



Galing Pook Foundation Press Release  
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## **Building Bridges: BARMM Local Government Fellowship Strengthens Regional Collaboration**

The Galing Pook Foundation, in collaboration with The Asia Foundation and the Department of the Interior and Local Government, and with support from the UK Government, successfully convened government leaders from the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) on February 6-7, 2024, at the Marco Polo Hotel in Ortigas, Pasig City.

In his opening message, Galing Pook Chairperson Mel Sarmiento emphasized the significance of the collaborative efforts in BARMM, saying, "The work that we are collaboratively pursuing in BARMM is very relevant and much needed as we are gradually seeing the gains from the Peace Agreement between the Government of the Philippines and the MILF. But at the same time, we also see the many opportunities that still need to be developed to ensure resilient and sustainable peace in the Bangsamoro Region."

Over the course of two days, the fellowship activity facilitated constructive dialogue among participants to deepen inter-LGU collaboration, strengthen bonds between local and regional government officials, promote best practices, and exchange insights on adaptive leadership. This program served as a pivotal platform for sharing experiences and exploring avenues for partnership to further enhance the region's social and economic development landscape.

Interior and Local Government Secretary Benhur Abalos, Jr welcomed the BARMM LGUs through a fellowship dinner where he committed the support of the national government in driving peace and development in the region. Secretary Abalos also commended the initiatives of the mayors and their teams, and recognized the fellowship as a valuable platform for them to share their governance innovations to a larger audience.

The Office of the Presidential Adviser on Peace, Reconciliation, and Unity (OPAPRU) shared its localized normalization initiative in BARMM which echoed the importance of social cohesion and resilience in addressing conflict. "OPAPRU will continue to work with partners in addressing all drivers of conflict, especially with the private sector," remarked Undersecretary Isidro Purisima, "The roadmap for peace process will be owned by the LGUs."



Representatives from various provinces within the region showcased their respective initiatives aimed at fostering social cohesion, resilience, and economic prosperity. Participating provinces included Maguindanao del Norte (Parang, Matanog, Datu Blah Sinsuat), Maguindanao del Sur (Datu Anggal Midtimbang and Datu Hoffer), Lanao del Sur (Taraka, Piagapo, Butig, Pagayawan, and Marawi City), Basilan (Maluso, Lamitan City, and Hadji Muhtamad), Sulu (Lugus and Panglima Estino), and Tawi-Tawi (Simunul and Sibutu). Through presentations and interactive sessions, mayors and their teams emphasized the significance of service delivery, local economic development, and community engagement as pillars of progress.

The presentations highlighted innovative approaches to community development and governance. Notable initiatives included WOW (Women of War) Matanog's economic empowerment program for women in Maguindanao del Norte, Parang's efforts towards becoming the future BARMM capital through improvements in social services and infrastructure, and Datu Blah Sinsuat's commitment to enhancing disaster resilience through capacity development.

In Lanao del Sur, Taraka showcased their adaptive community gardening initiative, while Piagapo emphasized the adoption of a unified madaris curriculum for Muslim education. Meanwhile, island municipalities of Lugus, Panglima Estino, Simunul and Sibutu from the provinces of Sulu and Tawi-Tawi demonstrated community-based tourism initiatives focusing on culture and heritage preservation. Hadji Muhtamad in Basilan showcased their rich aquamarine resources through a sustainable livelihood initiative for their fisherfolk.

Agriculture Undersecretary Zamzamin Ampatuan underscored the pivotal role of these initiatives in driving positive change, highlighting that the collaborative efforts of the LGUs exemplify the spirit of progress and unity that will propel the BARMM region towards a brighter future.

Meanwhile, Tourism Undersecretary Myra Paz Valderrosa-Abubakar applauded the efforts of the LGUs, stating, "I have noticed that a good number of projects are related to tourism, and I'm happy to share that the Department has programs you may take part in, like our Filipino Brand of Service Excellence Training Program, Muslim-Friendly Accommodation/Establishment Recognition program, and our exhaustive list of modules on Tourism Standards, the backbone of our mandate at the Department of Tourism."

Following the presentations, partners from the private sector expressed keen interest in exploring collaborative opportunities and extending support to the showcased initiatives. The networking session provided a valuable platform for further dialogue and potential partnerships, highlighting the collective resolve to propel the BARMM towards prosperity.

This initiative is part of the BRIDGE program, which stands for Building Resilience and Inclusion through Democratic Governance and Engagements in the Bangsamoro.

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