

Dynamics of Resolving Conflicts of a Barangay Justice System's Efficiency

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ABSTRACT. Through the Katarungang Pambarangay (KP), a community-driven framework crucial for formal litigation, the Philippines exemplifies restorative justice as it obtains international prominence. The operational dynamics of the KP in Calbayog City are evaluated in this study, with a focus on assessing the administrators' competence and identifying obstacles to successful conflict settlement in accordance with the law. 112 members of Lupong Tagapamayapa, who serve as quasi-judicial officers and mediators, participated in the study using a descriptive-evaluative approach. Key findings suggest a competence paradox: qualitative insights reveal substantial gaps in technical legal knowledge and jurisdictional limits, notwithstanding officials' claims of high moral integrity and independence. The KP successfully uses a restorative method in spite of these obstacles, giving emotional expression precedence over rigid procedural rules. Strong administrative performance in documentation is noted in the report, but structural flaws resulting from a lack of coercive power and inadequate financial incentives are also revealed. In the end, even though the KP effectively promotes harmony and social cohesiveness, its long-term viability will rely on closing the gap between professionalization and volunteerism through focused capacity-building programs.

KEYWORDS: *Alternative Dispute Resolution; Conflict Management; Local Governance; RA 7160; Community Mediation; Peacebuilding*

INTRODUCTION

The legal thought around conflict resolution has changed on a global scale. Through a process marked by communication, accountability, and reparation, restorative justice aims to repair the harm caused by crime rather than concentrating just on retributive punishment ^[1]. The ultimate objective of this framework, which can be understood on a continuum from a particular judicial procedure to a more general societal philosophy, goes beyond merely resolving individual disputes to addressing the larger social damages and systemic problems that underlie human relationships ^[2].

Through the special institutionalization of the Katarungang Pambarangay (KP), the Philippine legal system operationalizes this theory. But in the context of Southeast Asia, the Philippine approach is unique. The KP is required, in contrast to voluntary mediation systems in Thailand or Indonesia, as mentioned by Glubwila et al. ^[3]. The KP serves as a mandatory filter for the legal system under the Local Government Code of 1991 (RA 7160). The law mandates that disagreements between inhabitants of the same municipality go through barangay conciliation as a prerequisite to filing a case in court; it supplements rather than replaces the regular courts. The formal court system can only step in when mediation is unsuccessful and a Certificate to File Action is granted.

The Lupong Tagapamayapa, a body headed by the Punong Barangay and made up of ten to twenty community members chosen for their honesty and impartiality, is how the KP functions. Three different forms of peaceful resolution are required by the system: (1) mediation, (2) conciliation, and (3) arbitration.

The Katarungang Pambarangay's three goals are to reduce court docket congestion, preserve Filipino culture regarding amicable settlement, and accomplish a fair, quick, and affordable resolution of disputes. This ultimate goal is essential because evidence shows that the formal judicial system is marked by significant delays and inefficiencies. Narag ^[4] points out that although the median pretrial detention period is 268 days, the mean rises to 529 days, resulting in a situation where the detention procedure itself becomes the penalty.

A humanitarian disaster has been brought on by this incompetence. According to Valenzuela ^[5], jail overcrowding has reached a startling 511% nationwide, with certain facilities overcrowding by 2,000%, making systemic paralysis fatal. Due to these causes, the focus of the modern criminal justice system has switched from providing justice to simply "processing cases" ^[6]. As a result, the Katarungang Pambarangay's efficient

operation is crucial to the legal well-being of the country.

However, a crucial tension has surfaced: whereas restorative justice's theoretical frameworks have grown, its real practical application frequently finds it difficult to keep up ^[6]. Empirical research reveals a glaring gap between mediator skill and case resolution, even if forced mediation has been incorporated to clear court dockets. Although mediators frequently exhibit procedural skill, Soriano et al. ^[7] discovered that this knowledge does not necessarily convert into efficiency, finding a sluggish disposal rate of just 24.2% in some jurisdictions. Additionally, Umengan [8] contends that there are still substantial gaps in the Lupong Tagapamayapa's comprehension of tenure and contentious issues, calling for focused training initiatives.

These operational disparities imply that the KP system's success is not assured by its very existence. Therefore, by performing a thorough evaluation of Calbayog City's Barangay Justice System, this study seeks to close the gap in local literature. In particular, this study aims to:

- (a) evaluate the traits and skills of the Lupon members;
- (b) ascertain their performance level;
- (c) assess how well the system settles legal disputes; and
- (d) pinpoint the precise issues that arose during implementation in order to make recommendations based on evidence.

LITERATURE

The aim to transition from strict, state-centric adjudication to more adaptable, restorative models is the driving force behind the global trend toward community-based dispute resolution. According to Procter-Legg et al. ^[2], this is a continuum where justice is a tool for social preservation rather than just a legal procedure, with the goal of addressing the root causes of conflict rather than just its symptoms. Informal justice institutions are vital substitutes for official courts throughout Southeast Asia. Nonetheless, there are clear differences in how they are applied. Glubwila et al. ^[3] point out that although Thailand and Indonesia use voluntary mediation systems that rely on cultural consensus (like the *musyawarah*), the Philippines is unique in that its system is incorporated into the governmental machinery as a requirement prior to litigation. Because it aims to reconcile two frequently incompatible paradigms—the flexibility of restorative justice and the rigor of bureaucratic procedure—this distinct institutionalized informality merits careful examination. According to Gavrielides ^[6], this junction frequently results in a theory-practice divide where the theoretical principles of restorative justice clash with practical realities. Examining the Philippine Katarungang Pambarangay provides a unique chance to assess how community mediators operate when they are not just social elders but also legally required quasi-judicial officers.

The Philippine Katarungang Pambarangay is unique in Southeast Asia. According to Glubwila et al. ^[3], the KP requires village-level mediation for even small disputes prior to police intervention, in contrast to voluntary systems in Thailand or Indonesia. This legal need, however, presents a paradox: although the law guarantees a large number of cases (quantity), the system frequently suffers with the quality of resolution because of a lack of systematic personnel development.

Social abilities and technical legal skills are clearly at odds, according to recent evaluations. Although Lupon members typically exhibit a high level of knowledge of their responsibilities, they frequently have trouble understanding the KP Law's intricacies, such as how to properly issue a Certificate to File Action ^[9,10]. Officials lack the confidence to provide legal advice, which is referred to as a "knowledge gap" ^[11,12].

The system adjusts through social pressure and collective resilience rather than rigorous obedience to the law. Members frequently tackle problems as a cohesive group, depending more on friendship than protocol, according to Plaza-Saligumba et al. ^[13]. As a result, the operational preference strongly favors compromise, a conflict resolution approach in which parties forfeit legal rights in order to maintain relationships ^[10].

The KP mostly uses social structures because of the technical deficiency. According to Metillo et al. ^[14], social preservation—rather than the legal code—is the vehicle for resolution; mediators remind disputants that they are a single community by using religious appeals and community kinship. This is supported by research showing that authorities often use Bible verses or indigenous rites (such the *hidit*) to explain mistakes in a moral rather than legal perspective ^[15,16].

Instead of strict statutes, this flexibility enables agreements that are suited to needs. Because they reject strict deadlines and use shared meals as spiritual seals of agreement—a mechanism lacking in the formal bureaucratic process—informal methods, such as the *Tingiting* practice, frequently succeed where the formal KP fails, according to a comparative study by Basilio et al. ^[16].

Empirical evidence shows high settlement rates when appropriate procedures are followed, despite the

competency disparities. Agoot and Cruz ^[17] reported a settlement efficacy of 89.82% in jurisdictions where secretaries accurately documented processes, indicating a substantial association between systematic documentation and success. In a similar vein, Guia and Mangubat ^[18] reported that 68 of the 72 instances that were submitted within the parameters of their study were satisfactorily settled, with the exceptions being complicated problems like debt collection and divorce.

It's interesting to note that inefficiencies can occasionally be strategic. Lupon members frequently postpone issuing the Certificate to File Action (CFA), according to Agustin et al. ^[19]. This wait is a calculated move to provide disputants a cooling-off time and avoid disputes from being prematurely escalated to the courts, rather than necessarily a procedural error.

Despite the system's promise, research points to a cycle of failure caused by three interrelated factors: power dynamics, political meddling, and financial inability ^[20]. One common issue is the absence of funding. Honoraria, which are frequently as little as P450 per month, are insufficient to encourage professional devotion, according to Jumalon et al. ^[21] and Elizaga-Pagalilauan ^[22]. Partisanship exacerbates this lack of resources; when the SK Chairman or Councilors do not share the Captain's political views, opposition members in the barangay council frequently postpone budget releases or closely examine monies ^[24, 25].

Although they can provide front-line services, officials sometimes lack the administrative governance skills. Gonzales et al. ^[25] discovered that although Barangay Councils (like the BCPC) are excellent at providing basic help, they perform badly when it comes to creating intervention programs and drafting laws, which leads to generic solutions that fail to address the underlying causes of conflict.

The opposition of disputants, which is frequently based in social rank, is a major obstacle to resolution. According to Damayon et al. ^[26], complainants frequently disrespect the Council's authority when they have greater social standing or educational backgrounds than the Lupon members. Hard-headed responders frequently disregard summonses with impunity since the KP lacks the authority to enforce attendance ^[27]. The Lupon must issue a Certificate to File Action due to this lack of coercive power, not because mediation was unsuccessful but rather because the parties just wouldn't show up.

The actual application of the BJS and the research methods used to evaluate it are covered in the Process component. In essence, it involves the Punong Barangay and the Pangkat conducting arbitration, conciliation, and mediation. In terms of methodology, it entails conducting surveys, interviews, and data analysis in order to convert inputs into empirical conclusions. The evaluated degree of the Barangay Justice System's efficacy in case resolution (perceived fairness, adherence to procedure, and acceptance of decisions) is the output or result. This results in recommendations based on evidence to improve administrative performance and close implementation gaps in Calbayog City.

METHODS

1. Research design

This study evaluated the Barangay Justice System's (BJS) functioning using a quantitative, cross-sectional descriptive-evaluative survey design. With an emphasis on the perceived performance of the Lupon Tagapamayapa and the efficacy in case resolution, the descriptive design sought to determine respondents' agreement with BJS operations. It also assessed how the BJS actually operated, focusing on internal operational viewpoints to identify administrative and technical challenges that might not be visible to the general public.

2. Respondents of the study

Members of the Lupon Tagapamayapa from different barangays in Calbayog City were the focus of the study. Internal members were chosen as respondents because they could offer in-depth insights into operational variables including accuracy in record-keeping and compliance with the Local Government Code. Cochran's formula was used to determine a goal of 112 respondents from a total of 157 barangays, with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. The three districts of the city were represented in a variety of urban and rural regions thanks to the purposive sampling technique. Newly appointed members with little experience or those who were unavailable during data collection were not eligible to participate; instead, participants had to be active Lupon members with at least a year of service and give their consent.

3. Data gathering instrument

A structured questionnaire created especially for members of the Lupon Tagapamayapa in Calbayog City served as the study's primary data collection tool. The self-administered questionnaire included both closed-ended and a few open-ended questions that matched the problem description. The tool measured perceived efficacy and competency using a 5-point Likert scale. The instrument featured open-ended questions that let respondents identify certain operational issues in order to provide richness to the quantitative results.

4. Data gathering procedure

Members of the Lupong Tagapamayapa in Calbayog City were given a structured survey to complete in order to gather data for the study. Prior to collecting data, the researcher obtained written consent from the City Government and worked with the Punong Barangay or Lupon Chairperson of the relevant barangays to schedule the study and ensure their cooperation. Four main areas were the focus of the survey: (a) the degree of agreement between Lupon members and the Barangay Justice System (BJS); (b) the Lupong Tagapamayapa's perceived performance; (c) the perceived efficacy of the Barangay Justice System in resolving cases; and (d) the difficulties encountered during its implementation.

4. Data analysis

The efficacy of the Barangay Justice System in the City of Calbayog was evaluated by the researcher using a 5-point Likert scale. The central tendency of the responses was determined using weighted means. The specific issues found in the survey's open-ended section were categorized using descriptive statistics (frequency and percentage).

RESULTS

A.Respondents' degree of agreement with BJS Lupon members

Table 1. Respondents' degree of agreement with BJS Lupon Members, 2022

Indicators	Mean	Description
Lupon members possess integrity	3.67	Agree
Members of Lupon are impartial, just and neutral.	3.87	Agree
Members of the Lupon have independent minds and decide according to their own will.	4.20	Agree
Lupon members have sense of fairness in treating both parties	4.16	Agree
Lupon members possess reputation for probity	3.23	Moderately Agree
Total Mean	3.87	Agree

Table 1 demonstrates that respondents have a favorable opinion of their own and their coworkers' attributes. "Members have independent mind" (Mean: 4.20) and "sense of fairness" (Mean: 4.16) received high agreement scores. A grand mean of 3.87 represents the general belief in adherence to ethical principles. However, "reputation for probity" scored the lowest (3.23), suggesting that moral integrity and independence are viewed differently.

B.Lupong Tagapamayapa's Performance Level in the Barangay Justice System

Table 2. Performance Level of Lupong Tagapamayapa, 2022

Indicator Lupon Administrative Performance	Mean	Description
Conduct meetings regularly once a month to provide a forum for exchange of ideas among its members and the public.	4.0	High
The Lupon secretary records the results of mediation proceedings before the punong barangay and submits a report thereon to the proper city or municipal courts.	4.26	High
The Lupon secretary receives and keeps the records of proceedings submitted to him by the various conciliation panels.	4.57	Very High
There is a duly constituted conciliation panel for each dispute brought before the Lupon consisting of three (3) members chosen by the parties from the list of members	3.9	High

of the Lupon

Total Mean	4.18	High
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Table 2 shows that the Lupon's administrative performance was assessed as "High," with an average score of 4.18. The creation of conciliation panels was ranked lower at 3.90, but it was still in the "High" category. In comparison, the Lupon Secretary's efficiency in documenting obtained the highest rating of 4.57, which was defined as "Very High."

C.The barangay justice system's effectiveness in resolving cases

Table 3. The efficiency of the barangay justice system in resolving cases

Indicator Settlement of Cases	Mean	Description
Complaints filed were given necessary action and the result was agreed by both parties.	4.43	Effective
The chairperson/mediator is fair, just and impartial.	4.67	Very Effective
The chairperson/mediator follows the procedure in administering cases filed in the Lupon.	4.30	Effective
Both parties involved were given the opportunity to express their sentiments, ideas and opinion.	4.70	Very Effective
The member of the conciliation panel listens well to the opinion of both parties.	4.13	Effective
The mediator did not pressure anyone to settle	4.33	Effective
Total Mean	4.43	Effective

Table 3 reveals that respondents gave the BJS system a grand mean of 4.43, classifying it as "Effective." The indicators that reflect procedural fairness received the highest ratings, with "Both parties were given opportunity to express sentiments" (4.70) and "Chairperson is fair and just" (4.67), highlighting these as important system strengths.

D.Issues that respondents had with BJS in Calbayog City

Table 4. Issues with the Barangay Justice System

Indicators Problems Identified	Number of Respondents	Percent (%)
Not enough technical knowledge of the Lupon on mediation	5	13.16
Low honorarium for the Lupon members	5	13.16
Cases filed are outside the jurisdiction of barangay ex. VAWC	4	10.53
No uniform for the Lupon for identity	4	10.53
Lack of coordination with other concerned agency	3	7.89
Lack of participation of parties involved	3	7.89
No proper training on technical report writing	3	7.89
Lack of knowledge of Lupon members on cases being filed like VAWC	3	7.89
Functionality of the Lupon is politically influenced which resulted in nonmediation.	2	5.26
Non-appearance of respondent and complainant during the actual settlement of disputes	2	5.26
Most of the barangay, only the secretary of Lupon is attending settlement,no Lupon members	2	5.26
No available funds for the Lupon	2	5.26

Total Mean	38	100%
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Table 4 summarizes 38 (34%) of the 112 respondents' qualitative comments on implementation issues. Two of the main issues raised by five respondents (4.4% of the total, 13.16% of the feedback group) were the low honorarium and the lack of technical expertise in mediation. Lack of uniforms and jurisdictional confusion, as stated by four respondents, were other concerns raised by smaller groups. Three respondents pointed out specific weaknesses in technical capability and cooperation within particular barangays, citing poor inter-agency coordination and insufficient report writing training.

DISCUSSION

1. The dichotomy of low technical proficiency and high integrity

Evaluating the Lupon members' attributes was the initial goal. Additionally, RA 7160 mandates that Lupon members be chosen according to their sense of justice. However, when these results are compared to the issues found in the study, a crucial disagreement appears. Respondents gave the Lupon good marks for moral qualities, while qualitative comments pointed out certain technical shortcomings. This supports the competency gap noted by Pajimola and Salom^[9], who contended that although Lupon members typically have the requisite moral standing and social capital, they frequently struggle with the legal nuances.

According to the data, the Lupon in Calbayog City principally relies on a framework of social preservation rather than legal expertise, as described by Metillo et al.^[14]. The high "Independent Mind" ranking indicates that they are confident in their judgment, but the frequent grievances about technical expertise suggest that this confidence is based more on social authority than on legal expertise. This corroborates Barcellano's^[11] conclusion that, despite their social respect, officials lack trust in their ability to provide particular legal advice due to a knowledge gap.

2. Documentation and administrative performance

According to the survey, administrative efficiency is at a "High" level. Interestingly, the Secretary's record-keeping efficiency received the highest rating. This is an important discovery because, as Agoot and Cruz^[17] pointed out, systematic documentation and successful settlement are strongly correlated. By guaranteeing that agreements are enforceable and executable and exhibiting high organizational compliance, the secretaries' excellent performance in Calbayog probably adds to the system's efficacy^[28].

It is noteworthy, therefore, that the conciliation panel's constitution received the lowest grade in this category. This little decline might be an indication of the compromising approach described by Añana et al.^[10], in which the Punong Barangay or the Chairman alone occasionally forego the formalities of panel formation in favor of quicker, less formal resolutions.

3. Efficiency

According to the survey, the Barangay Justice System works well. The highest-rated indicator, "Both parties involved were given the opportunity to express their sentiments," is the most instructive data point.

The Restorative Justice framework covered in the Introduction is validated by this particular finding^[1]. The Barangay Justice System in Calbayog is successful because it offers a forum for discussion, in contrast to the formal court system, which Narag^[4] describes as punitive and procedural. The high satisfaction percentage implies that the community evaluates the quality of justice based more on the emotional connection and chance to be heard than it does on legal correctness^[29]. This is consistent with research on indigenous customs by Basilio et al.^[16] and Chavez et al.^[30], which found that process flexibility—allowing parties to vent and explain—is more beneficial than strict adherence to deadlines.

4. Systemic obstacles and operational bottlenecks

The qualitative data reveals certain structural risks despite the excellent quantitative ratings. It is important to highlight that only a small percentage of respondents (about 13% of the feedback group) mentioned these issues, suggesting that these are specific operational bottlenecks rather than widespread systemic flaws.

The lack of technical understanding of certain complicated regulations was the most noticeable theme. The results of Jumalon et al.^[21] about the challenge of professionalizing volunteer mediators are corroborated by this. It is challenging to compel Lupon members to complete the demanding training necessary to understand legislation like VAWC without sufficient pay. The findings of Chavez et al.^[28] about the dangers of legal error in specialist matters are supported by the qualitative complaints about jurisdictional confusion (e.g., processing VAWC cases). Additionally, the issue of "Non-appearance of respondent" draws attention to a fundamental flaw in the law. The Barangay Justice System does not have contempt powers, as Cerna^[27] points out. The Lupon

cannot force parties to cooperate when they refuse. This demonstrates that although the system works well for willing participants, it is nevertheless susceptible to individuals who choose to reject the council's authority. Furthermore, although it may appear insignificant, the respondents' observation of the mediators' absence of uniforms may exacerbate this lack of authority by undermining their visual credibility during proceedings^[31].

Gonzales et al.'s findings^[25] are consistent with the data showing a lack of coordination with other authorities. Although the Lupon is excellent at frontline mediation, administrative governance and interagency connectivity are conspicuously lacking. This implies that the system works effectively as a stand-alone conflict resolution unit but finds it difficult to incorporate into the city's larger legal framework.

CONCLUSION

According to the study's conclusions, Calbayog City's Barangay Justice System is acknowledged as an essential, albeit vulnerable, restorative justice mechanism that successfully provides accessible dispute resolution by giving the parties' opinions precedence over rigid procedural procedures. The operational continuity and legitimacy of settlements are improved by Secretaries' documenting of processes. There is a competency paradox, too; whereas Lupon members are thought to be honest and capable of mediating disputes, their technical legal knowledge is severely lacking. This shortcoming makes it more difficult for them to handle increasingly complicated conflicts, making the system more dependent on individual fortitude than institutional power, which is dangerous when dealing with resistant parties. Low honoraria, a lack of distinguishable uniforms, and a lack of training are examples of sustainability concerns that, although acknowledged by a minority of respondents, impede professionalization. If these resource shortages are not addressed, the Lupon's legitimacy is at risk and its ability to serve as a crucial filter for court proceedings may be compromised.

AI Use Statement

The authors declare that they developed and created every aspect of the research, including the study design, data collecting, thematic analysis, interpretation of findings, and conclusions. To increase readability and clarity, artificial intelligence-assisted techniques were only utilized for grammatical correction, language improvement, and consistency enhancement. No data, themes, interpretations, or scholarly arguments were produced by an AI system. The writers retain complete intellectual ownership of all work.

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