

Lived Experiences of Filipino Young Leaders on Participation in Community Development in a Municipality in Northern Negros Occidental

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Abstract. Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) is the Philippine version of the village youth council. They serve as youth leaders, help in decision-making relative to youth affairs in the LGU, and became a training ground for future leaders in the community.

Despite the promising results and the importance of youth participation in community development, youth have no authentic participation. SKs faced criticism and became an avenue for corruption, inefficiency, and allegations of malpractices, misconduct, vote-buying, and patronage politics. Adversely, congress believes that an inclusive and empowered youth government should be given a chance to renew the perception of the community to the SK by giving them more accountability and opportunity in participatory governance and community development.

There were studies on youth and SK in community development such as youth engagement in agricultural development, youth involvement in community extension programs, and youth inclusion in peace processes. However, there were limited studies that explored the Lived Experiences of Filipino Young Leaders on Participation in Community Development in A Municipality in Northern Negros Occidental. This is the research gap that this study aims to fill.

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore the lived experiences of young leaders on participation in community development in a municipality in northern Negros Occidental.

The SK Officials encountered challenges and struggled in implementing PPAs that involve gathering the youth in the community. It was influenced by low esteem and confidence, far-flung sitios, criticism, change in perspective, the restrictions brought Covid-19 Pandemic. It is notable that in all the areas of youth

participation, the sports program is the most participated program. Youth and community development is not limited to sports, it is only a small part of programs that should be initiated by young leaders to drastically improve the development of the community.

Keywords: Negros Occidental; Public Management; Sangguniang Kabataan; Youth; Youth Governance

1. Introduction

Youth are perceived as active citizens (Martinez et al., 2017). They are well aware of their local environment, idealistic, and always ready to provide logical solutions and innovations (Śmiechowski, 2019). Young people are dynamic and adaptable and are usually the source of innovation and creativity (Ekka et al., 2022). According to Karagianni and Montgomery (2018), it is the time for the youth as an individual to develop their leadership. The same author also claims that this can help reinforce self-esteem and be a catalyst for flourishing adulthood.

The youth sector is being strengthened and involved in the development of society (Romić & Dujmović Bocka, 2022). The development of the youth has a direct effect across all sectors of society (Scales et al., 2016). In India, Mathiyazhagan (2020) claims that a multi-stakeholder approach in community development including the youth can enhance collective accountability. The same author says a youth-led co-creation can build a powerful community. In Egypt, they recognized that the youth can foster further human and social development, transform communities, and improvement of society. (Mansour, 2016). Young people's involvement in the policy-making process at every stage has a more successful outcome (Macauley et al., 2022).

In the Philippines, the 1987 Constitution recognized the youth as having a critical role in nation-building, therefore, establishing the Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) through the Republic Act (RA) 7160 or the Local Government Code (LGC) of 1991. SK is the Philippine version of the village youth council (Flores et al., 2021). They serve as youth leaders (De Jesus, 2022) and help in decision-making relative to youth affairs in the LGU, and became a training ground for future leaders in the community (Enopiquez et al., 2019).

Youth are treated as partners of the city government in developing a better community (Dumbrique, 2014) and the SK are shaping them into better citizens (Alampay and Angeles, 2012). The youth can also promote patriotism if they participate in government and community development (Jacinto, 2023).

Despite the promising results and the importance of youth participation in community development, youth have no authentic participation (Stocklin, 2017). SKs faced criticism and became an avenue for corruption, inefficiency (Bautista, 2021), and allegations of malpractices, misconduct, vote-buying, and patronage politics (Flores, et.al, 2021). Adversely, congress believes that an inclusive and empowered youth government should be given a chance to renew the perception of the community to the SK by giving them more accountability and opportunity in participatory governance (Flores et.al, 2021) and community development.

There were studies on youth and SK in community development such as youth engagement in agricultural development (Manalo et al., 2019), youth involvement in community extension programs (Rubio et al., 2016), and youth inclusion in peace processes (Cabanas Ragandang and Podder, 2022). However, there were limited studies that explored the Lived Experiences of Filipino Young Leaders on Participation in Community Development in A Municipality in Northern Negros Occidental. This is the research gap that this study aims to fill.

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore the lived experiences of young leaders on participation in community development in a municipality in northern Negros Occidental. At this stage in the research, the participation in the community development of the young leaders in the municipality will be generally defined as the participation in community development and activities implemented by the young leaders in a municipality in northern Negros Occidental.

2. Methodology

This study will utilize a descriptive phenomenological research design. This research design offers a way in understanding the wide range of factors, perspectives, and understanding personal experiences, to explore and reveal meanings that are concealed, rather than making inferences on the current situation (Rodriguez and Smith, 2018; Onan et al., 2021). The use of

phenomenology will be appropriate for exploring the Lived Experiences of Filipino Young Leaders on Participation in Community Development in A Municipality in Northern Negros Occidental.

2.1. Sampling Procedure

The researcher sent a letter to the respondents securing the approval of Punong Barangays (PBs) and SK Officials in the conduct of the study. The participants were identified using purposive sampling. They were oriented on the purpose of the study and the proposed timeframe for the interview and related activities. The researcher commences the face-to-face interview by observing the minimum public health standard. The interview started by introducing myself and reiteration of the Research Informed Consent. They were reminded again of the purpose of the study for ethical consideration, their freedom to withdraw their participation if they feel any discomfort, and may opt not to answer questions that would trigger emotional or psychological distress. I asked permission from the participants to record our interview and upon their approval, I utilized my smartphone to record the interview and transcribed it verbatim.

During the interview, the researcher utilizes the four essential steps of Greening (2019) namely, 1. Bracketing, 2. Intuiting, 3. Analyzing, and 4. Describing. I deferred all my preconceived ideas about the topic and I focused on seeking and elaborating on the participant's response on the topic. This process was called bracketing wherein I held into abeyance all my preconceived ideas and opinions concerning the phenomenon. I utilized probing questions to prompt more information on the responses of the participant.

After the interview, the researcher debriefed and assured the respondents that all the gathered information will be treated with the utmost confidentiality in adherence to the Data Privacy Act of 2012 and a possible follow-up interview as the need arises. After, I expressed my gratitude for their participation in the study and will inform them of the findings of the study. The transcript of the interview was played many times to capture the essence. Data Saturation was then achieved upon interviewing four (4) participants wherein follow-up data collection is no longer needed.

2.2. Respondents

There were four (4) participants of this study will be SK in a municipality in northern Negros Occidental. They were identified using the purposive sampling technique. Purposive Sampling refers is also known as judgment sampling, wherein the identification of the participants will be based on the quality they possess (Etikan et al., 2016). Inclusion criteria were the elected and qualified SK Officials during the Barangay and Sangguniang Kabataan Election (BSKE) 2018, a resident of a northern municipality in Negros Occidental, and at least 3 years in the service.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Difficulties in gathering the youths in youth activities

SKs who participated in the study expressed their hard time gathering their youth constituents. SKs wanted to empower their youth constituents and implement the prescribed programs of the government for the youth. However, their youth constituents are shy, reserved, and have low self-esteem and confidence. They are afraid to express their views and opinions. SKs fail to gather the youths in activities such as symposiums, advocacy campaigns, assemblies, and meetings that are spearheaded by the SKs and other organizations. On the other hand, the youth are actively participating in sports-related activities because they feel comfortable, have a higher

level of self-esteem, and are confident on their own or as a team. This supports the study of Collins et al. (2018) that the students who are participating in sports have a higher level of self-esteem and happiness versus those who do not indulge in sports.

SK's prevalent types of projects, programs, and activities (PPAs) are focused on sports activities due to the outstanding number of participants participating in sports and wellness programs, unlike other areas of development as identified in the Philippine Youth Development Plan (PYDP). This validates the findings of Flores III, et al (2021) that SK tends to neglect sectors such as economic empowerment, education, and health (mainly anti-drug abuse campaigns). There is a low outcome of youth participants when it comes to activities that are not sports-related.

SKs shared their experiences on inviting their youth constituents in far sitios. The location of the youth became a challenge in the implementation of SK PPAs since they fail to participate due to the distance. According to Digun-Aweto et al (2019), communities in proximate and remote areas have a direct effect on their participation. The constituents prefer activities where that are near to them and where can gain money. They ought not to spend on fares and transportation and resulting in the failure of the youth residing in far sitios fails to participate in the activities prepared by the SK.

Criticism faced by the SKs is brought by their constituents and the community. This brings a negative influence that directly affects the involvement of the youth (Elliott and Drummond, 2016). They shared the same experience of being accused of implementing sports activities only. The parents of their youth constituents tagged SKs as a useless mechanism and incapacitated in implementing PPAs (Flores III et. al, 2021). As much as the SKs desire to implement projects they are bounded by the SK Reform Act of 2015 which mandated them to implement soft projects only and conduct activities. The parents of the youth constituents and the constituents themselves also wanted to see abrupt improvement in their barangay and huge expectations of the elected SK Officials. However, SKs are bounded by PPAs that are a program on their respective CBYDP and ABYIP. They are also constricted by financial limitations and government procurement law.

One of the SK's dilemmas is the youths with parental and financial obligations. They are the sect of youth that are not interested to join in the activities set by the youth. They prioritized and join activities that can provide a living for their family, and will fill their empty stomach. The perspective of the youth with parental obligations is different from other youths. According to the study of Ricks (2016), youth with parental obligations have a different perspective, brought by their experience in enduring criticisms of the community, and how they manage to cope and survive even in the most challenging circumstances. The same author claims that alternative programs for the youth with parental obligation should be implemented to further develop their strength, wiser and more productive members of the community. SKs should ensure a comprehensive development for their youth constituents; they should see to it that all sectors whether youth with parental obligation or youths are included in their plan and implement PPAs that will address the problems in the sectors mentioned.

The COVID-19 Pandemic brought forth unprecedented challenges, disruptions, and interruptions (Ettekal & Agans, 2020) in the implementation of youth programs (Kelly et al., 2020). SKs were limited to conducting face-to-face activities, and other related activities with gatherings. The pandemic has proven that youth organizations and youth workers can be the government's partner in terms of providing services and they are also swift in the dissemination of information to stop the spread of the virus (OECD, 2022). There were also SK initiatives that have been conducted during the pandemic such as the conduct of online symposiums, online assemblies' meetings, and activities. Still, the majority of the youth still failed to attend online activities due to the implications brought by the pandemic. The youth are focused on finding a job due to the displacement brought forth by the pandemic in their family. There were also youths that

became a parent during the pandemic and focus on raising their own family. Thus, the implication of the pandemic affected the participation of the youth in the community.

Youth Participation in Sports Programs

Sports activities unite the youth in a community. Based on the study of McEwan and Beauchamp (2020), team sports create an opportunity for the youth to learn about the power of teamwork and develop their skills as a team. Sports will develop the traits of teamwork, sportsmanship, problem-solving skills (Gould, 2016), and physical health benefits (Malm et al., 2019). This confirms to the findings of Côté and Hancock (2014) wherein the involvement of youths in sports leads to performance, participation, and personal development.

The SKs shared their experience in terms of the conduct of sports events and why they prefer sports activities over other pillars of development. When it comes to sports, their involvement and participation are surprisingly high. This supports the findings of Enopiquez et al., (2019) that youth appreciate their inclusion, engagement, and participation in sports activities. The reason why the SKs are pushing forward the conduct of sports activity is because of the turnout of the youths that are willing to participate whether playing or cheering.

The SKs shared their experience that they are frequently requested to conduct leagues and sports activities by their constituents and their barangay council. They perceive sports as entertainment and is one way to reduce crime (Richardson et al., 2017) and serve as a diversion program. The author explains that through sports, the youths will be able to improve their self-esteem, enhance social bonds and provide a feeling of purpose in life.

Lack of Governing Guidelines for the SK Financial Disbursement

Based on the SK Reform Act of 2015, SK shall have financial independence in its operations, disbursements, and encashment of its funds, income, and expenditures. The same law mandates that agencies such as the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG, Commission of Audit (COA), Bureau of Treasury (BTr), and Department of Budget and Management (DBM) to formulate guidelines in terms of financial independence of the SK.

SK shared their experience as to their current financial situation over a year after their election the COA has not yet released guidelines for the disbursement and liquidation of Financial Funds. They were delays in the implementation of projects because the Sangguniang Barangay would not allow the disbursement of funds to the SK because of the risk and lack of governing guidelines. Thus, it hampered the implementation of youth programs in the barangay.

They also shared that after the release of the guidelines by the COA, there was an online orientation regarding SK Financial Transactions however, the SKs in the northern municipalities of Negros Occidental find it difficult due to the intermittent internet signal. As much as they want to participate in the discussion, they were also bounded by the time limitation of the webinar.

SK expressed their difficulty in appointing the SK Treasurer. Youth in the barangays hesitate to be appointed as SK Treasurer because of limited benefits and no compensation despite the work description as provided by RA 10742 and COA. Thus, this supports the findings of Flores et. al (2021) on the difficulty to find people that are devoted, skilled, and willing to take the role without financial compensation.

Figure 1 shows an illustration of how the challenges and experiences of young leaders in the implementation of youth empowerment programs for community development by being participatory, accountable, and empowered youth constituents. This conceptual model specifically shows the challenges for young leaders in participation in community development.

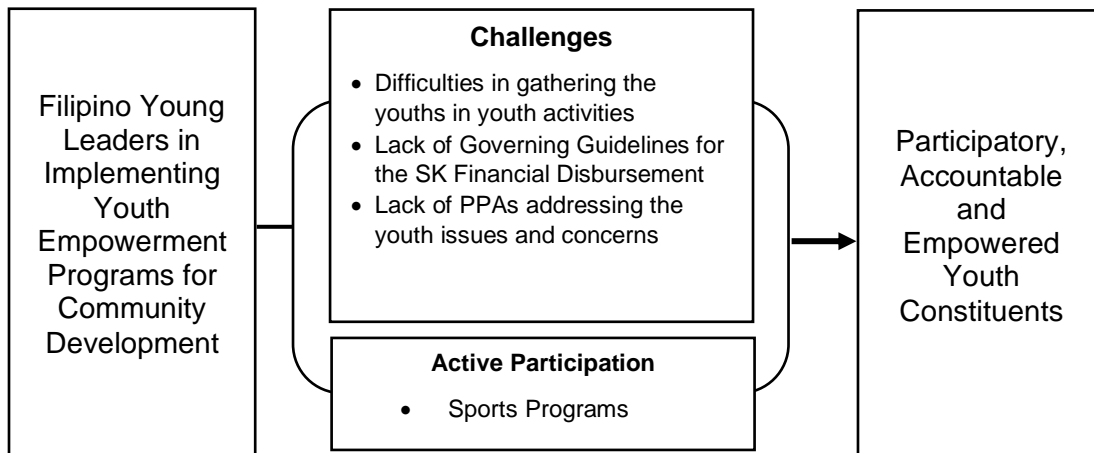


Figure 1. A conceptual model on Challenges for young leaders in Participation in community development

4. Conclusions

The SK Officials encountered challenges and struggled in implementing PPAs that involve gathering the youth in the community. It was influenced by low esteem and confidence, far-flung sitios, criticism, change in perspective, the restrictions brought Covid-19 Pandemic. It is notable that in all the areas of youth participation, the sports program is the most participated program. Youth and community development is not limited to sports, it is only a small part of programs that should be initiated by young leaders to drastically improve the development of the community. The delayed release of guidelines and orientation of the COA affected the financial independence and transactions of the SK. Today, the SKs are now expediting the implementation of their PPAs because of the recent guidance of the COA. SK should foresee the conduct of programs for the youth with parental obligations and ensure the continuous development of the youth. SK should also incorporate and implement their PPAs with sports to ensure the participation of the youth. These experiences can create an opportunity to SK to further improve their delivery of basic services and implement PPAs that will ensure the participation and development of the youth in the community.

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