

Towards Inclusive Governance: Evaluating Gender Mainstreaming in Local Government Units

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ABSTRACT

This study evaluates the gender responsiveness of Cagayan Province's first-class municipalities in the Philippines through the Gender-Responsive Local Governance (GeRL Ka Ba) Assessment Tool. Institutional mechanisms, service delivery, monitoring and evaluation, and sectoral integration in social, economic, and environment programs were the focus. The results showed that three municipalities GAD-Enabling, and two were GAD-Starting. None of these municipalities reached the GAD-Sustaining level. No such municipalities attained the GAD-Sustaining level. Economic development and environmental management were low responsiveness, and social development programs were highly responsive, with selective gender mainstreaming applied. Budget and utilization patterns indicated a high correlation between exceeding the mandatory 5% Gender and Development (GAD) fund and performance scores, observing the importance of commitment of resources to ensure gender equity. Monitoring and evaluation practice, however, was uneven, limiting transparency, accountability, and adaptive policy-making. Outcomes of the study typically mirror the degree of Cagayan municipalities' progress toward mainstreaming gender issues in governance but also indicate the issues that continue to exist in institutional capacity, cross-sectoral balance, and monitoring mechanisms. The outcomes thus highlight the imperative on holistic and long-term intervention to shift from enabling to sustaining gender responsiveness. The research offers evidence-informed inputs to policy action at the local level and serves as the basis for the crafting of a five-year gender-responsive intervention plan to ensure inclusive governance in Cagayan Province.

Keywords: Gender Responsiveness, Local Governance, Gender Mainstreaming, Cagayan Province, Inclusive Development

INTRODUCTION

Local Government Units (LGUs) in the Philippines have drawn growing research and policy interest in recent years for their responsiveness to gender concerns (Vito et al., 2025). Gender responsiveness is the ability of LGUs to recognize, consider, and address the distinct needs, priorities, and experiences of women, men, girls, and boys in their policies, programs, and services. It assumes added urgency because gender discrimination and inequality persist in much of society, and they have direct implications for individuals' rights, security, and well-being ("Gender Issues Behind Bars: Insights for a Sustainable Wellbeing Plan," 2023). In the last three decades, the Philippines has achieved an impressive recognition in the country in advancing gender equality and empowering the female population on the women empowerment (Baena et al., 2024). The country has ratified the various global commitments on gender and development, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), an international bill of rights for women that has been adopted in 1979 at the United Nations (UN). With its ratification of CEDAW, the Philippines has undertaken to enshrine in the legal system the principle of gender equality, to get rid of laws that discriminate, to enact protective laws, and to establish institutions to advance the rights of women. It reaffirmed commitment to the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) in 1995, which outlined 12 priority areas where strategic goals were defined, including poverty reduction, education, health, political empowerment, economic empowerment, and eliminating violence against women.

Solidifying these activities more, the Philippines has harmonized the national plan of action on development to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Goal 5 specifically, which entails that gender equality be attained

and all women and adolescent girls be empowered. In accord with said global directives, the Magna Carta of Women (MCW) became landmark legislation requiring extensive measures to advance and defend the rights of women. To translate the MCW to the local context, Joint Memorandum Circular No. 2013-01 has been issued delineating the supervisory functions of the Philippine Commission on Women (PCW), the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG), the Department of Budget and Management (DBM), and the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA). The circular mandates LGUs to incorporate gender views in local planning, programming, budgeting, legislation, and in the plan, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of projects.

LGUs serve as the frontline in advancing gender equality and eliminating discrimination within their jurisdictions (Chant, 2007). They are responsible for delivering essential services including the health care, education, and social welfare—and for implementing policies that directly affect their constituents. However, LGUs frequently face challenges in addressing gender issues effectively due to entrenched gender roles and stereotypes, limited awareness and information, and insufficient resources and institutional capacity. As Leal et al. (2017) in their study, LGU performance is assessed through governance indicators such as transparency, participatory decision-making, equity, and gender responsiveness. Gender responsiveness, in particular, strengthens governance by enabling LGUs to better identify and address the practical and strategic needs of men and women, increase efficiency by engaging women in decision-making and program implementation, and ensure equitable opportunities for all.

There remain LGUs in the country which continue to ignore gender issues in governance. Without periodic evaluation, gaps in gender mainstreaming remain unseen and unchecked, and vulnerable groups—such as the female, child, poor, jobless, and elderly—continue to be at risk of not benefiting from development programs. This study aims to assess the gender responsiveness of political decision-making and gender equity policy implementation in selected municipalities in Cagayan, Philippines. Specifically, it examines gender awareness in political decision-making and gender equity policy implementation at the local level. Gender responsiveness takes a two-fold view, first in LGUs as organizations, and second in the delivery of basic services and basic facilities in the social, economic, and environmental sectors. From literature and best practices that apply, the results shall be used to guide the five-year gender-responsive plan of community empowerment.

This study purposively selected only five first-class municipalities in the province of Cagayan, Philippines as these represent the economically advanced LGUs within the province and are expected have greater institutional capacity, governance structures and resource availability for implementing GAD programs. This enabled a more consistent comparison of gender responsiveness across LGUs with similar socioeconomic characteristics.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

The study employed a mixed-methods research design as it assessed the gender responsiveness of the local governments in Cagayan province as an organization, and in terms of their delivery of basic services and facilities. The study developed a five-year gender responsive intervention plan for the LGUs.

Locale of the Study

The study was conducted in the 5 first class municipalities in the province of Cagayan. The selected municipalities were chosen due to their classification as first-class municipalities, indicating higher economic activity and development potential. Their inclusion provides a comprehensive representation of the province's capacity for governance, institutional collaboration, and policy implementation, making them ideal for the objectives of this study.

Researchers and practitioners can learn important lessons and advance gender equality and social justice in local governance by looking at the approaches, difficulties, and successes of gender-responsive projects in this area. Moreover, given the targets provided by the SDGs, LGU efforts in achieving gender equality (SDG 5) must be measured, especially in first-class municipalities.

Respondents and Sampling Procedure

The unit of analysis is the 1st-class local government units in the province of Cagayan. Their gender-responsiveness was assessed using the GeRL Ka Ba tool, an instrument developed by the Philippine Commission on Women (PCW). The GAD focal persons of the LGUs served as key informants of the study. An in-depth interview was conducted among key informants to identify the LGUs' gender index. As some key informants were not aware of other priority areas along GAD, heads of relevant offices and personnel were also interviewed.

Instrumentation

Among the research instruments employed was the “GeRL Ka Ba?” Gender-Responsive Local Governance (GeRL) Assessment Tool of the Philippine Commission on Women (PCW) and Local Government Academy. Piloted in 2004 in 73 LGUs across the nation and updated in 2015 to address emerging gender concerns and new GAD policies, the tool provides a general framework for determining to what extent LGU policies, programs, and services advance gender equality. The tool, which overall comprises 73 indicators, covers institutional arrangements, planning, budget, provision of service, and inclusion in three general sections: LGU profile, organizational gender responsiveness in local administration and institutional capability, and gender responsiveness of local basic services in social, economic, and environmental sectors. The tool provides LGUs the ability to gauge gaps and best practices on gender integration and policy and program corrections guidance.

Data Gathering

Information were gathered from government portals, reports, statistical databases, and official publications, complemented with structured and semi-structured interviews of major informants such as local leaders, department heads, planners, GAD focal persons, and other stakeholders. Both secondary and primary sources were used to access demographic, economic, and governance profiles, organizational structures, policies, programs, issues, and best practices in gender mainstreaming. The Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) Region 02 provided coordination with the LGUs. Retrieved data were coded and analyzed using quantitative and qualitative methods to generate credible results and gender-responsive recommendations.

Data Analysis

The study used descriptive statistical methods in data analysis collected from the GeRL Assessment Tool, whereby responses were quantified using a five-point rating scale to mark various indicators. Statistical measures used included Mean and Standard Deviation to determine conformity or integration level of Gender and Development (GAD) principles, Frequency and Percentage to analyze categorical variables. The measurement tool employed a five-point Likert-type scale, where each response had an associated numerical rating and description, utilized in different areas of performance, including Administrative Governance, Human Resource Management, Financial Allocation, and Social Development Services.

Ethical Concern

Several ethical factors must be taken into account while doing research with participants from local government units. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, giving their informed permission, confirming that they are aware of the study's goals, methods, potential risks, and advantages before deciding to take part. Anonymity and confidentiality were upheld to safeguard respondents' privacy, particularly when dealing with sensitive data. Responsible data handling is required of researchers, ensuring that only authorized people have access to personal information that is stored securely. The selection of participants was also governed by the fairness and equity principles to make sure that no person or group is unfairly burdened or left out of the research. To maintain open lines of communication and establish trust between the researchers and the local government entities involved, the researcher made it clear about the aims, potential conflicts of interest, and the potential impacts of the research. The research can be performed in a way that respects the rights and well-being of the respondents while still offering insightful contributions to the area by abiding by certain ethical considerations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Gender Responsiveness Scores of Selected LGUs in Cagayan

Table 1. Composite gender responsiveness scores of selected LGUs in Cagayan

Municipality	Institutional Mechanisms (Mean $\pm$ SD)	Service Delivery (Mean $\pm$ SD)	Monitoring & Evaluation (Mean $\pm$ SD)	Composite Score	Category
A	4.25 $\pm$ 0.31	3.98 $\pm$ 0.27	3.45 $\pm$ 0.39	3.89	GAD-Enabling
B	4.12 $\pm$ 0.36	3.85 $\pm$ 0.34	3.35 $\pm$ 0.42	3.77	GAD-Enabling
C	4.05 $\pm$ 0.29	3.76 $\pm$ 0.30	3.28 $\pm$ 0.37	3.70	GAD-Enabling
D	3.42 $\pm$ 0.33	3.15 $\pm$ 0.28	2.78 $\pm$ 0.35	3.12	GAD-Starting
E	3.30 $\pm$ 0.35	3.08 $\pm$ 0.32	2.70 $\pm$ 0.40	3.03	GAD-Starting

As shown in Table 1, three municipalities – A, B and C - fall within the GAD-Enabling category, representing moderate-to-high integration of gender concerns in local governance. Institutional mechanisms always had higher marks in comparison to service delivery and monitoring, which means structures like GAD Focal Point Systems already exist but operation and monitoring remain to be addressed. On the other hand, municipalities D and E, lies within the category of GAD-Starting, had lower marks across all aspects, especially monitoring and evaluation.

This performance spread corresponds to Akanbang & Bekyieriya, (2020) finding that LGUs commonly demonstrate strength in developing institutional arrangements but fall short in systematic monitoring, largely because of scanty technical capability and resources. Yet, some research, as evidenced in Vito et al. (2025), posits that identified LGUs to have high institutional marks have the tendency to advance faster in-service improvement, which has not yet clearly become outlined in the two lower-performing local governments. That would mean institutional preparation may be inadequate on its own to ensure service excellence without the assistance of leadership and resource allocation.

Distribution of LGUs

Table 2. Distribution of LGUs by gender responsiveness category

Category	Criteria (Composite Score)	No. of LGUs	Percentage (%)
GAD-Starting	2.50 – 3.49	2	40
GAD-Enabling	3.50 – 4.19	3	60
GAD-Sustaining	4.20 – 5.00	0	0

Most (60%) of the municipalities fall within the category of GAD-Enabling, and 40% of the municipalities fall in the GAD-Starting category as depicted in table 2. None of the municipalities attained the GAD-Sustaining status, which implies that none of the municipalities has attained full, integrated, and on-going gender

mainstreaming. This gap indicates the necessity of having capacity-building interventions and enhanced policy enforcement measures to push LGUs to sustainability in gender responsiveness.

The lack of GAD-Sustaining LGUs echoes the national situation documented by the Philippine Commission on Women (PCW, 2021), in which full integration continues to be exceptional, particularly in first-class provinces away from metropolitans. In contrast, Prabha (2024) stress that through specific leadership training and periodic GAD program review, LGUs can transition from enabling to sustaining in five years, which indicates that there is a possibility for Cagayan municipalities to reach such standard through guided interventions.

Sectoral Performance Scores

Table 3. Sectoral performance scores by municipality

Municipality	Social Development	Economic Development	Environmental Management
A	4.10	3.50	3.25
B	4.05	3.40	3.20
C	3.95	3.35	3.15
D	3.70	3.05	2.95
E	3.65	3.00	2.85
Mean	3.89	3.26	3.08

Social development programs such as women’s health, VAWC desk services, and training on livelihood ranked highest in all municipalities, which shows high concern for welfare-oriented services. Economic development and environmental management ranked lower, which shows weak integration of gender views in agriculture, enterprise development, and environmental policies. This trend suggests that gender mainstreaming has been selectively undertaken, specially where social welfare matters get first priority and economic and environmental ones remain less attended to.

Oedl-Wieser (2015) also noted parallel sectoral disparities, stating that gender policies of local governments often target welfare, so economic and environmental planning remain comparatively gender-neutral. In contrast, Economics of Gender in Resource Dependent Communities (2022) indicate that, if economic empowerment and environmental protection programs become distinctly gender-inclusive, overall GAD performance scores rise substantially within three years, debunking the thesis that welfare must be the main GAD issue.

GAD Budget Allocation and Utilization

Table 4. GAD budget allocation and utilization

Municipality	Mandated Allocation (5% of total budget)	Actual Allocation (%)	Utilization Rate (%)
A	5.0	6.2	93
B	5.0	5.8	88

C	5.0	5.5	85
D	5.0	5.0	72
E	5.0	5.0	69

Those LGUs which were above the minimum 5% GAD budget appropriation (municipalities A, B and C) had higher utilization rates and higher composite GAD performance. Conversely, municipalities D and E allotted only the minimum and had lower than 75% utilization rates, which befits their lower gender responsiveness performance. It then implies a direct link between priority in budget, efficient spending, and GAD performance.

These results support Chakraborty & Sengupta (2023) which found that adequate and well-focused GAD funding is one of the best predictors of gender mainstreaming success. Other researchers (PCW, 2021), however, issue a warning that increased allocations in themselves offer little assurance of better results if there is no evidence-led planning, sound monitoring, and leadership commitment, suggesting that both budgetary and managerial capability must be addressed in parallel.

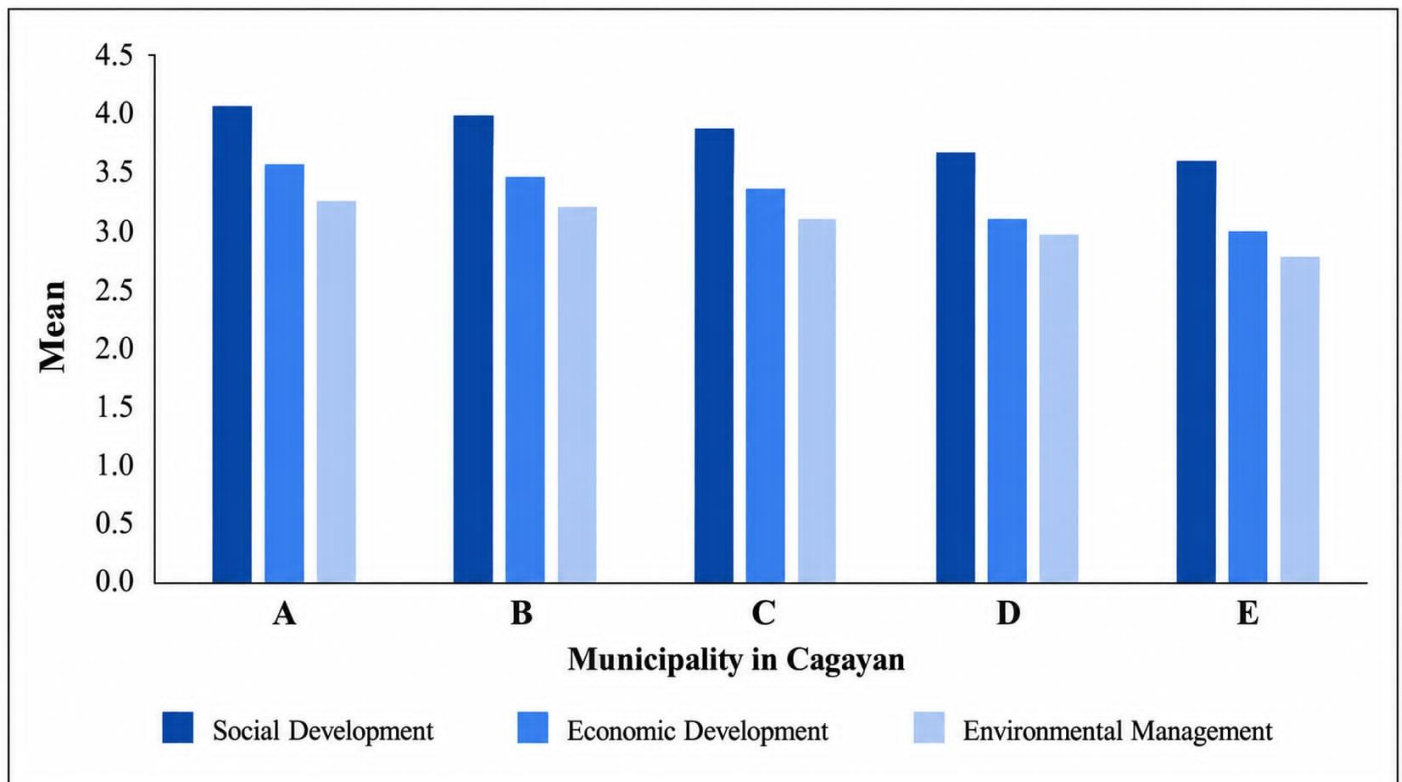


Figure 2. Sectoral gender responsiveness scores

Figure 2 illustrates the dominance of social development in gender responsive initiatives with a mean scores approach 4.0, in contrast to economic and environmental services, which fall below 3.5. This signals sectoral integration imbalance, which can limit the transformative capacity of GAD programs to seek economic resilience and environmental protection.

This is a trend similar to that noted in Leal and Saguibo (2017) report, where economic and environmental governance trail in terms of gender integration due to technical capacity deficits. Some instances of case study at the international level in the Southeast Asian region (UN Women, 2022) do exist, however, whereby sectoral integration that is balanced has led to more equitable and more sustainable developmental outcomes, which would indicate there may be merit in undertaking a cross-sectional gender mainstreaming strategy on the part of the LGUs of Cagayan.

Prevalence of Monitoring and Evaluation Practices in Selected LGUs

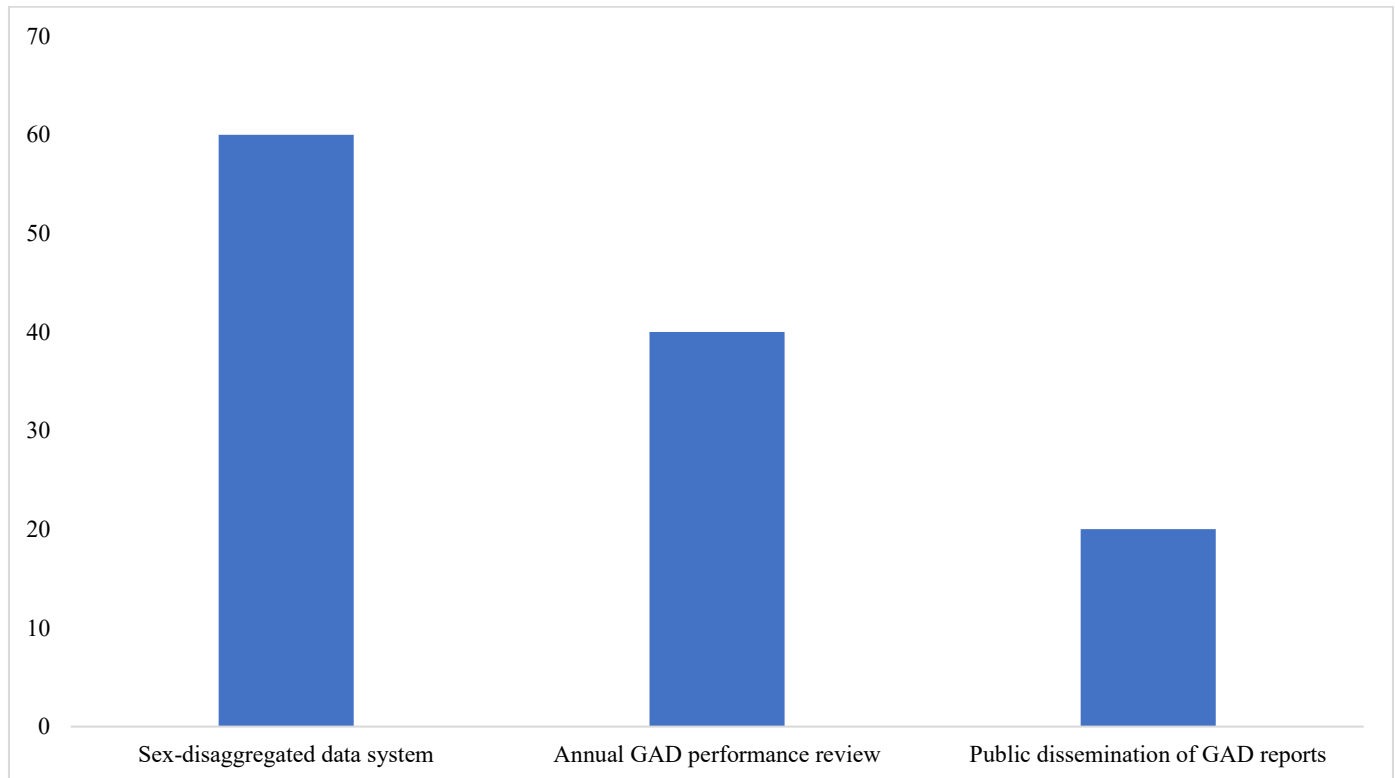


Figure 3. Prevalence of Monitoring and Evaluation Practices in Selected LGUs

Figure 3 indicates that while the majority of LGUs (60%) reveals a sex-disaggregated data system, lower possess an annual GAD performance review (40%) and only a minority (20%) release GAD-related reports in this initiative. This indicates that LGU's of transparency and accountability remain to be established, which can undermine the feedback loop necessary for adaptive policy-making and good gender-responsive governance.

This result corresponds to the Philippine Commission on Women (2021) discovery on recurrent bottlenecks to LGU gender mainstreaming, including inconstant M&E practices. Conversely, other ASEAN studies (UNDP, 2020) show that well-managed M&E, especially when results are shared publicly, correlate to increased trust in communities and higher policy compliance, and thus there could be much to be had in institutionalizing such practices in the whole of the Cagayan LGUs.

CONCLUSION

The results show that first-class municipalities in Cagayan have significantly improved with regards to institutional mechanisms for gender responsiveness but are still irregular in sectoral integration, monitoring, and service delivery. Most of the towns are classified as GAD-Enabling, which means they are moderately integrated. None of the towns, however, reached the GAD-Sustaining level, which means gender mainstreaming is not yet totally institutionalized. Welfare and health-based social building programs are more gender-inclusive than environmental and economic services, which still have a gender-bound focus. Budget usage and allocation were most strongly associated with gender responsiveness because higher-performing LGUs had gone beyond required GAD expenditures and enhanced implementation. Monitoring and evaluation practices were weakest in quality, however, that further constrained governments to be responsive and accountable. These results suggest that despite the existence of institutional mechanisms, day-to-day leadership, resource prioritization, and full integration among sectors are all necessary for the achievement of long-term gender-responsive governance.

These findings should be interpreted with caution and should not be considered fully representative of all LGUs in the Philippines. The country comprises municipalities with varying levels of socioeconomic characteristics, governance capacity, demographic composition and even GAD practices. Consequently, the experiences of the

LGUs included in the study differ from those of lower-income municipalities, highly urbanized cities, and geographically isolated areas.

Despite these limitations, the study offers insightful information about the current status of gender mainstreaming in local government. The strengths and challenges that have been identified—especially in the areas of institutional mechanisms, sectoral integration, budget utilization, and monitoring and evaluation—reflect problems that have also been noted in national policy reports and earlier research on gender-responsive governance in the Philippines. Therefore, while the results cannot be generalized statistically to all Philippine LGUs, they might be suggestive of more general patterns and ongoing difficulties in the local implementation of gender mainstreaming programs. To enable more robust national-level comparisons and generalizations, future research should incorporate LGUs from various regions and income brackets.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to promote the gender mainstreaming forward in Cagayan's local government units (LGUs) in the Philippines, the following strategic action steps are proposed. Towns must have regular monitoring of GAD performance, tabulating by sex, and public disclosure as part of its regular function. This will discipline them and enable fact-based decision-making. Cross-sectoral integration must get top priority by mainstreaming gender considerations not just in social welfare but even in economic development and environmental management programs to attain equitable and just growth. Third, the GAD budget should always exceed the minimal 5%. For efficient utilization of funds, open and evidence-based planning, and leadership commitment are required. Other than this, capacity building intervention such as leadership training, technical seminars, and peer-learning exchange among LGUs must be institutionalized so that the local leaders and focal persons will have the right skills so that their activities will be executed properly. Through these recommendations, municipalities will be able to transition from practicing gender responsiveness to maintaining it, and therefore lead to more inclusive and equitable governance.

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