

Conflict Resolution in the Barangay Justice System

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ABSTRACT

This study assessed conflict resolution in the Barangay Justice System (BJS) in selected barangays of Mambajao, Camiguin, using the disputants' perspectives. Anchored on John Rawls' theory of justice as fairness, the study employed a quantitative descriptive-comparative design. Data were gathered from 232 disputants involved in officially recorded cases in Barangay Poblacion, Baylao, and Balbagon during calendar years 2023 and 2024. Respondents were selected through stratified sampling with purposive or availability-based selection. A researcher-made questionnaire based on the Katarungang Pambarangay handbook underwent expert validation and pilot testing, yielding a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.8471. Frequency counts, percentages, means, standard deviations, an

independent-samples t-test, analysis of variance, and ranking were used. Results showed that conflict resolution was observed at all times ($M = 3.57$, $SD = 0.58$). Accessibility and fairness of the process both obtained the highest area mean of 3.64, followed by effectiveness of the resolution ($M = 3.53$) and implementation and due process ($M = 3.51$). No significant differences were found when perceptions were grouped according to sex or educational attainment; however, perceptions differed significantly across age groups ($F = 2.49$, $p = .044$). The most serious reported challenges were fear of retaliation, perceived imbalance when one party was wealthier or more influential, and concern about external influences within the community. The findings affirm the value of the BJS as an accessible community-based justice mechanism while indicating the need for post-settlement monitoring, protection-oriented interventions, procedural safeguards, and information campaigns.

Keywords: *Barangay Justice System, conflict resolution, justice as fairness, Katarungang Pambarangay, procedural justice, Lupon Tagapamayapa*

INTRODUCTION

Peaceful conflict resolution is essential to effective local governance because disagreements among community members may affect social relationships, public trust, and the stability of everyday life. At the grassroots level, accessible mechanisms are especially important for residents who may find formal litigation costly, intimidating, or time-consuming. The Philippine Barangay Justice System (BJS), also known as Katarungang Pambarangay, provides a community-based venue for the amicable settlement of appropriate disputes before they are elevated to courts or other government offices.

The BJS was institutionalized through Presidential Decree No. 1508 (1978) and incorporated into the Local Government Code of 1991 through Republic Act No. 7160. It authorizes barangays to facilitate mediation, conciliation, and, when agreed upon by the parties, arbitration. The system seeks to reduce unnecessary court filings, decongest court dockets, preserve community relationships, and provide a faster and less costly form of dispute resolution. In practice, the Punong Barangay and members of the Lupon Tagapamayapa assist disputants in identifying issues, expressing their concerns, and reaching mutually acceptable settlements (Vigo & Manuel, 2004).

Although the BJS has long been part of Philippine local governance, its effectiveness depends on how the process is experienced by the people it is intended to serve. Accessibility, impartiality, timeliness, confidentiality, proper documentation, respect for due process, and the enforceability of settlement agreements all affect whether residents view barangay-level conflict resolution as credible and fair. Previous studies have emphasized the importance of Lupon competence, continuing training, and consistent compliance with legal procedures (Lupao & Alejandro, 2022; Pajimola & Salom, 2023; Anaña et al., 2024). Executive Order No. 394 (1997) further institutionalized incentives for exemplary Lupon Tagapamayapa performance and public awareness of Katarungang Pambarangay.

In Camiguin, consolidated records from four municipalities showed that 571 of 1,201 reported cases in 2023 and 2024 were resolved, while 155 cases remained unresolved or were issued a Certification to File Action. However, localized empirical evidence on the disputants' direct experiences remained limited. This gap is important because studies in other areas have commonly examined the performance of implementers, while fewer have centered on complainants and respondents who personally underwent barangay proceedings.

This study therefore assessed conflict resolution in the BJS in Barangay Poblacion, Baylao, and Balbagon in the Municipality of Mambajao. It examined accessibility of the process, fairness of the process, effectiveness of the resolution, and implementation and due process; tested whether assessments differed according to sex, age, and highest educational attainment; and identified the principal challenges encountered by disputants. Guided by Rawls' (1999) theory of justice as fairness, the study treated impartial procedures, equal opportunity to be heard, and protection against disadvantage as essential standards for evaluating grassroots justice.

Literature Review

Community-Based Conflict Resolution and Local Justice

Conflict is an inevitable feature of social interaction because individuals and groups hold different needs, priorities, and interpretations of events. Zartman (2009) described conflict as the presence of incompatible positions, while Pruitt and Kim (2004) emphasized that conflict may escalate when disagreements are not addressed constructively. Community-based mechanisms provide a space for dialogue before disagreements become more adversarial. They are designed to restore communication, clarify interests, and encourage settlements that are acceptable to the parties involved. Contemporary conflict research likewise emphasizes the importance of examining the conditions that influence whether disagreement escalates or is resolved constructively (Minson et al., 2023).

Community justice practices are not unique to the Philippines. Glubwila et al. (2021) described community-level mechanisms in Thailand, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Myanmar, showing that local mediation may be supported by village committees, customary institutions, or community leaders. These mechanisms vary in legal status and procedural form, but they share a restorative orientation: they seek to resolve disputes close to the community, reduce costs, and preserve social relations.

The Barangay Justice System and Its Legal Foundations

The Philippine BJS was established through Presidential Decree No. 1508 (1978) and later integrated into Republic Act No. 7160 (1991). The system requires appropriate disputes to undergo barangay-level proceedings before formal court action may be initiated. The Lupon Tagapamayapa, chaired by the Punong Barangay, facilitates mediation and conciliation. Arbitration may also occur when both parties agree to submit the dispute for a decision. These procedures are intended to support amicable settlement and reduce the burden of lengthy formal litigation (Vigo & Manuel, 2004).

The BJS operates within jurisdictional limits. Republic Act No. 7160 identifies the types of disputes covered and excludes matters involving specified government parties, certain public-officer functions, offenses exceeding the statutory penalty threshold, and disputes outside the applicable territorial conditions. These safeguards clarify that the BJS is not a substitute for courts in all cases but a localized mechanism for resolving appropriate community disputes efficiently and peacefully.

Accessibility, Fairness, and Procedural Justice

Accessibility is one of the major strengths of barangay-level justice. The process is located within the community, generally requires minimal expense, and gives residents an opportunity to communicate their concerns without navigating formal court procedures. Almazan (2025) emphasized the role of the BJS as a peace-building mechanism, while Guia and Mangubat (2021) described the value of localized processes in preserving community relationships. Accessibility is meaningful, however, only when disputants receive proper notice, understand the steps involved, and can participate without fear or undue pressure.

Fairness is equally important. Rawls' (1999) theory of justice as fairness provides a useful lens because it emphasizes impartial rules, equal basic liberties, and fair opportunities. Applied to the BJS, these principles require both parties to be heard, treated respectfully, and protected against favoritism linked to kinship, wealth, influence, or social standing. Procedural justice scholarship similarly indicates that people are more likely to accept decisions when they view the process as transparent, respectful, and unbiased (Tyler & Blader, 2003).

Implementation, Due Process, and the Role of the Lupon

The effectiveness of the BJS is closely linked with the knowledge and practices of barangay officials and Lupon members. Proper notice, documentation, record keeping, confidentiality, and adherence to timelines help protect due process. Vigo and Manuel (2004) outlined these requirements in the Katarungang Pambarangay handbook. Studies have also emphasized that Lupon members need continuing training, particularly in legal procedures, mediation techniques, referrals, and the issuance of documents such as the Certification to File Action (Pila, 2021; Pajimola & Salom, 2023; Anaña et al., 2024).

Local implementers face practical limitations. Lupao and Alejandro (2022) identified concerns related to compliance, enforcement, and operational constraints. Other studies have pointed to the need for sustained capacity development and support systems for Lupon members (Benter, 2020; Erivera, 2025). These concerns show that access alone does not guarantee meaningful justice; the quality of implementation affects the credibility and sustainability of settlements.

Challenges in Grassroots Conflict Resolution

Even where barangay-level proceedings are available, disputants may encounter barriers that affect participation and confidence. Fear of retaliation, privacy concerns, unequal social influence, perceived favoritism, difficulty enforcing agreements, poor coordination, and limited information campaigns can weaken the process. These concerns are especially significant in small communities where personal relationships are visible and where residents may worry that participation could intensify existing tensions.

The present study contributes to this literature by examining the BJS from the disputants' perspective. Rather than focusing only on implementers, it evaluates how complainants and respondents experienced accessibility, fairness, effectiveness, and due process in selected barangays of Mambajao. This approach helps identify areas where high overall assessments coexist with specific concerns that require targeted intervention.

METHODS

Research Design

The study employed a quantitative descriptive-comparative research design. The descriptive component measured the respondents' perceptions of conflict resolution in the BJS, while the comparative component examined whether assessments differed across demographic groups. The survey method was appropriate because it enabled the standardized collection of quantifiable responses from disputants with direct experience of the system (Koh & Owen, 2000; Roopa & Rani, 2012).

Research Locale

The study was conducted in the Municipality of Mambajao, Camiguin, particularly in Barangay Poblacion, Baylao, and Balbagon. These barangays were selected because they recorded the highest numbers of BJS cases in the municipality during 2023 and 2024. Of the 949 cases recorded in Mambajao, Poblacion accounted for 270 cases, Baylao for 180 cases, and Balbagon for 130 cases.

Participants and Sampling Technique

The respondents were disputants who had participated in BJS proceedings as complainants or respondents in the selected barangays. The sampling frame consisted of 580 cases recorded during 2023 and 2024. Using a 5% margin of error, a 95% confidence level, and a 50% response distribution, the required sample was 232 respondents. Stratified sampling was used to ensure barangay-level representation, followed by purposive or availability-based selection because participation depended on respondents' accessibility, willingness, and consent. When an identified participant declined, the next eligible case from the same barangay was considered.

Table 1. *Distribution of Respondents by Barangay*

Barangay	Cases (2023-2024)	Sample	%
Poblacion	270	108	46.55
Baylao	180	72	31.03
Balbagon	130	52	22.41
Total	580	232	100.00

Research Instrument

A researcher-made questionnaire served as the primary instrument. It was anchored on *Katarungang Pambarangay: A Handbook* by Vigo and Manuel (2004). Part I covered respondents' profiles. Part II measured accessibility of the process, fairness of the process, effectiveness of the resolution, and implementation and due process using a four-point Likert scale. Part III ranked the challenges encountered. Part IV contained an open-ended question used during casual interviews to obtain suggestions for improving BJS implementation.

Validity and Reliability

Four experts with relevant backgrounds in BJS implementation validated the instrument: the Municipal Local Government Operations Officer of Mambajao, a representative from the Public Attorney's Office, an academic expert, and a supervising statistical specialist. The revised instrument was pilot-tested among 30 disputants from Barangay Tupsan, which was not part of the final sample. Cronbach's alpha was 0.8471, indicating acceptable internal consistency.

Data Gathering Procedure

After securing the required institutional and local permissions, the researcher coordinated with the Municipality of Mambajao, the Department of the Interior and Local Government, and the selected barangays. The study purpose, voluntary nature of participation, and confidentiality safeguards were explained to respondents. Survey administration was conducted face-to-face. Revisit strategies, verification questions, and careful replacements from the same barangay stratum were used when respondents declined participation, denied involvement, or provided inconsistent responses. A total of 232 completed questionnaires were encoded and analyzed with the assistance of a qualified statistician.

Data Analysis

Frequency counts and percentages summarized the respondents' profiles. Means and standard deviations measured the extent of conflict resolution. An independent-samples t-test examined differences according to sex, while analysis of variance tested differences according to age and highest educational attainment. Challenges were ranked based on their total scores, with Rank 1 representing the most serious concern.

Ethical Consideration

Participation was voluntary and based on informed consent. Respondents were informed that they could discontinue participation at any time without providing a reason. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained, and the collected information was used solely for academic purposes. Completed survey questionnaires were disposed of through shredding after recording and analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profile of the Respondents

The study involved 232 disputants from the three selected barangays. Female respondents slightly outnumbered male respondents, with 119 women (51.29%) and 113 men (48.71%). The largest age groups were 29 years old and below and 30-39 years old, each with 68 respondents (29.31%). In terms of education, the largest group had reached the high-school level (34.48%), followed by respondents with college-level education (22.41%) and high-school graduates (21.55%). The profile indicates that the BJS served a diverse group of residents across age, sex, and educational categories.

Table 2. *Profile of the Respondents (N = 232)*

Variable	Category	n	%
Age	29 years old and below	68	29.31
	30-39	68	29.31
	40-49	49	21.12
	50-59	24	10.34
	60 years old and above	23	9.91
	Total	232	100.00
Sex	Male	113	48.71
	Female	119	51.29
	Total	232	100.00
Highest educational attainment	Elementary level or graduate	27	11.64
	High-school level	80	34.48
	High-school graduate	50	21.55
	College level	52	22.41
	College graduate	23	9.91
	Total	232	100.00

Extent of Conflict Resolution in the Barangay Justice System

The overall extent of conflict resolution was rated high ($M = 3.57$, $SD = 0.58$), indicating that the assessed practices were observed at all times. Accessibility of the process and fairness of the process obtained the highest area means ($M = 3.64$ for both). Effectiveness of the resolution ($M = 3.53$) and implementation and due process ($M = 3.51$) were likewise rated high. The narrow range of area means shows that the favorable assessment extended across the different stages of the BJS rather than being limited to a single aspect. This favorable assessment is consistent with Noveloso et al. (2024), who highlighted the role of Katarungang Pambarangay in promoting accessible justice and peaceful community relations.

Table 3. *Summary of the Extent of Conflict Resolution in the BJS*

Dimension	M	Description	Interpretation
Accessibility of the process	3.64	High extent	Observed at all times
Fairness of the process	3.64	High extent	Observed at all times
Effectiveness of the resolution	3.53	High extent	Observed at all times
Implementation and due process	3.51	High extent	Observed at all times
Overall	3.57	High extent	Observed at all times
Overall SD	0.58		

For accessibility, the highest-rated item was the receipt of a complete notice of hearing or summons within three days after the complaint was filed ($M = 3.82$). The scheduling of hearings at a time when the disputant could attend ($M = 3.79$) and the availability of a dedicated hearing room ($M = 3.75$) were also rated highly. The lowest accessibility rating, although still high, concerned the simplicity and ease of filing a complaint ($M = 3.35$). These results indicate that the selected barangays generally provided a reachable and organized venue for residents seeking resolution.

For fairness, the highest rating was given to the view that settlements were based on facts and evidence rather than personal connections ($M = 3.71$). Equal time for both sides to explain their positions also received a high rating ($M = 3.70$). These results are consistent with Rawls' (1999) emphasis on impartial procedures and with the procedural-justice principle that fair treatment strengthens confidence in institutions (Tyler & Blader, 2003).

For effectiveness, the item stating that the case reached an amicable settlement obtained the highest mean ($M = 3.70$). Satisfaction with the outcome ($M = 3.62$) and the ability of the settlement to address the main issues of the conflict ($M = 3.61$) also received high ratings. The lowest item concerned follow-up after resolution and settlement ($M = 3.32$). Although still within the high-extent category, this result identifies post-settlement monitoring as an area for improvement.

For implementation and due process, respondents highly rated the recording and explanation of case details ($M = 3.75$) and adherence to BJS guidelines ($M = 3.75$). The lowest item in the entire implementation dimension was the statement that delays occurred because of poor case handling ($M = 2.55$), which was rated only as moderate. This suggests that the system was generally implemented properly, but the management of delays requires closer attention. The findings support the importance of procedural compliance and documentation emphasized by Vigo and Manuel (2004), Lupao and Alejandro (2022), and Anaña et al. (2024).

Differences in Assessments According to Respondent Profile

Perceptions of conflict resolution differed significantly across age groups ($F = 2.49, p = .044$), leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis for age. In contrast, no significant difference was found according to highest educational attainment ($F = 1.69, p = .154$). The independent-samples t-test also showed no significant difference according to sex ($t = 1.09, p = .279$). These findings indicate that the BJS was generally perceived consistently by male and female respondents and by respondents with different educational backgrounds, although age shaped the way some participants assessed their experiences.

Table 4. *Tests of Difference in the Extent of Conflict Resolution*

Grouping variable	Test	Statistic	p	Decision	Interpretation
Age	ANOVA	2.49	.044	Reject H0	Significant
Highest educational attainment	ANOVA	1.69	.154	Fail to reject H0	Not significant
Sex	Independent-samples t-test	1.09	.279	Fail to reject H0	Not significant

Challenges Encountered in Conflict Resolution

Despite the favorable overall assessment, respondents identified concerns that may affect confidence in the process. Fear for personal safety or retaliation ranked first. The second-ranked challenge was the perception that mediation could become unbalanced when one party was wealthier or more influential. Concern that external influences within the local community might affect the decision or agreement ranked third. These findings are important because they qualify the high overall ratings: the BJS was generally perceived as effective, but its legitimacy may be weakened when disputants feel unsafe or believe that power differences can shape outcomes.

Table 5. *Ranked Challenges Encountered in the Barangay Justice System*

Challenge	Score	Rank
Fear for personal safety or possible retaliation from the opposing party	914	1
Perceived imbalance when one party is wealthier or more influential	986	2
Concern that external community influences may affect the agreement	999	3
Perceived favoritism due to personal relationships	1,070	4
Privacy concerns or becoming the subject of gossip	1,142	5
Difficulty enforcing the agreement when one party refuses to comply	1,250	6
Lack of proper referral to the appropriate government agency	1,505	7
Lack of strong community support for peaceful conflict resolution	1,626	8
Poor coordination among barangay officials, the Lupon, and the police	1,652	9
Limited information dissemination or awareness campaigns	1,817	10
Need to elevate the case because it was not resolved at the barangay level	2,346	11

The identified concerns align with literature emphasizing the need for stronger Lupon capacity, coordinated referral systems, implementation support, and clear follow-up mechanisms (Benter, 2020; Pila, 2021; Pajimola & Salom, 2023; Erivera, 2025). They also reinforce the relevance of justice as fairness: access to a procedure is insufficient if residents fear retaliation or perceive that influence may compromise impartiality. Targeted interventions should therefore combine training, monitoring, safety coordination, confidentiality safeguards, and public information campaigns.

CONCLUSION

The Barangay Justice System in Barangay Poblacion, Baylao, and Balbagon in Mambajao, Camiguin functioned as an accessible and generally effective community-based mechanism for resolving appropriate local disputes. Respondents assessed accessibility, fairness, resolution effectiveness, and implementation and due process as practices observed at all times. The favorable ratings indicate that the system provided residents with an organized venue for hearings, gave disputants opportunities to explain their sides, facilitated amicable settlement, and generally followed the procedural requirements of Katarungang Pambarangay. The consistency of perceptions across sex and educational categories supports the view that the system was broadly experienced as equitable. However, differences across age groups and the ranked concerns involving retaliation, unequal influence, and external pressure show that procedural safeguards remain necessary. The findings support Rawls' principle of justice as fairness while demonstrating that grassroots justice must be strengthened through continuing monitoring, protection-oriented measures, and responsive local coordination.

Recommendations

The Department of the Interior and Local Government, the Municipal Government of Mambajao, and the concerned barangays should strengthen the BJS through continuing capacity-building programs for Punong Barangays, barangay secretaries, and Lupon members. Training should focus on mediation techniques, procedural due process, confidentiality, documentation, referral protocols, and the enforcement and monitoring of amicable settlements. Barangays should establish a simple post-settlement monitoring mechanism to determine whether both parties comply with agreements and whether tensions recur. Because fear of retaliation was the most serious concern, barangay officials should coordinate with appropriate local peace-and-order and law-enforcement units whenever safety risks are reported. Measures should also be adopted to reduce perceptions of unequal influence, including transparent documentation, consistent application of procedures, conflict-of-interest safeguards, and clear referral options when impartiality may reasonably be questioned. Regular information campaigns should explain the BJS process, the rights and responsibilities of disputants, the limits of barangay jurisdiction, and the available options when settlements are not reached. Future researchers may expand the study to other municipalities in Camiguin, compare urban and rural barangays, examine settlement compliance over time, and incorporate the perspectives of Lupon members and local officials.

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