



# Peacetech Technology Education in Post-Conflict Youth Peacebuilding Programs

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With global conflict currently riding at its highest levels in the past 30 years, the international community has recognised the importance of engaging young women and men in shaping lasting peace. In 2015 the United Nations Security Council passed a ground-breaking resolution, Youth, Peace and Security: Resolution 2250 (United Nations Security Resolution 2250, 2015). This urged member states to increase inclusive representation of young people in institutions to establish mechanisms for the prevention and resolution of conflict, and to counter violent extremism. Youth were finally recognised as ‘the missing peace’ in the role of global peace processes. The United Nations acknowledged the potential for good of these 1.8 billion young people who, on a daily basis, seek creative ways to prevent violence and consolidate peace across the globe in devastated and conflict-affected societies. Technology-based peacebuilding practices, collectively known as Peacetech, were enshrined as a route forward in this complex task. Peacetech, combining the strategic use of technology in peacebuilding practice, has been pioneered as one pillar of Resolution 2250. Post-conflict education programs often deliver Peacetech’s technology-based peacebuilding programs to post-conflict youth groups. This paper on Peacetech is divided into three parts. First, it outlines the definition and goals of Peacetech. Secondly, it outlines the definition and goals of Peacebuilding and outlines the significant role post-conflict education can have in peacebuilding. Thirdly, it highlights three Peacetech case studies evaluated in the field by the author. Overall, it is hoped that the paper will enthuse researchers in both the education and development fields to engage in further extensive research on post-conflict education.

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## **Introduction: Definition and Goals of Peacetech**

Peacetech is defined as the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) for Peacebuilding purposes (Young and Young, 2016). As the name indicates, it consists of ‘technology’ and ‘peacebuilding’, both of which are elusive to define. It is further defined through the strategic use of multimedia<sup>1</sup> and digital arts for peacebuilding purposes (British Council, 2016). Advances in ICTs represent great opportunities for innovation, growth and the unfettered exchange of ideas. Peacetech is lauded as a fast-growing emerging global trend affecting the way people and societies operate and interact whose potential is firmly embraced by its use in agencies such as the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF), United Nations High Commission for Human Rights (UNHCHR) and International Red Cross Red Crescent Societies (IRCRC). All of these agencies are now directly involved in utilizing technology to support post-conflict youth.

Data, communication, and networking/mobilization have been identified as the three key functions technology can fulfill in Peacetech peacebuilding initiatives (British Council, 2016 a). The data component in Peacetech consists of aggregation, gathering, analysis and visualization. The communication component consists of more voices, alternative narratives and sharing information. The networking and mobilisation component consists-of alternative spaces and engagement towards collective action (British Council, 2016 b).

The strategic importance and key function of the majority of Peacetech projects involve communication of a new set of points of view. In relation to the artistic and creative media that digital devices provide, individuals can now represent, respond to, seek to transform, or prevent the occurrence and negative impact of conflict and violence using digital media (Hunter, 2014).

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<sup>1</sup> This includes the strategic use of film, photography, radio, multimedia; app-based platforms and associated mediums, used in peacebuilding.

One of the most powerful uses of Peacetech is to make adolescents visible and countable; to take children into account in diverse ways (UNICEF, 2015). That, in turn, can help to make adults and governments accountable for their welfare in the post-conflict setting (UNHCHR, 2018). This is important in the process of strengthening the social contract between government and citizens, which is especially important in post-conflict societies and fragile states.

The British Council's most recent classification of its Peacetech's short, medium and long-term goals (British Council, 2016 b), which encompass those of most other international organisations, are now described below.

*Short term goals: -*

- Peacetech offers one the opportunity to engage in peacebuilding without using this term. For example, it allows groups to wage conflict non-violently and reduces direct violence.
- Peacetech allows networking to take place amongst peace builders (as in Syria).
- Peacetech can present opportunities to reach out to people in areas that can be physically hard to get access to.

*Medium term goals:-*

- Peacetech offers a multitude of means to try to stabilize, build capacity in and transform society.
- Peacetech can offer many local, small-scale initiatives great benefits through the provision of strategic communications support and connection.
- Peacetech technology and associated processes can provide benefits for engagement in creative and artistic initiatives by broadening their reach.
- Local peace builders can be given the capacity to maintain a strong online presence and develop an interest to learn other technology tools and processes.

- Peacetech can provide various diaspora groups produced by conflicts with full support and capacity to be engaged in peacebuilding activities in the societies to which they fled.

*Long-term goals:*

- Peacetech offers one the opportunity to harness cultural, educational, and livelihood initiatives so that one can try to build social cohesion and community resilience.

## **Peacebuilding: Definition and Goals**

Peacebuilding is understood throughout this study as being “action(s) to identify and support structures which tend to strengthen and solidify peace to avoid a relapse into conflict” (UN, 2018, p. 843). A central associated strategy of peacebuilding pursued by governments and international development agencies across all sectors and amongst all levels of society, is to try to reduce tensions and mitigate conflict (UNICEF, 2014).

A key element to successful youth Peacebuilding programs is through education. The relationship between education and violent conflict is very close. Indeed, schools can be complicit in conflict by reproducing the skills, values, attitudes and social relations of dominant groups in society. Accordingly, they are usually a contributing factor in conflict (World Vision, 2003, 22). A key message is that conflict presents not only challenges for reconstruction but also significant opportunities for the reform of education systems (World Bank, 2011). Further, states with little or no education and economic opportunities are more likely to experience outbreaks of violence (UN, 2018).

Ethnic and religious dominance can also be powerful contributing factor in civil conflict. On this, education has a key role to play in either mediating or deepening ethnic, religious, and other identity-based conflicts. Indeed, civil war can increase the likelihood of further outbreak of conflict, as it divides a national community into separate parts, each vying for dominance over the other (UN, 2018).

The main purpose of all human rights legislation is to provide people with safeguards against abuses of power by governments (Tomaveski, 2002). Youth occupy a grey area between the rights and protections afforded to children and the rights and political entitlements that they should, but often do not, enjoy as young adults. Nevertheless, in post-conflict education there is a tendency to focus on getting all children and youth into education programs rather than insisting that they be protected from brainwashing or violence while they are receiving them (World Vision, 2002). This can, and is often, the case in conflict and post-conflict education settings.

All children's rights should be honoured both to education and in education. Adults should, but often do not acknowledge that they routinely abuse their power over children. Often it is said that 'children are ours, so are their rights' (Tomaveski, 2002). International human rights law protects the parental choice of education of their children, however, requires states to constrain that choice wherever it jeopardises the best interest of the child (Tomaveski, 2002). There is ample evidence that, while all schooling is simply called schooling, even when it is a case of re-education, it is often aimed at curing ideological or political dissidents of their subversive ideas by forcing them to regurgitate official dogma (Tomaveski, 2002). Relatedly, there is little available information on institutional attempts to brainwash youth about their peers and schooling them to fear and hate each other as youth. Schooling can be viewed as a means to either retain or eliminate inequality (World Vision, 2002).

There is a myth that any-and-every type of schooling is worthy of the name education and is inherently good. However, indigenous people worldwide often do not perceive 'Western' schooling as inherently good. Rather, we know for some time that many see it as oppression (Tomaveski, 2002). Further, the umbrella term 'education' encompasses an immense variety of phenomena, from schooling children into submission and training them to obey orders, to helping them recognize and develop their talents, fostering the curiosity, and nurturing their ability to help others

(Tomaveski, 2002). Finally, while compulsory education is promoted and defined as a duty, rather than a right, of the child, getting all children into school is still mistaken for fulfilling their right to an education. This is because they can end up being brainwashed, indoctrinated or abused (Tomaveski, 2002).

## **Peacetech Country Case Studies**

This section details three country case studies that highlight how Peacetech can be used in conflict prevention. Selection was based on the view that technology, art, and participatory media can be of great help to youth in mitigating polarization and generating constructive and inclusive political dialogues. The chapter outlines a brief historical, demographic and economic analysis of each country to which a case relates. It then examines general issues concerning technology and Peacetech there. Finally it gives a detailed outline of each Peacetech project.

### **Peacetech Case Study # 1: Conflict and peacebuilding in Colombia**

#### ***Introduction***

The population of Colombia has endured fifty-three years of war between its government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). This, the world's longest running war, has produced over 260,000 casualties in the last three decades (UNHCHR, 2018). That concurrently produced the world's largest population of internally displaced persons (IDPs) numbering 7.9 million (El Tiempo, 2019).

With a comprehensive peace deal signed by both parties in 2016, post-conflict Colombia stood at the crossroads. Transition from a failed-state to OECD membership and finally peace had somehow occurred. The world looked on with hope at the promises given by all parties to create a new, fair and equitable society for all citizens.

In 2020, however, worrying signs indicating transition back to conflict are evident, namely, remilitarization of government policy and practice, government reluctance to implement the Havana Peace Accords, the resurgence of widespread assassination of leaders of land restitution, substitution of crops and human rights activists by illegal groups, and the emergence of FARC dissident groups and Mexican Drug cartels. In other words, ‘conflict’, ‘post-conflict’ and ‘transition’ inhabit the revolving reality of Colombia’s peace in 2020.

### ***The Conflict***

Colombia’s population was devastated by war, with an estimated 80 per cent of its most recent 260,000 casualties being civilians (OECD, 2019). Education opportunities in post conflict zones and for displaced people are limited and in some places non-existent (OECD, 2019). An estimated 7.9 million IDPs, predominantly Indigenous and Afro-Colombian, have been displaced due to conflict (Amnesty International, 2019), around 40 per cent of whom are children and adolescents (UNICEF, 2018). FARC’s political aims were to redistribute national wealth along communist lines. These ‘broadened’ to include widespread kidnapping, murder, extortion and the taxation of drug and mineral extraction. The power vacuum resulting from demobilization saw national and international gangs, drug cartels and FARC dissidents re-enter conflict areas to control illicit economies. This has had a negative impact on the rights of Colombia’s civilians.

There has also been the resurgence of widespread assassination of leaders, of land restitution, denouncement of illegal extractive industries, substitution of illegal crops and human rights activists. By December 2018, a total of 1,741 attacks on social leaders had occurred, including 801 fatalities (UN, 2018). This constitutes a new tendency in the motives for killings as in previous years; civilians and human rights defenders are executed largely because of opposition to government policies.

## ***The Demography and Economy of Colombia***

Colombia is Latin America's fifth biggest nation and is the most bio-diverse country on the planet, being endowed with a wealth of natural and mineral resources. It has a predominantly young and urbanised population of 47.6 million people, 33% of whom live below the poverty line (OECD, 2018). Colombia is also the second most unequal country regionally (0.54 Ginni), with only Honduras ranking lower (0.57 Ginni) (World Bank, 2017).

Colombia is classified as having an upper middle-income economy, producing a GDP of US \$301 Billion in 2017 (World Bank, 2017). Across regions, however, poverty rates are very deep, especially in rural communities. Colombia's two main illegal economies, namely cocaine (US \$3Billion/PA) and illegal mining (US \$7Billion/PA) (UNODC, 2017), gross vast revenue for the groups that control them.

Corruption is a significant problem, reinforced by the fact that government in remote departments of Colombia does not exist in many of its traditional forms. That situation perpetuates inequality and fuels further conflict. The Office of the General Controller estimates the cost of corruption at approximately US \$18 Billion per year (UNODC, 2017). This figure accounts for approximately 4% of Colombia's annual GDP. This can be compared to the World Bank estimation that Colombia spends approximately 5% of annual GDP on healthcare (UNICEF, 2018).

## ***Peacetech in Colombia***

Colombia is positioned regionally as the country where the internet comes closest to being 'affordable' for users (UNHCHR, 2018); 88% of Colombian users use the web for social networking (Datareportal, 2019). Across the regions of the country, however, internet and phone coverage varies, and is non-existent in remote communities



The United Nations Peacebuilding Fund (UN PBF) has been active in Colombia since 2014, promoting inclusive and engaging projects in Peacetech arts, that include the use of mobile cinema, transmission of radio and television serial dramas and peace-related activities in conflict-affected municipalities. These have benefitted over 500,000 people. In 2017, the UN PBF further supported the peace agreement through a series of projects aimed at accelerating collective reparation of victims in areas close to FARC containment sights (United Nations, 2017). These include a range of actions prioritized by the victims themselves, to repair the damages caused by the conflict and protect them from further violence. The Peacetech project reported later in this thesis is one of these projects.

### ***UNHCHR, Colombia- Basic Instructive Course in Digital & Social Media***

The targeted assassination of more than 800 social leaders since the formal end of hostilities in 2016 highlights a new form of insurgency-based conflict in Colombia (UNHCR, 2018). Essentially, one social leader is murdered every three days (The Atlantic, 2018)<sup>2</sup>. There were over 223 recorded homicides of social leaders in 2019. Terrorised communities are either forced to allow illegal narcotics or extractive industries to flourish in their ancestral lands, or be threatened, killed or displaced.

Assistance in promoting collective human rights, through Peacetech, was requested by youth social leaders. UNHCHR responded quickly, introducing a Basic Instructive Course in Digital & Social Media (ODI, 2017). The project teaches youth participants the strategic communication and dialogue/mobilization strand of Peacetech. It also introduces youth leaders to multimedia, social media, and digital art. The explicit teaching involves the use of film, photography, editing on mobile media. Additional lessons

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.theatlantic.com/video/index/561194/colombia-social-leaders/>

regarding the use of You Tube, Facebook, Twitter and Whats-app for Peacebuilding purposes are taught.

It is envisaged that the skills gained in small regional workshops will assist participants to promote both their communities and themselves online safely, improve communication of events, and defend themselves and their communities through positive promotion of their culture and unique ways of life in an increasingly dangerous post-conflict setting. Participant mobile devices were donated by UNHCHR. This Peacetech initiative was run in field by UNHCHR Colombia and funded by the UK Government (ODI).

## **Peacetech Case Study # 2: Participatory Film - Conflict and Peacetech in East Timor**

### ***Introduction***

East Timor has endured over four centuries of colonialism and occupation by both European and Asian powers, and the lives of its population have been punctuated by constant violence. Emerging as South East Asia's newest, youngest and poorest nation, the inhabitants know that peace and security go hand in hand with development. The country underwent almost total devastation to gain independence. Youth now find themselves earmarked to assist in national development. With 74 per cent of the population under 35 years old and 65 per cent of the population under 25 years old the government views them as having within them the nation's unique development opportunity. Responding bravely to demographic realities, a paradigm shift away from youth bulge towards youth dividend is occurring (UNDP, 2018). A necessity to rebuild society using youth and ICT, funded by newly discovered offshore gas reserves, lies ahead.

### ***Conflict***

East Timor's 24 year occupation by Indonesia was brutal and resulted in over 200,000 deaths (CAVR, 2013). The 1997 Asian Economic Crash forced Indonesia to cede control of the state,

holding a referendum on independence in 1998. Over 78 per cent of the East Timorese population rejected political autonomy, voting instead for independence (UN Security Council, 1999). The vote was conducted in a climate of intense intimidation from Indonesia, and violence broke out even before the final votes were collected.

The results of the initial wave on violence were 1,500 deaths, over 250,000 refugees displaced to West Timor, the wholesale destruction of 80 per cent of East Timor's infrastructure (including 95 per cent of schools), the complete destruction of its cities, and the evacuation of all but 80 UN staff. A United Nations common country assessment depicted the situation as tragically unique claiming that not since the end of World War II has a country experienced such destruction of its infrastructure, complete collapse of government structures, displacement of most of its population and near-total disruption of all economic activities. The cost in material and human terms 'has been immense' (United Nations, 2000 p.3).

United Nations peacekeepers arrived with a mandate to secure the Territory. Plans for an orderly transfer of power had to be scrapped due to violence and all international actors struggled to respond to urgent needs. Along with physical destruction and population displacement, the institutional framework of government had vanished (World Bank, 2005). The short but intense period of violence following the independence referendum in 2000 is perhaps a most extreme global example of destruction of education infrastructure; 95% of East Timor's classrooms were destroyed or seriously damaged in the conflict (World Bank, 2000). The country changed its name to Timore-Leste once independence had been gained.

### ***The Demography and Economy of Timor-Leste***

The mountainous nation was one of SE Asia's smallest, poorest and most rapidly growing nations at the time of independence in 1996. Despite improvements, including the recent discovery of considerable petroleum reserves, the nation still ranks as one of the

regions poorest. Currently 50 per cent of Timor-Leste's population live below the poverty line and 45 percent of children below 5 years of age suffer from malnutrition-related physical and mental stunting (UNDP, 2018). Timor-Leste's Ginni Coefficient (0.35) is low in comparison to the ASEAN average (World Bank, 2017). This means that although poor, the standard of living is relatively equal across the country.

Timor-Leste has a population of 1.269 million (DGE, 2015) and it is growing rapidly. The median age of its population is 17.4 years (DGE 2015), which is the lowest in the ASEAN region and the 15th youngest globally (UNDP, 2018). Rapid growth is highlighted by the staggering 10 per cent increase in population that occurred between 2010-2015. A major factor fuelling this was remarkably high female fertility, especially during the first 10 years since independence (Saikia & Hosgelen, 2010); during that period, Timor-Leste's rate of 7.8 children per female was deemed the second highest globally (UNDP, 2018).

Demographic realities place a substantial burden on Timor-Leste's working-age population, highlighted by a dependency ratio of 82 (DGE, 2015). This means that every 100 persons of working age (>15yrs and <65yrs) must support 82 who are not of working age, plus themselves. ASEAN neighbours, such as Indonesia, Thailand and Singapore have rates as low as 37 (DGE, 2015). Due to this demographic structure, Timor-Leste experiences a larger economic burden than its neighbours. Currently most youth are economically inactive, inadequately educated and ill equipped to participate in socio-economic and political life (World Bank, 2017).

However, all countries experience changes in demographic structure and dependency ratios, as mortality and fertility rates decline. Timor-Leste's impending decline in its dependency ratio (as youth transition into being economically active adults) heralds a demographic window of opportunity. By seizing the opportunity through having sound policy, the country will enjoy a demographic dividend for 30-40 years, creating enormous socio-economic benefits for society.

Recent discovery of significant oil and gas reserves stimulated an economic surge. Ongoing production began in 2014 and is forecast to continue until 2021 (SDG Working Group, 2017). Today 90 per cent of national GDP is supported by oil and gas revenues. Tremendous pressure is exerted on these reserves due to the rapidly growing population, limited human resources and negligible economic diversification (UNDP, 2018). The country has undergone further political turmoil with no party being able to establish a governing majority following elections in 2018 held amid accusations of government corruption and a contracting, oil dependent economy (Graca Feijo, 2019)

### ***Peaceteach in Timor-Leste***

In the year 2000, Xanana Gusmao<sup>3</sup> asked 50 digital-arts-based friendship groups (businesses and universities) across Australia to assist in national recovery (Moreira, 2009b). Technology professionals from Australia have travelled to newly named Timor-Leste since then to explore opportunities to increase communication between the nations. This heralded the birth of Peaceteach there. Numerous NGO's and youth media-training groups were established over the years, supported by the Australian Government, the Australian Arts Council and the International Centre for Journalism.<sup>4</sup>

Since independence in 2002, the growth of the technology sector in Timor-Leste has been rapid, yet patchy. Growth in internet access and use is being driven by bundled mobile phone subscriptions (UNDP, 2018) and has leapt by almost 2,500 per cent since 2015 (We Are Social 2018). Almost all of the growth can be attributed to improved mobile internet access including free Facebook access (We Are Social, 2018).

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<sup>3</sup> Who went on to be the first President of Timor-Leste.

<sup>4</sup> [www.suaimediaspace.org/youth/category/yomatre/](http://www.suaimediaspace.org/youth/category/yomatre/) & [https://www.facebook.com/pg/Empreza.Diak/about/?ref=page\\_internal](https://www.facebook.com/pg/Empreza.Diak/about/?ref=page_internal).

It is envisaged that technology will lift the Timorese people to a new collective and moral consciousness based on a shared sense of destiny and values associated with creativity, entrepreneurship and stewardship (UNDP, 2018). Boldly envisaged in the nation's 2018 National Human Development Report (UNDP, 2018), ICT is highlighted as being the means to enlarge young people's opportunities and find their space in the fourth industrial revolution by gaining skills demanded for new labour markets, venturing into social entrepreneurship and e-citizenship, and participating in nation building through e-citizenship. Through these ways, it is hoped that technology will move the country far away from its troubled past.

### ***Independent Film Cooperatives: Timor-Leste, Participatory film***

Timor Leste youth is attempting to find identity and create narratives of peace in the complex post-conflict society in which they work. Peacetech projects that teach youth film-making skills in Dili's main art cooperative are Animatism<sup>5</sup> and Cinema Malkradiku<sup>6</sup>. They are both projects that build knowledge in the region about post-conflict life through digital art. They showcase opportunities for collaboration between Australian and Timor-Leste artists. They teach participants participatory film production and

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<sup>5</sup> *Animatism* is a collective of artists and curators from Australia, East Timor and Indonesia founded by Chris Parkinson. The collective is: Chris Parkinson, Chris Phillips, Amanda Haskard, Bryan Phillips, Michael Fikaris and Liam Barton (AUST), Etson Caminha, Alfe Perreira, Tony Amaral, Osme Goncalves, Mely Fernandes and Gil Valentim (East Timor), Djuwadi Awhal (Indonesia). David Palazon was a founder member of the organisation, prior to its official naming. <http://www.animatismart.com/exchange/>

<sup>6</sup> *Cinema Malkradiku* is a collective of film makers, artists and curators from Australia, East Timor and Indonesia founded by Thomas Henning. The collective is: Thomas Henning (AUST), Jonas Rusumalay Diaz, Giovanni Lorusso, Mariano Goncalves, Etson Caminha, Liam Barton & Lucy MacCallum. <https://australianculturalfund.org.au/artists/malkriadu-cinema/>

support youth activism, peacebuilding, minority group empowerment and cultural exchange.

Four award-winning film directors (Thomas Henning, Chris Phillips, Chris Parkinson and David Palazon) oversee the emerging film and participatory digital arts scene in Timor-Leste. They attempt to challenge the stereotypes associated with the 'Third World' that serve to perpetuate myths of colonialism in which people of former colonies are incessantly depicted as voiceless victims, impoverished and exotic noble savages, subhuman, and under-evolved. They also seek to create an alternative style and narrative in order to promote an alternative perception of Timor internationally. The projects develop spaces for intergenerational cultural exchange and dialogue around artistic resilience, peace and the creative articulation of a unified vision of contemporary Timor-Leste.

### **Peacetech Case Study # 3: Independent Participatory Film - Conflict and Peacetech in the Philippines**

#### ***Introduction***

The resource rich island of Mindanao has been governed by Muslim sultans since the early 1400s. Their sultanates were recognized as the official form of government by Asian allies and colonial enemies alike. Further, successive colonial and Philippine governments in recent times found the military strength of the sultanates profoundly threatening. Policies to address this led to widespread Christian settlement, declaration of martial law and years of open war. There was failure to ratify self-government peace deals with autonomous regions<sup>7</sup> due to mistrust, violence, insecurity, intimidation and a feuding culture that had become well embedded in the local political economy.

Recent Islamic extremism, which destroyed two major cities, catalysed action in a newly incumbent government. Martial law was

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<sup>7</sup> Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM)

imposed in 2018 and laws were passed granting independent government to the Autonomous Regions of Muslim Mindano (ARMM) regions of the island. Here, Muslim separatists seem to have been catered for, yet the rise of extremist groups across the province also heralds a new era of conflict on the island. The world looks on at post-conflict Mindanao and the struggle being undertaken to make it a fair and equitable society for all. An education system with strong youth peacebuilding elements has a key role to play in this.

### ***Conflict***

There are two main types of conflict in Mindanao. The first is referred to as separatist, political, rebellion-related, top-down conflict related violence, which pertains to the vertical armed challenges against the infrastructure of the State and the insurgent and rebel groups. The second is called non-separatist, bottom-up, inter- or intra-ethnic, clan or group violence which pertains to horizontal armed challenges (Reno, 2000; Tilly, 2003; Keen, 2008). An important related question to pose is why is there so much conflict in the post-conflict moment? The roots of this go beyond the original narratives of resistance and rebellion and shed light on the shifting political and economic conditions that explain their longevity. On this it is important to distinguish between the original causes of conflict (onset) and the emerging politico-economic conditions that underlie their persistence (duration) (Collier & Sambanis, 2005).

An exogenous factor worth considering is Rido. This is Moro society's clan-based system of feuding and revenge killing. It serves to perpetuate high levels of on-the-ground violence. Between 1980 and 2005 a total of 2,500 Rido cases were documented, resulting in the death of more than 15,500 people. Relatedly, there has been a marked rise in incidents of clan-based violence following unratiated peace agreements.

Mindanao's population also suffers from controversial government narcotics policies, which resulted in 10,000 state-sponsored killings



of ‘drug users’ in 2019. Naturally, the victims of these efforts have mainly been poor, young men. The ‘war on drugs’, is in effect, a war on the poor and on political dissidents. (Amnesty International, 2019).

The long timeframe and geographical range of the conflict mean it is hard to provide exact data on casualties and costs. However, a World Bank study estimated the direct economic costs of the conflict in 2005 at over US \$6 Billion, with 220,000 casualties and 2 million refugees (World Bank, 2005). The rise of militant extremism since 2013 has also resulted in two highly destructive sieges of the cities of Zamboanga and Marawi, whose repair will cost in excess of US\$3 billion. It involved the displacement of over 500,000 residents into transitory camps (UNICEF, 2019).

### ***Islamic Extremism***

In Asian countries, political radicalization seems to be region specific, localised and internal despite its direct or indirect links with external or trans-border groups. In the autonomous region of Muslim Mindanao province, various groups promote political independence, this is identified in the Philippines as Muslim separatism (Lidasan, 2015). In this connection, despite the popularly held view of South East Asia as a religiously diverse, tolerant and peaceful region, there are signs that underlying frustrations and inequalities are fueling a worrying rise in radicalization and violent extremism (IAG, 2017).

Researchers in Asia have developed a complex understanding of radicalization as being deeply connected to such psychosocial and economic grievances as poverty and unemployment, marginalization through illiteracy and lack of education (UNODC, 2016). It also involves admiration for charismatic leaders, pursuit of social acceptability, and psychological trauma. These factors are considered to facilitate online radicalization-orientated recruitment, especially among young people who are more vulnerable to it as they often spend a great deal of time online (UNESCO, 2017).

## ***Demography and Economy***

Mindanao is the nation's second largest island with a population of 25.5 million. This makes it the eighth most populated island in the world. The Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao has a population of 3.7 million (UNDP, 2018).

Mindanao is known as the breadbasket of the Philippines. It has rich agricultural land and high-yield fisheries that produce approximately 50% of nation's food. Undeveloped mineral resources estimated at US \$1 Trillion add to its huge resource base.

Following the 1997 Asian Economic Crash, the Philippines experienced growth rates of 4% per annum. The Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindano provinces however were systematically subjected to decades of dispossession and political marginalisation. Recent development indices demonstrate the effect of this on the Muslim population (UNDP, 2018).

- Unemployment levels (56%) five times higher than the national average (10%).
- Life expectancies (52 years) nineteen years below the national average (71 years).
- Higher infant mortality rates (19%) compared against the national average.
- Higher rates of poverty (45%) as compared to the national average (36%).
- Lower school enrolment (26%) as compared to the national average (45%).
- Lower rate of primary graduation (37%) as compared to the national average (66%).

A huge task of achieving economic growth and poverty reduction exists.

### ***Peacetech in the Philippines***

In 2018, for the third year in a row, the Philippines topped the world in the amount of time its citizens spend on social media; four hours daily<sup>8</sup> (We Are Social, 2018). Mobile devices are relatively affordable for all. Research also shows that the use of social media by religious extremists in the Southern Philippines takes place through Facebook and Twitter to communicate with young people, to train them, and to fundraise online (UNODC, 2016). This points to the relevance of the Peacetech in this area.

#### ***UNICEF, Art for Development Programme, Zamboanga City Transitory Camps***

As a result of ISIS infiltration, the Muslim community of Zamboanga rebelled in 2013. The city was declared a war site for three weeks. More than 10,000 houses were burned and more than 100,000 residents were made homeless in transitory camps (Chalk, 2016). In 2017 ISIS led an uprising in nearby Marawi City that resulted in a further 360,000 refugees and US\$ 2 billion dollars-worth of damage. These sieges highlight an urgent need for Peacetech measures to counter rising Islamic youth extremism.

UNICEF's Art for Development program has been running in Zamboanga City since 2015. Implemented by SUGPAT, a Youth Arts Cooperative of Ateneo University of Zamboanga (<https://sugpat.org>), it holds numerous film, photography, rap and digital story-telling workshops that focus specifically on creating 'safe spaces' and facilitating 'youth participation and networks' (UNICEF, 2015). One of the aims of the project is to work towards the creation of lasting connections, understanding and friendships amongst youths in transitory sites from different tribal backgrounds and to counter religious extremism. The project is coordinated by UNICEF Philippines, implemented by the University of Zamboanga and funded by USAid.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://wearesocial.com/blog/2018/01/global-digital-report-2018>

## Conclusion

This paper presented the definitions and goals of Peacetech, peacebuilding and post-conflict education programs. It then presented three country case studies to highlight how Peacetech is used in conflict prevention. Selection was based on the view that technology, art, and participatory media can be of great help to youth in mitigating polarization and generating constructive and inclusive political dialogues. The paper outlined a brief historical, demographic and economic analysis of each country and examines general issues concerning technology and Peacetech there. Hopefully other researchers in both the education and development fields will now be enthused to engage in further extensive research in Peacetech post-conflict education.

## Authors

Alex Robins is a primary school principal with 20 years of experience in digital arts education, peacebuilding education and development projects. Alex works extensively in Colombia with the Ethnic Commission, Colombians national representative body for Indigenous and Afro-Colombians.

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