

Effectiveness of Local Dispute Resolution Through Lupong Tagapamayapa System

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Abstract

This study assessed the effectiveness of local dispute resolution through the Lupong Tagapamayapa System in Barangay Kematu, T'Boli, South Cotabato, focusing on arbitration, conciliation, mediation, and the overall performance of Lupong Tagapamayapa members. The study was anchored on Restorative Justice Theory, Social Capital Theory, Conflict Resolution Theory, and the Input-Process-Output framework. A descriptive-quantitative research design was used, with data gathered through a survey questionnaire from thirty purposively selected respondents who had direct experience with the Barangay Justice System. The data were analyzed using weighted mean to determine respondents' level of agreement on the effectiveness of the dispute resolution mechanisms and the performance of the Lupong Tagapamayapa. Findings showed that arbitration was rated effective, particularly in providing faster resolution, confidentiality, and clarity of decisions. Conciliation was also rated effective, especially in ensuring compliance with agreements and preserving relationships, while mediation was effective in reducing hostility, promoting reconciliation, and maintaining community trust. The Lupong Tagapamayapa members were likewise rated effective, particularly in helping disputing parties reach settlements, following the Katarungang Pambarangay Law, and demonstrating competence in handling disputes. However, areas needing improvement included timeliness, documentation, perceived neutrality, communication, participant satisfaction, and post-resolution monitoring. The study concludes that the Lupong Tagapamayapa System functions as an accessible, timely, cost-efficient, and community-centered mechanism for maintaining peace and order. The findings support SDG 16 on peace, justice, and strong institutions and also relate to SDG 11 on sustainable communities. The study contributes to governance, institutional, social, and community sustainability by strengthening grassroots justice, public trust, and peaceful conflict resolution.

Keywords: Lupong Tagapamayapa, Barangay Dispute Resolution, Arbitration, Conciliation, Mediation, Community Governance, Peace and Order, Katarungang Pambarangay

1. Introduction

This study examines the effectiveness of local dispute resolution through the Lupong Tagapamayapa System in Barangay Kematu. It focuses on arbitration, conciliation, and mediation as barangay-level mechanisms for resolving community disputes, maintaining peace and order, and reducing dependence on formal court litigation. The study is grounded in the legal foundation of the Katarungang Pambarangay, the role of the Lupong Tagapamayapa, and the need to strengthen accessible, community-based justice at the grassroots level.

The Philippine system of government and justice has undergone many changes yet delays in the formal court system remain a continuing concern. Although the Constitution provides for the speedy disposition of cases, disputes may still take months or years before resolution. In this context, the barangay, as the smallest political unit in the Philippines, serves an important role in local governance, peacekeeping, and community-based conflict settlement. The Katarungang Pambarangay or Barangay Justice System was institutionalized under Presidential Decree No. 1508 and is now governed by the Local Government Code of 1991 (Republic Act No. 7160). Its primary purpose is to promote amicable settlement, reconciliation, and community harmony without immediately resorting to costly and time-consuming court litigation. Through the Punong Barangay and the Lupong Tagapamayapa, civil and minor criminal disputes may be addressed through mediation, conciliation, and arbitration. Despite its legal foundation, the effectiveness of the Barangay Justice System remains affected by factors such as lack of training among barangay officials, limited resources, political influence, and unwillingness of disputing parties to cooperate. Assessing the effectiveness of dispute resolution in Barangay Kematu is therefore necessary

to determine how well the Lupong Tagapamayapa contributes to peace and order, court decongestion, community trust, and social harmony.

The literature generally presents the Barangay Justice System as an accessible, participatory, and less adversarial mechanism compared with formal judicial processes. Mediation, conciliation, and arbitration are recognized as key alternative dispute resolution mechanisms that may resolve conflicts faster, reduce costs, and promote cooperation among disputing parties (Golub, 2003; Wojkowska, 2006). According to the Local Government Code of 1991, the Katarungang Pambarangay was institutionalized to provide an accessible, community-based justice system aimed at reducing court congestion and promoting amicable settlement of disputes. This legal framework strengthens grassroots governance and access to justice, especially among marginalized sectors (Department of the Interior and Local Government [DILG], 2016). The system operates through the Lupong Tagapamayapa, whose members are expected to demonstrate integrity, impartiality, and community respect. The dispute resolution process usually begins with mediation by the Punong Barangay. If mediation fails, the case proceeds to conciliation through the Pangkat Tagapagkasundo. Arbitration may also be used when both parties voluntarily agree to submit to a binding decision (DILG, 2016; RA 7160). This multi-step process promotes dialogue, cooperation, and mutual understanding. Golub (2003) emphasized that community-based justice systems are often more accessible and culturally relevant, especially in resolving minor disputes. Foreign studies also show that community-based justice systems can improve access to justice. Golub (2003) noted that alternative dispute resolution mechanisms are useful in developing countries where formal courts may be costly, distant, or procedurally complex. Wojkowska (2006) argued that informal justice systems are often faster, less expensive, and more flexible, especially for marginalized groups. In Rwanda, the Gacaca courts encouraged truth-telling, confession, forgiveness, and community participation after the genocide, although concerns on due process and consistency were noted (Clark, 2010). In the United States, mediation and arbitration are widely used because of their efficiency, confidentiality, and cost-effectiveness, although issues such as unequal bargaining power and limited awareness remain (American Bar Association, 2018). In Southeast Asia, village-level mediation in Indonesia has also been used to address local conflicts such as land and family disputes (World Bank, 2011).

Local studies affirm the importance of the Barangay Justice System in maintaining peace and resolving disputes. Dela Cruz (2018) found that many disputes brought to barangay authorities are resolved without escalation to formal courts. Guzman and Cruz (2020) reported that barangay dispute resolution helps decongest courts by handling minor civil and criminal cases at the community level. Santos (2020) emphasized that the success of mediation depends on the credibility, neutrality, and communication skills of the Lupong Tagapamayapa, while Reyes (2018) highlighted restorative justice in promoting reconciliation and preventing recurring conflicts. Villanueva (2020) observed that barangay dispute resolution promotes social cohesion through cooperation, mutual respect, and community participation.

However, challenges remain. Lopez (2019) noted that political interference may weaken impartiality, while Ramos (2021) pointed out that insufficient training and legal knowledge among mediators may affect dispute resolution outcomes. The Philippine Judicial Academy emphasized the need for continuous training and capacity-building for barangay justice practitioners. Villanueva (2022) also identified problems in resources and record-keeping, while the Department of Justice noted that low public awareness may limit the effective use of the system.

At the local level, Barangay Kematu provides the setting for examining how the Lupong Tagapamayapa performs its dispute resolution functions. The study focuses on how arbitration, conciliation, and mediation are implemented in the barangay and how these mechanisms contribute to maintaining peace and order. At the national level, the study is anchored on the Katarungang Pambarangay as a Philippine mechanism for decentralized justice. The Barangay Justice System reflects the government's effort to bring justice closer to the people by resolving disputes at the community level before they escalate to formal courts (DILG, 2016; Golub, 2003). According to the Department of the Interior and Local Government (2016), a significant proportion of disputes are successfully settled at the barangay level, showing the potential of the system to resolve conflicts efficiently and reduce court congestion. At the global level, the study relates to broader practices in alternative and community-based dispute resolution. International experiences such as Rwanda's Gacaca courts, India's Lok Adalat system, mediation and arbitration in the United States, traditional dispute resolution in African communities, and village-level mediation in Southeast Asia show that local justice systems can improve access to justice, promote reconciliation, and reduce the burden on formal courts. These examples support the continuing relevance of community-based justice in different legal and cultural contexts.

The study is supported by Restorative Justice Theory, Social Capital Theory, and Conflict Resolution Theory. Restorative Justice Theory, as explained by Howard Zehr (2002), emphasizes repairing harm, promoting accountability, and restoring relationships rather than focusing only on punishment. This is relevant to barangay dispute resolution because the parties often live in the same community and must maintain continuing social relationships. Social Capital Theory, introduced by Robert Putnam (1993), highlights the role of trust, cooperation, and social networks in achieving collective outcomes. In barangay dispute resolution, public trust and social relationships influence the willingness of residents to participate, cooperate, and comply with settlement agreements. Conflict Resolution Theory, discussed by John Burton (1990), explains

that conflicts may be resolved when parties communicate openly and address underlying needs and interests. This supports the use of mediation and conciliation as processes that allow disputing parties to clarify issues, express concerns, and arrive at mutually acceptable solutions. The study also uses the Input-Process-Output framework. The inputs include arbitration, conciliation, mediation, and the performance of the Lupong Tagapamayapa. The process involves the implementation of dispute resolution methods through hearings, negotiation strategies, facilitation of dialogue, and agreement-building. The output consists of implications that may guide improvements in barangay dispute resolution.

Although many studies have examined the Barangay Justice System, several gaps remain. Existing studies often focus on general effectiveness, court decongestion, and settlement rates (Golub, 2003; Department of the Interior and Local Government, 2016). However, many rely on national or regional data and may not fully capture the specific realities of individual barangays. The Philippine Judicial Academy emphasized the need for localized assessments because leadership, resources, and community participation may vary across barangays. Previous studies have also focused mainly on quantitative indicators such as settlement rates and case statistics (Guzman & Cruz, 2020). While these are useful, they may not fully capture the perceptions, satisfaction, and experiences of disputing parties. Robert Yin (2018) emphasized that social processes such as conflict resolution require attention to both measurable outcomes and lived experiences. Another gap concerns community perception as a factor in effectiveness. Santos (2020) highlighted the importance of mediator credibility, but further examination is needed on how trust, fairness, and transparency affect participation and compliance. This is consistent with Robert Putnam (1993), who stressed that institutional effectiveness is connected to public trust and social capital. Recent challenges such as political interference, inadequate training, and resource limitations have also been identified (Lopez, 2019; Ramos, 2021), but there remains a need for updated and localized empirical assessment of how these issues affect barangay dispute resolution. The Department of Justice also emphasized the importance of strengthening alternative dispute resolution mechanisms to reduce court congestion and improve access to justice. Therefore, this study is justified by the need to assess the effectiveness of arbitration, conciliation, mediation, and the performance of the Lupong Tagapamayapa in Barangay Kematu.

The study is directly aligned with SDG 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions. This goal promotes the rule of law, access to justice, peaceful communities, and accountable institutions. By examining the effectiveness of the Lupong Tagapamayapa, the study contributes to understanding how grassroots justice mechanisms can support peace, fairness, reconciliation, and community stability. The study also supports the broader intent of SDG 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities because effective local dispute resolution helps maintain safe, peaceful, and cooperative communities. However, the strongest and most explicit alignment of the study is with SDG 16 because the research focuses on access to justice, conflict resolution, peacekeeping, and institutional effectiveness at the barangay level.

This study contributes to policy and governance sustainability by providing evidence that may help barangay officials, policymakers, and local institutions improve the implementation of the Katarungang Pambarangay. Strengthening the Lupong Tagapamayapa may improve fairness, transparency, accountability, and public trust in local governance. It also contributes to community and social sustainability by promoting peaceful conflict resolution, reconciliation, cooperation, and social harmony. Since barangay residents often maintain close and continuing relationships, effective dispute resolution can prevent recurring conflicts and strengthen community cohesion. The study further supports socio-economic sustainability by encouraging low-cost, accessible, and timely dispute resolution. When disputes are resolved locally, residents may avoid the financial and time burdens of formal litigation. It also supports institutional sustainability by identifying areas for capacity-building, training, improved documentation, and stronger procedures among Lupong Tagapamayapa members. Overall, the study is important because it connects criminal justice, public administration, local governance, community development, social relations, and sustainable peace. By assessing the effectiveness of the Lupong Tagapamayapa in Barangay Kematu, the research provides a localized basis for improving grassroots justice and strengthening peaceful, inclusive, and responsive community institutions.

2. Material and methods

2.1 Research Design

This study used a descriptive-quantitative research design. The descriptive method was appropriate because the study aimed to describe the existing condition of the Lupong Tagapamayapa (LT) system in resolving disputes at the barangay level. It also sought to determine the effectiveness of the system based on measurable indicators such as fairness, timeliness, satisfaction of parties, and compliance with agreements. According to Saunders, et al., (2012) descriptive survey method is one which looks with intense accuracy at the phenomena of the moment and then describes precisely what the researchers sees. Since the study focused on the effectiveness of local dispute resolution through the Lupong Tagapamayapa System, the descriptive survey method was considered suitable. The quantitative approach allowed the researchers to gather numerical data through survey questionnaires, analyze the results statistically, and interpret the overall effectiveness of the dispute resolution process in maintaining peace and order in the community.

2.2 Locale of the Study

The study was conducted in Barangay Kematu, Municipality of T'Boli, Province of South Cotabato, Region XII or SOCCSKSARGEN, Philippines. Barangay Kematu was selected because it has an established and functional Lupong Tagapamayapa that actively handles community disputes and minor offenses through mediation, conciliation, and arbitration. The barangay is one of the 25 barangays of T'Boli and is located in the upland portion of the municipality, approximately 15 kilometers northwest of the town proper. It is accessible through paved and rough roads and is situated in a mineral-rich mountainous area known for small-scale gold mining activities. The community is composed of indigenous T'Boli residents and settlers from nearby municipalities. Its hilly to mountainous terrain, relatively cool climate, and forested surroundings influence the residents' lifestyle and the nature of disputes in the area. According to the 2020 Census of Population and Housing conducted by the Philippine Statistics Authority, Barangay Kematu has a total population of 8,141 individuals and is composed of approximately 10 sitios, which served as the primary sources of respondents in the study.

2.3 Respondents of the Study

The respondents of the study were selected residents of Barangay Kematu who had direct experience with the Barangay Justice System, particularly those who had participated in mediation, conciliation, or arbitration. The respondents were chosen because they had sufficient knowledge and firsthand experience necessary to provide meaningful information about the effectiveness of the dispute resolution process and the performance of the Lupong Tagapamayapa.

2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

A total of thirty (30) respondents were selected through purposive sampling. Purposive sampling was used because not all residents of the barangay had been involved in dispute resolution processes. The researchers deliberately selected individuals with actual experience in the Barangay Justice System to ensure that the data gathered would be relevant and reliable. This sampling procedure was considered appropriate because the study aimed to generate focused and experience-based insights rather than generalize the results to the entire barangay population.

2.5 Research Instrument

The study used a survey questionnaire to gather the necessary data. The questionnaire was intended to obtain information from the respondents and support the interpretation of the study results. In this study survey questionnaire was adopted Brillantes, A. (2014). Local governance and dispute resolution in rural communities. *Philippine Journal of Public Administration*, 58(2), 101–120. The first part of the questionnaire measured the effectiveness of the dispute resolution process in terms of arbitration, conciliation, and mediation. The second part determined the level of performance of the Lupong Tagapamayapa using a four-point scale: 4.00 for Strongly Agree, 3.00 for Agree, 2.00 for Disagree, and 1.00 for Strongly Disagree.

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

The researchers used survey questionnaires to collect data from the respondents. A formal letter was submitted to the Office of the Punong Barangay and the Lupong Tagapamayapa to seek approval for the conduct of the study. After approval was granted, the researchers explained the purpose of the study and coordinated with barangay officials to identify active Lupong Tagapamayapa members and residents who had experience with mediation, conciliation, or arbitration. The researchers assured the confidentiality of the survey responses since the identities of the respondents were not necessary. The questionnaires were collected on the same day or within an agreed schedule, after which the researchers checked all responses for completeness and validity before including them in the data analysis.

2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

The data were analyzed quantitatively based on the responses gathered from the survey questionnaire. The assigned four-point scale was used to interpret the respondents' level of agreement regarding the effectiveness of arbitration, conciliation, and mediation, as well as the performance of the Lupong Tagapamayapa. The results were analyzed statistically to determine the overall effectiveness of the dispute resolution process and to provide an objective assessment of how the Lupong Tagapamayapa System functions in maintaining peace and order in Barangay Kematu.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Effectiveness of Local Dispute Resolution Process

3.1.1 Arbitration

The results showed that arbitration was generally rated effective, with a total weighted mean of 3.03, interpreted as Agree. The highest-rated indicator was that arbitration provides faster resolution compared to court litigation, with a mean score of 3.50, interpreted as Strongly Agree. Other positive results included clarity and enforceability of decisions with a mean of 3.20, confidentiality of the process with a mean of 3.13, satisfaction with arbitration outcomes with a mean of 3.06, and residents' trust in the barangay arbitration process with a mean of 3.03. The lower-rated indicators were minimization of retaliatory actions with a mean of 2.66, reduction of legal costs with a mean of 2.83, and fairness and impartiality of the

arbitrator with a mean of 2.90. These findings indicate that arbitration under the Lupong Tagapamayapa system is effective particularly in terms of speed, confidentiality, and clarity of decisions. However, the relatively lower ratings on retaliation, cost reduction, and perceived fairness suggest the need to strengthen trust, impartiality, and post-resolution monitoring. Arbitration provides a formal but community-centered approach to resolving disputes, reducing legal costs and court congestion while promoting local settlement and social harmony (Delos Santos, 2018).

3.1.2 Conciliation

The results showed that conciliation was also rated effective, with a total weighted mean of 2.70, interpreted as Agree. The highest-rated indicator was compliance with agreements reached through conciliation, with a mean score of 3.36, interpreted as Strongly Agree. Other favorable results included the preservation of relationships between parties with a mean of 3.23, the conciliator's ability to guide parties toward mutual understanding with a mean of 3.13, accessibility of conciliation with a mean of 3.03, and the ability of conciliation to lead to mutually acceptable solutions with a mean of 3.00. The lower-rated indicators included promotion of open communication with a mean of 2.53, conciliator neutrality with a mean of 2.83, and active participation of parties with a mean of 2.86. These findings suggest that conciliation is effective in promoting agreement compliance and preserving relationships among disputing parties. However, the lower ratings on open communication, neutrality, and active participation indicate that the process may still be improved by encouraging fuller engagement from both parties and strengthening the perceived impartiality of conciliators. Conciliation emphasizes dialogue, understanding, and relationship preservation, as noted by Cruz (2019) and Villanueva (2021). Continuous training for conciliators may further improve neutrality, participation, and the sustainability of conciliation outcomes.

3.1.3 Mediation

The results showed that mediation was generally effective, with a total weighted mean of 2.99, interpreted as Agree. The highest-rated indicator was that mediation reduces hostility and promotes reconciliation between disputing parties, with a mean score of 3.20. This was followed by mediation as a fair and balanced platform for dispute resolution with a mean of 3.06, efficient dispute resolution with a mean of 3.03, and residents' trust in the barangay mediation process with a mean of 3.03. Lower-rated indicators included the mediator's facilitation of constructive dialogue with a mean of 2.50, party satisfaction with the mediation process and outcome with a mean of 2.63, and mediation's ability to enhance cooperation and trust with a mean of 2.86. These findings indicate that mediation contributes to reconciliation, fairness, efficiency, and community trust. However, the lower ratings on constructive dialogue and satisfaction suggest that mediator skills, communication strategies, and participant experience need further improvement. Mediation allows disputing parties to maintain autonomy over outcomes while fostering trust and reconciliation (Anderson, 2017; Garcia, 2018).

3.2 Performance of the Lupong Tagapamayapa

The performance of the Lupong Tagapamayapa was rated effective, with a total weighted mean of 3.12, interpreted as Agree. The highest-rated indicators were the members' capability to help disputing parties reach a settlement with a mean of 3.70, adherence to the Katarungang Pambarangay Law with a mean of 3.40, and competence in handling disputes with a mean of 3.36. Other favorable ratings included effective dispute resolution with a mean of 3.16, community satisfaction with overall performance with a mean of 3.10, and efficient performance of duties and implementation of agreements, both with a mean of 2.96. The lowest-rated indicator was timely and efficient action when a case is filed, with a mean of 2.80, followed by effective communication facilitation with a mean of 2.86 and documentation of case proceedings with a mean of 2.93. These results show that the Lupong Tagapamayapa members are generally capable, legally guided, and competent in handling disputes. Their strong performance in settlement facilitation and compliance with the Katarungang Pambarangay Law strengthens the legitimacy of barangay-level justice. However, the lower ratings on timeliness, communication, and documentation suggest that procedural improvements are needed to enhance efficiency and credibility. Research indicates that an effective Lupong Tagapamayapa strengthens local justice and community trust (Santos, 2019; Mendoza, 2020).

3.3 Implications of the Findings

The findings show that arbitration, conciliation, and mediation are generally effective mechanisms for resolving disputes at the barangay level. Arbitration was strongest in providing faster resolution, conciliation was strongest in ensuring compliance with agreements, and mediation was effective in promoting cooperation and reconciliation. The overall results imply that the Lupong Tagapamayapa system in Barangay Kematu provides accessible, low-cost, and timely dispute resolution while helping maintain peace and order in the community. At the same time, some indicators were rated only as Agree rather than Strongly Agree, particularly in the areas of party engagement, satisfaction, neutrality, timely action, documentation, and post-resolution monitoring. These findings imply that the system is functional but still requires improvement in procedural consistency, communication, follow-up, and capacity-building. Strengthening these areas may improve public confidence, prevent recurring conflicts, and further enhance the effectiveness of the Lupong Tagapamayapa system.

3.4 Overall Summary of Results

Overall, the Lupong Tagapamayapa system in Barangay Kematu was found to be effective in terms of both dispute resolution mechanisms and member performance. The system demonstrated capacity to resolve conflicts efficiently, promote cooperation among disputing parties, and uphold the Katarungang Pambarangay Law at the community level. These findings support the role of the Lupong Tagapamayapa as a functional and community-centered alternative to formal judicial proceedings. However, the results also show that continuous training, improved documentation, faster response, stronger neutrality, and better participant engagement are necessary to further strengthen local dispute resolution and sustain community trust.

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

The study concludes that the Lupong Tagapamayapa system in Barangay Kematu effectively resolves local disputes through arbitration, conciliation, and mediation. These mechanisms provide residents with a timely, cost-efficient, and accessible means of conflict resolution that helps maintain peace and order in the community. Arbitration was recognized for speed and clarity, conciliation for promoting adherence to agreements, and mediation for fostering trust and cooperation among disputing parties. The performance of the Lupong Tagapamayapa members was also found effective, particularly in handling disputes, facilitating communication, assisting parties in reaching settlements, and complying with the Katarungang Pambarangay Law; however, documentation, timeliness, perceived neutrality, and participant satisfaction still require further attention to improve the system's credibility and effectiveness.

The study recommends that the Punong Barangay, barangay officials, policymakers, community residents, and members of the Lupong Tagapamayapa work together to strengthen local dispute resolution practices. Barangay leaders should review and improve policies, procedures, institutional support, and resource allocation to ensure efficient handling of community disputes, while policymakers should develop supportive programs, ordinances, monitoring systems, and legal frameworks that promote transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement. Community awareness campaigns should also be conducted to encourage peaceful conflict resolution and active participation, while regular training, workshops, and seminars should be provided to Lupong Tagapamayapa members to improve their skills in arbitration, conciliation, mediation, communication, neutrality, and facilitation. These actions may further strengthen grassroots governance, community trust, and the study's alignment with Sustainable Development Goal 16 on access to justice, inclusive institutions, and sustainable peace.

The study was limited to Barangay Kematu and focused only on the effectiveness of the Lupong Tagapamayapa system in terms of arbitration, conciliation, mediation, and the performance of its members. It used thirty (30) purposively selected respondents who had direct experience with the Barangay Justice System, such as those who participated in mediation, conciliation, or arbitration. Since the study aimed to generate focused and experience-based insights rather than generalize the findings to the entire population, its results are mainly applicable to the specific context of Barangay Kematu and may not fully represent other barangays with different leadership, resources, community participation, or dispute resolution practices.

Compliance with ethical standards

This study on the effectiveness of local dispute resolution through the Lupong Tagapamayapa System in Barangay Kematu was conducted in accordance with institutional ethical standards. Approval and permission to conduct the study were sought from the concerned barangay authorities, and the respondents participated voluntarily after being informed of the purpose of the research. Confidentiality of all responses was observed, and no personal information was disclosed in the presentation of findings. The authors declare that there was no conflict of interest in the conduct of the study, acknowledge the contributions of all individuals and institutions who supported the research, and affirm that the manuscript and its contents remain the responsibility and copyright of the authors.

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