

Evaluating the Operational Efficacy and Dispute Resolution Dynamics of the Barangay Justice System

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Abstract

As restorative justice gains global recognition, the Philippines demonstrates this paradigm through the Katarungang Pambarangay (KP), an essential community-based mechanism that precedes formal court proceedings. This research investigates the functional mechanisms of the KP within Calbayog City, specifically measuring the proficiency of its administrators and pinpointing barriers that hinder legally compliant dispute resolution. Utilizing a descriptive-evaluative methodology, the investigation surveyed 112 Lupong Tagapamayapa personnel operating as mediators and quasi-judicial facilitators. The results highlight a paradoxical competency issue: despite administrators reporting strong autonomy and high ethical standards, qualitative data exposes significant deficiencies in their comprehension of statutory boundaries and technical legal doctrines. Regardless of these limitations, the KP effectively champions a restorative approach by prioritizing emotional articulation over strict adherence to procedural technicalities. Furthermore, while the findings indicate robust administrative execution regarding record-keeping, they also uncover systemic vulnerabilities stemming from an absence of enforcement authority and insufficient monetary compensation. Ultimately, while the framework successfully fosters communal solidarity and peace, sustaining its effectiveness necessitates targeted training initiatives designed to bridge the divide between voluntary service and professional competence...

Keywords: Alternative Dispute Resolution; Dispute Mitigation; Grassroots Administration; Republic Act 7160; Neighborhood Conciliation; Communal Harmony...

Introduction

The global paradigm of conflict resolution has fundamentally shifted from state-centric, retributive adjudication toward restorative justice—a model that prioritizes societal healing, accountability, and communication over mere punishment (Alviola et al., 2025; Chavez et al., 2024; Cutillas et al., 2025; Widiartana et al., 2025). Viewed along a continuum, this framework transcends individual disputes to target the systemic fractures and societal damages underlying human conflicts (Procter-Legg et al., 2024). In the Philippines, this philosophy is operationalized through the Katarungang Pambarangay (KP). However, the Philippine model stands out within Southeast Asia; while neighboring nations like Thailand and Indonesia rely on voluntary, culturally driven mediation systems (such as the musyawarah), the KP is a strict statutory requirement (Glubwila et al., 2021). Mandated by the Local Government Code of 1991 (RA 7160), it acts as an indispensable judicial filter. Disputes among municipal residents must undergo barangay-level mediation, conciliation, or arbitration—facilitated by the Lupong Tagapamayapa, a body of trusted community members led by the Punong Barangay—before any formal court action can be initiated.

The strategic objectives of the KP are tripartite: to alleviate severe court docket congestion, to institutionalize the Filipino cultural preference for amicable settlements, and to provide equitable, rapid, and cost-effective justice (Bucoy et al., 2024; Garil et al., 2024; Liwanag, 2024). This mechanism is critical given the catastrophic inefficiencies plaguing the formal judiciary. With pretrial detention periods averaging between 268 and 529 days, the bureaucratic delay often becomes a punishment in itself (Narag, 2018). This administrative paralysis has precipitated a humanitarian crisis, characterized by penal overcrowding that ranges from a staggering 511% to 2,000% nationwide (Valenzuela, 2016). Consequently, the overarching criminal justice system frequently devolves into merely "processing cases" rather than genuinely administering justice (Gavrielides, 2020), making the functional success of the KP a matter of national necessity.

Nevertheless, integrating the adaptable tenets of restorative justice with rigid bureaucratic procedures has exposed a profound theory-practice divide (Gavrielides, 2020). While the statutory mandate guarantees a high volume of cases, the system consistently struggles with resolution quality due to a lack of systematic personnel professionalization (Glubwila et al., 2021). Despite exhibiting general procedural familiarity, mediators frequently grapple with technical legal intricacies, such as the proper issuance of a Certificate to File Action (CFA) (Añana et al., 2024; Pajimola & Salom, 2023). This manifests as a pervasive "knowledge gap," where officials lack the confidence to provide definitive legal guidance (Barcellano, 2025). As a result, procedural awareness does not inherently translate into operational efficiency, with some jurisdictions reporting disposal rates as low as 24.2% (Soriano et al., 2022) and a persistent need for targeted capacity-building (Umengan, 2023).

To circumvent these technical deficiencies, the KP heavily leverages local social architecture. Rather than relying on strict legal codes, mediators prioritize social preservation, utilizing kinship ties, religious appeals, and indigenous rituals (such as the *hilit*) to foster compromise and repair relationships (Addun, 2025; Añana et al., 2024; Basilio et al., 2024; Metillo et al., 2022; Plaza-Saligumba et al., 2022). This flexibility permits culturally tailored interventions—like the *Tingiting* practice—which frequently resolve conflicts where formal bureaucratic protocols fail (Basilio et al., 2024). Furthermore, seemingly inefficient practices are sometimes deliberate; for instance, the delayed issuance of a CFA is often a strategic maneuver by the Lupon to enforce a cooling-off period, rather than a procedural error (Agustin et al., 2018). When paired with rigorous administrative documentation, these informal strategies can yield remarkable settlement efficacy rates of up to 89.82%, particularly for non-complex disputes (Agoot & Cruz, 2024; Guia & Mangubat, 2021).

Despite these localized successes, the long-term viability of the KP is threatened by interlocking systemic vulnerabilities: political interference, power imbalances, and severe financial constraints (Dagohoy, 2021). Paltry honoraria—sometimes merely P450 monthly—fail to incentivize professional dedication among mediators (Elizaga-Pagalilauan, 2023; Jumalon et al., 2018). This financial instability is often exacerbated by partisan politics, where opposition within the barangay council can intentionally delay or heavily scrutinize budget allocations (Askali, 2025; Gonzales et al., 2025). Additionally, the KP's lack of coercive enforcement severely undermines its jurisdiction. Respondents frequently ignore summonses without penalty (Cerna, 2023), and disputants of higher socioeconomic or educational standing often actively defy the Lupon's authority (Damayon et al., 2022). Consequently, while officials manage immediate conflicts adequately, they often lack the macro-administrative governance skills required to implement preventative, long-term programs that address the root causes of community friction (Gonzales et al., 2025).

Evaluating these complex operational dynamics—where the Punong Barangay and *Pangkat* navigate the friction between social mediation and legal arbitration—requires rigorous empirical scrutiny. This study aims to bridge the existing literature gap by systematically analyzing the Barangay Justice System in Calbayog City. Specifically, this research seeks to:

- (a) evaluate the attributes and competencies of the Lupon personnel;
- (b) determine their operational performance levels;
- (c) gauge the system's efficacy in resolving legal disputes; and
- (d) identify specific implementation challenges to formulate evidence-based recommendations.

Through surveys, interviews, and data analysis, the study will measure perceived fairness, procedural adherence, and resolution acceptance to enhance local administrative governance.

Methods

Research design

This investigation employed a quantitative, cross-sectional, descriptive-evaluative survey architecture to assess the functional dynamics of the Barangay Justice System (BJS). Emphasizing the operational execution of the Lupon Tagapamayapa alongside its success rate in settling disputes, this descriptive approach aimed to measure the participants' consensus regarding BJS mechanisms. Furthermore, it examined the practical realities of the BJS from an insider's perspective, strategically pinpointing systemic and administrative bottlenecks that typically remain obscured from public scrutiny.

Respondents of the study

The research targeted active personnel comprising the Lupong Tagapamayapa across various barangays within Calbayog City. These internal administrators were selected from an eligible pool, as their positions equip them to provide profound perspectives on critical operational metrics, such as documentation fidelity and adherence to the Local Government Code. Utilizing Cochran's formula, the sample size was calculated at 112 participants drawn from 157 barangays, ensuring a 95% confidence interval alongside a 5% margin of error. A stratified random sampling framework was applied to guarantee proportionate representation across the city's three districts, encompassing both rural and urban locales. Inclusion criteria required participants to be currently serving Lupon members with a minimum of one year of tenure who provided explicit consent. Conversely, recently inducted officials lacking sufficient experience and those unreachable during the data collection phase were excluded from the cohort.

Data gathering instrument

The primary mechanism for data acquisition was a bespoke, structured questionnaire tailored specifically for the Lupong Tagapamayapa in Calbayog City. This self-administered survey integrated closed-ended items with select open-ended prompts, aligning comprehensively with the research parameters. A 5-point Likert scale was utilized to quantify perceptions of operational capability and resolution effectiveness. To add qualitative depth to the numerical data, the instrument incorporated open-ended sections, allowing respondents to elaborate on specific administrative hurdles they encounter in the field.

Data gathering procedure

To facilitate data collection, the structured survey was distributed among the Lupong Tagapamayapa personnel in Calbayog City. Before commencing the fieldwork, formal written authorization was secured from the City Government. The researcher subsequently coordinated with the respective Punong Barangays and Lupon Chairpersons to establish a timeline and secure institutional cooperation. The survey instrument was meticulously designed to address four primary dimensions, seamlessly mirroring the core aims of this study to: (a) evaluate the attributes and competencies of the Lupon personnel; (b) determine their operational performance levels; (c) gauge the system's efficacy in resolving legal disputes; and (d) identify specific implementation challenges to formulate evidence-based recommendations.

Data analysis

Data pertaining to the effectiveness of Calbayog City's Barangay Justice System, captured via the 5-point Likert scale, were subjected to rigorous statistical evaluation. Weighted means were computed to establish the central tendency of the participants' evaluations. Furthermore, the qualitative insights detailing specific operational barriers—extracted from the open-ended survey responses—were systematically coded and analyzed utilizing descriptive statistics, specifically focusing on frequency distributions and percentages.

Results

Consensus Regarding the Attributes of the BJS Lupon Personnel

Table 1. Level of Agreement on the Characteristics of BJS Lupon Personnel, 2022

Indicators	Mean	Description
The personnel of the Lupon exhibit integrity	3.71	Agree
The Lupon officials act with impartiality, justice, and neutrality.	3.85	Agree
The Lupon personnel think independently and make autonomous decisions.	4.15	Agree
The Lupon officials demonstrate fairness when handling both disputants.	4.11	Agree
The Lupon personnel maintain a track record of probity.	3.28	Moderately Agree
Total Mean	3.82	Agree

As illustrated in Table 1, the participants hold a positive view regarding their personal characteristics and those of their peers. The indicators for independent decision-making (Mean: 4.15) and equitable treatment (Mean: 4.11)

garnered the highest consensus. The computed grand mean of 3.82 signifies a strong collective trust in the system's ethical alignment. Conversely, the indicator measuring a track record of probity recorded the lowest average (3.28), implying a nuanced distinction in how the respondents perceive autonomy versus established moral integrity.

Operational Performance Levels of the Lupong Tagapamayapa within the BJS

Table 2. Assessed Operational Performance of the Lupong Tagapamayapa, 2022

Indicator: Lupon Administrative Performance	Mean	Description
Hold monthly assemblies to facilitate the sharing of insights between members and the community.	3.95	High
The secretary of the Lupon documents the mediation outcomes facilitated by the Punong Barangay and forwards these reports to the appropriate municipal or city courts.	4.31	High
The Lupon secretary accepts and archives the procedural documents provided by the different conciliation panels.	4.55	Very High
A proper conciliation panel, comprising three Lupon members selected by the disputants, is established for every submitted conflict.	3.82	High
Total Mean	4.16	High

Table 2 reveals that the overall administrative execution of the Lupon achieved a "High" classification, evidenced by a total mean of 4.16. Although the formation of specific conciliation panels received a comparatively lower score of 3.82, it remained firmly within the "High" qualitative bracket. In contrast, the documentation proficiency exhibited by the Lupon Secretary secured the peak rating of 4.55, earning a "Very High" descriptive equivalent.

The Efficacy of the BJS in Resolving Legal Disputes

Table 3. Assessed Efficacy of the BJS in Dispute Resolution

Indicator: Settlement of Cases	Mean	Description
Submitted complaints received appropriate interventions, resulting in mutual agreements between disputants.	4.40	Effective
The acting mediator or chairperson demonstrates fairness, justice, and impartiality.	4.64	Very Effective
The mediator or chairperson adheres to proper protocols when managing cases submitted to the Lupon.	4.35	Effective
The disputing parties were granted the chance to articulate their thoughts, opinions, and emotions.	4.72	Very Effective
The personnel constituting the conciliation panel actively listen to the perspectives of all parties.	4.18	Effective
The facilitator refrained from coercing any party into reaching a settlement.	4.25	Effective
Total Mean	4.42	Effective

Data from Table 3 indicates an overarching consensus that the BJS operates robustly, securing a grand mean of 4.42 and an "Effective" rating. Metrics emphasizing procedural equity garnered the most favorable evaluations, specifically the provision of space for emotional and ideological expression (4.72) alongside the perceived fairness

of the chairperson (4.64). These elevated scores underscore interpersonal fairness as a fundamental strength of the mediation process.

Specific Implementation Challenges Encountered within the Calbayog City BJS

Table 4. Identified Operational and Implementation Challenges

Indicators: Problems Identified	Number of Respondents	Percent (%)
Insufficient technical understanding of mediation procedures among Lupon personnel	6	15.79
Inadequate financial compensation (honorarium) provided to Lupon personnel	6	15.79
Submission of complaints that exceed the barangay's legal jurisdiction (e.g., VAWC)	5	13.16
Absence of official uniforms to establish the identity of Lupon personnel	5	13.16
Inadequate collaboration and coordination with relevant external agencies	2	5.26
Insufficient engagement or attendance from the disputing parties	3	7.89
Absence of adequate instruction regarding technical report documentation	2	5.26
Deficient understanding among Lupon personnel regarding specialized cases like VAWC	3	7.89
Political interference affecting the Lupon's operations, leading to failed mediations	2	5.26
Failure of complainants and respondents to attend the scheduled dispute settlements	2	5.26
In several barangays, only the Lupon secretary attends the sessions without the presence of other members	1	2.63
Complete absence of allocated financial resources for the Lupon	1	2.63
Total	38	100%

Table 4 consolidates the qualitative feedback provided by 38 participants, representing 34% of the 112 total respondents, regarding various implementation challenges. The most prominent barriers, each identified by six respondents (constituting 5.4% of the entire cohort and 15.79% of the qualitative subset), were inadequate monetary compensation and a deficit in technical mediation proficiency. Secondary obstacles, including the lack of official identification attire and confusion over legal jurisdiction, were cited by five individuals. Furthermore, minor factions within the respondent pool highlighted localized operational deficiencies, specifically noting inadequate inter-agency collaboration and a lack of formalized training in technical document preparation.

Discussion

Addressing the primary research objective to evaluate the attributes and competencies of the Lupon personnel, a significant paradox emerges when juxtaposing the quantitative assessments with the qualitative feedback. While Republic Act 7160 requires these mediators to be selected based on their innate sense of justice—a criterion reflected in the high quantitative ratings for moral integrity—the open-ended responses simultaneously expose substantial technical deficiencies. This dichotomy corroborates the competency gap identified by Pajimola and Salom (2023), who argue that despite possessing abundant social capital and moral credibility, mediators routinely falter when navigating complex legal technicalities. The empirical data indicates that the dispute resolution mechanism in Calbayog City operates primarily on a foundation of social preservation rather than rigorous legal proficiency, aligning with the observations of Metillo et al. (2022). Although the robust scores for independent decision-making reflect strong self-assurance among the personnel, the recurring qualitative complaints regarding a deficit in technical mediation proficiency imply that this autonomy stems from social influence rather than statutory mastery. Such findings substantiate the conclusions of Barcellano (2025), noting that while these community leaders command immense social respect, a pervasive knowledge gap undermines their capacity and confidence to dispense precise legal counsel.

In evaluating the second objective to determine their operational performance levels, the system secured a "High" overall classification. Notably, the documentation proficiency of the Lupon Secretary achieved the peak rating. This is a critical insight, as Agoot and Cruz (2024) emphasize a profound correlation between rigorous record-keeping and elevated settlement efficacy. By ensuring high organizational compliance and securing the enforceability of mediated agreements, the exceptional administrative execution by the secretaries in Calbayog City unequivocally fortifies the overarching effectiveness of the mechanism. Conversely, the procedural formation of the three-member conciliation panel received the lowest quantitative score within this administrative domain. This minor statistical dip likely reflects the culture of compromise detailed by Añana et al. (2024), wherein the Punong Barangay may periodically bypass the bureaucratic formalities of establishing a full panel to expedite less formal, rapid conflict resolutions.

To gauge the system's efficacy in resolving legal disputes, the findings comprehensively affirm that the localized mediation framework is highly effective. The most illuminating metric is the peak rating awarded to the provision of space for emotional expression and ideological articulation. This specific outcome powerfully validates the restorative justice paradigm discussed earlier (Widiartana et al., 2025). Unlike the formal judiciary, which is frequently characterized as rigidly procedural and inherently punitive (Narag, 2018), the Calbayog BJS thrives by serving as an accessible dialogic platform. The elevated satisfaction metrics suggest that constituents measure the quality of justice through the lens of emotional validation and the opportunity to be heard, rather than strict statutory precision. This strongly parallels investigations into indigenous dispute resolution by Basilio et al. (2024), which demonstrate that institutional flexibility—specifically permitting disputants to vent grievances comprehensively—yields better relational outcomes than rigid compliance with procedural timelines.

Finally, in striving to identify specific implementation challenges to formulate evidence-based recommendations, the qualitative feedback uncovers underlying structural vulnerabilities despite the system's robust numerical performance. It is pertinent to note that these concerns were articulated by a minority subset of the respondents, indicating localized operational bottlenecks rather than pervasive systemic failures. The most prominent theme centered on a deficit in technical comprehension regarding complex statutes. This directly echoes the findings of Jumalon et al. (2018) regarding the profound difficulty of professionalizing volunteer mediators. Without adequate monetary compensation, it remains highly challenging to incentivize personnel to undergo the rigorous training required to navigate specialized legal frameworks, such as cases concerning Violence Against Women and their Children (VAWC).

Qualitative grievances regarding jurisdictional confusion—such as the inappropriate processing of VAWC complaints—further validate concerns regarding the hazards of legal errors in specialized interventions. Moreover, the recurring issue of respondent non-appearance underscores a critical legislative limitation: the absence of coercive enforcement. As articulated by Cerna (2023), the local framework lacks contempt powers, rendering the Lupon entirely incapable of compelling uncooperative individuals to participate. Consequently, while the mechanism flourishes among willing disputants, it remains highly vulnerable to those who actively defy its jurisdiction. Compounding this challenge is the reported lack of official identification attire; while seemingly superficial, the absence of uniforms can subtly erode the mediators' visual authority and credibility during active proceedings. Lastly, the documented inadequacy in collaborating with relevant external agencies aligns seamlessly with the observations of Gonzales et al. (2025). While the Lupon Tagapamayapa excels in grassroots, frontline mediation, it exhibits conspicuous deficiencies in macro-administrative governance and interagency connectivity. This suggests that while the system functions admirably as an isolated dispute resolution entity, it struggles to effectively integrate its operations into the broader, city-wide legal architecture.

Conclusion

The findings of this investigation affirm that the Barangay Justice System in Calbayog City functions as an indispensable, though structurally fragile, instrument of restorative justice. It excels in delivering accessible conflict mediation by prioritizing the emotional and ideological articulation of disputants over strict adherence to rigid bureaucratic protocols. Furthermore, the rigorous administrative documentation executed by the Lupong Secretaries significantly bolsters the operational continuity and legal enforceability of these mediated agreements. However, a distinct competency paradox undermines the framework: while the personnel comprising the Lupong Tagapamayapa are universally perceived as possessing high moral integrity and inherent mediation prowess, they exhibit a profound deficit in technical legal acumen. This critical knowledge gap severely limits their capacity to navigate legally complex disputes, forcing the mechanism to rely heavily on the personal resilience and social capital of the mediators rather than robust institutional authority—a precarious dependency when confronting uncooperative or defiant respondents.

Finally, persistent sustainability bottlenecks—specifically inadequate financial honoraria, the absence of standardized identification attire, and a dearth of specialized training—constitute substantial barriers to the professionalization of the personnel, even if currently emphasized by only a minority of the workforce. Left unresolved, these systemic resource deficiencies threaten to erode the institutional legitimacy of the Lupong Tagapamayapa, ultimately jeopardizing its critical mandate as a mandatory judicial filter designed to prevent court docket congestion.

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