

## Exploring the Challenges and Coping Strategies of the Sangguniang Kabataan in Organizing Youth Advocacies in Local Governance

### Menjelajahi Tantangan dan Strategi Penanganan Sangguniang Kabataan dalam Mengorganisasi Advokasi Pemuda dalam Pemerintahan Lokal

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#### Abstract

This qualitative case study examines the challenges and coping strategies employed by Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) Chairpersons in organizing youth advocacy initiatives within the context of local governance in Pagadian City, Philippines. Grounded in Empowerment Theory, the study emphasizes youth empowerment through active participation, resource access, and autonomy in decision-making. Data were collected via semi-structured interviews, field observations, and document analysis involving eight elected SK Chairpersons. The findings reveal that SK leaders encounter systemic and operational challenges, including low youth participation due to disinterest in formal assemblies and advocacy events, limited financial resources that impede project implementation, and minimal support from barangay councils, which negatively affects coordination and morale. Attendance at assemblies and activities is typically recorded using manual systems, as digital attendance tools are either unavailable or not widely utilized among SK councils in the region. In response to these challenges, SK officials employ various coping strategies, such as forming partnerships with local organizations and NGOs, leveraging social media creatively, incorporating gamified activities, and integrating advocacy initiatives into popular youth events, such as sports tournaments. These strategies demonstrate the adaptability and resilience of young leaders navigating the complexities of local governance. The study offers valuable insights for strengthening policy frameworks and support systems for youth councils, thereby promoting more inclusive and participatory community development.

**Keywords:** sangguniang kabataan; youth advocacy; local governance; empowerment theory; coping strategies.

#### Abstrak

Studi kasus kualitatif ini menganalisis tantangan dan strategi penanggulangan yang diterapkan oleh Ketua Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) dalam mengorganisir inisiatif advokasi pemuda dalam konteks pemerintahan lokal di Kota Pagadian, Filipina. Berdasarkan pada Teori Pemberdayaan, penelitian ini menekankan pemberdayaan

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pemuda melalui partisipasi aktif, akses terhadap sumber daya, dan otonomi dalam pengambilan keputusan. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur, observasi lapangan, dan analisis dokumen yang melibatkan delapan Ketua SK terpilih. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa para pemimpin SK menghadapi tantangan sistemik dan operasional, termasuk rendahnya partisipasi pemuda akibat ketidaktertarikan terhadap pertemuan formal dan kegiatan advokasi, keterbatasan sumber daya keuangan yang menghambat pelaksanaan proyek, serta dukungan yang minimal dari dewan barangay yang berdampak negatif terhadap koordinasi dan semangat kerja. Kehadiran dalam pertemuan dan kegiatan umumnya dicatat menggunakan sistem manual, karena alat presensi digital tidak tersedia atau tidak digunakan secara luas di kalangan dewan SK di wilayah tersebut. Sebagai respons terhadap berbagai tantangan ini, pejabat SK menerapkan berbagai strategi penanggulangan, seperti menjalin kemitraan dengan organisasi lokal dan LSM, memanfaatkan media sosial secara kreatif, mengintegrasikan aktivitas berbasis permainan (gamifikasi), dan menggabungkan inisiatif advokasi ke dalam acara pemuda yang populer, seperti turnamen olahraga. Strategi-strategi ini menunjukkan kemampuan beradaptasi dan ketangguhan para pemimpin muda dalam menghadapi kompleksitas pemerintahan lokal. Penelitian ini memberikan wawasan berharga untuk memperkuat kerangka kebijakan dan sistem dukungan bagi dewan pemuda, dengan tujuan mendorong pembangunan komunitas yang lebih inklusif dan partisipatif.

**Kata kunci:** sangguniang kabataan; advokasi pemuda; pemerintahan lokal; teori pemberdayaan; strategi penanggulangan.

## Introduction

Youth participation in governance is increasingly recognized as a crucial element of democratic processes and sustainable development. International organizations such as UNESCO (2021) and UNICEF (2024) consistently advocate for the inclusion of youth in decision-making, emphasizing that young people bring unique perspectives, creative solutions, and dynamic approaches to addressing community challenges. This recognition stems from the understanding that youth are not merely the recipients of future development efforts but are active agents capable of shaping their communities and influencing policy outcomes. Accordingly, it is essential to establish mechanisms and opportunities that enable youth to engage meaningfully in governance and contribute to decision-making at all levels.

In the Philippine context, this global advocacy is realized through the institutionalization of the Sangguniang Kabataan (SK), a youth council established under Republic Act No. 7160, also known as the Local Government Code of 1991. This legislative milestone was a significant step in recognizing the role of youth in local

governance, creating a formal platform for youth representation and participation at the grassroots level. The creation of the SK aimed to provide young Filipinos with an opportunity to voice their concerns, advocate for their interests, and contribute to the development of their communities.

The structure of the Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) was further refined and strengthened by Republic Act No. 10742, also known as the SK Reform Act of 2015, which introduced significant reforms aimed at enhancing the SK's effectiveness and accountability. This legislation sought to address longstanding criticisms of the SK system, such as corruption, patronage politics, and insufficient youth engagement. By implementing measures to improve transparency, accountability, and youth participation, the SK Reform Act sought to transform the SK into a more effective and responsive mechanism for youth empowerment.

The SK serves as the voice of the Filipino youth within the barangay, tasked with formulating and executing policies and initiatives in various domains, including education, health, livelihood, environmental protection, and disaster risk reduction. With a mandate to represent the interests of young people in their communities, the SK is responsible for identifying and addressing the needs and concerns of youth through targeted programs and projects. Through the Local Youth Development Plan (LYDP), the SK is expected to foster youth involvement in governance and community development by outlining strategic goals, objectives, and approaches for local youth engagement.

However, despite these institutional frameworks, many SK officials face significant challenges in meeting these expectations due to persistent and context-specific issues. Nationally, youth disengagement, limited financial allocations, inadequate training, and political interference hinder the realization of the SK's full potential (Castillo et al., 2022; Palangdao, 2023). These structural and systemic barriers often limit the ability of SK councils to implement meaningful programs, resulting in low youth participation and underutilized funding.

At the local level, particularly in Pagadian City, SK leaders face additional and deeply rooted challenges that further impact their capacity to function effectively. Among the most significant is community indifference, where many youth view SK

programs as irrelevant or uninteresting, leading to poor attendance in assemblies and low participation in planned activities. This apathy is often rooted in a lack of awareness or mistrust toward government-led initiatives. Furthermore, intergenerational political tensions within barangay structures create a power imbalance, with some barangay officials undermining SK autonomy by deprioritizing their programs or withholding logistical support. Institutional support remains inconsistent, with some SK councils lacking access to essential facilities, equipment, or dedicated spaces for youth gatherings and activities.

Limited financial resources also pose a pressing issue. While SKs receive an annual budget allocation, many SK leaders report delays in fund disbursement, lack of transparency in barangay-level budget processes, and insufficient training in financial management. These constraints often force SK officials to scale down or cancel projects altogether. Additionally, coordination with the Local Youth Development Officer (LYDO) and other local government units is sometimes hampered by unclear communication lines and bureaucratic bottlenecks, reducing the efficiency of project planning and implementation.

Another operational challenge is the lack of technical and leadership training, which leaves many young leaders unequipped to design and manage advocacy programs. As most SK officials are first-time public servants, they often navigate governance responsibilities with minimal preparation, relying heavily on trial-and-error approaches. This can lead to inefficient program execution and poor community impact, which, in turn, reinforces youth skepticism.

These barriers not only affect the implementation of programs but also challenge the legitimacy and functionality of the SK as a participatory mechanism. Despite the institutional support embedded in law, the persistent gap between ideal and actual practice calls into question the effectiveness of current frameworks in genuinely empowering youth leaders. This raises critical questions about the adequacy of existing policies and structures in addressing the specific needs and challenges faced by SK officials in different local contexts. It also underscores the importance of examining the coping strategies and adaptive mechanisms employed by SK leaders as they navigate these challenges.

To better understand these complexities, this study employs Empowerment Theory as its guiding framework. Empowerment Theory, as articulated by Rachmad (2022), emphasizes enhancing individuals' capacity to make decisions and take control over their circumstances by ensuring access to resources, institutional support, and opportunities for active participation. This theoretical lens provides a valuable framework for analyzing the experiences of SK officials, allowing us to examine the factors that enable or constrain their ability to exercise leadership and promote youth advocacy. Applying this theory to the experiences of SK Chairpersons allows us to examine how youth leaders assert agency amid systemic constraints and what strategies they employ to promote effective advocacy. The present study aims to contextualize these issues at the local level, offering insights that may inform broader policy discussions aimed at enabling and improving youth governance.

The central research question guiding this study is: "What are the main challenges faced by the Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) in Pagadian City, Philippines when it comes to organizing youth advocacies within local governance, and what strategies do they use to cope with these challenges?"

This inquiry aims to generate insights that can inform policy reforms and strengthen the capacity of youth councils in the Philippines and beyond. By exploring the perspectives and experiences of SK leaders, this study seeks to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing youth governance in the Philippines and to identify practical strategies for empowering young people to become effective agents of change in their communities.

## **Methods**

To gain a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the challenges faced by Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) Chairpersons and the coping strategies they employ in organizing youth advocacies within local governance, this study adopted a qualitative case study approach. As outlined by Merriam (2015), the case study design is particularly well-suited for exploring complex social phenomena within a bounded system; in this instance, the SK governance structure in Pagadian City, Philippines served as the defined boundary. This approach allowed for a holistic examination of the

experiences, perceptions, and practices of SK officials within their specific local context.

The selection of participants was conducted using purposive sampling, a non-probability technique that allowed the researchers to intentionally choose individuals with relevant experiences and knowledge about youth advocacy implementation. Eight SK Chairpersons were carefully selected from various barangays in Pagadian City, Philippines, based on specific criteria, including being an active SK Chairperson for more than one year and having direct involvement in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of youth programs. This sampling strategy ensured that the participants possessed the necessary insights and perspectives to provide rich and detailed data.

Although the sample size may appear limited, it is appropriate and justified within the context of a qualitative case study. As Patton (2015) and Merriam (2015) argue, qualitative inquiry prioritizes depth over breadth, focusing on obtaining rich, nuanced insights rather than generalizable data. Each of the eight participants provided in-depth narratives that revealed common themes and unique experiences essential for understanding the research problem. Furthermore, data saturation was achieved, as no new themes emerged after analyzing the interviews of the final participants. A larger sample may have yielded additional variations, but would also risk redundancy and compromise the detailed, contextual exploration that qualitative research aims to provide. Thus, the sample size of eight was sufficient to generate meaningful and trustworthy findings while maintaining the depth of analysis required in qualitative case research.

Data collection involved the use of multiple qualitative methods to ensure triangulation and enhance the reliability and validity of the findings. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant, utilizing a prepared interview guide composed of open-ended and probing questions. These interviews allowed for both structure and flexibility, enabling the researchers to explore pre-determined topics while also allowing participants to share their unique experiences and perspectives in their own words. In addition to interviews, the researchers conducted field observations during SK activities and community events to gather contextual data on leadership practices, youth involvement, and the overall dynamics of local governance. These

observations provided valuable insights into the day-to-day realities of SK officials and the challenges they face in engaging with their constituents. Supplementary documents, such as official reports, photos, program plans, and minutes of meetings, were also analyzed to validate and enrich the primary data obtained through interviews and observations. These documents provided a valuable source of contextual information and helped to corroborate the findings from other data sources.

Throughout the research process, ethical standards were strictly followed to protect the rights and well-being of the participants. Prior to their involvement in the study, all participants were provided with detailed information about the study's purpose, potential risks, and benefits, and were asked to provide their informed consent. Participants were guaranteed both confidentiality and anonymity, with their identities securely masked in all research documentation and publications. Additionally, they were advised of their unrestricted right to withdraw from the study at any point without facing any consequences.

The data collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis were analyzed using thematic analysis, following Merriam's (2015) method of categorical aggregation. This involved systematically coding and categorizing recurring ideas and patterns to identify key themes related to the challenges faced by SK Chairpersons and the coping strategies they employed. To further enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, the researchers triangulated their data with information obtained from the Local Youth Development Office (LYDO) and other relevant sources. This systematic and rigorous approach ensured the authenticity of participants' voices and allowed the researchers to generate meaningful insights into the dynamics of youth leadership in local governance.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Results**

The findings of this study reveal a complex landscape of both promise and persistent challenges in the work of Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) Chairpersons as they organize youth advocacies within local governance in Pagadian City, Philippines. Through a combination of semi-structured interviews, field observations, and document

analysis, the research uncovered a dynamic interplay between the aspirations of youth leaders and the structural and social constraints they navigate.

SK Chairpersons in Pagadian City have demonstrated a strong commitment to youth empowerment by initiating a diverse array of programs. These include health symposia addressing critical issues such as HIV awareness and anti-drug campaigns; educational support initiatives like scholarship grants, free printing services, and the distribution of school supplies; and livelihood training workshops such as soya milk production. Additionally, sports tournaments—particularly basketball and Sepak Takraw—have served not only as recreational outlets but also as platforms for advocacy and community building.

These initiatives align closely with the principles of Empowerment Theory, particularly the behavioral component, which emphasizes active participation in civic and community initiatives. By creating programs that respond to local needs, SK leaders demonstrate intrapersonal empowerment—a belief in their own leadership capacity and ability to effect change. These efforts reflect the intent of the SK Reform Act of 2015 and the Local Youth Development Plan (LYDP), highlighting how empowered youth can operationalize their mandates through proactive leadership.

Despite these proactive efforts, SK Chairpersons consistently encounter significant challenges that hinder the full realization of their advocacies. One of the most pervasive issues is low youth participation, particularly in formal events such as assemblies, symposia, and advocacy campaigns. Many young people perceive these activities as unengaging or disconnected from their interests, resulting in limited involvement. This presents a challenge to interactional empowerment, as SK leaders struggle to effectively communicate the relevance of their programs and mobilize broader youth participation.

Financial constraints represent another critical barrier. The limited budget allocated to SK councils restricts the scale, frequency, and quality of their programs. Participants reported that their funding is often insufficient to cover essential expenses for materials, logistics, and incentives. This limitation impacts both behavioral empowerment—as fewer visible activities are implemented—and intrapersonal empowerment, as SK Chairpersons must contend with feelings of inadequacy or



frustration due to resource limitations. These financial obstacles mirror national trends documented in youth governance literature, which call for enhanced fiscal autonomy for SK officials.

Furthermore, institutional support from barangay councils and other local government units remains inconsistent. While some SK Chairpersons report collaborative relationships with barangay officials, others experience resistance or lack of support—especially when youth-led initiatives are viewed as overlapping with or competing against barangay programs. This lack of structural support constrains interactional empowerment, limiting SK leaders' access to guidance, facilities, and administrative assistance necessary to implement their plans effectively. It also affects their perceived legitimacy and role within the broader governance structure.

In response to these challenges, SK Chairpersons have developed a range of coping strategies that reflect adaptability, resourcefulness, and empowered action.

One of the most prominent strategies is strategic planning. By prioritizing essential programs and aligning activities with available resources, SK leaders exercise intrapersonal empowerment—demonstrating critical thinking, decision-making, and confidence in navigating complex responsibilities. This enables them to implement feasible and impactful programs, even under budget constraints.

Partnership-building has also proven to be a key coping mechanism. Collaborations with NGOs, educational institutions, and the Local Youth Development Office (LYDO) provide additional resources and legitimacy. These partnerships strengthen interactional empowerment by enhancing SK leaders' capacity to engage with broader governance networks, leverage external support, and expand program reach.

In addition, the use of creative engagement techniques to boost youth involvement reflects a blend of empowerment dimensions. For example, some SK Chairpersons have successfully tied participation in sports tournaments to attendance at advocacy events such as health seminars or environmental campaigns. This strategy not only improves turnout but also promotes behavioral empowerment by fostering active youth participation in governance-related activities. Similarly, the use of social media

to promote programs and communicate with constituents enhances their outreach and reinforces their role as visible and responsive leaders.

In sum, the lived experiences of SK Chairpersons in Pagadian City reveal how empowered leadership can emerge even within resource-constrained and politically complex settings. While systemic challenges such as youth disengagement, financial limitations, and weak institutional support persist, the coping mechanisms employed by SK leaders reflect the three key dimensions of Empowerment Theory:

- Intrapersonal: confidence, motivation, and self-efficacy
- Interactional: strategic networking and contextual understanding
- Behavioral: tangible actions through program implementation

These findings underscore the importance of fostering enabling environments that support youth leaders' empowerment at multiple levels. The study contributes both practical and theoretical insights to the discourse on youth participation in governance, and highlights the value of investing in sustained support, capacity-building, and policy refinement to enhance the impact of SK councils in local development.

## **Discussion**

The experiences of Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) Chairpersons in Pagadian City, Philippines illustrate the practical application of Empowerment Theory within the unique landscape of local governance in the country. By asserting agency, mobilizing limited resources, and fostering youth participation through creative means, these young leaders go beyond merely fulfilling their mandates—they actively contribute to reshaping local governance by giving voice to youth concerns. Their ability to adapt, negotiate with various stakeholders, and innovate in the face of constraints underscores their leadership capacity and growing self-efficacy.

This study contributes to the ongoing national discourse on youth participation in governance. While previous research has emphasized the systemic and operational barriers faced by SK officials, such as insufficient funding and weak institutional support (Palangdao, 2023; Castillo et al., 2022), this study provides a localized and in-depth view of how SK Chairpersons in Pagadian City cope with these challenges

through adaptive strategies. The findings reveal that youth engagement is not merely a function of available resources or top-down policies but also a result of the initiative, creativity, and perseverance of youth leaders on the ground.

When compared with findings from other regions in the Philippines, similar patterns emerge. For example, Elsana (2020) observed that SK councils in urbanized areas often struggle with youth disengagement and bureaucratic constraints, yet they find success when they integrate advocacies with interest-driven youth activities—paralleling Pagadian SK’s approach of combining sports with civic education. Likewise, Palomares et al. (2021) noted that the presence of strong intrinsic motivation and a proactive attitude among SK leaders often compensates for a lack of financial or logistical resources. This mirrors the findings in this study, where youth leaders leveraged strategic partnerships and social media to implement meaningful projects despite limited funding.

Reguindin (2023) further highlighted that in some municipalities, intergenerational political dynamics and resistance from barangay officials pose a challenge to SK autonomy. This concern was also evident in Pagadian City, where some SK Chairpersons reported inconsistent support from barangay councils. However, those who managed to build stronger relationships with barangay officials were more successful in acquiring logistical assistance, venues, and moral support—reinforcing the importance of interpersonal and inter-organizational collaboration as a form of interactional empowerment.

Catapang (2024) and UNESCO (2021) emphasized the importance of using digital platforms and communication tools in promoting advocacy and civic participation among the youth. In Pagadian City, the strategic use of social media for awareness campaigns, event promotion, and youth mobilization has proven to be a vital strategy in overcoming participation barriers. This reinforces the broader national trend toward digital engagement as a cost-effective and accessible form of youth empowerment.

These local comparisons affirm the relevance of Empowerment Theory in the Philippine context. The three dimensions—intrapersonal (confidence and motivation), interactional (strategic relationships and resource navigation), and behavioral (visible,

community-based programs)—are all demonstrated by the SK Chairpersons in this study. Their success in initiating programs, engaging youth, and addressing community issues illustrates how empowerment can be achieved and enacted, even in challenging environments.

At the policy level, the findings emphasize the need for targeted reforms. These include increasing the financial autonomy of SK councils, providing sustained leadership and governance training, and formalizing institutional support from barangay councils and local development offices. As seen in other parts of the country, the presence of mentorship programs and youth development offices, such as the LYDO in Pagadian, significantly enhances the effectiveness of youth leaders.

This study acknowledges its limitations, particularly its focus on a single city and its qualitative approach. However, the insights provide a strong foundation for future localized and comparative studies across other municipalities in the Philippines. Further research could explore how varying socioeconomic and political contexts influence SK performance and how regional differences affect youth leadership outcomes. Including the perspectives of barangay officials, LYDO staff, and youth participants would also enrich the analysis of youth governance and its broader community impact.

At the practical level, the adaptive strategies used by SK officials in Pagadian—such as strategic planning, partnership-building, and creative engagement—offer valuable insights for other youth councils facing similar challenges across the country. The replication and sharing of such practices through inter-city collaboration or national capacity-building platforms may improve the implementation and sustainability of SK programs nationwide.

In summary, the experiences of SK Chairpersons in Pagadian City not only reflect the enduring challenges of youth governance in the Philippines but also highlight the remarkable capacity of young leaders to innovate, collaborate, and lead meaningful change within their communities.

## **Conclusion**

This study offers a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the various challenges and adaptive strategies employed by Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) officials

in organizing youth advocacies within the framework of local governance in Pagadian City, Philippines. Despite enduring obstacles, such as limited financial resources, low youth participation, and inconsistent support from barangay councils, SK leaders have demonstrated remarkable resilience, creativity, and commitment to fulfilling their mandate. Through strategic planning, collaboration, and innovative engagement approaches including the integration of advocacies into youth-focused events and the utilization of social media platforms these young leaders have effectively sustained and expanded their influence on community development.

From a practical perspective, the experiences of SK officials in Pagadian City provide valuable insights for enhancing youth governance across the Philippines. In response to the identified challenges, this study proposes the following actionable reforms: **Enhance Financial Autonomy:** Amend local budget allocation guidelines to increase the mandated percentage of the barangay budget designated for SK operations, ensuring councils receive sufficient and predictable funding. Additionally, clear guidelines should be established for accessing and liquidating funds to reduce bureaucratic delays. **Institutionalize Comprehensive Leadership Training:** Integrate mandatory and recurring capacity-building programs, facilitated by the Local Youth Development Office (LYDO) in collaboration with the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) and the National Youth Commission (NYC). These programs should emphasize project management, policy formulation, youth mobilization, and ethical governance.

**Formalize Barangay Support:** Issue a joint memorandum or ordinance at the city or municipal level mandating barangay councils to provide logistical, technical, and moral support to SK councils. Such measures should ensure guaranteed access to venues, transportation, and barangay records as needed for program planning and reporting. **Strengthen Integration with Local Development Plans:** Require that SK Local Youth Development Plans (LYDPs) be aligned with the Barangay Development Council's (BDC) plans to ensure improved program coordination, resource sharing, and institutional relevance. **Promote Best Practices and Innovation:** Encourage local government units (LGUs) and the National Youth Commission (NYC) to document and disseminate innovative engagement models, such as integrating sports with advocacy

or using social media for civic engagement. These models can be shared across municipalities through platforms like the Youth Organizations' Registration Program (YORP) or regional youth summits. By addressing systemic issues directly and promoting locally grounded solutions, these reforms can significantly enhance the effectiveness, sustainability, and legitimacy of SK governance. Moreover, the policy environment must evolve to not only support but also empower youth leaders, enabling them to become proactive contributors to inclusive governance and community transformation.

In conclusion, this research underscores the critical role of the Sangguniang Kabataan in democratizing local governance in the Philippines. By documenting both the persistent challenges and the innovative responses of SK leaders, this study contributes to the expanding body of literature on youth governance. It also offers practical insights for strengthening the structures that support youth participation. Strengthening the institutional and policy frameworks will be crucial in ensuring that the next generation of Filipino leaders can continue to drive inclusive, participatory, and empowered local communities.

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### **Authors' Contributions**

All authors have contributed to the final manuscript. The contribution of all authors: conceptualization, methodology, formal analysis, writing original draft preparation, writing review and editing. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

### **Conflict of Interest**

All authors have no conflict of interest related to this study.

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