

Barangay Justice System Vis-À-Vis Dispute Resolution

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to explore the awareness, effectiveness, and challenges of the Barangay Justice System in Dapa, Surigao del Norte. Employing a sequential explanatory mixed-method design, the research involved 363 barangay officials and community members who participated in BJS proceedings. Key findings indicated high awareness among respondents regarding the BJS's importance, Lupon's constitution, dispute resolution processes, case coverage, and agreement execution. While both groups rated the BJS as very effective across conciliation, mediation, and arbitration, barangay officials perceived higher effectiveness in mediation and arbitration than dispute parties, though no significant difference was observed in conciliation. Further, the main challenges identified includes limited legal knowledge and training, perceived external influence, and weak enforcement power. Hence, this study recommends the conduct of mandatory legal and ethics training, institutional reforms, clearer guidelines, enhanced DILG support, and strengthened community education for sustaining the BJS as a reliable, fair, and community-based dispute resolution mechanism.

Keywords: Barangay Justice System, Dispute Resolution, Awareness, Effectiveness, Conflict Mediation

INTRODUCTION

The Barangay Justice System, also known as the *Katarungang Pambarangay*, is a formalized, community-based approach to dispute resolution in the Philippines, reflecting a long-standing cultural tradition of local conflict mediation (Metillo et al., 2022; Molina-Lingvall et al., 2024). The BJS, established through mechanisms like the Local Government Code of 1991 (and later institutionalized through the Local Government Code of, 1991), was designed to deliver justice swiftly, economically, and equitably, aiming to avoid protracted court litigation (Pimentel, 1991). At its core, this quasi-judicial system empowers the Lupon Tagapamayaya—a council of appointed community mediators—to settle minor disputes. The BJS is tasked with not only resolving interpersonal conflicts but also promoting civic discipline, community education, and local peacekeeping (Brillantes & Moscare, 2002), aligning with restorative justice frameworks that prioritize reconciliation and community cohesion over retribution (Brillantes & Moscare, 2002; Lama, 2023; Naseer, Khan, & Shah, 2023).

While global Alternative Dispute Resolution systems, such as Indonesia's Lembaga Perdamaian Desa (Folden, 2013; Marzuki & Sijabat, 2018) and Singapore's Mediation Centre (Wall & Dunne, 2012), offer comparable community-based approaches, the BJS faces persistent challenges in balancing informality and fairness. These challenges include the potential for barangay officials to lack formal legal education and be influenced by local power hierarchies, which can compromise the impartiality and integrity of dispute resolution at the community level (UNDP, 2019). The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2019) has underscored the importance of informal justice mechanisms adhering to human rights standards and gender-sensitive practices, a critical consideration for the BJS.

The Philippine experience with the BJS highlights both its promise and its pitfalls. Studies have documented inconsistencies in procedure, inadequate record-keeping, and the limited capacity of Lupon Tagapamayaya members to mediate complex cases (Pagandian, Ponce, & Santos, 2019). Furthermore, at the local level, residents sometimes bypass the BJS in favor of informal negotiations or external authorities due to perceptions of political interference or a lack of neutrality. Socioeconomic conditions exacerbate these limitations, creating a gap between the BJS's intended inclusivity and the realities of marginalized populations, who may experience

distrust and misunderstanding of the system (aranda, & Bautista, 2021). The lack of sustained institutional capacity-building, including legal literacy and conflict management training, further diminishes the *Lupon Tagapamayapa*'s ability to perform its quasi-judicial role effectively (Garcia, 2019). Therefore, empirical evaluations and localized, evidence-based approaches are crucial for identifying best practices and systemic weaknesses, ensuring the BJS fulfills its vital role in providing accessible justice within communities (Benter, 2020).

METHODOLOGY

The study on the Barangay Justice System in Dapa, Surigao del Norte, employed a sequential explanatory mixed-method design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to achieve a comprehensive understanding of its effectiveness and implementation. The quantitative component used a descriptive-evaluative approach to measure respondents' awareness and assessment of BJS performance in conciliation, mediation, and arbitration, while the qualitative component utilized a phenomenological method to explore the lived experiences of barangay officials, *Lupon Tagapamayapa* members, and disputing parties. This dual-method strategy, which conducted quantitative analysis followed by qualitative validation, was informed by the principle that combining numerical trends with qualitative insights enhances research validity and interpretive depth. The study population included barangay captains, *Lupon members*, and community members from 13 poblacion barangays in Dapa, with 363 respondents selected via stratified random sampling using Slovin's formula and 15 key informants, including experienced barangay officials and mediators, purposively selected for the qualitative phase (Silverman, 2020). Dapa, Surigao del Norte, was chosen as the research locale due to its geographical isolation and limited access to formal courts, making it an ideal setting to evaluate the BJS's accessibility and functionality as a microcosm of grassroots justice in the Philippines.

A structured questionnaire served as the main instrument for quantitative data collection. The tool consisted of four parts: demographic profile, awareness of BJS policies and functions, perceived effectiveness of dispute resolution mechanisms, and encountered challenges. Responses were rated using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree." Content validation was performed by experts in criminology, public administration, and peace studies, while a pilot test produced a Cronbach's alpha of 0.89, indicating strong reliability. For the qualitative phase, a semi-structured interview guide was designed to explore procedural adherence, fairness, and perceptions of justice delivery. The study's data gathering adhered to strict ethical and administrative protocols, obtaining formal approvals and ensuring participant confidentiality and voluntary participation through personally administered surveys and recorded, in-depth interviews. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS 26, employing descriptive statistics, Multivariate Analysis of Variance, and t-tests, while qualitative data underwent thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's framework (Ahmed et al., 2025; Byrne, 2021; Nowell et al., 2017), with both datasets triangulated to strengthen validity. The research focused on civil and interpersonal disputes within the Barangay Justice System at the barangay level, examining awareness, effectiveness, and challenges, with findings contextually limited to Dapa, Surigao del Norte. Ethical considerations, including compliance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Doce & Celis, 2020; Tanate-Lazo & Cabonero, 2021), were meticulously observed throughout, ensuring informed consent and secure data storage. Finally, research findings were disseminated to academic institutions and local government bodies to inform policy development, enhance training for *Lupon Tagapamayapa* members, and promote evidence-based reforms within the barangay justice framework.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This chapter presents the discussion and analysis of the data gathered from the respondents.

Level of Awareness of the Respondents in BJS

The table presents the level of awareness of the respondents regarding the Barangay Justice System (BJS) across its key components, including its role in the Criminal Justice System, organizational structure, procedures, scope of cases, and execution of agreements. This information is relevant as awareness is a critical factor in the effective utilization and acceptance of the BJS as a community-based justice mechanism. The results provide a foundation

for assessing existing knowledge gaps and guiding future interventions aimed at strengthening understanding and participation in barangay-level dispute resolution processes.

Variables	Overall Median	Description
BJS importance in Criminal Justice System.	3.50	Highly Aware
Constitution of the Lupon	3.20	Aware
Process of settling disputes	3.00	Aware
Cases covered by BJS	4.00	Highly Aware
Execution of the agreement	4.00	Highly Aware

The findings indicate that respondents generally exhibit a high level of awareness of the Barangay Justice System (BJS) across its key dimensions. Awareness of the importance of the BJS within the Criminal Justice System obtained a median of 3.50, interpreted as highly aware, reflecting respondents' recognition of the system's role in promoting community-based dispute resolution and decongesting formal courts. Similarly, the variables "Cases Covered by the BJS" and "Execution of the Agreement" both registered a median of 4.00, indicating a high level of awareness of the BJS's jurisdiction and the binding nature of amicable settlements. In contrast, awareness of the "Constitution of the Lupon" (median = 3.20) and the "Process of Settling Disputes" (median = 3.00) was interpreted as aware, suggesting adequate but comparatively lower familiarity with the structural composition of the *Lupon Tagapamayaya* and the procedural aspects of dispute resolution. Overall, these results imply that while respondents are well informed about the general functions and authority of the BJS, there remains a need for continued education and information dissemination focusing on its organizational structure and procedural mechanisms to promote more consistent and effective engagement with the system.

Level of Effectiveness of the BJS in Settling Disputes

The table presents the respondents' assessment of the level of effectiveness of the Barangay Justice System (BJS) in settling disputes through its primary mechanisms, namely conciliation, mediation, and arbitration. This presentation is relevant as it provides empirical evidence on how effectively the BJS fulfills its mandate as a community-based dispute resolution mechanism. The results offer insight into the strengths of each process and serve as a basis for evaluating the overall performance of the BJS in promoting amicable settlements and reducing the escalation of conflicts to formal courts.

Variables	Overall Median	Description
Conciliation	4.00	Very Effective
Mediation	3.50	Very Effective
Arbitration	4.00	Very Effective

The results indicate that the Barangay Justice System (BJS) is perceived as highly effective in settling disputes across its primary mechanisms. Conciliation and arbitration both obtained an overall median of 4.00, interpreted as very effective, suggesting that these processes are successful in facilitating amicable settlements and resolving conflicts at the barangay level. Mediation likewise garnered a high median of 3.50, also described as very effective, reflecting its important role in promoting dialogue and mutual understanding between disputing parties. Collectively, these findings demonstrate that the BJS effectively fulfills its mandate as a community-based dispute resolution mechanism, contributing to conflict resolution, social harmony, and the reduction of cases escalated to formal courts.

Significant Difference on the Level of Effectiveness of the BJS in Settling Disputes

MANOVA tested significant difference on the level of effectiveness of the BJS in settling disputes in terms of Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration according to the barangay officials and dispute parties.

Dispute Parties	Barangay Officials and Lupon Tagapamayapa			F-ratio	p-value	Remarks	
	Median	IQR	Mean				
Mediation	3.20	0.597	3.67	0.592	4.05	0.046	Significant
Conciliation	3.00	0.629	3.63	0.603	1.09	0.298	Not significant
Arbitration	3.20	0.677	3.62	0.585	4.83	0.030	Significant

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Challenges Encountered by the BJS Members in Settling Disputes

A careful analysis of the data revealed key patterns that were organized into themes. These themes highlight the main findings of the study and guide the discussion that follows.

The discussion as to the challenges encountered by the BJ members in settling disputes is subdivided into two: responses from dispute parties and responses from Lupon Tagapamayapa and Barangay Officials.

Themes generated from the responses of dispute parties:

Theme 1: Perceived Power Imbalance and Favoritism

“Some parties are more vocal or influential, and the officials tend to side with them.” (C1)

“If you're not close to the barangay, your side might not be heard.” (C2)

“Honestly, I felt nervous because the other party is well-known in the barangay. The Lupon seemed a bit hesitant too.” (C6)

The qualitative findings reveal a recurring perception among complainants that dispute resolution within the Barangay Justice System (BJS) is not always impartial or equitable. A dominant theme emerged around social influence and perceived favoritism, suggesting that familiarity, social standing, or vocal assertiveness may affect the neutrality of barangay officials.

Theme 2: Inequality in Opportunity to Speak

“It wasn't fair. I wasn't given a proper chance to explain. I kept getting interrupted.” (C7)

“I wasn't given the space to present my side properly. It felt a bit one-sided.” (R2)

“I felt like my side wasn’t fully heard.” (R1)

The findings reveal that some disputing parties were not given equal opportunities to present their perspectives during Barangay Justice System proceedings, with several respondents reporting interruptions, limited speaking time, and perceived disregard of their concerns. These experiences suggest procedural weaknesses in facilitation, where mediators failed to ensure balanced participation and active listening. Such inequality undermines the principles of fairness and neutrality essential to effective mediation and arbitration. This highlights the need to strengthen facilitation and communication skills among Lupon members to ensure equitable and respectful engagement of all parties during dispute resolution.

Theme 3: Reluctance Among Ordinary Complainants

“Ordinary people tend to just agree to end the issue fast, even if it’s unfair.” (C3)

“I had a hard time speaking because it seemed like they favored the other side, but I was still able to talk.” (C4)

“Honestly, I felt nervous because the other party is well-known in the barangay.” (C6)

Themes generated from the responses of Lupon Tagapamayapa and Barangay Officials:

The findings indicate that some ordinary complainants hesitate to fully express their concerns during Barangay Justice System proceedings due to intimidation, time pressure, or perceived social disadvantage. Several respondents admitted to agreeing with resolutions merely to conclude the process quickly, even when outcomes were perceived as unfair. This reluctance reflects the influence of socio-cultural factors such as deference to authority and fear of conflict, which suppress meaningful participation. These dynamics underscore the need for mediators to actively empower less assertive parties and ensure that consent to settlements is both voluntary and informed.

Theme 1: Limited Legal Knowledge and Lack of Formal Training

“We’re often asked to resolve complex cases, yet we don’t have the legal expertise needed to mediate them effectively.” (BC1)

“Sometimes we are expected to handle complicated cases, but we lack the legal background to mediate properly.” (BC4)

“There are times when we’re assigned difficult disputes, but without proper legal training, it’s hard for us to manage them correctly.” (LT3)

The results revealed that the perceived effectiveness of the Barangay Justice System (BJS) is significantly constrained by the limited legal competence and inadequate formal training of the *Lupon Tagapamayapa* members and barangay officials who serve as frontline mediators. Respondents consistently underscored that their lack of legal background hampers their ability to resolve disputes objectively and in accordance with established legal standards.

Theme 2: Perceived Pressure and Influence in Decision-Making

“There are times we feel pressured, especially when one party is influential or close to the barangay officials.” (LT2)

“It can be difficult to stay neutral when one party is well-connected or has a close relationship with those in the barangay.” (LT4)

“We sometimes feel under pressure when one of the parties has strong ties to barangay officials or holds influence in the community.” (LT3)

The findings indicate that *Lupon Tagapamayapa* members often experience pressure when disputes involve socially or politically influential individuals within the barangay. Such pressure, whether implicit or explicit, compromises mediator neutrality and creates ethical tension between procedural fairness and local power dynamics. This influence undermines the integrity of the Barangay Justice System and weakens public trust in its impartiality. The results underscore the need for stronger institutional safeguards, ethical training, and protective mechanisms to ensure independent and fair decision-making in barangay-level dispute resolution.

Theme 3: Lack of Cooperation and Limited Enforcement Power

“Even when we reach a settlement, some parties don’t follow it, and we have limited power to enforce the agreement unless it goes to court.” (BC3)

“Reaching a settlement doesn’t always guarantee compliance, and without court involvement, we have little power to make parties follow through.” (BC3)

“Sometimes, even after a settlement is reached, one party doesn’t comply — and our authority to enforce the agreement is limited unless the matter is escalated to the courts.” (LT5)

The findings indicate that the effectiveness of the Barangay Justice System is constrained by limited cooperation from disputing parties and the restricted enforcement authority of the *Lupon Tagapamayapa*. Respondents reported instances where parties failed to comply with amicable settlements, particularly when enforcement required escalation beyond the barangay level. This limitation undermines the sustainability of resolutions and contributes to recurring disputes, thereby weakening public confidence in the system. The results underscore the need for strengthened post-settlement monitoring, clearer enforcement procedures, and enhanced coordination with formal justice institutions to ensure compliance and uphold the credibility of barangay-level dispute resolution.

1. Program Proposed to Improve the Effectiveness of the BJS in Resolving Conflicts.

Barangay Justice System Vis-À-Vis Dispute Resolution Concrete Action Plan Rationale:

This operational plan responds to the statistically established gaps in community awareness and stakeholder perception regarding the Barangay Justice System (BJS), particularly in its functions, legal scope, execution, and overall effectiveness across mediation, conciliation, and arbitration. Based on the findings, this plan seeks to strategically address deficiencies in awareness, procedural trust, implementation logistics, and stakeholder capacity, with the end goal of improving access to justice, restoring faith in community mechanisms, and institutionalizing restorative justice at the barangay level.

Action Plan Matrix

KRA 1: Addressing Limited Legal Knowledge and Lack of Formal Training

Key Results Area	Key Performance Indicator (KPI)	Innovative Action Plan	Persons Responsible	Timeline	Resources Needed	Means of Verification	Possible Budget (PHP)
1. Enhanced legal knowledge and understanding of Lupon roles	At least 80% of Lupon members complete a legal literacy orientation	Conduct quarterly Legal Literacy Seminars in partnership with local law schools or the Public	DILG, Barangay Captain, Local Law Schools	Q1 to Q4, Annually	Venue, legal resource speakers, training materials, certificates	Attendance sheets, training reports, pre- and post-test results	₱20,000–₱30,000/year (₱5,000–₱7,500 per quarter)

		Attorney's Office					
2. Improved mediation and dispute resolution skills	90% of participants demonstrate improved skills in practical mediation exercises	Develop and implement a Simulation-Based Mediation Workshop using real-life case scenarios	DILG, Barangay Justice Program Officers	Q2 and Q3 of each year	Facilitators, printed case studies, role-play kits	Skills assessment forms, observation checklists, video documentation	₱15,000–₱25,000/workshop
3. Standardized and accessible training for all new Lupon members	All new Lupon members trained within 1 month of appointment	Establish a Lupon Onboarding E-Training Module accessible via barangay computers or mobile phones	DILG ICT Unit, Barangay Council, NGO partners	Launch in Q1, ongoing updates yearly	Computers/tablets, internet access, e-learning software	Completion tracking, user feedback	₱50,000–₱80,000 (initial setup) + ₱10,000/year maintenance
4. Continuous professional development and refresher courses	75% of Lupon members attend annual refresher training	Introduce an Accredited Barangay Justice Continuing Education Program with certifications valid for 2 years	DILG, Local Government Academy (LGA), DepEd ALS (as support)	Annually, every Q3	Budget for facilitator honoraria, certificates, logistics	Training certificates, annual participation reports, performance evaluation	₱25,000–₱40,000/year

KRA 2: Perceived Pressure and Influence in Decision-Making

Key Results Area	Key Performance Indicator (KPI)	Innovative Action Plan	Persons Responsible	Timeline	Resources Needed	Means of Verification	Possible Budget (PHP)
1. Strengthened impartiality and ethical awareness	100% of Lupon members trained on conflict of interest and impartiality	Conduct a Barangay Justice Ethics Orientation focusing on neutrality, conflict of interest, and influence handling	DILG, Legal Aid Volunteers, Municipal Legal Officer	Q1 – Initial training; refresher courses annually	Legal resource speakers, printed materials, venue	Attendance sheet, training certificates, pre/post-test results	₱15,000–₱25,000/year
2. Minimized influence from	80% of disputes mediated without interference or	Establish a Barangay Conflict Shielding Protocol that	Sangguniang Barangay, Lupon Chairperson	Q2 – Protocol development	Drafting workshops, legal consultation	Approved protocol document, incident	₱10,000–₱15,000 (one-time)

barangay officials in case decisions	favoritism reports	restricts barangay officials from influencing active BJS cases		nt and approval		monitoring logs	
3. Increased confidence among Lupon members to report unethical pressure	At least 3 reported and acted-upon incidents per year without retaliation	Create a Confidential Feedback and Reporting System for Lupon members facing undue pressure	DILG Field Officer, Barangay Ethics Committee	Q3 – System development and pilot	Feedback forms, locked dropbox, digital reporting tool	Report records, committee resolutions, follow-up actions	₱8,000–₱12,000 (setup) + ₱5,000/year maintenance
4. Improved transparency in mediation process	100% of sessions logged and monitored for procedural compliance	Require Session Observation and Documentation by an assigned barangay observer (rotating basis)	Lupon Secretary, Barangay Council	Q2 – Launch observation system	Monitoring forms, observer logbook	Completed monitoring reports, observer evaluations	₱5,000–₱8,000/year
5. Increased public trust in BJS outcomes	80% of community members express trust in fairness of BJS (via annual survey)	Conduct Community Awareness Forums on BJS impartiality, ethics, and the role of Lupon	Barangay Council, DILG, CSO partners	Q3 and Q4 – Biannual forums	IEC materials, sound system, logistics, speaker honoraria	Event photos, attendance list, post-forum evaluation	₱20,000–₱30,000/year

KRA 3: Lack of Cooperation and Limited Enforcement Power

Key Results Area	Key Performance Indicator (KPI)	Innovative Action Plan	Persons Responsible	Timeline	Resources Needed	Means of Verification	Possible Budget (PHP)
1. Improved compliance with mediated agreements	At least 70% of parties comply with settlements within 30 days	Introduce a Settlement Compliance Follow-Up Program, where Lupon follows up on agreements	Lupon Secretary, Barangay Council	Q1 – Program design; ongoing implementation	Monitoring forms, communication load (calls/visits)	Compliance logs, signed confirmation sheets	₱8,000–₱12,000/year

		after 7, 14, and 30 days					
2. Increased sincerity of party participation	80% of parties attend mediation willingly (based on exit interviews)	Develop a Pre-Mediation Orientation Session to explain the purpose, benefits, and process of BJS to both parties	Barangay Secretary, Lupon Chairperson	Q2 – Rollout with every case filing	Orientation slides, flyers, venue	Orientation attendance sheet, feedback forms	₱10,000–₱15,000/year
3. Stronger enforcement of non-compliance consequences	At least 50% reduction in repeat offenders due to enforcement referrals	Establish a Referral Procedure to the Courts for serious or repeat non-compliance cases	DILG, Barangay Captain, Local Legal Officers	Q3 – Formulation and dissemination	Referral forms, legal checklist, coordination with courts	Referral records, docket tracking, feedback from courts	₱5,000–₱8,000 (one-time)
4. Increased community understanding of legal weight of settlements	90% of residents aware that BJS agreements can be enforceable by law	Conduct a Barangay Legal Literacy Caravan to educate residents on the authority of BJS	DILG, Barangay Legal Aid Desk, CSO partners	Q3 and Q4 – 2 caravans/year	IEC materials, sound system, legal speakers	Attendance list, photo documentation, pre/post quiz	₱20,000–₱30,000/year
5. Improved cooperation through positive reinforcement	At least 50% of successfully resolved cases are recognized publicly	Launch a Barangay Mediation Success Recognition Program that highlights compliant and cooperative parties	Barangay Council, Peace and Order Committee	Q4 – Launch during Barangay Assembly	Certificates, tokens, bulletin board	List of awardees, photos, assembly records	₱10,000–₱15,000/year

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study affirm that the Barangay Justice System (BJS) remains a cornerstone of community-based dispute resolution and restorative justice in the Philippines. As revealed by both quantitative and qualitative analyses, respondents demonstrated a high level of awareness regarding the BJS's legal foundation, its jurisdictional scope, and the specific processes involved in conciliation, mediation, and arbitration. The data

further showed that both barangay officials and disputing parties generally perceived the system as highly effective in promoting peace and order within the community. This reinforces the BJS's relevance as a people-centered mechanism that not only decongests formal courts but also strengthens the moral and social fabric of grassroots governance (Brillantes & Moscare, 2002; Guia, Peñaranda, & Bautista, 2021).

Despite its recognized importance, the study also identified several limitations that hinder the BJS's full potential. Among the most salient challenges are the lack of legal education and formal training among members of the Lupon Tagapamayapa, inadequate enforcement mechanisms for mediated settlements, and susceptibility to external or political influence during dispute resolution. Moreover, while barangay officials tend to view mediation and arbitration as highly effective, dispute parties express reservations regarding impartiality and procedural consistency. These disparities indicate an enduring gap between policy intent and grassroots practice, suggesting the need for both administrative reform and human resource development. Addressing these deficiencies is crucial not only to preserve the credibility of the BJS but also to ensure that justice delivery remains equitable and transparent across all barangays (Pagandian et al., 2019; DILG, 2021).

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