Youth in Nation-Building: A Qualitative Study on National and Local Participation in Socio-Political Issues among Students

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CALAWA, Ghea Lennette E.¹*, DECUZAR, Earl Jhoen M.², TERRIBLE, Dean Genesis M.³, ALUBONG, Vina Mae N.⁴

(1) 0009-0006-4887-5748, University of Baguio, Baguio, Philippines, 20192203@s.ubaguio.edu

(2) 0009-0003-8673-9577, University of Baguio, Baguio, Philippines, jongdecuzar@gmail.com

(3) 0009-0006-2643-0967, University of Baguio, Baguio, Philippines, deangenesisterrible@gmail.com

(4) 0009-0006-5481-2903, University of Baguio, Baguio, Philippines, 20192674@s.ubaguio.edu

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A B S T R A C T

Youth participation in socio-political issues in this modern time is gradually rising, and the effects of it on nation-building are well observed, especially when it comes to change and progress. The main objectives of this study are to identify the instances where the students participate, to determine how students get involved, to understand the driving force of youth participating, to understand the experience/s of the students, and to determine possible causes why youth do not participate in national and local socio-political issues. Through the use of key informant interviews and focused group discussions, the researchers found that participants have engaged and participated in different socio-political issues on a national or local scale, such as civic engagement, volunteerism, policy-making, joining the labor sector, safeguarding and preserving national sovereignty, information drive to combat cultural discrimination and misinformation, and such. It was also discovered that a preference for social media and conventional methods were used by participants in their participation, depending on their target audience and the specific area where they would take part. Furthermore, it was unveiled that disinterest in youth, lack of encouragement coming from the community leaders, and lack of ways to empower youth due to lack of platforms are reasons youth do not participate in socio-political activities. Lastly, this study found that participants are eager to participate to obtain self-awareness and knowledge. And the support from the government and different institutions is needed in order to increase the awareness of the youth when it comes to socio-political issues.

RESUMO

A participação da juventude em questões sociopolíticas nos tempos modernos está aumentando gradualmente, e os efeitos disso na construção da nação são bem observados, especialmente quando se trata de mudança e progresso. Os principais objetivos deste estudo são identificar as instâncias em que os alunos participam, determinar como os alunos se envolvem, entender a força motriz da participação dos jovens, entender a(s) experiência(s) dos alunos e determinar as possíveis causas pelas quais os jovens não participam. não participar de questões sócio-políticas nacionais e locais. Por meio do uso de entrevistas com informantes-chave e discussões de grupos focados, os pesquisadores descobriram que os participantes se envolveram e participaram de diferentes questões sociopolíticas em escala nacional ou local, como engajamento cívico, voluntariado, formulação de políticas, ingresso no setor trabalhista, salvaguardar e preservar a soberania nacional, o impulso da informação para combater a discriminação cultural e a desinformação, e outros. Constatou-se também que a preferência pelos meios sociais e métodos convencionais foram utilizados pelos participantes na sua participação, dependendo do seu público-alvo e da área específica onde iriam participar. Além disso, foi revelado que o desinteresse pelos jovens, a falta de incentivo dos líderes comunitários e a falta de formas de empoderar os jovens devido à falta de plataformas são motivos pelos quais os jovens não participam de atividades sócio-políticas. Por fim, este estudo constatou que os participantes estão ansiosos para participar para obter autoconsciência e conhecimento. E o apoio do governo e de diferentes instituições é necessário para aumentar a consciência dos jovens quando se trata de questões sócio-políticas.

Keywords*:*
Civic Engagement, Nation-Building, Socio-Political Issues, Volunteerism, and Youth Participation

Introduction

Students are a powerful demographic in society, as they are the most active participants in pressing social, national, political, economic, as well as environmental issues that have made their mark in the Philippines as well through volunteerism, civic engagement, and other forms of participation. Such as traditional in form of protests, and armchair activism using social media, and the internet. The youth movement in the Philippines is the most vibrant force of societal and political change as they took part of the majority when it comes to voting and serves the future generation who will take part in the citizenry of the country. The youth's participation is indeed essential when it comes to formal political processes and having a voice on the future creation of politics.

The youth often find themselves marginalized when it comes to mainstream politics and decision making and there are limited opportunities that the youth can participate in. Considering that there are many obstacles in formal and institutionalized political processes and few opportunities to get involved in and to be heard, it usually rapidly results in the youth feeling disempowered and leaving them frustrated and neglected. There is a need also to educate the youth on civic engagement and governance in order to fulfill these political, democratic rights. This is seen in the weakness of the political parties which do not have entry points for the youth to enter politics (Onda, 2018). There are studies that prove the relationship between political awareness and political participation is not significant, even if there is a high level of significance because of voting of political leaders and discussions only (Dioso & Mendaña, 2019; Hermosa, 2021). There is also a problem of misinformation on the internet since the internet serves a new space for participatory and democratic decision making. Knowledge of current events and understanding politics are essential to improve their awareness, academic performance and transform them to become better citizens. However, the internet is rife with misinformation so it can be dangerous to the students especially when they digested such information. This study seeks to understand and determine the participation of the tertiary level students in the University of Baguio and how they participate or get involved with socio-political issues.

Materials and Methods

The researchers utilized a qualitative-descriptive research design. The researchers analyzed the participants' responses to describe this study which involves recording,

transcribing, coding, analyzing, and interpreting data gathered during the data-gathering process.

The researchers have chosen the qualitative research design to understand why the youth engage in such a kind of movement and to unearth the participants' opinions, thoughts, and feelings about socio-political issues and how they participate. It is also effective in determining the objectives, especially from the standpoint of the participants (students) when it comes to student participation.

Sample/Population of the Study

The study was conducted among the tertiary students from the School of Teacher Education and Liberal Arts (STELA) of University of Baguio. For the inclusion criteria on selecting qualified research participants, the researchers decided that participants (students) should come from the second to fourth-year level. Participants should have enrolled in any of the programs offered under the School of Teacher Education and Liberal Arts (STELA). Snowball sampling, or chain referral sampling, is used in qualitative research for the researchers to generate participants (students) for a research study by referring to other individuals who share common characteristics of a subject within the target population. The researchers used Key Informant Interviews (KII) and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) in this study. Random sampling was used to identify which three of the eight programs offered under STELA were to participate in the KII, the remaining five of which will participate in FGD. Two participants represented each STELA undergraduate program. For the KII, BAPS, BSEd, and BAComm were randomly selected as the participating program. The remaining five programs were split up to participate in separate FGDs (FGD 1 & FGD 2) for triangulation. BA Music and BA English comprise FGD 1, while BA Psych, BEEd, and BSPEd comprise FGD 2. However, with the circumstances faced in the previous focused group discussion, an FGD 3 was created for data saturation, with different participants still coming from programs under FGD 1 and 2. All in all, eighteen participants participated in the KII and FGDs from the eight baccalaureate programs under STELA.

Data Gathering Tools

Semi-structured interviews were utilized to gather necessary information from the participants about their personal experiences, perceptions, and observations regarding the topic. The researchers used Key Informant Interviews and Focus Group Discussions since it is essential for the study to gather the participants' perceptions, opinions, and personal experiences. Such tools allow the opportunity to express themselves. Interviews and focus groups provided a depth of information that may be useful to answer the objectives of the

study. The questions for the interview were open-ended, with the researcher's interview guide questions to understand the flow and identify further the participants' responses which were associated with follow-up questions to probe further and gather data. Moreover, it allowed participants to base their answers on their complete knowledge, experiences, observations, and understanding of the topic. Thus questions do not limit their response to a set of options. Prior to the conduct of interviews and focused group discussions, the researchers first processed and secured a tool validation certification from the Research and Development Center (R&DC), to ensure that the research tool was subjected to a review before proceeding to data gathering. Video conferencing apps such as Google Meet and Zoom, social media platforms, or any other medium the participants were comfortable using were the researchers' primary data gathering tools. Due to continuing effects of the global pandemic, the researchers resorted to using gadgets (i.e., laptops, mobile phones) with stable internet or Wi-Fi connection in place of actual, in-person interviews.

Data Gathering Procedures

The researchers conducted a pre-survey on the selected participants from various degree programs of STELA. After this, the pre-screening survey was sent to participants once they were confirmed to be the participants. In the pre-survey screening, participants put a check mark on the socio-political issues in which they have participated. Thus, the researchers used it as their basis in interviewing the respondents regarding their participation in socio-political issues. This also included the circumstances and factors that drive them to join such socio-political activities and their experiences. Furthermore, the emails sent to the participants included the informed consent form and the study's objectives. Researchers were informed immediately by participants in case of unforeseen circumstances (e.g., internet connectivity issues, power interruptions, conflict of schedule to other matters) that may affect the interview or discussion.

The researchers scheduled the online interview based on the availability of the participants, starting from KII before moving forward for the FGD. After the date was finalized, before the day of the interview and focused group discussion, an email was sent to the participants containing the meeting link and time for the interview. The interviews and the focus group discussion lasted about thirty minutes to an hour. The researchers themselves served as the interviewers and recorders of the interviews. Before the interview and focused

group discussion proper, the researchers asked the participants if they allowed themselves to be recorded during the virtual interview for ease of transcription.

Treatment of Data

The data obtained from the Key Informant Interview and Focused Group Discussion were transcribed. Then analyzed and checked for validity and reliability before the data were subject to thematic analysis. The researchers were guided by their research teacher and adviser with the following process of thematic analysis. The researchers first familiarize themselves with the collected data and to be followed by transcribing the interviews. After this, the coding process was applied to unitize the text segment. As for the codes, researchers came up with a word or short phrase that would descriptively capture the essence of each text. Codes are, in fact, necessary to better analyze and summarize the results of the interview. The researchers collated codes with the collected data, and themes were identified through the codes to be grouped based on commonality and significance. The coded data would then be analyzed to determine which themes occur most frequently in the contexts. The initial set of themes was reviewed and revised first to ensure that every theme had sufficient data. Finally, the researchers made a statement about the identified themes to link them all together.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were observed in this study as the responsibility of the researchers was to guarantee the privacy and confidentiality of the participant's responses as well as the rights of the participants during the conduct of the study. Before the conduct of the study, the researchers subjected the interview guide questions to tool validation assigned by the Research Development Center (RDC). Moreover, the researchers secured the consent of the participants by furnishing them with informed consent forms to be signed before the interview. The researchers submitted the research proposal to the University of Baguio Ethics Reviewer Committee for its thorough review to ensure that the proposal is free from any possible unethical procedures and activities.

The researchers also recognize their responsibilities under the Republic Act. No, 10173, otherwise known as the Data Privacy Act of 2012, for the collection, recording, organization, storage, updating or modification, retrieval, consultation, use, consolidation, blocking, erasure, or destruction of personal data from the said participants. Any personal or sensitive data that may be collected or recorded during the interviews were held under strict confidentiality and were processed for research purposes only. Researchers also ensured the

confidentiality and anonymity of the participants in KII and FGD, as researchers used pseudonyms as codes.

Results and Discussions

Instances or Situations where Students Participate in Socio-Political Issues

Based on the data gathered from the participants, the researchers categorized the national participation of youth from local participation where they involved themselves.

National Participation

It was identified that the students participate in socio-political issues. These involve, probing unproven red-tagging, safeguarding and preserving national sovereignty and territorial integrity, and combating cyberbullying.

In probing unproven red-tagging, "red-tagging" was coined decades ago by the Philippine government which they used to further intensify its campaign against terrorism, especially in combating the New People's Army. Red tagging is done by directly accusing journalists, politicians, and activists supporting the cause of Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army (CPP-NPA), which many would claim as an "anti-government" organization. This issue was quite sensitive for the participants, hindering their participation in socio-political issues. They want to take part in resolving these issues, but somehow they are seen as a threat by most of the government instead of partners of peace (United Nations, n.d). They feel scared or disheartened to hear that they are being red-tagged despite their efforts to resolve socio-political issues. However, from the participants' responses, they also know the precaution to be taken not to join an organization that promotes communist ideology, which is usually red-tagged. Such as joining an organization that is legally registered and proven that the organization is not encouraging youth to become members of the terrorist group.

In safeguarding and preserving national sovereignty and territorial integrity, it was shown that the participants are engaging in security issues concerning the national security of the Philippines, most especially the country's internal territory. The participants also gave importance to the role of the military in providing the people security and delivery of basic needs, which is hard to deliver to such remote places. Based on the responses of the participants, they are aware of the state of the Philippines' leverage in terms of security issues. From them, a responsible citizen must be interested in such matters because, in the end, they will benefit from it. This is within the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, which

the United Nations Security Council also adopted in 2015, where the youth has a significant role in preventing and resolving conflicts.

Cyberbullying is done by sending and posting negative, harmful, and meaningful content about one's personality and sharing private information about someone that causes humiliation and embarrassment. Based on the participant's responses, the researchers inferred that they are participating in combating cyberbullying due to their experience, as they do not want other students to experience cyberbullying. Because it can affect their mental stability and can cause psychological problems. In data presented by the Philippine National Police, the authorities recorded 22 cyberbullying cases from the year 2017 up to March 2019, which consisted of the majority of minors in the country. The country's law enforcement arm cited cyberbullying as the most prevalent form of bullying among the Youth nowadays. In addition, cyberbullying often transpires through social media. The Philippines National Police created special force units to effectively address cyberbullying in schools in the Philippines (Gonzales, 2019).

Local Participation

The study shows that participants need to be more engaged or participate nationally. Based on the participants' responses, they also engage in local participation. Based on the data gathered, participants are more engaged or participative in local issues.

Inculcating the spirit of volunteerism, it was shown that volunteerism is a fundamental expression of human relationships. The importance of youth volunteerism provides the opportunity to pass on different skills to civil society sectors. The participants narrated in their responses that they are active in participating in any activities regarding volunteerism.The participants themselves had the initiative to engage in volunteerism not because they could not only reach out and help a particular community but also because they were learning something about themselves based on their experiences and takeaways. The researchers inferred that volunteerism has tested their limitations and allows them to go beyond their comfort zones. Volunteerism creates meaningful change and encourages the youth to confront moral dilemmas, look for better solutions and instill innovative thinking.

Engaging in Policy Reform and Legislation Processes, it was shown that the role of citizens in a democracy as decision-makers is to enhance their analytical and defense skills in examining matters of public agenda, form sound judgments, and establish a dialogue with others as to findings and observations (Branson, 2015). These strategies became the driving force of the students to participate in formal political processes such as legislation and policymaking in national and local government units and lobbying certain public officials to influence their decisions on a particular issue. Based on the participants' responses shows that

some of the participants have engaged in the policymaking process in several socio-political issues. These include youth welfare, lack of general application of laws and policies, and the call for academic breaks and limited face-to-face classes. From the responses, it could be inferred that participants have observed and participated in their community issues that require a change of policies. Many young people are aware of politics because they are also concerned with current trends related to the culture, behavior, and structure of Philippine politics, especially its impact on their future and everyone.

Partaking in youth service (tree planting, clean-up drive, community service, seminar), it was shown in the responses of the participants that they are joining tree-planting activities, clean-up drives, community service, and seminars in their localities. From the response, the researchers inferred that the informants engaged in several environmental activities such as tree planting projects, cleanup drives in their respective communities, climate change and development aggression, and even attending seminars discussing environmental issues. Environmental education has a vital part to play in promoting environmental awareness. Aside from the current activities (tree-planting, cleanup drives, community service, and protests) that promote environmental awareness during pre-pandemic days up to the present Covid-19 Pandemic, new ways to educate youth have emerged, such as through the use of technology. Webinars are being utilized to get in touch with the youth. Youth continue embracing conventional and mechanical methods to contribute to environmental care and security.

In advocating mental health awareness, it was shown that, due to the heightened demand for academics and the difficulty of gathering resources in order to continue education and all other needs, mental health becomes a rising challenge and issue since there are reports and cases of suicide, depression and other related illnesses. A number of the participants have expressed their support for promoting mental health awareness. Having the youth start to support such a cause gives us an idea of the evolving needs and broadening of different perspectives, such as why this issue is happening, which can be deduced from different reasons. They find ways to improve their participation and engage with social issues that open them up to other opportunities and share them with others. The idea has been supported by a study in which the interest in the mental health and well-being of university students has grown in the last decades and in a very significant way during the last ten years, indicating that this area has not still reached its maturity period and will continue developing in the future (Hern√°ndez-Torrano, 2020).

In advancing the gender equality agenda, it shows that some of the participants show their support by providing platforms and programs to support the students who are members of the LGBTQIA+ community. The participants also invite others to support the cause for the government and others to give attention to the community and the concept of gender equality.

The participants gave importance to gender equality. Some of the participants engaged with the cause through curiosity and learning information. As such, they participate in organizations that support gender equality, and by gender, this includes the non-heteronormative ones belonging to the LGBTQIA+ community. The connection to political participation also increases their participation in such issues to provide resolution to it or, if not, raise awareness to other youth through inviting friends and colleagues whom they think will somehow contribute to new legislation. The participants' statements also created an atmosphere of trust in other young people to be confident about themselves, which is why most of them organized events where the sense of belongingness within these young people is that they are not left out.

In petitioning for an academic break, it shows that, in 2021, some students lobbied members of the City Council of Baguio to call for the implementation of academic breaks in various higher education institutions in the city due to recorded incidents of alleged suicide and other mental health problems. Even though the online class learning platform still exists today, only some students have access to a stable internet, and their electronic learning packets still need to be improved. In the meantime, a few colleges in Baguio City announced a scholastic ease or "health break" to grant students and staff a chance to recover their well-being from overwhelming scholarly workloads. From the participants' responses, they know the educational issues on their school premises. The pandemic brought rise to a learning emergency with a significant effect on the mental and physical well-being of students, instructors, and administrators. With the burden of studying in an online set-up, students call for an academic break. Thus factors such as poor internet connection, the cost of a mobile load, and financial problems were associated with many lockdowns that had happened. Contributing to the stress and anxiety of students, they call for an academic break for students to regain and recover for better productivity.

In organizing outreach programs, it was shown that aside from participating in educational-related issues in their school, a participant shared an experience in the outreach program and conducting activities for youth. From the response, the researchers inferred that giving the platform to create youth activities brings positive community development. The participant was able to empower youth such as college dropouts, high school, and elementary to showcase their talent and build their confidence and capabilities through joining activities that were created for them. Indeed youth are agents capable of guiding the community toward goodness and well-being. Flanagan and Christens (2021) point out that more youths are allowed to participate and contribute to associations or beneficial activities will create more relationships with the community, and the enhancement of Youth leadership skills involved in the decision will enable a decision to be made relevant and does not harm the youth.

In the information drive to combat cultural discrimination and misinformation, according to Amnesty International (2022), indigenous peoples are often marginalized and face discrimination in countries' legal systems, leaving them even more vulnerable to violence and abuse. Discrimination is why Indigenous peoples make up 15% of the world's extremely poor. Cultural Misinformation is false information surrounding cultural issues or topics, spread unintentionally (NBCI Trust, n.d.). The participants claimed that they are much more active in raising awareness of cultural issues because of the misinformation and discrimination observed and experienced by the Indigenous People. That is why youths participate in cultural issues through sharing information on Facebook, joining in seminars and competitions such as infographic videos that show the information drive of the culture, and competing in Baguio Youth Parliament 2002, promoting the creation of Youth Indigenous who would be genuine and devoted in addressing the central issue of culture. Based on the participants' responses from the focused group discussion, they know the discrimination and Misinformation about indigenous people in the Cordillera. They are educating their fellow students to combat cultural discrimination and Misinformation.

Methods Used by Students to Participate in National and Local Socio-Political Issues

1. *Mixed Mode of Participation (Social Media and Conventional Modes)*

The participants utilized the mixed mode of participation involving the use of social media and the non-use of technology or conventional means. The participants prefer a mixed mode of participation that would depend on the target audience and the particular issue in which they will participate.It was shown that the participants have a personal choice as to which platforms they will use to participate in a particular socio-political issue. However, it also depends on the scope of how they will participate in various activities. A participant said they would use social media if social issues are being discussed and conventional platforms for cultural, environmental, and educational issues. Meanwhile, a participant considered the target audience using social media and conventional platforms to make their strategy efficient in participating in socio-political issues. The researchers also inferred that social media and conventional leading platforms to participate in socio-political issues are effective.

Experience/s of the Participants in Becoming Part of National and Local Socio-Political Issues

a. *Perceive Self-actualization*

Based on the participants' responses, the researchers inferred that participation in socio-political issues has the positive effects of self-awareness, unearthing talents, practical socialization skills, gain of more remarkable growth or insights and knowledge that develop youth in terms of participating in any socio-political issues within their communities. Youth participation in different socio-political issues tends to further develop their skills in forming sound judgments and opinions and how they are governed. They also get themselves involved to shape the decisions made by political personalities that could impact their lives. One advantage of becoming part of different political movements is the greater learning capacity which connotes awareness of issues and a better understanding of institutions to know how they work.

b. Emerging of Envy, Judgements, Self-Confusion

Participants are very particular about the negative effects of participating in socio-political issues wherein their confidence was downgraded because of other peoples' judgments towards them. Their actions were unappreciated, which affected insecurities that led them to question their capabilities. The youth, especially adolescents, is considered to be the period of developing crucial political competencies, which justifies the need for greater attention to the effects of socializing factors (Tzankova & Cicognani, 2019). Hence, this is a formation period in developing their awareness and consciousness. That is why the political culture must be conducive enough to foster high levels between interpersonal trust and life and political circumstances that will result in relatively long-lived and stable democratic institutions.

c. Instilling Nationalism and Patriotism

The participants showed their love for their country as they believed that participating in socio-political issues would remain a way to show their love for their country. With the participants' statements, the researchers can infer that the youths still believed that nationalism and patriotism are instilled through participating in socio-political issues. Strong characters among youth who love the country are capable, credible, and confident (Johari, 2021). The participants also imply that everything will follow, such as engaging in one issue, which will drive the government to give attention or solution through laws, intervention programs, and other forms of support to that particular issue. The youth believed that there is a strong sense of urgency to move and resolve these socio-political issues from the values formed so that they will do something about it, such as knowing the processes of the government and the solution

to these socio-political issues. Engaging in socio-political will eventually instill nationalism and patriotism in themselves.

Possible Causes Why Youth do not Participate in National and Local Socio-political issues

a. Disinterested Youth

The researchers inferred from the participants' responses that youth are disinterested in participating in socio-political issues because as long as they are not affected by the status quo problem, they will not show interest in participating. As stated by Almond and Verba on their types of political culture, parochial political culture people have neither knowledge nor interest in politics and no orientation in political inputs, outputs, and political systems. In this research, the participant's responses on the effect of youths' disinterest in participating in socio-political issues are the hardest part because even though they are aware of the problem but will not participate, the process of progress will be stagnant.

b. Lack of Encouragement coming from the Community Leaders (Barangay officials and Sangguniang Kabataan Chairpersons)

As mentioned by the participants, the causes of why youths are uninvolved in participating in socio-political issues is because of the failings of the leaders in encouraging the youths to participate in the activity, the lacking in the dissemination of information, and the limited availability of programs offered by the leaders of the community. According to ACE (2022), young people can rapidly feel disempowered when there are lackings and obstacles to participating in formal, institutionalized political processes. Many people used to believe that their voices would only sometimes be heard. It leads to the exclusion among youth in formal political processes or debates about major socio-political issues, despite their sensitivity to the demands for social equity and justice, environmental protection, and cultural diversity.

Conclusion

Participants engage and participate in national and local socio-political issues present in their community. The researchers found that students start to take part in participating when they gain awareness of the issues. However, without awareness they do not engage, because they do not understand the significance of their participation in the issues. It was also found that if participants are given platforms such as competition (e.g., policy-making,

infographics), seminars/webinars, dialogues talks, able to organize activities, participate in civic engagement, that creates awareness. This built knowledge and initiative towards them to address issues and public concerns they see in their surroundings.

This research shows that most young people participate in socio-political issues through a mixed method, a combination of social media and conventional platforms. The researchers found that participants have their preferences, which depend on their convenience to the extent of what and how they participate. Participants are used to using social media to engage in such a cause because it creates a larger space to disseminate information and to influence and encourage other young people in civic engagement.

The researchers find out that youth who participate in socio-political issues have been experiencing positive and negative criticisms within their family, community, peers, and even in the institution to which they belong. Furthermore, it was unveiled that disinterest in youth, lack of encouragement coming from the community leaders, and lack of ways to empower youth due to lack of platforms are some of the reasons why youth do not participate in socio-political activities. The researchers found that there are lacking activities formulated by their barangay, school institution, and community leaders to boost youth engagement. The Sangguniang Kabataan (SK), a council meant to represent the youth in Local Governance and amplify the youth to participate in civic activities actively, needs to be more decisive in constructing and implementing activities that tackle youth empowerment.

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