

SUSTAINING THE PRACTICES OF CITY GOVERNANCE: EXPERIENCES IN A DEVELOPING NATION

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ABSTRACT

Sustaining the practices is vital in the progress of governance and quality service delivery of a city. However, little is known about the experiences of cities in developing nations. This study aimed to explore the prevailing practices implemented in the northern city of the Philippines to effective public service delivery, the challenges and strategies to overcome the challenges. Fifteen semi-structured interviews were conducted with diverse social service providers, residents and business in a northern Luzon city, Philippines. Participants' responses to open ended questions were then analyzed using Yin's (2003) data analysis model. Findings revealed that the prevailing practices are captured in three themes: e governance implementation, employee development and maintaining peace and order. On the other hand, the challenges experienced were over population, downside of being a center of development, and pandemic problems. The strategies implemented are bold, determined and committed leaders, agile participatory governance, and aggressive pandemic response management. The results suggest that the government may consider local experiences to plan for policy enhancement. Future research may develop tools to be used in quantitative methodology or use grounded theory to form a theory for sustaining practices of service providers in city government in a developing nation.

Key words: governance, public service delivery, practices, developing nation

Introduction

Sustaining the practices of city governance by the social service providers support the nation's economic development, poverty alleviation, environmental conservation, resilience to climate change, public health improvement, infrastructure improvement, community empowerment, among others. The central aim of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is to promote peaceful and inclusive societies and ensure equal access to justice for all, with a view to empowering institutions to become more effective, accountable, and inclusive at all levels. An important area of advancement in this regard is the assessment of citizen satisfaction with government services, especially the proportion of people reporting a positive experience during their last interaction with public institutions. This indicates how effectively and transparently government services operate to cater to the needs of their citizens.

https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal16#targets_and_indicators.

Implementing sustainable management in city governance holds the potential to revolutionize the way governments carry out policy implementation and provide social services (Zeemering, 2021). However, several government agencies that fly the sustainability flag don't seem to make many significant changes to the way they interact with natural and human systems.

Sustainable practices in cities should be coupled with high quality services to ensure that customers have the required satisfaction. As Engdaw (2019) states, the public service delivery

quality to customers is also satisfied by effective and efficient services and ultimately leads citizens to more positive experiences. Evidence from different studies has shown that public services delivered excellently improve customer satisfaction. Furthermore, for city administrators to continue serving the developmental agenda, there should be innovative thinking into governance. By adopting forward-looking policies and continuous improvement in delivery services, they will be able to encourage more responsive and efficient public administration that will eventually feed into the growth and sustainability of the city.

Hence, this paper aims to explore the prevailing practices implemented by a city in the northern Philippines to effective governance and service delivery. Further, it looked into the challenges encountered in the delivery of service as well as the strategies to overcome the challenges.

Also, according to Puppim et al. (2013), the challenges and opportunities pertaining to the establishment of good governance for a more sustainable and greener global economy are largely dependent on the planning, development, and management of cities. Cities become better in having knowledge, innovation, and technology, as well as institutional advancement where they import ideas and practices conducive to sustainability. Using this, cities can influence the greening of the economy while also strengthening governance within their confines and contribute regionally and globally to sustainability initiatives.

Literature Review

Public service delivery

Public service delivery means the service should be offered in accordance with citizens' needs and preferences while, at the same time, maintaining efficiency by delivering such services of the best quality at least cost. Influencing the reform process within public administration is the global trend regarding the social, political, and economic flux, particularly in developed countries. Such foreign influence, apparent in the 1970s and early 1980s, formed the basis of the political realization that a heavily centralized model of public service delivery was not viable (Denhardt & Grubbs, 2003, p. 334).

The definition given by Gaster and Squires (2003, p. 8) says that public services are those services provided by the government for the benefit of citizens, whether directly from the public sector or indirectly through private service providers funded by the government. The principle has a basis in social consensus-most usually formed by democratic elections-that certain services are essential and must be made available to all citizens regardless of their ability to pay. This basis guarantees that services are distributed fairly and through inclusive governance.

The effectiveness of public service delivery is the cornerstone of New Public Management (NPM)-driven Public Sector Reforms (PSRs). As Kiragu (2002, p. 6) contended, one of the fundamental causes of the failure of the first and second generations of reforms in developing countries has been the failure to place sufficient emphasis on public service delivery. In much the same breath, Batley (2004, p. 53) perceived that the predominant fault with first-generation reforms of the 1980s and 1990s came from the fact that they were more concerned with organizational restructuring rather than looking into service delivery. Their glaring misplacement arose out of pressures emanating largely from economic crises and structural adjustment programs.

Against this backdrop, third-generation reform concentration on service delivery has come to be somewhat stronger, as lessons from past reform experiences have been incorporated.

In light of these observations, it would appear that PSRs, which ignore service delivery, cannot make any meaningful impact. The conundrum of ensuring the delivery of quality public services has continued to persist regardless of the varied reform efforts implemented over time. The continuing predicament could also arise from the fact that the very nature of demand in the society is forever changing, and the expectations of citizens are subject to a lot of interpretations and variations. Governments, as public needs keep shifting, must adopt more fluid and citizen-centric strategies to ensure the effectiveness of service delivery reform in satisfying the desires of the populace it seeks to serve.

Prevailing practices

E-government

E-government or electronic government refers to the use of internet technologies to promote efficiency and convenience in the governmental interactions with their stakeholders (Chen, Chen, Ching, & Huang, 2007). Early research on e-government mainly dealt with the progressive development of government websites, analyzing their level of maturity and functionalities (Layne & Lee, 2001; Moon, 2002). Over time, under the influence of developments in the private sector, government institutions transformed their websites from one-way communication to involve more interactive and transactional online services to engage and involve citizens in their own promotion (D'Agostino, Schwester, Carrizales & Melitski, 2011).

Calista and Melitski (2007) focused on the fact that e-government is about public service delivery using electronic means, which reduces the necessity for physical personal interaction. This view is supported by Cloete, who pointed out that governments must incorporate technology into the delivery of their services for purposes of efficiency and accessibility. Thus, the main aim of the e-government concept is to use ICTs to enhance the accessibility, turnaround time, and quality of public service delivery.

E-government strategies have been successfully adopted across the globe, with the ongoing transformation of traditional bureaucratic behavior into citizen-centric digital services. However, this transformation encompasses more than just technology; rather, it calls for some political and cultural adaptation so that it may thrive and be accepted by the broader public (Nfuka & Rusu, 2011; Rana, Dwivedi & Williams, 2013). Within this framework, Coleman (2006) defined e-government as a system controlled by the flow of electronic information, re-emphasizing that technology is a crucial vehicle for modern governance.

Research Questions

1. What are the prevailing practices implemented by the northern city government to effective governance and service delivery?
2. What specific challenges does the northern city government encountered in the execution of its duties and responsibilities?
3. What are the strategies to manage the challenges in order to maintain efficient administration and meet the needs of its constituents?

Methodology

This study utilized qualitative research, specifically exploratory case study (Yin, 2014) to explore the experiences of northern city government on their practices, challenges and strategies in the delivery of their services. This design is best for this study as it would look into the case of a city in the northern Philippines. The case study had emerged as one of the most widely used methods in qualitative social research. Over the years, it developed significantly and

became the core research strategy of disciplines in the social sciences, ranging from sociology to management, aside from anthropology, psychology, and others (Priya, 2020).

This research was even more initially limited to case studies by the study of some social phenomena providing more in-depth large and contextual information concerning certain cases or groups. However, acquisition of awareness that case study could be versatile has led many more researchers into using this method to look into complex issues in a variety of settings, from studying organizational behavior and governance to culture and human development.

An exploratory study design is suitable for exploring situations to evaluate an intervention that has no clear outcome. This case study has thus been conducted under an exploratory design as the most feasible within the stated objectives. This approach has afforded sufficient leeway for detailed investigation (Yin, 2014). It also seeks to define the research questions and hypotheses pertaining to an event. Within an exploratory framework, the study managed to unveil new insights into how local government units contest complex governance problems, respond to changing conditions, and innovate their service delivery mechanisms.

This study was not about evaluating the reasons why there are challenges of local government units. Therefore, an explanatory case study design was not appropriate for this study. It is also not a descriptive case study design because descriptive case study is suitable for describing the prevailing practices in a real-life context (Yin, 2014). This study explored the prevailing practices and challenges of local government units and the coping strategies they develop when faced with these challenges. The exploratory case study design was appropriate for this study because it would bring out the experiences in service delivery of a city in the northern Philippines.

Sample

June and July of 2021 were the period during which this investigation was done. This period coincided with the greatest height of the COVID-19 pandemic experienced in the country. The global health crisis prompted careful preparation to take forth relevant and rich findings through selecting all the participants. This was done through purposive sampling, where a researcher deliberately selected those individuals with certain characteristics or experiences needed for the study.

Sampling is essential in case study because it does not allow for a comprehensive study of a whole population. Miles and Huberman (1994) assert, "You cannot study everyone everywhere doing everything." That's an argument for needing to decide on quite a manageable yet meaningful sample. In purposive sampling, individuals are chosen deliberately because they have the potential to produce valuable insight into the specific research topic (Punch, 2005, p. 187). Unlike a random sampling method, this strategy assures that those in the sampling space are the ones well-placed to provide relevant and detail-rich perspectives.

The participants of the study are the administrators, residents, and business owners in the northern city in the Philippines. The criteria for the participants are for administrators – they should be administrators for more than 10 years, have direct involvement on the projects implemented by the city, may have handled or initiated projects, and willing to participate in the study. With these criteria these administrators are able to elucidate the experiences of sustaining the practices and are witnesses on how the city overcome its challenges. The criteria for the participants who are residents are: they should live in the city for ten years or more, they live within the fifty-kilometer radius in the central business district of the city, they experienced being clients to the services provided by the city and are willing to be interviewed. Additionally,

the criteria for the business owners are: they may own or rent the business establishment for ten years or more, the location of the business must be within the central business district of the city and must be willing to be interviewed.

Some participants tended to be pre-existing health condition bracketing with employees, students, and individual citizens but still not part of the research study. Their exclusion is because they did not actively participate in the adoption or long-term sustainability of the practices under investigation. The research pertains to those with firsthand knowledge and experience in the implementation of the practices. Therefore, participants who have no direct engagement will not be meaningfully contributing to the study's objectives.

These citizens with comorbidities were also excluded for health-related reasons and for complying with strict safety protocols at the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Interviewing such people with pre-existing pathologies raised ethical and safety concerns because these individuals are much more susceptible than the general population. The public health mandates at that time mandated restriction in contact with high-risk persons to avoid possible exposure or infection from the virus. Thus, their exclusion was mandatory as it complied with safety regulations and ensured the well-being of every participant in this research.

Castillo notes that in the process of identifying certain participants for a particular study, difficulties may arise. This process becomes arduous to achieve if one were to consider multiple barangays within a local community as well as moving with restriction/limitations. Clearly, the current study faced similar situations, for the travel restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic complexified access to potential participants. The researcher experienced the same as that found by Abdulhussein et al. (2022) and Riyaz et al. (2020), wherein the challenges of informants' recruitment during health crises were accentuated, connoting difficulties in mobility along with stringent safety protocols that inhibited direct engagement.

To alleviate these difficulties, the researcher adopted an approach using a focused-specific barangay for the commencement of the study. Then, a referral scheme was used whereby named participants were asked to recommend others involved in local initiatives. This proved to be an effective snow-ball technique in tracking down potential informants, ensuring the inclusion of those concerned with implementing and sustaining local practices, with an overriding concern to sidestep pandemic restrictions.

Data saturation was reached after interviewing a total of fourteen (14) participants including eight (8) LGU officials, three (3) residents, and three (3) business owners.

Instrument

The researcher's goal was to gather enough evidence to make an informed study. To avoid data collection from a single source, the researcher used multiple sources of evidence. Most of the interview items were structured within a rigorous validation process it was approved by three experts in qualitative research, who also gave their comments for better alignment with the study objectives. Their collected recommendations ensured clarity, relevance, and method of the questions. Through validation, the revised instrument was pilot tested, including three participants who were different from the diverse experiences in community involvement. This initial testing formed the basis for measuring the effectiveness of the questions and making further improvements to it before going into full scale data collection.

The other qualitative research methods were constructed for this research in addition to interviews to improve the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. Observations, reflections, and emerging patterns in the study area were journaled. The other sources of data

included a physical analysis of physical artifacts, such as reports coming from the government or databases from local government units.

This methodological triangulation-involving interviews, documentation, and reflective journaling-enhanced the robustness of the research through establishing a broader landscape of perspectives related to its central concern. Such broadening study is attempted to investigate two diverse sources of evidence that yield a far completer and more sustained study findings.

Procedure

This research was conducted in a city in Northern Philippines after obtaining the necessary approval from a reputable University accredited within the country. The entirety of the approval process included rigorous screening and evaluation by a panel of research experts from diverse backgrounds relevant to social research, political science, and public administration. Their expertise had deemed that this study was of the highest academic and methodological standards before entering the collection of data for confidentiality.

The university from which approval was sought maintains strict ethical guidelines in the doing of research. It enforces these wide ethical considerations to fully protect human participants, and the confidentiality of all data collected from such research. Measures were taken to ensure that all respondents volunteered to participate, with informed consent obtained prior to their participation.

Furthermore, the study followed all prescribed procedures on the processing and protection of personally identifiable information in such a way that personal information and responses have been kept anonymous and securely archived. Thus, by following these standards, the research had preserved its integrity, giving priority to the rights of the participants and the legitimacy of the findings.

Validity and Reliability

To make the study trustworthy, the researcher has laid down some of the key qualitative research criteria: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Yin (2003) also argued that case-study research should provide validity and credibility from its design so that the phenomena under study are well-represented by the findings.

In the study, credibility was established in the rigorous reflective thematic analysis of the data. In the deeper analysis of the gathered data, relevance and meanings were assigned to the themes, and core essences that laid claim to the authenticity of the participants' lived experiences were determined. In addition, member checking (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), in which transcribed interviews were sent back to the participants for their approval, was carried out by the researcher to strengthen credibility. This step guaranteed credibility through an accurate rendering of the actual voices, sentiments, and perspectives of the participants engaged in the study.

Dependability was ensured by using more than one data-gathering procedure, including series of observations and informal conversations with participants (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014). The tactic of iteration allows triangulation of information to minimize inconsistency and establish more trustworthiness of the findings. The researcher kept going back and forth between the data and the observations, taking care that the results of the study would hold true.

For confirmability, direct links were established in the study between the collected data and the actual source. This link was thereby beefed up by appealing to outside researchers to confirm and validate independently the coding and categorization of data (Burnard, 1991;

Graneheim& Lundman, 2004). Through an external validation process, this minimizes potential biases and increases the objectivity of the findings of this study.

Lastly, in terms of transferability, the current findings were set in an extended regional and institutional context. The case location is compared to other case sites in the region with similar settings to gauge the research findings' applicability in different settings (Yin, 2003). A lot of the detailed characteristics of the study context were left for the researcher so that other scholars and practitioners could weigh the relevance and applicability of the present findings in similar scenarios.

All the rigorous methodological standards uphold the credibility, reliability, and applicability of the research study, thereby contributing to a well-grounded and trustworthy qualitative research work.

Ethical Considerations

Before starting data collection, the researcher got permission from the key gatekeepers to ensure that their research complied with the institutional and ethical requirements (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Approval from these authorities was important to legitimize the research process and allow entry into the target respondents.

To promote the idea of a clear, ethical relationship between researchers and participants, informed consent was obtained from each of the individuals' part of the study. This step ensured that the individuals were totally aware of the research goals, their part in it, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalties incurred against them. The consent form very clearly presented the voluntary nature of participation, hence affirming ethical research conduct.

The researcher also considered the aspect of confidentiality and privacy in the management of all the data gathered. Respondents were promised anonymity and that access to their responses would be limited solely for research purposes. These ethical considerations were explicit in the entire process of consenting, in line with the best practices in social research and the strengthening of the protection of human subjects (Raguindin et al., 2021).

Through proper authorization, informed consent, and data confidentiality, the researcher maintained the ethical integrity of the study and established a trustworthy and respectful research environment for all participants.

Data Analysis

It was Yin's five-fold analytical framework, a clear but flexible methodology for data analysis. An example of this is a quite iterative and non-linear process involving all phases in interacting with each other to ensure an overall understanding of the data. According to Yin (2011), the five phases are compiling a database, disassembling data, reassembling data, interpreting findings, and drawing conclusions. The following are the processes in Yin's model:

- 1. Compiling a Database** – This initial phase focused on systematically gathering, transcribing, and organizing raw data into structured and comprehensible units. The researcher ensured that all collected information, including interview transcripts, field notes, and relevant documents, was compiled in an accessible format, creating a well-organized foundation for subsequent analysis. This step was essential in maintaining data integrity and facilitating a seamless transition to the next analytical stages.
- 2. Disassembling Data** – In this phase, the compiled data was broken down into meaningful components by assigning labels, codes, and categories. The researcher carefully analyzed the data, identifying key patterns and concepts that reflected the core themes of the study. This process required meticulous examination and segmentation to ensure that significant

insights were captured while maintaining the contextual richness of the responses. Coding allowed the researcher to systematically classify recurring ideas, ensuring an in-depth exploration of the research topic.

3. **Reassembling Data** – Once the data was disassembled into categories and themes, the next step involved reorganizing and restructuring these elements to identify relationships, patterns, and underlying connections. The researcher analyzed how various themes interacted, particularly in the context of how service providers sustained their practices. By synthesizing different fragments of data, a coherent and meaningful narrative was developed, allowing for a holistic understanding of the subject matter.
4. **Interpreting Data** – This phase centered on deriving meaning from the findings and evaluating their implications in relation to the study's objectives. The researcher critically analyzed the qualitative data, considering theoretical perspectives, existing literature, and real-world applications to construct a well-founded interpretation of the results. This step involved a reflective process, ensuring that the extracted themes provided substantive insights into the research inquiry.
5. **Concluding the Data** – The final phase aimed to validate and ensure the credibility of the research findings. To enhance reliability and trustworthiness, the researcher conducted member-checking by returning the interpreted results to the participants, allowing them to verify the accuracy and relevance of the conclusions based on their lived experiences. Additionally, external qualitative research experts were consulted to review the findings, ensuring that the analysis and interpretations were robust, methodologically sound, and aligned with established qualitative research standards. This process reinforced the validity and dependability of the study, ultimately leading to well-supported conclusions that accurately depicted the subject of inquiry.

Findings

Following the tenets of exploratory case study an interrelated set of emergent themes that formed a model in sustaining practices of a city that includes its prevailing practices, challenges and strategies in overcoming these challenges. One on one in depth interviews, archival analysis, observation, and validation of results yielded the following themes. The prevailing practices include e governance, employee development and peace and order. The challenges encountered are overpopulated city, downside of being center of development, and pandemic problems. Whereas, the strategies they implemented are as follows: bold, determined and committed leaders; agile participatory governance; and aggressive covid response management.

Prevailing Practices Implemented by the Northern City Government to Effective Governance and Service Delivery

The prevailing practices for better service delivery to constituents are encapsulated in three themes namely: e governance in service delivery, employee development, and peace and order situation. This result is summarized in table 1.

The participants believe that emphasis on the implementation of the e governance will be a great advantage of the city apart from being compliant to government rules and regulations in terms of delivering quality service to clients. Further, employee development will aid employees to stay motivated in projecting their delivery of service notwithstanding the fact, if peace and order is observed, the delivery of services will not be hampered. These are further described by the participants as follows:

Table 1 Prevailing practices implemented by the northern city government to effective governance and service delivery

Themes	Categories	Quotes
E-governance in service delivery	<p>E -Budgeting implementation</p> <p>E- Procurement implementation</p> <p>E-Buil pass implementation</p> <p>E- BPLS implementation</p>	<p><i>this system works in such a way that balances of appropriations are presented in real time. The e-Budgeting system is linked to all offices (P6)</i></p> <p><i>All these activities (from PPMP to issuance of P.O) are done using the e-Procurement system (P7)</i></p>
Employee development	<p>Staff development</p> <p>Technical trainings</p> <p>Administrative trainings</p>	<p>We are required to attend to at least 1 training per year but we allow 5 trainings to our employees. P1.</p> <p>The accountants attend to technical trainings, while the administrative staff are provided with trainings that they need as well P1</p>
Peace and order situation	<p>Inter- agency committee to maintain peace and order</p> <p>Deployment of police officers around the city</p>	<p>In my many years of stay here in the city, I feel safe and free from harm. There are no untoward incident that my family and I have experienced. P14</p>

E-governance in Service Delivery. The use of information and communication technology (ICT) in governance and, recently, the world has been learning so fast in adopting these technologies progressively promoting effective public service delivery, improved administrative

efficiencies in running government offices, and enhanced levels of citizen participation in governance. This development has prominently nurtured and supported in its evolutionary path the progress towards "integrated digital services" in which government functions are centralized in one place or online so that the public, including businesses, can easily access diverse services offered by government bodies.

Like other government initiatives, the e-government strategy is grounded in national development plans and in alignment with global commitments to give it better coherence in the overall approach to digital governance. So, the major objective is to have a properly coordinated ICT framework at maximum government digital resource utilization that promotes inter-agency collaboration, allows data sharing, and enables database development. Also, developing secure and efficient infrastructures for ICT is what governments focus on as these are meant to protect digital networks and ensure that e-governance policy implementations are sustained (DICT, 2019).

With the above premise, the city has rapidly implemented the e-Government in terms of e-Budgeting system, e-Procurement System, e Build Pass, and e-BPLS among others. The e-Budgeting system started by hiring program developers to come up with a customized e-Budgeting system for the city. This e-Budgeting system was developed based on the experiences of the employees of the city government employees. The system was created and customized based on the needs and challenges in terms of financial management. As one administrator shared:

".....this system works in such a way that balances of appropriations are presented in real time. You may check on the actual balances of appropriations of funds which greatly helps in decision making. Aside from real time balances, generation of real time reports are easily available. The process starts with the usual OBR/BUR once entered into the system, the approval is also within the system. The particular OBR will be checked based on the approved programs, projects and activities of the office where the OBR originated. This way, records are intact, records are kept and that records are easily tracked. Also, the system can detect who acted upon the request. The e-Budgeting system is linked to all offices (P6)....."

Another is the e-Procurement system where the process from the Purchase Request (PR) to the Request for Quotation then to the Purchase Order, Delivery, Acceptance and Issue report are facilitated using this system. As pointed out by another administrator:

".....This starts with entering data from the PPMP of an office to the e-Procurement System, then approval by the budget office, another approval by the City Council, then finally the approval of the mayor using the system. If the PPMP is approved, then the PR is initiated by the requesting office also using the system. This will be approved by the department head, then the budget office. This will be forwarded to the GSO for procurement, then evaluation for mode of procurement, then a canvasser will do the canvass using the RFQ. After this, the abstract of quotation is generated by the system, to be signed by the BAC members. Then the P.O is issued, followed by the delivery of the item. The A.R.E. is now generated together with the Acceptance and Issue Report. All these activities are done using the e-Procurement system (P7)....."

Participant 8 added:

"there is no need for face to face transaction for signatures, there is less contact with people, follow up thru phone and less processing time....."

The next one is the build pass. This is utilized in the online application of building permit. As shared by participant 6:

“.....the client uploads the plan in the system. Approval is done online. Prior to the implementation of the e Build Pass, the client has to go to five offices before the document is approved. Now, with the use of the e Build Pass, the documents are already uploaded in the systems, all heads of offices in charge in the evaluation of the documents can simultaneously evaluate. This procedure is called multiple evaluation.....”

Employee development. While employees have number of tasks to delivery in their offices, employee development is highly supported by the heads of offices. This is conducted to ensure wholistic development of an employee and to establish balance in their professional life.

“...we make sure that each one is attending not only one or two trainings outside of the region, but at least three to five trainings. Such training will not only give them additional knowledge for them to experience other environment, observe other cities and come back renewed and refreshed to offer better services to our clientele. P1...”

“We have many trainings and we benefit from them. Aside from visiting new places, we have the opportunity to meet other employees from otherregion and learn from them as well. P8.”

“We value our human resource, they are the most important resource. We let them attend technical trainings for those who need it and trainings needed by our administrative staff, and we ensure that their needs are provided. P2”

Professional development comes in many forms. The most important is training to help employees learn new skills they can apply in their work place. Trainings do not only motivate them but increase their productivity.

Maintaining Peace and order. In terms of peace and order, the city created traffic development authority likened to that of MMDA, the traffic and transportation management committee – an inter-agency committee which conducts regular meeting to discuss traffic solution, traffic rerouting plans – to minimize traffic, and the implementation of no jeepneys in the central business district (CBD). Another solution is the provision of parking facilities which includes the plan of multi-level parking near UC. The crime situation is decreasing based on latest report. The creation of anti-crime plan which is devised for anti-criminality campaign.

“In my many years of stay here in the city, I feel safe and free from harm. There are no untoward incident that my family and I have experienced. I heard some news but only isolated cases and petty crimes are committed. When I was still in college many of my school mates came from other regions and some were even foreigners, they like it here because of the orderliness of the place and they feel safe even if they are far from their parents. Now, that I am a parent, I definitely would like to stay here with my family. P14”

“The reason why there are so many business establishments here in the city is because of the peace and order situation. Businessmen consider the peace and order situation before they invest in business. P15”

As the administrators shared, they conduct weekly meetings with the police officers, this is to update them with the crime incidents, peace and order situation and possible threats that could happen. Police officers are deployed in schools, around the central business district, in the marketplace, to ensure that every citizen is free from harm and danger and that they are protected.

Challenges the Northen City Government Encountered in the Execution of its Duties and Responsibilities

Evidence from the data gathered shows that even in city challenges are inevitable. These challenges shared by the participants were clustered into three themes: overpopulated city; downside of being center of development; pandemic problems. These challenges are summarized in table 2.

Table 2 Challenges the NorthernCity Government encountered in the execution of its duties and responsibilities.

Themes	Categories	Quotes
Overpopulated City	Presence of immigrants Influx of tourists Presence of universities Business establishments	<i>.....due to its topography, many individuals, families settle in city; number of tourists would love to visit all year round.</i>
Downside of being center of development	Problems in traffic Problems in garbage disposal air pollution minimal water resource	<i>“The traffic in the city is getting worse. P3</i> <i>“Manpower is needed to augment the workforce in garbage disposal since there is a significant volume of garbage being collected each day. P8</i>

<p>Pandemic problems</p>	<p>Limited manpower</p> <p>Limited isolation facilities and supplies</p> <p>Economic down turn due to lockdown</p>	<p><i>we had to work round the clock, nobody from the team had the time to go home and because of our high risk of being infected we kept our selves isolated here in the center.P5</i></p> <p><i>businesses were not allowed to operate or were closed; schools also were not allowed to open; transport service has no clients; in short, the city suffered economically. P2”</i></p>
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Overpopulated city. As estimated, Baguio City's population would reach 392,262 in 2023, a sharp rise from the population: 33,470 recorded in 1950. This growth signifies the city's advancing urbanization, economic improvement, and gradually increasing attractiveness as a place to live and do business. The city's population has jumped by 6,896 from last year, an annual growth rate of 1.79%.It is on account of the latest revision to the UN World Urbanization Prospects (2022), which provides figures on urbanization across the globe, that such population estimates have been arrived at. These are estimates for the urban agglomeration of Baguio City, hence including not just the population within the administrative boundaries of the city but also those living within surrounding suburban and peri-urban areas that add to its overall demographic footprint.

There are reasons that may have contributed to such gradual growth in population, from rural-to-urban migration as people move to Baguio City looking for better opportunities in education, employment, and the quality of life. As an education hub in Northern Luzon with many universities and colleges, a fair number of students, faculty, and professionals are attracted to Baguio. Finally, Baguio, being a tourist destination, further pumped-up economies and indirectly influenced the swelling number of people who create various businesses, develop infrastructures, and offer employment opportunities.Yet, the growing population has so many challenges to meet in terms of urban planning, housing, traffic congestion, environmental sustainability, and public service delivery. These policies must then ensure the balanced development of Baguio City while also maintaining and protecting the ecological integrity, livability, and cultural heritage of the place.

“Due to the location of the city which includes the weather, many individuals, families settle here. They love its topography which makes them decide to transfer their residence here. Aside from this, the city is considered the educational capital of the northern part of the Philippines where many colleges students swarm to the several universities located in the cities. This is where number of tourists would love to visit all year round. Businesses also swarm the city

because of the viability of businesses here. These and many more reasons why the city is overpopulated.”

It is crystal clear that the city is densely populated, and it could possibly experience urban decay. With this rate of growing population even after the pandemic, overpopulation is a great deal of issue.

Downside of being center of development. Aside from overpopulation, the city is also experiencing the negative effects of it being a center of development. As a center of development where there are many business establishments, schools, universities and even families settling in, problems such as traffic, congestion, garbage disposal, water source issues and squatting are experienced.

“The traffic in the city is getting worse, however, the city will soon construct a parking lot located nearby, this will now be utilized by tourist and other motorists to lessen the traffic in the central business district. P2”

“Manpower is needed to augment the workforce in garbage disposal since there is a significant volume of garbage being collected each day. P8”

“Until now there are problems on squatting, one example are the squatters in the watershed areas. P3”

Pandemic problems. The pandemic has greatly affected the city just like any other area. On the onset of the pandemic, access to the right information about the virus and other relevant information was a great problem. During the lock down, supplies such as vaccines, alcohol, personal protective equipment are hard to source out.

“As the disaster response team, we had to work round the clock, nobody from the team had the time to go home and because of our high risk of being infected we kept our selves isolated here in the center. We have our quarters where we can rest while others are on duty, then we take each other's place just to make sure that we cater to all the needs in the office. We lacked manpower. P5”

“During the surge of the virus, isolation facilities were limited. During vaccination, many constituents from other areas would claim that they are from the city just to get the vaccine. Since the location of the city is centered to several other municipalities there are many entry points as to where possible virus could enter. P13”

“Our initial reaction was that we were shocked, overwhelmed, we were caught with our pants down, we needed information. There are so many government protocols and guidelines. P1”

“Our budget was greatly affected because we had lesser collection: the collection on local income went down; there were less business permits to be paid because businesses were not allowed to operate or were closed; schools also were not allowed to open; transport service has no clients; in short, the city suffered economically. P2”

There is a great effect of the pandemic all over the world, including this city in the northern Philippines. It cannot be discounted that the after effect of pandemic still lingers as of this writing.

Strategies. Despite these challenges, there are strategies shared by the participants in addressing these challenges. These strategies are captured in three themes namely: bold, determined and committed leaders; agile participatory governance; and aggressive pandemic response management.

Themes	Categories	Quotes
Bold, determined and committed leaders	Determined leaders Brave leaders Effective leaders Leaders who are workers	<i>“From my experience as a resident, the leaders in the city are effective, they promote tourism, each leader has its own strategy but all their efforts are towards the promotion of a better of the city. P10.”</i> <i>“I am satisfied with the leaders of the city. They are workers and are transparent in what the activities and projects they do and matters they decide on at the same time they get participation from the public. P12”</i>
Agile participatory governance	Participatory governance Involvement of everyone Consultation with stakeholders	<i>everybody has a role to play.” “I cannot do it alone P1.</i> We complement each other. P4
Aggressive pandemic response management	Innovative measures for pandemic Effective leadership during pandemic	<i>The mayor is very effective in implementing measures to counter covid 19. When he instructs, he makes sure that his instructions are implemented. P5”</i> <i>Use of technology for contact tracing, GIS to monitor infected persons, online health declaration, use of VISITA online monitoring of visirotrs.</i>

Bold, determined and committed leaders. They made bold decisions to implement actions that led to the improvement of delivery of services which also led them to attain numerous international, national, regional and local awards received by the city.

“The city is the only city in the Philippines declared by UNESCO as most creative, most peaceful city in the Asian Region. It has a national award in Nutrition, top 4 child friendly city in the Philippines, has received Seal of Good Local Governance awards many times where they got Php 25M because of SGLG earmarked for development. P3”

“The programs and activities of the city were implemented and immediate results were observed. For example, the city conducted side walk clearing and restricted ambulant vendors. As of now there are no more ambulant vendors along the streets of Baguio. P4”

“From my experience as a resident, the leaders in the city are effective, they promote tourism, each leader has its own strategy but all their efforts are towards the promotion of a better of the city. P10.”

“I am satisfied with the leaders of the city. They are workers and are transparent in what the activities and projects they do and matters they decide on at the same time they get participation from the public. P12”

The determined and committed leaders in the city brought about camaraderie, teamwork and unity among its constituents. This is evident in the strong, bold decision makers, determined and committed leaders of the city.

Agile participatory governance. Participatory governance is observed in the city by involving all other offices, stakeholders, and constituents to better perform responsibilities and delivery services at its best. Participatory governance is not only observed in the top management but in all levels of the management.

“.....our style is participatory governance, where everybody has a role to play.” “I cannot do it alone, this kind of governance help us to be recognized nationally and internationally. All officials should be treated by all means in a nice way. P1.”

“In displaying participatory governance, the conduct of regular Monday meetings together with the executive, legislative to include the PNP is always a must in the city. All the members of the city council meet to tackle important issues that confront us. For the legislative department, the city council’s task is to pass legislations to address problems. If it entails implementation, it is directed to the different department heads of the city. Everybody is present to look at the concerns of the city. P3”

“We complement each other. We may argue but at the end of the day, we agree. We have sincere, open communication. What others can’t do, the others will do, as part of their unity in the office. In terms of open communication, the information is shared to all, there is transparency inside the office. P4”

The collective effort of each member of the organization to include stakeholders will be the driving force in attaining the goals and objectives of the government. It takes teamwork in order to implement whatever the project and activities are set for the city.

Aggressive covid response management. The term aggressive was meant in a positive way. Aggressive in the sense that it aims to control the surge of covid 19, the city has to come up with its own measures to overcome the increasing number of covid patients.

“The city mayor leads us in attaining an aggressive covid response. Personnel listen to the mayor’s instructions. The mayor is very effective in implementing measures to counter covid 19. When he instructs, he makes sure that his instructions are implemented. P5”

“We have several responses during the pandemic. These include: One Baguio Hospital Command which is for more enhanced and faster coordination of covid 19 related cases. We

have the emergency operation center activated last March 2020. We also disinfect establishments, vehicles, residents. P6.”

“We also do contact tracing using digital platform which was first in the entire Philippines. We use software in the contact tracing with the aid of GIS. This platform capture, store, manipulate, analyze, manage, and present all types of geographical data related to COVID19 cases. We also use technology to analyze data. We have the analytical tool link analysis that shows gaps and creates more opportunities on how to properly track down close contacts of the patient through the timeline. We also implemented the online health declaration which be downloaded from the portal of the city. There is also what we call the Visitor and Travel Assistance using online platform to regulate visitors and monitor their movements. This is part of the city tourism recovery plan. The city initiated the establishment of “survival gardens to ensure food always in the house (FAITH), and finally the establishment of a financing facility for Micro and Small Enterprises (MSEs) for the purpose of mitigating the impact of the COVID 19 Pandemic to business operations. P15”

Discussion

The findings of this paper advance the proclamation of sustaining the practices for the continuous delivery of services to the constituents. In the parlance of governance, regardless of the situation, there could be calamities, pandemic, inflation, wars and other adversities, there should be resilience in the service delivery. The growing challenges in every government today should ensure sustenance of services provided.

This study provided evidence for the results of previous studies on prevailing practices for delivery of services, the challenges encountered and strategies in overcoming these challenges. The prevailing practices implemented by a northern city governance to effective service delivery include e governance, employee development and maintaining peace and order. This paper has added evidence that e governance should be sustained in the service delivery of a northern city. This result is supported by Mishra and Geleta (2019) in their study about e governance and cited The World Bank: As an integral element of contemporary governance on a global scale, the last ten years have witnessed the advance of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) as a basic tenet. Along with advances in internet technology has grown e-government, where the online platform is being put to use to optimize further governmental procedural operations and public service delivery. However, the application of e-government differs widely among nations because of the differential levels of technological acceptance, infrastructure, and policy frameworks.

Just affixing the prefix “e-” does not change the character of government. Effective implementation of e-governments is not limited to just computerization and online connectivity, but rather it requires a paradigm shift of the government leaders and officials as well as the citizens. E-governments are other public sectors essential, enabling efficient service delivery, citizen engagement, and good governance. It catalyzes transparency, accountability, and participatory democracy, giving citizens the means to take an active role in governance processes at all levels.

In essence, e-government streamlines bureaucratic procedures by reducing paperwork, eliminating duplication, and promoting more efficient service delivery. When a government moves a service to an e-platform, service delivery is enhanced with respect to speed, quality, and accessibility, thus bringing governance systems in line with current technological developments.

The effect goes beyond service delivery and includes workforce development and employee productivity.

The study shows that e-government initiatives result in professional development of employees within the public sector due to a culture of continuous learning and skill enhancement. This goes along with the work of Laing (2012), who pointed out that the competence and on-going development of employees are one of the key factors for organisational sustainability and productivity. Investing in training and capacity-building of employees will be beneficial in improving individual performance and efficiency at the organisation level. Hence effective governance and improvement of public services are set in motion.

In terms of strategies in addressing challenges, this paper has added evidence that bold, determined and committed leaders, agile participatory governance and aggressive pandemic response management are effective in overcoming challenges in governing cities in a developing nation in their governance and service delivery.

Moreover, their study corresponds with the conclusion of Eltarabily and Elgheznawy (2020), reinforcing proposals on changes in urban planning and city design considerations based on population density. In terms of influencing all pathways for infectious disease transmission, the most crucial is population density: cities with higher density levels experience more risk in epidemics. Therefore, cities should entail rethinking urban planning efforts to truly address health crises, ensuring that spatial development will support public health safety, equitable resource distribution, and sustainable crisis management.

However, apart from pandemic governance, these initiatives are set to also boost long-term urban resilience that helps cities build equilibrium between social justice, public health, and effective service delivery. Such co-working would merge data-driven decision-making and inclusive governance practices with strategic urban development. Consequently, they could improve their future resilience against public health threats while constructing a more equitable and sustainable urban environment.

Conclusion

This research paper is about the prevailing practices of a northern city in a developing country to effective governance and service delivery, the challenges encountered in the implementation and the strategies addressing these challenges. In cities, it is important that strategies should be institutionalized such that even if leaders, administrators will change, retire or resign the practices are intact and sustained.

Also, in times of adverse situations, calamities, pandemic, tragedies that the cities may experience, these practices are here to stay since these are tested by time. Innovation and creative should always be part of the ingredients of implementing these practices in order to attain progress and improvement in the city.

Through this study, it is found that these prevailing practices should put on record and should be handed to the next leaders and administrators: e governance implementation, employee development, and maintaining peace and order. Despite growth and development, governance in a northern city in the Philippines has met challenges along the way which include: overpopulation; downside of being a center of development and pandemic problems. In addressing these challenges, the following strategies were considered: bold, determined and committed leaders,

agile participatory governance and aggressive pandemic disaster management. These strategies will make cities more effective in service delivery.

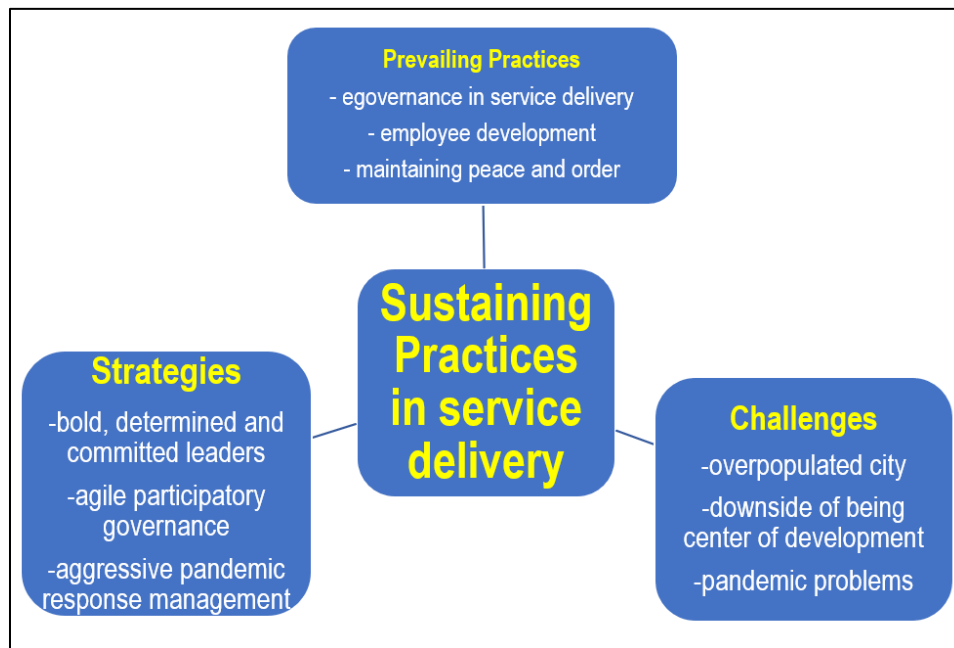


Fig 1. Model of Sustaining Practices in Service Delivery in a City

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