

## BARANGAY GOVERNANCE GAPS: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN ADVANCING THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN ZAMBOANGA CITY, PHILIPPINES

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### Abstract

*This study examines the governance gaps at the barangay level in Zamboanga City, Philippines, with a particular focus on their impact on the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As the smallest political units in the Philippines, barangays are critical to effective local governance, providing essential public services and facilitating community development. However, many barangays face persistent governance challenges, including financial constraints, leadership turnover, coordination issues, and barriers to community participation, which can hinder their ability to effectively promote sustainable development. The study employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to capture the perspectives of barangay officials, community leaders, and institutional stakeholders. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, exploratory factor analysis (EFA), and correlation analysis to identify significant governance gaps and their underlying dimensions. Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis to capture the lived experiences and insights of local leaders. Key findings reveal that financial instability, leadership turnover, coordination challenges, and limited public participation are the primary governance gaps hindering SDG progress. Financial constraints were identified as the most significant barrier, closely linked to leadership instability and weak institutional capacity. The study also highlights the critical need for capacity building, better financial management, stronger inter-agency collaboration, and more inclusive decision-making processes to address these gaps. The study concludes that addressing these governance challenges requires targeted interventions, including diversified funding sources, leadership training, integrated planning frameworks, and enhanced community engagement. These strategies are essential for building resilient, community-driven local governments capable of promoting long-term sustainable development. The findings provide a practical roadmap for policymakers, local leaders, and development practitioners seeking to enhance local governance and improve the quality of life for their constituents. Recommendations for future research include longitudinal studies on governance reforms, comparative studies across regions, and impact assessments of capacity-building programs.*

**Keywords:** Barangay Governance, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Financial Constraints, Leadership Turnover, Community Engagement, Inter-Agency Coordination, Zamboanga City, Local Government, Public Administration

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Localizing the SDGs through barangay governance

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development presumes that global goals will be realized through local institutions that can convert broad commitments into community-scale programs. In the Philippine governance context, barangays hold a unique institutional position: they serve as the most immediate interface between citizens and government, and they coordinate a range of local responsibilities spanning basic service delivery, community development, disaster risk reduction, peace and order, and local economic initiatives. Their proximity to residents suggests comparative advantages for participatory planning and needs-based programming. At the same time, their size and dependency relationships—especially fiscal reliance and political turnover—create structural vulnerabilities that can disrupt continuity, limit capacity, and weaken accountability for long-horizon development goals.

In Zamboanga City, a rapidly urbanizing and socially diverse local context, barangays face escalating service demands alongside complex social dynamics and constrained resources. The city's growth intensifies needs for health access, education support, climate and disaster preparedness, environmental management, and livelihood development—domains aligned directly with SDG targets. However, barangay capability is not solely a matter of political will; it depends on administrative capacity, financing, coordination networks, and the legitimacy generated through community participation. Recognizing these realities, this study examines the governance gaps barangays experience and assesses how these gaps shape SDG advancement at the local level.

## **1.2 Research problem and questions**

Despite the centrality of barangays in the decentralization architecture, many continue to experience governance challenges that undermine effective performance and impede sustainable development. The present study addresses this gap by answering five questions: (1) the primary governance gaps in barangay administration that hinder SDG achievement in Zamboanga City; (2) how barangay leaders perceive their role in advancing the SDGs; (3) the strategies used by barangays to promote SDGs and their perceived effectiveness; (4) the barriers and challenges encountered in aligning governance efforts with SDGs; and (5) opportunities for improving barangay governance to better support SDG achievement.

## **1.3 Objectives and significance**

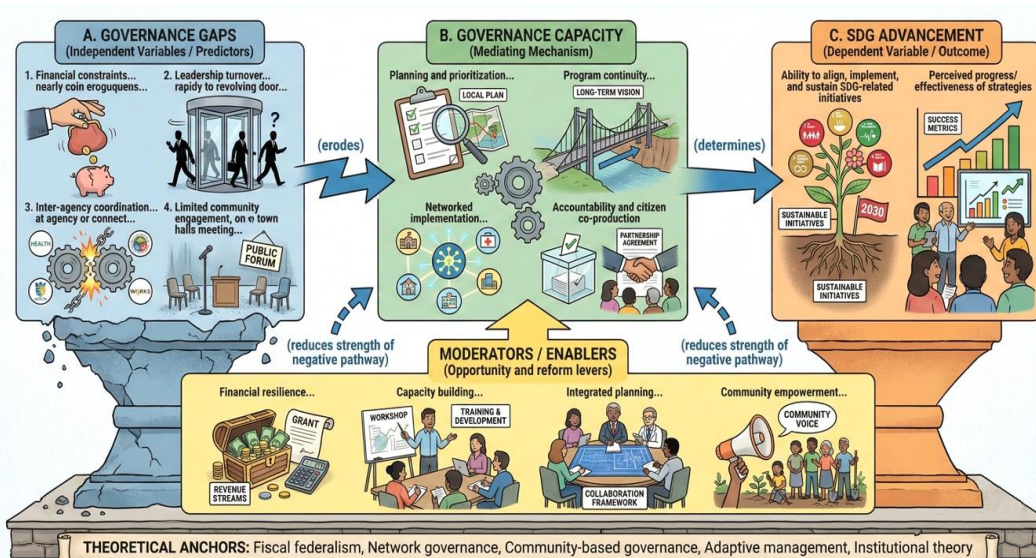
Aligned with the research questions, the study aims to (i) identify key governance gaps; (ii) assess leadership perceptions regarding SDG roles; (iii) evaluate strategies and perceived effectiveness; (iv) examine barriers to alignment; and (v) surface opportunities and practical pathways for strengthening governance.

This research contributes in three ways. First, it provides an empirically grounded picture of barangay governance gaps in a major Philippine city. Second, it connects these gaps to SDG localization through leaders' perceptions and strategy choices, clarifying where implementation bottlenecks emerge. Third, it produces actionable recommendations that local policymakers, development practitioners, and barangay leaders can adapt to strengthen governance for SDG outcomes.

## **1.4. Conceptual and Analytical Framing**

The conceptual framework of this study positions barangay-level progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Zamboanga City as an outcome shaped primarily by the strength of local governance capacity, which is, in turn, constrained by identifiable governance gaps. In this model, barangay governance gaps—particularly financial constraints and resource limitations, leadership turnover and institutional instability, inter-agency coordination weaknesses, and limited community engagement—operate as the principal drivers that reduce the barangay's ability to translate SDG commitments into coherent plans, adequately funded programs, coordinated service delivery, and sustained implementation over time.

**Figure 1.**  
**Barangay Governance Gaps Conceptual Framework (Zabala Model)**



#### 1.4.1 Governance gaps as structural and relational constraints

A “governance gap” in this study is treated not as a single deficit (e.g., lack of funds) but as a set of interlocking constraints that hinder institutions from executing mandates effectively and consistently. In barangay contexts, governance gaps tend to be both structural (resource scarcity, administrative capacity limits, legal and fiscal constraints) and relational (coordination failures, weak citizen engagement, fragmented accountability, politicized leadership shifts). Because SDG implementation demands continuity, monitoring, and cross-sector integration, governance gaps can have disproportionate effects: even small weaknesses in planning, budgeting, or coordination can accumulate into persistent underperformance.

#### 1.4.2 SDG localization and barangay administrative capacity

SDG localization requires (i) goal translation into local plans and programs; (ii) resourcing and implementation capacity; (iii) monitoring and feedback loops; and (iv) community legitimacy and participation. Barangays are strategically positioned for localization because they are close to residents and can tailor interventions. However, localization is constrained when barangays lack planning systems, do not possess stable or sufficient financing, cannot maintain program continuity due to turnover, or are weakly connected to city/national support systems.

#### 1.5 Collaborative governance and multi-level coordination

Barangay SDG progress depends on collaboration: vertical coordination with city, provincial, and national agencies, and horizontal collaboration with neighboring barangays, civil society, and private sector actors. Where coordination is weak, efforts are duplicated, resources are wasted, and cross-cutting challenges (e.g., health, environment, disaster risk) remain unaddressed. Coordination deficits therefore function as a governance gap that limits SDG performance regardless of local motivation.

#### 1.6 Participation, legitimacy, and accountability

Participatory governance is not simply normative; it is instrumental for SDG implementation. Community involvement improves targeting, strengthens legitimacy, increases compliance, and creates local accountability mechanisms that reduce elite capture and corruption risk. When participation is limited—whether due to low trust, weak engagement platforms, or political exclusion—barangay decisions may fail to reflect needs, and implementation may be undermined by low citizen ownership.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1 Research design**

The study used a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews, enabling triangulation between measurable perception patterns and context-rich explanations of governance barriers. The design is appropriate for governance research because it captures both the “distribution” of perceived gaps (how prevalent and severe they appear across respondents) and the “mechanisms” (how gaps arise and reinforce one another in practice).

### **2.2 Study setting and respondents**

The study was conducted in Zamboanga City and involved barangay officials, community leaders, and institutional stakeholders. The quantitative dataset includes 78 respondents. Respondents represented multiple barangays in the city, reflecting variation in local context and experience.

### **2.3 Instruments and measures**

Survey items operationalized the constructs corresponding to the research questions: governance gaps (financial constraints, leadership stability, coordination, participation), SDG role perception (awareness, relevance, training adequacy, communication effectiveness, promotion), SDG strategy implementation (program alignment, resources, governance structures, planning, monitoring), and barriers/challenges in SDG alignment. Items were captured using scaled responses, enabling calculation of means and dispersion.\

## **3. DATA ANALYSIS**

Quantitative analysis applied descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation) to summarize response patterns, complemented by exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to identify underlying dimensions in governance gaps and leadership perceptions. Correlation analysis was used to examine associations between demographic characteristics and perception variables where applicable.

Qualitative interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis to derive recurring patterns related to resource constraints, political pressures, institutional support, leadership turnover, and community engagement. Integration occurred through a synthesis stage that compared and aligned quantitative patterns with qualitative themes to strengthen inference validity.

### **3.1 Ethical considerations and rigor**

Standard ethical safeguards for governance research were observed, including confidentiality of respondents, voluntary participation, and careful treatment of politically sensitive experiences. Rigor was supported through methodological triangulation, use of established statistical summaries, and transparent theme derivation in qualitative analysis.

## **4. RESULTS**

#### 4.1 Research Question 1: What are the primary governance gaps hindering SDG achievement?

The study identifies four major governance gaps that constrain barangay performance in SDG localization: financial constraints, leadership turnover, coordination challenges, and limited community participation. Importantly, these are not independent problems. Rather, they operate as a reinforcing system:

1. **Financial constraints** limit the ability to fund programs, retain competent staff, invest in planning and monitoring systems, and sustain long-term initiatives. Financial instability was reported as the most significant gap; 72% of respondents identified it as a major constraint.
2. **Leadership turnover** disrupts institutional memory, reduces continuity of plans and programs, weakens trust, and forces repeated “resetting” of priorities.
3. **Coordination challenges** reduce efficiency, produce duplicative programming, and weaken linkages between barangays and higher-level agencies that provide technical and financial support.
4. **Limited community participation** diminishes legitimacy, weakens feedback mechanisms, and prevents barangays from designing programs aligned tightly with local needs.

##### 4.1.1 Qualitative reinforcement of governance gaps

Qualitative accounts explain how these gaps materialize in day-to-day governance. Barangay leaders described themselves as “critical drivers” of development but constrained by limited resources, political pressures, and weak institutional support—particularly for SDG integration. Respondents emphasized the need for clearer guidance, targeted training, and more autonomy paired with improved access to financial resources.

These narratives align with the interpretation that governance gaps are not simply local deficiencies but reflect structural constraints embedded in multi-level governance relationships. Financial constraints, for example, were linked to dependence on higher-level funding flows and to limited local revenue generation capacity.

#### 4.2 Research Question 2: How do barangay leaders perceive their role in advancing the SDGs?

The quantitative results show a differentiated pattern: respondents expressed relatively high familiarity and strong belief in SDG relevance, but lower ratings for training adequacy, communication effectiveness, and active promotion, suggesting that normative commitment does not automatically translate into implementation capacity.

**Table 1.**  
**Perceptions of SDG awareness, relevance, training, communication, and promotion**  
**(n = 78)**

Item	Indicator	Mean	SD
1	Familiar with the concept of SDGs	3.55	1.05
2	SDGs are relevant to community development	4.08	1.02
3	Barangay officials are adequately trained on SDGs	3.01	0.95
4	SDGs are effectively communicated to residents	2.83	1.06
5	Barangay leaders actively promote SDG activities	2.82	0.91

The strongest rating pertains to SDG relevance (Mean = 4.08), indicating that leaders see SDGs as meaningful for local development. Familiarity is also above the midpoint (Mean = 3.55), suggesting moderate awareness.

However, training adequacy (Mean = 3.01) sits close to the midpoint, indicating uneven capacity-building exposure. More critically, perceived communication (Mean = 2.83) and active promotion (Mean = 2.82) are lower, implying that SDGs may remain largely within administrative discourse rather than broadly “owned” by residents.

#### 4.2.1 Qualitative interpretation

Qualitative findings reinforce this pattern. Leaders generally expressed commitment to community development and interest in SDG integration, but reported that political pressures, training gaps, and lack of institutional support restricted their ability to convert SDG principles into consistent community-facing programs. This suggests that SDG role perception is shaped not only by individual motivation but by the enabling environment: training systems, resource access, and coordination structures.

#### 4.3 Research Question 3: What strategies are used to promote SDGs, and how effective are they?

Research Question 3 examines SDG implementation strategies at the barangay level, including program alignment, resource sufficiency, governance structures, planning, and monitoring. Quantitative results show moderate program alignment but weaker ratings for planning and monitoring—two functions essential for sustained SDG progress.

**Table 2.**  
**Barangay governance and SDG implementation strategies (n = 78)**

Item	Strategy/Capability	Mean	SD
1	Implemented programs aligned with SDGs	3.17	0.96
2	Sufficient resources provided for SDG implementation	2.96	0.97
3	Governance structures efficient for SDG initiatives	2.97	1.04
4	Clear plan/strategy for achieving SDGs	2.87	0.99
5	Regular monitoring & evaluation system	2.74	0.92

The highest-rated strategy is the existence of programs aligned with SDGs (Mean = 3.17), indicating that respondents observe at least some alignment between barangay activities and SDG themes. Yet the lower means for planning (Mean = 2.87) and monitoring/evaluation (Mean = 2.74) suggest fragility: without planning and monitoring systems, alignment may be incidental rather than strategic, and programs may lack measurable targets and feedback loops.

#### 4.3.1 Interpretation: strategy presence vs. strategy maturity

These results can be interpreted as a distinction between (i) strategy presence (barangays doing SDG-relevant activities) and (ii) strategy maturity (barangays having robust systems for planning, resourcing, implementation, and evaluation). The pattern indicates that maturity is constrained by structural gaps, especially resourcing and technical capacity, consistent with the study’s broader governance gap findings.

#### 4.4 Research Question 4: What barriers and challenges do barangays face in aligning governance with SDGs?

Barriers identified across the dataset and interviews converge on three reinforcing constraints: resource limitations, institutional discontinuity, and weak external support/coordination.

Qualitative analysis highlights that leaders frequently confront limited resources, political pressures, lack of training, inadequate support from higher-level agencies, and frequent leadership changes—all of which restrict SDG integration. Respondents noted that leadership turnover disrupts continuity, reduces institutional memory, and undermines community trust, which in turn makes participatory governance more difficult to sustain.

These barriers align with the governance gaps surfaced in Research Question 1 and provide an explanatory layer for the quantitative pattern: lower scores on communication, promotion, planning, and monitoring can be traced to capacity and resource constraints rather than indifference to SDG aims.

#### **4.5 Research Question 5: What opportunities exist for improving barangay governance to support SDGs?**

Despite challenges, the study identifies a set of opportunities for strengthening barangay governance. These include increased funding access, improved training and capacity-building, enhanced community participation, and stronger inter-agency collaboration.

The opportunity structure is important: it suggests that barangay governance is not “fixed” by structural constraints alone but can be improved through targeted reforms and support systems—especially those that reduce financial vulnerability, stabilize leadership capacity, and build coordination platforms.

### **5. DISCUSSION**

#### **5.1 The governance gap system: why SDG localization stalls**

The study’s central contribution is the identification of governance gaps as a system rather than a list. Financial constraints restrict program capacity and the ability to invest in administrative systems (planning, monitoring, training). Leadership turnover interrupts continuity and weakens institutional memory, making it difficult to sustain SDG initiatives across political cycles. Coordination failures prevent barangays from accessing technical support, aligning programs with city/national priorities, and pooling resources for cross-boundary challenges. Limited community engagement reduces legitimacy and weakens feedback loops that would otherwise improve targeting and accountability.

The empirical pattern reflects this system logic: SDG relevance is rated highly (Mean = 4.08), but communication and promotion are low (Means = 2.83 and 2.82), indicating an “awareness–implementation gap.” Likewise, program alignment is moderate (Mean = 3.17), but monitoring/evaluation is weak (Mean = 2.74), indicating an “activity–accountability gap.”

#### **5.2 Financial resilience as the enabling condition**

With 72% of respondents identifying financial constraints as the most significant governance gap, the data positions fiscal vulnerability as the central bottleneck. This matters because SDGs require sustained investments and multi-year planning. Where barangays operate primarily as implementers of limited budgets without meaningful fiscal space, programs become reactive, short-term, and heavily dependent on external funding flows. In such contexts, the “implementation ceiling” is low: even competent and motivated leadership may not overcome resource scarcity.

### **5.3 Leadership stability and institutional memory**

Leadership turnover is not only a personnel issue; it is an institutional design problem. Turnover weakens continuity and reduces the likelihood that barangay SDG initiatives will survive political transitions. Qualitative findings describe how turnover disrupts program continuity and erodes trust. The implication is that SDG localization requires mechanisms that transcend individual officeholders: documentation systems, succession planning, standard operating procedures, and community oversight that stabilizes priorities.

### **5.4 Coordination as a governance multiplier**

Coordination failures are costly because they undermine efficiency and foreclose access to support. Barangays often need city-level technical assistance for SDG planning, monitoring tools, and program integration across sectors (health, livelihoods, DRRM, environment). Without effective coordination, barangays may implement fragmented programs, duplicate initiatives, or miss opportunities for joint projects and resource pooling. This is particularly salient in urban governance environments where issues spill across barangay boundaries.

### **5.5 Participation, legitimacy, and citizen ownership of SDGs**

The lower perceived communication of SDGs to residents (Mean = 2.83) and lower active promotion (Mean = 2.82) point to limited citizen-facing SDG engagement. Participation deficits then become self-reinforcing: low engagement weakens trust, which further reduces participation, thereby limiting accountability and program alignment with local needs. The study's qualitative themes highlight inadequate community engagement as a persistent challenge.

## **6. POLICY AND PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **(Roadmap for Governance Strengthening)**

Based on the findings, the study proposes practical strategies in four reform areas: financial resilience, leadership stability and capacity, inter-agency coordination, and participatory governance.

#### **6.1 Strengthening financial resilience**

- **Diversify funding sources.** Barangays should reduce overdependence by exploring alternative revenues such as local taxes/fees where feasible, partnerships, and community-based enterprises.
- **Improve financial management.** Targeted training for barangay treasurers and finance officers can strengthen budgeting, planning, and resource allocation.
- **Advocate for equitable funding.** Strengthen engagement with higher-level agencies to improve timeliness and equity of disbursements and reduce operational uncertainty.

#### **6.2 Enhancing leadership stability and capacity building**

- **Leadership training.** Institutionalize training focused on strategic planning, crisis management, and community engagement.
- **Succession planning and institutional memory.** Establish documentation systems and transition protocols to reduce disruption from turnover.
- **Merit-based leadership strengthening.** Promote competence-based processes and performance norms that stabilize governance quality across cycles.

#### **6.3 Improving inter-agency coordination and collaboration**

- **Integrated planning frameworks.** Align barangay SDG initiatives with city and national priorities through formal planning integration.
- **Collaborative platforms.** Create regular inter-agency meetings and forums to strengthen communication and coordination.
- **Cross-sector partnerships.** Engage civil society, academe, and private sector to mobilize expertise and resources.

#### 6.4 Promoting community engagement and participatory governance

- **Inclusive decision-making.** Expand participation in planning and priority-setting, strengthening legitimacy and citizen ownership.
- **Digital engagement.** Use digital platforms and social media to improve transparency and enable two-way communication.
- **Community capacity building.** Train officials on mobilization, conflict resolution, and public communication to increase engagement quality.

### 7. LIMITATIONS

This study relies on self-reported perceptions of governance gaps and SDG practices; responses may reflect subjective experience, social desirability, or differences in interpretation of SDG concepts. The cross-sectional design also limits causal inference: while patterns and associations can be observed, governance changes over time require longitudinal follow-up.

### 8. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The study identified several areas for further research to build on the findings and address the remaining gaps in understanding barangay governance:

1. **Longitudinal Studies on Governance Reforms:** Future studies should track the long-term impact of governance reforms to assess their effectiveness in improving barangay performance and community outcomes.
2. **Comparative Studies Across Regions:** Comparative studies can provide valuable insights into the unique challenges and opportunities facing different barangays, helping to identify best practices and scalable solutions.
3. **Impact Assessments of Capacity-Building Programs:** Rigorous evaluations of leadership training and capacity-building programs can help identify the most effective approaches for strengthening local governance.
4. **Digital Governance and E-Government Initiatives:** Research should explore the potential of digital platforms and e-government tools to improve transparency, efficiency, and public participation in local governance.

### 9. CONCLUSION

Barangays are pivotal to SDG localization in the Philippines, yet their capacity to advance SDGs in Zamboanga City is constrained by a reinforcing system of governance gaps—financial instability, leadership turnover, coordination challenges, and weak community participation. While leaders strongly recognize SDG relevance (Mean = 4.08), gaps in training, communication, planning, and monitoring limit implementation maturity and citizen ownership. The study concludes that accelerating SDG progress requires a focused governance strengthening agenda that improves financial resilience, stabilizes leadership through institutional memory and capacity-building, builds inter-agency coordination mechanisms, and

deepens participatory governance. These reforms function not merely as administrative upgrades but as enabling conditions for sustained, measurable, and inclusive sustainable development outcomes at the community level.

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