

Beyond the court: Evaluating balanced youth development program in the Sanguniang Kabataan

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ABSTRACT

The Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) Reform Act of 2015 mandates holistic youth development; however, cultural expectations often pressure local councils to prioritize highly visible sports tournaments ("pa-liga"), raising concerns that this traditional focus crowds out essential sectors like education, health, and livelihood. To investigate this resource allocation issue, this study employed a qualitative document analysis by examining the fiscal year 2026 Annual Barangay Youth Investment Programs (ABYIPs) and accomplishment reports from three selected barangays in Anao, Moncada, and San Manuel, Tarlac. A review of these financial records revealed a persistent bias toward recreational activities, with sports constituting the largest programmatic expenditure. Specifically, sports consumed between 28% and 49% of discretionary youth funds across the observed barangays, creating a financial bottleneck for other vital developmental initiatives. Ultimately, these findings indicate that SK governance remains disproportionately sports-centric, highlighting the need for councils to transition away from short-term recreational spending and reallocate resources toward sustainable capacity-building, health interventions, and genuine civic engagement.

Keywords: Sangguniang Kabataan, "Liga", Holistic Development, Recreation, Active Participation.

INTRODUCTION

The Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) is known as the primary governing body for youth affairs at the barangay level. Accordingly, SK is mandated to implement programs that promote the holistic development of the youth.

Pursuant to Republic Act No. 10742, otherwise known as the Sangguniang Kabataan Reform Act of 2015, SK councils are required to formulate and implement programs through the Comprehensive Barangay Youth Development Plan (CBYDP) and the Annual Barangay Youth Investment Program (ABYIP).¹ To operationalize this mandate, the National Youth Commission (NYC) developed the Nine Centers of Meaningful Youth Participation, namely: active citizenship, governance, education, health, economic empowerment, environmental sustainability, peacebuilding, social inclusion, and global mobility. These centers of meaningful youth participation aim to guide SK Councils in planning and

¹ Section 8. The Sangguniang Kabataan shall: (a) In consultation and with the concurrence of the Katipunan ng Kabataan, and within three (3) months from assumption to office, formulate a three (3)-year rolling plan, which shall be known as the Comprehensive Barangay Youth Development Plan, which shall serve as basis in the preparation of the Annual Barangay Youth Investment Program. This plan shall be aligned with the Philippine Youth Development Plan (PYDP) and other Local Youth Development Plans in every level, municipal, city and provincial as is relevant;

implementing quality programs for the betterment of the youth and the production of law-abiding citizens and professionals.

“Liga” or sports festivals have long been the flagship projects of SK in the country. SK focuses on these festivals as projects because these are relatively easy to organize and highly appealing to Filipino youth, who generally have a strong interest in sports and recreational activities.

Ponce (2013) observed that SK councils have historically prioritized sports and recreation over programs focusing on education, employment, and leadership development. Similarly, Rosales (2023) found that although SK programs generally receive positive evaluations from youth participants, many councils still struggle to provide balanced interventions that adequately address the multiple dimensions of youth development identified by the National Youth Commission. Perez and Clamo (2025) likewise reported that youth competence, confidence, and civic engagement improve when SK programs integrate education, health, livelihood, governance, and leadership initiatives rather than concentrating predominantly on sports.

When a significant portion of SK resources, time, and organizational effort is concentrated on Liga activities, programs related to education, leadership development, mental health, livelihood, environmental protection, disaster preparedness, and civic participation may receive less attention and funding. As a result, the broader goal of holistic youth development envisioned by the SK Reform Act and the National Youth Commission’s framework for meaningful youth participation may not be fully realized

The heavy prioritization of sports leagues or “liga” in SK programming raises concerns about whether youth funds are genuinely aligned with the holistic goals of Republic Act No. 10742 and the National Youth Commission’s Nine Centers of Meaningful Youth Participation. While sports foster community engagement, overspending on these seasonal tournaments often leaves vital sectors such as education, mental health, livelihoods, and civic leadership severely underfunded.

To address this issue, this study will examine Annual Barangay Youth Investment Programs (ABYIPs) and SK accomplishment reports to determine the exact extent to which sports dominate program implementation and budget allocation. Ultimately, this research aims to provide the concrete data needed to push barangays toward more balanced, inclusive, and legally compliant youth development planning.

METHODOLOGY

To determine the extent to which sports-related programs or “liga” dominate SK program implementation and budget allocation, the barangay youth financial documents must first be systematically examined. The researchers propose to evaluate the SK programs and resource distribution of 3 selected barangays in the Municipalities of Moncada, Anao, and San Manuel in the province of Tarlac for the fiscal year 2026. Upon securing approval through formal letters addressed to the Local Youth Development Office (LYDO) and the SK Federation President, the researchers will request access to the approved Annual Barangay Youth Investment Programs (ABYIPs) and SK accomplishment reports.

Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative research design using document analysis to examine the implementation and budget allocation of SK programs. Document analysis is appropriate for systematically reviewing official records to understand policy implementation (Bowen, 2009).

Participants and Sampling

The study used purposive sampling to select official SK documents, including Annual Barangay Youth Investment Programs (ABYIPs), Comprehensive Barangay Youth Development Plans (CBYDPs), and accomplishment reports from selected barangays.

Data Collection

Official permission was secured from local authorities before accessing SK documents for academic use. Data were extracted systematically using the analysis guide, while ensuring confidentiality, proper record handling, and ethical compliance.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis through systematic coding, categorization, and frequency comparison of SK programs and budget allocations. Categories were aligned with RA 10742 and NYC's Nine Centers to assess compliance and balance in youth development programming.

RESULTS

Barangay (Municipality)	Sangguniang Kabataan Budget for fiscal year 2026	Sports Allocation	Sports % of Adjusted Budget	Other remaining categories (Education, Health, Minor Events)
Barangay A	₱145,000.00	₱50,000.00	34.48%	₱95,000.00 (Linggo ng Kabataan, Education, Environment)
Barangay B	₱130,648.07	₱37,000.00	28.32%	₱93,648.07 (Kamote Festival, Tumblers, DRRM/First Aid)
Barangay C	₱205,288.69	₱100,288.69	48.85%	₱105,000.00 (Street Dancing, Education Assistance, Printing)

An analysis of the adjusted SK programmatic budgets across certain barangays in Anao, Moncada, and San Manuel, Tarlac reveals clear evidence of youth development prioritization. By isolating discretionary funds, except mandatory administrative overhead, like honoraria, a clear picture emerges of how community-level youth councils allocate their operational resources. It has been analyzed in this study that SK programmatic funding mostly focused on sports-related projects

1. The Pervasiveness of Sports Funding

The data validates the premise that sports-related activities are primary financial pillars of SK programming. Across all three cases, sports represent a top-tier expenditure, consuming between roughly 28% and nearly 49% of the available programmatic budget.

- Barangay A in Anao, Tarlac represents a "Sports-Dominant" allocation model. With 48.85% (₱100,288.69) of its ₱205,288.69 budget dedicated to sports, nearly half of all discretionary youth funds are poured into this single sector.
- Barangay B in San Manuel, Tarlac demonstrates a "Strong Priority" in sport-related projects. Sports command 34.48% (₱50,000.00) of the ₱145,000.00 budget, marking it as the single largest program category.
- Barangay C in Moncada, Tarlac: Although the proportion allocated to sports is comparatively lower at 28.32% (₱37,000.00) of the total SK budget, it remains the single largest budget allocation, indicating that sports continue to dominate program funding over other youth development initiatives.

This concentration in sports-related projects highlights the deeply embedded cultural expectation surrounding SKs in the Philippines, where organizing local basketball leagues

("pa-liga") is historically viewed as a primary metric of a youth council's activity and success.

2. Implications for Youth Development Policy

Historically, the SK has faced a lot of criticism for limiting its scope to sports tournaments. Accordingly, the lawmakers initiated and passed Republic Act No. 10742, otherwise known as the Sangguniang Kabataan Reform Act, which explicitly mandates SK councils to broaden their horizons by allocating funds to other equitable youth development projects involving health, education, environment, and active citizenship.

This data suggests a transitional phase in SK governance. While SK councils are indeed funding diverse initiatives—evidenced by the inclusion of educational assistance (Free Board fee for the takers), free printing, communal library, and DRRM materials—the financial gravity remains heavily skewed toward sports. The persistent concentration of funds in sports allocations raises a critical question for policy evaluation: Are these SK budget allocations driven by genuine concern to the youth, or are these projects mere continuation of traditional and popular political expectations and convenience?

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to determine if SK councils pour a proportionate amount of their program budgets into sports projects. By looking closely at the discretionary spending of three specific barangays—Barangay A, Barangay B, and Barangay C in Municipalities of Anao, Moncada, and San Manuel, Tarlac—it is evident that sports dominate the financial priorities, even if the exact percentages vary from place to place.

The Sports-Centric Governance

The massive chunk of the budget allocated for sports in Barangay A (48.85%) and Barangay B (34.48%) points back to a deeply rooted cultural habit, often driven by the "pa-liga" expectation. For a long time, people have judged the success of local youth councils mostly by how well they run basketball tournaments and summer leagues. This aligns with local observations and governance studies noting that SK programs often revolve around traditional sports leagues, which voters historically see as the primary evidence of an active council.

Furthermore, paying for a sports league prioritizes visibility over actual development by giving elected SK officials instant recognition. Because these programs are so popular, SK councils tend to lean on them heavily to keep their constituents happy. However, as noted in recent policy assessments of SK budget optimization, a significant portion of youth funds often goes to one-time events with minimal long-term impact rather than sustainable programs that address deeper community issues. This means quieter, long-term developmental programs often get pushed to the side.

Missed Opportunities and Policy Gaps

The Sangguniang Kabataan Reform Act (Republic Act No. 10742) aims to steer SK councils away from just throwing sports fests as their projects or legacies. The law pushes for a more well-rounded approach, mandating that the 10% Barangay fund be used for comprehensive youth empowerment, including health, education, the environment, and disaster preparedness. But the SK budget breakdown shows a real disconnect between what the law mandates and what happens on the ground.

While SK councils are allocating some funds to health and education, the sheer size of sports budgets creates a financial bottleneck. In Barangay A, for example, dropping over ₱100,000 on sports leaves hardly any financial room to run meaningful environmental or health campaigns. Studies analyzing barangay budget utilization often note that while SK funds should not be used solely for sports, the pressure to deliver visible recreational activities crowds out economic and social investments.

Different Approaches for Spending SK Funds

Even with sports commanding significant SK resources and covering three of the nine centers of youth participation, namely: active citizenship, health and social inclusion, the variance between the three areas demonstrates that SK budgeting is not entirely monolithic. Barangay C demonstrates an effort to branch out with a slightly more varied approach, allocating 28.32% to sports while also funding insulated tumblers, first-aid kits, and local festivals. This indicates an attempt to find a middle ground between public expectations for sports and broader health or environmental goals. This mirrors findings of (Tormon, 2020), which show that progressive SK councils actively attempt to broaden by organizing clean-up drives and educational assistance, despite struggling with limited budgets.

Moving away from the standard sports league allows youth councils to explore alternative programs that offer deeper, longer-lasting impacts. Instead of channeling funds into basketball jerseys, trophies, and referee fees, policy experts argue for reallocating budgets toward capacity-building initiatives. Funding technical-vocational training, digital literacy workshops, or direct educational subsidies (shouldering the board examination fees of aspiring professionals in marginalized sectors) addresses real economic and educational vulnerabilities, building tangible human capital rather than providing temporary entertainment (Armada, 2020).

Expanding the definition of holistic youth health is another critical alternative to the traditional sports-centric model. While a summer basketball league promotes physical activity, it ignores other pressing wellness issues. When councils move away from heavy sports spending, they can redirect funds into mental health awareness campaigns, teenage pregnancy prevention seminars, or substance abuse interventions. These alternative programs provide critical support systems and safe spaces that a sports tournament simply cannot offer.

Finally, shifting the budget away from the "pa-liga" culture opens opportunities for genuine civic engagement. Rather than settling for high-visibility recreational tournaments, investing in youth-led disaster response training or sustainable community gardening transforms the SK from a local events committee into a vital driver of long-term community development.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Based on the analysis across selected barangays in Anao, Moncada, and San Manuel, Tarlac, this study concludes that Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) councils have yet to fully realize and operationalize the holistic youth development mandates of Republic Act No. 10742.

Sports-related programs continue to overwhelmingly dominate discretionary funds by consuming between 28% and 49% of the budget. This persistent trend suggests that grassroots programming remains heavily driven by entrenched cultural expectations and political convenience rather than an equitable distribution of resources across the National Youth Commission's broader developmental centers.

To align the vision proposed by national policy and community-level implementation, it is highly recommended that DILG and LYDO enforce stricter budget alignment checks and establish sectoral expenditure caps, such as a 20% limit on sports funding. Furthermore, the DILG should conduct targeted workshops and seminars designed to widen the gaze of SK officials regarding the vast array of possible programs outside of sports. Finally, targeted capacity-building for SK officials on non-sports initiatives and community-wide awareness campaigns are essential to shift the grassroots paradigm away from the traditional "pa-liga" and toward comprehensive, high-impact youth development

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