

Sangguniang Kabataan intervention programs in disaster contexts: Evidence from selected barangays in Baguio City

Rose Chell Anne Cuarto Rojas¹

Abstract

Disasters pose complex governance challenges, particularly at the barangay level where public services are most immediate; yet youth participation in local disaster governance remains insufficiently institutionalized and empirically examined. This study analyzes the intervention programs implemented by the Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) in selected barangays in Baguio City during the COVID-19 Enhanced Community Quarantine, focusing on how youth participation responds to disaster governance challenges. Anchored in Community Youth Development and Empowerment Theory, the study employed a qualitative descriptive design using semi-structured interviews with 19 SK officials representing 19 selected barangays. The findings reveal that SK officials consistently faced resource, institutional, coordination, and operational constraints that limited their participation and program implementation. Despite these constraints, they implemented a range of interventions—including relief and social protection initiatives, public health support, governance assistance, and youth engagement activities—demonstrating adaptability and responsiveness to community needs. The Mental Health Support Program emerged as a best practice due to its responsiveness, innovation, and replicability. The study underscores the need to institutionalize youth participation, strengthen capacity development, and enhance coordination mechanisms in disaster governance. These findings imply that local governments and disaster governance bodies should formally integrate SK participation into disaster planning and implementation, provide sustained capacity-building and resources, and establish clear coordination protocols to enable youth to contribute effectively to disaster preparedness, response, and recovery.

Keywords: *Disaster Governance, Intervention Programs, Local Governance, Sangguniang Kabataan, Youth Participation*

A. Introduction

Disasters—whether health-related, environmental, or socioeconomic—generate complex governance demands that require coordinated responses across institutions, with local governments bearing the most immediate operational responsibilities. The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated how systemic crises can disrupt essential service delivery and strain governance capacities at multiple levels, particularly where administrative resources are constrained (World Health Organization, 2020). In the Philippines, the March 2020 Enhanced Community Quarantine placed local government units at the center of continuity planning, public order maintenance, and emergency service provision, exposing both the centrality and the fragility of local governance arrangements under crisis conditions (Department of the Interior and Local Government, 2020; United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, 2019).

At the barangay level, response mechanisms such as Barangay Health Emergency Response Teams were mobilized, yet youth institutions, such as the Sangguniang Kabataan (SK), were not

¹University of Baguio. Philippines. rosechellyanne@gmail.com

formally integrated into these structures (Republic Act No. 10742, 2016). Existing evidence indicates that although Philippine policy has long encouraged youth council involvement in disaster risk reduction, implementation has been inconsistent: youth councils often lack a clear understanding of their expected roles, and few allocate disaster risk reduction funds despite such encouragement (Fernandez & Shaw, 2013). Comparative evidence from Infanta and Makati further shows that, while youth councils place high importance on disaster risk reduction tasks, actual involvement in village-level implementation remains limited, especially where resources are not designated for such activities (Fernandez & Shaw, 2013). This gap between policy expectation and institutional practice constitutes the central problem addressed in this study.

Youth participation is nonetheless increasingly recognized as a vital component of disaster risk reduction and resilience building because it contributes to innovation, social mobilization, and community cohesion (Mort et al., 2020). Community Youth Development Theory positions youth as active contributors to community development rather than passive recipients of services (Checkoway & Aldana, 2013), while Empowerment Theory emphasizes the capacity of individuals and groups to influence social systems and to exercise control over decisions that affect their lives (Zimmerman, 2000). In the Philippine context, the Philippine Youth Development Plan 2023–2028 identifies youth engagement as a key strategy for national development, including disaster preparedness and community resilience (National Youth Commission, 2023). However, evidence from comparable developing-country contexts indicates that youth-led disaster initiatives often face policy gaps, coordination challenges, resource constraints, and insufficient institutional recognition, which constrain their capacity to mobilize communities effectively (Mort et al., 2020). An Input–Process–Output framework is therefore used in this study to examine how SK interventions are shaped by inputs and processes and what outputs they generate under disaster conditions.

Although grounded in the COVID-19 experience, this study situates its findings within a broader disaster governance perspective and addresses a gap in the literature on the formal integration of youth institutions in local disaster governance, particularly in developing-country contexts (Fernandez & Shaw, 2013; Mort et al., 2020). Existing Philippine studies have primarily reviewed policy implementation or assessed youth council participation at the local level, but empirical analysis of the specific intervention programs that SK officials design and implement during a prolonged disaster—and of the challenges they encounter in doing so—remains limited, especially in urban highland contexts such as Baguio City. Accordingly, this study examines the challenges experienced by SK officials in implementing intervention programs during disasters, analyzes the intervention programs implemented by the Sangguniang Kabataan in selected barangays in Baguio City, and identifies and evaluates best practices in SK-led interventions. In doing so, it contributes to understanding how youth-led institutions can be more systematically strengthened within local disaster governance.

B. Methods

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to provide a detailed account of the challenges faced by Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) officials and the intervention programs they implemented during disasters. This design is appropriate for capturing participants' experiences and perspectives in their natural context and for providing a straightforward, comprehensive description of phenomena without extensive theoretical abstraction, making it suitable for policy-relevant research, such as youth participation in local governance and disaster response (Sandelowski, 2000). The study was conducted in Baguio City, a highly urbanized city in Northern Luzon, and involved SK officials from nineteen selected barangays. These

barangays were purposively selected based on available information and prior coordination regarding their involvement in intervention programs during the disaster period.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling. The inclusion criteria were SK officials from the selected barangays in Baguio City who were actively involved in planning, implementing, or coordinating intervention programs during the COVID-19 Enhanced Community Quarantine in 2020. Participants were selected based on their direct experiences and their ability to provide relevant information on youth-led interventions in disaster contexts. Officials who were not directly involved in intervention programs during the disaster period, those unavailable during data collection, or those who opted not to participate were excluded. Selection was conducted using non-discriminatory criteria and was based solely on the relevance of participants' experiences to the study objectives.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 19 SK officials, one from each selected barangay, to gather insights into the challenges they experienced, the intervention programs they implemented, and their perceived effectiveness during the disaster period. The interview guide was developed based on the study objectives and was reviewed for clarity and relevance before data collection. The interviews served as the primary data source, and data saturation was achieved when no new themes emerged from subsequent interviews. To ensure confidentiality, participants were assigned codes (e.g., SK Official 1; SK Official 2), which are used in presenting responses in the Results section.

Ethical considerations were observed throughout the study. Coordination and communication with relevant stakeholders and participants were undertaken throughout the study and related academic activities. Participation was voluntary, and participants were informed of the research purpose and the intended academic use of the data. Measures were taken to minimize potential risks to participants, researchers, and involved personnel, particularly during the pandemic. Anonymity and confidentiality were strictly observed: participants were assigned codes rather than real names, and any personally identifying information disclosed during interviews was omitted from the manuscript. All information and responses were used strictly for academic and research purposes and handled in accordance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012. Interview data and related materials were securely stored and accessed only by the researcher and authorized academic advisers. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006), involving familiarization with the data, initial coding of interview responses, identification of recurring patterns, and development of themes aligned with the study objectives; themes were reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately represented the data.

C. Results and Discussion

Thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with 19 Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) officials generated four themes on the challenges they experienced, four categories of intervention programs, and one best practice. To ensure accessibility for an international readership, quotations originally given in Filipino are presented in English translation, with participant codes retained.

Challenges Experienced by SK Officials

Four major themes described the challenges encountered by SK officials during program implementation. The first theme, resource constraints, captured participants' consistent identification of limited financial and logistical resources as a major barrier. Participant 2 explained, "Funding was insufficient, so we could not extend assistance to everyone in need,"

while Participant 5 noted, “Sometimes we used our own money just to continue the program.” These responses indicate that financial limitations affected both the scale and sustainability of interventions.

The second theme, institutional limitations, concerned the absence of formal inclusion of SK officials in disaster governance structures. Participant 3 stated, “We were not included in barangay response planning, so our role was limited.” This finding suggests that institutional gaps constrained SK officials’ participation in decision-making and reduced their influence in disaster governance. The third theme, coordination challenges, reflected difficulties in aligning initiatives with barangay officials and stakeholders. Participant 7 reported, “There was sometimes miscommunication between the barangay and the SK,” indicating problems with coordination and the efficient implementation of programs. The fourth theme, operational constraints, referred to mobility restrictions and health risks during the disaster period. Participant 1 shared, “Because of the quarantine, we had difficulty going out and distributing relief,” highlighting how external conditions affected program delivery.

Intervention Programs Implemented by the Sangguniang Kabataan

The analysis identified four major categories of intervention programs. The first, relief and social protection initiatives, involved immediate responses to basic needs. Participant 4 reported, “We distributed food packs and hygiene kits to those in need,” while Participant 6 stated, “We helped those who were stranded and unemployed during the lockdown.” The second category, public health and safety initiatives, included health-related interventions such as distributing face masks, disinfecting areas, disseminating information materials, distributing protective equipment, and promoting health protocols. Participant 8 noted, “We distributed face masks and disinfected places.”

The third category, governance and administrative support, showed SK officials contributing to governance processes during the disaster. Participant 9 explained, “We helped in listing the beneficiaries of the Social Amelioration Program,” indicating their role in supporting administrative functions and facilitating government assistance. The fourth category, youth engagement initiatives, demonstrated adaptive strategies for sustaining youth participation despite restrictions. Participant 10 shared, “We conducted online activities for the youth,” reflecting innovation through community-based and online engagement during constrained conditions.

Best Practices in SK-Led Interventions

The Mental Health Support Program emerged as a best practice based on participant accounts and program characteristics. Under the theme of responsive and transformative mental health intervention, participants emphasized the program’s impact on psychosocial needs. Participant 11 stated, “Many young people benefited from the mental health sessions,” while Participant 12 noted, “It had a large impact, especially on the anxiety of the youth during the lockdown.” A best practice is characterized by approaches that go beyond routine interventions through innovation, effectiveness, and adaptability in addressing emerging needs (United Nations, 2010); in governance contexts, best practices are also identified by demonstrated impact, sustainability, and potential for replication.

The Mental Health Support Program extended beyond traditional relief efforts by addressing the psychosocial well-being of youth, an aspect often overlooked in disaster response. SK officials organized online mental health sessions and peer support activities to provide accessible support despite mobility restrictions (Participant 11). This indicates that the program was not merely reactive but anticipatory, addressing emerging psychosocial risks that were not typically prioritized in disaster response. Unlike routine relief interventions focused on material

assistance, the initiative expanded the scope of SK participation by integrating mental health support, reflecting innovation in both approach and service delivery. The program also demonstrated effectiveness in reaching beneficiaries, sustainability through partnerships with local organizations, and strong potential for replication in other communities, justifying its classification as a best practice.

Summary of Findings

Overall, the findings show that although SK officials faced significant resource, institutional, coordination, and operational challenges, they demonstrated adaptability by implementing a range of interventions, including relief distribution, public health initiatives, governance support, and youth engagement activities. Among these, the Mental Health Support Program stood out as a best practice because of its responsiveness, innovation, and potential for replication. These findings highlight both the limitations and potential of youth participation in disaster governance.

The findings further suggest that youth participation in disaster governance operates within constrained institutional environments, where agency is present but structurally limited. Despite these constraints, SK officials exercised adaptive governance practices by responding to immediate community needs, indicating that youth participation is not merely symbolic but functionally significant, particularly in filling operational gaps during crises. In relation to the first objective, the challenges experienced by SK officials reflect structural and institutional gaps that limit youth participation. The absence of formal integration into disaster response mechanisms constrained their ability to contribute fully, despite their initiative and willingness to serve. This supports Empowerment Theory, which emphasizes that individual agency is influenced by structural conditions (Zimmerman, 2000).

With respect to the second objective, the intervention programs demonstrate youth's capacity to respond effectively to community needs. Youth participation in crisis response has been increasingly recognized as a critical component of inclusive governance and recovery strategies (United Nations, 2020; UNDP, 2021). Their involvement in relief operations, public health initiatives, and governance support reflects adaptability and commitment to service, aligning with Community Youth Development Theory, which emphasizes youth as active contributors to community development (Checkoway & Aldana, 2013). These findings demonstrate that youth participation in disaster governance is not merely supportive but functionally significant and adaptive. Despite structural limitations, SK officials filled operational gaps through localized, context-driven interventions, indicating the potential of youth institutions as complementary actors within governance systems.

Regarding the third objective, identifying the Mental Health Support Program as a best practice highlights the evolving nature of disaster response. Beyond addressing physical needs, there is increasing recognition of the importance of psychosocial support. The effectiveness of this program reflects the capacity of youth-led initiatives to respond to complex and emerging challenges. Overall, the findings underscore the need to strengthen institutional support for youth participation in disaster governance and contribute to policy discussions on inclusive governance and the institutionalization of youth participation in local disaster risk reduction frameworks.

Limitations of the Study

Several limitations should be considered in interpreting the findings. First, the study focused on intervention programs implemented in nineteen selected barangays in Baguio City, which may limit the generalizability of the results to other local government contexts in the Philippines. Second, the study relied on data collected through semi-structured interviews with SK officials regarding their activities during the Enhanced Community Quarantine; formal triangulation

involving multiple data sources and stakeholder perspectives was limited. The study relied primarily on available interview data and prior coordination conducted during the 2020 pandemic period, which may have limited the availability of supplementary documentary records and formal triangulation materials. Third, the study primarily relied on qualitative and descriptive analyses and did not incorporate quantitative measures of program effectiveness and long-term impact. Future research may expand the scope by including a broader range of local government units, incorporating multi-stakeholder perspectives, and applying more robust mixed-methods approaches to assess the outcomes and sustainability of youth-led intervention programs in disaster contexts.

D. Conclusion

This study examined the intervention programs implemented by Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) officials in selected barangays of Baguio City in the context of disasters, with three objectives: to examine the challenges experienced by SK officials, to analyze the intervention programs they implemented, and to identify best practices in SK-led interventions. The findings show that SK officials encountered resource, institutional, coordination, and operational constraints that limited program implementation and reach. Despite these constraints, they implemented relief and social protection initiatives, public health and safety activities, governance and administrative support, and youth engagement programs, demonstrating adaptability and responsiveness to community needs. The Mental Health Support Program emerged as a best practice because of its responsiveness, innovation, effectiveness, and potential for replication.

The study contributes empirical evidence on the informal yet functionally significant role of youth institutions in local disaster governance, particularly in a developing-country context. It supports Community Youth Development Theory and Empowerment Theory by showing that youth agency is exercised within, and constrained by, structural conditions. Practically, the findings imply that youth participation should be formally institutionalized in disaster governance, supported through sustained capacity development, and reinforced by clearer coordination mechanisms. These measures are necessary to move SK participation from informal gap-filling toward a sustained and recognized contribution to disaster preparedness, response, and recovery.

Several limitations qualify these findings. The study was confined to 19 purposively selected barangays in Baguio City, relied mainly on interviews with SK officials, and had limited formal triangulation and documentary evidence. It also used qualitative descriptive analysis without quantitative measures of program effectiveness or long-term impact. These limitations restrict the generalizability of the findings and the attribution of outcomes. Future research should include a broader range of local government units and diverse stakeholder perspectives, apply mixed-methods or longitudinal designs to assess outcomes and sustainability, and examine how formal integration, capacity building, and coordination mechanisms affect youth-led disaster governance. Such research would strengthen the evidence base for institutionalizing youth participation in local disaster risk reduction and management.

References

- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.

- Checkoway, B., & Aldana, A. (2013). Four forms of youth civic engagement for diverse democracy. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 35(11), 1894–1899. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2013.09.005>
- Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2018). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Department of the Interior and Local Government. (2020). DILG Memorandum Circular No. 2020-62: Supplementary LGU guidelines on the implementation of Enhanced Community Quarantine in Luzon, and state of public health emergency in other parts of the country due to the COVID-19 threat. DILG.
- Department of the Interior and Local Government. (2020). Omnibus guidelines on the implementation of community quarantine in the Philippines.
- Fernandez, G., & Shaw, R. (2013). Youth council participation in disaster risk reduction in Infanta and Makati, Philippines: A policy review. *International Journal of Disaster Risk Science*, 4(3), 126–136. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13753-013-0014-x>
- Mort, M., Rodriguez-Giralt, I., & Delicado, A. (Eds.). (2020). *Children and young people's participation in disaster risk reduction: Agency and resilience*. Policy Press.
- National Youth Commission. (2023). *Philippine Youth Development Plan 2023–2028*. National Youth Commission.
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Republic Act No. 10121. (2010). *Philippine Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act of 2010*.
- Republic Act No. 10742. (2015). *Sangguniang Kabataan Reform Act of 2015*.
- Republic Act No. 10742. (2016). *An act establishing reforms in the Sangguniang Kabataan creating enabling mechanisms for meaningful youth participation in nation-building, and for other purposes*. Official Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines.
- Sandelowski, M. (2000). Whatever happened to qualitative description? *Research in Nursing & Health*, 23(4), 334–340.
- United Nations Development Programme. (2021). *Youth empowerment in crisis response and recovery*.
- United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction. (2019). *Reducing risks and building resilience at the local level: A global review of local DRR strategies (Contributing Paper to the Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction 2019)*. UNDRR.
- United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction. (2019). *Words into action guidelines: Youth engagement in disaster risk reduction*.
- United Nations. (2010). *Good practices in youth development*.
- United Nations. (2020). *Youth and COVID-19: Impacts on jobs, education, rights and mental well-being*.
- Wong, N. T., Zimmerman, M. A., & Parker, E. A. (2020). A typology of youth participation and empowerment. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 65(1–2), 100–114.
- World Health Organization. (2020). *Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic*.
- World Health Organization. (2020). *COVID-19: Strategic planning and operational guidance for maintaining essential health services during an outbreak (Interim guidance, 20 March 2020)*. WHO.
- World Health Organization. (2022). *Mental health and psychosocial support in emergencies*.

- Zimmerman, M. A. (2000). Empowerment theory: Psychological, organizational and community levels of analysis. In J. Rappaport & E. Seidman (Eds.), *Handbook of community psychology* (pp. 43–63). Springer.