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Research Article

Malakas na Barangay, Malakas na Bayan: Empowering Local Leaders Through Multi-Sectoral Collaboration

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ABSTRACT

The *barangay*, which literally means village or community, is the smallest political unit in the Philippine political structure as defined in the Local Government Code. It is led by *barangay* officials, who are often elected based on popularity or familial ties rather than formal credentials. These officials serve as frontliners in providing basic services and performing executive, legislative, and quasi-judicial functions. This study was conducted to strengthen the capacity of the *barangay* to fulfill its mandate to alleviate poverty and promote sustainable and inclusive human growth through collaboration with selected government agencies, private institutions, the academe, and community members. Using the focus group discussion, information was gathered and used to design appropriate interventions. The study yielded both positive and negative outcomes that future advocates may utilize to effect change and empower *barangays* in promoting sustainable human growth and development.

Keywords: *Barangay, Empowerment, Local Government Code, Multi-sectoral, Sustainable growth and development*

Introduction

Empowering the *barangay* is essential for progress and community development. The Local Government Code of the Philippines states that “as the basic political unit, the *barangay* serves as the primary planning and implementing unit of government policies, plans, programs, projects, and activities in the community, and as a forum wherein the collective views of the people may be expressed, crystallized, and considered, and where disputes may be amicably settled” (Local Government Code

of the Philippines, n.d.). This provision highlights the indispensable role of the *barangay* in promoting the country’s human growth and development. The country’s aspiration for political and economic progress can only be realized if *barangays* and their officials effectively perform the duties mandated to them. When *barangays* function efficiently, city, municipal, and provincial governments are less burdened with addressing local concerns and can focus on broader development priorities.

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Despite this important mandate, *barangays* often require assistance in carrying out their responsibilities. At the onset of this project, the Philippines had 42,044 *barangays* distributed across 81 provinces, 146 cities, and 1,488 municipalities. Among these municipalities, only 322 belong to the first-class category, which means they generate an average annual income of at least Php55,000,000.00. The remaining municipalities earn less. For example, the Municipality of Paombong in the Province of Bulacan is classified as a third-class municipality, earning an average annual income ranging from Php35,000,000.00 to Php49,000,000.00 (Cities and Municipalities Competitiveness Index, n.d.), with a population of 53,294 based on the 2015 census.

This financial disparity reflects broader socioeconomic conditions in the country. According to the Philippine Statistics Authority (2015), the full-year poverty incidence among the population in 2015 was estimated at 23.3 percent. This translates to approximately 23.5 million Filipinos living below the poverty threshold, which was estimated at Php9,452 per month for a family of five. Many individuals living in *barangays* under third-class municipalities are likely to belong to this group (Philippine Statistics Authority, n.d.). Consequently, income distribution remains uneven, with some individuals earning significantly more than others.

Section 16 of the Local Government Code of the Philippines further emphasizes the responsibility of local government units through the General Welfare Clause. This provision grants powers to local government units and their officials that are essential for promoting the general welfare of their constituents. It mandates local government units to ensure and promote economic prosperity, social justice, and full employment among their residents.

In this context, the *Sangguniang Barangay*, or Village Council, plays a crucial role in delivering basic services and promoting local growth and development. In some communities, such as Abucay, Albay, *barangay* officials are perceived to be competent in performing their duties and responsibilities based on face-to-face interviews conducted with constitu-

ents. However, other studies present a different perspective. The study conducted by Amoro, Abay, and Magat (2020) found that some respondents were uncertain about the performance and functions of their *barangay* officials. This indicates a possible disconnection between the perceptions of *barangay* officials and the experiences of their constituents. In many cases, beneficiaries of public services may provide more candid assessments compared with service providers, who may have a tendency to present more favorable outcomes.

A discussion paper by Layug et al. (2010) further explains the situation faced by many *barangays*. According to the authors, "*barangays* have the option of either remaining as one of the IRA dependent LGUs unable to deliver basic services or struggling to be self sufficient economic and political communities able to effect positive change in the lives of their people and be an engine of inclusive growth for the country at large" (p. 21).

In their conclusion, Layug et al. (2010) emphasized that many *barangays* remain heavily dependent on the Internal Revenue Allotment (IRA), which refers to the share of national government revenues allocated to local government units. This dependence suggests that many *barangays* and their officials face challenges in delivering basic services, achieving financial self sufficiency, and contributing to inclusive growth and development.

Given these structural and fiscal limitations, multi sectoral collaboration was implemented as a strategy to strengthen the institutional capacity of *barangays*, particularly their officials. In practice, *barangay* officials exercised their executive functions by organizing and implementing livelihood programs and skills training initiatives. They performed legislative functions by developing community guidelines for program participation, and they carried out quasi judicial functions by resolving disputes that surfaced during project implementation. Through active participation in these collaborative interventions, *barangay* officials enhanced their administrative and collaborative capacities, which contributed to improved service delivery and more responsive local development outcomes.

Discussion

Malakas na Barangay, Malakas na Bayan (Empowered Village, Empowered Nation) was conceptualized as a multi-sectoral initiative aimed at strengthening *barangay* governance through coordinated institutional support. Rather than functioning solely as a service-delivery program, the initiative was structured as a collaborative governance arrangement involving public agencies, private organizations, and community stakeholders.

Participating institutions included the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) – Bulacan and the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) – Bulacan, alongside private partners such as Ligas Kooperatiba ng Bayan sa Pagpapaunlad (LKBP) and Breakthrough and Milestones Productions International, Inc. BMPI. Each partner assumed roles consistent with its mandate. TESDA provided skills training and scholarship opportunities, while LKBP focused on cooperative development and credit access. Further BMPI facilitated medical, dental, optical, and legal missions that addressed immediate community needs.

The structure of the initiative reflects Ansell and Gashs (2008) concept of collaborative governance, particularly in its formalized

agreement, shared decision-making processes, and collective implementation of public programs. The Memorandum of Agreement signed on August 3, 2016 institutionalized the partnership and clarified responsibilities among stakeholders. However, initial coordination required sustained negotiation, particularly in aligning schedules and securing institutional commitments.

The first launch occurred on February 10, 2017, at Barangay Bunsuran II, followed by a second launch on March 10, 2017, at Barangay Malumot. Both events featured BMPI-UNTV social services, including medical, dental, optical, and legal missions, free haircuts, and massages. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were held during both launches, attended by representatives from DILG, TESDA, BMPI, LKBP, *barangay* officials, organization leaders, and community members.

Collectively, the findings indicate that multi-sectoral collaboration can function as a supplementary governance mechanism, particularly in resource-constrained *barangays*. However, its effectiveness depends not only on resource pooling, but also on sustained coordination, clarity of roles, and institutional commitment beyond ceremonial launches.



Figure 1

The signing of the memorandum of agreement by the heads and representatives of the participating government agencies and private entities.



Figure 2

The pledge of commitment to the project *Malakas na Barangay, Malakas na Bayan* by the heads of participating government agencies and private entities.

This study aimed to enable *barangays* to provide essential services and foster self-sufficiency. *Barangays* play a vital role in nation-building by delivering necessary services to constituents. The findings will benefit Local Government Units (LGUs) and *barangay* officials in fulfilling their duties and promoting inclusive growth and sustainable development.

Citizens can benefit from TESDA scholarships and partner-led training programs to improve employment prospects and livelihoods, thereby contributing to the local economy through taxes and community support. Government agencies and the private sector play essential roles in policy-making, job creation, investment, and financial assistance, all of which stimulate local economic development.

It is crucial for government agencies to engage directly with communities to understand their needs and provide appropriate interventions. The study's findings may also guide future researchers in conducting more comprehensive investigations to enhance outcomes.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design to examine capacity-building initiatives in *barangays* through multi-sectoral collaboration. Data were collected using Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), semi-structured interviews, and observation.

Drawing on Montiels (2002) approach in Philippine political research, FGDs were conducted with *barangay* leaders, representatives of government agencies and private organizations, and community stakeholders. The semi-structured interviews were guided by a flexible protocol, allowing participants to discuss their experiences, perceptions of local governance, and engagement with community programs. The interviewer facilitated the conversation by gently redirecting topics when necessary to maintain focus on the study objectives (Burns, 2000).

Face-to-face interviews were conducted to explore participants' perceptions of themselves, their environment, and their experiences. No standard list of questions was used; instead, conversations were impromptu and relied heavily on the quality of social interaction between the investigator and the inform-

ant. The interviewer subtly redirected the conversation when it deviated from the research focus (Burns, 2000).

Moreover, observation was also employed as a research method. According to De Walt and De Walt, as cited by Thiel (2022), “the researcher remains aloof in an open observation format, the researcher situation but does not interact with the subjects, who may or may not be informed about this person’s role of researcher...” (p. 71). During the research project, the reactions, responses, and acceptance of participants—particularly *barangay* officials—were observed. These observations informed strategic planning and contributed to the realization of the project.

The study was implemented as part of the pilot initiative *Malakas na Barangay, Malakas na Bayan*, which aimed to strengthen *barangay* governance through multi-sectoral collaboration. The project was guided by the principles of collaborative governance, which Emerson, Nabatchi, and Balogh (2012) define as structured processes that engage diverse stakeholders across institutional and societal boundaries to achieve public objectives that could not be accomplished by a single actor. Using this framework, the pilot initiative sought to foster trust, encourage active participation, and promote shared responsibility among *barangay* stakeholders, enabling more effective decision-making and program implementation.

Results

The “Malakas na Barangay, Malakas na Bayan” initiative was designed to promote change in local governance by fostering collaboration among key stakeholders. Its primary objective was to encourage inclusive and sustainable development through coordinated multi-sectoral engagement.

Government agencies, private institutions, and *barangay* leaders participated in planning and strategy meetings, contributing to the design and implementation of the initiative and supporting its long-term sustainability.

This collaboration facilitated Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and interviews, which informed the rollout of various activities, including social services, capacity-building seminars, and skills and livelihood training. Community

feedback identified dressmaking, food processing, and welding as high-demand training areas, which were subsequently prioritized.

Drawing from Klijn and Koppenjans perspective, public goals are achieved through interaction and negotiation, producing mutually beneficial outcomes (Warsen et al., 2019). The initiative illustrated how coordinated efforts from academia, government, private sectors, and local communities can address specific local needs. Training activities not only enhanced participants’ skills and productivity, but also supported self-sufficiency. *Barangay officials* reported that engagement with cross-sector partners strengthened their understanding of collaborative governance and improved their capacity to serve constituents.

The first pilot site was Barangay Bunsuran II in Pandi, Bulacan, where BMPI-UNTV, a private media partner, delivered social services to 1,035 constituents, demonstrating the practical application of the collaborative model. Services included:

- Medical adult consultation (189)
- Pediatric consultation (171)
- Optical consultation with free eyeglasses (76)
- Dental extraction (46)
- Chest X-ray (8)
- ECG (12)
- Random blood sugar testing (12)
- Legal consultation (10)
- Urinalysis (2)
- Haircut (59)
- Massage (35)
- Medicine distribution (415)

Barangay Malumot in Paombong, Bulacan, also received services through the project. BMPI-UNTV provided:

- Medical consultation (157)
- Pediatric consultation (54)
- Optical consultation with free eyeglasses (98)
- Dental extraction
- ECG (15)
- Random blood sugar testing (18)
- Legal consultation (4)
- CBC (1)
- Urinalysis (2)
- Massage (30)

- Haircut (43)
- Medicine distribution (336)

Health and wellness were emphasized as critical components of development. BMPI-UNTV's services contributed to sustainable growth by enhancing physical and mental well-being. As Collins noted, "There's a well-understood correlation that as the economy of a country improves, so the health of its citizens as well. What may be less obvious is that the opposite is also true – improving the health of a nation's citizens can directly result in economic growth, because there will be more people able to conduct effective activities in the workforce" (World Economic Forum, n.d.).

Capacity-building seminars were scheduled with inputs from stakeholders. Although both pilot *barangays* agreed to participate, only Barangay Malumot sent representatives. Seminar topics included:

- Values education (peace, human rights, democracy, sustainable development)
- Community organization leadership
- Best practices in barangay governance

Training outcomes included:

- Meat processing graduates: 13 (TESDA-certified)
- Dressmaking graduates: 9 (TESDA-certified)
- Welding graduates: 34 (TESDA-certified)

The Department of Science and Technology's Provincial Director also conducted training on good manufacturing practices, packaging, and labeling.

Many beneficiaries of the livelihood and skills training are now employed or self-employed. However, some face financial constraints that hinder income generation. The Sangguniang *Barangay* acknowledged that partnerships with other sectors are essential for delivering basic services and promoting self-sufficiency. They also recognized the need for further capability-building interventions.

The studies by *Malakas na Barangay, Malakas na Bayan* yielded insights that would improve the approach in the next attempt to empower the community and promote governance, inclusive growth, and sustainable

development. Ansell et al. (2022) clearly discussed what it takes to affect growth and development in co-creation for sustainability, the UN SDGs, and the power of local participation. Accordingly, *we need global action to secure a strong political leadership and commitment to SDGs at the level of national government. We need government action to mobilize public institutions, budgets, and policies in the struggle to achieve SDG. We need people's action that brings citizens, neighborhoods, civil society organizations, private enterprises, and trade unions to join forces to make progress* (Ansell, Sørensen, & Torfing, 2022, p. 12).

This statement indicates that, in order to achieve the desired goal of promoting inclusive growth and development, local participation is crucial. No matter how ambitious the plans may be from a higher level of government, without collaboration in the community—particularly among the people and other sectors in society—achieving the goal will not be possible. Moreover, it has been proven that governments alone are not capable of doing so. To be effective and efficient, the government must cooperate with like-minded partners.

Rimban (2011) wrote in her article about the Concerned Citizens of Abra for Good Government, Inc. (CCAGG), an organization in Northern Philippines. Its success is one of the best examples to justify how collaboration works and produces results. CCAGG began with a group of ordinary citizens who were tired of corruption in local government infrastructure projects. Their diligence in monitoring government-funded projects, such as road construction, led to the formation of an advocacy group composed of citizens and professionals, including engineers, accountants, and teachers. CCAGG became instrumental in preventing corruption in Abra and even partnered with the Commission on Audit (COA) to conduct participatory audits. The lessons from Abra can be replicated anywhere in the Philippines if well-intentioned people are willing to curb corruption. The experience from Abra provides a conceptual precedent for *Malakas na Barangay, Malakas na Bayan*, illustrating how individuals with shared goals can collaborate to achieve positive community outcomes. This example underscores that multi-sectoral collaboration

can enhance participant engagement and effectiveness when stakeholders are aligned in purpose.

At the same time, the study identified challenges to the sustainability of collaborative initiatives at the *barangay* level, particularly during leadership transitions. Newly-elected officials may not continue programs initiated by their predecessors, requiring renewed efforts to build trust and participation. In Barangay Bunsuran II, Pandi, Bulacan, council members were initially absent during planning meetings, attended the project launch, and subsequently disengaged. These observations indicate that political turnover can disrupt continuity and limit the longterm impact of collaborative interventions, highlighting the need for strategies that institutionalize processes beyond individual officeholders.

Mabolo (2020) stated, “Political overlords control the lives of the people and manipulate political exercises to perpetuate themselves into power” (p. 161). Monsod (2013) noted that political dynasties correlate with lower income, higher poverty, and lower human development indices. Timberman (2019) discussed how elite democracy has stunted the Philippine economy and weakened the state. Tadem and Tadem (2016) emphasized that the aid-dependent model pursued by ruling regimes has blocked popular movements from challenging dynasties.

Bad politics continue to hinder government officials from effectively providing essential services, and as long as these conditions persist, poverty in the Philippines remains entrenched. Local *barangay* officials, although expected to act apolitically, are often influenced or manipulated by political dynasties. Timberman (2019) provides a recent assessment of Philippine politics, noting that elite democracy and entrenched political families have weakened state institutions and limited the ability of local governments to implement meaningful reforms. Tadem and Tadem (2016) similarly emphasize that the aid-dependent model adopted by ruling regimes restricts grassroots movements from challenging political dynasties. These systemic constraints directly affect the capacity of *barangay* officials to collaborate with multi-sectoral partners and deliver basic

services. Therefore, empowering and training *barangay* officials to perform their mandates independently is critical for enabling effective local governance, promoting inclusive growth, and overcoming political barriers to development.

The training programs conducted for *barangay* residents demonstrated positive outcomes, enhancing skills and promoting self-reliance. However, some participants were unable to fully benefit due to limited financial resources. To address this, the next phase of the project aimed to provide financial support through LKBP, which was responsible for educating and guiding beneficiaries in utilizing these resources. Unfortunately, the momentum of the initiative was temporarily halted by the COVID-19 pandemic, with strict restrictions only lifted in the third quarter of 2023.

Conclusion

This study aimed to enhance the capacity of *barangays* to fulfill their mandate of promoting poverty reduction and fostering inclusive, sustainable local development. The initiative *Malakas na Barangay, Malakas na Bayan* sought to achieve this through multi-sectoral collaboration involving government agencies, academic institutions, private organizations, *barangay* officials, and community members.

The effectiveness of the project was reflected in its ability to convene stakeholders from diverse sectors, facilitating meaningful discussions and knowledge exchange that informed decision-making and project implementation. Academic partners, including the Institute of Local Governance and Administration (ILGA) at Bulacan State University, contributed technical expertise. Government participation was led by the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) and the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), with additional support from the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) and the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD). Private-sector partners included *Ligas Kooperatiba ng Bayan sa Pagpapaunlad* and Breakthrough Milestones Productions, Inc. *Barangay* officials and community members also played key roles in planning and implementing activities.

Moreover, *Barangay* officials benefited from capacity-building seminars and collaborative engagements, improving their ability to provide livelihood opportunities and essential services to constituents. Community participants who underwent skills training in welding, food processing, and dressmaking reported positive outcomes, including employment, self-employment, and increased financial independence. These outcomes contributed to community development and had potential implications for local revenue generation.

Despite these successes, challenges to sustainability emerged. Political turnover at the *barangay* level sometimes disrupted project continuity, as newly elected officials were reluctant to continue initiatives started by their predecessors. Instances of officials prioritizing visibility over substantive engagement highlighted the difficulty of changing entrenched mindsets. Internal dynamics within academic institutions occasionally affected continuity, particularly when support from appointing authorities was withdrawn. Financial constraints among program participants, particularly in accessing startup capital for entrepreneurial activities, also limited the long-term impact of training programs.

Ultimately, the findings suggest that multi-sectoral collaboration can strengthen *barangay* capacity and improve service delivery. However, for such initiatives to achieve sustainable impact, interventions must consider political transitions, institutional support, and financial accessibility. Future research may explore strategies to institutionalize collaborative governance processes, ensuring the continuity and scalability of community-based programs in resource-constrained settings.

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