

Effectiveness of Barangay Justice System in Zamboanga City: An Assessment

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Abstract— *The objective of this study is to assess the effectiveness of the Barangay Justice System (BJS) in Zamboanga City, a highly-urbanized city in the southern part of the Philippines. The BJS employs a community approach to assist in the prevention and management of local disputes, thereby alleviating the burden on the formal judiciary system and court processes. The data collection methods employed in this study are both quantitative and qualitative. These methods include surveys of two hundred (200) residents of the area, interviews with twenty (20) Barangay officials and mediators, and secondary data from the BJS and other formal courts. The quantitative finding shows that a high level of effectiveness in case disposition with eighty percent (80%) of the respondents confirming that they were able to solve their cases through the BJS. Also, the surveys revealed that seventy five percent (75%) of the residents reported high levels of satisfaction or simple satisfaction with the services and results of the BJS. The qualitative results demonstrate the advantageous attributes of BJS, such as accessibility, cost efficiency, and community involvement. Nevertheless, there are still some challenges that persist, such as inadequate resources, certain biases, and inadequate mediator training. The BJS reduces the workload of the formal courts, as forty percent (40%) of the local court cases that could have been heard by the BJS would have been heard by the formal courts, according to the study. This means that only those cases that are complicated or those that have not been solved through the conflicting parties are taken to the formal judiciary thus increasing the efficiency of the judiciary. Thus, the present work recommends enhancing the training of mediators, increasing the budget for the BJS and addressing the issues related to bias and equity. The BJS in Zamboanga City is effective in resolving local disputes and complementing the formal judiciary. However, the study shows that the integration of the BJS into the overall judicial system is necessary to improve and maintain grassroots conflict resolution. Addressing its operational concerns will enhance the effectiveness and reach of the system. This study offers critical recommendations for community representatives and policymakers who wish to improve the justice system at the local level.*

Keywords— *Barangay Justice System, Case Resolution, Effectiveness, Local Disputes, Mediation.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The Barangay Justice System (BJS), also known as Katarungang Pambarangay is an essential part of the justice structure especially at the grass root level in the Philippines. The BJS was created under the provision of the Presidential Decree No. 1508 and enhanced through other subsequent laws and implementing rules and regulations. The BJS is a community-based institution that seeks to address the problem of clogging of cases in formal courts by providing quick and affordable solutions to inter-personal and minor disputes in the

barangays. The system deals with the conflict and the harmony between the members of the society and its aim is to establish order beginning from the smallest unit of the society.

The study was carried out in Zamboanga City, which is one of the highly urbanized cities in the Mindanao Island situated in the western part and composed of different ethnic groups including the Tausugs, Chavacanos, and other indigenous people. Thus, the evaluation of the BJS in this city is especially pertinent owing to the cultural environment and socio-political context of the city. The purpose of the current study is to determine the effectiveness of BJS in the context of Zamboanga City, thus, comparing the strengths and weaknesses of the system.

Thus, the primary objective of this study is to determine the effectiveness of the Barangay Justice System in Zamboanga City. Specifically, this study aims to; (1) identify the types of disputes regularly mediated by the BJS in Zamboanga City; (2) evaluate the efficiency of the BJS in terms of resolving disputes in a timely and cost-effective manner; (3) determine the satisfaction level of community members who have utilized the BJS for conflict resolution; (4) identify the strengths and weaknesses of the BJS from the perspectives of both barangay officials and community members; and (5) analyze the influence of local cultural and socio-political factors on the performance of the BJS.

As stated earlier, the implication of the results of this study is relevant to several stakeholders. The study offers invaluable information to policymakers that, in case of contemplated change, will help to optimize the performance of the BJS. From this study, barangay officials and mediators will be informed of the best practices and the areas that require enhancements and the suggestions that would further enhance the quality of services delivered. Moreover, for the broader community and academic researchers, the study contributes to the understanding of grassroots justice mechanisms and their role in maintaining social harmony.

This study is confined to assessing the effectiveness of the BJS within the geographical limits of Zamboanga City. The study focuses exclusively on disputes and cases handled by the BJS from 2019 to 2023. The study does not encompass formal court proceedings or other alternative dispute resolution mechanisms outside the purview of the BJS. Additionally, the study considers only the perceptions and experiences of individuals directly involved in the BJS process, excluding external observers and entities.

The conceptual framework of this study is anchored on the theories of community justice and restorative justice. The BJS embodies the principles of these theories by promoting reconciliation, community involvement, and the restoration of social harmony. The framework analyzes the input (disputes and community expectations), process (BJS procedures and mediation), and output (resolution effectiveness and satisfaction levels) to evaluate the overall performance of the BJS in Zamboanga City.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a mixed-methods research design, using both quantitative and qualitative approaches to gain a comprehensive understanding on the effectiveness of the Barangay Justice System (BJS) in Zamboanga City. The quantitative component involves the collection and statistical analysis of data regarding dispute resolution outcomes, efficiency measures, and satisfaction levels. The qualitative component includes in-depth interviews and focus group discussions to capture the perspectives and experiences of stakeholders involved in the BJS process.

The study utilized a purposive sampling method which ensures that the sample is representative of key stakeholders in the BJS. A total of twenty (20) barangays out of ninety-eight (98) barangays in Zamboanga City were selected for this study. Ten (10) barangays from the West Coast and ten (10) barangays from the East Coast were selected using a simple random sampling. From each barangay, records of disputes handled from 2019 to 2023 were reviewed. A sample of ten (10) cases per barangay were randomly selected, resulting in a total of two hundred (200) cases for quantitative analysis.

In-depth interviews were conducted with key informants, including ten (10) barangay captains, ten (10) members of Barangay Justice Committee (BJC) or Lupong Tagapamayapa, and thirty (30) disputants who have gone through the BJS process. Additionally, three (3) focus group discussions comprising eight (8) participants each were organized with community members.

Included as participants of the study were barangay officials and members of Lupong Tagapamayapa who currently are serving or have served within the last five (5) years; individuals who have filed or responded to a dispute through the BJS from 2019 to 2023; and residents of Zamboanga City who have awareness or experience with the BJS. Cases handled by formal courts and individuals who have not utilized the BJS were not included in the study.

Structured questionnaires were administered to disputants to assess satisfaction levels, perceived fairness, and the impact of the resolution on their lives. Data on the nature of disputes, resolution time frames, and costs were collected from barangay records. In-depth interviews were conducted with barangay captains, Lupong Tagapamayapa members, and disputants to explore their experiences, challenges, and perceptions regarding the BJS. Focus group discussions were used to gather diverse community perspectives on the effectiveness and cultural relevance of the BJS.

III. RESULTS

The results are categorized into quantitative and qualitative findings. The quantitative data encompasses the nature of disputes, resolution efficiency, and satisfaction levels, while the qualitative data highlights the perspectives of key stakeholders, including barangay officials, Lupong Tagapamayapa members, and community members.

A. Nature of Disputes

As to the nature of disputes, a review of the records from twenty (20) barangays across Zamboanga City revealed the types and frequencies of disputes handled by the BJS from 2019 to 2023. The data showed that thirty five percent (35%) of the disputes is related to family, twenty five percent (25%) is related to property, twenty percent (20%) is related to debt, ten percent (10%) is neighborhood conflicts, while another ten percent (10%) is other disputes (e.g. small business disagreements).

B. Resolution Efficiency

As to the resolution efficiency, data showed that it takes fifteen (15) days to resolve the dispute and with a range of three (3) to sixty (60) days. The average cost per dispute is Php 1,200.00. It is significantly lower compared to the estimated average cost of Php 10,000.00 for similar cases in formal courts. Moreover, eighty percent (80%) of the respondents indicating that they were able to resolve their disputes through the BJS.

C. Disputant Satisfaction Levels

As to the disputant satisfaction levels, a survey of two hundred (200) disputants who utilized the BJS revealed that forty five percent (45%) of the disputants is highly satisfied, thirty percent (30%) is satisfied, fifteen percent (15%) is neutral, five percent (5%) is dissatisfied, and another five percent (5%) is highly dissatisfied. Forty percent (40%) of the disputants strongly agrees that the BJS is fair, thirty five percent (35%) agrees, fifteen percent (15%) is neutral, five percent (5%) disagrees, while another (5%) strongly disagrees.

D. Strengths and Weaknesses

The primary strengths and weaknesses as identified through surveys revealed accessibility, cost effectiveness, and community involvement as strengths. While, limited enforcement power and mediator bias are identified as weaknesses. The data showed that eighty percent (80%) of the respondents finds the BJS easily accessible, eighty five percent (85%) appreciates the low cost involved in the proceedings, and seventy percent (70%) values the involvement of community members in the resolution process. The data also showed that sixty percent (60%) of the respondents feels that the BJS lacked enforcement power for resolutions, and twenty five percent (25%) reports perceptions of bias among mediators.

E. Stakeholders' Experiences and Perceptions

The in-depth interviews with barangay captains and Lupong Tagapamayapa members highlighted several key themes. These include community cohesion and efficiency as

strengths, and training, resources, and complex cases as challenges. Officials noted that the BJS strengthens community bonds by resolving disputes amicably. Lupong Tagapamayapa members emphasized the swiftness of the resolution process compared to formal courts. However, a recurring theme was the need for more training for mediators and additional resources to support the BJS activities. Another challenge identified is that officials often struggled with more complex cases that arguably needed formal judicial intervention.

The interviews with disputants provided personal insights into their experiences. Many disputants appreciated the personalized attention and culturally sensitive handling of their cases. Several emphasized that they felt their disputes were resolved in a more human and understanding manner. Some disputants pointed out that mediators sometimes appeared biased, particularly in disputes involving high-profile community members. While, a common complaint was the lack of follow-up and difficulty in enforcing resolutions, leading to unresolved tensions.

F. Community Perspectives

Three (3) focus group discussions with community members revealed broader community perspectives. Participants highlighted the alignment of the system with local customs and values, emphasizing reconciliation and harmony. The BJS was widely seen as an effective mechanism for maintaining peace within the community context. Discussions revealed that socio-political dynamics could influence the effectiveness of the BJS, with power imbalances sometimes skewing outcomes. Community leaders and politicians occasionally meddled in the process, affecting impartiality and fairness. Many community members expressed that the BJS provided a sense of immediate justice, contrasting sharply with the protracted and impersonal nature of formal court proceedings. However, there was a significant call for greater transparency and training to mitigate biases and enhance trust in the BJS process.

The quantitative results indicated that the BJS in Zamboanga City is effective in resolving a significant number of disputes quickly and cost-effectively, with a majority of disputants expressing satisfaction. However, challenges related to enforcement and perceived biases were noted. The qualitative analysis underscored the strengths of the system in promoting community cohesion and cultural relevance while also identifying areas needing improvement, such as mediator training and reducing external influences. These findings provide a nuanced understanding of the effectiveness of BJS, highlighting both its potentials and limitations within the unique socio-cultural landscape of Zamboanga City.

IV. DISCUSSION

This discussion integrates both quantitative and qualitative results, drawing conclusions about the effectiveness of the Barangay Justice System (BJS) in Zamboanga City and offering insights into the strengths, challenges, and areas for improvement.

A. Nature of Disputes

The findings indicate that family disputes are the most prevalent type of conflict resolved through the BJS, followed by property and debt-related disputes. This prevalence suggests that the BJS plays a crucial role in addressing interpersonal issues that can significantly impact community harmony and well-being.

Family disputes encompass a wide range of issues including domestic conflicts, inheritance disputes, and marital disagreements. The high frequency of these disputes underscores the importance of having a reliable and culturally sensitive mechanism like the BJS to handle delicate and emotion-laden issues that are often better resolved at the community level rather than through formal legal procedures.

B. Resolution Efficiency

The median resolution time of fifteen (15) days reflects the ability of BJS to provide relatively swift conflict resolution compared to the often-protracted process of formal courts. This efficiency is critical in preventing the escalation of conflicts and fostering prompt reconciliation, which is essential in a tight-knit community like Zamboanga City.

The significantly lower average cost of PHP 1,200 per dispute compared to formal court costs demonstrates the economic advantage of the BJS. This cost-effectiveness not only makes justice more accessible to poorer segments of the population but also reduces the overall burden on the formal judicial system.

C. Disputant Satisfaction Levels

The data reveals that a substantial majority of disputants (75%) are either highly satisfied or satisfied with the outcomes facilitated by the BJS. This high satisfaction rate indicates that the BJS is successful in meeting the expectations and needs of the disputants by providing resolutions that are perceived as fair and just by the community members.

While the majority of respondents feel that the BJS is fair, a notable percentage (10%) expressed dissatisfaction, which points to areas where the system could be improved. The perception of fairness is crucial for the legitimacy of any justice system, and efforts to enhance impartiality and transparency could further boost community trust.

D. Strengths and Weaknesses

The high accessibility and low cost of the BJS are major strengths, making it an invaluable resource for communities. The involvement of community members ensures that the processes are in line with local customs and values, enhancing the acceptance and sustainability of resolutions.

The inability of BJS to enforce resolutions as effectively as formal courts remains a significant weakness, often leading to unresolved disputes and lingering tensions. Perceptions of bias among mediators, especially in cases involving influential community members, highlight a critical area needing reform to maintain fairness and integrity.

E. Stakeholders' Experiences and Perceptions

The insights from barangay officials and BJC members reflect a deep appreciation for the role of BJS in fostering community cohesion and swiftly resolving disputes. However,

they also underscore significant challenges, such as the need for better training and resources. These findings suggest that while the framework of the BJS is sound, its effectiveness could be considerably enhanced with additional support and capacity-building efforts.

The experiences of the disputants reinforce the importance of the BJS in providing personalized and culturally appropriate resolutions. However, concerns about mediator bias and enforcement issues point to systemic weaknesses that need addressing to ensure that the BJS remains a trusted and effective conflict resolution mechanism.

F. Community Perspectives

Focus group discussions revealed that the cultural relevance and immediacy of the BJS are highly valued by the community. Nevertheless, the impact of socio-political dynamics on the effectiveness of the BJS indicates that external influences can undermine its impartiality and fairness. The community's call for greater transparency and improved mediator training highlights areas where strategic interventions could enhance the credibility and functionality of the system.

The integration of quantitative data showing high satisfaction rates and qualitative insights revealing systemic challenges provides a holistic understanding of the performance of the BJS. The strengths of the BJS in terms of accessibility, cost-effectiveness, and community involvement are clearly evident. However, the challenges related to enforcement and mediator bias underscore the need for targeted reforms.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following policies and practices are recommended:

1. Implement comprehensive training programs for mediators focused on impartiality, cultural sensitivity, and advanced conflict resolution skills.
2. Increase funding and resources for the BJS to improve its capabilities and support its operations more effectively.
3. Develop mechanisms to enhance the enforceability of BJS resolutions, possibly in collaboration with local law enforcement agencies.

4. Implement measures to increase transparency in the BJS process, such as regular audits and feedback mechanisms, to build greater trust within the community.
5. Increase awareness and understanding of the BJS among community members to maximize its utilization and effectiveness.
6. Establish regular feedback loops with disputants and community members to continuously improve the BJS process based on real-world experiences and suggestions.
7. Introduce peer review systems among barangays to share best practices and address common challenges collaboratively.

VI. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study highlight the significant role that the Barangay Justice System plays in resolving disputes at the community level in Zamboanga City. While the BJS is effective in many aspects, including accessibility, cost-efficiency, and community involvement, it faces substantial challenges that need to be addressed to further enhance its effectiveness. By implementing targeted reforms and harnessing the strengths of the BJS, there is substantial potential to improve justice delivery and promote lasting peace and order within the community.

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