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## Research Article

### Challenges in Sustaining the Seal of Good Local Governance: The Case of City of Carmona, Cavite

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#### ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the City of Carmona, Cavite, and aims to describe the problems the city has in maintaining the Seal of Good Local Governance. It seeks to determine what the challenges are to the Local Government Units' (LGU) ability to keep the SGLG status, how these challenges affect the city's operations, then provide recommendations to address these challenges. Based on the data and a "Strongly Agree" consensus from respondents, the Local Government Unit of Carmona has a considerable capacity to sustain its governance practices. This is attributable to the governance framework being grounded on well-defined and institutionalized policies and sufficiency of resources, ability to balance SGLG compliance and SGLG urgent local priorities, and active participation from stakeholders. On the other hand, respondents "Agree" that there are risks to the long-term sustainability of the LGU, which include policy gaps, and unclarity of mandates, inadequate funding, political shifts, the turnover of leadership, natural calamities, and disasters.

**Keywords:** *SGLG, City of Carmona, Cavite, Seal of Good Local Governance, DILG, Challenges, Good governance*

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#### Background of the Study

The Seal of Good Local Governance (SGLG), established under Republic Act No. 11292, is a performance-based program of the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) that recognizes local government units (LGUs) that demonstrate good governance practices. The SGLG evaluates LGUs across

several areas, such as financial administration, disaster preparedness, social protection, environmental management, peace and order, and business-friendliness.

Previous studies emphasize that sustaining good governance requires more than meeting performance indicators. It also depends on institutional stability, financial preparedness,

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and the ability to respond to risks and crises (Brillantes & Fernandez, 2019). Research on fiscal sustainability and disaster risk reduction shows that governance systems are often tested during emergencies, leadership changes, and periods of limited resources. An LGU may perform well under normal conditions but become vulnerable when unexpected challenges arise.

Recent literature highlights the importance of digital governance in improving transparency, service delivery, and citizen participation (Valle et al., 2024; Asadon et al., 2024). While digital systems help LGUs perform better operationally, they do not fully address risks related to political changes, disasters, and financial shocks. This study builds on existing literature by examining governance sustainability beyond digital performance, focusing on fiscal resilience, disaster preparedness, and institutional continuity.

This study aims to examine the challenges encountered by the City of Carmona, Cavite in sustaining its Seal of Good Local Governance (SGLG) recognition, focusing on the institutional, operational, and compliance-related issues that hinder consistent performance across the SGLG assessment areas. Specifically, it seeks to identify gaps in governance processes, citizen engagement mechanisms, service delivery systems, and interdepartmental coordination that affect the city's ability to maintain SGLG standards. Through this inquiry, the research intends to determine key organizational and policy factors that influence SGLG sustainability and to develop evidence-based recommendations that will support LGU leaders in strengthening governance practices and improving long-term SGLG compliance.

The findings of this study are expected to contribute significantly to enhancing local governance by providing LGUs with a deeper understanding of the structural and operational factors affecting SGLG sustainability. By uncovering the root causes of compliance challenges, the research can guide local executives, department heads, and policymakers in designing strategic interventions that reinforce accountability, transparency, citizen participation, and service excellence. Furthermore, the study can

serve as a valuable reference for other LGUs aspiring to sustain their SGLG status, as it highlights practical lessons and best practices that strengthen governance systems and ultimately improve public trust and overall quality of local government performance.

## **Research Methodology**

### ***Research Design***

The study used a quantitative descriptive research design to assess the perceptions of key stakeholders regarding the sustainability of SGLG practices in the City of Carmona. Given the limited number of respondents and the focused scope of the study, it is best considered a pilot case inquiry rather than a basis for broad generalizations to all component cities. The design was appropriate because it allowed the researchers to measure attitudes, experiences, and organizational realities using structured and objective tools, enabling the identification of patterns, gaps, and areas for improvement in SGLG compliance.

### ***Research Locale***

The study was conducted in the City of Carmona, Cavite—an award-winning local government unit known for its strong governance practices and previous recognition under the SGLG program. The locality was selected because it provides a relevant context for examining both the successes and the emerging challenges in sustaining SGLG standards.

### ***Population and Sampling Techniques***

A total of 25 respondents participated in the study. These included local government officials, representatives from national government agencies, and civil society stakeholders who are directly involved in SGLG-related planning, implementation, and monitoring. The respondents were purposively selected because of their knowledge and experience with governance processes in the city. Although the sample does not encompass the entire workforce of the City Government of Carmona, it represents key decision-makers and implementers whose insights are essential in documenting institutional challenges affecting SGLG sustainability.

### Research and Validation of the Instrument

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire with Likert-scale items based on SGLG assessment indicators. The questionnaire was reviewed by a research expert and pilot-tested with three DILG officers to ensure clarity and relevance. The results of the pilot test showed acceptable internal consistency, with a Cronbach's Alpha value of at least 0.70, indicating that the instrument was reliable for the study.

### Data Gathering Procedure

The Google Form link was disseminated to the identified respondents along with an explanation of the study's purpose. Respondents were informed that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw or skip items at any time. Informed consent was secured before data collection, and confidentiality of responses was strictly maintained. To enhance data credibility, the researchers also conducted a document review using the SGLG Governance Assessment Report (GAR) and the SGLG Database, which were officially requested from the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) Region IV-A through a formal letter. DILG was assured that all documents would be handled confidentially and used solely for academic purposes.

### Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The following scale was used to interpret the results:

- 4.50–5.00 = Strongly Agree
- 3.50–4.49 = Agree
- 2.50–3.49 = Moderately Agree
- 1.50–2.49 = Disagree
- 1.00–1.49 = Strongly Disagree

### Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to standard ethical research protocols, ensuring voluntary participation, informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality. Respondents were assured that their identities and responses would not be disclosed or used outside the purposes of this research. Permission to access official documents was also secured, and institutional data were treated with strict confidentiality.

### Results And Discussion

This part presents the results of the study entitled "*Challenges in Sustaining the Seal of Good Local Governance (SGLG): The Case of the City of Carmona, Cavite*." The responses were analyzed and processed using descriptive statistics to determine the level of agreement of the respondents with the indicators and questions related to the sustainability of the SGLG.

Table 1: A. Institutional Mechanisms & Policies

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Standard Deviation	Verbal Interpretation
The LGU has well-defined policies to sustain good governance practices beyond the SGLG award cycle.	4.88	0.331662479	Strongly Agree
Governance standards are integrated into annual and medium-term development plans.	4.68	0.4760952286	Strongly Agree
The LGU regularly reviews and updates governance policies to maintain relevance and alignment with SGLG standards.	4.8	0.4082482905	Strongly Agree
Internal monitoring and evaluation systems are in place to track compliance with SGLG standards yearly.	4.76	0.4358898944	Strongly Agree
There are institutionalized performance indicators that ensure continuity of reforms regardless of political changes.	4.64	0.4898979486	Strongly Agree
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4.75</b>	<b>0.06300230531</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>

The results show that the City of Carmona has strong institutional mechanisms that support good governance. Policies related to SGLG are well-defined, integrated into development plans, and regularly reviewed. However, the indicator on ensuring continuity of reforms despite political changes received the lowest rating among the institutional indicators. This suggests that although policies exist, their sustainability may still depend on political leadership.

To address this concern, the LGU may strengthen institutionalization by passing local ordinances, establishing permanent offices or units responsible for SGLG-related functions, and embedding SGLG commitments into legally binding plans. These measures can help ensure continuity regardless of changes in political leadership.

*Table 2: Financial, Human & Technical Resources: Financial Resources*

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Standard Deviation	Verbal Interpretation
Budget allocation for SGLG-related programs is adequate to sustain initiatives beyond the award period.	4.76	0.4358898944	Strongly Agree
The LGU has contingency funding to maintain governance reforms during financial constraints.	3.44	0.4582575695	Moderately Agree
Fund disbursement processes support timely implementation of governance projects.	4.5	0.5	Strongly Agree
There is flexibility to reallocate funds for sustaining high-priority SGLG reforms.	4.56	0.5830951895	Strongly Agree
External financial support (grants, partnerships) is effectively mobilized to maintain SGLG standards.	4.64	0.5686240703	Strongly Agree
There are enough skilled personnel to support the continuation of SGLG initiatives.	4.36	0.4898979486	Agree
Staff are adequately trained in SGLG-related standards and governance reforms.	4.44	0.5066228051	Agree
Succession plans are in place to maintain institutional knowledge even if key personnel leave.	4.32	0.4760952286	Agree
Inter-departmental coordination supports the long-term maintenance of governance standards.	4.84	0.3741657387	Strongly Agree
Staff motivation and morale contribute to sustaining governance practices.	4.52	0.5099019514	Strongly Agree
ICT systems and databases are sufficient to monitor and sustain SGLG compliance.	4.64	0.5686240703	Strongly Agree
There is access to reliable data and analytics for governance decision-making.	4.64	0.4898979486	Strongly Agree
The LGU uses technology to automate and track governance performance indicators.	4.72	0.4582575695	Strongly Agree
Adequate technical support is available for implementing governance-related innovations.	4.6	0.5	Strongly Agree

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Standard Deviation	Verbal Interpretation
Continuous upgrading of systems and tools supports long-term SGLG sustainability.	4.76	0.4358898944	Strongly Agree
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4.51</b>	<b>0.05566654705</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>

Based on the overall assessment of resource capacity with a weighted mean of 4.51 ('Strongly Agree'), the results on financial resources reveal an important finding. While respondents strongly agree that budget allocations for SGLG-related programs are adequate, they only agree that contingency funding is available. This suggests that Carmona has sufficient funds for regular operations but may be vulnerable during financial emergencies or

unexpected crises. In other words, the city is operationally capable but financially vulnerable during transitions or shocks.

This finding highlights the importance of establishing contingency funds and adopting risk-informed budgeting practices. Strengthening financial preparedness can help ensure that governance reforms are sustained even during periods of uncertainty.

Table 3: Balancing Local Priorities

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Standard Deviation	Verbal Interpretation
The LGU effectively prioritizes SGLG standards alongside other urgent local concerns (e.g., disaster response, health).	4.75	0.4423258685	Strongly Agree
Decision-making processes consider both short-term needs and long-term governance goals.	4.76	0.4358898944	Strongly Agree
Conflict between competing programs is minimized through clear prioritization strategies.	4.63	0.494535355	Strongly Agree
Stakeholder consultations help balance local demands and SGLG requirements.	4.75	0.4423258685	Strongly Agree
Political leadership consistently supports maintaining SGLG compliance despite competing priorities.	4.67	0.5646597026	Strongly Agree
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4.71</b>	<b>0.05495635363</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>

Carmona integrated Local Governance of the SGLG standards into daily practices, yielding an overall weighted mean of 4.71 ('Strongly Agree'). This indicates that the SGLG compliance is not viewed by the LGU as an additional burden but as an integrated perspective through which all local priorities are attended to. The equally high mean scores (4.75) on the SGLG's efficient integration and prioritization of urgent local issues and stakeholder consultations underscore a success in two main areas, that is, strategic planning and governance. This

is an ethically positive scenario, wherein the community's voice is strategically solicited, which enables the LGU to demonstrate high standards of governance in a responsive manner to pressing needs like disaster management and public health. Moreover, the strong endorsement of political leadership (4.67) as well as the governance leg of no conflict (4.63) on competing programs illustrates that the approach is sustained from the top, which is fundamental in providing the mandate and political stability needed to manage competing

programs. All these elements show that the Local Government of Carmona has developed an integrated approach to decision making that

considers and resolves competing short-term pressures with long-term and institutional goals.

*Table 4: Stakeholder Contribution*

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Standard Deviation	Verbal Interpretation
Civil society groups actively engage in planning and sustaining governance reforms.	4.88	0.331662479	Strongly Agree
The private sector provides resources or technical expertise to support SGLG compliance.	4.56	0.5066228051	Strongly Agree
Barangay officials align their governance efforts with municipal-level SGLG priorities.	4.76	0.5228129047	Strongly Agree
Community members are informed and encouraged to participate in good governance programs.	4.8	0.4082482905	Strongly Agree
Public-private partnerships contribute to sustaining SGLG-related innovations and reforms.	4.76	0.4358898944	Strongly Agree
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4.75</b>	<b>0.07754542846</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>

Furthermore, the overall collaboration fostered outstanding governance in Carmona as recorded in the October 2023 report with an overall weighted mean score of 4.75. This signifies that governance is not merely a function of the government, but a joint responsibility of the entire community. Of particular note is the mean score of 4.88 which result from the participation of the civil society in the planning and maintenance of the reforms. This score reflects the reality that civil society is no longer an indifferent on-looker, an uncommunicative critic, but a committed partner and an institutional

guardian of the reforms. Also, the cooperative and barangay alignment scores of 4.76 show that the participatory disposition is, indeed, extending to the grassroots. The score from the participation of the private sector, at 4.56 is slightly lower, however, the scores across the different actors indicate that the City has established a culture of openness and public trust which motivates actors from grassroots and commercial sectors to invest their time, resources, and expertise to ensure the standards of local governance are upheld.

*Table 5: Risks to Sustainability*

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Standard Deviation	Verbal Interpretation
Political changes and leadership turnover threaten the continuity of governance reforms.	3.71	1.082636342	Agree
Limited or unstable funding poses a risk to maintaining SGLG standards.	4.08	0.7023769169	Agree
Natural disasters or crises can disrupt governance programs and priorities.	3.32	1.180395414	Agree

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Standard Deviation	Verbal Interpretation
Weak community engagement endangers long-term sustainability of SGLG achievements.	4	0.8164965809	Agree
Policy gaps and unclear mandates hinder the institutionalization of good governance practices.	4.16	0.687992248	Agree
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3.85</b>	<b>0.2251507164</b>	<b>Agree</b>

Unlike the previous section, which described the capabilities of the SGLG organization, the last section of the SGLG report describes a significant, almost self-imposed, vulnerability assessment. Here, the preponderance of the respondents seem to agree (overall weighted mean of 3.85) that there are a number of different risks to the sustainable maintenance of the SGLG in the long term. Most respondents believe that the most significant perceived internal threat is not some external and unpredictable force, but systemic weaknesses within the SGLG, specifically the self-imposed gaps in institutionally ambiguous policies and provisions that set operational boundaries (4.16). This is an important distinction. Most stakeholders believe that the local government unit (LGU) seems to have policies (Table 1), but stakeholders perceive that their clarity and root institutional coherences within these policies need to be refined to establish smooth, sustained operationalization. The next most significant threats are constrained or unreliable resources (4.08) and weak public participation (4.00). This relies on the foundational affirmations of public trust in the previous tables and suggests that the current level of operational stability is rather fragile and highly dependent on ongoing resource provision and active maintenance of public trust. The risks tied to shifts in political power and leadership (3.71) or to natural disasters and crises (3.32) seemed to suggest the respondents had confidence in the existing preparedness or that these risks are external and unpredictable.

The results in this table indicate that LGUs must shift focus from Strong LGU Capacity towards guaranteed resilience by explicitly advancing better internal resilience, clarity, and the security of resources that LGUs target systemic, clear, and definable risks.

## Conclusions

The findings show that the City of Carmona has a strong capacity to comply with SGLG standards and maintain good governance practices. However, several risks may affect the long-term sustainability of these achievements. These risks are mainly related to limited contingency funding, political transitions, disaster-related disruptions, and policy clarity.

To strengthen governance sustainability, the City of Carmona is encouraged to institutionalize SGLG reforms through local ordinances and permanent structures, improve fiscal preparedness by establishing contingency funds, and integrate SGLG goals with disaster risk reduction plans. In addition, the city should assess how its recent transition to cityhood affects administrative capacity, resource allocation, and governance responsibilities.

By addressing these areas, Carmona can move beyond strong performance and work toward more resilient and sustainable local governance.

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