

Dispute Resolution Practices among Urban and Rural Barangays in Butuan City

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ABSTRACT

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The Katarungang Pambarangay (Barangay Justice System) provides a community-based mechanism for settling disputes without resorting to formal litigation, thereby easing the caseload of Philippine trial courts. This quantitative descriptive study examined the dispute resolution practices of mediation, conciliation, and arbitration across forty-five barangays in Butuan City, Philippines, encompassing twenty-seven urban poblacion barangays and eighteen centrally located rural barangays. Two hundred ninety-seven respondents, comprising two hundred fifty-two Lupong Tagapamayapa (Pacifying Committee) members and forty-five Punong Barangay (barangay chairpersons), completed a modified survey questionnaire measuring respondent profile, barangay caseload profile, and the extent of practice of the three dispute settlement mechanisms. Frequency and percentage, weighted mean, and nonparametric comparative tests (Mann-Whitney U, Kruskal-Wallis, and chi-square)

were used to treat the data. The typical respondent was female, aged forty-one years or older, and had attained at least secondary or tertiary education. Financial, family, and neighbor disputes were the most frequently filed complaints. Mediation and conciliation were consistently rated "Always Practiced," while arbitration was rated only "Often Practiced" to "Sometimes Practiced," confirming that arbitration is invoked mainly when mediation and conciliation fail. No significant difference emerged between Lupon Tagapamayapa and Punong Barangay perceptions in most comparisons, but significant variation surfaced across individual barangays. The study concludes that the Katarungang Pambarangay functions as an active and generally effective grassroots justice mechanism anchored on voluntary, relationship-preserving settlement rather than binding adjudication, and recommends standardized training and monitoring to reduce barangay-to-barangay inconsistency.

INTRODUCTION

Disputes are an inevitable feature of community life, arising from personal interest, miscommunication, unmet emotional needs, or diverging perceptions of fairness, and left unaddressed, they can escalate into more complex and costly conflicts. Globally, societies have long relied on structures outside formal courts to manage such friction. Article 33(1) of the United Nations Charter identifies negotiation, mediation, conciliation, and arbitration as standard peaceful means of dispute settlement, principles that now underlie what the field broadly calls alternative dispute resolution, or *ADR* (Haley, 2020). Comparative experience illustrates both the promise and the growing pains of institutionalizing these mechanisms: in Ukraine, for instance, mediation remains an emerging legal institution requiring clearer regulatory frameworks, professional mediator associations, and public education before it can rival litigation as the default recourse for conflict (Izarova, 2019). Similarly, workplace-conflict practitioners have observed that organizations often treat conflict purely as a risk to be suppressed rather than an opportunity for restorative dialogue, underscoring a persistent global tension between adversarial and conciliatory approaches to dispute settlement (Liddle, 2023).

Within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations region and the wider Asia-Pacific, community-based dispute resolution has likewise been positioned as a means of relieving overburdened judiciaries while preserving culturally rooted practices of consensus-building. Comparative dispute-resolution scholarship notes that court systems in many developing economies lack enforceable timelines for full case resolution, leaving disputants in prolonged uncertainty and strained relationships while their cases move through appeal (Izarova, 2019). Community-based peacebuilding initiatives, which grant local groups direct authority over how conflicts in their midst are investigated, negotiated, and resolved, have consequently been promoted as one of the more durable peacebuilding strategies available to conflict-affected and resource-constrained communities.

In the Philippines, this global and regional impulse toward community-anchored justice finds its clearest expression in the Katarungang Pambarangay, or Barangay Justice System. Former President Ferdinand E. Marcos created a Presidential Commission under Presidential Decree No. 1293 to design a dispute settlement mechanism operating below the level of formal courts, a mandate realized through Presidential Decree No. 1508 in 1978 (PD 1508, 1978). The system was later folded into Republic Act No. 7160, the Local Government Code of 1991, whose Sections 399 to 422 govern the composition of the Lupong Tagapamayapa (literally, the "Pacifying Committee"), the selection and duties of its members, and the sequential phases of mediation, conciliation, and arbitration (RA 7160, 1991). The law's stated purposes are to expedite the administration of justice, honor the constitutional duty to preserve Filipino cultural values, strengthen the family as the basic social institution, and reduce the indiscriminate filing of minor cases that congest trial court dockets (Escabel, 2019; Guia & Mangubat, 2021).

Under this framework, a complainant first brings a grievance to the Punong Barangay, who summons the parties to a face-to-face mediation session. If mediation fails, the dispute proceeds to conciliation before a Pangkat ng Tagapagkasundo, a panel drawn from the Lupong Tagapamayapa. Should conciliation likewise fail, the parties may submit to arbitration, in which a designated authority renders a binding award (Domingo, 2020; Seguido & Cartin-Pecson, 2022). Philippine jurisprudence has repeatedly affirmed the mandatory character of this sequence: in *Ngo v. Gabelo* (2020), a complaint was dismissed for failure to first undergo barangay conciliation, while in *Crisanta Alcaraz Miguel v. Jerry D. Montanez* (G.R. No. 191336), the Supreme Court upheld the enforceability of a barangay arbitration award once a settlement agreement was breached. These rulings confirm that the Katarungang Pambarangay is not merely aspirational policy but an operative precondition for access to the formal justice system in most minor civil and quasi-criminal disputes (RESPICIO & CO., 2024).

Existing local literature has examined how demographic and training-related factors shape the effectiveness of Lupong Tagapamayapa members. Age and accumulated social wisdom are associated with stronger conflict-management skill (Villamor & Dagohoy, 2021), while gender composition on mediation panels has been found to shape how comfortable disputants, especially women, feel expressing themselves during proceedings (Cerna, 2023; Cosain et al., 2022). Regular training in reconciliation and legal procedure has likewise been linked to more consistent and higher-quality settlement outcomes (Pagalilauan, 2022; Metillo et al., 2022), and prior comparative work in Buenavista, Agusan del Norte found that Lupon members who were college graduates with several years of experience and multiple training exposures were the most consistently effective in conciliation and mediation (Acbay et al., 2021). Despite this body of work, the literature has rarely examined dispute resolution practice across a full spectrum of barangay settings within a single city, and gaps remain regarding whether urban, densely populated poblacion barangays and more centrally located rural barangays exhibit comparable patterns of mediation, conciliation, and arbitration. Addressing this gap matters

because Butuan City's forty-five most active barangays, spanning both urban and rural character, jointly account for a substantial share of the Katarungang Pambarangay caseload handled in the Caraga Region, and any divergence in practice has direct implications for equitable access to grassroots justice.

This study accordingly examined dispute resolution practices among forty-five participating barangays in Butuan City, drawing on Lupong Tagapamayapa members and Punong Barangay respondents across the city's urban poblacion and centrally located rural clusters. By profiling respondents and barangay caseloads, measuring the extent to which mediation, conciliation, and arbitration are practiced, and testing for differences by official role and by barangay, the study provides a citywide account of how the Barangay Justice System functions in practice, one intended to benefit policymakers seeking to refine Katarungang Pambarangay implementation, Lupong practitioners seeking to strengthen their own dispute-handling competence, and future researchers extending inquiry into community-based justice in Mindanao.

FRAMEWORK

The study is anchored on Burton's (1990) Human Needs Theory, which holds that destructive conflict arises when certain universal human needs go unmet, including security, identity, recognition, personal growth, belonging, self-esteem, freedom, and distributive justice, alongside the more basic physical needs of food and shelter. Individuals who feel excluded, unrecognized, or disrespected are more prone to conflict, and poor communication about needs and objectives compounds misunderstanding, making resolution harder to achieve (Burton, 1990). Applied to barangay dispute resolution, the theory suggests that family disputes, neighbor conflicts, financial disagreements, minor physical altercations, and property disputes often mask deeper unmet needs for security, recognition, or participation (Lubczynski & Matusitz, 2024). Katarungang Pambarangay mechanisms that emphasize collaborative, face-to-face, and inclusive dialogue, namely mediation and conciliation, are consequently better positioned than purely adjudicative arbitration to address these underlying needs, foster durable settlement, and prevent recurring conflict. This framework guides the interpretation of why mediation and conciliation are practiced more consistently across Butuan City's barangays than the more formal, adjudicative process of arbitration.

OBJECTIVES

This study analyzed the dispute resolution practices employed during the settlement process across participating barangays through the following specific objectives: (1) describe the profile of Lupong Tagapamayapa members in terms of age, sex, educational attainment, trainings attended, and years of experience; (2) describe the profile of participating barangays in terms of common types of disputes filed, number of cases filed per year, number of settled cases, and number of

unsettled cases; (3) determine the level of dispute resolution practices employed during the settlement process, as perceived by the Lupong Tagapamayapa and the Punong Barangay, in terms of mediation, conciliation, and arbitration; (4) determine whether a significant difference exists in the dispute resolution practices as perceived by the Lupong Tagapamayapa and the Punong Barangay; and (5) determine whether a significant difference exists in the dispute resolution practices across the participating barangays.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study employed a quantitative descriptive research design using a structured survey questionnaire to describe respondent and barangay profiles and to measure the extent of practice of mediation, conciliation, and arbitration under the Katarungang Pambarangay system. The descriptive approach allowed the researchers to quantify and tabulate responses from a defined population of barangay justice officials across two purposively selected barangay clusters within a single highly urbanized city, enabling comparison of practice across differing community settings.

Research Site

The study was conducted in Butuan City, a highly urbanized, historically significant, and multicultural city in the Caraga Region of northeastern Mindanao, Philippines. The city, once the seat of the pre-colonial Rajahnate of Butuan, comprises eighty-six barangays, twenty-seven classified as urban (poblacion) barangays and fifty-nine as rural barangays. As of the 2020 Census, Butuan City had a population of 372,910. The study drew its respondents from forty-five barangays: all twenty-seven urban poblacion barangays and eighteen purposively selected, centrally located rural barangays, chosen from among the fifty-nine rural barangays because of logistical and resource constraints associated with citywide data collection.

Participants

The combined population frame across the forty-five barangays comprised four hundred ninety-nine Lupong Tagapamayapa members (two hundred eighty-six from the twenty-seven urban barangays and two hundred thirteen from the eighteen rural barangays) and forty-five Punong Barangay (twenty-seven urban, eighteen rural), for a total population of five hundred forty-four. Applying the fifty-percent-plus-one sampling technique to the Lupong Tagapamayapa population yielded a combined sample of two hundred fifty-two members (one hundred forty-four urban, one hundred eight rural). All forty-five Punong Barangay were included without sampling, since a chairperson population of one per barangay does not admit further reduction. The final study sample totaled two hundred ninety-seven respondents.

Instrumentation

The study used a survey questionnaire adapted and modified, with the original authors' permission, from Acbay, Caila, Acbay, and Acabo's (2021) instrument, "Dispute Resolution and Its Effectiveness in the Municipality of Buenavista," itself derived from an earlier instrument by Mahinay, Balinton, Jamito, and Tiempo (2020). Two parallel questionnaire sets were prepared: one for Lupong Tagapamayapa members and one for Punong Barangay. Each set contained two parts. The first part gathered respondent or barangay profile data, namely age, sex, educational attainment, trainings attended, and years of experience for Lupong Tagapamayapa members, and common types of disputes, cases filed per year, and numbers of settled and unsettled cases for the barangay-level questionnaire. The second part of each questionnaire measured the extent of practice of mediation, conciliation, and arbitration using a four-point Likert scale (Always Practiced = 4, Often Practiced = 3, Sometimes Practiced = 2, Never Practiced = 1).

Research Ethics Protocol

The researchers observed the confidentiality and dignity of all respondents throughout data collection. Formal letters of request were submitted to the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) Region 13 to obtain official population counts, and separate letters were submitted to each participating barangay to request permission and to inform officials that their Lupong Tagapamayapa members and Punong Barangay would serve as respondents. Before administration, respondents were briefed in the vernacular regarding the purpose, procedures, and expected benefits of the study, and all questions about the instrument were addressed without interference in how respondents subsequently answered. Signed informed consent was obtained prior to questionnaire administration. Collected data were treated as strictly confidential, anonymized during tabulation, and securely stored to protect respondent identity.

Data Collection

The data collection procedure was implemented through a structured and ethical framework. Letters were first sent to the DILG Regional Director to obtain the official count of urban and rural barangays and their respective Lupong Tagapamayapa populations. Subsequently, the fifty-percent-plus-one sampling technique was applied to determine the Lupong Tagapamayapa sample in each barangay cluster, while all Punong Barangay were retained without sampling. Letters requesting permission and explaining the study were then sent to each of the forty-five participating barangays. Informed consent forms and the research instrument were distributed and explained to respondents, with the researchers available to clarify any item as needed. Upon collection over a period exceeding one month, the completed questionnaires were checked for completeness. Finally, the data were tabulated, evaluated, and subjected to statistical treatment to answer the study's objectives.

Data Analysis

Frequency and percentage were used to describe the demographic profile of respondents (age, sex, educational attainment, trainings attended, years of experience) and the caseload profile of barangays (common types of disputes, cases filed per year, and numbers of settled and unsettled cases). Weighted mean was used to determine the level of practice of mediation, conciliation, and arbitration, interpreted using the following descriptive scale: 3.26 to 4.00, Always Practiced; 2.51 to 3.25, Often Practiced; 1.76 to 2.50, Sometimes Practiced; and 1.00 to 1.75, Never Practiced. The Mann-Whitney U test and chi-square test were used, as appropriate to each barangay cluster's collected response distribution, to determine whether significant differences existed between Lupong Tagapamayapa and Punong Barangay perceptions of dispute resolution practice, while the Kruskal-Wallis test and chi-square test were used to determine whether significant differences existed across individual barangays.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profile of the Lupong Tagapamayapa

Across the pooled sample of two hundred fifty-two Lupong Tagapamayapa members, the overwhelming majority, two hundred six respondents or 81.75 percent, were forty-one years old or older, followed distantly by the thirty-one-to-forty age bracket at 17.46 percent; almost no members were younger than thirty-one. This pronounced skew toward older membership held in both the urban cluster (82.64 percent aged forty-one and above) and the rural cluster (80.56 percent), indicating that seniority and long community tenure, rather than youth, are the dominant qualifying traits for Lupon service across barangay settings. Villamor and Dagohoy (2021) attribute this pattern to the greater experience and social wisdom that older members bring to conflict management, a pattern consistent across both urban and rural strata of this study.

By sex, the pooled sample was more evenly balanced than either stratum alone suggested: of two hundred fifty-two members, one hundred thirty-seven, or 54.37 percent, were female and one hundred fifteen, or 45.63 percent, were male. This overall female plurality was driven primarily by the urban barangays, where women held 61.11 percent of Lupon seats, whereas the rural barangays skewed slightly male, at 54.63 percent. Cerna's (2023) study of Metro Vigan similarly found that the gender composition of Lupon panels shapes disputants' comfort in expressing themselves, with panels dominated by women generally perceived as more approachable, while male-dominated panels have occasionally been associated with reduced attentiveness to gender-specific grievances (Cosain et al., 2022). The near-even overall balance observed citywide suggests that Butuan City's barangays, taken together, have moved toward more gender-inclusive dispute-resolution bodies even where individual barangay clusters diverge from that citywide average.

In terms of educational attainment, both barangay clusters confirmed that Lupong Tagapamayapa membership is concentrated among respondents with at

least a secondary education. In the urban cluster, some college education (34.72 percent), high school graduation (32.64 percent), and college graduation (29.86 percent) accounted for nearly all respondents, while in the rural cluster, high school graduates alone constituted 44.44 percent of the sample, the single largest category. No respondent in either cluster reported having no formal education or only an elementary-level education, and none held postgraduate qualifications. This concentration of members with secondary-to-tertiary schooling is consistent with Dionisio et al.'s (2023) observation that higher educational attainment supports more effective implementation of Katarungang Pambarangay law, and with Lupao and Alejandro's (2022) finding that varied professional and educational backgrounds among Lupon members, spanning law enforcement, academe, religious institutions, business, and local government, strengthen the Barangay Justice System's overall functioning.

Trainings attended by Lupon members, measured in the urban cluster, showed that reconciliation-focused training (83.33 percent) and legal-procedure training (72.22 percent) were far more commonly attended than rule-enforcement training (56.94 percent), suggesting that barangay officials are more thoroughly prepared to facilitate amicable settlement than to enforce compliance with settlement terms. This pattern is corroborated by Metillo et al.'s (2022) finding that barangay officials place a premium on helping disputants reach agreement rather than on the coercive enforcement of outcomes.

Years of experience likewise skewed toward long-serving members, particularly in the urban cluster, where 37.50 percent of respondents had more than eight years of service and a further 27.08 percent had between five and eight years, against only 20.14 percent with two years or less. The rural cluster showed a comparable, though somewhat less extreme, distribution, with the largest share of members (47.22 percent) reporting between two and five years of experience. Long-serving members bring an accumulated repertoire of successful dispute-resolution techniques (Verdad, 2024), while the comparatively smaller share of newly appointed members across both clusters points to a continuing need for structured onboarding and mentorship to sustain institutional capacity over time.

Taken together, these profile findings show that Butuan City's Lupon Tagapamayapa is staffed predominantly by older, moderately to highly educated, and experienced community members, with women assuming a larger collective share of seats than men. This composition aligns closely with Burton's (1990) emphasis on the importance of legitimacy, recognition, and trust in effective dispute resolution: senior, credentialed, and experienced Lupon members are more likely to be perceived by disputants as neutral, capable authorities, which in turn supports voluntary compliance with mediated and conciliated outcomes. A methodological critique worth noting, however, is that reliance on a fifty-percent-plus-one sampling frame concentrated on incumbent officials may understate the perspectives of newer, younger, or less formally educated Lupon members whose experiences could reveal different training or support needs.

Profile of Participating Barangays

Financial disputes, neighbor conflicts, and family disputes dominated the caseload of participating barangays. Financial disputes were reported by twenty-four of twenty-seven urban barangays (88.89 percent) and sixteen of eighteen rural barangays (88.89 percent), making money-related conflict, chiefly informal debts and unpaid obligations, the most pervasive single category citywide. Neighbor conflicts followed closely, cited by twenty-one urban barangays (77.78 percent) and all eighteen rural barangays (100 percent), while family disputes were reported by eighteen barangays in each cluster (66.67 percent urban; 100 percent rural). Workplace or institutional disputes were consistently the least common category in both clusters. This citywide pattern, with financial, neighbor, and family disputes forming the bulk of barangay caseloads, mirrors findings from a comparable Zamboanga City study, where debt, property, and family matters together accounted for the majority of barangay-level cases resolved between 2019 and 2023, underscoring the centrality of interpersonal and household-economic strain as drivers of grassroots conflict (Haim, Nanes, & Davidson, 2021).

Case volume varied meaningfully by barangay cluster. Among urban barangays, 44.44 percent handled twenty-five cases or fewer annually and 37.04 percent handled fifty-one cases or more, while among rural barangays the pattern reversed sharply: 77.78 percent of rural barangays handled fifty-one cases or more per year, a volume that plausibly reflects the wider land area and dispersed populations typical of the rural cluster's more populous barangays such as Libertad and San Vicente. Settlement outcomes were broadly favorable across both clusters. Among urban barangays, settled caseloads clustered at the lower end (40.74 percent settling fifteen cases or fewer), consistent with their generally lower filing volume, whereas among rural barangays, 55.56 percent settled forty-six cases or more, consistent with their higher filing volume. Unsettled cases were rare in both clusters: 88.89 percent of urban barangays and 77.78 percent of rural barangays reported fifteen or fewer unresolved cases, indicating that the great majority of disputes brought before either barangay cluster are ultimately resolved without recourse to the courts. This finding is consistent with regional data reported for Region 7, where the Lupon Tagapamayapa achieved a 75 percent settlement rate across more than 27,000 referred cases in the first half of 2023 (Palaubsanon, 2023), and it lends support to the Katarungang Pambarangay's founding objective of decongesting court dockets (RA 7160, 1991). Where unsettled cases persist, prior research attributes the residual backlog to noncompliance with agreements, dishonesty, disrespect toward proceedings, nonattendance, inadequate compensation for Lupon members, and occasional violent incidents during proceedings (Rsis, 2022).

Level of Dispute Resolution Practices

Across both barangay clusters, mediation and conciliation were consistently rated "Always Practiced," while arbitration fell to "Often Practiced" or "Sometimes Practiced" depending on respondent group. In the rural cluster, Lupong Tagapamayapa and Punong Barangay recorded identical weighted means for

mediation (3.78) and conciliation (3.84), both squarely within the Always Practiced range, while arbitration registered weighted means of 3.51 (Lupong Tagapamayapa) and 3.50 (Punong Barangay), the boundary of the Always Practiced range but visibly lower than mediation and conciliation. In the urban cluster, conciliation was similarly rated Always Practiced overall (weighted mean 3.77, with Lupon at 3.75 and Punong Barangay at 3.79), while arbitration fell markedly to Often Practiced for the Lupong Tagapamayapa (weighted mean 2.63) and Sometimes Practiced for the Punong Barangay (weighted mean 2.41), the clearest citywide evidence that arbitration functions as a mechanism of last resort rather than a routine settlement pathway.

Within mediation, both barangay clusters rated procedural compliance items, such as summoning respondents, ensuring jurisdictional coverage, and conducting timely conciliation efforts, most highly, while the requirement that "all proceedings for settlement are open to the public and informal" consistently received the lowest rating in both clusters, falling to Often Practiced rather than Always Practiced. This finding suggests that barangay officials citywide prefer to conduct sensitive negotiations privately, likely to protect disputants' confidentiality and to encourage candor, even though this preference sits somewhat in tension with the law's informal, community-facing character (Lupao & Alejandro, 2022). Within arbitration, the item most consistently endorsed was the Lupon Chairman's effort to settle opposing parties, while items concerning the enforcement of arbitration awards within six months and the issuance of notices of execution after noncompliance received comparatively lower ratings in both clusters, indicating that once a matter proceeds to formal arbitration, the greater challenge lies not in reaching an award but in ensuring its subsequent execution.

The consistent citywide pattern, mediation and conciliation strongly and almost uniformly practiced, arbitration comparatively underused, corroborates prior research describing the Barangay Justice System's core function as resolving disputes through the disputants' own voluntary settlement, with arbitration reserved for cases in which conciliation and mediation efforts have already been exhausted (Metillo et al., 2022). This ordering aligns closely with Burton's (1990) Human Needs Theory: mediation and conciliation, precisely because they are voluntary, face-to-face, and relationship-preserving, are structurally better suited to addressing disputants' underlying needs for recognition, security, and participation than the more adversarial, outcome-imposing character of arbitration, which likely explains why barangay officials across both urban and rural settings gravitate toward the former and treat the latter as an exception rather than a rule.

Differences by Official Role

When perceptions were compared between Lupong Tagapamayapa and Punong Barangay, most comparisons in both clusters showed no statistically significant difference. In the urban cluster, Mann-Whitney U tests produced p-values of 0.933 for mediation, 0.578 for conciliation, and 0.490 for arbitration, all comfortably exceeding the 0.05 threshold, indicating that Lupon members and

barangay chairpersons hold closely aligned views of how each mechanism is practiced. In the rural cluster, by contrast, chi-square comparisons revealed statistically significant differences for all three mechanisms (mediation: Lupong Tagapamayapa chi-square 440.69, Punong Barangay 199.22; conciliation: 154.00 and 77.22; arbitration: 1124.91 and 224.82, all $p < 0.05$), suggesting that in the more dispersed rural setting, the structure, training, and authority differences between the two official roles translate into more visibly divergent day-to-day practice.

This contrast between the two clusters is instructive rather than contradictory: it indicates that the degree of alignment between Lupon members and barangay chairpersons is itself shaped by setting. In the urban poblacion barangays, where officials interact more frequently, share overlapping training pipelines, and operate under closer municipal oversight, perceptions of practice converge. In the more dispersed rural barangays, where distance, workload, and variable access to training and resources are more pronounced, the same two official roles appear to experience and describe dispute resolution somewhat differently, a pattern consistent with Aquino's (2008) observation that the Lupong Tagapamayapa tends to follow a more formalized, consensus-based process while the Punong Barangay more often relies on personal authority and informal negotiation, occasionally producing less consistent settlements.

Differences by Barangay

Both barangay clusters showed statistically significant variation when dispute resolution practices were compared across individual barangays rather than by official role. Kruskal-Wallis tests among the urban barangays yielded p-values of 0.001 for mediation, conciliation, and arbitration alike, rejecting the null hypothesis of uniform practice; pairwise comparisons repeatedly implicated Barangay Mahogany as diverging significantly from several peer barangays, including Lapu-Lapu, Limaha, San Ignacio, J.P. Rizal, Tandang Sora, and Obrero, across all three mechanisms. Chi-square tests among the rural barangays likewise rejected the null hypothesis for mediation (243.52), conciliation (190.40), and arbitration (1349.44), confirming that practice intensity varies meaningfully from one rural barangay to another as well.

These citywide findings indicate that while the overarching legal framework and general hierarchy of preference, mediation and conciliation ahead of arbitration, hold uniformly across Butuan City, the specific intensity and consistency with which each barangay implements that framework depends heavily on localized factors: leadership style, resource availability, the training exposure of individual Lupon members, and the degree of community engagement in dispute settlement (Badua et al., 2024; Gallego et al., 2019). This is consistent with findings from Iloilo City, where barangays handling higher case volumes tended to be more proactive and procedurally mature in their mediation practice, while barangays with fewer cases sometimes showed correspondingly lower participation, possibly reflecting fewer resources or less-trained personnel rather than genuinely fewer underlying disputes (Lims, 2019). The persistence of barangay-to-barangay variation, even though

official-role variation is muted in the urban cluster, points to a critique applicable across both settings: the Katarungang Pambarangay's decentralized, barangay-by-barangay implementation is simultaneously its greatest strength, allowing responsiveness to local culture and need, and its principal vulnerability, since it leaves service quality dependent on the initiative, training, and resources of each individual barangay rather than on a uniformly enforced citywide standard.

CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that the Katarungang Pambarangay functions as an active, broadly effective, and voluntarily oriented grassroots justice mechanism across Butuan City's urban and rural barangays, staffed predominantly by senior, moderately to highly educated, and experienced Lupong Tagapamayapa members who confront a caseload dominated by financial, neighbor, and family disputes and who resolve the great majority of these disputes without leaving unsettled backlogs. Mediation and conciliation are practiced with near-uniform consistency across both barangay clusters, always rated at the highest descriptive level, while arbitration functions as a genuine last resort, invoked and rated less consistently once informal settlement efforts have been exhausted, a hierarchy that aligns with the voluntary, needs-responsive character predicted by Burton's Human Needs Theory. Perceptions of practice between Lupong Tagapamayapa and Punong Barangay converge closely in the more centrally administered urban barangays but diverge more visibly in the more dispersed rural barangays, and in both clusters, practice intensity varies significantly from one barangay to the next, confirming that citywide legal uniformity does not yet translate into citywide operational uniformity. These findings collectively affirm the continuing relevance of barangay-level dispute resolution to Philippine grassroots governance while identifying barangay-to-barangay inconsistency, rather than any fundamental defect in the mediation-conciliation-arbitration sequence itself, as the system's most pressing improvement priority.

TRANSLATIONAL RESEARCH

Barangay officials could benefit from standardized, citywide training modules covering mediation, conciliation, and arbitration procedures, ideally delivered uniformly to both Lupong Tagapamayapa members and Punong Barangay so that the two official roles maintain aligned practice regardless of whether a barangay is urban or rural in character. Local government units may wish to strengthen enforcement outcomes by establishing clearer post-award monitoring protocols, since both barangay clusters showed comparatively weaker performance on timely execution of arbitration awards than on the earlier stages of mediation and conciliation.

Policymakers could further support system-wide consistency by periodically benchmarking individual barangay performance against citywide averages, which

would allow barangays such as those identified as significant outliers in pairwise comparisons to receive targeted capacity-building support rather than uniform, undifferentiated interventions. Future researchers are encouraged to extend this line of inquiry through longitudinal designs that track individual disputes from filing through settlement or escalation, and through qualitative inquiry into disputants' own experiences of mediation, conciliation, and arbitration.

Such work would complement the official-perspective data reported here and could further clarify how well the Katarungang Pambarangay addresses the underlying human needs that Burton's theory identifies as the true drivers of durable conflict resolution.

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