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ROOTED IN **TRUST**

DISCONNECTED: Information Dynamics in BARMM during the COVID-19 Pandemic

AN INFORMATION ECOSYSTEM ASSESSMENT BY INTERNEWS

PHILIPPINES - FEBRUARY, 2021

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



This **Information Ecosystem Assessment (IEA)** aims to study the information environment in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) of the Philippines during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Its main objective is to explore the dynamics of information in the region. The first section of the report discusses the **media landscape in BARMM and its implication on the supply of information** in the region during the pandemic. The second section covers **the information demands and experiences of communities**, particularly those from vulnerable groups such as internally displaced persons (IDP) and remote populations. It also tackles the access to as well as the use and influence of information, along with identifying its trusted sources for the locals. The third section explains the **dynamics between the information supply and**

demand from the community along with their effects on trust, influence, and behaviors. The fourth section outlines **the humanitarian response to COVID-19 and the challenges faced** by different organizations in their efforts to inform the public at large.

This IEA was conducted through a combination of key informant and community interviews, surveys, and extensive desk research. Fieldwork was done through partner organizations while complying to local lockdown guidelines and health protocols. The qualitative and quantitative research were focused on communities in the two largest provinces in BARMM, Lanao del Sur and Maguindanao. The three remote island provinces (Basilan, Sulu, and Tawi-Tawi) were out of scope for fieldwork, though perspective from experts on those areas were captured whenever possible. ...

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KEY FINDINGS

INFORMATION SUPPLY

1. The media landscape in BARMM is a composed of a few national TV outlets and many small community radio outlets. BARMM census data shows only 40% of households have a TV and 25% have a radio. While social media has given community media and local governments new ways to operate in the pandemic, the reach of social media remains limited as most communities (77% of the population live in rural areas) do not have internet access.

2. Access to important information has been difficult for all information providers, from media outlets, to public bodies, to humanitarian organizations. Information on COVID-19 cases and preparations, lockdown restrictions, and government aid was often incomplete and ever-changing, leading to confusion and commotion. This struggle for information was exacerbated by the

Access to important information has been difficult for all information providers, from media outlets, to public bodies, to humanitarian organizations.

poor technical infrastructure in the region and the **absence of two-way feedback systems** across information providers.

3. While there is a variety of community media players in BARMM, the vast majority of them **are not equipped** to supply locally relevant COVID-19 information to the public. Most community radio programs follow a tabloid-news-entertainment hybrid model that is not suited for reporting on public health crises. **Journalists also do not feel enabled to report on COVID-19,** with local officials holding limited press briefings and directing them to data reports instead of taking questions.

INFORMATION DEMAND

1. Communities are well-aware of COVID-19 health protocols such as social distancing, wearing of masks, having good hygiene, and avoiding crowds. These protocols are well known with at least 60% of individuals able to cite at least two recommended health protocols. **While these protocols have become general knowledge and widely-practiced behaviors, rumor analysis and focus groups indicate that communities' attitudes towards these protocols are not ideal.** For example, some feel the need to follow protocols for compliance rather than genuine concern for public health. Some question the rationale behind the protocols (particularly strict lockdown measures) as they disrupt livelihoods.

2. In many communities, COVID-19 remains to be an invisible threat that they do not understand. The ...

●●● public is not clear on the basic aspects of COVID-19 such as modes of transmission, the range of symptoms (especially asymptomatic cases), the nature of testing, hospitalization, and treatments. **In addition to lacking information on COVID-19 itself, information needs outside public health are not being addressed adequately.** The biggest gaps between information supply and demand are on aid, livelihood, and education, all of which were affected by the pandemic.

3. Friends and family, and TV are the two channels of information most accessed by communities. Friends and family are used the most (score of 4.5 / 5.0), followed by TV (score of 4.2 / 5.0), then social media (3.6 / 5.0) and radio (2.4 / 5.0). **Vulnerable groups such as IDP and remote populations heavily rely on face-to-face communication** from local governments and community

leaders. **These channels have been restricted by the pandemic, making them feel further left out or forgotten.** Key informant interviews and fieldwork also suggest that communities retain and act on information better from stories and conversations with friends or family as well as from group discussions led by leaders in their community.

Friends and family, and TV are the two channels of information most accessed by communities.

DYNAMICS

1. **COVID-19 rumors and misinformation are widespread across all groups,** particularly on topics around the COVID-19 related **government's policies and their implementation, stigma and discrimination** towards potential and confirmed COVID-19 ●●●





●●● positive people, and a spectrum of rumors and conspiracies about **COVID-19 being a hoax. Many of these rumors persist because communities remain under-educated about COVID-19** and its risks. Although 78% report feeling concerned or nervous about these rumors circulating in their communities, many shared that the only action available to them is to rely on asking friends and family. **Thus, over the long-term media and information literacy programs are also needed** to empower individuals to navigate the information around them.

2. Leaders in the communities are trusted more widely than other stakeholders: 80% of individuals trust or highly trust religious leaders, compared to 74% in health workers, 72% in national authorities like the Department of Health, 69% in national media, and 61% in international organizations. This suggests that **trust and influence are not automatically granted to authorities, nor purely driven by the information or services provided.** Contributing factors include how the links to communities are sustained, whether they are two-way

relations, and if they are without burden of scandal or perceived agenda.

3. While health experts and health workers are trusted by 80% of Filipinos, it is not the same in BARMM. This is not only consistently verbalized in our interviews (“I trust my ulama over the WHO”) but also observed in community behaviors, such as fearing hospitalization lest they will be denied proper Muslim burial rites. There is therefore **a need to recognize and leverage this unique local realities in BARMM** in the COVID-19 response. ●●●



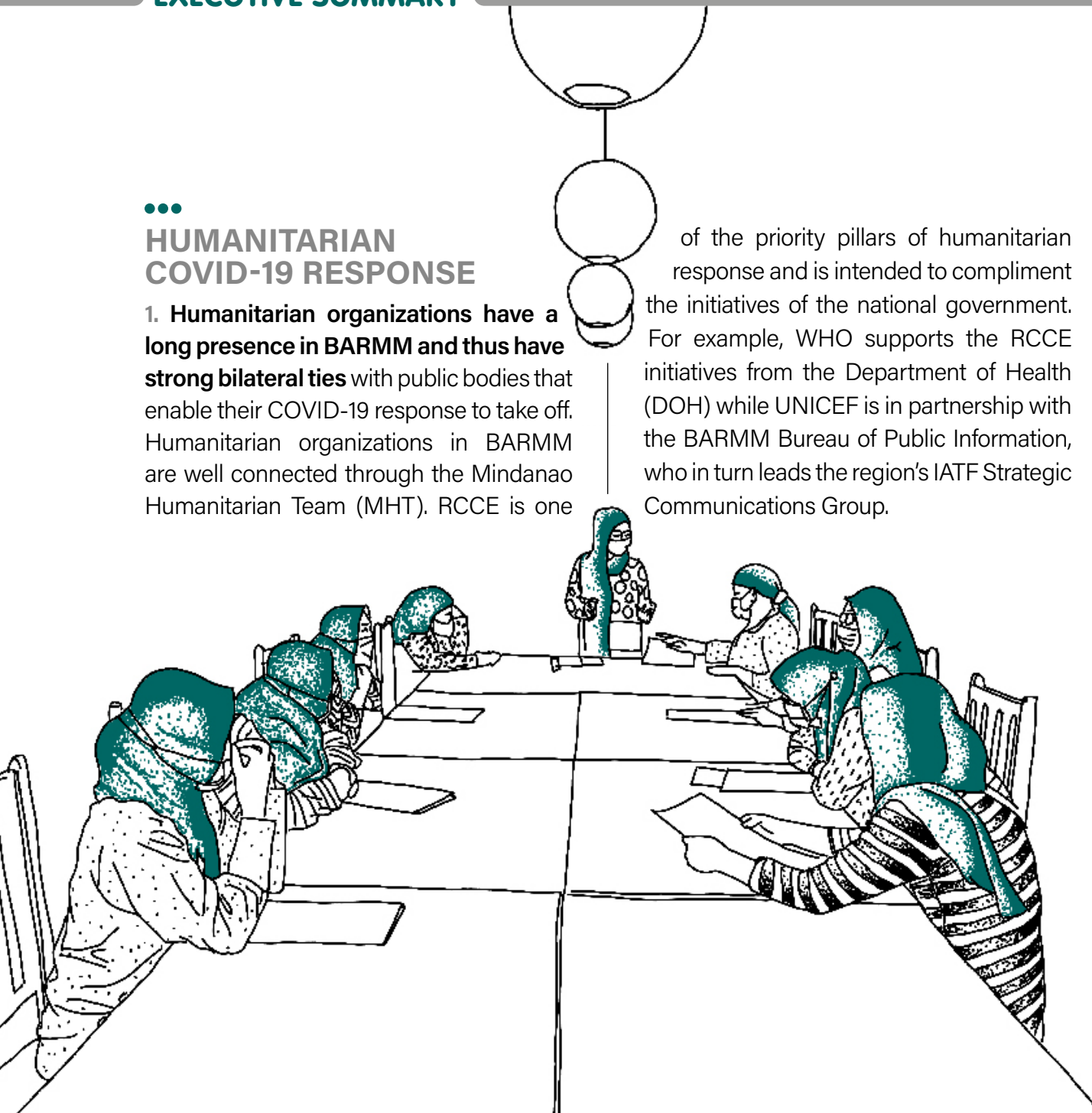
HUMANITARIAN COVID-19 RESPONSE

1. Humanitarian organizations have a long presence in BARMM and thus have strong bilateral ties with public bodies that enable their COVID-19 response to take off. Humanitarian organizations in BARMM are well connected through the Mindanao Humanitarian Team (MHT). RCCE is one

of the priority pillars of humanitarian response and is intended to compliment the initiatives of the national government. For example, WHO supports the RCCE initiatives from the Department of Health (DOH) while UNICEF is in partnership with the BARMM Bureau of Public Information, who in turn leads the region's IATF Strategic Communications Group.

2. The COVID-19 response follows a top-down approach, starting from the national government (IATF, DOH and other agencies) to the local government units at provincial and municipal level. Guidelines in the form of memorandums, executive orders, and other updates are disseminated through press briefings. The DOH also launched an information campaign (known as "BIDA Solusyon sa COVID-19") focusing on teaching health protocols. Yet, **since the expectation is to adapt the resolutions from the national level, many communication initiatives are not localized and lack genuine community engagement.**

3. Although information providers including humanitarian organizations acknowledge the emerging COVID-19 infodemic, there is still no coordinated means and effort to fight misinformation. Community feedback mechanisms were affected by COVID-19 restrictions, limiting organizations to check if information is trickling down to communities.





KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

IMMEDIATE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COVID-19 RESPONSE

There is a **need for regional and local governments and humanitarian organizations to expand COVID-19 communication strategies** to address information needs and issues in BARMM particular context. While the current linear, top-down, and purely public health approach implemented thus far has succeeded in informing the public on minimum health protocols, the public remains under-educated and exposed to the risks of misinformation. We suggest the following:

- Topics – In addition to public health updates and guidelines, cover information needs on livelihood, aid, and education as they are not being addressed in communities.
- Channels – Directly engage communi-

ties via local governmental units and local Public Information Officers on succeeding COVID-19 initiatives, particularly on government aid and vaccination efforts. This is because a purely media-based effort is not enough to penetrate the communities.

- Context – Supplement information from the national and regional government and Department of Health with credible community-centered messages. For

The current linear, top-down, and purely public health approach has succeeded in informing the public on minimum health protocols, but the public remains under-educated and exposed to the risks of misinformation

example, Islamic principles can be used to explain the importance of quarantine or sharing stories COVID-19 recovery from community members to address stigma.

- Content – Explore layman ways of verbally explaining technical aspects of COVID-19 such as transmission, testing, symptoms, and vaccination to communities. This includes translating COVID-19 terms to local dialects.

- Community Engagement using Trusted Sources – Complement COVID-19 messages from public officials and health experts with support from traditional and/or religious leaders at the community-level.

- Community Feedback Mechanisms – Introduce a common service platform for feedback and understanding rumors in communities. These mechanisms should be compatible with various humanitarian initiatives but designed to be inclusive to local actors and other sectors, such as CSOs.





COORDINATION AND COLLABORATION

To improve the COVID-19 response, particularly the flow of information, there is a need to **strengthen coordination and collaboration between these particular stakeholders:**

- **Community media and government offices** such as IATF and MOH – Journalists were often limited to press briefings and public releases. Many government offices are understaffed in terms of Information Officers hence not able to link with the many community media outlets. One approach could be to strengthen groups of journalists in BARMM (for example, the Marawi Broadcasters Association) to advocate for press access and contextualize National and Regional responses to be more locally relevant.

- **Local organizations and established humanitarian organizations** – Local organization should be included in coordination meetings while ensuring

that those from marginalized/GIDA areas (BASULTA) are represented. RCCE initiatives should always be in partnership community-based organizations, in addition to local government units, to promote a community-driven approach.

CAPACITY BUILDING

Over the long-term, the following efforts will sustain a healthier information ecosystem in BARMM:

- **Community-Based Rumor Management** – Capacitate and empower Muslim religious leaders, CSOs, and traditional leaders to incorporate rumor management practices in their existing community touchpoints, such as during masjids prayers and community listening groups.

- **Media and Information Literacy (MIL) programs** – They should specifically include modules on ethics and accountability for local journalists, digital information literacy for the youth sectors, and civic participation for local community influencers. ●

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

■ **BARMM**

Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao

■ **BTA**

Bangsamoro Transition Authority

■ **CORA**

Community Consultation on the Response Actions for COVID-19

■ **COVID-19**

Coronavirus Disease 2019

■ **CSO**

Civil Society Organizations

■ **DOH**

Department of Health

■ **HCT**

Humanitarian Country Team

■ **HRP**

Philippine Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19

■ **IATF**

Inter-Agency Task Force

■ **IEC**

Information, Education, Communication

■ **IDP**

Internally Displaced Person

■ **IP**

Indigenous People

■ **LGU**

Local Government Unit

■ **LSI**

Locally Stranded Individual

■ **MHT**

Mindanao Humanitarian Team

■ **MRL**

Muslim Religious Leaders

■ **NTF**

National Task Force

■ **NUJP**

National Union of Journalists of the Philippines

■ **OFW**

Overseas Filipino Worker

■ **PPE**

Personal Protective Equipment

■ **RCCE**

Risk Communications and Community Engagement

■ **RICAA**

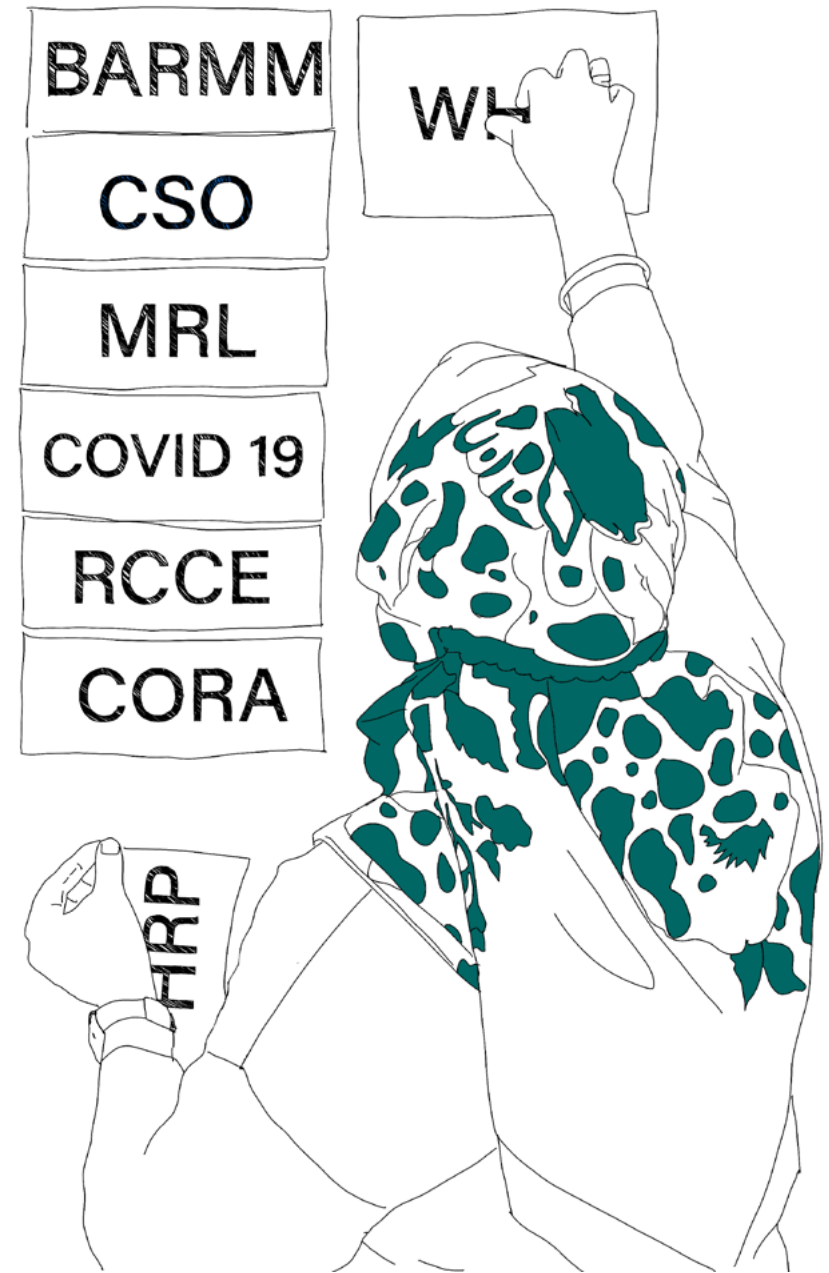
Rapid Information, Communication and Accountability Assessment

■ **UN**

United Nations

■ **WHO**

World Health Organization

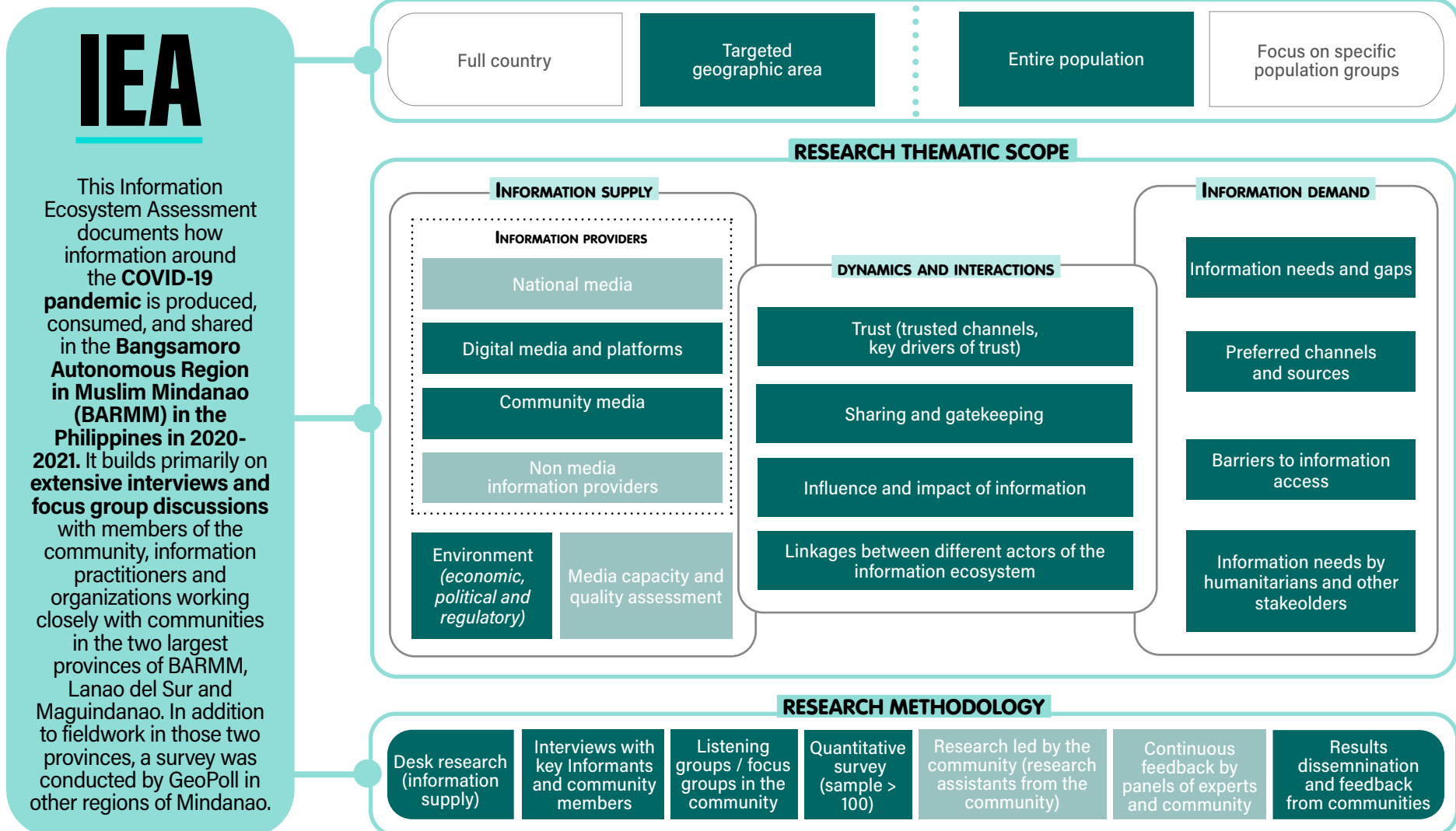


I. RESEARCH SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

LEGEND

- Addressed
- Partially addressed
- Not addressed in this IEA

1.1. RESEARCH SCOPE AND MAIN 'BUILDING BLOCKS' OF THE IEA



1.2. PHILOSOPHY AND METHODOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES

The people we seek to reach often live in diverse, noisy, risky and confusing news and information environments that present them with challenges - as well as choices - as to what information they access, what they trust and what they share and act upon. Internews undertakes Information Ecosystem Assessments (IEA) to better understand unique and localized information needs, gaps, sources and patterns of access and use. Information Ecosystem Assessments offer us an analytical framework to capture all dimensions of the relationship between information consumers and information supply. Gaining precise high-quality insights into these interactions allows us to design truly unique projects that meet people where they are to deliver information through the channels, platforms, formats or people that they prefer and trust.

Our IEA research is based on four key principles:

1- Putting the community at the core of the research -- Internews seeks to be at the core of the communities it serves. For our IEAs, we endeavor to have the community itself do a large part of the research: we hire researchers and enumerators from the community and we rely on community members to disseminate results and gather feedback. When context truly limits our ability to do so (as during the COVID pandemic) we strive to design multiple ways to gather feedback from community members and representatives as a second best alternative.

2- Following a human-centered research design -- We seek to develop a holistic understanding of people's information practices. We understand demand and supply in a broad sense, not narrowly focused on media outlets or traditional media actors. Our scope of analysis is defined by how people actually access and consume information and not by pre-defined categories. We strive to understand both which practices are broadly shared and what are the specific

needs and behaviors of groups, especially the most vulnerable ones.

3- Marrying qualitative and quantitative data -- We seek to combine different types of data to best understand both the supply and demand of information and how the two interact to produce a dynamic ecosystem. We go beyond traditional mapping and audience surveys. Our IEAs rely heavily on a qualitative approach: understanding information practices requires getting up close and personal to people to figure out the best ways to reach them with good information.

4- Integrating research and action - We do not see Information Ecosystem Assessments as an "end product." They are most often the first stage of our project design, providing invaluable context and a way to build a trusting relationship with the community we hope to work with. They are always connected to recommended actions, whether our own, those undertaken by the communities or by our partners and other key stakeholders in the ecosystem. ●

I. RESEARCH SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

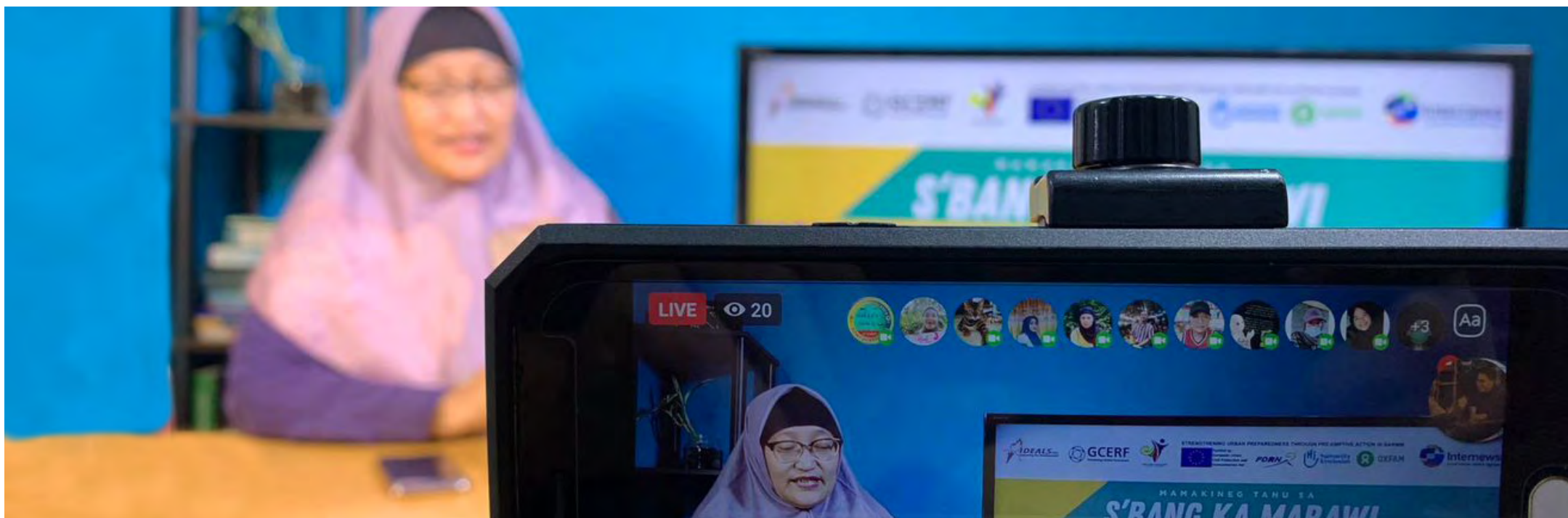
1.3 DATA COLLECTION AND SAMPLE

INFORMANTS	COLLECTION TOOL	SAMPLE	SPECIFICS
Individuals and Communities	Interviews and Focus Groups	52	Community members from Lanao del Sur and Maguindano
	Focus Groups	10	Internally Displaced Person (IDP)
	Survey	278	Random sampling phone-based surveys in the Mindanao region
	Survey	167	Convenience sampling door-to-door survey in rural areas of Maguindano and Lanao del Sur
Informal Representatives & leaders	Interviews	3	CSOs
	Interviews	2	Community-based Religious Leaders
Government Authorities	Interviews	4	Officials from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA) ■ BARMM Bureau of Public Information ■ Provincial government of Lanao del Sur ■ Local Upi Municipality
	Interviews	6	Barangay Workers in Lanao del Sur and Maguindano
Media	Interviews	6	Representatives from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Philippine Daily Inquirer (National Newspaper) ■ National Union of Journalists of the Philippines ■ Mindanao Cross (Regional Newspaper) ■ Mindanews (Regional Online News Provider) ■ Sbang Ka Marawi (Local Radio) ■ Brigada News (Local Radio)
International Agencies and Humanitarian Actors	Interviews	4	OCHA (CoPCE Cluster Lead and BARMM focal) WHO (Risk Communications) IOM (Head of Zamboanga Sub-Office)
Experts (academics, think tanks...)	n/a	0	

1.4 LIMITATIONS TO THE RESEARCH

The pandemic has significantly limited the team's ability to connect to the community in BARMM directly. In addition to internet connectivity issues, parts of Lanao del Sur and Maguindano are still under some form of lockdown during the fieldwork period. We have addressed this through active collaboration with our partners on the ground and an intentional sampling design in our fieldwork. The partners shared detailed summaries, attended debrief sessions, and shared recordings on their interactions with the community when permission granted. In terms of information stakeholders, the team was not able get firsthand perspective from TV outlets, from national media associations, from national authorities (such as the IATF), and ...

I. RESEARCH SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY



●●● from government health authorities (the Department of Health). Other main limitations of this research included:

■ **Geographic limitations:** All of the quantitative and qualitative fieldwork was conducted in Lanao del Sur and Maguindanao. Fieldwork was not in scope for the island provinces of BARMM (Basilan, Sulu, and Tawi-Tawi). Nevertheless, perspective from experts with experience in those areas were

captured whenever possible.

■ **Time frame limitations:** The research was produced within 2 months and has therefore condensed Internews IEA methodological phases into a simplified IEA phase-based methodology.

■ **Field work limitations:** Although the fieldwork covered a good representative sample of the target population, the vast majority of the interviews and focus group discussion were conducted by In-

ternews' project partners rather than the country research lead itself. This may result in some information lost and potential bias on the findings.

■ **Network mapping limitation:** The network mapping conducted in this evaluation is a pilot test with a limited number of responses and shall therefore be considered just a first step for further development in future ongoing IEA efforts. ●

II. COUNTRY PROFILE

2.1 COUNTRY PROFILE INDICATORS

		Philippines
Press related index	Civil liberties (including freedom of expression)	34/60
	Press freedom index 2019 (out of 180 countries)	134
	Press freedom index 2020 (out of 180 countries)	↓ 136

* Source civil rights: freedom house global freedom status

** Source index ranking: Reporters without borders

Freedom on the net	Obstacles to access (0=Worst; 25=Best)	16
	Limits on content (0=Worst; 35=Best)	26
	Violation of user rights (0=Worst; 30=Best)	22
	Freedom on the net score 2019	66
	Freedom on the net score 2020	↓ 64

* Source: Freedom house freedom on the net

ICTs	Internet penetration rate	60.1%
	Mobile phone penetration	110.1%

* Source: United Nations Human Development Reports

Key demographic, social and political factors	Total population (millions)	106.7
	Population in multidimensional poverty (% headcount)	7.41%
	Human development index (rank)	0.712 (106)
	Rural population (%)	53.1%
	Illiteracy rate**	3.6%
	Refugees by country of origin	0.5
	Elections	2022

* Source: United Nations Human Development Reports

** Literacy is understood as the ability to read and write a short simple statement of everyday life

COVID-19	Confirmed cases	431.630
	Deaths	8392

* Source: World Health Organisation <https://covid19.who.int/> - as of Decembre 1st 2020

LEGEND

● Not free ● Partly free

The Philippines is an archipelagic country situated in Southeast Asia, with a total population of 100 million. In 2018, the poverty incidence is estimated to be at 16.7% which translates to about 17.7 million Filipinos. The highest were among farmers, fisherfolks, individuals

residing in rural areas and children who belong to families with low poverty thresholds.

The BARMM in the Philippines is made up of five provinces within the Philippines: Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao and the island provinces of Basilan (excluding Isabela City),

Sulu, and Tawi-Tawi, including two cities (Lamitan in Basilan and Marawi in Lanao Del Sur), 116 municipalities and 2,490 barangays. The population was 3.8 million as of the 2015 Census. The seat of government is in Cotabato City, Region XII, which is outside the jurisdiction of BARMM.

●●● The provinces of Maguindanao and Lanao del Sur are situated on the island of Mindanao, the largest of the Philippines' many islands. The other three provinces, Basilan, Sulu, and TawiTawi, form part of the Sulu archipelago which stretches from the tip of the Zamboanga Peninsula on the north to the island of Borneo in the south. These three provinces are made up of small islands which represent the fringes of a belt of volcanoes. Together, the five provinces of the BARMM region cover an area of 26,974 km². Lanao del Sur is the largest of the five provinces, with a total land area of 13,494.4 sq. km², stretching along the coast and into the hinterland. Maguindanao, the second largest province, has a total land area of 5,970.5 km². While the interior of the province is heavily forested, the coastal areas are low lying and prone to tsunamis and flooding.

In relation to this, the government continues to face threats from several armed

The government continues to face threats from several armed groups originating from the insurgent group in BARMM and other areas in Mindanao

groups originating from the insurgent group in BARMM and other areas in Mindanao. In 2017, an armed confrontation between government forces and pro-ISIS militants in Marawi City displaced 98% of the city's total population or 370,000 individuals. However, prior to this devastating event, there have already been existing conflicts and security threats in Mindanao resulting in the displacement of conflict-afflicted and marginalized families and individuals. In fact, September 2020 data showed that 277,846 individuals are still displaced in Mindanao, 33% of whom (92,765) are from the Bangsamoro

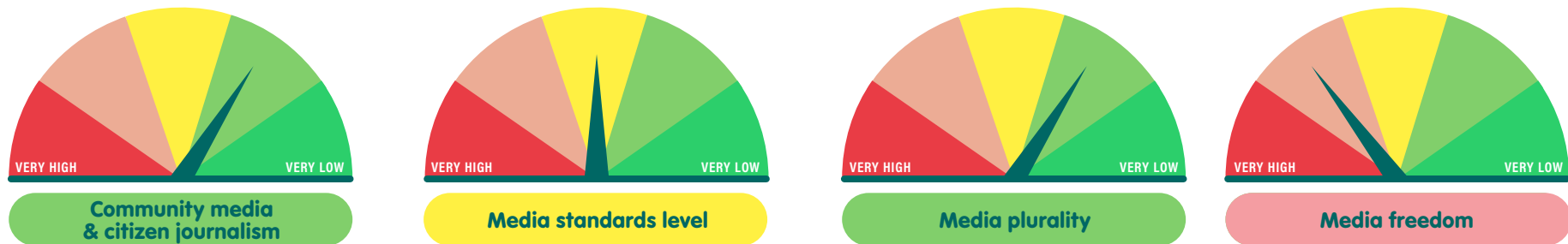
Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). Furthermore, 25,367 families (approximately 126,835 individuals) directly affected by the Marawi Siege are still displaced up to the present.

These displaced families and individuals, sheltered in evacuation centers and/or transitory shelters, are most at-risk for acquiring infectious diseases such as the COVID-19 virus due to difficulties in accessing 1) water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) facilities, 2) health services, and 3) accurate information. Furthermore, the loss of livelihood among these families further exacerbates their socio-economic conditions.

English and Filipino are the official languages of the Philippines. BARMM recognizes 13 languages spoken by the tri-people (i.e. Muslims, Christians, and Lumad or Indigenous peoples) of the Bangsamoro. ●

III. INFORMATION SUPPLY: information providers landscape review

(how information is produced and distributed)



Source: Internews 2020

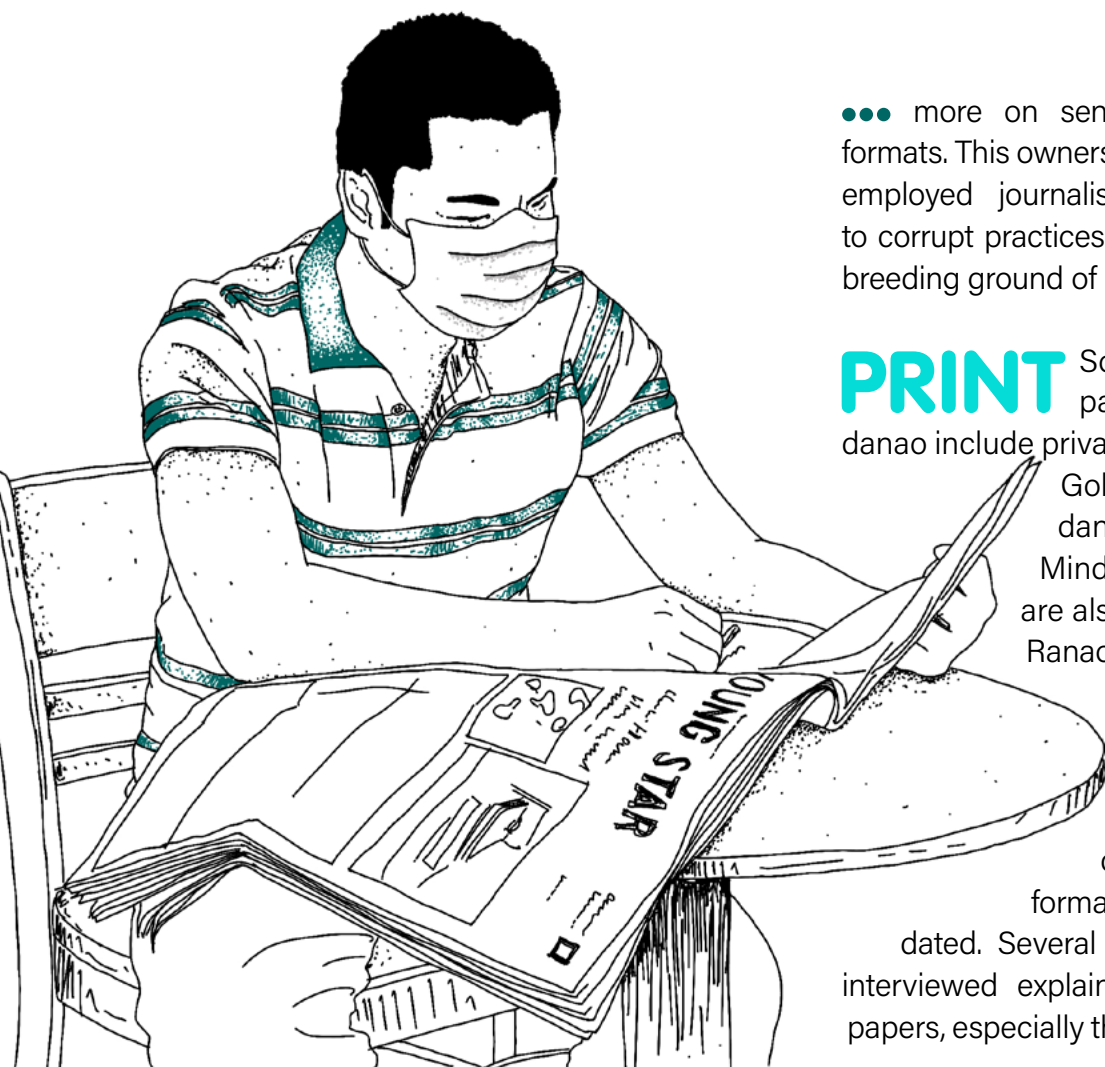
3.1 MEDIA PROVIDERS

Highlights of the freedom of expression environment, main stakeholders and key outlets in the country, their influencers and financiers.

In the 2020, Reuters Institute Digital News Report found that the majority of Filipinos access information through social media (68%) and TV (66%). Census data on BARMM showed that 40% of households have a TV and 25% have a radio.

TV National media giants ABS-CBN and GMA 7 dominate the TV market both in terms of entertainment, journalism, and advertising revenue. Both corporations are publicly listed on the Philippine Stock Exchange and operate other media-related subsidiaries like movie production. In Mindanao, these two networks account for 80% of TV viewership. Their primetime national news programs each reach about 15% of TV audiences in the region. Both networks broadcast and stream a News Show, specific to Mindanao daily in local dialects (e.g. Bisaya/Cebuano and Chavacano) using information gathered from various satellite offices in Mindanao.

RADIO Majority of Philippines radio stations are owned by a single corporation or broadcast network. The biggest is the privately-owned Radio Mindanao Network, followed by the government-owned Philippine Broadcasting Service and the privately-owned GMA Network. There are 18 AM and 25 FM radio stations broadcasting in BARMM. Because of the significant investment required to operate AM radio stations, more radio stations are shifting to FM frequencies. There is also a proliferation of community stations, owned and sometimes funded by private individuals and politicians. In general, they focus ●●●



... more on sensational, tabloid-style formats. This ownership model leaves their employed journalists highly vulnerable to corrupt practices and likely results in a breeding ground of misinformation.

PRINT Some of the main newspapers available in Mindanao include privately owned Mindanao Gold Star Daily, Mindanao Daily News and Mindanao Times. All three are also available online.

Ranao Star, the only newspaper in Marawi City, is only published monthly so by the time it reaches the communities, the information is usually outdated. Several of the journalists we interviewed explained that local newspapers, especially those in less developed

Media freedom and free expression have become casualties of the 'war' against the COVID-19 pandemic that has led to severe restrictions on news coverage and economic difficulties for newspapers.

areas like BARMM, struggle to generate advertising and subscription revenues. Thus, they look to funding from politicians who expect them to cover "achievements" of the local government.

The pandemic has drastically affected the operations of print media in Mindanao, as the consequential economic downturn has made operating the platforms unsustainable. For example, SunStar Cagayan de Oro, had to stop its print operations and close its newsroom on 30 June 2020 after 25 years of publishing. Just a few weeks later, Mindanao Daily Mirror, a 70-year-old publication based in Davao City also made its last issue on 3 July 2020.



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LEGAL ENVIRONMENT

All broadcasting companies in the Philippines are required to have certificates of public convenience and necessity from the National Telecommunications Commission, and a legislative franchise from congress to operate. Print publications need only to register as business enterprises. The powers of the National Telecommunications Commission (NTC) are limited to allocating frequencies to TV and radio stations, but do not extend to supervise over content and operations.

Both NTC and the Philippine Congress were recently criticized for not granting a franchise renewal to ABS-CBN, the country's largest media company. On May 5, 2020, ABS-CBN's TV and radio channels were shut-down after lawmakers voted not to allow the network to renew its franchise. Reports show 36% of ABS-CBN viewers in the country stopped watching TV altogether,

even as the country was 3 months into the pandemic . This not only posed a threat to the country's press freedom but also a hit on at-risk communities' access to life-saving information, in general and in relation to COVID-19.

The Philippine Constitution has acknowledged free expression and press freedom, although this has not always ensured effective protection of these rights. The Philippine Constitution has acknowledged free expression and press freedom, although this has not always ensured effective protection of these rights. The Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ) reported "media freedom and free expression have become casualties of the 'war' against the COVID-19 pandemic that has led to severe restrictions on news coverage and economic difficulties for newspapers." In BARMM, our key informants feel most radio outlets are "not as critical" of local governments' response to COVID-19. Most outlets simply re-echo information and offer little critical commentary. ●

3.2 DIGITAL MEDIA LANDSCAPE

Infrastructure and reach, consumption habits, and main social networks.

In a report from The ASEAN Post, Philippines have the highest increase in social media use during the pandemic. With strict lockdown measures due to COVID-19 and the shutdown of ABS-CBN network, the majority of the population who are able to access to the internet have heavily depended on social media to access important information like pandemic health advisories, news reports, government assistance, programs, etc. Among those with internet access, the majority (60-70%) said that they get COVID-19 information mainly from online sources rather than offline channels. Among online platforms, the top social media and messaging applications used for news are Facebook (73%), YouTube (49%), and Facebook Messenger (33%).

The same trends on increased digital pivoting is true in BARMM. However, only 23% of BARMM populations live in urban areas with reliable, regular internet access. Even in key cities like Marawi, limitations on infrastructure means undependable broadband and mobile signal. BARMM users only have access to 4G connectivity

The majority of the population who are able to access to the internet have heavily depended on social media to access important information like pandemic health advisories, news reports, government assistance programs.

about 40% of the time . In addition, where 4G is available, Mindanao internet speeds are often at 50-60% of the speed in Metro Manila . Internet access is not available at all in remote, rural areas.

Local government, radio and TV programs are also increasingly going digital by streaming and posting contents on their organization's respective social media pages. For example, the Bangsamoro Government Facebook page has over 60,000 followers with live audiences of 3000 – 7000 at any one time. Local radio stations (such as Radyo Pilipinas Marawi, Sbang ka Marawi, Cool FM) have allocated time slots to discuss basic information and policies on COVID-19, including inviting speakers from the IATF, government officials, and the Provincial Ulama Council. These radio shows are interactive sessions since they are livestreamed on Facebook, where the audience can ask questions ●●●

III. INFORMATION SUPPLY



●●● or provide feedback through the comment section. While social media has been a game-changer for providing breaking news and public announcements to the general population, it was also instrumental in spreading misinformation about COVID-19 as reported by the key informants and as collected in rumor tracking.

MindaNews is a Mindanao-wide online news provider under the Mindanao Institute of Journalism. Its cooperative is composed of independent journalists producing publications online, training and research services. Due to the limitations brought about by the pandemic, media outlets have relied on citizen journalists for information which may not always

provide accurate representation of what is happening on the ground. Nevertheless, MindaNews has been able to maintain quality reporting over the years and even during the pandemic. It has managed to publish a variety of reports around the local government's COVID-19 response, status of health care facilities and relevant updates on infections. ●

3.3 MEDIA AND JOURNALIST ASSOCIATIONS AND REGULATORS

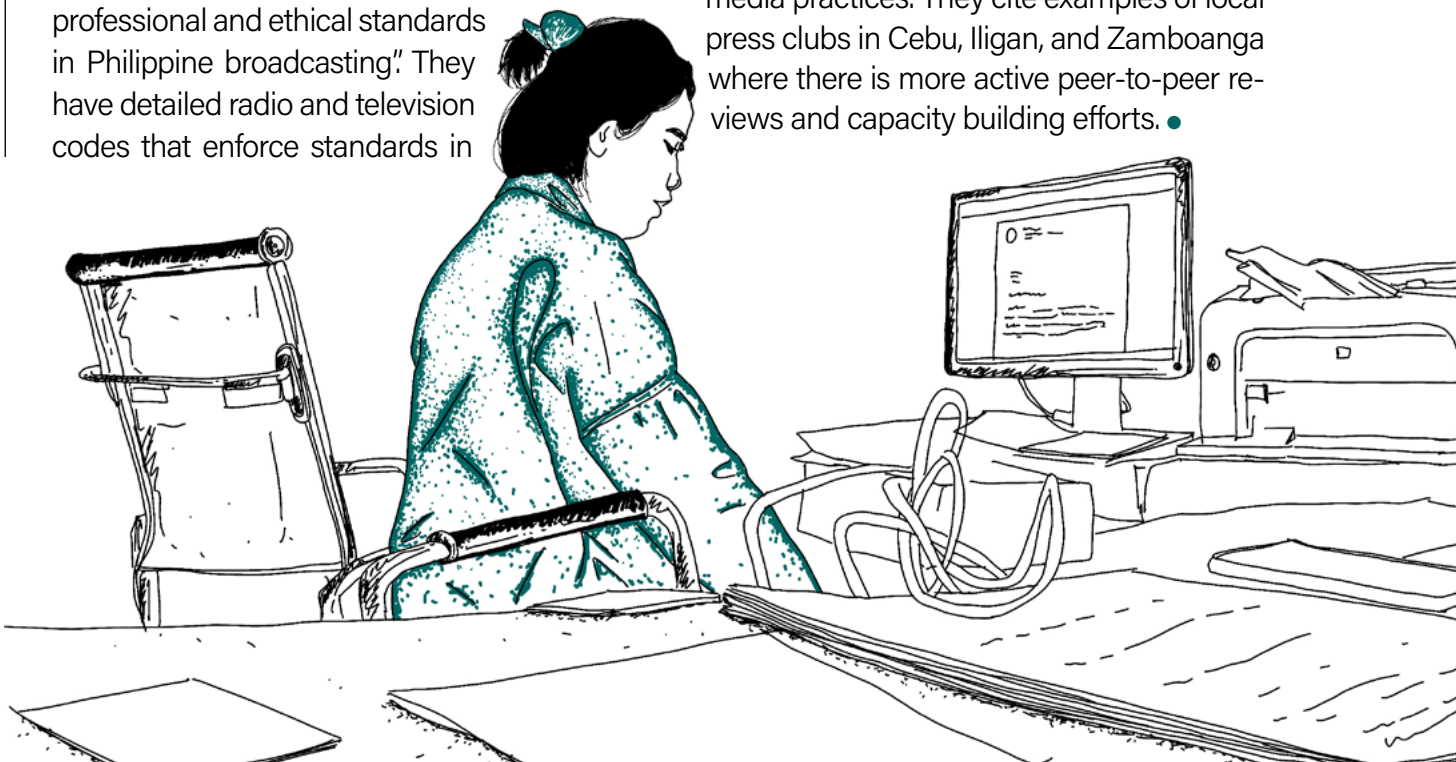
Associations and governance bodies in the media sector and their influence and representativeness of the sector.

REGIONAL The National Union of Journalists of the Philippines (NUJP) is a national organization with a chapter in Mindanao including in Davao, Cagayan de Oro, Bukidnon, Lanao del Norte and Zamboanga. The NUJP has provided safety training to its members all over the region with the Safety Officer/Lead is strategically based in Davao City to provide support on media welfare and capacity building. The Presidential Communications Operation Office launched a Mindanao Media Hub began operating in December 2020. The structure will house government-owned and operated TV, radio, and print offices that will serve as the information center and press briefing hub for the Philippine Information

Agency. The hub also seeks to become a training ground for the next-generation of media practitioners and professionals in the region and in the country.

NATIONAL The KBP (Kapisanan ng mga Broadcaster ng Pilipinas or the Association of Philippine Broadcasters) is the biggest self-regulatory media association in the country. The KBP administers a “system of self-discipline among member radio and TV stations as a way of promoting higher professional and ethical standards in Philippine broadcasting.” They have detailed radio and television codes that enforce standards in

programming, advertising, and trade. However, not all media outlets are part of the association; there are only 121 KBP members out of the thousands of stations in the country. GMA 7, the second biggest TV network for example, withdrew in 2003. Even then, fines and sanctions are minimal (below USD 1000) and there is difficulty enforcing these codes given the vast number of radio and TV stations in the country. Thus, the journalists we interviewed feel that local media associations or “press clubs” can play a bigger role in training and enforcing responsible media practices. They cite examples of local press clubs in Cebu, Iligan, and Zamboanga where there is more active peer-to-peer reviews and capacity building efforts. ●





3.4 LOCAL RELEVANCE OF INFORMATION

Local topics of interest and status of community media

In BARMM, information providers are mostly limited to privately-owned stations which can have specific political biases. Local media outlets interviewees confirmed that unlike reporting about local topics of interest related to the armed conflict, they are less experienced with the pandemic and infodemic in the local context and worldwide.

In this setting, far flung communities not reached by radio or mobile signal, rely on two-way radios managed by the military as they have done so to find out “breaking news” on any attacks and calamities in their immediate areas.

Information providers are mostly limited to privately-owned stations which can have specific political biases

Most community news outlets have limited capacity in basic fact-checking and mostly reply on tabloid-style reporting, delivering fast - but not always accurate and verified news. COVID-19 related information is provided solely by national health department before

being cascaded to the region, city and barangay respectively. This disrupts the flow of timely information when it is needed the most. Some journalists we interviewed shared this one-way flow of information is not enough. They have had to go directly to health officials and hospitals to get the real stories. This extra legwork puts them further at risk and even then not obtaining in several cases useful, timely or adequate information. ●

3.5 MEDIA CAPACITY AND INFORMATION QUALITY

Journalism training and education facilities and average professional standards and challenges

In Marawi, our key informants reported that most radio broadcasters in the area are less equipped to spot and address misinformation as they have limited professional training on media ethics, investigative journalism, triangulation of evidence, etc. In reality, there are often no hard qualifications to become a journalist and they mention how many try to appear as trained journalists (for example, by modulating their voices to sound like established radio anchors). Peer-to-peer initiatives are available and or being

Most radio broadcasters in the area are less equipped to spot and address misinformation as they have limited professional training on media ethics, investigative journalism, triangulation of evidence...

provided by media associations but may not be sustainable for the long term.

During the key informant interviews, media workers expressed their concern about the health and safety risks posed by covering issues on COVID-19. With media networks unable to provide health and safety provisions for its workers, journalists do not have full mobility required to

be able to verify and gather sources. In addition, government lockdowns limit the movement of journalists to get firsthand information. Local journalists have tried to adapt and continue reporting from their homes despite technical struggles like poor network connections and the lack of professional audio-visual equipment.

Local journalists' limited ability and capacity to address misinformation is on full display in the pandemic. Our informants cite examples of irresponsible sharing on social media by journalists under the guise of fishing for information or the guise of sharing their own opinions. With limited efforts from the local authorities to address misinformation on COVID-19, journalists on their own do not have access to sources that can quash rumors in a credible and timely manner. ●



3.6 COVID 19 INFORMATION COORDINATION MECHANISMS

Specific COVID-19 quality standards and linkages between stakeholders

The government through the national Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF) remains to be the central information source for

all COVID-related information. The local (province/city level) DOH and WHO offices' guidance is disseminated down to different towns and municipalities. During the pandemic, there were conflicting statements by different agency leads, which resulted in confusing information interpretation in different provinces especially around lockdown guidelines. For in-person press briefings, journalists are required to provide media accreditation passes in compliance with the strict home quarantine directives.

This was and continues to be a point of contention with media groups including those in Mindanao as it is perceived to be an official means to deprive the media of access to information. Moreover, most authorities do not take questions from journalists during press briefings (both online and in-person).

Most of the journalists we interviewed feel authorities are not doing enough to keep the public informed. COVID-19 Updates focus on case counts and ●●●

III. INFORMATION SUPPLY

●●● other statistics with limited context and explanation behind the data. At the local level, communication initiatives are not prioritized due to limited funding. The pandemic has also affected the Bangsamoro government transition process and thus many localities do not have public information officers.

In relation to the main stakeholders' interaction in the COVID-19 infodemic, the research has produced a first step towards a network mapping assessment in the media sector, asking informants about the main nodes of interaction. According to the responses provided in the interviews, and as reflected in the table below, media outlets main nodes of interaction are centered around engaging with public bodies and other media sector stakeholders. They do not include a representative sample of international organizations (including humanitarian organizations) and/or community representatives.

Moreover, the links with public bodies is noticeably stronger with regional and local authorities than with national level ●●●

Table 2. Media outlets COVID-19 principal interaction nodes

		AVG MEDIA
UN agencies	INTERNATIONAL	2.50
Multilateral organisations (other than UN)	INTERNATIONAL	2.00
Countries (other States donors)	INTERNATIONAL	1.00
Other international	INTERNATIONAL	2.00
Ministry of information/Communication	NATIONAL	3.00
Ministry of Health	NATIONAL	4.67
Ministry of Disaster Management (or similar)	NATIONAL	4.00
Other Ministries or executive bodies	NATIONAL	2.00
Regional/local level authorities	NATIONAL	5.00
Media regulatory authorities	NATIONAL	2.00
Other public bodies	NATIONAL	1.00
Community media representatives	MEDIA	3.33
Media associations	MEDIA	3.00
Public media	MEDIA	5.00
Commercial media	MEDIA	5.00
Community leaders	CIVIL SOCIETY	3.33
Religious leaders	CIVIL SOCIETY	3.67
Online platforms (private sector) – search engines	CIVIL SOCIETY	3.00
Key constituencies (women, youth)	CIVIL SOCIETY	3.67
Other private	CIVIL SOCIETY	1.33

Source: Interviews 2020





... authorities (as expected), despite still in the radar of media outlets (both the Ministry of health and the Ministry of Disaster Management or the equivalent). Out of other media stakeholders connected, both public and commercial local media seem to have the best links amongst the consulted outlets with a high intensity of interaction (average of 5 over 5) and wide spread of such contacts between respondents (all of them have them in their nets as key stakeholders). On the other hand, community media is only referred by one respondent as a high intensity contact in their nets. This further indicates that the reach and activities of community media (for example, 2-way radio) is limited compared to larger media outlets. Stakeholders less connected in terms of average interaction intensity and stand-alone

Most authorities do not take questions from journalists during press briefings

connections with high intensity stakeholders show community representatives and international organizations are left out of the media networks assessed. Only one media respondent (local media) showed good connections with community information nodes and another with international organizations. These responses show the need of further efforts on communication processes with communities that still seem disconnected from average media outlets and also bridging efforts with humanitarian international organizations that are coordinating the humanitarian response. ●

IV. INFORMATION DEMAND

(information communities needs most and how they access it)



4.1 INFORMATION NEEDS AND GAPS

General and COVID-19 specific information needs

According to the fieldwork and in both surveys (Mindanao region and BARMM specific), communities indicated that some but not all of their information needs are being met. In the Mindanao-wide phone survey, 33% feel that the information “covers basic needs” and 17% feel that they “get the most common information on general topics.” Similarly,

in our door-to-door survey in Lanao del Sur and Mindanao, 47% reported to be “informed but still have some questions.”

The topics needed by the community are consistent across urban and rural groups, ages and gender as well. The biggest concern is of course the many different aspects of COVID-19 such as treatments (77%), local updates (63%), prevention (59%), and restrictions on non-essential activities (47%). Outside COVID-19 specific concerns, the communities’ information needs center on livelihood, humanitarian aid, and/or government support (68%) followed by questions on education and schooling (61%).

According to the focus groups and interviews carried out, many respondents were frustrated, stressed, or tired of the “new normal” hence they were anxious of the pandemic to end. Thus, many of their questions were framed in the context of looking towards the future. On health and public safety, most members of the community wanted to learn when the pandemic would end and whether COVID-19 is actually real. On aid, many asked questions about the government’s Social Amelioration Program (SAP): why they did not receive help and when the government would release more funding. Relief operations were especially a pronounced concern in our focus groups in rural areas and in IDP communities. (“*We are going to die of hunger not from this pandemic.*”). On education, parents and the youth wanted to know when modular learning would end and in-person classes would be allowed. Finally, majority of individuals wanted to know when they would be allowed to return to their livelihood. (“*If the government won’t let me sell my products, they should give us allowance every day to survive!*” / “*Many of my constituents are asking me if they can go abroad to work already.*”) ●●●

IV. INFORMATION DEMAND

●●● Not all of these concerns are being addressed, as shown in Table 3. BARMM seems to be in a different place in terms of COVID-19 knowledge compared to the rest of Mindanao. Whereas the rest of Mindanao needs more information

on COVID-19 treatment (77%), BARMM still needs information to help them understand COVID-19 (83%). This is consistent with our qualitative findings that many in the community want to know where the virus came from and if it is a real disease, especially when the patients are asymptomatic. The impact of the lack of information

on these topics is that there is a disconnect between communities' motives and behaviors. For example, individuals wear masks because they want to go out and not necessarily because they are concerned of infection. While communities know about physical

distancing, many let their guards down during gatherings such as sermons in mosques.

Most of the information trickling down to communities seem to be regarding restrictions or lockdowns (4.1/5), while information

that is in much higher demand like education (3.5 / 5) and aid (3.1/5) are lacking. (*"We are far from the municipality so if we don't protest, I don't think we will get relief operations."*) On education, many parents and students rely on their own school officials for updates. These concerns are known to information providers. Local radio journalist interviewees often receive

concerns via text messages, while the Director for the Bureau of Public Information get messages on Facebook asking about aid. Barangay officials are constantly hounded about when the community can return to their livelihood and see their relatives. ●

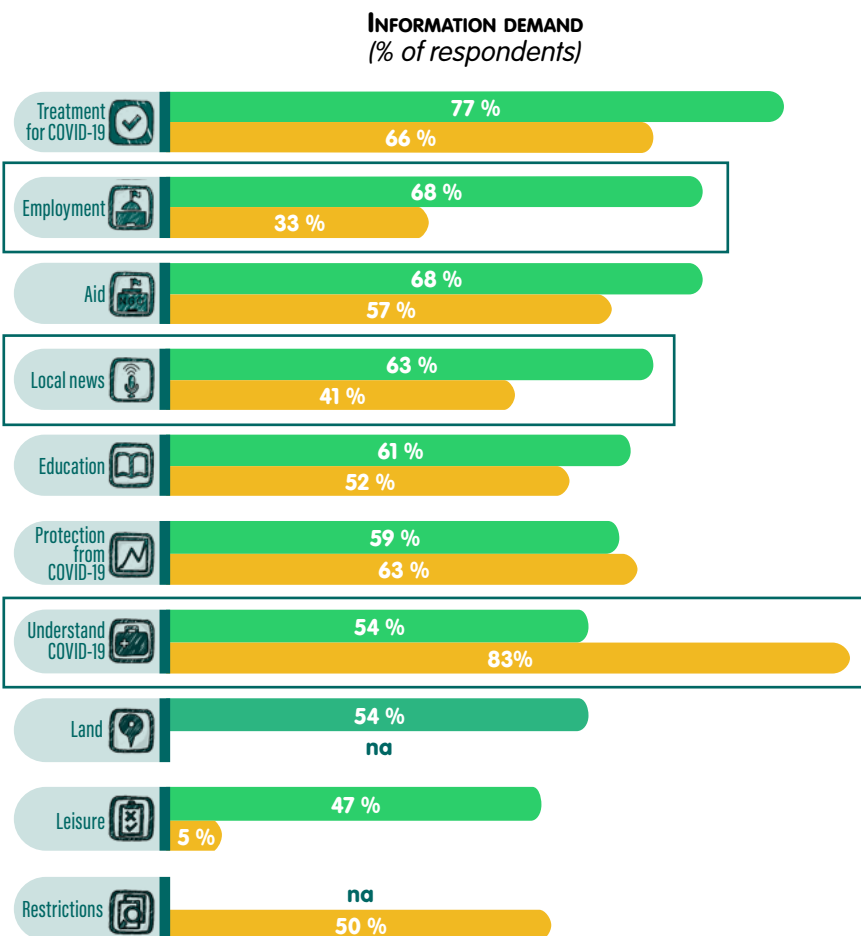
33%
FEEL THE INFORMATION
"COVERS BASIC NEEDS" AND

17%
FEEL THEY "GET THE MOST
COMMON INFORMATION ON
GENERAL TOPICS."

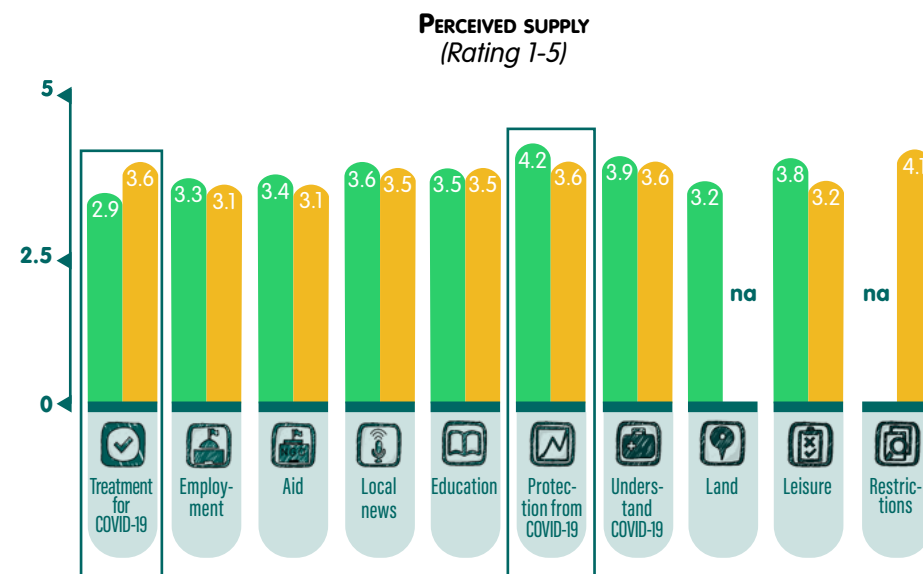


IV. INFORMATION DEMAND

Table 3. Information Demands vs Perceived Information Supply



Boxed : significant difference between Mindanao and BARMM



Source: Internews 2020

4.2 ACCESS - CHANNELS AND SOURCES

In the Mindanao region survey, most individuals use TV and social media (both score of 4.0 / 5.0) most often to access COVID information, followed closely by face-to-face channels like friends, family, or community events (score of 3.7 / 5.0). In BARMM, census data shows only 40% of households have a TV and 25% have a radio, while the majority lack access to the internet (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2020). In BARMM, friends and family are used the most (score of 4.5 / 5.0), followed by TV

(score of 4.2 / 5.0), then social media (3.6 / 5.0) and radio (2.4 / 5.0). This is consistent with another study conducted as part of the Initiative for Media Freedom, where news organizations and friends or family are the primary sources for information in BARMM. Notably, this study finds that BARMM also had the biggest share of respondents who secure information from public personalities and religious leaders compared to other parts of the country.

In urban areas, most individuals follow mainstream media outlets' Facebook pages (such as ABS-CBN) and the Facebook pages of their LGU to stay updated. Those who have access to the

internet prefer simple posts on Facebook, since connections are typically slow for videos. In rural areas, TV, radio (including two-way radio like SAKSI), printed materials, and in-person announcements are more common. The preferred delivery is in-person verbally through community assemblies (*pulong pulong* or *masjid*) or during sermons at the mosque. ("Most don't read flyers or tarpaulin.") Another individual from the community shared that because they are hesitant to go out, they are not able to see many of the posters in the municipal or barangay health clinic. Hence, they prefer authorities to reach out to them directly or through their religious gatherings. ●

FRIENDS AND FAMILY
ARE USED THE MOST.
SCORE OF:
4.5/5.0

FOLLOWED BY TV
SCORE OF:
4.2/5.0

THEN SOCIAL MEDIA
SCORE OF:
3.6/5.0

AND RADIO
SCORE OF:
2.4/5.0



4.3 MAIN DETERMINANTS AND BARRIERS TO ACCESSING INFORMATION

Languages and (media) literacy, context and culture

According to the Philippines Statistics Authority, Muslims comprise more than 90 per cent of the total population. Yet, BARMM, like the rest of Mindanao, is ethnically diverse. The main languages in Lanao del Sur and Maguindanao are Maguindanao, Maranao, Cebuano, and Tagalog. The information shared on local radio and in-person through local assemblies are always in these local languages. On TV, most information from the major media outlets are in Tagalog or English. Communication from the local governments and on social media often have a mix of English and local dialects.

In our focus groups and interviews, language did not come as a barrier to information: 82% said that they normally or always get the information in their preferred language.

Specific to covering COVID-19, information providers have to work harder to explain medical and scientific terminologies in simpler terms that their audiences can understand. A public official shared that since the average educational attainment is low, it is understandable why appeals to religious sensibilities and personal relationships may be more relatable to communities compared to a straight explanation of science and facts. A key informant shared that adopting more casual conversational tone or a group dialogue format can be more effective and accessible approach compared to broadcasting information. BARMM communities have a culture of regularly gathering and discussing issues in their mosques. In addition, they feel that acknowledging the local realities and context is an ●●●

IV. INFORMATION DEMAND

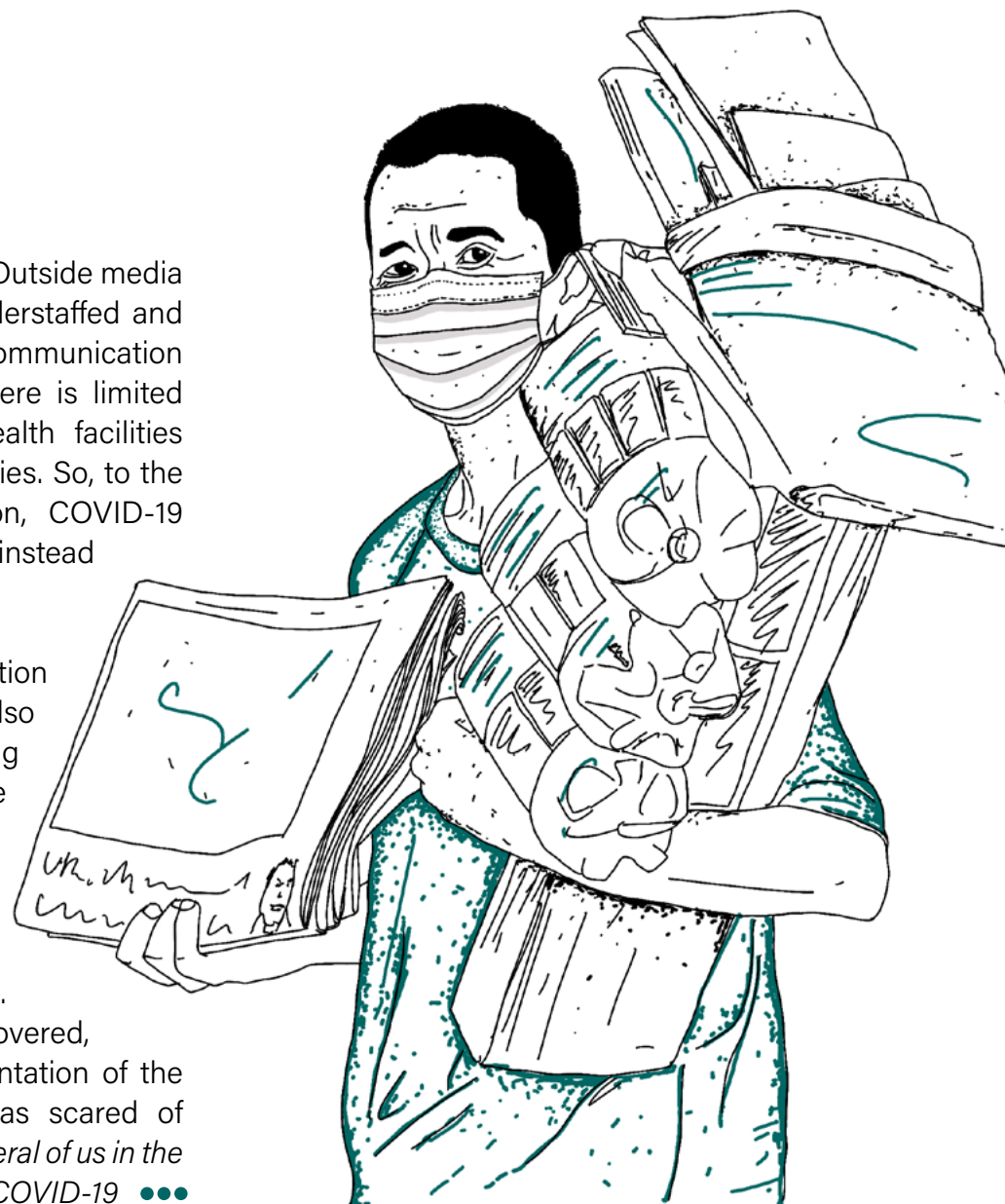
●●● important basis for effective information and educational campaigns to build upon. (*"We had this initiative for hygiene / handwashing for COVID, but these rural communities don't even have access to clean drinking water."*)

Main Barriers to Access - external and internal barriers

The main external barrier to information is poor infrastructure in BARMM. The lack of telephone lines, cell sites, radio systems, and local TV networks continue to restrict communication flow in BARMM. As a result, people living in far-flung areas rely on limited sources of information, such as word of mouth, printed materials, and two-way radios. BARMM residents expect the situation to improve once the WiFi project by the Department of Information and Communication Technology (DICT) DICT and UNDP is completed, which will provide stable internet connection to

around 50% of the region. Outside media outlets, LGUs are also understaffed and underfunded in terms of communication or information officers. There is limited COVID-19 testing and health facilities are concentrated in key cities. So, to the majority of the population, COVID-19 remains an invisible threat instead of a serious pandemic.

The stigma and discrimination around COVID-19 is also a barrier to spreading critical information. We saw that individuals who have had COVID-19 or close contacts to it are hesitant to share their views and experiences. One interviewee, who recovered, did not want any documentation of the interview because she was scared of being traced. (*"Actually, several of us in the community probably got COVID-19 ●●●*



●●● *since we had all the symptoms. But we were scared of getting tested so we just used herbal remedies.”*) She shared that she was scared of not only getting reinfected, but also getting hospitalized and perhaps dying in the hospital without given the proper Muslim burial rituals. A barangay official also shared that in his community, the ulama did not believe in COVID-19. So, any contradictory discussions would be seen as going against the religious leader. Some also expressed hesitation or fear in asking for COVID-19 information because they might be considered to have COVID-19.

Finally, Media and Information Literacy (MIL) in the region has been identified as one of the major root causes for the spread of misinformation and disinformation. Besides asking individual health workers or local authorities they know, most of the interviewees did not feel the need to actively search for information. They are

**In his community,
the ulama did not
believe in COVID-19.
So, any contradictory
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understandably more concerned about recovering their livelihood than deepening their understanding of COVID-19. In the surveys, less than 60% of respondents feel confident to tell the difference between correct and incorrect information. Further, our qualitative fieldwork reveals that this often has to do with assessing their familiarity with the source of information, instead of assessing the content in the piece of information itself (as shown in features of trust with a score of 4.2 out of

5 as a good or very good factor in trusting the information).

It is worth noting that the complex nature of the coronavirus itself is a barrier to effective communication. A number of public officials and community representatives interviewed described that the coronavirus is an invisible threat that is easily dismissed with anecdotal evidence. For example, positive but asymptomatic patients embolden individuals to question the seriousness of the disease. In a region long affected by military conflict, the relatively low death rate has led the residents to question whether such strict measures are necessary. This implies that not only is there a need to explain COVID-19 information in layman terms, but also a need to include relevant stories and experiences from the communities itself i.e. stories of COVID-19 recoveries or COVID-19 clusters. ●



4.4 FOCUS ON VULNERABLE GROUPS

As one of the least developed regions in the Philippines, most of BARMM is especially vulnerable to COVID-19. For example, in all of BARMM, there was only one hospital, Amai Pakpak Medical Center located in Marawi City, equipped with ventilators at the start of the pandemic. Within BARMM, even more vulnerable groups are IDPs and people living in geographically isolated areas. According to

a member of the BTA parliament, *“Insecurity has increased anxiety and paranoia, especially due to lack of information. Their situation and experiences make [IDPs in BARMM] vulnerable to be victims of misinformation and fake news.”* The shift to information dissemination through online platforms has further isolated those in remote areas. *“The lockdown pushed the government and organizations to rely online. But they forgot that a lot of people do not have access or rarely go online—and they are the most vulnerable,”* says a youth leader. In particular, the older generation that relied on traditional print media have

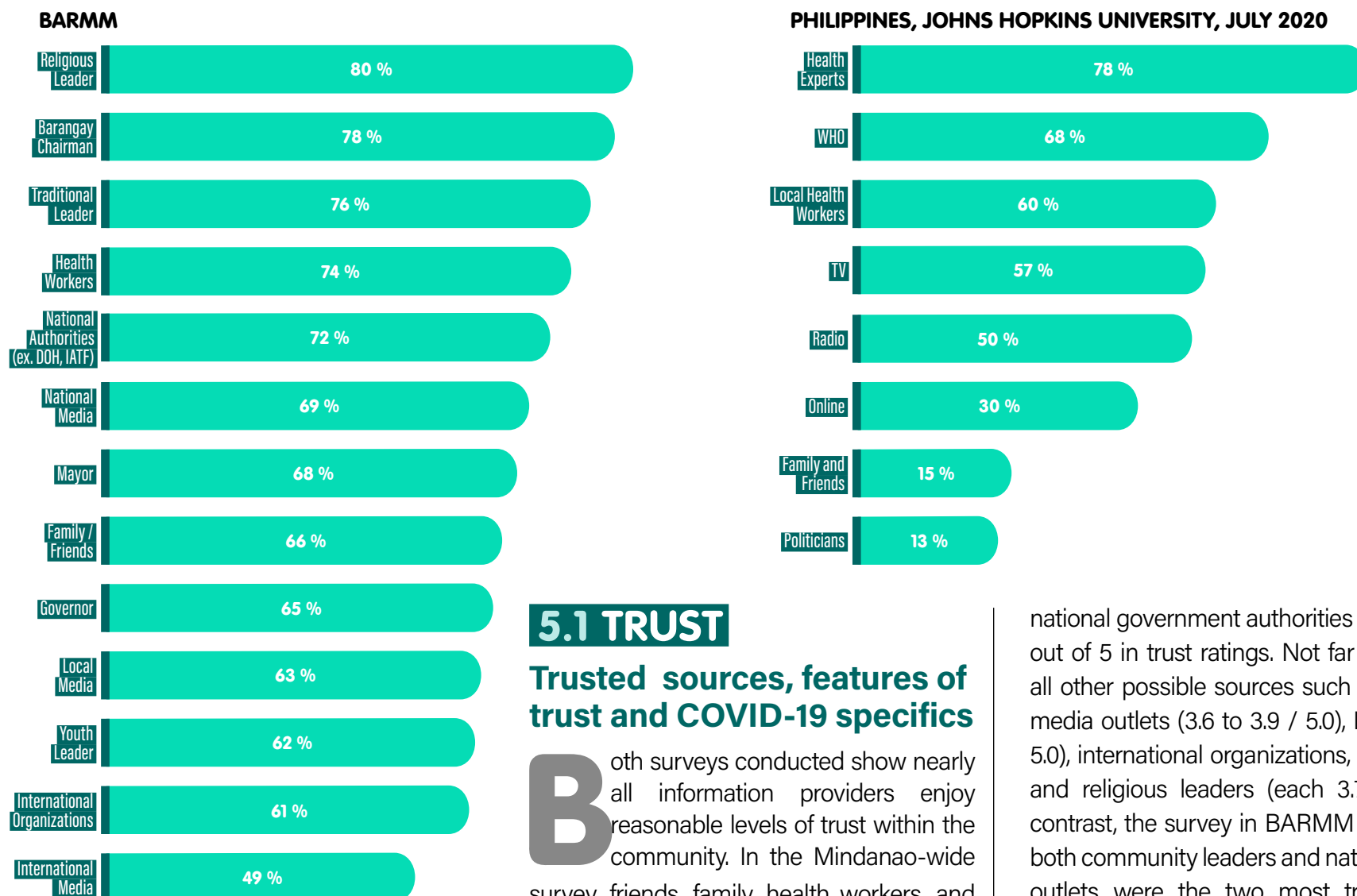
been adversely affected.

Another of the KII respondents shared that displaced families residing in the city have more access to assistance than those who live in the outskirts. In fact, among vulnerable groups reached by RCCE initiatives in BARMM, only 1% were IDPs and 7% were from geographically isolated areas. In these remote areas where access to telecommunications and internet service providers are limited, information is often provided by the military and/or the roving public announcement vehicles that pass through these communities. ●

V. INFORMATION DYNAMICS

(how individual and communities interact with the information ecosystem and what do they do with the information they access)

Table 4. Trusted Stakeholders in BARMM compared to the rest of Philippines



5.1 TRUST

Trusted sources, features of trust and COVID-19 specifics

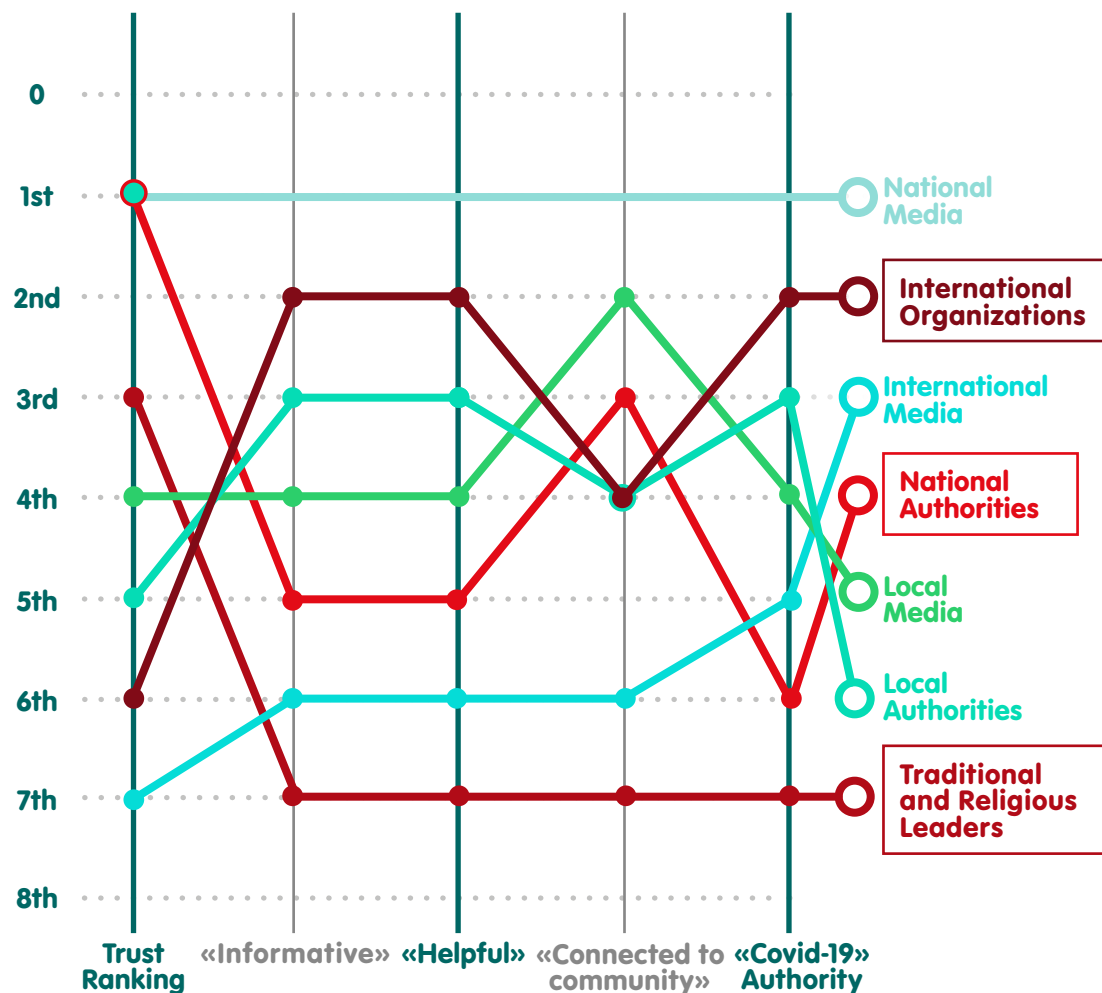
Both surveys conducted show nearly all information providers enjoy reasonable levels of trust within the community. In the Mindanao-wide survey, friends, family, health workers, and

national government authorities all scored 4 out of 5 in trust ratings. Not far behind are all other possible sources such as different media outlets (3.6 to 3.9 / 5.0), LGUs (3.8 / 5.0), international organizations, community and religious leaders (each 3.7 / 5.0). In contrast, the survey in BARMM shows that both community leaders and national media outlets were the two most trusted, ●●●

●●● scoring 4.2 out of 5.0. This is in contrast to findings of ongoing surveys conducted by Johns Hopkins for the entire country. In their Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practice (KAP) COVID-19 study conducted in July 2020, far more individuals trust health experts such as scientists and doctors (79%), WHO (68%), and local health workers (60%) compared to media outlets (TV 57%, radio 50%, and online sources 30%), journalists (27%), and politicians (13%). This suggests that a community-centered approach might be more relevant for BARMM, compared to the rest of the country where IATF and DOH-led communication will resonate better. Looking at possible features that drive trust, it is clear from Table 5 that being a trusted information provider goes beyond the substantive information and support provided. For instance, international organizations is the second stakeholder considered most informative and helpful, way ahead of community leaders who nevertheless are more trusted. ●●●

Table 5.
Ranking of sources of information

Source: Internews 2020



Boxed: Significant difference between rankings of trust and features of trust

●●● Our qualitative fieldwork reveals that trust is more driven by stakeholders' untarnished reputations and their sustained community involvement. For example, many individuals cited trust in regional and local authorities but lower trust in national authorities like PhilHealth and the Office of the President because of recent scandals. There are also rumors going around that health workers are profiting from COVID-19. Religious leaders are highly trusted because of their reputations ("Religious leaders will not lie because they are sharing the word of God."). While they are not objectively more informative than other stakeholders, a CSO we interviewed explained that religious leaders provide a deeper explanation through integrating Muslim teachings, whereas others just share the same factual

Being a trusted information provider goes beyond the substantive information and support provided. For instance, international organizations is the second stakeholder considered most informative and helpful, way ahead of community leaders who nevertheless are more trusted.

information to wear masks and such. A humanitarian official working on the island provinces in BARMM shared that in addition to religious leaders, there are other clusters of local influencers that may play a similar role outside the national authorities and mainstream media. These local influencers, religious leaders, and arguably mainstream media have longstanding community presence, whereas other stakeholders often

have intermittent, changing, or one-time engagements with communities.

In relation to features of trust, other factors are flagged as the most important features to build trust on information: sources coming closer from loved ones/relatives (scored 4.1 out of 5); official information from authorities (scored 3.9 out of 5); and level of detail of information (scoring 3.8 out of 5). In this regard, it is noticeable how information coming from international sources is scored significantly lower than all other potential features of trust (average score of 3.2 out of 5). This finding is relevant specially to humanitarian organizations working in the region to consider how and through which sources they should circulate information. ●



5.2 TRANSMISSION

Sharing, transforming and producing information

A majority of individuals (69%) report that they normally or always discuss useful information or whether an information is trustworthy. Moreover, 64% report that they normally or always share information with family or friends. In our focus groups, there does not seem to be a lot of transmission and transformation on “straight” information or facts. Rumors, anecdotes, and memes are more transmitted. Those with internet

access often share, react, or comment on stories and memes that resonate with their own feelings or experiences on their personal accounts. Some are willing to share other stories they have heard or experienced firsthand, especially around the topic of aid and the implementation of lockdown restrictions. This is in contrast with content from public authorities which seem to have less engagement from communities. For example, while a number of those we interviewed are aware of the recent BIDA campaign of DOH, many of them shared that they did not feel compelled to share or enrich the materials.

To note, communities seem to be interact with stories and information involving COVID-19 patients because they are afraid of discrimination and other consequences. (“I was so stressed during my quarantine and I don’t want to talk about it anymore.” / “We are worried about COVID-19 yes but several of us who got the symptoms don’t want to share because they might trace and punish us.”) Local barangay officials are also wary of actively sharing COVID-19 information if the religious leaders are preaching something different. ●



5.3 INFLUENCE

Knowledge gained from information and key features for influence

As most of the key stakeholders echo the same information on COVID-19 case counts and health protocols as shared by the Department of Health (DOH) and the Inter-agency Task Force (IATF), it is difficult to determine which stakeholder holds more influence in terms of developing knowledge and changing community behaviors. 78% of individuals reported changing some aspects of their behavior this year based on information received from different sources. In terms of channels used to deliver the information, there is a huge difference in accessibility of online, traditional media, and face-to-face channels across target groups. So, there seems to be no platform that is more influential than others. ●●●

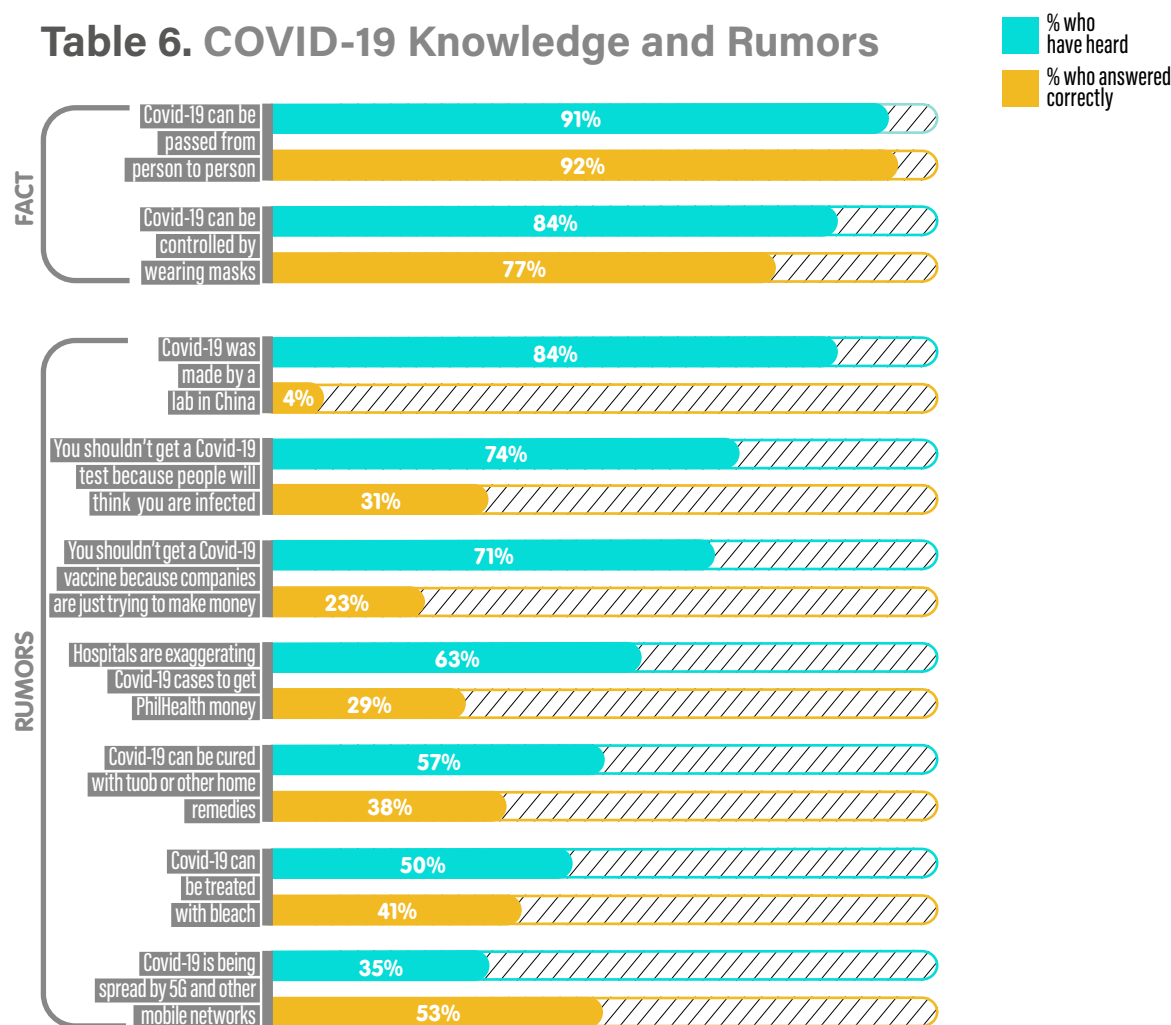
●●● In any case, a key driver to influence in the pandemic seems to be simple, consistent, and concrete messaging used across stakeholders and channels. For example, when asked about practices that protect them from COVID-19, 63% of individuals in our BARMM survey were able to cite wearing a mask and/or face shield. In contrast, the message on distancing has not translated as clearly to the community with 25% mentioning some articulation of social distancing, while 17% mentioned to stay at home. However, our interviews suggest information provided by community leaders or personal contacts, in the form of stories or discussions, is more likely to be retained and also acted on much more easily. For example, many were

able to share what their *ulamas* preached about COVID-19 in verbatim or describe in detail the experience of their relatives in quarantine. Despite the daily updates from local authorities being shared through official channels and through local media platforms, very few described the state of COVID-19 in their areas. Instead, many questioned if the pandemic is real and if the situation warranted such strict measures. In addition, while many shared that they trust and would follow health authorities like MOH or those in Amai Pakpak Medical Center, many are wary of the idea of getting tested or going to the hospital. The youth are more influenced by what they see on social media, especially by pages and accounts that have sizeable followings.

Information on lockdown guidelines and protocols have the biggest influence on the communities' day to day life. Many lost their source of livelihood because of the restrictions and they have no choice but to abide. Most feel that they have lost opportunities in the "new normal" including students learning online and farmers struggling since they cannot sell their harvest outside their municipality. Many shared that any information they will get on COVID-19 could only mean more bad news for them. (*"I pay attention to the pandemic because I have to think about where we will find food or money if this lockdown continues."*) Other COVID-19 updates tend to increase their concern and worry or don't address their concerns at all. ●

Source: Internews 2020

Table 6. COVID-19 Knowledge and Rumors



5.4 IMPACT ON KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES, AND PRACTICES

Filipinos have shown consistently high adoption to health protocols and in BARMM, this is no exception. Nationally from July to September 2020, 90% of Filipinos have consistently reported the adoption of mask-wearing in their communities and around 70% report practicing physical distancing. Similarly, the Social Weather Station surveys indicate high compliance of health protocols throughout Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao from May to July 2020. Fieldwork similarly indicates high overall compliance to mask-wearing and distancing.

However, both our quantitative and qualitative fieldwork shows significant and troubling gaps between COVID-19 knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors in the community. While mask ●●●

●●● wearing and the contagious nature of COVID-19 are common knowledge, there are many fundamental aspects of COVID-19 that is not known by the public, as shown in Table 4. We heard harmful threads of misinformation in all of our interviews and focus groups consistent with our rumor collection efforts. Many individuals were either doubtful that COVID-19 exists or believe that COVID-19 is not serious. For example, many believe that COVID-19 was created and it can be cured with home remedies: *“Several of us in the community probably got COVID since we had all the symptoms. But we got better from home remedies so is it even serious or real?”* There is a lack of understanding on the nature of testing and hospitalization due to rumors circulating in communities.

“You can see during relief operations that people forget about distancing.”

“People have masks because they want to go out, but you can see they’re not wearing it correctly most of the time.”

Because the public is under-educated and misinformed, we see attitudes of denial towards the pandemic. Many put the pandemic lightly and question the basis for strict lockdowns because of the relatively low mortality rates and asymptomatic cases. Thus, while many practice the recommended health protocols, these come from a desire to comply or have a semblance of normal rather than a real concern or desire to curb COVID-19 spread. (*“You can see during relief operations that people forget about distancing.” / “People have masks because they want to go out, but you can see they’re not wearing it correctly most of the time.” / “You wear your mask to go to the mosque, but most will take it off once inside. If you keep it on, it’s as if you’re saying you don’t trust the people in the masjid.”*)

Interestingly, while there is disbelief or doubt in the pandemic, there is also stigma and fear on COVID-19 in communities. In the beginning of the pandemic, locally stranded individuals (LSI) were discriminated and faced difficulties returning to their homes. Patients and close contacts are afraid to share their experience. Potential cases are wary of getting tested and hospitalized. As with the rest of the country, there are apprehensions about COVID-19 vaccines. These gaps in knowledge, attitudes, and practice highlight the need to help the public understand COVID-19 more thoroughly, not just in terms of basic public health measures. ●

“You wear your mask to go to the mosque, but most will take it off once inside. If you keep it on, it’s as if you’re saying you don’t trust the people in the masjid.”

VI. HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE AND INFORMATION

6.1 NATIONAL COVID-19 RESPONSE PLAN

Plan, network and coordination of action

At the start of the pandemic in March, the Philippines assembled an Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF) to lead and oversee the development and regulation of technical documents related to the overall COVID-19 response. To complement this group, a National Task Force (NTF) was also formed which serves as the operational command or the implementing arm during this pandemic. Through Resolution No. 51, the second phase of the National Action Plan for COVID-19 was institutionalized. One of its key features is the importance of risk communication and community engagement to promote behavioral change and increase compliance to the minimum public health standards.

Likewise, the DOH has released an information campaign known as “BIDA Solusyon sa COVID-19”. This campaign which is disseminated through various communication platforms – digital print, radio, tv, and traditional print – aims to encourage individuals to take an active role in the fight against COVID-19. Moreover, messaging tool kits for Local Government Units (LGUs) have also been developed by DOH to assist local health leaders in engaging communities. Following the top-down approach, coordination is done from the national government (IATF, DOH and other agencies) to the local government units (provincial and municipal level). Since the local government units are only expected to adapt the resolutions from the national levels, local discussions at the municipal IATF are minimal. Information is then localized and institutionalized in the form of memorandums and executive orders. In turn, circulation of these is done through

social media, radio, public texts blasts (to key actors and CSOs), and two-way radios (using the SAKSI frequency) to the community. Although risk communication and community engagement initiatives are specified in the NTF COVID-19 Response Plan, one of our key informants noted that in their municipal COVID-19 Response Plan, communication and coordination are not included.

According to the Network Mapping assessment in Table 6, public bodies’ main nodes of interaction are spread over the main clusters of stakeholders and include high interaction with all international organizations, other public bodies, media sector and community representatives. In this regard however, when looking at the specific stakeholders public bodies that stakeholders interact with in Figure 6, it is noticeable that they mainly nodes at the media sector level are interact with public media ●●●

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... (i.e. government radio stations and official government Facebook pages) at the media sector level. They interact most with religious leaders, likely because many restrictions they have to implement directly affect places of worship and religious gatherings.

Narrowing the assessment to specific high intensity nodes of interaction (over 3 out of 5), the mapping shows that key stakeholders are not well connected to the respondent networks. Our interviews reveal that public bodies have strong bilateral ties with specific stakeholders, for example, the Ministry of Health with WHO and the Bureau of Public Information with UNICEF. Multilateral ties are less common, especially between different sectors. Thus, the point remains that both key constituencies and UN agencies stakeholders are on the fringes. This denotes a potential risk in gaps of communication with communities and overall alignment to international efforts. ●

Table 7. Public Bodies COVID-19 Principal Interaction Node

		AVG PUB BODIES	
UN agencies	INTERNATIONAL	4.00	
Multilateral organisations (other than UN)	INTERNATIONAL	1.67	
Countries (other States donors)	INTERNATIONAL	1.67	
Other international	INTERNATIONAL	3.33	
Ministry of information/Communication	NATIONAL	2.33	
Ministry of Health	NATIONAL	4.00	
Ministry of Disaster Management (or similar)	NATIONAL	2.67	
Other Ministries or executive bodies	NATIONAL	1.67	
Regional/local level authorities	NATIONAL	3.67	
Media regulatory authorities	NATIONAL	1.33	
Other public bodies	NATIONAL	1.33	
Community media representatives	MEDIA	2.33	
Media associations	MEDIA	1.67	
Public media	MEDIA	3.67	
Commercial media	MEDIA	2.67	
Community leaders	CIVIL SOCIETY	3.33	
Religious leaders	CIVIL SOCIETY	4.33	
Online platforms (private sector) – search engines	CIVIL SOCIETY	3.00	
Key constituencies (women, youth)	CIVIL SOCIETY	3.00	
Other private	CIVIL SOCIETY	2.00	



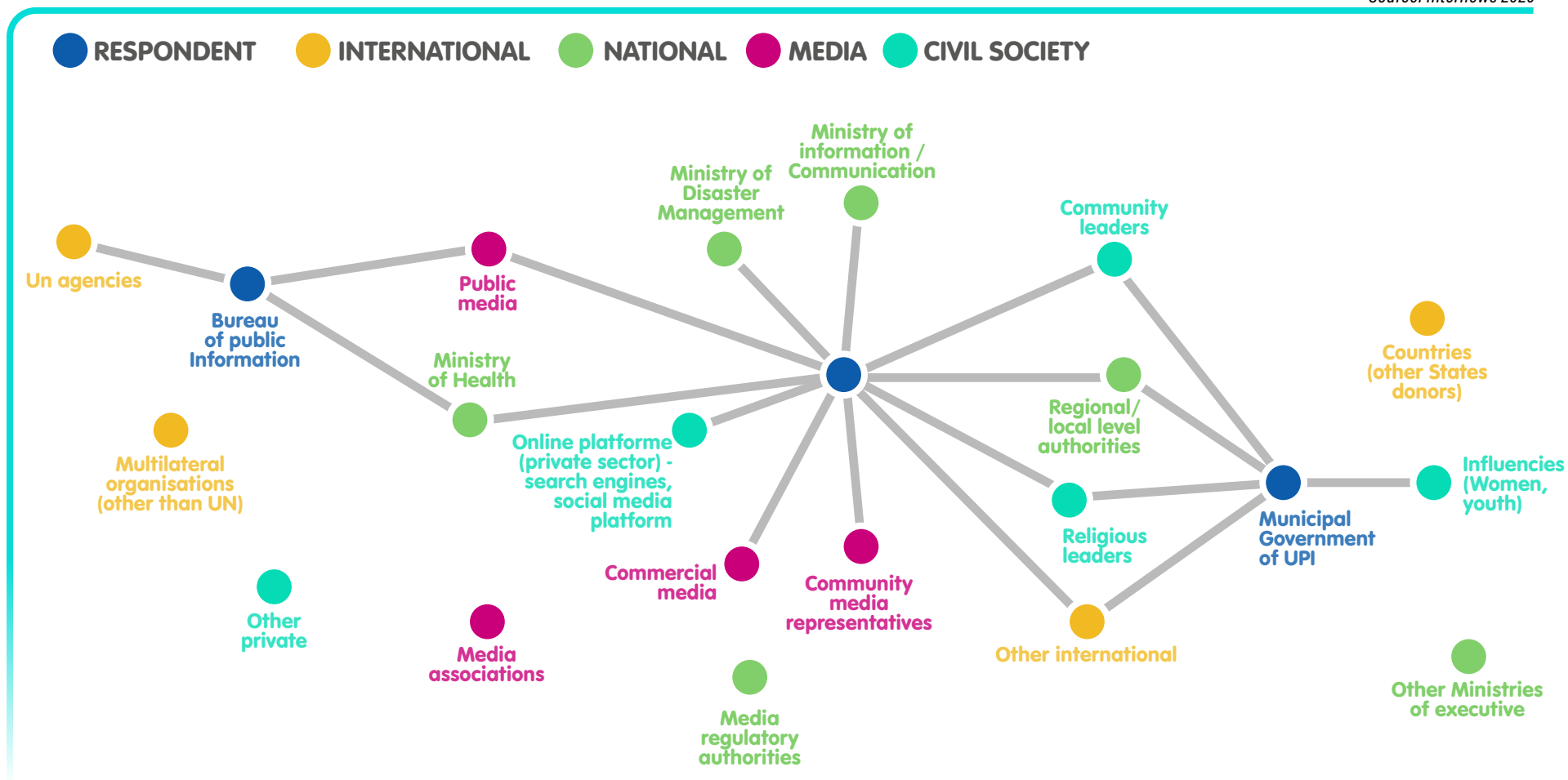
Boxed : significant difference between Mindanao and BARMM

Source: Internews 2020

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Figure 4. Visual Stakeholder Map of Public Bodies
(nodes with scored interaction over 3 in a scale from 1 to 5)

Source: Internews 2020



6.2 HUMANITARIAN ACTORS ACTIVE ON COVID RESPONSE

Humanitarian and development organizations have an established presence in the Philippines, one of the world's most disaster-prone countries. There are more than 50 UN and non-government organizations that are part of the COVID-19 humanitarian response, which include IOM, OCHA, UNDP, UNHCR, WHO, Save the Children, Action Against Hunger, Oxfam, Philippine Disaster Resilience Foundation (PDRF), and the Philippine Red Cross. Humanitarian networks are also present, such as the Philippine International NGO Network (PINGON) and the Disaster Risk Reduction Network Philippines.

Local non-government organizations and community-based civil society organizations have limited participation in RCCE groups and humanitarian coordination.

The government has had long established partnerships with various humanitarian and civil society organizations in BARMM. According to the latest COVID-19 Response Snapshot, there are 35 humanitarian organizations implementing COVID-19 response in BARMM, 26 of which are implementing risk communications and community engagement initiatives. Assistance from humanitarian organizations were mainstreamed and extended

to respond to the pandemic. For example, UN agencies have on-going support for the Bangsamoro Transition Authority and the Marawi Rehabilitation, and now cover the COVID-19 response and its foreseen socio-economic impact to the region. USAID also used their on-going Marawi Response Project to provide additional aid to address COVID-19. Maps were also created by the International Alert Philippines, which has been used to identify emerging clusters of cases in the area. UNICEF's U-Report, an online platform intended for youths, has been used to disseminate information on COVID-19 as well. The role of humanitarian actors has been crucial in BARMM but interviews have shown that at the municipal level, the support provided are often short-lived and mainly involve distribution of goods and services. ●●●

VI. HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE AND INFORMATION



●●● The UN-led Philippines Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) and sub-national coordination forums ensure that humanitarian action by its members is well coordinated, principled, timely, effective, and efficient. For the COVID-19 response, the Philippines HCT supports and coordinates with the National IATF. Lead agencies have been identified to lead response pillars and support government cluster leads.

The Mindanao Humanitarian Team (MHT) leads coordination in Mindanao for the COVID-19 response, as well as response programs for recent armed conflict, Typhoon Vongfong, and earthquakes in North Cotabato and Davao del Sur. For the Marawi Response in Lanao Del Sur, UNDP, UN-Habitat, and UNHCR lead the

coordination.

These humanitarian actors also work directly with local governments and implement projects through local organizations. Interviews have shown that mayors and community leaders are consulted and involved in all activities, including installation of COVID-19 IEC materials. Organizations like UNICEF have partnered with the BARMM Bureau of Public Information and Ministry of Health to support localization of key messages .

Local government coordination is done through IATFs and existing multi-sectoral coordination mechanisms such as the Technical Working Group on Preventing Violent Extremism and Municipal Peace and Order Councils. To coordinate with the media, they have created Facebook chat groups and organized regular meetings with the press through the «Kapihan sa Bangsamoro» initiative. ●

6.3 RISK COMMUNICATION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The government and humanitarian sector have poured their resources on risk communication. Risk Communications and Community Engagement (RCCE) is one of the priority pillars of the Philippine COVID-19 Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) that compliments the initiatives of the national government. The pillar aims to provide two-way communication platforms, improve the quality of community engagement and establish common messages.

WHO and UNICEF are the lead of the RCCE Pillar of the HRP. OCHA also leads the Community of Practice

on Community Engagement which coordinates feedback mechanisms as well as RICAA and CORA reports from humanitarian partners. WHO supports the Risk Communication and Community Engagement Group of the government, which is led by the Department of Health. UNICEF, on the other hand, is in close partnership with the BARMM Bureau of Public Information, who is the lead of the BARMM IATF Strategic Communications Group.

As of September 2020, 30 million people have been reached by 8,190 RCCE initiatives as implemented by humanitarian organizations, 9% of which were conducted in BARMM. As activities were focused on sharing general information and support on COVID-19, RCCE objectives on strengthening two-way communication platforms and

community engagement have yet to be met. However, local non-government organizations and community-based civil society organizations have limited participation in RCCE groups and humanitarian coordination. Our network assessment shows that there is little to no interaction (score of 1-2 in Table 5) with civil society and the media in the pandemic. As a result, RCCE mapping does not reflect numerous community-led initiatives.

In the latest RCCE report, the top two information needs are: (1) clarifications on information about COVID-19 released by WHO and/or DOH and (2) support or aid from the government and other organizations. There is also a need to clarify the guidelines of physical distancing, travel restrictions, and community quarantine for specific contexts. ●

6.4 RUMOR TRACKING AND COMMUNITY FEEDBACK MECHANISMS

Humanitarian organizations have their own community feedback mechanism integrated with their programs and conduct social listening initiatives. However, these are not mainstreamed and information gathered are only for internal use of the respective organizations. Interviews showed that there were previous initiatives to create common feedback platforms in previous emergencies but these were not sustained. A network mapping survey also shows that interactions between international organizations, the media, and the community are scarce.

Communication mechanisms are primarily done either through printed IEC materials distributed in barangays

and social media posts from the local government or trusted organization pages. Humanitarian organizations also include awareness raising activities during distribution of relief and hygiene kits. Community consultations were however limited and targeted to avoid survey fatigue. Existing data gathering tools, such as RICAA and CORA, were also maximized instead of creating new tools.

Communication has increased during the pandemic as governments shifted to coordinate through Facebook chat groups and Zoom meetings. These communication channels had already existing before COVID-19 but were maximized as part of the response. Prior to the pandemic, information dissemination and feedback sessions were only done by the government through annual barangay assemblies and League of Barangay meetings, which occur twice a year.

There is no coordinated or centralized rumor tracking or community feedback mechanism for the humanitarian and government COVID-19 response. Information sharing is heavily top-down while means to verify information that reach communities are lacking. Our interviews indicate that concerns from the community are addressed on an ad-hoc, informal basis. If there are rumors or disinformation on COVID-19 online, the government tries to respond via its official Facebook page or during Facebook Live sessions. Sometimes concerns are also addressed on the local government's radio programs or COVID-19 hotlines.

Moreover, there is no means to verify whether the right information has indeed reached the communities or if the concerns continue to linger. On completing this feedback loop, one of our key informants explained communities have "survey fatigue" which dissuades sustained efforts to collect feedback. ●

6.5 IDENTIFIED GAPS IN INFORMATION NEEDS AND PROGRAMMING

Handling multiple crises in BARMM is not new to humanitarian organizations, though the pandemic has made things more difficult. Information in the pandemic is fast-paced and

constantly changing, exacerbating information inequalities. Humanitarian organizations have found it hard to keep up with government's protocols to implement their programs and establish two-way communication with communities. Organizations usually complement information gaps by doing face to face community sessions, but this has been limited due to the travel and gathering restrictions in the pandemic.

OCHA for example has relied on its network of partners for information from the grassroots level. Some are leveraging SMS, hotlines, or social media though geographically isolated areas will be left out. Addressing varying information needs has also been challenging: (1) there are multiple crises to address, (2) needs are difficult to identify and keep changing, (3) localizing messages is not easy.

Humanitarian organizations are also not well-equipped to manage the rumors in the pandemic. Core efforts have been to spread vital information such as mask wearing, distancing, and COVID-19 symptoms especially to vulnerable communities. However, these same communities are often the ones plagued by potentially dangerous misinformation. Many of them recognize the need to reach out to local influencers such as religious and traditional leaders, but engagement has been challenging. They have tapped local influencers in past initiatives for education and peacebuilding but they have always been a "tough crowd to preach to." •



VII. KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS – Towards a healthier information ecosystem



7.1 KEY FINDINGS ON THE INFORMATION LANDSCAPE AND COMMUNITIES' INFOR- MATION PRACTICES

Foundations to build upon for a healthier information ecosystem

■ Information flows in local language is a strong driver. In our focus groups and

interviews 82% said that they normally or always get the information in their preferred language.

- The Department of Information and Communications Technology has an ongoing engagement with private-sector partners in strengthening connectivity in the region.
- Social media has given the government and media outlets a faster channel to share information to communities.
- Consistent information campaigns on

health protocols such as mask wearing and distancing across stakeholders have trickled thoroughly in the community.

- The communities trust the majority of stakeholder, including the media, public authorities, and humanitarian organizations involved in the COVID-19 response.
- There is a culture of dialogue and discussion on important issues within community that can serve as a platform to share critical COVID-19 information. ●●●

●●● Main challenges across the information ecosystem

- In geographically isolated communities, there are limited sources of information and the audience rely mostly on information from the military, their barangay officials, or their friends and family.
- Most journalists lack the training and on-ground support to report on COVID-19 thoroughly and in a way that is relevant (i.e. localizing technical information).
- While the LGUs and relevant offices are focused on sharing health protocols and data on cases, the public's concerns on timing and sources of livelihood are not being acknowledged and directly addressed.
- Media Information literacy is poor in the communities, on top of the limited access to information that they are already facing.

Opportunities and potential for information ecosystem health improvement

- Capacity-building activities are initiated by local associations like the Marawi Broadcasters Association.
- There is cross-sector engagement between local media and other sectors of society, including civil society and religious groups (Ulamas, Bishops, etc.).
- Military provides quick on-the-ground information, but accuracy is not always dependable.
- Members of the youth and the health-care sector have the ability and the will to research and inform their social circles of critical information.
- The Bangsamoro Transition is underway and should strengthen the government's capacity to respond to the pandemic.
- There are bright spots in the information ecosystem, such as community influencers

and broad trust in stakeholders, that can be researched further for future projects.

- The island provinces in BARMM (Basilan, Sulu, and Tawi-Tawi) deserve separate assessments in terms of the media landscape and gathering community feedback.

Risks to mitigate and negative trends to take into account in ecosystem strengthening efforts

- During the pandemic, there have been many closures of different media outlets which further reduce verified sources and increase exposure to rumors and misinformation regarding COVID-19.
- There is widespread misinformation especially on the seriousness of COVID-19 in both rural and urban areas. This further dampens the authorities' ability to control the pandemic and eventually re-open the region. ●

7.2 KEY FINDINGS ON HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE AND INFORMATION

Foundations to build upon

- Humanitarian organizations are already on the ground before the COVID-19 pandemic, due to Marawi Rehabilitation, IDP Camp Management, and other initiatives.
- Ulama councils have been tapped to share information on COVID-19.
- There is a strong interagency collaboration through the IATF, MHT, and other coordination mechanisms.
- Humanitarian organizations have strong partnership with the government, participate in IATFs, and influence with local decision-makers.
- Groups that were formed during the Marawi Siege and BBL are also being utilized for the COVID-19 response, as they are trusted and have a strong reach.

Challenges

- There is a lack of common service platform for feedback and no collaboration in data sharing. Most data being collected are only exclusive to each of the organizations. There is no collaboration or data sharing mechanisms in place.
- The lack of RCCE priority at the local and regional level results in poor allocation of resources.
- Communication and coordination have migrated online, thus resulting in the exclusion of local actors who have challenges in accessing platforms and tools due to poor connectivity.
- RCCE initiatives are not innovative and responsive to local needs: COVID-19 information is not localized, both in language and contents, and lacking genuine community engagement.
- There is leadership limitations, as BARMM is a transitional government and agencies and policies are still being formed.

Opportunities and potential for stronger information flows and linkages

- Use of multiple media platforms to share information
- Growing interest to participate in RCCE in BARMM, and local government and community-level
- Youth sector who are organized, empowered, well-informed, and very active in sharing information
- General population that accepts the implementation of safety standards as part of the new normal

Risks to mitigate and negative trends to take into account

- Recurring displacements and insecurity in BARMM that make it difficult to sustain community initiatives and increase health risks
- Alarming circulation of rumors surrounding efforts to combat COVID-19, including discrediting the virus and motives to fight the virus, even questioning its reality. ●

VII. KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.3 SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Immediate Recommendations for COVID-19 Response

There is a **need for regional and local governments and humanitarian organizations to expand COVID-19 communication strategies** to address information needs and issues in BARMM particular context. While the current linear, top-down, and purely public health approach implemented thus far has succeeded in informing the public on minimum health protocols, the public remains under-educated and exposed to the risks of misinformation. We suggest the following:

■ **Topics** – In addition to public health updates and guidelines, cover information needs on livelihood, aid, and education as they are not being addressed in communities.

■ **Channels** – Directly engage communities via local governmental units and local Public Information Officers on succeeding COVID-19 initiatives, particularly on government aid and vaccination ●●●



VII. KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

●●● efforts. This is because a purely media-based effort is not enough to penetrate the communities.

■ **Context** – Supplement information from the national and regional government and Department of Health with credible community-centered messages. For example, Islamic principles can be used to explain the importance of quarantine or sharing stories COVID-19 recovery from community members to address stigma.

■ **Content** – Explore layman ways of verbally explaining technical aspects of COVID-19 such as transmission, testing, symptoms, and vaccination to communities. This includes translating COVID-19 terms to local dialects.

■ **Community Engagement using Trusted Sources** – Complement COVID-19 messages from public officials and health experts with support from traditional and/or religious leaders at the community-level.

■ **Community Feedback Mechanisms** – Introduce a common service platform for feedback and understanding rumors in

communities. These mechanisms should be compatible with various humanitarian initiatives but designed to be inclusive to local actors and other sectors, such as CSOs.

Coordination and Collaboration

To improve the COVID-19 response, particularly the flow of information, there is a need to **strengthen coordination and collaboration between these particular stakeholders**:

■ **Community media and government offices** such as IATF and MOH – Journalists were often limited to press briefings and public releases. Many government offices are understaffed in terms of Information Officers hence not able to link with the many community media outlets. One approach could be to strengthen groups of journalists in BARMM (for example, the Marawi Broadcasters Association) to advocate for press access and contextualize National and Regional responses to be more locally relevant.

■ **Local organizations and established humanitarian organizations** – Local organization should be included in coordination meetings while ensuring that those from marginalized/GIDA areas (BASULTA) are represented. RCCE initiatives should always be in partnership community-based organizations, in addition to local government units, to promote a community-driven approach.

■ Other linkages that need to be strengthened include:

- Connections **between community, national, and international media** to compare experiences and to enable localization of stories where relevant.

- Long-term partnerships between **BARMM journalists and local organizations such as CSOs and Muslim Religious Leaders (MRL)** as voices for the community.

- **Institutionalizing local inter-agency coordination mechanisms** to sustain functions outside the framework of the IATF and thus beyond facing COVID-19. ●●●

VII. KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

... Capacity Building

Over the long-term, the following efforts will sustain a healthier information ecosystem in BARMM:

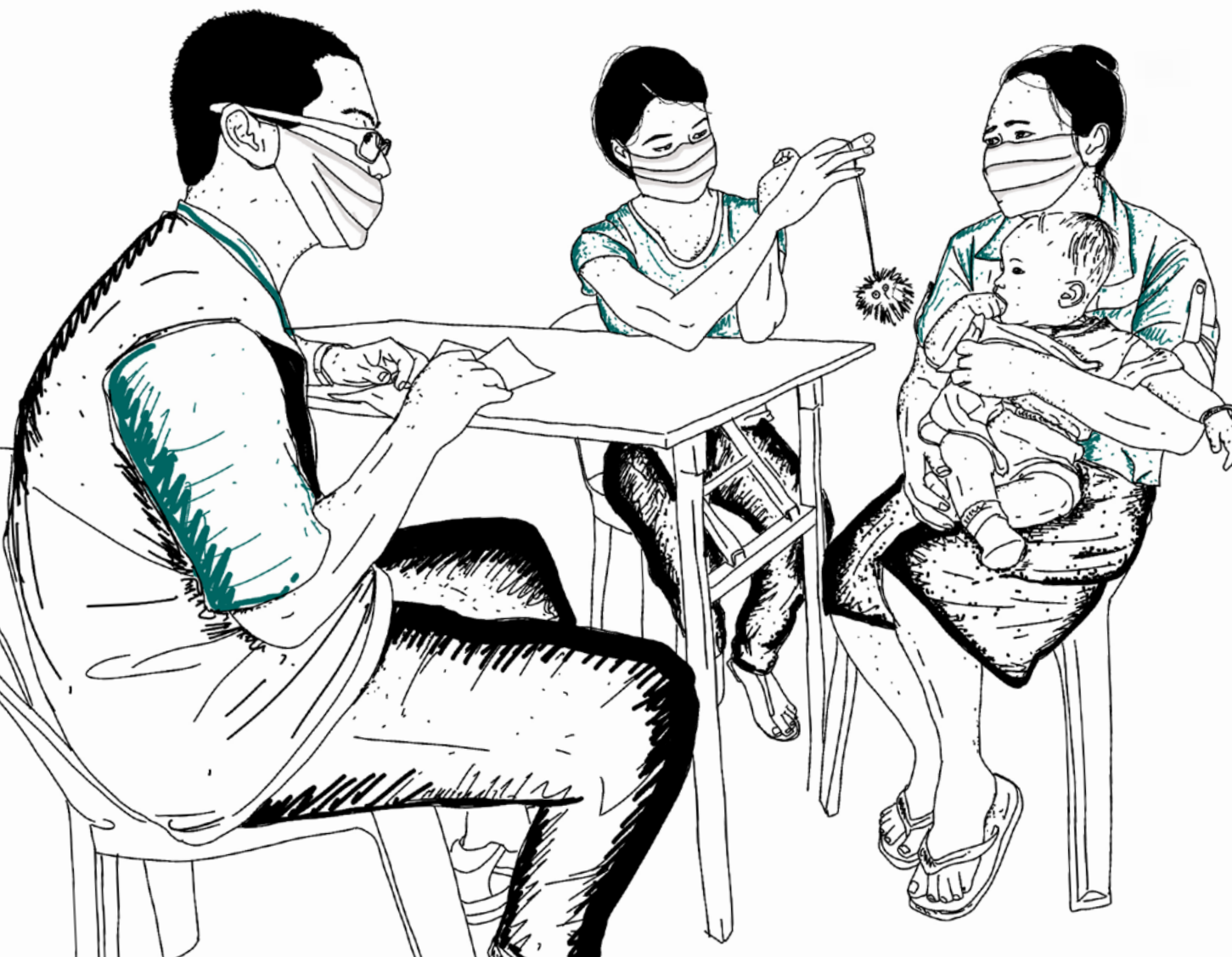
■ **Community-based Rumor Management** - Capacitate and empower MRLs, CSOs, and traditional leaders to incorporate rumor management practices in their

existing community touchpoints (e.g. during masjids facilitated by MRL or community listening groups run by CSOs).

■ **Media and Information Literacy (MIL) programs**, specifically modules on ethics and accountability intended for local journalists, digital information literacy for youth sectors, and civic participation for local community influencers.

■ Other opportunities for capacity building include:

- Activities on managing misinformation and rumors as well as effective crisis communication for local journalists and LGUs
- Developing capacities of youth organizations, women, traditional and/or religious leaders in risk communication in their current community touchpoints (e.g. during masjids facilitated by religious leaders or community listening groups run by CSOs).
- Training on amplifying social media presence to LGUs and government agencies to promote engagement of verified content. ●



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LIST OF KEY INFORMANTS

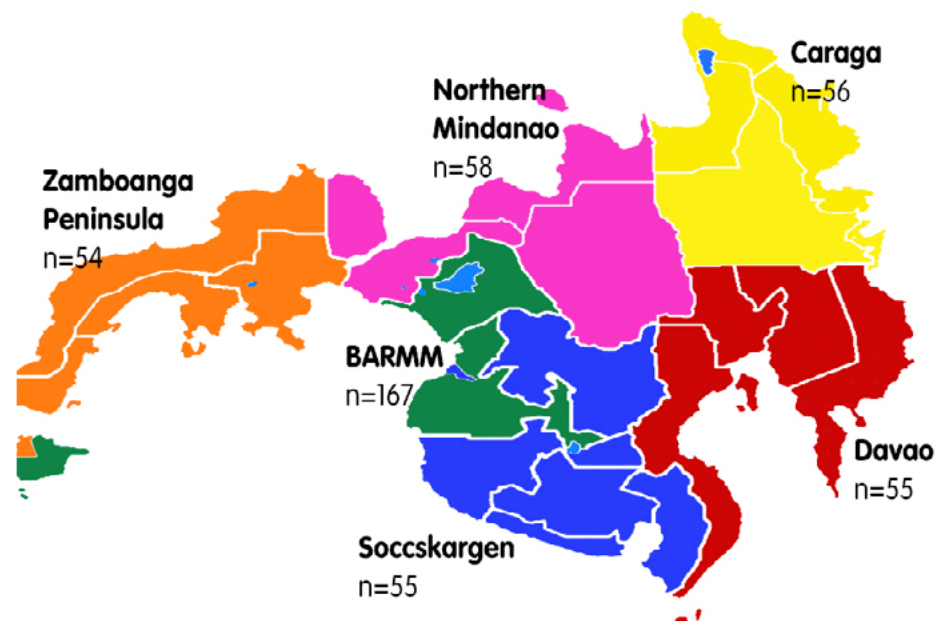
	Institution	Name (Position)
International Organizations	OCHA OCHA Cotabato WHO	Gil Arevalo (CoPCE Cluster Lead) Gemma Assis (Information Management Focal) Kei Bughaw (Risk Communications Consultant)
Government Authorities	BARMM Bureau of Public Information Bangsamoro Transition Authority Provincial Government of Lanao del Sur Municipal Government of Upi	Andrew Alonto (Director) Zia Alonto (Minister) Jennie Tamano (Information Office Head) Paulo Cagara (Planning & Development Coordinator)
Media Sector	Sbang Ka Marawi Radio Brigada News FM MindaNEWS National Journalists Union of the Philippines Peace and Conflict Journalism Network The Mindanao Cross	Sorhaila Latiph (Anchor) Richel Umel (Anchor) Ferdinand Cabrera (Member) Kathryn Cortez (Board of Director for Mindanao) Charlie Saceda (Former Chief Officer) Nash Maulana (Correspondent)
CSO	Girl Defenders Movement Global Marawi Youth Maranao People Development Center	Anna Boloto (Gender Advocate) Bin Nur Magancong (Youth Advocate) Norhana Talib (Project Officer)

FIELDWORK OVERVIEW

Information collection tools (survey and interview questionnaires) can be made available upon request

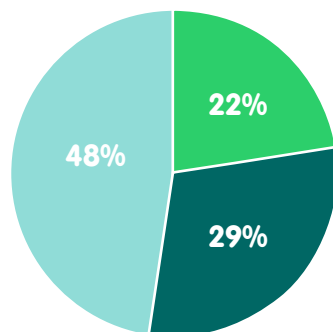
a) Quantitative Research

	Mindanao Survey	BARMM Survey
Conducted by	GeoPoll	Partners (CMYM and IDEALS)
Method	Random Sampling Phone Survey	Convenience Sampling Door-to-Door
Areas	Zamboanga Peninsula, Northern Mindanao, CARAGA, Davao, Soccskargen - see map below	Maguindanao (Shariff Aguak), Lanao del Sur (Bayang, Balindong, Lanao del Sur, Marantao) – see map below
Sample Size	278	167
Gender Split	60% Female	59% Female
Age Split	See graph below	See graph below



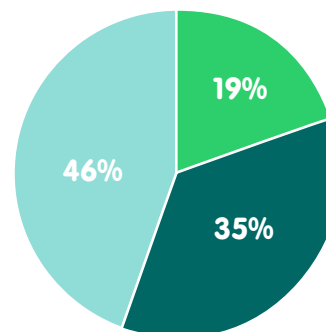
MINDANAO

- Above 35
- Below 24
- 25 to 34



BARMM

- Above 35
- Below 24
- 25 to 34



b) Quantitative Research

	AREA	PROVINCE			
	<i>Urban</i>	<i>Rural</i>	<i>Lanao del Norte</i>	<i>Lanao del Sur</i>	<i>Maguindanao</i>
Focus Group Discussions	30 (73%)	11 (27%)	5 (11%)	31 (78%)	5 (11%)
Individual Interviews	16 (50%)	16 (50%)	4 (13%)	19 (59%)	9 (28%)

	ETHNIC GROUP			GENDER	
	<i>Maguindanao</i>	<i>Maranao</i>	<i>Iliganon</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
Focus Group Discussions	5 (12%)	31 (76%)	5 (12%)	17 (43%)	24 (57%)
Individual Interviews	9 (28%)	19 (59%)	4 (13%)	13 (41%)	19 (59%)



c) Summary of Rumor Collection Mechanism (as of November 14 2020)

Internews' Rumor Management Methodology focuses on tracking rumors on local communities in BARMM. The selection is based on a risk assessment matrix that accounts for the frequency of the scenario or social media engagements and its potential impact on the community. This analysis is based on 135 rumors collected online and offline between September 4 to November 14, conducted in Tagalog, Maranao, Maguindanao and Cebuano.

Of the collected rumors, the dominant themes of the rumors were people's mistrust of the government and healthcare system along with stigma on testing that may lead people in the Bangsamoro Region to deny the reality of the pandemic. Of the 135, 61 rumors were criticisms or complaints, 31% of which 31% were directed at the government. There were common perceptions that the implementation of stricter measures in Lanao del Sur was selective and not fair. Other rumors related on issues such as the reliability of COVID-19 testing and allegations of corruption on hiring contact tracers.

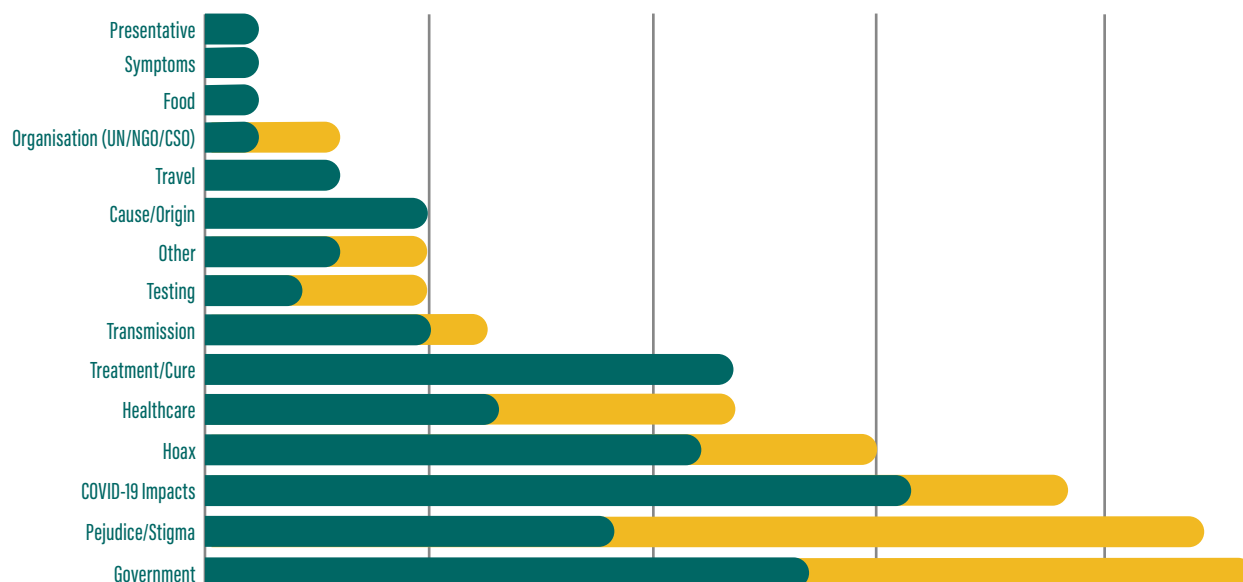
"People do not want to get rapid test or swab test as they develop a perception that getting checked for COVID-19 tells that a person is positive for COVID-19." (Feedback from peer-to-peer sharing via word of mouth in Maguindanao)

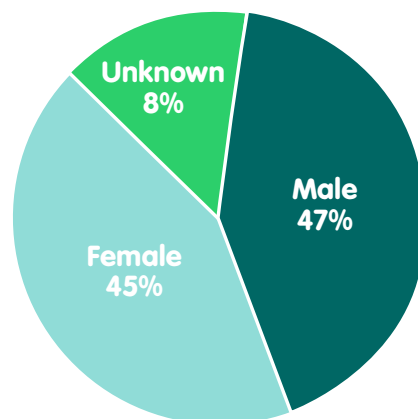
"In Manila, their local government has let their people to go back to normal... surprisingly, our province Lanao del Sur is still getting stricter because they still believe in COVID-19, even if the pandemic is now over." - Male, 26-35 years old

"Only those who are connected to local officials are hired as contact tracers. It is so unfair. I was informed it was an order from the mayor. Why is it people who don't have any connections can be easily removed from the list of candidates, despite being eligible and going through the right process?" - Female, 26-35 years old

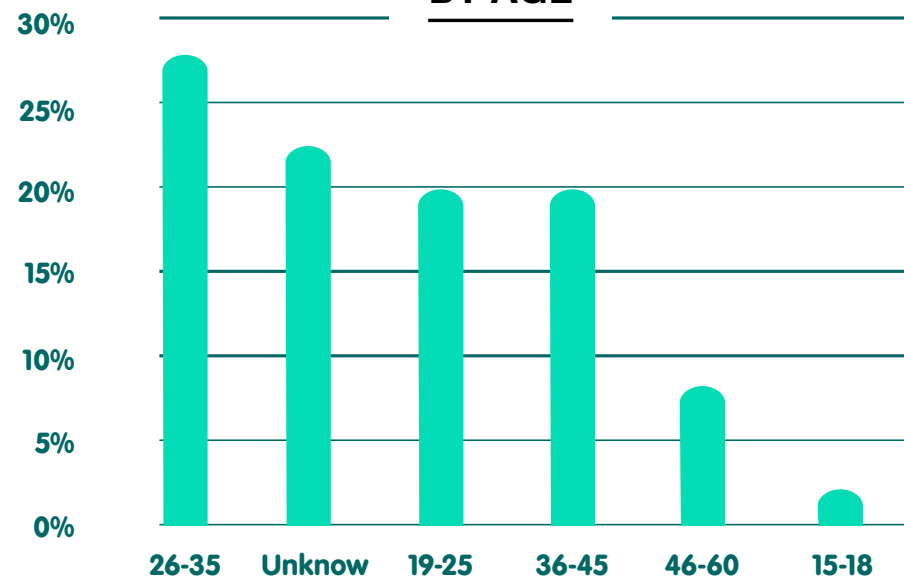
Local posts on social media blamed the government, expressing negative sentiment towards various government responses against COVID-19. 67% percent of the rumors were low risk, comprised largely of commentary on government as well as rumors about treatments and "cures" for COVID-19 ranging from home remedies to traditional medicines with low frequency of online engagements. No high-risk rumors were identified in the September to November 14 period.

RUMORS BY THEME (SEPT. 4 TO NOV. 14) ■ Low Risk ■ Low Risk



BY SEX

Among those who shared the rumors, 47% were male, 41% were female, and 13% were unidentified. Meanwhile, 28% who shared rumors belong to the 26-35 age group, followed by 19-25 years old (20%), and 36-45 years old (20%). 81% of the rumors were collected from social media, the majority of which on Facebook and 19% from community listening or peer-to-peer feedback.

BY AGE

Community conversations revealed that most in BARMM are still questioning the reality of COVID-19. There are also increasing concerns on testing, treatment, and on vaccine effectiveness. Even though the end of the pandemic is still far from sight, community members would like to hear more about the government recovery plan to shed light on the duration of quarantine measures, and how people can continue with

their livelihood and education. This is in hopes of helping them accept and understand this so-called “new normal”. Communities and information providers acknowledge the widespread and potential harms of misinformation. Over 70% feel concerned or scared about rumors circulating in their communities. However, communities must recognize and be empowered to recognize and act on rumors and misinformation.

■ Humanitarian Maps





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ROOTED IN **TRUST** **DISCONNECTED:** Information Dynamics in BARMM during the COVID-19 Pandemic

AN INFORMATION ECOSYSTEM ASSESSMENT BY INTERNEWS

PHILIPPINES - FEBRUARY, 2021