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THE BARANGAY JUSTICE SYSTEM AS A PEACE-BUILDING MECHANISM IN BARANGAY SALUMAGUE, PANIQUI, TARLAC

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ABSTRACT
This study is focused on the Katarungang Pambarangay that is implemented in Brgy. Salumague, Paniqui, Tarlac. It seeks to examine the role of KP as a peace building mechanism, investigate how they resolve dispute at the grassroots level to foster social harmony, and determine the challenges encountered in the implementation of KP. The methodology used was a qualitative research design. A total of five (5) participants were chosen based on their years of experienced in resolving disputes and a semi-structured interview was utilized. The findings of the study show that Katarungang Pambarangay is an alternative community-based dispute mechanism, convenient and accessible justice to the community of Brgy. Salumague fostering community peace despite of the challenges faced by the implementors.
KEYWORDS: *Katarungang Pambarangay, Peace building mechanism, community-based*

INTRODUCTION

The Katarungang Pambarangay, under the Local Government Code of 1991, serves as a community-based mechanism for resolving conflicts at the barangay level. Rooted in the principle of amicable settlements, Katarungang Pambarangay embodies the spirit of communal harmony by empowering local communities to resolve disputes without formal legal intervention (Zyre, 2024).

The establishment and operation of the Barangay Justice System is mandated by Republic Act No. 7160 or the Local Government Code of 1991. Katarungang Barangay (KP) is a system of justice implemented at the barangay level to amicably settle disputes through mediation, conciliation, or arbitration (Manuel & Vigo, 2004).

In a community, conflict is a natural and common occurrence. This may arise between families, members, leaders, or even those outside the group. Disputes can vary from small misunderstandings to significant issues that have the possibility of escalating to the court. However, disputes can serve as an opportunity for development and better relationships, by responding thoughtfully and navigating challenges with open communication and understanding can transform disagreements into positive outcomes. Minor civil and criminal cases that are covered by Katarungang Pambarangay, before being brought to the court should be settled first at the barangay level. Allowing the parties to amicably settle their dispute at the local level, helps resolve conflict in a cooperative manner leading to social harmony within the community.

The Katarungang Pambarangay Law, also known as the Barangay Justice System, is a significant legal mechanism in the Philippines designed to facilitate community-based conflict resolution. Its roots can be traced back to traditional pre-colonial practices of mediation and arbitration by local leaders, which emphasized communal harmony and restorative justice.

As the legal system in the Philippines progressed, the government recognized the necessity for a more accessible method of settling disputes within communities. The increasing backlog of court cases and limited access to justice for many Filipinos led to the formal institutionalization of a barangay-based dispute resolution mechanism. This realization led to the official creation of Katarungang Pambarangay Law, enabling locals to manage minor conflicts effectively. Addressing minor disputes at the barangay level, Katarungang Pambarangay also contributes to the decongestion of cases in formal courts.

Moreover, the Barangay Justice System (BJS) is an alternative mechanism at the local setting that benefits the parties involved by enabling them to resolve their issues free of charge and easily accessible, making it an affordable option for marginalized and economically disadvantaged individuals, fostering mutual agreement without the need for formal court proceedings (Verdad, 2024).

In addition, the system is not a court of justice or a tribunal where a judge hears cases and renders a decision. The community members can resolve their conflicts through this administrative body at the grassroots level without going through the judicial process, preventing lengthy and costly courtroom dispute resolution (Mohammed & Caingat, 2017).
Lastly, Katarungang Pambarangay is a community-based approach that encourages the persons involved to settle disputes peacefully, maintaining harmony within the community. The community-based approach has been adopted in fragile and conflict-affected societies which can be an effective approach to peacebuilding (Guia & Mangubat, 2021a).

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A study on the Katarungang Pambarangay of barangay Salumague, Paniqui, Tarlac, seeks to examine its role in community justice. This study aims to investigate how the Barangay Justice System resolves disputes at the barangay level to foster social harmony. It delves into the responsibilities of those involved in the system and explores the challenges they face in administering peaceful resolution. Additionally, it seeks to understand the limitations and areas for improvement to enhance the overall efficiency of the Barangay Justice system for better conflict resolution and community peacebuilding

METHODOLOGY

This section presents the Research design, Population and Locale of the Study, Research Instrument, Research Procedure, Data Analysis, and Ethical Considerations.

Research Design

The researcher utilized qualitative research method of examining the role of Katarungang Pambarangay as an alternative mechanism for settling disputes and peace building mechanism of Barangay Salumague, Paniqui, Tarlac. In this study, the researcher used thematic analysis to analyze the data gathered from the participants.

Population and Locale of the Study

The participants in this study are the Barangay Captain and 5 selected participants from barangay officials. The participants of the study were qualified and selected based on their years of experience, with at least one (2) year in service and having resolved at least ten (10) conflicts and disputes to generate extensive information based on their years of practice. Further, the study was conducted in Barangay Salumague, Municipality of Paniqui, Province of Tarlac.

Research Instrument

The data collection method that was used was the interview. The interview is semi-structured. This is a form of interview that has an interview protocol, wherein there were a set of questions asked but were not limited, hence, the researcher can follow-up questions for additional information. Further, audio recording is the means used to record the interviews of the participants. It will help to interpret and analyze the views, opinions, and facts related to the study.

Research Procedure

The researcher provided a letter to formally ask permission for an interview from the office of the Barangay Chairman of Barangay Salumague, Paniqui, Tarlac for the conduct of the study. Upon approval, the researcher conducted a face-to-face interview with the selected participants. The interviews were transcribed, and the data was coded and analyzed to identify themes related to the research questions.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis is utilized in this study to analyze the qualitative data collected from the interviews of the participants. Thematic analysis is a method of analyzing qualitative data and applied to a set of texts, such as interview transcripts. The researcher applied this approach, trying to find out something about people's views, opinions, knowledge, experiences, or values from the set of gathered data – interview transcripts and survey responses (Caulfield, 2020).

Ethical Considerations

The researcher ensured the participation of the participants in this study is completely voluntary. All the information supplied by the participants during the research will be held in confidence. The researcher informed the participants of the nature of this study and ensured that no harm, whether physical or psychological was inflicted on the participants during the conduct of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Katarungang Pambarangay is a significant legal mechanism with a vital role in settling disputes at the barangay level. It plays a key role in promoting peace and order within the Barangay Salumague. According to one of the participants – being a persistent barangay chairman as the mediator will encourage the parties to have a peaceful settlement, leading to peace-building. This perseverance promotes understanding, which eventually results in successful settlements and supports long-term peacebuilding in the neighborhood. Moreover, the barangay officials involved in peaceful settlement acted as the frontliner to resolve disputes within their scope, helping parties to resolve their problems.

In addition, at the barangay level, the system provided a less costly and more convenient settlement process for the members of Brgy. Salumague, allowing faster access to justice. Therefore, they avoid lengthy court proceedings and make their agreements in a more personal way. The Katarungang Pambarangay system encourages two-way communication and mutual understanding that helps disputing parties reach amicable settlements. This not only saves time and money but also strengthens relationships within the community, promoting peace and order through localized conflict resolution.

Furthermore, implementing Katarungang Pambarangay is both the responsibility of the Barangay Chairman as the Mediator and Barangay officials who will be selected as a conciliation panel or pangkat tagapagkasundo during the process of settlement. In implementation of the system, is not always free of challenges. There are common issues encountered in the process of amicable settlement, first, lack of participation from one of the parties. Accordingly, after issuing a summon or invitation to the parties concerned, they will not appear during the scheduled hearing of dispute resolution. Second, there is often a lack of legal awareness among the parties involved, one or both of them do not want to reach an agreement and prefer to escalate the issue at the police station not knowing it will be more complicated. Lastly, one of the challenges that is hard to handle is, that the parties are arrogant and prideful to compromise, and with that character, unwillingness to participate in meaningful communication impedes the possibility of a peaceful resolution of conflict.

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CONCLUSIONS

Based on the data gathered, the following conclusions are drawn:

1. The active participation of disputing parties and the persistence of mediators and conciliators foster understanding and encourage peaceful resolution. Thus, the Katarungang Pambarangay or Barangay Justice System significantly contributes as peace building mechanism in Barangay Salumague, Paniqui, Tarlac.
2. The people of Barangay Salumague, easily access justice through Katarungang Pambarangay without resorting to lengthy and costly court proceedings. Thus, promotes localized peace and order through convenient conflict resolution.
3. The implementation of KP faces challenges despite its benefits, 1) lack of participation 2) lack of legal awareness, and 3) pride and hostility of parties. Thus, delayed or failure to reach amicable settlements.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions, the following are recommended:

1. The members involved in the implementation of Katarungang Pambarangay should sustain or improve their capabilities to maintain KP as a peace-building mechanism in Barangay Salumague, Paniqui, Tarlac.
2. The Barangay Chairman should establish community policies that encourage participation in the dispute process, such as issuing official warnings or requiring valid justifications for absence or non-participation.
3. The Barangay Chairman should consider collaborating with educational institutions and civic groups to promote Katarungang Pambarangay and involve them in advocacy campaigns to strengthen support for community-based justice.

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