and Local Youth Development Plans to become part of budgeting, programme cycles and service delivery. A series of technical workshops to assist the Bangsamoro government's ministries, offices and Local Government Units to mainstream the BAPYPS are designed for this alignment.

2) **Monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning (MEAL):** A MEAL framework, which is an accompanying document of the BAPYPS, will track outputs and outcomes, reveal implementation bottlenecks, as well as create feedback loops with youth

communities to observe whether the plan meets their needs. This is to hold institutions and partners accountable – and adapt to the evolving needs of young people based on evidence. It will be regularly conducted by the Bangsamoro Youth Commission and the youth-led technical working-group.

3) **Sustained financing and partnerships:** While the creation of the BAPYPS was funded by the UN Development Programme in the Philippines, it is necessary to move beyond that short project cycle. The BAPYPS calls for funding streams and durable partnerships not only in the government but also with development agencies, the private sector and civil society, not least to allow pilot interventions to scale.

8. Lessons for the other contexts

The Bangsamoro experience illustrates how YPS can move from aspiration to practice when legitimacy, intergenerational trust and policy coherence are intentionally designed into peacebuilding processes. Three lessons stand out for ASEAN and fragile and transitioning societies across Asia and beyond:

1) **Localisation with legitimacy:** Local plans must be co-designed with communities to be effective, because legitimacy cannot be imported or legislated from above. In conflict-affected settings, policies that are perceived as externally driven or culturally misaligned often fail at the point of implementation. In Bangsamoro, local

ownership transformed the BAPYPS from a policy document into a shared social commitment, generating trust, compliance and resilience at the community level. This demonstrates that localisation is not merely an administrative adjustment, but a political process through which peace and security agendas gain credibility and staying power.

2) Institutionalised intergenerational mechanisms: Meaningful youth inclusion must be structural rather than episodic and explicitly intergenerational in design. In many societies emerging from conflict, youth participation is confined to consultations, while decision-making authority remains concentrated among elders and institutions. The Bangsamoro experience shows that when intergenerational collaboration is formalised through joint working groups and shared governance mechanisms, it bridges generational divides, balances urgency with wisdom and transforms

potential tension into productive partnership. Institutionalising intergenerational roles ensures continuity, accountability and the transfer of trust across generations – all of which are essential for sustaining YPS commitments beyond political cycles.

3) Linkage across scales: Local action must be connected to national and regional frameworks to be sustainable. Without vertical linkages, locally driven initiatives risk remaining under-resourced, isolated or symbolic. By aligning the BAPYPS with the Philippine NAP-YPS and regional YPS commitments in ASEAN, Bangsamoro youth actors gained access to policy influence, technical support and funding streams beyond the regional level. This multi-scalar linkage enables local experiences to shape broader agendas, while ensuring that global YPS principles are grounded in lived realities.

9. A blueprint that asks us to choose

When I look at the BAPYPS now, I do not see bureaucracy. I see a covenant. It demands courage and persistent engagement from young people; openness to new voices from older people; and accountability and humility from institutions. Above all, it calls on us

– the people of Bangsamoro and our partners – to stop treating youth as future subjects and to start treating them as present citizens.

I started working on YPS because my experience of displacement taught me how

fragile peace can be. I continue because I have seen how youth, when trusted and resourced, transform fragility into resilience. The BAPYPS is our attempt to make that transformation systematic. It is

Bangsamoro's blueprint for unity, intergenerational peace and sustainable progress. If we commit to living it, not just launching it, then the next generation will inherit not only stability but dignity.

The author is responsible for the content of the article. The contribution does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Bundeskanzler-Helmut-Schmidt-Stiftung.

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