

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Settling Disputes: Effectiveness of Barangay Justice System in Calbayog City

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ABSTRACT

As restorative justice gains global traction, the Philippines presents a unique model through the Katarungang Pambarangay (KP), a community-based mechanism that serves as a mandatory condition precedent to formal litigation. This study evaluated the operational dynamics of the KP in Calbayog City, assessing the competency of administrators and the barriers to effective dispute resolution amidst this legal mandate. Using a descriptive-evaluative design, the research analyzed the perspectives of 112 Lupong Tagapamayapa members regarding their dual role as mediators and quasi-judicial officers. The results revealed a competency paradox: while officials perceived themselves as highly effective in maintaining moral integrity and independence, qualitative feedback highlighted specific operational bottlenecks regarding technical legal knowledge and jurisdictional limits. Despite these localized deficits, the system remains effective, largely because it prioritizes a restorative approach that allows disputants to voice sentiments over rigid procedural adherence. Administrative performance in documentation was found to be strong; however, the system faces structural vulnerabilities, including insufficient financial incentives and a lack of coercive power. The study concludes that while the KP successfully fosters peace through social preservation, its long-term sustainability requires bridging the gap between volunteerism and professionalization through targeted capacity building.

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

1. Introduction

Globally, there has been a shift in legal philosophy regarding conflict resolution. Rather than focusing solely on retributive punishment, restorative justice seeks to repair the harm inflicted by crime through a process characterized by dialogue, accountability, and reparation ^[1]. This framework can be conceptualized on a continuum ranging from a specific legal process to a broader social ideology, where the ultimate goal extends beyond simply resolving individual conflicts to addressing the wider social harms and systemic issues that underpin human relationships ^[2].

The Philippine justice system operationalizes this philosophy through the unique institutionalization of

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the Katarungang Pambarangay (KP). However, the Philippine model is distinct in the Southeast Asian context. As noted by Glubwila et al. ^[3], unlike voluntary mediation systems in Thailand or Indonesia, the KP is mandatory. Under the Local Government Code of 1991 (RA 7160), the KP acts as a compulsory filter for the judicial system. It does not replace the formal courts but supplements them; the law requires that disputes between residents of the same municipality undergo barangay conciliation as a condition precedent to filing a case in court. Only when mediation fails, and a Certificate to File Action is issued, can the formal justice system intervene.

Functionally, the KP operates through a body known as the Lupong Tagapamayapa, presided over by the Punong Barangay and comprised of 10 to 20 community members selected for their integrity and fairness. The system mandates three distinct modes of amicable settlement: (1) mediation, (2) conciliation, and (3) arbitration.

The objectives of the Katarungang Pambarangay are threefold: to achieve a just, speedy, and inexpensive settlement of disputes; to preserve Filipino culture concerning amicable settlement; and to relieve the courts of docket congestion. The necessity of this final objective is critical, as data reveals a formal justice system characterized by profound delays and inefficiencies. Narag ^[4] notes that while the median pretrial detention is 268 days, the mean spikes to 529 days, creating a crisis where the process of detention itself becomes the punishment.

This inefficiency has precipitated a humanitarian crisis. Valenzuela ^[5] reports that jail congestion rates have reached an alarming 511% nationwide, with some facilities reaching 2,000% overcapacity, turning systemic paralysis lethal. Burdened by such factors, the contemporary criminal justice system has largely shifted its focus from delivering justice to merely 'processing cases' ^[6], making the effective functioning of the Katarungang Pambarangay vital to the nation's legal health.

However, a critical tension has emerged: while the theoretical frameworks of restorative justice have expanded, the actual practical application often struggles to keep up ^[6]. Despite the integration of mandatory mediation to decongest court dockets, empirical evidence exposes a stark disconnect between mediator competence and case resolution. Soriano et al. ^[7] found that while mediators often demonstrate procedural proficiency, this knowledge does not always translate into efficiency, citing a lethargic disposal rate of only 24.2% in some jurisdictions. Furthermore, Umengan ^[8] argues that significant gaps remain in the Lupong Tagapamayapa's understanding of tenure and dispute subject matters, necessitating targeted training programs.

These operational discrepancies suggest that the mere existence of the KP system does not guarantee its success. Consequently, this study aims to fill the gap in local literature by conducting a comprehensive assessment of the Barangay Justice System in Calbayog City. Specifically, this research seeks to:

- (a) assess the qualities and capabilities of the Lupon members;
- (b) determine their level of performance;
- (c) evaluate the system's effectiveness in legally settling cases; and
- (d) identify the specific problems encountered during implementation to propose data driven recommendations.

2. Literature review

2.1. Global Perspectives on Community-Based Restorative Justice

The shift toward community-based dispute resolution is a global phenomenon, driven by a desire to move away from rigid, state-centric adjudication toward more flexible, restorative models. Procter-Legg et al. [2] describe this as a continuum where justice is not merely a legal process but a mechanism for social preservation, aiming to address the underlying causes of conflict rather than just the symptoms. Across Southeast Asia, informal justice systems serve as critical alternatives to formal courts. However, distinct variations exist in their implementation. Glubwila et al. [3] highlight that while Thailand and Indonesia utilize voluntary mediation systems reliant on cultural consensus (such as the *musyawarah*), the Philippines stands out because its system is integrated into the state apparatus as a mandatory condition precedent to litigation.

This unique institutionalized informality warrants specific analysis because it attempts to bridge two often conflicting paradigms: the flexibility of restorative justice and the rigidity of bureaucratic procedure. Gavrielides [6] notes that this intersection often creates a theory-practice gap, where the theoretical ideals of restorative justice struggle against operational realities. Analyzing the Philippine Katarungang Pambarangay offers a distinct opportunity to evaluate how community mediators function when they are not just social elders, but quasi-judicial officers mandated by law.

2.2. The legal mandate and the competency gap

The Philippine Katarungang Pambarangay stands out in Southeast Asia due to its mandatory nature. As noted by Glubwila et al. [3], unlike voluntary systems in Thailand or Indonesia, the KP compels even minor conflicts to undergo village-level mediation before police intervention. However, this legal mandate creates a paradox: while the law ensures a high volume of cases (quantity), the system often struggles with the quality of resolution due to a lack of systematic personnel development.

Recent assessments reveal a distinct dichotomy between social skills and technical legal skills. While Lupon members generally display high awareness of their duties, they often struggle with the technicalities of the KP Law, failing to grasp core provisions such as the proper issuance of a Certificate to File Action [9,10]. This is described as a knowledge gap, where officials lack the confidence to dispense legal advice [11,12].

Instead of strict legal adherence, the system compensates through collective resilience and social pressure. Plaza-Saligumba et al. [13] note that members often address challenges as a unified group, relying on camaraderie rather than procedure. Consequently, the operational preference leans heavily toward compromising—a conflict management style where parties give up legal rights to preserve relationships [10].

2.3. Sociocultural and restorative approaches

Because of the technical gap, the KP operates primarily through social structures. Metillo et al. [14] argue that the mechanism for resolution is not the legal code, but social preservation; mediators utilize religious appeals and community kinship to remind disputants that they are just one community. This is corroborated by studies wherein they found that officials frequently bypass legal procedures in favor of indigenous rituals (such as the *hidit*) or Bible verses to contextualize faults in a moral, rather than legal, sense [15,16].

This flexibility allows for agreements tailored to needs rather than rigid statutes. A comparative study by Basilio et al. [17] highlights that informal systems like the *Tingiting* practice often succeed where the formal KP fails because they reject rigid timelines, employing shared meals as spiritual seals of agreement—a mechanism absent in the formal bureaucratic process.

2.4. System performance and settlement efficacy

Despite the competency gaps, empirical data indicates high settlement rates when proper procedures are followed. Agoot and Cruz ^[18] found a strong correlation between systematic documentation and success, reporting a settlement efficacy of 89.82% in jurisdictions where secretaries accurately recorded proceedings. Similarly, Guia and Mangubat ^[19] noted that out of 72 cases filed in their study scope, 68 were successfully resolved, with failures limited to complex issues like debt collection and marital separation.

Interestingly, what appears to be inefficiency may sometimes be strategic. Agustin et al. ^[20] observed that Lupon members often delay the issuance of the Certificate to File Action (CFA). This delay is not necessarily a procedural lapse but a strategic intervention to provide disputants a cooling-off period, thereby preventing the premature escalation of cases to the courts.

2.5. Challenges to implementation

Despite the system's potential, literature identifies a cycle of failure driven by three intersecting factors: financial incapacity, political interference, and power dynamics ^[21].

The lack of financial support is a recurring theme. Jumalon et al. ^[22] and Elizaga-Pagalilauan ^[23] emphasize that honoraria (often as low as P450/month) are insufficient to motivate professional commitment. This resource scarcity is compounded by partisanship; opposition members in the barangay council often delay budget releases or scrutinize funds when the SK Chairman or Councilors do not share the Captain's political color ^[24,25].

While officials are capable of frontline delivery, they often lack the capacity for administrative governance. Gonzales et al. ^[26] found that while Barangay Councils (such as the BCPC) excel in basic assistance, they score poorly in designing intervention programs and drafting ordinances, resulting in generic interventions that do not address the root causes of conflict.

A significant barrier to resolution is the resistance of disputants, often rooted in social hierarchy. Damayon et al. ^[27] observed that when complainants possess higher educational backgrounds or social status than the Lupon members, they tend to disregard the Council's authority. Since the KP lacks contempt powers to compel attendance, hard-headed respondents often ignore summonses with impunity ^[28]. This lack of coercive power forces the Lupon to issue a Certificate to File Action not because mediation failed, but because the parties simply refused to show up.

2.6. Conceptual framework

In this study, the framework draws on the legal mandate of the Barangay Justice System (BJS) under PD 1508 and RA 7160 and on empirical work on community-based dispute resolution. It organizes the study using an Input–Process–Output (IPO) scheme.

In the Input, the study considers both the characteristics of the actors and the key conditions of system implementation. These include: (a) the personal and ethical qualities of Lupon members (integrity, impartiality, and fairness); (b) the administrative performance of the Lupon Tagapamayapa (meetings, documentation, and constitution of conciliation panels); and (c) the problems encountered (limited training, low honoraria, resource constraints, and political interference).

The Process component covers the actual implementation of the BJS and the research procedures used to assess it. Substantively, it includes the conduct of mediation, conciliation, and arbitration by the Punong Barangay and the Pangkat. Methodologically, it involves the administration of surveys, interviews, and data analysis to transform inputs into empirical findings.

The Output or result is the assessed level of effectiveness of the Barangay Justice System in the settlement of cases (perceived fairness, adherence to procedure, and acceptance of outcomes). This leads to evidence-based recommendations to strengthen administrative performance and address implementation gaps in Calbayog City.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional descriptive-evaluative survey design. The design is descriptive because it sought to determine the level of agreement of respondents regarding Barangay Justice System (BJS) operations, as well as the perceived performance of the Lupong Tagapamayapa and the effectiveness of the system in settling cases. It is evaluative because it assessed how well the Barangay Justice System functions in practice. While case outcomes provide external data, this design specifically targeted the internal operational perspective to identify administrative and technical bottlenecks that are not visible to the general public.

3.2. Respondents of the study

The respondents of the study were members of the Lupong Tagapamayapa from the different barangays of Calbayog City. The decision to utilize internal members as the primary data source was strategic: while disputants can evaluate satisfaction, only the administrators can accurately assess operational variables such as adherence to the Local Government Code, the constitution of quorums, and technical record-keeping.

The population of interest consisted of Lupon representatives from the 157 barangays of Calbayog City. To determine an adequate number of respondents, the researchers applied Cochran's formula for finite populations, using a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. The computation indicated that at least 112 respondents were required. To ensure broad representation across the city's sub-regions, the study utilized a purposive sampling strategy, selecting active Lupon members distributed across the three administrative districts of Calbayog to capture a diverse cross-section of both urban and rural barangay operations.

For this study, respondents were Lupon members who were officially serving in the Lupong Tagapamayapa of their respective barangay during the period of data collection, had at least one year of experience to ensure actual exposure to Barangay Justice System proceedings, and voluntarily agreed to participate by providing informed consent. Newly appointed Lupon members with minimal experience, as well as those who were on leave or unavailable at the time of data gathering, were not included as respondents.

3.3. Data gathering instrument

The main data gathering instrument of the study was a structured questionnaire designed specifically for members of the Lupong Tagapamayapa in Calbayog City. The questionnaire was self-administered and consisted of both closed-ended and a few open-ended items aligned with the statement of the problem. The instrument utilized a 5-point Likert scale to measure perceived competence and effectiveness. To nuance the quantitative data, the instrument included open-ended sections allowing respondents to identify specific operational problems.

3.4. Data gathering procedure

The data for this study were collected through a structured survey administered to members of the Lupong Tagapamayapa in Calbayog City. Prior to data collection, the researcher obtained written permission

from the City Government and coordinated with the Punong Barangay or Lupon Chairperson of the participating barangays to secure their cooperation and schedule the administration of the questionnaire.

A survey instrument was prepared to obtain information on (a) the level of agreement on the BJS and Lupon members, (b) the perceived performance of the Lupon Tagapamayapa, (c) the perceived effectiveness of the Barangay Justice System in settling cases, and (d) the problems encountered in its implementation.

4. Data analysis

The researcher used the 5-point Likert-scale to assess the effectiveness of Barangay Justice System in the City of Calbayog. Weighted means were calculated to determine the central tendency of responses. Descriptive statistics (frequency and percentage) were used to categorize the specific problems identified in the open-ended portion of the survey. The Likert’s 5-Point Scaling Technique is described in Table 1.

Table 1. Likert’s 5-Point Scaling Technique

Numerical	Range	Qualitative Description		
Value	4.50-5.00	Very Effective	Very High	Strongly Agree
5	3.50-4.49	Effective	High	Agree
4	2.50-3.49	Moderately Effective	Moderate	Moderately Agree
3	1.50-2.49	Ineffective	Fair	Disagree
2	1.00-1.49	Very Ineffective	Poor	Strongly Disagree

5. Results

A. Level of Agreement of respondents on BJS Lupon Members

Table 2. Level of Agreement of respondents on 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 2 presents the respondents' self-assessment regarding the qualities of Lupon members. The data revealed that respondents perceived themselves and their colleagues favorably. Indicators such as "Members have independent mind" and "sense of fairness" received high agreement ratings (Mean: 4.20 and 4.16, respectively). The grand mean of 3.87 indicates that the respondents believe the Lupon members in Calbayog City generally observe the ethical standards stipulated under the Local Government Code and PD 1508. However, it is noted that the indicator for "reputation for probity" received the lowest rating (3.23), suggesting a slight variance in how their moral standing is viewed compared to their independence.

B.Level of Performance of Lupong Tagapamayapa on Barangay Justice System

Table 3. Level of Performance of Lupong Tagapamayapa, 2022

Indicator Lupon Administrative Performance	Mean	Description
Conduct meeting 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 of the Lupon	3.9	High
Total Mean	4.18	High

Table 3 displays the self-reported administrative performance of the Lupon. The respondents rated their administrative performance as "High" with a grand mean of 4.18. The highest-rated indicator was the Lupon Secretary's efficiency in receiving and keeping records (Mean: 4.57), described as "Very High." This suggests that from the perspective of the administrators, the documentation phase of the BJS is functioning optimally. The constitution of conciliation panels received a comparatively lower rating (3.90), though it remains within the "High" descriptive range.

C.Effectiveness of Barangay Justice System in terms of Settlement of Cases

Table 4. Effectiveness of Barangay Justice System in Settlement of Cases

Indicator Settlement of Cases	Mean	Description
Complaints filed were given necessary action and 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 4 illustrates the perceived effectiveness of the system in settling disputes. The grand mean of 4.43 indicates that the respondents consider the BJS to be "Effective." The highest-rated indicators were "Both parties were given opportunity to express sentiments" (4.70) and "Chairperson is fair and just" (4.67). These results indicate that the respondents view the procedural fairness and the voice given to disputants as the strongest assets of the system.

D.Problems encountered by the respondents on BJS in Calbayog City

Table 5. Problems encountered on 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 non-mediation.	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%

Table 5 summarizes the qualitative feedback provided by the respondents regarding challenges in implementation. Out of the 112 total respondents, 38 (34%) provided qualitative feedback regarding operational problems. The results presented in Table 5 reflect the themes identified by this subgroup.

Among those who provided feedback, the most frequently cited concerns were "Not enough technical knowledge on mediation" and "Low honorarium," each cited by 5 respondents (representing 4.4% of the total sample, but 13.16% of the feedback group). This suggests that while not a universal complaint, a distinct minority of officials feel under-equipped and under-compensated.

Other operational bottlenecks identified by smaller subsets of respondents include jurisdictional confusion (e.g., handling VAWC cases), cited by 4 respondents, and the lack of uniforms or identification. Three respondents specifically noted a "Lack of coordination with other agencies" and "No proper training on report writing." While these frequencies are low in absolute numbers, they represent qualitative themes pointing to specific gaps in inter-agency linkage and technical capacity that exist in certain barangays.

6. Discussion

6.1. The paradox of high integrity and low technical proficiency

The first objective sought to assess the qualities of the Lupon members. The results indicate a generally positive perception, with respondents agreeing that members possess integrity, impartiality, and an independent mind, aligning with standards for responsive public service leadership [29]. This is also a statutory requirement of RA 7160 that Lupon members be selected based on their sense of fairness.

However, a critical contradiction emerges when these findings are juxtaposed with the problems identified in the study. While respondents rated the Lupon high on moral attributes, qualitative feedback highlighted specific technical deficits. This confirms the competency gap identified by Pajimola and Salom

[9], who argued that while Lupon members often possess the necessary social capital and moral standing, they frequently struggle with the technicalities of the law.

The data suggests that the Lupon in Calbayog City operates primarily on what Metillo et al. [14] describe as a framework of social preservation rather than legal expertise. The high rating for "Independent Mind" suggests they are confident in their decisions, but the recurring complaints regarding technical knowledge imply that this confidence stems from social authority rather than legal mastery. This supports the finding of Barcellano [11] regarding the knowledge gap where officials lack confidence in dispensing specific legal advice despite being socially respected.

6.2. Administrative performance and documentation

In terms of performance, the study reveals a "High" level of administrative efficiency. Notably, the highest-rated indicator was the efficiency of the Secretary in keeping records. This is a significant finding because, as noted by Agoot and Cruz [18], there is a strong correlation between systematic documentation and successful settlement. The high performance of the Secretaries in Calbayog likely contributes to the effectiveness of the system by ensuring that agreements are binding and executable, demonstrating high organizational compliance [30].

However, it is notable that the lowest score in this category was the constitution of the conciliation panel. This slight dip may reflect the compromising style noted by Añana et al. [10], where the formalities of constituting a panel are sometimes bypassed in favor of faster, more informal resolutions by the Punong Barangay or the Chairman alone.

6.3. Effectiveness

The study found the Barangay Justice System to be effective. The most illuminating data point is the highest-rated indicator: "Both parties involved were given the opportunity to express their sentiments."

This specific finding validates the Restorative Justice framework discussed in the Introduction [1]. Unlike the formal court system, which Narag [4] characterizes as punitive and procedural, the Barangay Justice System in Calbayog succeeds because it provides a venue for dialogue. The high satisfaction rate suggests that the quality of justice is measured by the community not strictly by legal correctness, but by the emotional connection and opportunity to be heard [31]. This mirrors the findings of Basilio et al. [17] and Chavez et al. [32] regarding indigenous practices, where the flexibility of the process—allowing parties to vent and explain—is more valuable than rigid adherence to timelines.

6.4. Operational bottlenecks and systemic barriers

While the quantitative ratings were high, the qualitative data exposes specific structural vulnerabilities. It is crucial to note that these problems were cited by a subset of respondents (approximately 13% of the feedback group), indicating that they represent specific operational bottlenecks rather than universal systemic failures.

The most distinct theme identified was the lack of technical knowledge regarding specific complex laws. This supports the findings of Jumalon et al. [22] regarding the difficulty of professionalizing volunteer mediators. Without adequate compensation it is difficult to demand that Lupon members undergo the rigorous training required to master laws such as VAWC. The qualitative reports regarding jurisdictional confusion (e.g., handling VAWC cases) validate the observation of Chavez et al. [30] regarding the risks of legal error in specialized cases.

Furthermore, the problem of "Non-appearance of respondent" highlights a legal structural weakness. As noted by Cerna ^[28], the Barangay Justice System lacks contempt powers. When parties refuse to cooperate, the Lupon is powerless to compel them. This confirms that while the system is effective for willing parties, it remains vulnerable to those who choose to disregard the authority of the council. Additionally, the lack of uniforms noted by respondents, while seemingly minor, may contribute to this lack of authority by weakening the visual legitimacy of the mediators during proceedings ^[34].

The data indicating a lack of coordination with other agencies aligns with the observations of Gonzales et al. ^[26]. While the Lupon excels in frontline mediation, there is a clear deficiency in administrative governance and inter-agency linkage. This suggests that the system functions well as a standalone conflict resolution unit but struggles to integrate into the broader legal infrastructure of the city.

7. Recommendations

In light of these discussions, the following recommendations are proposed to strengthen the Barangay Justice System in Calbayog City:

To address the resource gap, the Local Government Unit should prioritize the improvement of financial and material support. This includes reviewing the honoraria scheme to align it with the demands of the service. Furthermore, to solve the problem of authority and visibility, the City Government should provide official identification or uniform vests for Lupon members. This simple measure would reinforce their public image and authority during mediation proceedings.

To bridge the competency gap, the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) must institutionalize a targeted training curriculum that goes beyond basic orientation. The training should focus specifically on the pain points identified in this study: the determination of jurisdiction, the handling of special cases like VAWC, and technical report writing, to build confidence and an updated mindset among Lupon members ^[35]. Standardized templates for case intake and outcomes should be distributed across all barangays to ensure consistency in documentation.

Finally, to address the issue of non-appearance and lack of participation, the Barangay Councils should launch an information campaign regarding the mandatory nature of the Katarungang Pambarangay. This should be coupled with strengthened coordination with local law enforcement and social welfare agencies to ensure that parties understand that the Barangay Justice System is a requisite step in the legal process, not merely an optional social forum.

8. Limitations of the study

This study acknowledges inherent limitations in its design. First, the data relies on the internal self-assessment of Lupon members. This method is susceptible to Social Desirability Bias, where respondents may rate their own performance and integrity higher than an external observer might. Consequently, the high "Effectiveness" ratings should be interpreted as measures of perceived administrative self-efficacy rather than objective external metrics of client satisfaction or long-term recidivism. Second, while the sample size meets statistical requirements, the qualitative feedback regarding operational problems comes from a smaller subset of respondents. These findings should therefore be viewed as emergent themes that warrant further investigation, rather than as problems prevalent in every barangay in Calbayog City.

9. Conclusion

Based on the findings and the interpretation of data, the study concludes that the Barangay Justice System in Calbayog City operates as a vital, albeit vulnerable, mechanism for restorative justice. The system appears to meet its fundamental objective of providing an accessible venue for dispute resolution, largely because it prioritizes the restorative value of allowing parties to be heard over rigid procedural adherence. The high administrative performance, particularly in the documentation of proceedings by the Secretaries, serves as the operational backbone that sustains the validity of these settlements.

However, the operations are characterized by a distinct competency paradox. While the Lupon members possess the necessary integrity and independence of mind to mediate fairness, qualitative evidence suggests a gap in technical legal knowledge regarding specific laws and jurisdictions. The effectiveness of the system is currently reliant on the personal resilience and social capital of the Lupon members rather than on institutional robustness. This reliance creates a risk: without the support of technical mastery, the Lupon may struggle to assert authority when facing complex cases or uncooperative parties who exploit the lack of coercive power of the council.

Furthermore, the long-term sustainability of the Barangay Justice System faces structural challenges. The identified issues regarding low honoraria, lack of identifiable uniforms, and insufficient training—though cited by a minority of respondents—point to significant barriers to professionalization. The system is essentially asking community members to perform quasi-judicial functions with volunteer-level resources. If left unaddressed, these resource gaps threaten to erode the credibility of the Lupon, potentially undermining its legal mandate to serve as a compulsory filter for the courts.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest

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