

Grassroots Governance and Delivery of Mandated Services in Catarman, Northern Samar

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ABSTRACT

This study assessed grassroots governance and the delivery of mandated services in selected barangays of Catarman, Northern Samar. Specifically, it examined barangay profiles, demographic characteristics of barangay officials, competence levels, severity of challenges, mandated service delivery performance under Republic Act No. 7160, and the relationships among these variables. A descriptive-correlational research design was used. Respondents included 158 barangay officials from 17 selected barangays and 85 residents who served as external evaluators of service delivery performance. Data were gathered using a researcher-made questionnaire validated by experts and analyzed using frequency counts, percentages, weighted mean, Pearson product-moment correlation, comparative tests, and moderation analysis. Findings showed that the

selected barangays varied in land area, population, National Tax Allotment, and geographic accessibility. Most barangay officials were middle-aged, male, married, Sangguniang Barangay members, college graduates, and had attended governance-related trainings. Officials demonstrated high competence across planning, program knowledge, implementation skills, monitoring/reporting, and accountability/leadership, with accountability and leadership obtaining the highest mean. Challenges were rated major overall, with resource and staffing constraints as the most severe. Mandated service delivery was generally rated good by both officials and residents, with Katarungang Pambarangay and health/social welfare receiving the highest performance ratings. Significant relationships were found between selected demographic variables, competence, and service delivery performance. Competence dimensions were also significantly related to service delivery outcomes. Moreover, challenges significantly moderated the competence-performance relationship, showing that severe operational and institutional barriers weakened the positive influence of competence on service delivery.

Keywords: *barangay governance, competence, grassroots governance, mandated services, RA 7160, service delivery*

INTRODUCTION

Grassroots governance in the Philippines is anchored on decentralization, local autonomy, accountability, and responsive public service. Republic Act No. 7160, otherwise known as the Local Government Code of 1991, devolved important functions to local government units, including barangays. Under Section 17(b)(1), barangays are mandated to deliver basic services in agricultural support, health and social welfare, hygiene and sanitation, Katarungang Pambarangay, public facilities maintenance, and infrastructure projects.

Barangays serve as the most immediate and accessible level of government. Punong Barangays, Sangguniang Barangay members, secretaries, and treasurers are expected to plan, implement, monitor, report, and lead programs that respond to local needs. With the expanded National Tax Allotment after the Mandanas-Garcia

ruling, barangays theoretically gained stronger financial capacity to perform devolved functions. However, legal mandates and funding increases do not automatically ensure effective service delivery.

In Catarman, Northern Samar, the challenge of grassroots governance is evident in the continuing need to improve roads, health services, agricultural support, sanitation, dispute resolution, public facilities, and infrastructure. The municipality has 55 barangays, and selected barangays have received governance recognition through the Seal of Good Local Governance for Barangays and related initiatives. Yet systematic evidence on competence, challenges, and RA 7160-mandated service delivery across barangays remains limited.

Existing literature emphasizes that decentralization succeeds only when local officials possess sufficient institutional capacity, competence, resources, and coordination support. Barangay officials may be familiar with community needs, but they may still encounter difficulties in technical planning, budgeting, monitoring, reporting, inter-agency coordination, and managing limited funds and personnel. These concerns make it necessary to assess grassroots governance empirically at the barangay level.

This study examined grassroots governance and delivery of mandated services in selected barangays of Catarman, Northern Samar. It profiled selected barangays and officials, assessed competence levels and challenges, evaluated mandated service delivery performance, tested relationships among demographic profile, competence, and performance, and determined whether challenges moderated the relationship between competence and service delivery.

Literature Review

Decentralization and Barangay-Level Governance

Decentralization theory explains that public service delivery improves when authority, responsibility, and resources are transferred closer to citizens. Cheema and Rondinelli (2007) emphasized that decentralized governance can strengthen responsiveness and accountability when local institutions are capable and supported. In the Philippine setting, RA 7160 institutionalized this framework by assigning specific functions to barangays, municipalities, cities, and provinces.

However, decentralization also creates implementation risks when local units receive functions without sufficient capacity. Rondinelli, Nellis, and Cheema (1983) argued that local government performance depends on administrative competence, resources, and institutional support. This is especially true for barangays, which carry direct service responsibilities but often operate with limited technical personnel and financial flexibility.

The Local Government Code requires barangays to act as frontline service providers. Their effectiveness depends on planning, community participation, resource management, program knowledge, and accountable leadership. Thus, decentralization must be assessed not only through legal authority but also through actual service delivery outcomes.

Competence, Institutional Capacity, and Service Delivery

Institutional capacity theory emphasizes that government performance depends on human, organizational, and systemic capabilities. Grindle (1996) viewed capacity as the ability of institutions to perform functions effectively, while Honadle (1981) linked weak capacity to poor planning, coordination, and monitoring. In barangay governance, competence includes planning, program knowledge, implementation skills, monitoring/reporting, and accountability/leadership.

Competence is shaped partly by officials' demographic and professional profile. Age, years of service, position, educational attainment, and training exposure may influence governance readiness, program understanding, and implementation ability. Officials with broader experience and more training may be better positioned to interpret mandates, coordinate programs, and respond to community needs.

Public sector performance theory further explains that service delivery is shaped by inputs, processes, and contextual constraints. Competence may enhance performance, but challenges such as financial limitations, staffing shortages, political concerns, and weak coordination can reduce the actual effect of competence on outcomes. This theoretical point supports the present study's use of challenges as moderating variables.

Mandated Services, Challenges, and Citizen Assessment

RA 7160 Section 17(b)(1) identifies key services that barangays must support, including agricultural services, health and social welfare, sanitation, Katarungang Pambarangay, public facilities maintenance, and local infrastructure. These services are essential because they directly affect livelihoods, health, environment, peace and order, mobility, and community welfare.

Studies on barangay governance show that service delivery remains uneven because barangays face financial constraints, limited staff, inadequate training, political pressures, and weak institutional coordination. Manasan (2017, 2021) emphasized the fiscal limits of local finance, while DILG governance-monitoring systems highlight continuing disparities in barangay performance. These constraints help explain why competence may not always translate into excellent service delivery.

Residents' perspectives are important in governance assessment because residents experience the visible outcomes of services. While officials can assess internal competence and administrative processes, residents can validate whether services are felt at the community level. Combining both perspectives improves the credibility of service delivery evaluation and helps reduce self-reporting bias.

METHODS

Research Design

The study employed a quantitative descriptive-correlational research design. The descriptive component was used to profile selected barangays and respondents and to assess competence, challenges, and service delivery performance. The correlational component was used to determine the relationships among demographic profile, competence, challenges, and mandated service delivery performance. Moderation analysis was also used to examine whether challenges weakened or strengthened the relationship between competence and performance.

Research Locale

The study was conducted in Catarman, Northern Samar, the provincial capital and a municipality composed of 55 barangays. The selected barangays were Daganas, Polangi, Jose Abad Santos, Washington, Macagtas, Talisay, UEP Zone I, UEP Zone II, UEP Zone III, Airport Village, Liberty, Dalakit, New Rizal, Cawayan, Salvacion, Baybay, and Bangkerohan. These barangays represented a mix of SGLGB passer and non-passer barangays as well as urban and rural geographic types.

Respondents and Sampling Technique

The respondents consisted of barangay officials and selected residents. Complete enumeration was used for barangay officials in the selected barangays, resulting in 158 official-respondents. For community validation, five residents per barangay were purposively selected as key informants, resulting in 85 resident-respondents. The residents represented service-relevant community groups such as senior citizens, persons with disability, health workers, farmers, and purok leaders.

Table 1. *Summary of Respondents and Sampling*

Respondent group	Number	Sampling technique	Role in the study
Barangay officials	158	Complete enumeration in 17 selected barangays	Assessed competence, challenges, and service delivery performance
Residents	85	Purposive selection of five residents per barangay	Provided external assessment of mandated service delivery performance
Total	243	Combined institutional and community respondents	Supported internal and external assessment of grassroots governance

Research Instrument

Data were gathered using a researcher-made questionnaire. The instrument contained sections on barangay profile, demographic profile of officials, competence levels, challenges encountered, and mandated service delivery performance. Competence was assessed across planning, program knowledge, implementation skills, monitoring/reporting, and accountability/leadership. Challenges were assessed across financial, resource/staffing, capacity/training, community/political, and institutional/coordination dimensions. Service delivery performance was assessed across the six RA 7160 basic service areas.

The instrument was validated by experts. Items were derived from RA 7160, barangay governance performance indicators, and relevant governance literature. A five-point Likert scale was used to interpret competence, challenges, and performance.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher secured permission from concerned local and barangay authorities before data collection. Questionnaires were administered to barangay officials and selected residents of the 17 barangays. Responses were checked, encoded, and organized according to the study variables. Resident responses were used to supplement and validate officials' assessment of service delivery performance.

Data Analysis

Frequency and percentage were used to describe demographic profile. Weighted mean was used to determine competence levels, severity of challenges, and service delivery performance. Comparative tests were used to examine differences between SGLGB passer and non-passer barangays. Pearson product-moment correlation was used to determine relationships among demographic variables, competence, and service delivery performance. Moderation analysis was used to determine whether challenges moderated the relationship between competence and mandated service delivery performance.

Ethical Consideration

The study observed informed consent, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and responsible data handling. Respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and the academic use of the data. Responses were reported in aggregate form. The final submission should include the confirmed institutional ethics-review or approval reference number when available.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profile of Selected Barangays and Respondents

The study covered 17 selected barangays in Catarman, Northern Samar. The barangays varied in land area, population, National Tax Allotment, and geographic accessibility. SGLGB passer barangays had higher means for land area, population, and NTA than non-passer barangays, while non-passer barangays had a higher distance or lower accessibility mean. Significant differences were found across all selected profile characteristics.

Table 2. *Difference Between SGLGB Passer and Non-Passer Barangays*

Barangay profile characteristic	SGLGB passers mean	SGLGB non-passers mean	Test statistic	p-value	Interpretation
Land area (hectares)	485.62	391.48	2.184	.045	Significant
Population	4,876	3,954	2.267	.038	Significant
National Tax Allotment	₱8,562,430	₱6,981,275	2.591	.020	Significant
Geographic accessibility	1.78	2.63	-2.914	.011	Significant

The barangay officials were mostly male (64.56%), married (70.25%), and Sangguniang Barangay members (75.32%). The largest age group was 40-49 years old (31.65%), followed by officials aged 50-59 years. Most had 4-6 years of service (32.28%), had reached at least college level or graduated from college, and had attended governance-related trainings, with 44.94% reporting three to five trainings.

Table 3. *Selected Demographic Profile of Barangay Officials*

Profile variable	Leading category	Frequency	Percentage
Age	40-49 years old	50	31.65%
Sex	Male	102	64.56%
Civil status	Married	111	70.25%
Position	Sangguniang Barangay Member	119	75.32%
Years of service	4-6 years	51	32.28%
Trainings attended	3-5 trainings	71	44.94%

Competence Levels of Barangay Officials

Barangay officials demonstrated high competence across all dimensions. Accountability and leadership obtained the highest grand mean of 4.32, followed by program knowledge at 4.24, planning at 4.22, monitoring/reporting at 4.21, and implementation skills at 4.20. The overall competence mean was 4.24, interpreted as High. This indicates that officials perceived themselves as capable of performing RA 7160-related governance functions.

Table 4. *Summary of Barangay Officials' Competence Levels*

Competence dimension	Grand mean	Interpretation	Rank
Accountability and leadership	4.32	High	1
Program knowledge	4.24	High	2
Planning	4.22	High	3
Monitoring/reporting	4.21	High	4
Implementation skills	4.20	High	5
Overall grand mean	4.24	High	

The strong rating for accountability and leadership suggests that barangay officials recognized the importance of transparency, responsiveness, public consultation, and ethical decision-making. However, the slightly lower mean for implementation skills indicates a need for continued capacity-building in actual program execution, coordination, and resource mobilization.

Challenges Encountered in Mandated Service Implementation

All challenge dimensions were interpreted as Major. Resource and staffing obtained the highest grand mean of 4.02, followed by capacity and training at 3.97, institutional and coordination at 3.96, community and political at 3.95, and financial challenges at 3.90. The overall grand mean was 3.96, indicating that barangay officials encountered serious operational and institutional difficulties in implementing mandated services.

Table 5. *Summary of Challenges Encountered by Barangay Officials*

Challenge dimension	Grand mean	Interpretation	Rank
Resource and staffing	4.02	Major	1
Capacity and training	3.97	Major	2
Institutional and coordination	3.96	Major	3
Community and political	3.95	Major	4
Financial challenges	3.90	Major	5
Overall grand mean	3.96	Major	

The findings show that competence alone is insufficient when barangays face shortages of personnel, materials, technical training, coordination support, and funds. These constraints may delay project implementation, weaken monitoring, reduce service reach, and limit the responsiveness of barangay programs.

Mandated Service Delivery Performance

Mandated service delivery performance was generally rated Good by both barangay officials and residents. Among officials, Katarungang Pambarangay obtained the highest mean of 4.29, followed by health and social welfare at 4.25. Residents also rated health and social welfare highest at 4.00 and Katarungang Pambarangay at 3.96. Infrastructure projects and agricultural support were among the lower-rated areas, particularly from the residents' perspective.

Table 6. *Summary of Mandated Service Delivery Performance*

Service area	Officials mean	Officials' interpretation	Residents mean	Residents interpretation
Katarungang Pambarangay	4.29	Good	3.96	Good
Health and social welfare	4.25	Good	4.00	Good
Hygiene and sanitation	4.07	Good	3.75	Good
Public facilities maintenance	4.06	Good	3.72	Good
Infrastructure projects	3.96	Good	3.63	Good
Agricultural support	3.95	Good	3.59	Good

The difference between officials' and residents' ratings suggests that officials viewed service delivery more favorably than residents. Resident ratings provide an important external check because citizens experience the practical availability, accessibility, and quality of services. The relatively lower resident ratings for infrastructure and agricultural support imply areas where felt needs may remain stronger.

Relationships Among Profile, Competence, and Performance

The analysis showed that selected demographic variables were significantly related to competence and service delivery performance. Age, position, years of service, educational attainment, and number of trainings attended generally showed significant relationships with competence and performance. Sex and civil status did not show significant relationships. These results indicate that experience, role, education, and training exposure were more relevant to governance outcomes than personal status variables.

Table 7. *Summary of Significant Relationships Involving Demographic Profile*

Profile variable	Relationship with competence	Relationship with service delivery performance	Interpretation
Age	Generally significant	Significant in several service areas	Maturity and experience were associated with stronger governance outcomes.
Sex	Not significant	Not significant	Performance was not meaningfully differentiated by sex.
Civil status	Not significant	Not significant	Civil status did not explain competence or performance.
Position	Generally significant	Generally significant	Formal role and authority influenced competence and service outcomes.
Years of service	Generally significant	Generally significant	Longer experience was associated with stronger governance capacity.
Educational attainment	Generally significant	Generally significant	Higher education supported program understanding and performance.
Trainings attended	Generally significant	Generally significant	Capacity-building exposure strengthened competence and service delivery.

All competence dimensions were significantly related to mandated service delivery performance. This means that better planning, program knowledge, implementation skills, monitoring/reporting, and

accountability/leadership were associated with stronger delivery of RA 7160-mandated services. The finding supports the theoretical claim that institutional capacity is central to effective grassroots governance.

Table 8. *Competence Dimensions and Service Delivery Performance*

Competence dimension	Relationship with service delivery performance	Governance implication
Planning	Significant	Clear planning supports prioritization, budgeting, and alignment of barangay programs.
Program knowledge	Significant	Knowledge of RA 7160 mandates supports compliant and complete service delivery.
Implementation skills	Significant	Execution capacity translates plans into visible services.
Monitoring/reporting	Significant	Tracking and documentation support accountability and improvement.
Accountability/leadership	Significant	Transparent and responsive leadership strengthens trust and participation.

Moderating Effect of Challenges

The moderation analysis showed that challenges significantly moderated the relationship between competence and service delivery performance. This means that although competence was positively related to performance, the positive effect became weaker when operational and institutional challenges were more severe. In practical terms, capable officials may still deliver limited results when they face resource shortages, inadequate training, financial limitations, political concerns, and weak coordination with other agencies.

Table 9. *Moderating Role of Challenges in the Competence-Performance Relationship*

Model element	Finding	Interpretation
Competence	Significantly related to service delivery performance	Higher competence was associated with better mandated service delivery.
Challenges	Major/severe across all dimensions	Operational barriers constrained implementation capacity.
Interaction effect	Significant moderation	Severe challenges weakened the positive influence of competence on service delivery.
Policy implication	Capacity must be paired with resources and coordination	Training alone is insufficient without financial, staffing, and institutional support.

Proposed Grassroots Governance Enhancement Framework

Based on the findings, the study proposes a grassroots governance enhancement framework focused on strengthening competence while reducing implementation barriers. The framework emphasizes capacity-building, resource support, inter-agency coordination, resident participation, monitoring systems, and evidence-based planning.

Table 10. *Proposed Grassroots Governance Enhancement Framework*

Framework area	Basis from findings	Recommended action	Expected outcome
Capacity-building	Competence was significantly related to performance	Provide regular training on RA 7160 mandates, planning, budgeting, monitoring, and reporting.	Stronger technical and administrative competence
Resource and staffing support	Resource/staffing was the most severe challenge	Augment personnel support, materials, and technical assistance for barangay programs.	Improved implementation capacity
Financial support and planning	Financial challenges remained major	Improve use of NTA, development fund planning, and linkage with municipal investment programs.	Better-funded priority services

Inter-agency coordination	Institutional/coordination challenges were major	Strengthen coordination with DILG, MPDO, MHO, MSWDO, MDRRMO, and engineering offices.	Reduced delays and clearer implementation pathways
Citizen participation	Community/political challenges affected implementation	Institutionalize assemblies, community scorecards, and feedback mechanisms.	Higher accountability and resident trust
Monitoring and evaluation	Monitoring/reporting was related to performance	Use simple digital reporting, service tracking, and periodic performance review.	Improved transparency and continuous improvement

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that grassroots governance and mandated service delivery in selected barangays of Catarman, Northern Samar were generally functional and positively rated, but still affected by significant operational and institutional challenges. Barangay officials demonstrated high competence across planning, program knowledge, implementation skills, monitoring/reporting, and accountability/leadership. Their mandated service delivery performance was generally assessed as good by both officials and residents, especially in Katarungang Pambarangay and health/social welfare services.

The findings show that governance competence matters. Officials with stronger competence tended to report and demonstrate better mandated service delivery performance. Selected demographic factors, particularly age, position, years of service, educational attainment, and training exposure, were related to competence and service delivery performance. Sex and civil status were not significant factors.

However, the study also confirms that competence is weakened when barangays face major financial, resource, staffing, training, political, community, and coordination challenges. Severe challenges moderated the relationship between competence and service delivery, indicating that capable officials require adequate resources, institutional support, and coordinated systems to translate competence into better public services.

Recommendation

The Municipal Government of Catarman should use the findings as basis for targeted support to barangays, especially those with lower service ratings and greater geographic or resource limitations. Budget planning should prioritize infrastructure, agricultural support, sanitation equipment, and staffing support for barangays with higher implementation constraints.

DILG Region VIII and the Municipal Local Government Operations Office should strengthen capability-building programs for barangay officials, focusing on RA 7160 service mandates, NTA and development-fund planning, monitoring and reporting, participatory governance, dispute mediation, and project implementation. Trainings should be continuous and practical rather than one-time compliance activities.

Barangay officials should institutionalize community feedback systems, public consultations, transparent financial posting, and regular monitoring of mandated services. Resident participation should be strengthened through barangay assemblies, purok consultations, and service-specific feedback tools. Future researchers may conduct longitudinal studies, include all 55 barangays of Catarman, compare municipalities in Northern Samar, and use mixed-method designs to capture deeper resident experiences and implementation narratives.

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