

The Seal of Good Local Governance in Digos City: Challenges and Opportunities

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Abstract: This descriptive study aimed to explore the challenges and opportunities of the local government of Digos in its endeavor for the Seal of Good Local Governance (SGLG) and the Performance Challenge Fund (PCF). Mixed methods research design was employed, particularly the convergent parallel approach. The qualitative part constructed the enabling factors and areas for improvement in the implementation of the SGLG and PCF based on accounts of personnel of the City Government who were directly involved in the assessment and preparations, representatives of oversight government agencies relevant to the seven SGLG criteria and PCF project beneficiaries. The quantitative part described the level of perceptions on the contribution of the SGLG and PCF to improved local governance in the City based on a survey to the constituents. Thematic analysis and descriptive statistics were used to process the data. It was found that the enabling factors in the accomplishment of the SGLG award of Digos City were anticipation, articulation and delegation, while areas for improvement were risk aversion, information and data management, participation and devolution. The perception of the people of Digos City also revealed a high level of agreement ($\alpha=3.98$, $n=399$) that the SGLG and PCF elicited improved local governance. Considering each criteria of the SGLG, it was found that the areas on financial administration and business friendliness and competitiveness have garnered very high levels of perception. Based on these findings, it was inferred that the challenges for Digos City for better implementation of the SGLG law in the future are risk management and increasing spaces for participation while the opportunities are implementation of e-governance and increasing capacity for decentralization.

Keywords: Seal of Good Local Governance, Performance Challenge Fund, Challenges, Opportunities, Digos City

I. INTRODUCTION

Establishing local governments that are highly accountable, effective, and transparent results in the efficient delivery of public services and high levels of public trust. Yet the ramifications of external shocks like the pandemic and economic crisis make the whole gamut of local governance laden with intricacies. In the Philippines, since the Local Government Code was enacted in 1991, the full benefits of the fiscal decentralization policy is yet to be seen. There are observed discrepancies in local development caused by lack of due diligence in the practice of devolved powers and responsibilities [1]. Following the tenets of new public management, a way to address this paradox is the adoption of performance management systems. Recently, performance evaluation became a significant means of improving efficiency,

effectiveness and accountability of government organizations all over the globe [2]. Ideally, these systems provide guidance through a set of indicators and metrics that aim to translate organizational goals into tangible breakthrough results and also to introduce reforms. Hence, the objective measurement of performance of local governments provides a considerable assurance to citizens that accountability is delivered [3].

Though government performance systems are theoretically viable, there are inherent flaws that prevent its effective implementation among organizations [4]. Studies on this area show that performance systems are not always successfully implemented nor used to improve decision-making and accountability. Poorly designed and understood performance evaluation may be of no benefit to organizations and could potentially result in dysfunctional behaviors. Some agencies focused on fulfilling the formal reporting requirements, rather than using of performance information functionally for decision-making, planning or project development. It was also found that government performance reforms implemented in several Asian countries have not achieved the goals of improving accountability, increasing efficiency nor reducing corruption in the public sector. Most of the studies on this line of inquiry focused on developed countries and few have examined the impact of performance evaluation systems in public sector reform of developing countries. Little has been understood on the various contextual factors or barriers of organizations and their relevance to implementation these systems [3]. On the other hand, more and more local governments become proficient at collecting and reporting performance measures, and that the emerging trend now is how performance measurement systems are being utilized by organizations to inform decisions and improve service delivery [5]. While the connection between good governance and development in a country level has also been well deliberated, only a few have examined the same study in the local government unit (LGU) setting [6].

In the Philippines, several performance management systems that were established to assess local governance are the Full disclosure Policy (FDP), the Seal of Good Local Governance, the Fiscal Sustainability Scorecard and Cities and Municipalities Competitiveness Index. This study focuses on the Seal of Good Local Governance [7].

In 2010, the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) of the Philippines institutionalized the

Seal of Good Housekeeping (SGH) to measure financial transparency and institute public reporting of budget and expenditures of local governments. The SGH has evolved to become the Seal of Good Local Governance (SGLG) in 2014. It was launched as part of the Philippine Open Government Partnership Commitment and raised the bar by up scaling the performance measurements of LGUs to include financial transparency and citizen engagements [8]. Becoming the guide to improve local governance, the SGLG became the most sought-after recognition of local government units in the national scale. Aside from commendation, the SGLG award makes an LGU eligible to the Performance Challenge Fund (PCF) and access to other financial facilities [9]. The PCF is intended for high impact local development projects prioritized by the LGU that enhances convergence of local development initiatives to the Philippine Development Plan for 2017-2022 [10].

Striving for the SGLG is a manifestation of results-based management (RBM). Over the last decade, many institutions have adopted the RBM as a performance management technique. As RBM puts results measurement at the center of management, it has substantial strategic planning, monitoring and evaluation consequences for the organization [11].

The study of the SGLG also anchors on the Theory of Change [12] which forwards the principle that through evaluating the performance of LGUs, awarding qualifiers, and by tying SGLG to incentives and stakeholder support, local government performance should improve. Theory of Change frames a rigorous yet participatory process whereby groups and stakeholders in a planning process articulate their long-term goals and identify the condition for meeting organizational goals [13]. Thus it is a viable analytical framework for evaluating systems from strategic planning to measurement and evaluation. This in a greater sense articulates how an intervention like the SGLG contribute to the desired state or impact.

Studying the Seal of Good Local Governance is imperative because of two important policies; Republic Act 11292 or the SGLG Law of 2019 and Executive Order No 138 known as the Mandanas-Garcia ruling. Based on these national mandates, the SGLG is not anymore a voluntary assessment for municipal, city and provincial governments, but for compulsory implementation. The recent Mandanas- Garcia ruling devolves most of the national government functions to the local government units, increasing their autonomy as well as responsibility [14]. Another compelling directive is the Participatory Governance Cluster resolution [15], which is a flagship program of the DILG to reinforce the achievement of the SGLG by identifying pathways for local participatory governance.

However, not all local governments have successfully achieved the SGLG award. Findings of a nationwide survey on SGLG performance revealed non passers that come from the 5th and 6th income class LGUs. Annual performances of a number

of LGUs were inconsistent as the evaluation framework has been varying annually since 2017 in terms of qualifying criteria, assessment criteria and indicators [16]. The variability poses a difficulty since data suggest that the average learning curve is 2 years for LGUs to be able to adapt the new evaluation criteria. Due to this, the incentive effects of the SGLG as an award and the PCF grant diminish. It was also found that though planning officials of LGUs recognize the importance of the SGLG, the cost of the award is greater than the perceived benefits [16]. The World Bank conducted a rapid assessment of the SGH and PCF programs in 2012 to examine the incentive effects on the LGU recipients [17]. It was found that while LGUs appreciated the financial assistance, the ineffective communication within the local government unit organizations weaken the potential benefits of the program. On the contrary, a DILG report for the third quarter of 2020 revealed that the PCF accessed through the SGLG over the years has been proven to be an effective motivational tool for LGUs. Though an increase in the number of LGUs that receive the SGLG is one indication of improved governance, an evidence gap is still noted due to lack of counterfactual [16].

In terms of the Performance Challenge Fund, a nationwide survey of local government units in the country in 2020 revealed that the PCF was well appreciated despite that majority were not able to avail of the PCF grant [16]. It was also found that there was a need to address administrative and procedural concerns to facilitate PCF utilization of grantees. Further, lapses in LGU planning resulted to the delay in projects and poor utilization of funds. There is insufficient evidence if the impact to the outcome areas targeted by the PCF grant have been felt by its intended beneficiaries [10].

It can be inferred then that there is a need to contextualize the study of SGLG implementation since most research dwell on aggregated secondary data from LGUs in the country. As LGUs have varied absorptive capacities, these findings open doors for a clearer curation of the performance indicators in the context of individual local government units [18]. As a progressive performance evaluation system, it is essential in order to see how the award translates to decision-making, planning, operations and service delivery of the LGUs and that lessons learned will enable better chances of achieving the most coveted award.

This study looked into the SGLG implementation of the local government of Digos City, a second class component city and capital of the province of Davao del Sur. It has been a recipient of the SGLG award in 2018 and 2019, making it eligible for the Performance Challenge Fund for two years. Along with the changes in the evaluation framework since 2014, Digos City had its rough ride in adjusting to the dynamic and more challenging indicators. The financial assistance derived from the PCF was utilized by the City government by procuring a lot to be used as relocation site and the upgrading of its slaughterhouse.

After a decade, it is recognized that the local government of Digos City is not exempted from the obstacles

in implementing the PCF and striving for its SGLG prerequisite. In order to benefit from the experiences, there is a need to locate opportunities that exist to build upon and strengthen. A number of key governance issues or challenges may also be recollected for continuous improvement. This study aims to explore the challenges and opportunities of the local government of Digos City for the Seal of Good Local Governance. Specifically, the following questions were raised:

1. What are the enabling factors and areas for improvement in the implementation of the SGLG and the PCF?
2. Do the SGLG award and the PCF grant of Digos City elicit improved local governance as perceived by its constituents?

II. METHODS

The design of this study is descriptive using the mixed methods approach due to the highly pragmatic nature of the inquiry. Both primary and secondary data were utilized. Convergent parallel approach [19] was employed. The enabling factors and areas for improvement were explored qualitatively while constituents’ perceptions on the contribution of the SGLG and PCF to improved local governance were accounted quantitatively. The two results were converged to arrive at the challenges and opportunities.

The first objective of the study was to construct the enabling factors and constraints in the implementation of the SGLG and the PCF. The investigation took off from the SGLG performance of Digos City for the years 2018, 2019 and 2020 as indicated in the Government Assessments Reports of DILG. The desk review informed the probing that was carried out by qualitative primary data gathering on the experiences and perceptions in the implementation of the SGLG. The participants of the key informant interviews were officials of the LGU directly involved in the SGLG preparation relevant to various criteria and representatives of the oversight government agencies and the DILG personnel from the city. For the PCF part, the exploration of the the implementation of the PCF projects was also based on project reports accessed through the PCF Portal. The documents involved were project proposal, project annual investment plan (AIP) and project Completion for the Slaughterhouse and Relocation Lot projects for 2018 and 2019 grants respectively. Based on the reports, two sets of participants were interviewed; LGU personnel involved in the design, implementation and monitoring of the PCF projects and beneficiaries. By analyzing thematically the responses of the various participant groups, enabling factors and constraints both in the SGLG and PCF implementation were determined.

In order to describe the constituents’ level of perceptions on whether the SGLG and PCF contributed to improved local governance in Digos City, primary data was collected. This was done through a survey of 399 randomly selected constituents of different baranggays in Digos City and employees of the City Government. Stratified random sampling was used to determine the distribution of the 26 baranggays. A semi-structured questionnaire was crafted using the published

work of Diokno-Sicat et al (2020) and Medina-Guce (2020) with contextual modifications. The questionnaire was of two parts, the first 18 items reflect the statements on the SGLG and PCF’s contributions to local governance items while the second part was made of 25 items reflecting the perceived attainment of criteria specific indicators. The 2018 standard of the SGLG employed seven criteria namely; good financial housekeeping, disaster preparedness, social protection, business friendliness and competitiveness, peace and order, environment management, tourism culture and arts. The respondents used a 5-point scale reflecting their degree of agreement or disagreement to the items. The survey responses were treated using quantitative descriptive measures, particularly the mean, which were interpreted using the following scheme:

4.51 - 5.0	very high perception
3.51- 4.5	high perception
2.51-3.5	moderate perception
1.51-2.5	low perception
1.0-1.51	very low perception

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The local government of Digos City has consistently submitted itself to SGLG evaluation since the beginning of the assessments by the DILG for the Seal of Good Housekeeping in 2011 until its evolution to SGLG in the present. It became a consistent passer to the SGH and the Good Financial Housekeeping. However, for the SGLG, it was only in 2018 and 2019 that the City successfully accomplished the award. The achievement of the criteria for the years 2014, 2016 and 2017 was not constant since only half the number of varying criteria was met. Among the criteria, Financial Administration was constantly achieved, while Social Protection and Environmental Management was achieved for two years. Peace and Order, Disaster Preparedness and Tourism, Culture and Arts was only achieved for one year. There were also specific indicators within each criteria that were hard to comply in 2018 and 2019.

Consequently, since the City government of Digos passed the SGLG, the Performance Challenge Fund was granted for two years. The first PCF project was the procurement of 3.7-hectare land for relocation site in the baranggays of Mahayahay and Dulangan amounting to 5.1 million pesos. This was for the purpose of future resettlement of informal settlers, landless families and displaced victims of natural disasters. The second PCF project is the rehabilitation of the city’s slaughterhouse in baranggay Tres de Mayo amounting to 3.5 million pesos. Under the pillar stimulation of local economic development and promotion of ease of doing business, this project aimed to boost economic enterprise through the provision of a central regulating facility for meat processing.

Based on these performance and projects implemented of Digos City, the experiences and perceptions of various constituents were gathered and analyzed to determine

the challenges and opportunities for better implementation of the SGLG law and the PCF in the future.

Enabling Factors and Areas for Improvement in the Implementation of the SGLG and PCF in the City Government of Digos City

The tables that follow present the results of the thematic analysis of the responses of key informants who were directly involved in the SGLG preparations. The participants were asked of their experiences and insights in the preparations

of their specific criteria, particularly on the strategies, constraints and suggestions. Qualitative responses were converted to codes and categories and eventually to themes which reflect the enabling factors and areas for improvement. It is important to note that these thematic areas are not mutually exclusive; rather they highly interdependent.

Table 1 shows the enabling factors in the SGLG and PCF implementation based on the thematic analysis.

Table 1. Enabling Factors in the Implementation of the SGLG and the PCF

Themes	Core Ideas
Anticipation	Timely updating of the City Development Plan and its projects, programs and activities (PPAs) based on evolving indicators
	Resource requirements for new indicators of SGLG criteria allocated in Local Development Investment Plan
	In medias res monitoring of levels of accomplishment of indicators to allow room for possible interventions
	Digitization of transactions and operations to serve the data needs for the SGLG commenced
	Executive-legislative agenda laid out for term-specific transition
Articulation	Unmet conditions for indicators in the past evaluations now acted upon
	Ensuring that the SGLG criteria and indicators are captured and integrated in planning and resource allocation
	Government agencies/ sectoral requirements aligned with SGLG indicators are determined and streamlined for optimization of resources
	Other concurrent performance management systems' metrics are harmonized with preparations for the accomplishment of SGLG criteria indicators
Delegation	Enactment of City ordinances for contextualization of national laws
	PCF projects contribute to the development goals
	SGLG criteria indicators not treated as compliance but guide to carrying out office mandate
	Offices or departments in charge of criteria and indicators analyze hard to comply indicators and empowered to apply strategies
	Offices and departments collaborate internally and externally with government agencies for data sharing
	Sangguniang Panlungsod or the city legislative body represent the local development council which ensure that the committees assigned to various sectors represent the concerns of each SGLG criteria
Offices and departments' high level of trust and cooperation to the Chief Local Executive	
Clarity of the contribution of each employee of the CGO to the accomplishment of the SGLG	

The first enabling factor in the SGLG success of Digos City is anticipation. This theme refers to the City Government's responsiveness to the changing external environment. This enabled the organization to arrive at courses of action that are needed to support the SGLG implementation beyond the usual plans and operations. Anticipatory planning in the City Government is basically of two characteristics - expecting the trend of the evolving indicators of the criteria and the ensuring that the previous unmet conditions are being addressed. The hard to comply and complex indicators have been studied and acted upon by office heads. In the last assessment in 2018, only seven criteria were set as standard, but with the institutionalization of the SGLG in 2019, 10 areas are required, hence the new indicators for the new criteria have been considered. The city government has determined its learning curve, and that measures like digitization of some transactions are underway to address the previous bottlenecks. Timely identification and possible modification of the PPAs to meet

the SGLG criteria indicators is also crucial. This also means adjusting the resource requirements to ensure that the PPAs are met. If the shift in indicators are not captured in the usual planning and budgeting cycles, supplemental measures are employed. An important part of anticipation is the timely monitoring of the levels of accomplishment of the SGLG indicators to make room for needed compensation if any. Anticipation in governance is a capacity stretched through society that can act on a range of inputs to manage new knowledge-based technologies while maintaining composure in management [20]. Hence, anticipatory planning allows organizations to make decisions that rely on predicting potential outcomes before making choices based on the information available. This is to lower risk and create effective solutions to deal with events at their inception or prevent them entirely.

Another enabling factor is articulation. This theme refers to the harmonization of the LGU plans to SGLG criteria and its indicators, NGA sector requirements and other performance management systems. The City Planning Office ensures that there is vertical alignment of plans like the Comprehensive Land Use Plan (CLUP), Comprehensive Development Plan (CDP) and their corresponding policies, projects and activities to national development frameworks like the Philippine Development Plan 2017-2022 and Ambisyon Natin 2040. Consequently, all SGLG criteria and indicators are captured in the CLUP, CDP, CDIP, AIP and other policy instruments of the City Government. Horizontal alignment on the other hand, is ensured in the consideration of sector frameworks like Solid Waste Management, Climate Change, Disaster Risk Reduction and international commitments like the Sustainable Development Goals. National government agencies' mandates are also interwoven, like that of the Department of Health, Bureau of Local Government Finance, Department of Social Welfare and Development, Department of Tourism and others. It is evident that the SGLG criteria and indicators intersect with these frameworks and these were mostly considered by heads of offices during planning to facilitate accomplishment of the SGLG. This theme is legally grounded on DILG - Bureau of Local Government Development MC 2017-84 entitled Guidelines for Strengthening Linkage of National, Regional and Provincial Development Strategies, Programs, Projects and Activities with the Comprehensive Development Plan. In this mandate, local governments are prescribed to conduct an assessment of the alignment of the CDIP. This is also emphasized in Section 4 of the Republic Act 11292, the Council of Good Local Governance. There is also articulation of various sector metrics, which is crucial to optimize government resources. For instance, metrics in the City Competitiveness Index by the or Seal of Good Financial Housekeeping by the BLGF are subsumed in the SGLG. This is a manifestation of the whole of

government approach to management; treating these as integrated measures rather than office-specific, distinct and fragmented. Under this theme, the City Government enacted ordinances for the contextualization of national laws and mandates in aid of better implementation of the SGLG indicators. Finally, the slaughterhouse PCF project completed represent development goals that have directly impacted lives of the beneficiaries by boosting their economic well-being. The relocation lot acquisition also addressed the social well-being of constituents.

The third enabling factor in the City Government's endeavor for the SGLG is delegation. This refers to the accountability entrusted by the local chief executive to the departments of the City Government of Digos. Delegation is based on qualifications, knowledge and skills set to strategically carry out their mandates as well as accomplishing the SGLG criteria indicators. Accountability is cascaded to the subordinate level as every member of the organization understands his or her contribution not only for the SGLG compliance but to provide genuine public service. This is identified as coercive isomorphism, wherein the organization is pressured to comply, which is a driver of the implementation of performance management systems [3]. There is also empowerment of the heads of departments and chairman of committees to represent the sector concerns, implement strategies and innovate based on the learning from the previous SGLG assessments. A manifestation of delegation is also seen in the interdepartmental and external collaborations needed for data streamlining and compliance to the indicators.

While enabling factors facilitated the accomplishment of the SGLG, there are also constraints and bottlenecks that encountered by the City Government of Digos. These formed the themes for areas for improvement as found in Table 2.

Table 2. Areas for Improvement in Implementation of the SGLG and PCF

Theme	Core Ideas
Risk Aversion	Unanticipated and uncontrolled events like pandemic and disasters disrupted continuity of operations
	Need for standard operating procedures for replacement of employees affected by unexpected sickness or calamity
	Need for new expertise and skill set not in the current staffing program to adapt to the changing indicators
	Need for research and feasibility studies for program and project conceptualization and development, as well as impact studies
	Technicalities in project phases that constrained effective implementation
	Boundary or territorial issues in the project implementation
Information and data management	Need to increase awareness of the SGLG and PCF projects at the grassroots
	Lack of community-based information system resulting to inaccurate estimates and dis aggregation of population as required by SGLG indicators
	Need for proactive communication and coordination between NGA offices and the departments of the LGU for data sharing
	Sector-level assessment revealed management information system (MIS) as a deficiency
	Real-time information needed to inform constituents specially in times of disaster and calamity
	Need for automation of financial transactions to reduce paperwork

	Need to automate for easy storage, retrieval and processing of records
	Need for a more informative website
	Need for more interactive spaces for citizens access to information on current events, not only social media
Participation	Lack of constituents' awareness of the SGLG and their roles in the overall effort of the City towards achieving the award
	System for social preparation and selection of beneficiaries became an issue in a PCF project
	Unwanted political influence over decisions in project implementation
	Need to involve more civil society organizations (CSOs) and constituents in project development and phases to promote transparency
	Need to identify vulnerable and marginalized sectors for representation
	Need for more proactive identification of stakeholders and CSOs to become partners and volunteers in carrying out programs for the SGLG criteria
	Need for CG departments' inventory of needs and requirements of internal and external relevant interested parties
	Need for better system for feed backing and client satisfaction on front line services as well as PCF projects
	Need to identify the roles and responsibilities of various offices involved in the project phases and timelines
	Devolution
Need to enact more local ordinances to aid in the enforcement of mandates aligned with SGLG Criteria indicators	
Need to identify and emphasize baranggay level contribution to SGLG criteria indicators and mode of coordination	

The first area for improvement is risk aversion. This theme is described as the City Government's capacity and capability to address the likelihood and consequences of adverse events having direct effect on the accomplishment of the SGLG. Some LGU processes were impeded and outcomes like internal revenue growth were not achieved due to the unanticipated and uncontrolled events like 2019 earthquake, the pandemic that immediately followed and economic shocks brought by global enmity. Capacity refers to the necessary resources and processes that need to be deployed not just as a stop gap but to ensure the continuity of operations and public service [21]. On the other hand, capability refers to increasing the risk aversion strategies by augmentation of human resources' skill sets and expertise, standard operating procedures as well as research and technology required to support decision making for risk aversion. This forwards the need for redefining and transforming jobs and skills development to equipping employees with the right skills and competencies that are relevant to ensure productivity, efficiency and competitiveness in times of organizational changes [6]. Moreover, a number of risks like specific technicalities in the projects phases and boundary issues were not anticipated in the implementation of the PCF projects.

Another area for improvement is information and data management. This theme refers to the need for policy and mechanisms for information dissemination, inventory, collection, processing and use of relevant data in aid of decision support for SGLG indicators. A number of unmet criteria in 2017 SGLG assessment resulted from the inaccurate estimates of population parameters and data dis aggregation. This may result to the deficient identification of appropriate interventions to address population-specific needs and problems [22]. Due to the sectoral nature of the SGLG criteria, there is a need for

coordination between national government agencies and the internal offices of the city government for the identification, systematic delineation and schedule of the data collection and analysis. Data veracity and protocols for privacy, confidentiality, storage must also be in place [23]. In the baranggay level, the lack of implementation of the Community-based monitoring system (CBMS) is attributed to the lack of awareness of the nature and purpose of the SGLG. In terms of information, it has been suggested that the Digos City LGU website could provide pertinent information on the City Government's efforts towards the SGLG by criteria and real-time updates for disaster-related events for constituents. When online access is not viable, appropriate and effective mechanisms for communication like use of information and education and communication (IEC) materials or use of vernacular language should be studied and employed.

The third area for improvement is participation. This theme reflects the need to augment spaces for constituents of Digos City to participate in the efforts towards the SGLG and in the implementation of the PCF projects. Substantive participation through proactive identification of social sectors like civil society organizations and marginalized or vulnerable groups is needed for appropriate representation and engagement [24]. This is due to the perceived lack of awareness of the SGLG in the grassroots level. Further, social preparation of beneficiaries of PCF projects should be based on data-driven analytics of the population. Reaching out to the various sectors necessitate the need for varied approaches of communication, engagement and empowerment. More avenues for information pertinent to LGU like the website should be reinforced to contain basic information like the offices, mandate, citizen's charter and public servants. Interactive mechanisms are encouraged such as feed backing for satisfaction of services and

transactions and request for public assistance utilizing varied platforms. There is also a need to identify and link with stakeholders and civil society organizations (CSOs) [25] who are relevant to the sectors representing the criteria like disaster management, environment, social protection, tourism, business friendliness and peace and order in carrying out programs that contribute in the accomplishment of the indicators. By involving the CSOs and constituents in project development and implementation, unwanted influence may be prevented and transparency increased [26].

Finally, devolution is also seen as an area for improvement. This fourth theme refers to the need for baranggay local government units to exercise their devolved functions in order to assist the City Government of Digos in the efforts towards the SGLG. Pursuant to the Local Government Code, the local governments are most knowledgeable of the context of the geographical area of jurisdiction. Attached to this is the accountability to its constituents [13]. The baranggay LGUs also have important roles to play in the implementation of national laws like the Solid Waste Management Act (RA 9003) and the Philippine Disaster Reduction Management Act (RA 10121). This role includes capacity and capability building programs ranging from additional human resource needs like additional personnel and new skills, technology resources and capital outlay [27]. Prior to execution, there is also a need for legislation of city ordinances by the Sangguniang Panglungsod

not only in the sector of health during the pandemic but in the other areas to contextualize the implementation of national mandates which are reflective of the SGLG metrics. This will aid the offices in the City Government to streamline implementation as well as data needs for SGLG implementation. Clarity in the delineated and shared roles between and among the departments in the City government of Digos and the 26 baranggays should also be clear so that the contribution of each operating unit is accounted.

The SGLG and PCF towards Improved Local Governance as Perceived by Constituents

To provide a holistic view of the SGLG and PCF experience of Digos City in the relevant years of implementation, the enabling factors and areas for improvement are substantiated by gauging the SGLG and PCF contribution to improved local governance based on constituents' level of perceptions. A survey was carried out to 399 constituents composed of employees of the City government and constituents coming from the 26 baranggays of the city.

Based on the results of the survey, there are varied levels of perceptions on particular contributions of SGLG and PCF to improved local governance as shown in Table 3. Overall, the level of perception was found to be high with a mean of 3.98.

Table 3. Level of Perception on the Contribution of SGLG and PCF to Improved Local Governance

	Indicator Items	mean	Verbal description
1	the SGLG Criteria serve as guide/bases for goal, vision and PPA identification and plan formulation	4.67	Very high
2	SGLG criteria motivates the LGU to perform and achieve program goals	4.45	high
3	The SGLG ensures accountability of departments involved in the assessment	4.56	Very high
4	SGLG ensure that the plans are aligned with National Government Agencies directives	4.38	high
5	SGLG promotes institutional mechanisms for effective policy implementation	3.89	high
6	The SGLG ensures substantive citizen participation	3.16	moderate
7	The SGLG promotes transparency and public access to information for citizens and interested parties	3.23	moderate
8	The SGLG creates viable spaces for communication, feed backing and mechanisms for redress or grievances of participating citizens	3.72	high
9	The SGLG ensures inclusiveness and multisectoral representation	4.29	high
10	The SGLG ensures that resources are mobilized in support of constituents	4.13	high
11	Through the SGLG implementation, Civil Society Organizations and private sectors are mobilized in achieving the criteria	4.46	high
12	The SGLG increases public awareness on the City's initiatives and thrusts	3.51	high
13	The SGLG helps the City government in the delivery of basic services.	4.18	high
14	Projects are implemented due to the PCF grant	3.12	moderate
15	PCF motivates the LGUs to perform better	4.58	Very high
16	PCF is a significant budget source of funds for LGU	4.32	high
17	PCF Meets/ addresses the problems of the LGU	3.75	high
18	PCF addresses the needs of the marginalized sectors	3.27	moderate
Overall		3.98	high

The pulse of the people of Digos City was also checked in terms of perception of improved governance in every SGLG criteria. It was found that the areas on Financial administration and business friendliness and competitiveness have garnered very high levels of perceptions. The rest of the

criteria on disaster preparedness, social protection, peace and order, environmental protection and tourism closely follow as having high level of perception from the constituents. Specific indicators under each criteria are elaborated in Table 4.

Table 4. Level of Perception of Improved Local Governance in Specific Criteria of the SGLG

SGLG Criteria and Indicator Items	Mean	Verbal description
Financial Administration	4.51	Very high
1. The City Government practices accountability and transparency by adherence to accounting and auditing standards	4.18	high
2. Sound management of resources is evident	4.63	Very high
3. There is optimal utilization of available mechanisms and resources to support local development	4.73	Very high
Disaster Preparedness	4.04	high
4. The City government is proactive in preparing for disasters through mobilization of DRRM structures and systems	4.65	Very high
5. The Development and implementation of appropriate programs and plans on disaster preparedness and the use of funds provided are evident	4.07	high
6. The CDRRM personnel capacity and competencies were built and enhanced	3.85	high
7. There is operational readiness with the availability of equipment, supplies and other resources intended for early warning and response	3.59	high
Social Protection	4.03	high
8. LGU actions to respond to the needs of the disadvantaged sectors like women, children, senior citizens, indigenous peoples and PWDs, urban poor are evident	3.8	high
9. Facilities or services that cater to the needs of the disadvantaged such as residential care facilities are provided	3.59	high
10. There is provision of support to basic education and accessibility features in local government buildings	4.02	high
11. Means of social welfare services are enhanced	4.15	high
12. Participation of the sectors in local special bodies and in the local Sanggunian is enhanced	4.59	Very high
Peace and Order	4.38	high
13. LGU efforts in maintaining peace and order with the implementation of activities are evident	4.67	Very high
14. Support mechanisms to protect constituents from threats to life and security are well provided	4.49	high
15. Drug-free communities in Digos City are ensured	3.99	high
Business Friendliness and Competitiveness	4.69	Very high
16. The actions of the City Government of Digos to bring about business and employment opportunities are evident	4.57	Very high
17. Systems, structures and legislation to support local economic development are manifested	4.88	Very high
18. Digos City attracts business for investments and employment	4.63	Very high
Environmental Management	4.29	high
19. City Government upholds the integrity of the environment	4.37	high
20. The City governments efforts in safeguarding the integrity of the environment are evident	4.48	high
21. Compliance with the solid waste management act of 2000 is manifested	4.02	high
Tourism, Culture and the Arts	4.40	high
22. The City government's effort to promote and develop local tourism industry is evident	4.61	Very high
23. The City government's efforts to preserve and enrich cultural heritage is evident	4.62	Very high
24. The City government's effort to advance creativity through local support is evident	3.67	high
25. Overall, Digos City optimizes its tourism potential	4.73	Very high

Challenges and Opportunities Framework for Digos City

The enabling factors and areas for improvement determined in the qualitative part of the study and the quantitative description of constituents perceptions on the contribution of the SGLG to improved local governance were further analyzed. It was found that they do not necessarily converge but more or less address the various nuances of the implementation of the SGLG and the PCF. Based on these findings, challenges and opportunities are framed for the more

effective implementation of the City Government of Digos of the SGLG law.

Challenges are constructs that need great organizational effort in order to be accomplished successfully. Opportunities on the other hand arise from circumstances or developments outside of the organization, that offer a positive outcome to the organization if taken advantage and treated appropriately. It is still important to note that these challenges and opportunities are not mutually exclusive, but are

interrelated and complementary.

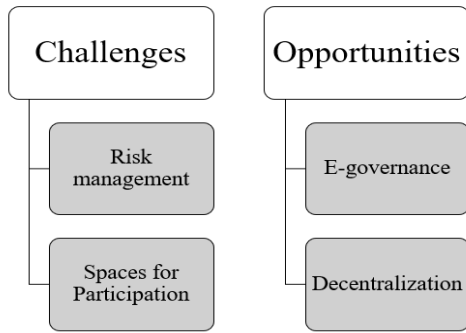


Figure 1. Challenges and Opportunities towards the SGLG and PCF of Digos City

Based on the lessons learned in recent natural calamities and the pandemic, a foremost challenge for the City Government of Digos challenge is risk management. For effective and efficient implementation of the SGLG law, there is a need to develop and document policies, arrangements and procedures to enable the City Government of Digos to prevent, respond to or recover from a threats, emergencies and hazards. Risk management in the context of SGLG is not just intended as a stop gap mechanism but rather to ensure that the organization is flexible and resilient from shocks that hamper operations that directly impact the performance metrics. Contingency in terms of financial and human resources have to be allocated so that operations, transactions and services resume at acceptable pace in the occurrence of unanticipated events. This includes response to emergencies, mitigation of the impact of disasters, hazards, illness, injury, damage and data loss.

The findings on the involvement and engagement of Digosenos in the SGLG and PCF implementation point to the second challenge for the local government, which is spaces for participation. There is a need to open or widen spaces for participation which means perceptive and inclusive avenues for constituents, stakeholders and civil society organizations to participate in programs relevant to each SGLG criteria and in PCF projects. Inclusion refers to the proactive identification not only of the relevant stakeholder groups but of the vulnerable and marginalized, as well as removing barriers to participation. Protection and autonomy should also be promoted by recognizing the freedom of these entities to organize, promote their agenda and express claims. The LGU should also be responsive to the agenda put forward by these groups so that in return, citizen trust and confidence will increase. Participation may also be strengthened through the expansion of membership to the city local development council and the creation of other special bodies which include representation from private sector, academe and other relevant sectors. The local development council plan and prioritize local programs and projects in relation to many indicators specially under the criteria on youth development, social protection, peace and order. Furthermore, there is also a need to strengthen documentation of participation for better presentation during

the SGLG evaluations. It is noteworthy to reiterate that these are part of the LGU's imperatives under the DILG mandate of Participatory Governance Cabinet Cluster which declared major milestones to ensure that there is allocation in support of initiatives for participatory governance.

While there are challenges that the City Government of Digos needs to get better at, opportunities were also formed based on the findings.

The first opportunity is E-governance. Despite that there are still gaps in the e-government ecosystem in the country, institutionalizing an optimal level of digitization in the City government of Digos, will bring about comparative advantage in terms of achieving the SGLG award. Since the accomplishment of almost all of the indicators of the ten criteria are data-driven, there is a need to establish and integrate an interoperable information and data management and sharing. As experienced, the lack of reliable and timely data not only resulted to noncompliance of a number of indicators but also to lapses in social preparation of projects and identification of appropriate interventions. This endeavor of e-governance subsumes the full roll-out of the community-based monitoring system (CBMS) in Digos City and its baranggays to provide dis-aggregated and panel data for the consumption of local planners and monitoring and evaluation. Pursuant to Republic Act11315, the CBMS intends to organize a technology-based system of collecting, processing and validating local-level data based on households of the local government unit. Other relevant laws that need to be articulated and contextualized in the effort for e-governance are Electronic Commerce Act of 2000 which necessitates the use of electronic commercial and noncommercial transactions and documents and prevention of misuse, the Data Privacy Act of 2012 for protection of digitized information and the Freedom of Information Bill which promotes the transparency accountability and citizen participation in governance, recognizing the right of the people to information in matters of public concern.

Finally, decentralization is considered an opportunity due to the passage of Executive Order No 138 or the Mandanas-Garcia ruling which redefines not only the fiscal landscape of LGUs but also transfers the roles of national government agencies to the local government unit. This concept of self reliance and exercise of authority and accountability for local governments has long been emphasized in section 17 of the Local Government Code. Devolved functions in social welfare, health, disaster, peace and order and environmental management are some of the basic services which mirror the criteria of the SGLG. Hence local devolution planning for the city government of Digos will be advantageous for the accomplishment of the SGLG criteria indicators. The vital role of civil society organizations, private organizations and other stakeholders are also highlighted for their participation in planning how to implement full devolution. Another important aspect of this opportunity is extending devolution to the baranggay levels. The delineation of functions should be clear between the NGAs, city government and baranggays. Likewise, capacity and capability of the baranggay government

units should be increased in order to empower them to perform their functions.

Implications for practice and further study

While the City Government of Digos is considered successful in its SGLG endeavor in the recent years, it is still urgent to act upon the various challenges and opportunities. The full swing of the SGLG law of 2019 and the Mandanas-Garcia ruling are the compelling national mandates. This is because the increased number of criteria and more stringent indicators in the new SGLG law and that functions previously assumed by national government agencies are now devolved to the LGUs. Based on the findings of this study, three thematic recommendations are forwarded for the City Government of Digos. The specific pathways may be operationalized contextually.

The first is people centeredness which may be translated through clear inclusion, representation and engagement strategies for all people of Digos City as well as stakeholders. These groups should also be empowered and equipped to represent, carry out their roles and responsibilities. Functional mechanisms for transparency, access to information and services and feedbacking should also be in place.

The second thematic recommendation is responsiveness. This is operationalized at the planning level, particularly anticipating full devolution, disasters and risks. This also includes the technology needs for information and data management.

Finally, the City Government of Digos has to be harmonized. Harmonization includes dovetailing of the various indicators and metrics of performance management systems. An important aspect under this thematic recommendation is project development and management and the implementation of the community-based monitoring system.

Meanwhile, this study serves as benchmark to future researchers to probe, confirm or explore related issues based on the findings. Specific implications for further study would be to investigate the dynamics of each SGLG criteria, consider population-specific perceptions or determine factors for LGUs that are nonpassers of the SGLG.

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