

Mindanao (Philippines): Thanks to ESSF and to all the people who supported us in 2020

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To all donors

We would like to thank you for the help we have received from you, via ESSF

We cannot present today a collective “consolidated” assessment of the activities carried out last year thanks, in part, to your support. Mihands [1] is a network of about fifty associations, each with its own expertise, which collaborate to respond in a coordinated way to the multiple humanitarian crises that hit the island of Mindanao, in the south of the Philippines.

Preparing a collective assessment with such a large network is indeed not easy and requires time. Travel is complicated by the health situation (Covid-19), the often deplorable state of the roads, the numerous local armed conflicts (with various causes), military operations, the threat of extrajudicial executions (covered by the presidential impunity granted to the forces of repression), and natural disasters (floods, earthquakes...). The Internet does not work, or works poorly, in many remote areas and does not always allow for zoom-type exchanges.

Without trying to be exhaustive, let us however give some examples of what our network has accomplished.

Action against the Covid-19 pandemic

From September to November 2020, we broadcast via the Tripod Cotabato and Mihands Facebook pages, an information and advice program, the COVID support to Online *Kwentong Kabayanihan* Serie, with five episodes every two weeks.

A face mask production (as well as mats and rugs) was set up in Iligan City with eight urban poor women.

Physically intervening under the conditions of a health crisis required a lot of preparation. We refer you to the report of the humanitarian mission carried out in May 2020 in six communities in the municipalities of Lebak and Kalamansig (Sultan Kudarat province) [2]. Our intervention was based on an adapted visual presentation of the measures to be taken in response to the pandemic.

On this occasion, you will note that aid in the form of basic necessities was distributed and that mediation was carried out in a situation of strong inter-community tensions. As a general rule, a “solidarity mission” led by Mihands will address more than one issue (health, poverty, conflicts...). In this perspective, it can call upon various member associations of our network, according to their specific fields of action.

Emergency relief, training and long-term defense of victims’ rights

Another general rule is that we provide long-term support to the communities concerned, not just first aid, after a humanitarian disaster. We intervene in an emergency after a natural disaster, such as after the earthquake in Bansalan (Davao del Sur) in September 2020. Then, we help the survivors to defend their rights in the long term, as for the victims of typhoon Sendong (2012) whose houses were destroyed.

Victims of a humanitarian disaster can end up living for a long time in centers for displaced persons or, as the living conditions in these camps are often deplorable, with relatives (in this last case, they are ignored by the authorities and we contact them). During the second half of 2020, we intervened in two refugee evacuation centers, following an earthquake, bringing kitchen equipment and tools. We provided various trainings in which about 57 people participated: organic gardening techniques, making liniment and ointment, from medicinal plants, against cold, body aches, skin diseases, a children’s stomach ache (called *kabag sa bata*) (the ointment also protects from mosquitoes). We have also facilitated the “homemade” production of soaps.

Based on the experience gained, we also exchanged with the local authorities (of the *barangays*) and the population on the policy of preparation for future disasters and possible evacuations.

Support for conflict resolution and indigenous populations affected by armed conflict

We supported communities affected by armed conflict, such as in Kalilangan (Iligan) in 2020 and January 2021. [3]

In addition, we continue to assist families displaced during the Marawi war (2017) who have still not been able to return to their homes.

During the Solidarity for Peace Missions, carried out with other coalition and associations, we aim to bring together the conditions for a sustainable resolution of conflicts, the origins of which often depend on the local context or on the increasingly extensive and aggressive intervention of economic lobbies (mining industry, logging industry...). The indigenous mountain peoples (IPs) are the first victims of this predation.

We contributed, in January 2021, to the adoption of a declaration on the recognition of the rights of the Lumad (name of the mountain communities of our island) in the new political entity Bangsamoro led by the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) [4].

Economic and solidarity projects

Even during the period of confinement, we continued to promote economic projects that generate

income for marginalized communities, and solidarity activities:

Soap making by women from the Arumen Tribe (North Cotabato) in June 2020

The deployment of solidarity canteens in nine areas of Mindanao from April to July 2020.

We also provided support for two deaths and two hospitalizations.

Maintaining social mobilization

Finally, we participated in “virtual mobilizations” to express the demands of the social movements, to ensure their visibility during this difficult period and to maintain the pressure on the established powers.

Our network of associations has remained active throughout 2020 (and at the beginning of 2021). Your political and financial support has been particularly valuable to us.

Thank you again,

Mihands

Footnotes

[1] Multi-Stakeholders Initiatives for Humanitarian Action against Disaster

[2] ESSF (article 53454), [Covid-19 \(Mindanao, Philippines\): Humanitarian relief mission to six communities](#).

[3] ESSF (Section 57198), [Solidarity mission in Mindanao \(Philippines\) – Brgy. Kalilangan: We’re Always with You](#).

[4] ESSF (article 56530), [Peoples’ Rights Matter! Peace and Human Rights Advocates Call for a Democratic, Moral and Inclusive Peace in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, Philippines](#).