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Versions of Transformation: Insights On Good Local Governance In Low-Income Cities In The Philippines

Abstract

The economic status of a local government is not a determinant of its governance quality. In the case of Philippine cities, the Seal of Good Local Governance (SGLG) award conferment demonstrates that good institutional performance is achievable regardless of income classification. Annually, awards come from the entire income class spectrum, from the highly urbanized city to the poorest, albeit inconsistently. This study examines the factors found in low-income cities that perform well, despite resource limitations. Using the cases of the cities of Balanga and Lamitan – consistent SGLG awardees – this qualitative study suggests that sociocultural factors (e.g., social networks), rather than socioeconomic factors (e.g., income), influence local government performance. As seen in its dense social networks, a city's stock of social capital manifests as active civic participation that reinforces good institutional performance. Similarly, local chief executives with substantial social capital influence good governance and have potential to become local policy entrepreneurs. They thrive in low-income cities due to the networks and resources that allow them to innovate. The results of this study emphasize the importance of civic participation in improving the institutional performance of local governments.

Keywords:

Seal of Good Local Governance; the Philippines; local governments; social capital; local policy entrepreneurs

Introduction

The economic status of a local government is not a determinant of its governance quality (Capuno, 2007; Adriano, 2014). In the case of Philippine cities, the Seal of Good Local Governance (SGLG) award conferment demonstrates that

good institutional performance is achievable regardless of income classification. Annually, awardees come from the entire income class spectrum, from the highly urbanized to the poorest local governments, albeit inconsistently.

The endeavor to measure

the quality of local governance in the Philippines was proposed immediately after the adoption of the Local Government Code of 1991. One mechanism is recognition and awards (Capuno 2007). As early as 1998, with the Local Governance Performance Management System (LGPMS) and now institutionalized SGLG, the evolution of the criteria for the quality of local governance is motivated by increasing the number of local government units (LGUs) that will qualify in the succeeding year (Medina-Guce, 2016; Diokno-Sicat, et. al., 2022).

The literature on local government performance measurement in the Philippines has established a weak correlation between governance quality and economic status. Performance measurements using Human Development Index scores (Capuno, 2007) in select provinces, LGPMS data in select provinces and highly urbanized cities (Adriano, 2014), and SGLG assessment areas in municipalities (Diokno-Sicat, et. al., 2022) confirmed that economic status does not impact governance quality. Both high- and low-income LGUs experience deteriorating and improving local governance performance during different periods. Good practices can also be obtained from both wealthy and poor LGUs.

While these studies provide a general picture of the lack of correlation between governance quality and economic status in provinces, highly urbanized cities, and municipalities, they fail to elucidate the case of low-income cities. Good practices have been under-studied. Several studies have examined the uneven development in provinces and municipalities. The case studies compiled by Hechanova et al. (2017) and the Galing Pook Foundation feature provinces and municipalities. While several cities are on the list, most belong to the upper income tier.

This study examines the cities of Balanga and Lamitan. Both are SGLG hall of famers and belong to the fourth and sixth income classes. The SGLG is a progressive assessment system that measures

the performance of LGUs in different assessment areas that evolve annually. Established in 2014, it succeeded in the Seal of Good Housekeeping (SGH). As models of good local governance, the two cities are characterized as having robust social networks with which they closely collaborate. Balanga Performance Governance System (PGS) strengthened public participation in policy planning and project implementation by creating the city's multi--sectoral governance coalition. Lamitan, on the other hand, was able to activate community groups to deliver social services at the grassroots level. As explained by Putnam's (1993) findings on institutional performance, successful and effective local governments have strong civic communities that contribute to their stock of social capital, eventually reinforcing good institutional performance. Putnam (1993) defines *social capital* as the "features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions." This study follows this definition in order to understand local governance.

Balanga and Lamitan have city mayors who are key to shaping cities' social networks. These city mayors capitalized on their social networks to affect innovation in their cities. While they carry on the work of their predecessors, they have made changes and improvements in existing policies and programs, allowing them to innovate (Takagi, 2021). The mayors of Balanga and Lamitan are examples of local policy entrepreneurs working around existing policies and resources while implementing reforms with their leadership.

This study aims to contribute to the growing literature on local government transformation in the Philippines. The SGLG is a good jumping board for examining emerging good practices in local reforms.

In the succeeding chapters, this study aims to answer the primary research question: What governance factors are found in low-income cities performing well despite resource limitations?

Chapter One examines the existing literature on institutional performance, typologies of local political elites in the Philippines, social capital, and emerging local policy entrepreneurs. Chapters Two and Three illustrate how social networks become effective social capital as defined by Robert Putnam, as seen in the case studies of the two low-income cities of Balanga in Luzon and Lamitan in Mindanao's Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). Chapter Four examines the cases of Balanga and Lamitan's unique social networks and how they made the two cities accountable and efficient. Chapter Five provides conclusions and policy implications.

Methods

This study employs Robert Putnam's social capital theory to analyze governance factors in low-income cities with good performance. This theory has been applied in previous studies on institutional performance. This paper attempts to apply the theory in the Philippine context in the contemporary period.

Using Putnam's theory, this qualitative research developed two case studies to illustrate cases of existing civic networks and stocks of social capital in Balanga and Lamitan. To develop the cases, first-hand information was gathered through key informant interviews (KIIs) with key personnel from the two local governments, such as their city administrator and city planning and development coordinator. Secondary data were obtained from desk research and a review of related literature.

Results and Discussion

An emerging dimension of good local governance

A review of the existing literature on Philippine LGUs shows that the quality of local governance in low-income cities is understudied. This contrasts with the other LGUs in the classification spectrum, from low-

income municipalities, first-income class, and highly urbanized cities to provinces, where emerging studies on good local governance exist. These studies revealed that a local government's economic status does not determine its quality of governance (Capuno, 2007; Adriano, 2014; Diokno-Sicat et. al., 2022). Both wealthy and poor LGUs can perform well or vice versa, as measured against the available good governance indicators.

This chapter introduces existing studies that illustrate how the quality of governance is not directly correlated with income level or economic status but rather is a consequence of other sociocultural factors. Organized into two thematic areas, the sub-groups of literature will look into early and contemporary studies that measure LGUs' performance as institutions and the typologies of local political elites juxtaposed with emerging local policy entrepreneurs in the Philippines.

Measuring institutional performance

Studies conducted in different areas and timelines have examined the performance of institutions, particularly subnational governments. Putnam (1993) studied twenty (20) regional governments in Italy between 1970 and 1989 to understand why some governments are more successful and effective than others and why some are lagging. Putnam noted that LGU performance varies across policy sectors. While the structures and resources of LGUs are the same, there is a variety in the institutions' effectiveness. The results of the performance assessment show that high-performing LGUs have stable institutions, sound financial management, and enact timely legislation. They also deliver efficient public services to their constituents regardless of their economic status.

Meanwhile, in the Philippines, several studies have explored the relationship between governance quality and post-decentralization economic status (Capuno, 2007). The Human

Development Index (HDI) scores and Local Governance Performance Management System (LGPMs) results validated the lack of correlation between economic status and governance quality (Capuno, 2007; Adriano, 2014).

Meanwhile, the analysis of Capuno's (2007) study was echoed in a contemporary study that examined the impacts of the SGLG's Performance Challenge Fund (PCF) in municipalities (Diokno-Sicat et. al., 2022). It was found that most municipalities not qualifying for the PCF and its pre-requisite SGLG belong to the third to sixth income classes. The survey results attributed the shortcoming to the lack of capacity or resources to meet the assessment criteria of the Seal.

Overall, the works of Putnam, Capuno, Adriano, and Diokno-Sicat et. al. provide different perspectives and arguments regarding the value of measuring government performance. More importantly, they all pointed out the weak correlation between governance quality and economic status in the Philippine LGUs.

Social capital or patronage politics?: Contested views on family politics in the Philippines

Typologies of local political elites

De Dios (2007) identified three typologies of local political elites in Philippine politics: patrons, bosses, and brokers. First, patrons engage in a patron-client relationship. The political and economic powers of patrons or local elites are maintained by assuring and supporting the needs of their clients or constituents as a form of reciprocity. Dense social networks are prevalent in areas where patron-client relationships exist. However, these networks are characterized as transactional and have the advantage of local elites and constituents.

Second, bosses or local warlords whose rise to power was brought about by weakening clientelist relations. Warlords' use of violence ensures the hold-to-power of the new local elites. The authority exercised using violence is

commonly seen in areas with land disputes and where law enforcement is weak or absent, such as in Mindanao, Southern, and Central Luzon.

Third, the so-called fiscal brokers broker between national and local governments. They do not belong to the landed class or are warlords. Instead, they bank on their reputation and influence to haggle resources to be channeled into projects that will benefit their constituents.

De Dios's (2007) categories elucidate the existing types of local political elites found in the country. Two glaring characteristics that can be gleaned from these typologies are a vertical-dependent relationship between leaders and constituents, and the absence of civic participation.

Emerging local policy entrepreneurs

Putnam (1993) defined and elaborated on the concept of social capital in the same study on Italian regional governments. Communities with dense civic networks, a form of social capital, tend to develop a high level of social trust that results in cooperation. A community's high social capital stock promotes effective government. A recent study of Italian municipalities also examined the connection between social capital and government performance (Batinti et. al., 2017). The researchers found a high probability of mayors being re-elected in areas with high social capital, given that public spending and fiscal reporting are transparent. Re-election becomes a reward for mayors practicing good governance.

Nishide and Yamauchi (2005), in their study of civic activities and environmental sustainability in Japan, argued that social capital is critical to empowering communities. They suggest activities to enrich social capital in different community groups: citizens, non-profit organizations, governments, and businesses. Emphasis was placed on the vital role of horizontal networks, such as non-profit organizations (NPOs), in creating social capital.

In a collection of case studies by Hechanova et al. (2017), common factors were seen in the transformation of the LGUs led by visionary leaders. Local chief executives have a clear grasp of their realities and futures. The second is the active collaboration of LGUs with multistakeholder groups in development planning and service delivery. The cooperation between the public and private sectors improved local economic development, resilience, and decreased the incidence of poverty, and allowed them good governance citations.

Takagi (2021) examined a different type of local leader in the Philippines: local policy entrepreneurs. He highlighted that, given the built-in nature of local policymaking, succeeding leaders cannot abandon the achievements of former leaders. Instead, they built on these accomplishments and enhanced existing policies. Local policy entrepreneurs need not formulate new policies or strategies to effect reforms in their leadership. Instead, they devised innovative ways and solutions to address local issues through policymaking. One example is the continuation and improvement of their predecessors' policies and programs.

In the northern Philippines, reform-oriented politicians emerged in the Municipality of San Nicolas, Ilocos Norte (Kusaka, 2021). Considered local elites, the Valdezes are credited for developing the town by banking on the country's changing landscape of the political economy. Remittances from Ilocanos working overseas drove the demand for increased business establishments in the municipality owing to the strengthened purchasing capacity of locals. The Valdezes used their land to create the Valdez Center, a real estate project catering to large business groups that opened shops in San Nicolas. Eventually, government offices set up spaces in the Valdez Center. The business-friendly politics of the Valdezes resulted in a booming local economy that created new jobs. In terms of policies, the

municipal council passed the municipality's investment incentive code in 2004, first in the Ilocos region. The Valdezes banked on its friendly relations with the private sector to generate income for the municipality, improve service delivery, and create a robust local economy.

In Metro Manila, Marikina City is synonymous with disciplined and law-abiding citizens. The leadership of the husband-and-wife tandem Bayani and Maria Lourdes Fernando is credited with the transformation of the city (Mendoza, 2021). Urban development became a priority for Fernandos when they were city mayors in their respective terms in office. They maximized the local autonomy given to local chief executives by the Local Government Code and ran the city government as a private company. Processes and transactions in offices have become increasingly efficient. The couple delivered basic services using a corporate-like approach, focusing on environmental management, solid waste management, health, and hygiene. The success of the Fernandos' leadership in Marikina is anchored to the continuity of leadership and is not limited to affecting their innovations.

This chapter establishes a weak correlation between the quality of local governance and economic status. Fiscal resources do not determine institutional performance. The cases illustrate the prevalent types of local political elite in the country and how they foster a dependent relationship between leaders and constituents. While these political elites deliver development, citizens' voices remain silent. Meanwhile, the emergence of local policy entrepreneurs has provided a new perspective on the transformation and development of local leadership. Given the cases illustrated above, there is a need to look for new governance factors that explain how good governance is achieved in Balanga and Lamitan in the succeeding chapters.

Translating vision to good governance: The case of Balanga City

Geographically situated in Central Luzon, Balanga City hosts commercial establishments and several academic institutions from primary to tertiary levels, making the city come up with a fitting long-term vision to become a university town and a hub for knowledge-based businesses (City Government of Balanga, n.d.). Balanga has received accolades because of its good institutional performance. Among these is the SGLG. A consistent awardee since 2015, the legacy of Mayor Joet Garcia – the Performance Governance System (PGS) – has resulted in local economic development and active stakeholder involvement. This chapter focuses on Balanga City's journey towards good governance. From realizing its vision to becoming an important global business hub, Mayor Joet Garcia led the city's transformation brought about by his leadership and policy innovations.

Building Balanga's strategic importance: The Philippines' hub for global technology

Balanga's vigorous development since its cityhood in 2000 can be attributed to the leadership of the Garcia brothers, who all served as city mayors. However, during the nine-year term of Mayor Joet from 2007 to 2016, the city received numerous recognitions of its best practices.

Towards a robust local business sector: Balanga City's conducive business environment

As a young city, Balanga's economic growth has steadily increased. When Mayor Joet assumed office as a city mayor from 2007 to 2016, the local development accelerated. Locally generated revenue increased from Php 29.69 million in 2001 to Php 265.62 in 2016 during his last year in office (BLGF, 2000-2022). This increase is attributed to the hike in local tax rates and the transformation of the Balanga Public Market into a profitable local economic enterprise through a public-private

partnership (PPP) (Figure 1) (E. Ilagan, personal communication, June 09, 2023). The public market is a model for local government-benchmarking activities (ISA, 2018).

Mayor Joet is credited with introducing PPP as an innovation to increase local revenues in the city. He allowed the lease of local government land to private investors to build malls and commercial establishments in the city.

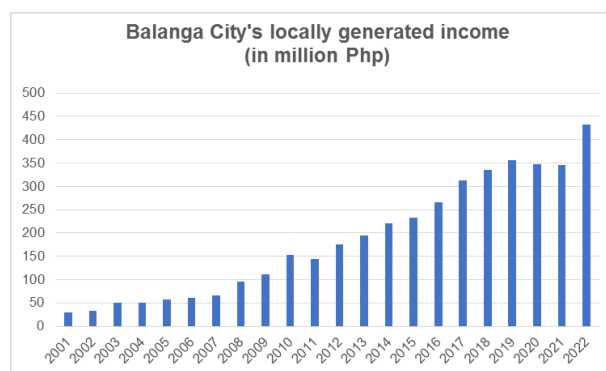


Figure 1. Balanga City's locally generated income (2001-2022)

Source: Author

The local business sector is the critical actor that supports Balanga City's vision of becoming an established hub for global technology businesses in the country. To support investors and business owners, the city government established a conducive environment for the Ease of Doing Business, which included systems, infrastructure, and talent supply. The Business One-Stop Shop (BOSS) and e-business Permit and Licensing System (e-BPLS) for business permit application and renewal processing were established by the city government.

When Mayor Francis assumed the post of city mayor in 2016, he continued and further improved the city vision initiated under Mayor Joet's term. From "Balanga University Town 2020: The Emerging Hub for Technology-related Businesses in the Philippines," Mayor Francis built on the city's potential to become a smart city and later adopted the refreshed vision of "Balanga Smart University Town 2030: An Established Center for Global Technology Businesses", developed with

members of the city's multi-stakeholder groups (City Government of Balanga, n. d.).

The SGLG conferment by the DILG started during the term of Mayor Joet and continued up to the current term of Mayor Francis. Before becoming an SGLG Hall of Famer, Balanga City had already received attention for its good governance in different sectors. During Mayor Joet's term, the city was awarded by different national government agencies for its successful campaign for a tobacco-free environment in 2013, an outstanding justice system at the barangay (village) level in 2012, and was among 2013's most business-friendly LGUs in the country (Provincial Government of Bataan, n. d.). The continued recognition of Balanga's good governance allowed it to become an ideal and preferred site for locators in the IT-BPM industry.

During Mayor Joet's nine years in office, Balanga's city vision underwent four reviews and modifications (Figure 2) (DICT, n. d.). The review of city vision has become more frequent than usual. While remaining anchored in the university town concept, the vision evolved from broad to refined and specific to its niche as a prime location for knowledge-based and technology-related businesses.

Mayor Joet Garcia: Balanga City's local policy entrepreneur

Mayor Joet's entry into local politics was unsuccessful. He ran for the city mayor in the 2004 elections to succeed his brother, Mayor Abet, but lost. Nevertheless, towards the end of his term, COMELEC released a decision in January 2007, declaring Mayor Joet as the duly elected city mayor in the 2004 elections to obtain more votes (PhilStar, 2007).

Mayor Joet initiated a new strategy and enrolled the city government in the Performance Governance System (PGS). As the significant transformation of Balanga City began when it underwent the PGS, city government personnel were the first to question the program's necessity. Nevertheless, despite the excellent performance of the city, Mayor Joet saw the opportunity to raise the city's standards in local government operations and service delivery.

The Performance Governance System: The cornerstone of Balanga City's good governance

A signature of good governance stands out in Balanga City. The city government and stakeholders share the city governance. The PGS, introduced in 2008 during Mayor Joet's term, accelerated the city's economic development

City mayor	City vision	Year formulated
Hon. Jose Enrique "Joet" S. Garcia	By 2020, World Class University Town: Center for Political, Economic, Social and Cultural Interaction in the Asia Pacific region	2008
Hon. Jose Enrique "Joet" S. Garcia	Balanga City, University Town by 2020: Top Five IT-BPM Locations in the Philippines	2013
Hon. Jose Enrique "Joet" S. Garcia	Balanga University Town 2020: The Emerging Hub for Knowledge-Based Businesses in the Philippines	2014
Hon. Jose Enrique "Joet" S. Garcia	Balanga University Town 2020: The Emerging Hub for Technology-related Businesses in the Philippines	2016
Hon. Francis Anthony S. Garcia	Balanga Smart University Town 2030: An Established Center for Global Technology Businesses	2019

Figure 2. Evolution of Balanga City's vision from 2008-2019

Source: Author

and steered it to realize its vision. The PGS is a governance framework based on the Harvard Business School's Balanced Scorecard, which measures performance based on the organization's goals. One critical element of PGS is the importance given to stakeholders' participation (ISA, n.d.). Frequent reviews of Balanga's city vision and strategy roadmap are products of its PGS journey.

The success of a city in its pursuit of development and good governance can be attributed to three main groups of actors in the city:

- 1.) City government personnel perform the interventions indicated in the city's strategy roadmap on top of their mandated roles and functions.
- 2.) Investors from the IT-BPM industry, local business establishments, and MSMEs play important roles in achieving the city's long-term vision.
- 3.) The multi-sector governance coalition (MSGC) created under the PGS *Ugnayang Balangueño*.

The MSGC is another important stakeholder group that strengthens citizens' trust in the local government in effecting innovations to local governance through collaboration.

When Mayor Joet's term in office ended, the younger Garcia sibling, Mayor Francis sustained and improved the city vision and programs from Mayor Joet's administration and institutionalized the PGS into Balanga's local government system. He also inculcated the smart city concept into Balanga's strategy roadmap for 2030 (City Government of Balanga, n.d.).

The internal stakeholders: The PGS Core Team, OSM, and VACs

The PGS was implemented by the Institute for Solidarity in Asia (ISA), a non-profit organization advocating for transforming the public sector in the Philippines. The ISA guided Balanga City in formulating its roadmap and establishing the

teams necessary to move it closer to its goal. The PGS Core Team, Office of Strategy Management (OSM), Vision-Aligned Circles (VACs), and MSGC are elements of the PGS (ISA, n. d.). These groupings, composed of internal and external stakeholders, collaborate on many aspects of the city government's development planning processes and implementation of projects, programs, and activities (PPAs).

Within the city government, the Balanga City OSM is primarily responsible for monitoring the progress of the city and ensuring that the PPAs stay within the strategy roadmap. It is not a mandatory local government office for LGC. Only LGUs and organizations enrolled in the PGS had OSM. Having realized the crucial role of the OSM in keeping track of the city's transformation, the OSM was institutionalized (E. Ilagan, personal communication, June 09, 2023).

Meanwhile, VACs are smaller groups of city government employees assigned to oversee the implementation of initiatives in the strategy roadmap (City Government of Balanga, n. d.). One of the most successful VACs of Balanga City that has been replicated by other cities is *tobacco-free generation*. This initiative promotes healthy lifestyles. It earned Balanga City a Red Orchid Award from the Department of Health (City Government of Balanga, 2018).

Ugnayang Balangueño: co-partner in governance

The PGS formalized the federation of various external stakeholders in Balanga City. The MSGC, a PGS element, was localized and adopted by Balanga as the Ugnayang Balangueño. It comprises community members, civil society organizations, academia, and the private sector, and is instrumental in operationalizing the concept of shared governance. The Ugnayang Balangueño plays a vital role in expanding the barangay learning hubs (BLHs), the priority project of Mayor Francis, when he assumed office in 2016 (City Government of Balanga, 2018). The

Ugnayang Balangueño took the lead in gathering donations to build alternative classrooms.

Through the PGS, shared governance was instilled during Mayor Joet’s administration. Stakeholder participation was strengthened in the local development council (LDC) and other local special bodies. Stakeholder feedback is sought in the city’s project monitoring activities, allowing them to provide insights into project implementation and planning future projects.

From Mayor Joet to Mayor Francis: A follow through of leadership

When Mayor Francis assumed office in 2016, he supported the city’s PGS program. Even after graduating from the program this year, the city government maintained a balanced scorecard in its executive-legislative agenda and comprehensive development planning (City Government of Balanga, n.d.).

The PGS affected city government personnel’s attitudes toward performing their duties and functions. As they were used to measure every activity and keep scorecards and targets, it encouraged them to comply with the requirements of other government-mandated performance assessment programs, such as the DILG’s SGLG since 2015.

Balanga’s readiness to comply with the progressive SGLG criteria and overcome the learning curve is mainly due to the practice of undergoing the PGS accreditation program (E. Ilagan, personal communication, June 09, 2023).

Every year, the level of difficulty of the SGLG criteria becomes more tedious, causing other LGUs to fail in the succeeding years (Diokno-Sicat et. al., 2022). For Balanga’s SGLG assessment preparation, the City Planning and Development Office, with guidance from the city mayor, is the focal entity that guides all involved city departments and offices on the requirements that each office needs to comply with.

The turnover of city leadership from Mayor Joet to Mayor Francis proved seamless. This was evident in the continuous enhancement of the city vision, continued PPAs, and the institutionalization of the city’s performance measurement and monitoring through the PGS program. Mayor Joet’s leadership introduced innovations and strengthened the building blocks of Balanga’s good local governance (Figure 3). The networks’ contributions help achieve good governance and a roadmap to the city’s vision.

Mayor Francis sustained these gains during his term and introduced the PPAs that reflected his priorities and leadership. The induction of Balanga City into the Palladium Group’s Balanced Scorecard Hall of Fame for Executing Strategy in 2017, which brought global recognition, demonstrated the impact of the PGS on a city’s good governance (City Government of Balanga, 2017).

In this chapter, the case of Balanga City presents the PGS as the cornerstone of its good local governance. The city’s enrollment in the PGS yielded several benefits for the city government

Building blocks of Balanga City’s good local governance

Outcomes	Good institutional performance	Shared governance and responsibility	Increased local income, robust local economy
Contributions	Delivery of targets in the strategy roadmap	Participation in policy planning and program implementation	Investment and employment
Networks of civic engagement	Vision Aligned Circles (VACs)	<i>Ugnayang Balangueño</i>	Business sector

Figure 3. Building blocks of Balanga City’s good local governance

Source: Author

and its stakeholders. Its institutional performance has improved with guidance from the roadmap strategy. Balanga's internal stakeholders – city government personnel – improved their capacities to plan and deliver targets as part of VACs. As for its external stakeholders, the business sector has become an important building block of the city's good governance. The city's increased local income from investments gave it the fiscal capacity to implement innovative programs, such as the PGS. Balanga has created a conducive environment for businesses and investments, as seen in its EODB efforts. The PGS also triggered the creation and strengthening of social networks in the city. The multi-sectoral governance coalition, a PGS component, called for the creation of the *Ugnayang Balangueño*. Eventually, with its good performance brought about by its collaboration with its internal and external stakeholders, Balanga became a consistent recipient of recognition and awards, among which is the SGLG.

The transformative leadership of the Furigays: The case of Lamitan City

Lamitan City is the capital of Basilan Province. Situated in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), its inhabitants practice a combination of Muslim and Christian religions. It is home to many indigenous groups.

Lamitan City was the first local government in Basilan to receive SGLG. Now a Hall of Famer, the LGU has continued with its best practice on service delivery at the grassroots level. The caravan initiated by former Mayor Rosita "Rose" Furigay has led to positive impacts in the community, therefore attracting participation from its constituents. This chapter introduces the ROSE caravan, Mayor Rose's flagship program. It presents a brief history of Lamitan and the influence of the Furigays as local leaders and how Mayor Rose and Mayor Roderick "Oric" Furigay became crucial in the city's transformation.

Reaching Out Serving Everyone: The flagship program of Lamitan City's good governance

In 2019, the Lamitan City Government established a history. For the first time, it delivered social services to the known bases of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in the city. After decades of fighting with government forces, the MILF welcomed the city government into its community (Unson, 2019). The flagship project of City Mayor Furigay, the Reaching Out Serving Everyone (ROSE) caravan, which began when she first assumed office in 2013, brought the city government closer to the people. Lamitan has barangays categorized as geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas (GIDA). These are isolated communities that lack transportation options and have underserved populations (DSWD MIMAROPA, 2021). The ROSE caravan provides residents with medical and dental care. It began as a medical outreach mission, but eventually expanded its services. Social services, such as birth certificate registration and application for senior citizen ID cards, were also brought down to the community level.

The caravan became an essential foundation of Mayor Rose's leadership. Her first order of business as mayor was to organize community groups, primarily the women sector and the barangay health workers (BHWs), to get their commitment to participate in the city government's programs and projects. Private- and public-sector stakeholder groups and civil society organizations were also activated to become city partners (L. Buenaventura, personal communication, June 14, 2023). Uniformed personnel from the military and police, non-government organizations, academe, LGBTQ+ community, civic groups, and ministries from BARMM also participate in the caravan (City Government of Lamitan, 2022).

The ROSE caravan was conducted on a quarterly basis. Led by Mayor Rose herself, she visits clusters of barangays together with city department heads, personnel, and community

groups. Apart from delivering services, part of the program is to gather feedback and suggestions from the community on LGU programs and activities. In communicating their needs, the LGU can provide support (L. Buenaventura, personal communication, June 14, 2023).

Throughout her nine years in office, Mayor Rose was backed by the city council led by his husband and former Lamitan mayor, Vice Mayor Oric Furigay. The couple's leadership is geared towards transforming Lamitan into progressive cities. In the city's Comprehensive Development Plan for 2016-2022, the city envisions an '*Abante Lamitan*' or a progressive Lamitan that is at the forefront of sustainable growth and development in the ARMM, now BARMM (City Government of Lamitan, n. d.). This was gradually achieved by the city with local economic growth from 2016 to 2020 per the Cities and Municipalities Competitiveness Index (DTI, n. d.). During these years, Lamitan City was conferred the SGLG award.

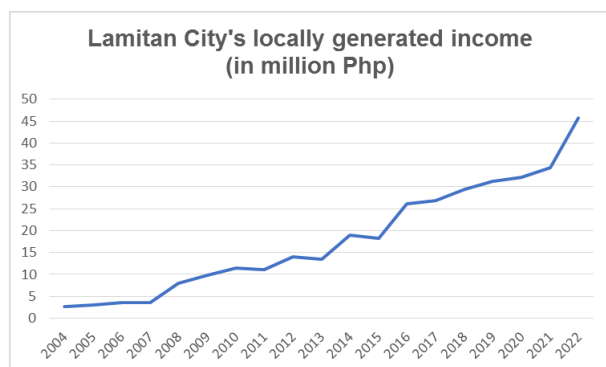


Figure 4. Lamitan City's locally generated income, 2004-2022

Source: Author

Locally generated income gradually increased during Mayor Oric's term from 2004 to Mayor Rose's last year in office in 2022. From 2.65 million Php in 2004, combined income from real property tax, business income tax, regulatory fees, and receipts from local economic enterprises grew to 45.72 million Php in 2022 (Figure 4) (BLGF, 2004-2022). In Mayor Rose's 2022 State of the City Report (Delos Reyes, 2022), 2021 business permit

issuances grew by 60% compared to 2013 data. Lamitans was among the first LGUs to adopt the Department of Information and Communications Technology's (DICT) electronic business permit and licensing system. It also established a business one-stop shop (BOSS) for one-day processing of business permit applications. In 2020, Lamitan was awarded the most competitive city in BARMM by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) (Bangsamoro Information Office 2021).

Emerging from a volatile environment: A brief history of Lamitan

Lamitan City is synonymous with an armed conflict zone. Located in its barangays are the lairs of the notorious local terrorist group Abu Sayyaf. Peace finally entered the city after being ground zero of the 2001 Lamitan Siege. In 2006, Lamitan hosted the 4th Mindanao People's Peace Summit (Philippine Human Rights, 2010). The city government is now focusing on maintaining peace and delivering social services to its 45 barangays. In 2016, Lamitan was awarded SGLG, the first in Basilan. It will receive its fifth SGLG in 2022 (Unson, 2022).

The roots of the Furigays in Lamitan run deep. Mayor Oric is a descendant of a Tagalog from Cavite, Pedro Javier Cuevas, most notably known as Datu Kalun, who founded Lamitan in the late 1880s. In 1975, when Lamitan became a municipality of Basilan Province, the grandson of Datu Kalun, Pedro Cuevas Pamaran, was appointed as the first municipal mayor from 1975 to 1980. Another grandson of Datu Kalun, Wilfredo Cuevas Furigay, Sr., was elected as the first municipal mayor between 1980 and 1992. Mayor Oric is the great-grandson of Datu Kalun. He entered local politics in 1992 as municipal councilor. He was elected as a municipal vice mayor in 1995 and served one term. In 2004, he was elected as a municipal mayor and served the city for nine years (Pamaran, 2018). Mayor Oric led Lamitan into its cityhood. In 2007, Lamitans was converted to a

city through the Republic Act No. 9393.

The partnership of Mayor Oric and Mayor Rose: Transforming Lamitan City

Mayor Rose continued with her husband's work in transforming Lamitan. Mayor Oric, who served as vice mayor, is not new to competition. In his previous post as mayor, the city was recognized for its compliance with the Full Disclosure Policy (FDP) and the Seal of Good Financial Housekeeping (L. Buenaventura, personal communication, June 14, 2023).

Mayor Rose's administration further ushered Lamitan in being recognized for good practices. Apart from bringing the city to the SGLG Hall of Fame, Lamitan also stood out in terms of education, innovation, gender, development, and resilience. In 2018, the DICT recognized Lamitan as one of the emerging Tech4Ed Centers in the National Tech4Ed Awards 2018 (DICT, 2018). Tech4Ed Centers bring ICT to the countryside to provide people with ICT skills for employment. In 2019, Lamitan's Tech4Ed Center was again awarded third place in the DigiPinay Digital Literacy Contest for having the most women trained in ICT (Himzon, 2019). From 2015 to 2022, Lamitan was awarded the Gawad Kalasag by the DILG and Office of Civil Defense (OCD) for its outstanding readiness to respond to emergencies and disasters, as reflected in its disaster risk reduction and management plan (Unson, 2015; Fernandez, 2022).

Maintaining peace in Lamitan is critical to the city's good governance. Mayor Oric remained influential in the city's peace and security affairs, even as a vice mayor. Visitors and correspondents doing business in Basilan are provided with security, with forces coming from the military and local police, and with instructions from Mayor Oric (Thompson, 2015). When he was re-elected for a new mandate as city mayor in 2022, Mayor Oric intervened in the reconciliation between the two warring groups in Lamitan. The leaders

of the MILF and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) signed a peace agreement, ending years of hostility. With Lamitan's good relations with BARMM, the Bangsamoro Ministry of Public Order and Safety also supported the signing of the peace accord (Unson, 2023). The LGU and its barangays participated in formulating the Second Bangsamoro Development Plan 2023-2028. The Bangsamoro Economic and Development Council (BEDC) received inputs from Lamitan locals in planning for the region's economic, infrastructure, social, peace, and governance sectors (Lao-Lastimosa, 2022). During the formulation of the city's Peace and Order and Public Safety (POPS) Plan for 2023-2025, multi-stakeholders from the city, military, and national government agencies participated in the planning process (Unson, 2023).

During the term Mayor Rose, Mayor Oric's leadership shifted from executive to legislative by heading the city council. As the city vice mayor, he presides over council meetings that deliberate the city government's policies, programs, and budget. Mayor Oric and the city council complemented Mayor Rose's priority programs, particularly the ROSE caravan. Even when Mayor Oric took office in 2022, he continued to implement the ROSE caravan even after the untimely death of Mayor Rose.

What makes social networks accountable?

Ugnayang Balangueño's trust in the local government is manifested in its active participation in civic affairs (Putnam, 1993). *Ugnayang Balangueño* is financially capacitated and funds some of the city's local programs and projects.

Balanga's successful transformation is also attributable to Mayor Joet Garcia's leadership style and social network. Mayor Joet played a crucial role in the partnership between Balanga City and ISA. The ISA envisions the Philippines becoming a country where no one is poor and citizens actively

participate in nation building (Lacson, 2021). ISA Chairperson Dr. Jesus P. Estanislao, a prominent Filipino economist and Opus Dei member, is one of the founders of the University of Asia and the Pacific (UA&P) (The Catholic University of America, n.d.). Mayor Joet met Dr. Estanislao at UA&P, where he obtained his bachelor's degree (E. Ilagan, personal communication, June 09, 2023). The UA&P's Credo anchored on forming "individuals who are professionally competent, creative and enterprising, zealous for the common good, and capable of making free, morally upright choices, and who can thus act as positive agents of change and service to society" (UA&P, n. d.) could be attributed to Mayor Joet's upbringing as a leader, in addition to having public servants as family members. Among Garcia siblings, only Mayor Joet was educated in UA&P.

UA&P is a tertiary academic institution rooted in the volatile period of contemporary Philippine history. Its origins can be traced back to the Center for Research and Communication (CRC), a non-profit think-tank for business development established in 1967 by Dr. Estanislao and Dr. Bernardo M. Villegas, an economist (UA&P, n. d.). In 1981, during the Marcos Sr. administration's Martial Law rule, the CRC and Ayala Corporation's Filipinas Foundation assisted in establishing the Makati Business Club (MBC). This organization of business sector members fought against the crony capitalism of the current administration and was branded as the "locus of business activism" (Hedman, 2006). With guidance from the Prelature of Opus Dei, the CRC, in 1989, began its conversion to a full-fledged university until its recognition in 1995 by the Commission on Higher Education (UA&P, n. d.). Dr. Estanislao was its first president. Dr. Estanislao and Dr. Villegas brought the apostolic work of Opus Dei to the Philippines in 1964 (Pintakasi, 2021). UA&P's institutional formation is guided by the Prelature of the Opus Dei (UA&P, n. d.). Through the CRC, Opus Dei had a history of civic

engagement and social participation by working with other sectors, as seen in the creation of the MBC. Opus Dei members are characterized as being at the top of the country's elite, and their influence is found everywhere (Tiglao, 2015).

Mayor Oric made good use of his association with the influence of the Cuevases, Pamarans, and Furigays in local politics to earn the trust of his constituents. Under his leadership, Lamitan became a city with an improved local economy that began to reap recognition. With Mayor Rose's turnover of leadership, she brought innovation to Furigay's leadership style. She employed a grassroots approach in her innovation, as seen in the ROSE caravan, giving weight to the importance of social service delivery. Mayor Rose tapped community groups and stakeholders from the public and private sectors and activated them to support the city's programs and become part of the implementers. Civic engagement eventually became a practice of the local governments.

Balanga City's case illustrates the benefits of strong social networks driven by its vision and goals. Interestingly, it should also be noted how Mayor Joet's personal and professional networks benefited the local government. Mayor Joet is confident that the ISA will help Balanga improve its institutional performance. Mayor Joet effected reforms and innovations in the city to push for development, as seen in his efforts to build a good business climate. Similar to San Nicolas (Kusaka, 2021), local chief executives can affect transformative reforms with substantial locally generated income. It allows them to exercise local autonomy better by being able to fund their initiatives and is not limited by their dependency on the funds allocated by the national government.

In examining social capital in the context of Lamitan, Mayor Rose, and Mayor Oric's social capital appears to be more influential in effecting changes in LGU. Mayor Rose benefited from Mayor Oric's network and accomplishments as the successor of his husband's post for nine years.

Mayor Oric's long years in public service earned him citizens' trust, including his relations with previous town leaders. He is also credited with the cityhood of the Lamitan.

The two cities exhibit different levels of social capital stock. However, both worked according to their context to the point that they could satisfactorily meet the requirements of SGLG. Balanga's case illustrates the benefits of having dense horizontal social networks and their benefits in checking the city government's institutional performance (Putnam, 1993). Lamitan, on the other hand, presents a different level of engagement with social networks. Lamitans' civic communities are still emerging with regard to the maturity of their networks. Peace and order during Furigays' leadership created a conducive environment for civic participation.

Local leaders' social capital must also be considered. In the case of Mayor Joet, Mayor Rose, and Mayor Oric, the social networks, relations, and resources of local chief executives shape their leadership style, eventually reinforcing good local government performance. In the cities of Balanga and Lamitan, the different characteristics and levels of social capital of leaders have characterized their approaches to promoting good governance. This study suggests that while a community's stock of social capital – its social networks – can guarantee good institutional performance of a local government, the stock of leaders' social capital is also an important factor in good local governance. The findings highlight how sociocultural factors, rather than socioeconomic factors, impact local government performance in Balanga and Lamitan. Leaders with strong social capital have the potential to become local policy entrepreneurs. They thrive in low-income cities because of the networks and resources that allow them to innovate. New policies and initiatives are borne out of the cities' contexts (Takagi, 2021).

It should be noted that both Garcias and

Furigays are still considered local political elites, particularly political dynasties. The difference between Mayor Joet, Mayor Rose, Mayor Oric, and the typical members of political dynasties is that they went beyond patronage politics by establishing strong social networks and involving them in local governance, establishing platforms for accountability (de Dios, 2007). Putnam (1993) posited that civic communities reinforce trust and cooperation.

Studying Balanga and Lamitan's social capital is an excellent starting point to understand why they perform well in SGLG. However, this study was limited to the experiences of two cities within a specific timeframe. It is also limited in terms of the collected data and timeline of the study. Therefore, future studies can expand this research by involving more cities to probe the same inquiry in a longitudinal study. Findings from many cities may explain why there are both performing and non-performing cities in SGLG. Furthermore, it may lead to a review of laws and policies, such as the LGC and SGLG. Social capital should be considered when designing policies and performance assessment tools.

Conclusion

In an attempt to identify the factors that shape good governance in low-income Philippine cities, this study explored the role of social capital in the good institutional performance of Balanga and Lamitan per the SGLG indicators. The analysis of the two cases crystallized social capital in the form of social networks as a crucial governance factor for LGUs to perform well. These social networks work for both the collective and individual.

In Balanga City, shared governance was fostered by the PGS. It expanded civic participation by creating a multisectoral governance coalition. It also capacitates internal stakeholders. City government personnel actively play an essential role in achieving the city's vision and goals

through their VACs. Mature social networks such as Balanga exhibit a certain level of dynamism, with leadership and initiative coming from the networks and not only from the direction of the local government. Local chief executives' social capital also propels good institutional performance. Balanga's visionary city mayor led the city to transform through economic and organizational interventions.

In Lamitan City, the emergence of active social networks was triggered by a city government program. The innovative approach to social services delivery at the grassroots level was the buy-in of community members to support and participate in the city's activities. To add to the innovativeness of the grassroots approach, the local government also maximized the initiative to gather inputs and feedback from the ground.

Local chief executives with strong social capital exhibit great potential to become local policy entrepreneurs. Their networks and resources available to them in the city allow them to thrive and innovate with their policies and programs in the city's context. Hence, good local governance is bolstered by strong horizontal social networks, complemented by visionary leaders in the form of local policy entrepreneurs. Notably, dense social networks are also found in communities where patronage politics persist. However, the only difference is that local policy entrepreneurs who thrive in communities with stocks of social capital work in their civic communities.

Putnam's (1993) study of Italian regional governments from 1970 to 1989 found that the civic context is important to explain good governance. Strong civic networks are equated with effective institutions. This study, situated in the Philippines, focuses on two low-income cities and their transformation from 2000 to 2022. This study highlights the relevance of Putnam's point on social capital as a crucial factor in improving institutional performance, applied in a different context and timeframe.

As a contribution to the study of social capital, Balanga and Lamitan's cases show ways in which social capital is nurtured in the Philippine setting. While dense horizontal social networks contributed to keeping the cities' institutional performance in check, this study highlights the significance of the social networks of local chief executives, as this influences their leadership styles.

This study highlighted the benefits of performance assessment mechanisms, such as PGS, to LGUs. This pushes for good local governance that targets internal stakeholders' capacity development and expands external stakeholders' participation. In addition, the partnership with multiple stakeholders showed that it is possible to delegate the implementation and monitoring of performance assessment mechanisms. Stakeholder participation can include policymaking, programming, monitoring, and evaluation. LGUs can maximize civic participation in local government bodies and may go beyond the 25% membership indicated in the LGC.

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