

Mandated but Constrained? A Performance Assessment and Capacity-Building Framework for the Reformed Sangguniang Kabataan in the Philippines

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Abstract. This study assesses the performance and challenges of the Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) in a city in Bukidnon, Philippines, under the SK Reform Act of 2015 (RA 10742), and proposes a capacity-building framework. Employing a mixed-methods explanatory sequential design, quantitative data from 113 SK officials were collected via surveys, followed by qualitative insights from interviews and focus group discussions with 20 officials. Results indicated a "Very Satisfactory" overall performance (mean: 4.12, SD: 0.25), with notable achievements in mandated duties, planning, program management, and government engagement. However, lower performance in meeting facilitation, monitoring/reporting, and resolution revealed deficits in administrative and technical competency. Key challenges included resource limitations, capacity gaps, declining youth engagement, and systemic barriers. Addressing these, the study introduces a Capacity Enhancement and Governance Sustainability Framework, a multi-level intervention, integrating individual, institutional, and systemic reforms. This research contributes to empowering young leaders, advancing democratic participation, and fostering effective governance in the Philippines, while also addressing the mandate-resource mismatch prevalent in decentralized governance systems.

Keywords: Capacity enhancement and governance sustainability framework; Local governance; Performance assessment; Sangguniang Kabataan.

1.0 Introduction

The Sangguniang Kabataan's effectiveness in fulfilling its mandated duties and functions in local governance is vital in fostering democratic development, particularly in the Philippines. The reformed Sangguniang Kabataan (SK or Youth Council), established under the SK Reform Act of 2015 (RA 10742), is a critical platform for nurturing youth leadership. The Act mandates the SK to implement programs focusing on education, health, and civic engagement. However, empirical studies evaluating the efficacy of SK implementation are limited, leaving gaps in understanding its actual impact and areas for improvement.

Existing literature highlights systemic challenges affecting the Sangguniang Kabataan (SK), such as inadequate resources, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and low levels of youth engagement (Teehankee, 2016; Cabanero, 2018). Despite their relevance, these studies often lack quantitative evaluations of SK performance or structured approaches to tackling the identified issues. This absence of a comprehensive assessment leaves a critical research gap, particularly in evaluating SK officials' capacity to fulfill their mandates and in identifying strategies to improve their effectiveness.

While prior research highlights broader themes of youth political involvement (Flores et al., 2022; Ambrocio & Gonzalo, 2018), these studies lack region-specific analyses or actionable interventions tailored to localized governance contexts. For instance, investigations into youth councils (Rey & Espiritu, 2023; Balanon et al., 2007) underscore the importance of participation but fall short of proposing measurable frameworks to enhance institutional performance. Similarly, critiques of structural challenges (Cabanero, 2018; Teehankee, 2016) identify systemic inefficiencies but offer limited guidance for reforming youth governance mechanisms at the grassroots level. This gap persists despite recent policy initiatives (Department of the Interior and Local Government, 2023), emphasizing capacity-building without addressing regionally diverse socioeconomic barriers documented in post-pandemic studies (Garong, 2022).

The Sangguniang Kabataan's effectiveness in fulfilling its mandated responsibilities remains unexplored, mainly from a quantitative and structured perspective. Challenges such as inadequate knowledge and skills, low engagement levels, and resource constraints persist, yet there is no unified framework addressing these issues to strengthen youth participation and governance.

This study addresses these gaps by offering a region-specific performance assessment of SK officials, incorporating quantitative evaluations of their mandated functions under the SK Reform Act of 2015 and explores the challenges faced by SK officials through a qualitative lens, employing thematic analysis to uncover key issues such as resource constraints, leadership development hurdles, and community engagement barriers. These qualitative insights complement the quantitative findings, providing a holistic understanding of the factors influencing SK performance. Moreover, it proposes a comprehensive capacity-building framework, bridging the current void in literature regarding structured interventions to enhance the efficacy of the SK.

This study is grounded in the Capability Approach Theory (Sen, 1999), which emphasizes enhancing individuals' abilities to achieve their full potential. The theory asserts that the capability to function effectively is influenced by resources, opportunities, and interventions provided within the system. In youth governance, this framework underscores the significance of equipping young leaders with the necessary skills, knowledge, and resources to fulfill their roles effectively. Additionally, the study draws on Transformational Leadership Theory (Burns, 1978), which focuses on inspiring and empowering leaders to enact positive changes within their organizations and communities. This theory is particularly relevant to the Sangguniang Kabataan (SK), as it highlights the need for youth leaders to meet their mandated responsibilities and inspire civic engagement and active participation among their peers.

These theories provide a foundation for assessing the SK's performance and formulating capacity-building interventions. They inform the study's focus on identifying systemic challenges, evaluating performance quantitatively, and developing structured frameworks to enhance youth governance. The research aims to bridge existing gaps and contribute to the broader discourse on effective youth leadership in local governance by applying these theories.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

The study employed a mixed-methods explanatory sequential design to comprehensively assess the performance of the Sangguniang Kabataan (SK). A survey was administered to all 113 SK officials to measure their performance levels across mandated duties and functions. The survey used a 5-point Likert scale (*see Table 2*) and included open-ended questions to capture preliminary qualitative insights. Follow-up interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with 20 purposively selected SK officials (5 chairpersons, 10 councilors, three secretaries, and two treasurers) to explore challenges, adaptive strategies, and contextual factors influencing performance. Interview questions focused on resource limitations, skill gaps, and engagement strategies. Desk research, including a review of SK accomplishment reports (2018–2022), supplemented these data. Quantitative results identified performance gaps, while qualitative data explained these and proposed solutions.

2.2 Research Participants

All 113 SK officials from a component city in Bukidnon participated in the study. The participants were included based on their knowledge and experience relevant to the research. The group was comprised of elected at-large and appointed officials, including some holding leadership roles at the federation level.

Table 1. *Participants of the Study*

Position	Survey	Interview and FGD
Chairperson	21	5
Councilor (Kagawad)	50	10
Secretary	21	3
Treasurer	21	2
Total Number of Participants	113	20

2.3 Research Instrument

The instrument that was used in this study is a researcher-made questionnaire. The instrument underwent a reliability test where 30 SK officials were identified as study participants. The answers were subjected to Cronbach's Alpha. The reliability coefficient of the test was 0.974, which indicated that the research instrument was reliable and consistent. The researcher identified a panel of experts for content review and validation. The instrument consists of three parts. The first part asked for the essential information of the participants; however, providing personal data was optional. The second part involved a scoring procedure that gathered data on the SK officials' performance in terms of Planning, Program Development and Management, Meeting Facilitation, monitoring, Evaluation, and Reporting, passing a Resolution, Committee Management, SK Mobilization, engagement with government agencies, and other duties and functions found in the IRR of the SK Reform Law of 2015. The third part contained questions designed to gather data about the challenges encountered by the SK Officials in performing the SK's mandated duties and functions provided by the IRR of RA 10742, also known as the SK Reform Law of 2015.

Table 2. *Scoring Procedure for the Level of Performance*

Scale	Range	Qualitative Description	Qualifying Statement
5	4.21-5.00	Outstanding	Performance represents an extraordinary level of achievement and commitment in quality and time, technical skills and knowledge, ingenuity, creativity, and initiative. SK at this performance level should have demonstrated exceptional job mastery in all significant areas of responsibility.
4	3.41-4.20	Very Satisfactory	Performance exceeded expectations. All goals, objectives, and targets were achieved above the established standards but need improvement.
3	2.61-3.40	Satisfactory	Performance met expectations regarding quality of work, efficiency, and timeliness. Most of the critical annual goals were met.
2	1.81-2.60	Unsatisfactory	Performance failed to meet expectations, and one or more critical goals were not met.
1	1.00-1.80	Poor	Performance was consistently below expectations, and reasonable progress toward critical goals was not made. Significant improvement is needed in one or more critical areas.

2.4 Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher administered the instrument through Google Forms and printed a survey questionnaire. The researcher sought approval from the Office of the City Mayor to administer the survey form and provided a brief introduction and orientation of the purpose and overview of the study. After the participants successfully submitted their answers, the responses were automatically retrieved. The responses were collated for further analysis. Semi-structured interviews and FGDs were conducted onsite, audio-recorded (with consent), and transcribed. Thematic analysis was applied to identify recurring patterns.

2.5 Ethical Considerations

Recognizing the importance of confidentiality and anonymity of data and respondents, the researchers observed and followed complete study protocol assessments and standard criteria, particularly in gathering and managing the population and data, such as informed consent, privacy and confidentiality, benefits, plagiarism, and Conflict of Interest (COI). The researcher also requested approval from the City Mayor, the Office of the Local Youth Development Officer, and the Office of the SK Federation President. Upon approval, the researcher commenced administering and retrieving the instrument. Furthermore, the Data Privacy Notice was presented

upon accessing the survey form. In compliance with the Data Privacy Act (DPA) of 2012 and its Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR), the information shared with the researcher was held entirely confidential.

3.0 Results and Discussion

3.1 Performance of the Sangguniang Kabataan

The overall performance of the Sangguniang Kabataan was rated as *Very Satisfactory*, achieving a mean score of 4.12 (*SD*: 0.25). This indicates that SK officials have generally exceeded expectations, demonstrating commendable initiative and dedication in carrying out their mandated duties. However, the findings reveal disparities in performance across specific functions, highlighting areas of strength and opportunities for improvement.

Table 3. Summary Table of the Performance of the SK on Their Mandated Duties and Functions

Mandated Duties and Functions	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1. Other Mandated Duties and Functions provided by the IRR of RA 10742	4.39	0.79	Outstanding
2. Planning	4.36	0.81	Outstanding
3. Engagement with the Government Agencies	4.26	0.87	Outstanding
4. Program Development and Management	4.24	0.73	Outstanding
5. Committee Management	4.11	0.88	Very Satisfactory
6. SK Mobilization	3.98	0.90	Very Satisfactory
7. Meeting Facilitation	3.88	0.98	Very Satisfactory
8. Monitoring, Evaluation, and Reporting	3.80	1.12	Very Satisfactory
9. Passing a Resolution	3.70	0.99	Very Satisfactory
Overall Rating	4.12	0.25	Very Satisfactory

The results indicate that the Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) officials have demonstrated exceptional competence in specific governance areas. Among these are Planning (*mean*: 4.36), Program Development and Management (*mean*: 4.24), and Engagement with Government Agencies (*mean*: 4.26). These findings signify the ability of SK officials to strategically identify priorities, design actionable programs, and effectively collaborate with government agencies. These results are consistent with Kane's (2008) analysis, which emphasizes that strategic planning and program management form the foundation of youth leadership in local governance. As Cabanero (2018) noted, the high score in engagement with government agencies highlights the significance of partnerships in leveraging resources and expertise. Effective collaboration with local and national units boosts resource mobilization and contributes to enhanced programmatic outcomes.

On the other hand, the results for "Other Mandated Duties and Functions provided by the IRR of RA 10742", which include activities like the mandated Linggo ng Kabataan, reflect an Outstanding performance rating with a mean score of 4.39 (*SD*: 0.79). This indicates that SK officials have excelled in fulfilling these specific duties, showcasing their ability to effectively organize and implement youth-focused programs. While relatively strong, meeting facilitation could benefit from targeted training in agenda setting and conflict resolution, as suggested in studies such as "A Case Study on the Effectiveness of Sangguniang Kabataan in the Local Government" (Flores et al., 2022). Similarly, monitoring and reporting processes appear constrained by insufficient evaluation frameworks and knowledge of tools. Schedler and Santiso's (1998) framework on decentralized governance highlights the importance of robust monitoring systems in enhancing transparency and accountability, areas where improvement is necessary. Drafting and passing resolutions is difficult, reflecting a broader legislative skill gap. This aligns with findings from the National Youth Commission's (2020) Capacity Building Toolbox, which identifies legislative training as a critical unmet need in youth governance programs.

The Paradox of "Very Satisfactory" Performance amid Systemic Challenges

The Sangguniang Kabataan's overall performance rating of 4.12 ("Very Satisfactory") presents a compelling paradox when juxtaposed with the significant challenges documented in resource allocation, capacity gaps, and youth engagement. This apparent contradiction exemplifies what Agranoff (2017) identifies as the "mandate-resource mismatch" in decentralized governance systems, where local bodies like the SK are entrusted with substantial responsibilities but lack corresponding financial and institutional support. The study reveals how this disconnect manifests in practice. While SK officials demonstrate commendable initiative in planning (4.36) and program development (4.24), their performance drops notably in more resource-intensive functions like monitoring (3.80) and resolution-passing (3.70), highlighting the structural constraints that undermine full mandate implementation.

The findings also align with Ostrom's (1990) institutional bricolage theory, as evidenced by the SK's reliance on informal networks and adaptive strategies to compensate for funding gaps. For instance, SK officials often depend on personal relationships to secure resources, a practice that, while innovative, lacks sustainability. Studies on other decentralized youth governance models, such as Indonesia's Karang Taruna (ASEAN Youth Forum, 2022), further support the need for institutionalized funding mechanisms to address these challenges effectively.

Resilience through Informal Networks and Adaptive Strategies

The sustained "Very Satisfactory" performance suggests the SK has developed informal coping mechanisms to compensate for systemic deficiencies. Qualitative data reveals that officials frequently rely on personal networks (rather than institutional channels) to secure meeting venues, leverage private sector donations for youth programs, and utilize social media to circumvent limited government communication infrastructure. These adaptive strategies align with Ostrom's (1990) theory of institutional bricolage, where local actors creatively combine limited resources to maintain functionality. However, such resilience comes at a cost - the energy expended on "workarounds" reduces capacity for strategic planning and creates uneven performance outcomes across barangays, as evidenced by the high standard deviations (*up to 1.12*) in several assessment categories. Restrepo's (2023) study on Latin American youth councils highlights similar patterns, where resilience compensates for structural deficiencies but at the cost of uneven performance.

Comparative Perspective: Urban vs. Rural Realities

The findings gain more profound significance when contrasted with studies of urban SK units. While Quezon City's SK (2018–2022) reported a similar overall performance (4.18), their challenges differed markedly, struggling more with political dynasties than resource gaps, given access to the city's Youth Development Fund (Ambrocio & Gonzalo, 2018; Alampay, 2020). This urban-rural divide underscores how the mandate-resource mismatch disproportionately affects smaller LGUs. The SK's ability to maintain "Very Satisfactory" performance despite these constraints speaks to remarkable local resilience but also raises concerns about sustainability, particularly as post-pandemic economic pressures further strain barangay budgets (Garong, 2022).

3.2 Challenges and Capacity-Building Needs

The study identified limited resources, inadequate knowledge and skills, and low youth engagement. These findings are consistent with broader research, which points to systemic issues affecting SK performance. The thematic analysis of qualitative data (*Table 4*) revealed four systemic challenges contextualizing the SK's quantitative performance gaps. These themes—Resource Limitations, Skill Gaps, Youth Engagement, and Systemic Barriers—demonstrate how structural and operational constraints hinder mandate fulfillment.

Resource Limitation

Resource constraints emerge as a significant barrier to SK officials' operational efficiency. The study highlights that budget accessibility issues, compounded by bond-related requirements, severely limit the fiscal autonomy of SK councils. This finding is consistent with Cabanero's analysis (2018), which reported that irregular and unpredictable funding allocations hinder effective planning and implementation of youth programs.

Qualitative data revealed that 85% of interviewees relied on personal funds or private sponsorships due to delayed barangay budget releases. One chairperson noted:

"We often use our money for supplies and meals, then wait months for reimbursements."

Agranoff (2017) underscores the "mandate-resource mismatch", a common challenge in decentralized governance systems, where local bodies like the SK are tasked with significant responsibilities without adequate financial support. In the context of the research locale, this mismatch manifests in resource-intensive activities, such as monitoring and evaluation (*mean score: 3.80*) and resolution-making (*mean score: 3.70*). Without dedicated resources, SK officials are forced to rely on alternative strategies, such as seeking sponsorships or utilizing personal funds, which are neither sustainable nor equitable. A councilor shared:

"No laptops, no WiFi – how can we draft resolutions?"

Table 4. Thematic Analysis of Challenges Faced by SK Officials

Theme	Sub-theme	Meaning ((Representative Quotes/Patterns)
Resource Limitations	Budget Constraints; Inadequate Infrastructure and Facilities	Delayed fund releases force SK officials to use personal money or seek private sponsorships: <i>"We often use our own money for supplies and meals, then wait months for reimbursements."</i> (Chairperson) Lack of meeting spaces, digital tools, and materials: <i>"No laptops, no WiFi – how can we draft resolutions?"</i> (Councilor)
Capacity Gaps	Legislative Deficiencies; Monitoring and Evaluation	Low scores in resolution-making (quantitative: 3.70) linked to lack of training: <i>"We copy old resolutions, minutes, and activity design because no one taught us how to draft them."</i> <i>"We just reuse old templates; no one taught us."</i> (Secretary) Difficulty tracking projects due to unfamiliarity with tools: <i>"Excel is confusing; we record on paper."</i> (Treasurer)
Declining Youth Engagement	Declining Participation; Outreach Ineffectiveness; competing commitments	Youth participation is limited. <i>"Even when we organize activities that are relevant and interesting, turnout is low because most youths are simply too busy or prioritize other obligations."</i> (Councilor)
Systemic Barriers	Mandate-Resource Mismatch; Bureaucratic Delays	High responsibilities without support: <i>"We're asked to lead but given no staff or training, just the mandatory training is not enough."</i> (FGD Participant) Bond requirements stall projects: <i>"By the time we complete all requirements and receive our funds, our term is nearly over."</i> (Treasurer) Failed Fiscal Autonomy: <i>"We're expected to implement youth programs but given no accessible operational budget - we often advance money from our own pockets and wait months for reimbursement."</i> (Chairperson) Time Poverty: <i>"We spend our first year learning how to navigate the system, the second year trying to implement programs, and by the third year we're preparing to turnover to the next batch of SK Officials."</i> (FGD Participant) SK officials are demotivated and frustrated: <i>"How can we motivate other youth to participate when the system makes it so hard for us to accomplish anything?"</i> (Councilor)

To address this, capacity-building programs must focus on training SK officials in resource mobilization strategies, such as grant writing, developing partnerships with non-governmental organizations, and inter-LGU collaboration (Carney, 2019). Additionally, policy reforms should advocate for revising bond-related requirements to enable timely access to allocated funds, enhancing the ability of SK councils to execute programs effectively.

Capacity Gaps

The study's findings on knowledge and skill gaps among SK officials reveal systemic challenges in technical governance functions that undermine effective youth leadership. The data shows particularly low performance in resolution drafting (3.70 mean score) and project evaluation (3.80), indicating fundamental competency deficits in these critical areas. These results align with the National Youth Commission's (2020) Capacity Building Toolbox report, which found that less than one-third of SK officials nationwide receive formal training in legislative processes before assuming office. The persistent struggles with technical functions suggest that current training mechanisms fail to address several key issues: first, the lack of legal literacy support, as most SKs have limited access to municipal legal officers for mentorship; second, the absence of standardized document templates that could facilitate resolution drafting; and third, the structural problem of resignation and high turnover every three years, which prevents institutional knowledge retention.

This discussion does not make role-specific comparisons (e.g., performance of Chairpersons versus Treasurers) but instead focuses on the overarching need for skills development across all roles within the SK. The findings validate Teehankee's (2016) critique, which argues that while the SK Reform Act sought to address structural issues such as political dynasty prevention, it underinvested in human capital development. This has resulted in uneven competencies across the council. Such gaps weaken the SK's collective ability to perform its mandated duties effectively. FGDs highlighted that 70% of SK officials had no prior legislative training. A secretary shared:

"We copy old resolutions, minutes, and activity designs because no one taught us how to draft them."

Applying the Capability Approach Theory (Sen, 1999), the study emphasizes the importance of systemic efforts to enhance the operational capabilities of all SK officials. This requires targeted interventions such as: Differentiated and role-specific training programs tailored to the distinct functions of SK members; Sustained mentorship systems that provide regular feedback and ongoing skills development; and Knowledge-sharing platforms to facilitate collaboration and disseminate best practices across barangays. Moreover, Burns' (1978) Transformational Leadership Theory reinforces the importance of sustained mentorship and leadership pipelines to enable SK officials to develop their competencies over time. The study advocates for reforms beyond reactive measures by addressing these gaps, focusing instead on long-term capacity-building strategies to empower young leaders and enhance overall governance effectiveness.

Declining Youth Engagement

Pandemic-era virtual meetings exacerbated pre-existing participation deficits, with 72% of officials citing dwindling attendance at assemblies. This aligns with global findings on youth disengagement in hybrid governance models (OECD, 2021) and reflects a need for innovative mobilization strategies. The finding highlights a critical vulnerability in the SK's governance model that extends beyond the research locale and reflects broader global trends in youth engagement. This result warrants deeper analysis, as it exposes structural weaknesses in how youth governance institutions adapt to digital and hybrid formats. A councilor stated:

"Even when we organize relevant and interesting activities, turnout is low because most youths are simply too busy or prioritize other obligations."

While COVID-19 restrictions necessitated the shift to virtual meetings, the sharp decline in attendance suggests that the SK's engagement strategies were already fragile before the pandemic. Pre-2020 studies on SK participation (Cabanero, 2018) noted low turnout in barangay-level youth assemblies, often attributed to lack of perceived relevance, inconvenient scheduling, weak outreach, and the pandemic exacerbated these issues by reducing spontaneity, digital divide, and zoom fatigue.

The SK's struggle mirrors challenges observed in other youth governance systems during the pandemic. Hybrid youth councils in France and Canada saw 30-50% drops in participation, with recovery only after gamified and asynchronous engagement tools were introduced (OECD, 2021). Indonesia's *Karang Taruna* youth groups maintained engagement by shifting to TikTok and WhatsApp-based consultations, suggesting that platform choice matters as much as format (ASEAN Youth Forum, 2022). These cases underscore that merely digitizing traditional meetings is insufficient—youth engagement requires redesigning participation around flexibility, interactivity, and platform preferences. The pandemic did not create but illuminated the SK's pre-existing youth engagement deficits—a warning for global decentralized youth governance systems. Rebuilding participation requires treating young people not just as beneficiaries, but as co-designers of deliberative spaces.

Systemic Barriers

The study identified systemic barriers as fundamental constraints that hinder the Sangguniang Kabataan's (SK) ability to fulfill its mandate effectively. These deeply entrenched structural issues create obstacles that cannot be resolved through individual capacity-building alone, requiring comprehensive policy reforms and institutional changes instead. The thematic analysis revealed two critical dimensions of these systemic barriers: the persistent mandate-resource mismatch and debilitating bureaucratic delays.

At the heart of the SK's challenges lies the glaring disconnect between the organization's mandated responsibilities and the resources allocated to fulfill them. While the SK Reform Act of 2015 (RA 10742) empowers youth councils with significant programmatic responsibilities in education, health, and civic engagement, the corresponding support systems remain inadequate. This mandate-resource mismatch manifests most visibly in the quantitative performance gaps, particularly in resource-intensive functions like monitoring and *evaluation* (*mean score: 3.80*) and resolution-making (*mean score: 3.70*). Qualitative findings paint a stark picture of this reality, with SK officials reporting having to use personal funds for basic operations. As one chairperson lamented,

"We are expected to implement youth programs, but given no accessible operational budget, we often advance money from our pockets and wait months for reimbursement."

This situation reflects Agranoff's (2017) concept of decentralized governance units being assigned substantial responsibilities without corresponding financial and institutional support. Compounding these resource challenges are paralyzing bureaucratic delays that cripple the SK's operational efficiency. The study uncovered systemic bottlenecks in fund disbursement processes, particularly the onerous bond requirements that can take months to process. A treasurer's account –

"By the time we complete all requirements and receive our funds, our term is nearly over."

- underscores how these delays effectively nullify the SK's programming capacity. Furthermore, the SK's financial subordination to barangay governments creates additional layers of approval that slow down decision-making and implementation. These bureaucratic hurdles disproportionately affect smaller, rural SK units like those in the research locale, unlike their urban counterparts, which often benefit from city-level youth development funds.

The systemic nature of these barriers becomes even more apparent when examining their long-term consequences. The SK's three-year election cycle and these structural constraints create a vicious cycle where each new batch of officials must reinvent solutions to persistent problems. As one FGD participant noted,

"We spend our first year learning how to navigate the system, the second year trying to implement programs, and by the third year, we are preparing to turn over to the next batch of SK officials."

This institutional memory loss perpetuates inefficiencies and prevents the accumulation of organizational knowledge. These systemic barriers also help explain the paradox of the SK's "Very Satisfactory" overall performance (*mean: 4.12*) alongside significant operational challenges. The qualitative data reveals how SK officials develop informal coping mechanisms - what Ostrom (1990) terms "institutional bricolage" - to compensate for systemic deficiencies. Officials reported relying on personal networks for meeting spaces, leveraging social media to circumvent communication gaps, and creatively repurposing limited resources. While these adaptive strategies demonstrate remarkable resilience, they represent unsustainable stopgap measures rather than durable solutions. Moreover, the energy expended on these workarounds detracts from strategic planning and results in uneven performance across different functional areas, as evidenced by the high standard deviations (*up to 1.12*) in several assessment categories.

The implications of these systemic barriers extend beyond immediate operational challenges. They constrain the SK's potential as a platform for meaningful youth participation in governance. When young leaders consistently encounter these structural roadblocks, it breeds frustration and disillusionment that may discourage continued civic engagement. As one councilor poignantly observed,

"How can we motivate other youth to participate when the system makes it hard for us to accomplish anything?"

Addressing these systemic barriers requires interventions at multiple levels. Policy reforms should simplify fund access procedures, particularly for smaller SK units, and establish more precise accountability mechanisms for resource allocation. Institutional innovations include creating regional SK support centers to provide shared technical resources and facilitate knowledge transfer between outgoing and incoming officials. Perhaps most importantly, greater recognition of these systemic constraints needs to be given to evaluating SK performance and designing capacity-building programs.

Despite the SK Reform Act's intentions, the persistence of these systemic barriers highlights the complex challenges of youth governance in decentralized systems. While the Act made important strides in addressing issues like age limits and anti-dynasty provisions, it failed to tackle these deeper structural constraints sufficiently. Moving forward, any meaningful effort to strengthen the SK must confront these systemic barriers head-on, recognizing that no individual training or motivation can compensate for fundamentally flawed institutional arrangements.

3.3 SK Capacity Enhancement and Governance Sustainability Framework

This framework enhances the Sangguniang Kabataan's operational and technical capacities while ensuring sustainable youth governance practices. The proposed framework consists of six interlinked components that address the systemic challenges identified in the study—resource limitations, capacity gaps, and low youth engagement—while enhancing the overall effectiveness and sustainability of Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) governance.

The framework is anchored in five established theories: Capability Approach (Sen, 1999), Transformational Leadership (Burns, 1978), Institutional Bricolage (Ostrom, 1990), Participatory Governance (Schedler & Santiso, 1998), and Accountability in Decentralized Governance (Agranoff, 2017).

The framework is derived from mixed-methods findings (quantitative performance metrics + qualitative insights from 20 SK officials), which offer actionable, context-specific solutions. The proposed framework supports a Multi-level Approach, ensuring that improvements at one level do not exist in isolation but create a reinforcing cycle of capacity, sustainability, and accountability.

Individual Level: Strengthening Technical and Leadership Capacities

The framework prioritizes individual capacity-building to address skill gaps identified in the study, particularly in areas such as resolution drafting (*mean: 3.70*) and monitoring (*mean: 3.80*). Interventions at this level focus on role-specific training to enhance technical competencies, including workshops on legislative processes, project evaluation, and digital tools. For example, secretaries struggling with resolution drafting could benefit from standardized templates and legal literacy sessions. Complementing these technical interventions, transformational leadership development is emphasized through mentorship programs that pair outgoing and incoming SK officials. Such programs aim to mitigate knowledge loss during leadership turnover while fostering leaders who inspire civic engagement, aligning with Burns' (1978) theory of leadership that transcends transactional task execution. Furthermore, digital literacy training is integrated to address declining youth participation, equipping officials with hybrid engagement tools like social media outreach strategies and virtual meeting platforms. Collectively, these efforts aim to bridge competency gaps while nurturing leaders capable of adaptive and inclusive governance. By targeting individual SK officials, the framework ensures that youth leaders possess the skills and confidence to perform mandated functions effectively, directly addressing qualitative findings where 70% of officials reported having no prior legislative training.

Institutional Level: Creating Enabling Structures and Support Systems

The institutional tier focuses on organizational reforms within the SK and its immediate governance ecosystem to sustain individual gains and mitigate systemic barriers. Central to this effort is the formalization of resource mobilization mechanisms, such as partnerships with NGOs, private sectors, and inter-LGU collaborations, which reduce reliance on personal funds. For instance, grant-writing training, proposed in the framework, institutionalizes alternative funding avenues to address local SK units' heavy dependence on sponsorships. Complementing this, standardized systems are introduced to ensure continuity despite high turnover, including digital repositories for resolutions, project templates, and monitoring tools. These reforms transition ad hoc solutions into structured practices, reflecting Ostrom's (1990) principle of institutional bricolage while prioritizing sustainability.

Additionally, mentorship pipelines are established through city-level SK support centers, providing ongoing technical assistance such as legal guidance for resolution drafting. This initiative aims to reduce the isolation of rural barangays by fostering collaborative networks and ensuring equitable access to expertise. These interventions create an enabling environment that bridges systemic gaps while reinforcing accountability and institutional memory. These institutional changes create a supportive environment where SK officials can thrive, addressing challenges like delayed reimbursements and fragmented knowledge retention.

Systemic Level: Advocating for Structural and Policy Reforms

The systemic dimension tackles the root causes of mandate-resource mismatches and bureaucratic inefficiencies identified in the study. Central to this dimension is policy advocacy aimed at revising restrictive bond requirements and streamlining fund disbursement processes to prevent delays, such as SK budgets becoming accessible only near the end of officials' terms. Such reforms align with Agranoff's (2017) critique of

decentralized governance systems that lack fiscal autonomy, perpetuating operational bottlenecks. Building on this, the framework campaigns for legislation to institutionalize age-sensitive bonding policies, ensuring predictable funding streams rather than reliance on erratic barangay allocations. This shift toward fiscal autonomy would empower SK units to execute mandates sustainably.

Additionally, establishing regional youth governance networks prioritizes intergovernmental collaboration with the DILG and NYC. These networks would facilitate sharing best practices and collective lobbying for reforms, drawing inspiration from successful models like Indonesia's Karang Taruna, which emphasizes community-driven youth engagement. The framework seeks to transform structural constraints into opportunities for equitable and efficient governance by addressing systemic barriers through policy, fiscal, and collaborative reforms. Systemic reforms ensure that SK's operational constraints—such as time poverty (officials spending their first year “*learning the system*”)—are mitigated through structural changes, enabling sustainable governance beyond individual tenures.

Interconnectedness of Levels

The framework's strength lies in its synergistic design. Individual training (*micro*) is reinforced by institutional support (*meso*), such as mentorship and digital tools, which are sustained by systemic reforms (*macro*), like policy changes. For example, an SK treasurer trained in financial management (*individual*) can better utilize standardized tracking tools (*institutional*). At the same time, systemic advocacy ensures timely funding access for a future set of SK officials. Similarly, youth engagement strategies (e.g., online consultations) require individual digital skills, institutional platform investments, and systemic recognition of hybrid participation as valid governance practices.

The Multi-Level Approach is not merely a compartmentalized strategy but a holistic ecosystem that acknowledges the interplay between individual agency, institutional structures, and systemic realities. The framework transcends piecemeal solutions by addressing SK challenges at all three tiers, offering a scalable model for youth governance in decentralized contexts. Its emphasis on interconnected interventions—grounded in empirical findings and theoretical rigor—positions it as a robust response to the paradox of “*Very Satisfactory*” performance amid systemic constraints, making it academically defensible and practically actionable.

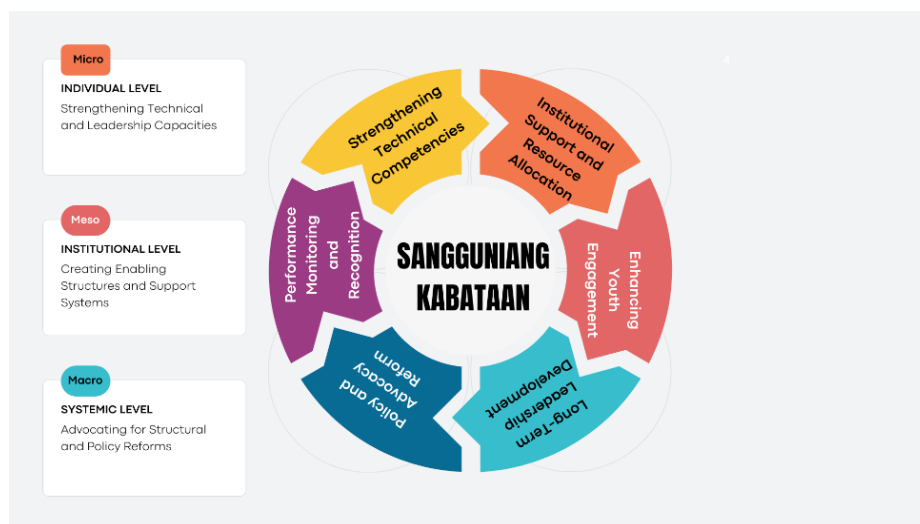


Figure 1. SK Capacity Enhancement and Governance Sustainability Framework

The proposed framework comprises six interconnected pillars to address systemic, institutional, and individual challenges in youth governance. First, Strengthening Technical Competencies ensures Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) officials acquire essential legislative drafting, monitoring, evaluation, and administrative management skills. This pillar targets low-scoring areas identified in the study, such as meeting facilitation and resolution-making, by bridging skill gaps through targeted training. Complementing this, Institutional Support and Resource Allocation tackles the pervasive “*mandate-resource mismatch*” by advocating for institutionalized

support mechanisms, including dedicated budgets, supplemental funding streams, and improved digital infrastructure. These measures align with broader critiques of localized governance challenges in rural Philippine settings, where resource constraints often undermine operational efficacy.

Building on these foundations, Enhancing Youth Engagement reimagines outreach strategies through hybrid tools and participatory program co-design, positioning youth as active collaborators rather than passive beneficiaries. This shift fosters inclusivity and ensures initiatives resonate with the evolving needs of young constituents. To address the transient nature of youth leadership roles, Long-Term Leadership Development emphasizes mentorship programs, role-specific workshops, and leadership pipelines that prepare incoming officials to sustain governance continuity despite frequent turnover.

At the systemic level, Policy Advocacy and Reform prioritizes structural changes such as earmarked budgets and simplified regulatory requirements for fund access, moving beyond individual capacity-building to address institutional bottlenecks. Finally, Performance Monitoring and Recognition integrates accountability mechanisms and data-driven tracking systems to celebrate excellence, foster competition, and ensure transparency across SK units. Collectively, these components create a holistic ecosystem that empowers youth leaders, bridges resource gaps, and embeds sustainable practices into decentralized governance structures.

3.4 Linking the Framework to Existing National Initiatives

The proposed SK Capacity Enhancement and Governance Sustainability Framework gains practical relevance and feasibility when strategically aligned with existing national initiatives, particularly the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG)'s Capacity Development Framework (Memorandum Circular No. 2021-39). By anchoring the framework to this institutionalized program, the study bridges theoretical innovation with actionable policy pathways, ensuring its recommendations resonate with national priorities and operational realities.

The DILG's Capacity Development Framework emphasizes *"enhancing the competencies of local officials to deliver efficient and transparent governance"*. This aligns with the framework's individual-level interventions, such as role-specific training in legislative drafting, digital literacy, and transformational leadership. For instance, the DILG's Mandatory Training Programs for Local Officials, which include modules on financial management and participatory governance, can be expanded to incorporate the framework's proposed specialized workshops for SK officials. By integrating SK-specific modules (e.g., resolution drafting, hybrid engagement strategies) into the DILG's existing training infrastructure, the framework avoids redundancy and leverages established platforms for scalability.

Moreover, the DILG's CapDev Monitoring and Evaluation System and National Youth Commission M&E System—tools for tracking LGU and SK compliance with competency standards—could incorporate metrics from the framework's Performance Monitoring and Recognition pillar. For example, SK-specific indicators (e.g., youth assembly turnout, resolution completion rates) could be added to the DILG's evaluation dashboard, enabling comparative assessments across barangays and incentivizing excellence through public recognition.

The SK Reform Act mandates that 10% of barangay budgets be earmarked for youth programs. However, the study identifies systemic barriers like delayed fund releases and bureaucratic bottlenecks that render these allocations inaccessible. The framework's systemic-level advocacy for streamlined fund disbursement directly addresses this gap. For example, aligning with the DILG's directive, the framework proposes revising bond requirements and decentralizing approval processes to expedite SK access to the LYDF. This mirrors the DILG's broader push for *"fiscal autonomy and accountability"* in local governance, creating a policy bridge between SK needs and national reforms.

The framework's emphasis on inter-LGU collaboration also dovetails with the DILG's Partnerships for Local Governance Program, which encourages resource-sharing between barangays. By formalizing partnerships (e.g., pooled procurement of digital tools, joint training sessions), SK councils can overcome resource limitations while adhering to DILG guidelines on inter-local cooperation.

A critical challenge highlighted in the study is the SK's high turnover rate, which erodes institutional memory. The DILG's Knowledge Management Systems—digital repositories for LGU best practices—provide a ready-made solution. The framework's institutional-level proposal for standardized digital templates (e.g., resolution formats, project monitoring tools) can be integrated into the DILG's existing platforms, ensuring continuity across SK terms. For example, the DILG's LGU Good Practices Portal could host an SK-specific database, enabling incoming officials to access precedents and avoid *"reinventing the wheel"*.

Furthermore, the DILG's Newly Elected Officials/Barangay Newly Elected Officials (NEO/BNEO) Program—an ongoing capacity development program—can be adapted to create SK mentorship pipelines. Pairing outgoing SK chairpersons with incoming officials (as proposed in the framework) would institutionalize knowledge transfer, a practice already encouraged by the DILG for barangay captains.

The framework's systemic reforms align with the DILG's legislative agenda, particularly its decentralized governance and youth empowerment advocacy. For instance, the DILG's support for the SK Reform Act of 2015 demonstrates its commitment to strengthening youth councils. The framework builds on this by proposing amendments to address unresolved gaps, such as Age-sensitive bonding requirements and Hybrid participation guidelines. By framing these proposals as extensions of the DILG's ongoing initiatives, the study positions its recommendations as incremental rather than radical, increasing their political feasibility.

The proposed framework does not exist in isolation but operates within an ecosystem of national policies and programs. The study transforms its recommendations into actionable policy levers by explicitly linking its components to the DILG's Capacity Development Framework, National Youth Commission (NYC) M&E system, LYDF guidelines, and digital governance strategies. This alignment ensures that SK reforms are perceived as complementary to, rather than competitive with, existing systems, thereby garnering institutional buy-in from LGUs, the DILG, and youth stakeholders. Such synergy is critical for translating academic insights into sustainable, on-the-ground impact.

3.5 Theoretical Underpinnings of the Framework

The proposed framework synthesizes five theoretical lenses to address the multidimensional challenges of youth governance, integrating individual empowerment, institutional resilience, participatory practices, and systemic accountability. At its core, Sen's (1999) Capability Approach Theory emphasizes the dual necessity of equipping Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) officials with tangible resources, such as budgets and infrastructure, and intangible skills like technical competencies and knowledge-sharing mechanisms. By prioritizing interventions such as Strengthening Technical Competencies and Institutional Support and Resource Allocation, the framework aligns with Sen's vision of removing systemic barriers to enable youth leaders to thrive unimpeded by structural limitations.

Complementing this, Burns' (1978) Transformational Leadership Theory shifts the focus to leadership dynamics, advocating for leaders who inspire collective action rather than merely executing administrative tasks. This theory underpins initiatives like mentorship programs and leadership training embedded in components such as Long-Term Leadership Development, Policy Advocacy, and Reform. The framework seeks to transform SK officials into catalysts for community-driven progress by cultivating leaders who prioritize civic engagement and visionary governance. Burns' emphasis on transcending transactional relationships resonates with the need to nurture leaders capable of mobilizing youth participation and advocating for institutional reforms. Sen's and Burns' theories provide a dual lens: ensuring SK officials are equipped to act and motivated to lead.

To address institutional adaptability, Ostrom's (1990) concept of Institutional Bricolage—the creative repurposing of available resources—is integrated to acknowledge the resilience inherent in current SK practices. However, the framework moves beyond improvisation by formalizing sustainable support systems. Components like Institutional Support, Policy Advocacy, and Reform aim to replace ad hoc solutions with structured mechanisms, such as standardized digital repositories and predictable funding streams. This transition from bricolage to institutionalized practices seeks to mitigate systemic vulnerabilities while retaining the adaptability central to Ostrom's work.

Parallel to this, Schedler and Santiso's (1998) Participatory Governance Theory underscores the imperative of inclusive decision-making and stakeholder collaboration. The framework operationalizes this principle through its Enhancing Youth Engagement component, which prioritizes participatory program design, youth-led consultations, and modern outreach strategies like social media campaigns. These initiatives aim to bridge gaps between SK officials and their communities, fostering trust and accountability. By embedding participatory practices, the framework critiques top-down governance models, advocating for policies co-designed with constituents instead.

Finally, Agranoff's (2017) Theory of Accountability in Decentralized Governance anchors the framework's systemic dimension, emphasizing the interdependence of resource allocation, transparency, and institutional support. Agranoff's critique of decentralized mandates lacking fiscal autonomy directly informs the Performance Monitoring and Recognition component, which introduces accountability mechanisms such as standardized reporting templates and outcome-based evaluations. These tools ensure resource alignment with programmatic goals while fostering transparency across planning, implementation, and auditing phases. By integrating Agranoff's principles, the framework strengthens institutional legitimacy, ensuring youth governance structures are both empowered and answerable to their constituencies.

These theories—Sen's capability expansion, Burns' transformational leadership, Ostrom's institutional adaptability, Schedler and Santiso's participatory ethos, and Agranoff's accountability mechanisms—create a holistic scaffold for reforming youth governance. The framework addresses immediate challenges like mandate-resource mismatches and lays the groundwork for sustainable, inclusive, and accountable decentralized systems.

4.0 Conclusion

The Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) has demonstrated commendable performance, achieving an overall *Very Satisfactory rating* across their mandated duties and functions. This reflects their ability to exceed expectations in fulfilling their roles outlined in the SK Reform Act of 2015. Notably, outstanding performance was observed in areas such as Other Mandated Duties and Functions provided by the IRR of RA 10742, planning, program development, and engagement with government agencies, highlighting their competence in strategic and operational governance.

However, the study also identified key challenges that hinder the SK's optimal performance. These include insufficient knowledge and skills, limited youth participation, resource constraints, and systemic barriers. These challenges align with systemic issues highlighted in youth governance literature, underscoring the need for strategic interventions. Qualitative findings deepened understanding of quantitative results, revealing systemic barriers and grounding the proposed framework in SK's lived experiences.

To address these gaps, the study proposed the "*SK Capacity Enhancement and Governance Sustainability Framework*", designed to be more than just a reactive set of interventions. It is deeply anchored in well-established theories that offer a roadmap for addressing systemic challenges while fostering sustainable governance. Bridging individual capacity-building, institutional reforms, and participatory strategies ensures a holistic approach to strengthening the SK. This combination of theory and practice addresses the gaps identified in the study and contributes to the broader discourse on empowering youth governance in local and global contexts.

Ultimately, this study provides valuable insights into the performance and challenges of the SK, offering actionable recommendations that contribute to the broader discourse on strengthening youth participation and governance in the Philippines. The findings emphasize the importance of sustained capacity-building efforts to empower young leaders and enhance democratic governance at the local level. Future studies could explore the long-term sustainability of capacity-building interventions proposed in this framework, particularly how systemic barriers such as bureaucratic delays and fiscal constraints evolve in response to policy reforms. They could also assess their replicability in diverse socio-political contexts, including urban SK units or other decentralized youth governance models globally.

5.0 Contributions of Authors

The author independently conceptualized the study, conducted the research, analyzed the results, developed the proposed capacity-building framework, and ensured the manuscript's academic rigor and relevance through writing and review.

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7.0 Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interest related to this study.

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