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Mainstream Governance in Local Politics: Experiences of Women Leaders in the Philippines

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Abstract

Mainstream governance in local politics aims to equalize men and women in the sphere of politics and all levels of decision-making to achieve equality in consonance with Sustainable Development. Specifically, it sought to answer the profile of the women punong barangay, leadership style, level of performance, level of administrative capability, and the experiences of women punong barangay. The study utilized descriptive research design using the quantitative qualitative approach and phenomenology approaches. Data were gathered using survey questions to 5 former and 13 incumbent women punong barangays, 26 barangay secretaries and treasurers, 91 barangay officials, and 381 barangay residents. The results indicated that typically the women punong barangay belonged to the adulthood stage aged 41-75, mostly are married, attained college level, and most of them served as barangay kagawad for 6-10 years. Almost all women punong barangay exhibited a democratic style of leadership. The level of performance of the women punong barangay is outstanding. The administrative capability of the women punong barangay capability is very high. The themes generated from the experiences where public service is a familial succession, vox populi, public trust, infrastructure and income-generating project implementation, recipient of awards and recognition, established local organizations and associations, discontentment of public service by the people, and gender equality is the political aspirations.

Keywords: political participation, women empowerment, administrative capability

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Introduction

Empowering women is a globally concerted endeavor, gaining momentum as more women enter the political arena across nations. Women's involvement in policy and decision-making is essential in advancing gender mainstreaming and fostering inclusive governance. Despite notable progress, women continue to occupy a minority of leadership and decision-making positions in both public and private sectors worldwide. According to the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), meaningful political participation by women is a cornerstone of gender equality and a genuine indicator of democratic governance (Apap et al., 2019).

In the Philippines, national legislation has laid a strong foundation for advancing women's rights and roles in governance. The 1987 Constitution affirms this commitment through two significant provisions. Article II, Section 14 of the Declaration of Principles explicitly acknowledges the vital contribution of women in nation-building and mandates the State to uphold the fundamental equality of men and women before the law. Meanwhile, Article XIII, Section 14 of the Labor provision underscores the State's responsibility to protect the welfare of working women, recognizing their maternal roles and supporting their full development as contributors to national progress. These constitutional mandates reflect the country's dedication to promoting gender inclusivity across all spheres of society.

Compared to other Asian nations, the Philippines has nurtured a relatively supportive political environment for women. Substantial gains have been made in enhancing their political representation; for instance, women's participation in national governance rose significantly from 15% to 27.2% by 2016 (Arendt, 2018). Nonetheless, the underrepresentation of women in critical policymaking roles and executive leadership remains a persistent issue (Necosia, 2020). Women continue to face systemic barriers that limit their influence in shaping public policies. Still, their roles in driving national development, economically, socially, and politically, are undeniable. Empowering women in leadership thus remains a vital imperative for building a more equitable, resilient, and inclusive society.

At the outset, the local governments are vital in this regard, as the level of government is closest to citizens and the matters directly concern them. They are also launching a pad to an elected office at the regional and national levels. At the local level, as mayors and councilors, as well as the barangay captains and councilors, political readiness can be demonstrated, political profiles shaped, networks built, and skills honed.

However, the United Nations (UN) General Assembly (2019) said that in every region of the world, women continue to be underrepresented in leadership positions since women and girls represent half of the global population. Nonetheless, there are a few exceptions in which women break barriers by confronting the so-called “man’s world” of politics by entering the local, national, and international arena of politics and governance. It is important for women’s general interests to be embodied in governance, including their participation in the decision-making process. Women’s active involvement in domestic and community work makes them apprehensive of the genuine issues the majority faces, especially those at the grassroots (Shankar, 2014 as cited by Benthillo et al., 2016). Further, including women in local government positively provokes other women to enter politics. It opens the door to fracturing the stereotypes of the role of women in society and public policy (iKnow Politics, 2013).

The Province of La Union has 19 municipalities and 1 component city. Considering the barangay level, there are 529 barangays in La Union. During the 2019 elections, data revealed that only 20% elected women candidates were out of the 19 municipalities and 1 component city. Similarly, at the barangay level, 14.37% of women were elected in 2016. This means that at the local level, a minority of women are elected. Moreover, the number of women is outnumbered by the men elected at the local level (Philippines Statistical Authority, 2019).

The City of San Fernando consists of 59 barangays. According to data from the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG, n.d), in 2010, only 5% of elected women were elected in the city. Likewise, in 2016, only 10.16% of women in the punong barangay were elected. In the 2018 election, 25.42% were elected punong barangay. Though there is an increase in the number of women punong barangay elected at the barangay level, it is apparent that women remain a minority in representation and even in the political processes.

Earlier studies on women’s political participation concentrated locally, nationally, or internationally. These studies showed that at a broader scale, women are underrepresented in different electoral positions across nations. Thus, this paper seeks to determine whether the same trend is experienced at the barangay level. While several studies addressed the topic of women’s political participation, a dearth of research gave attention to women’s political participation in the barangay. To address this gap, this research attempted to answer the following questions:

1. What are the leadership styles as manifested by the women punong barangay in terms of:
 - a. Directive;
 - b. Democratic; and

- c. Delegative?
2. What is the level of performance of the women punong barangay in terms of:
 - a. Social, Peace, and Order;
 - b. Financial Administration and Sustainability;
 - c. Disaster Preparedness;
 - d. Social Protection and Sensitivity;
 - e. Business Friendliness; and
 - f. Environmental Management?
3. What is the level of administrative capability as perceived by the women punong barangay, barangay secretary, barangay treasurer, barangay kagawads, and barangay residents in terms of:
 - a. Executive leadership;
 - b. Personnel capability; and
 - c. Financial capability?
4. What are the experiences of the women punong barangay in La Union in terms of:
 - a. Motivation in entering politics;
 - b. Successful stories in administration.
 - c. Frustrations and setback experiences; and
 - d. Political aspirations?

Hence, this study will be conducted among the lady barangay captains in the City of San Fernando, Province of La Union. This study aims to be an edifying piece of legacy by helping policymakers to become aware of the importance of this issue, thereby providing instruments to act, seeing that it is only through women's equal participation in political life that real and substantial gender equality, coupled with proper democratic governance, can be attained. Through this study, women at the barangay level will be encouraged to indulge in politics.

Development

This study employed a phenomenological mixed methods research design developed by Dr. Cheryl Tatano Beck, focusing on the lived experiences of women punong barangay on mainstream governance in local politics. It involves both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The quantitative approach was used to describe and interpret their leadership styles, performance level, and administrative capability. In contrast, the qualitative approach was employed to uncover and interpret the meanings of what people attribute to their experiences (Merriam, 2009), which in this study, is the experiences of women in the punong barangay. The

respondents comprised the current and former women punong barangay, barangay councilors, secretaries, treasurers, and barangay constituents. Through the employment of total enumeration, 13 incumbent women punong barangay, five (5) former women punong barangay, 91 barangay councilors, 26 barangay secretaries and treasurers, and 381 barangay constituents were involved as the sources of data in this study. Of the respondents mentioned, 10 were also interviewed. The research tools employed in this study were survey questionnaires and interview guides. Also, a review of the documents from the DILG and different bargains was conducted.

The questionnaire was then pilot tested on 30 barangay residents in the Municipality of San Juan, La Union. Women-headed Barangays Aludaid and Caculangan, punong barangay. Their responses were subjected to statistical computations using Cronbach's alpha, a reliability coefficient of 0.75, which means the instrument is highly reliable.

The researcher used frequency count and percentage to determine the profile of the women punong barangay. Likewise, summation was also used to determine the leadership styles of the women punong barangay. The Likert scale was used to give their score for each item for leadership style. Further, to determine the level of performance, the rubric was used to determine the score of the women punong barangay. The mean was also used to determine the administrative capability of the women in the punong barangay.

To determine the extent to which leadership styles exhibited by the woman punong barangay are interpreted as:

Point Value	Scale	Descriptive Equivalent (Leadership Styles)
5	4.50-5.00	Almost always
4	3.50-4.49	Frequently
3	2.50-3.49	Occasionally
2	1.50-2.49	Seldom
1	1.00-1.49	Seldom

To determine the level of administrative capability, the following norm for interpretation was used:

Point Value	Scale	Item Descriptive Rating (DR)	Descriptive Equivalent (Level of Administrative Capability)
5	4.50-5.00	Strongly agree (SA)	Very high (VH)
4	3.50-4.49	Agree (A)	High (H)
3	2.50-3.49	Neutral (N)	Moderate (M)
2	1.50-2.49	Disagree (D)	Low (L)

For the lived experience of the women punong barangay, a thematic analysis was used to understand the data collected.

Results and Discussion

Leadership Styles of Women Punong Barangay

Democratic Style

84.6% of the women punong barangay exhibited a participative style of leadership. This manifests that almost all the respondents practiced participative decision-making by involving the council members and stakeholders in managing the affairs of their respective communities. More so, the women punong barangays exercised the democratic way of planning and implementing the various programs, activities, and projects, utilizing consultation with the barangay officials and the community.

The Participative Theory supports this finding. This theory believes that this is the most effective leadership style. Further, it stated that democratic leaders offer guidance to group members but also participate in the group and allow input from other group members. Convincingly, participative leaders encourage group members to participate but retain the final say in decision-making.

Bass and Bass (2009) noted that democratic leadership tends to be centered on the followers and is a practical approach when maintaining relationships with others. People who work under such leaders tend to get along well, support one another, and consult other group members when making decisions.

According to the Philippine Commission on Women (2019), women's active and meaningful participation brings women's perspectives to all aspects of governance and leadership. Thus, it expands the scope of policies and programs to include issues and concerns that affect women, children, and their communities.

Delegative Style

15.38% or 2 of the women punong barangay practiced a delegative leadership style. This implies that the women punong barangay share the responsibilities and authority with the barangay kagawad, personnel, and constituents. Further, it is indicative that the women punong barangays practiced the least this kind of leadership style. Thus, the women punong barangay preferred a synergistic way of deciding matters in their respective barangays rather than leaving the decision-making

to specific personnel. This further implies that only a few individuals are involved in the political processes in their communities.

The laissez-faire leadership supports this finding. Lewin found that this theory was the least productive of all three groups. The theory also placed more demands on the leader, showed little cooperation, and prevented the leader from working independently. More so, delegative leaders offer little or no guidance to group members and leave their decision-making up to them. Furthermore, Lewin noted that laissez-faire leadership resulted in groups that lacked direction and members who blamed each other for mistakes, refused to accept personal responsibility, made less progress, and produced less work.

In contrast, a study has shown strength in their leadership styles because women are perceived as weak. Women’s predicaments of constantly proving they can be vigorous in decision-making still exist. Thus, they show the public that they are powerful and that not only men can be commanding (Macaraeg, 2021).

As a result, the women punong barangay’s leadership styles contribute to the development and attainment of the goals of their respective barangays. The ingredient of success for a leader is the involvement and participation of the barangay. The democratic (participative) and delegative (empowering) leadership styles manifest the good practice of the women punong barangay.

Level of Performance of the Women Punong Barangay

Safety, Peace, and Order

Women punong barangay are outstanding in performing their function in terms of safety, peace, and order, with a mean of 5.00. This implies that the outstanding ratings for safety, peace, and order only show that women punong barangay perform good governance and exercise authority over their barangays. This indicates that women punong barangay ensure their constituents’ security.

For BADAC, the DILG assessed the different barangays in terms of the functionality of their Barangay Anti-Drug Council in 2020. The result of the DILG audit report revealed that their score was 85.15, which translates to the Outstanding rating. The women punong barangay are faithfully working on their BADAC, and some of these barangays are drug-free already. The council underwent training to strengthen its BADAC program. Some of the drug dependents went for so-called community service. This only means that the women in the punong barangay must serve their stakeholders and promote their common good.

Table 1. Level of Performance around Safety, Peace, and Order

Items	X	Descriptive Rating
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Functionality of the Barangay Anti-Drug Abuse Council (BADAC)	5	Very Satisfactory
Updated Record of Barangay Inhabitants (RBI)	5	Outstanding
Professionalizing the Barangay Tanod	5	Outstanding
Average Mean	5.00	Outstanding

The barangay secretary must perform this function to update the inhabitants' records. According to the Barangay Health Workers, they oversee getting details in their respective site or "purok". This means that the personnel are helping each other to facilitate the work easily. It is also important for the personnel to know the information of their residents for proper accounting and for the services of the barangay to be accorded to the right person.

The indicator, Professionalizing the Barangay Tanod, garnered an Outstanding rating with a mean of 5.00. This implies that the women punong barangays are duty-bound to empower the Barangay Tanod through skills training. In every barangay, the women's punong barangay is the head of the barangay tanods. The Barangay organized the Barangay Peacemaking Action Team (BPAT). Aside from BPAT, the women punong barangays have a *Lupon Tagapamayapa*. This team ensures the community maintains peace, security, order, and safety. Peace and order are essential to maintaining economic development, social order, and political stability (Bayan, 2011). The finding implies that the women punong barangays are committed to performing their duties and obligations as mandated by the provisions of the Local Government Code of 1991 and religiously complying with all the requirements set by the Department of the Interior and Local Government. Thus, it is the primordial duty of the women punong barangay to keep their community free from violence and crimes. Thus, making the community a safer place for all the constituents.

Financial Administration and Sustainability

The overall mean for the financial administration and sustainability area garners a very satisfactory rating of 4.49. This means that the women punong barangay give importance to the financial management of the barangay.

Notedly, the Table shows that compliance with the Barangay Full Disclosure Policy (BFDP) has the highest mean of 5, which is an outstanding rating. This means that the women punong barangay made it a priority to comply with the Barangay Full Disclosure Policy (BFDP), which means that it is important for them to fully disclose financial documents to keep their constituents informed of how the barangay finances and budget are managed, disbursed, and used (FDPP, 2022). This indicates that

women punong barangay adhere to the highest ideals and standards of transparency and accountability.

Table 2. Level of Performance in the area of Financial Administration and Sustainability

Particulars	Mean	Descriptive Rating
1. Compliance with the Barangay Full Disclosure Policy (BFDP)	5	Outstanding
2. There is a percentage increase in local resources	4.69	Outstanding
3. Conducted Barangay Assembly	3.77	Very Satisfactory
Average Mean	4.49	Very Satisfactory

The women punong barangay have an outstanding rating (4.69) regarding the percentage increase in local resources. This implies that women in the punong barangay are capable and resourceful in sourcing their funds. This further inferred that this is attributable to the nature of women being the purse keepers in the family; thus, they applied this practice in increasing the finances of the barangay.

The indicator on the conduct of barangay assembly garnered a mean of 3.77 or Very Satisfactory. This means that the women in the punong barangay still give importance to the conduct of barangay assembly because they consider this a medium of information dissemination regarding their plans, projects, activities, and accomplishments.

This performance of the women's punong barangay reflects their adherence to transparency and accountability. This finding conforms with the findings of Floranza (2021), which generally stated that the Barangay Captains are capable in their discharge of duty along with Barangay Fiscal Administration. He further highlighted the strengths of punong barangays, as manifested by their accountability in budget allocation and transparency.

This finding implies that the women punong barangay can perform their duties regarding financial administration and sustainability. Further, they can deliver their quality services to their constituents, and they adhere to the principle of accountability and transparency.

This finding agrees with the Theory of Responsive Governance and Administrative Processes by Nonet and Selznick (as cited by Jones, 1998) whereby it characterized by decentralization and the board delegation of authority, the creative

use of planning, evaluation and development, and participatory-decision-making as a source of knowledge, a vehicle of communication, and the foundation of consent.

Disaster Preparedness

For disaster preparedness, Table 3 shows that the women punong barangay are Outstanding (4.92) in performing their functions on Disaster Preparedness. The rating of outstanding indicates that the women punong barangay consider Functionality of the Barangay Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Committee (BDRRMC) and the presence of Early Warning System as important to the barangay, that the safety and security of the constituents and their properties are priorities of the leaders. It can be inferred that women in the punong barangay are responsible for leading their respective communities on disaster risk reduction and management matters.

Table 3. Level of Performance in the Area of Disaster Preparedness

Particulars	Mean	Descriptive Rating
1. Functionality of the Barangay Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Committee (BDRRMC)	5	Outstanding
2. Accomplishment rate of the activities/projects reflected in the BDRRMC Plan	4.77	Outstanding
3. Presence of Early Warning System	5	Outstanding
Average Mean	4.92	Outstanding

The Theory of Responsive Governance and Administrative Processes by Nonet and Selznick (as cited by Jones, 1998) cited that legal regulation, norms, remedies, and safeguards need to be considered in the context of the adequacy of the design of the overall process whereby local services are delivered to citizens and public consumers.

This aligns with Section 1, Rule 6 of RA 10121 (PDRRMC Act of 2010), which provides for creating the Barangay Risk Reduction and Management. There is also an approved BDRRM Plan and a 5% BDRRM fund allocated, which was posted in the Barangay Full Disclosure Board. At the same time, the BDRRM conducts meetings at least once every quarter. This indicates that women punong barangay complied with the roles, responsibilities, and functions under Section 4 of the IRR 10121 and Section 7 of Joint Memorandum Circular No. 2014-1 among the NDRRMC, DBM, DILG, and CSC. This implies further that the women punong barangays are responsible for developing self-reliance by promoting and encouraging the spirit of self-help and mutual assistance in times of natural calamities. Thus, the women punong barangays

are expected to take responsibility for protecting their members from natural calamities.

Social Protection and Sensitivity

The average mean for the level of performance of the barangay in social protection and sensitivity, as shown in Table 4, is outstanding with a mean of 4.75.

Table 4. Level of Performance in the area of Social Protection and Sensitivity

Particulars	Mean	Descriptive Rating
1. Functionality of the Violence Against Women (VAW) Desk	5	Outstanding
2. Access to health and social welfare services in the barangay	5	Outstanding
3. Representation of CSOs in the Barangay Based Institutions (BBI)	4.38	Very Satisfactory
Registration of Kasambahay and establishment of Kasambahay Desk	4.38	Very Satisfactory
Allocation for the Annual GAD Plan and Budget	5	Outstanding
Average Mean	4.75	Outstanding

In the indicator on the functionality of the VAW Desk, all the women punong barangay revealed that they have a VAW Desk manned by trained personnel and submit quarterly reports. This implies that the women punong barangay are complying with the mandate of the law to protect the rights of those being abused by a family member.

The barangay is a partner of the government to end violence against women, as stated in the Millennium Development Goals of the Philippines. With the effort made by the women punong barangay, it can be said that women pay attention to programs, projects, activities, and services that uplift the standard of living for women and children, thus providing programs that will boost their morale.

For the indicator of access to health and social services of the barangay, all barangays have their barangay health station operated by trained barangay health workers, barangay nutritionists, midwives, and barangay service points. This implies that the women punong barangay also prioritize their constituents' health and wellness. Note that these healthcare personnel provide different services like immunization of children, maternal health care, Operation Timbang, Family Planning, Pre-natal care, first aid, and other services related to their function. The Barangay Health Center is also open from Monday to Friday to cater to the needs of its constituents. The nature of a loving mother is expected of the women punong

barangay because this nature is innate to them. Thus, they see that their constituents are provided with these services.

This finding agrees with participatory governance, which emphasizes democratic engagement through deliberate practices to ensure good governance that deepens citizen participation in planning the programs, projects, and activities to meet their fundamental needs (Fisher, 2012).

Business-Friendliness and Competitiveness

Table 5 shows the level of performance of the barangay in business-friendliness and competitiveness.

Table 5. Level of Performance in the Area of Business-Friendliness and Competitiveness

Particulars	Mean	Descriptive Rating
1. There is an enactment of the Barangay Tax Ordinance	5	Outstanding
2. There is an enacted ordinance relative to barangay clearance fees on business permits and locational clearance for building permits	5	Outstanding
3. There is an approved resolution authorizing the city treasurer to collect fees for barangay clearance for business permit and locational clearance purposes	5	Outstanding
4. Issued Barangay Clearance for Business Permit within seven (7) working days	4.38	Very Satisfactory
5. Issued Barangay Clearance for Locational Clearance in not more than three (3) working days from application at the city	4.46	Very Satisfactory
Average Mean	4.77	Outstanding

The average mean is 4.77 with an outstanding rating. This implies that the women punong barangays complied with the required days to issue documents. This indicates that the women punong barangay are given specific powers, like the power to generate their resources to fund their programs, projects, and activities according to the constituents' needs. The outstanding performance of the women punong barangays shows that enacting tax ordinances related to the imposition of fees and other charges is a sign of their commitment to source funds to augment their expenses.

The women's performance in punong barangays implies that they exerted much effort to source more funds to implement more projects in their barangays. This

shows how resourceful they are in generating their resources, knowing that these barangays depend on the Internal Revenue Allotment.

Participatory governance, which emphasizes democratic engagement through deliberate practices to ensure good governance, deepens citizen participation in planning the programs, projects, and activities to meet their fundamental needs (Fisher, 2012). According to Panadero (2004), in his speech entitled “*Local Governance Towards the Millennium Development Goals*,” an effective monitoring system for government units must be established to assist local government units in targeting appropriate and responsive interventions for poverty reduction and human development.

Environmental Management

Table 6 shows the level of performance on environmental management, with a mean of 5 and an outstanding rating, resulting in an outstanding general rating. This implies that women in the punong barangay consider environmental management crucial to the barangays and consider this a priority, thus achieving overall outstanding performance.

The Theory on Responsive Governance and Administrative Processes by Nonet and Selznick (as cited by Jones, 1998) affirmed this finding since legal regulation, norms, remedies, and safeguards need to be considered in the context of the adequacy of design of the overall process whereby local services are delivered to citizens and public consumers. The principle of responsive public governance requires responding efficiently and effectively to the people’s real needs. This entails anchoring policies, strategies, programs, activities, and resources, considering people’s expectations, local variations, and ambitions.

Table 6. Level of Performance in the Area of Environmental Management

Particulars	Mean	Descriptive Rating
1. There is a Materials Recovery Facility	5	Outstanding
2. There is an ordinance or similar issue for the segregation of waste at source	5	Outstanding
3. There is an organized Barangay Ecological Solid Waste Management Committee (BESWMC)	5	Outstanding
Average Mean	5	Outstanding

Level of Administrative Capability of Women Punong Barangay

The administrative capability of the women punong barangay shows that it has an overall mean of 4.62, which translates as Very High. The executive leadership and

personnel capability have the highest mean of 4.66 and the financial capability of 4.57. All the indicators are rated very high. The results show that improvement is needed in the financial capability, even if it is already rated high. The result showed that it is not at the executive leadership and personnel capability level.

The findings above show that being a woman punong barangay will not deter one from doing their functions and roles. Being a woman does not and should not be a problem with performing the expected duties of a punong barangay. A study by Rodil et al. (2020) determined the gender role differentiation among elected barangay officials and found that male officials dominate tasks involving vehicles and structure repairs, while women barangay officials dominate tasks involving finances and social welfare.

This finding coincides with the findings of Agustin, Aquino, and Guadamor (2017), who found that the Punong Barangays are competent in their managerial skills in directing and leading the community. It can be inferred that the women punong barangay can govern community affairs. Further, studies revealed that the punong barangays perform satisfactorily in implementation, legislation, peacekeeping, planning, and fiscal management (Noble-Nur 2018) and are “*very competent*” in barangay governance. Another study on Barangay Governance concluded that most Barangay Chairpersons deliver very satisfactory public services, indicating that governance core values are fair, transparent, and accountable (Boysillo 2017). One proposed that the local officials stay self-reflective or aware of their accountabilities in the barangay to maintain barangay governance (Nalbandian et al. 2013) to provide vital services and increase the excellence of their capability to render community services (Flores 2019). Moreover, the Barangay government is also given considerable autonomy to manage its affairs and explore any possibilities of raising its financial resources and utilizing them at their discretion, so long as this will improve the welfare of its constituents. Nevertheless, in order to fulfill the barangays’ mandates and functions, as contained in the Local Government Code, the barangays must be equipped with the necessary competencies, not only in terms of administrative capabilities but also the focal areas of good governance in terms of delivering public services to the people from different sectors of the society such as Education and Healthcare, Social Protection, Financial Management, Peace and Security, Business Friendliness, Tourism, Environmental Management and Disaster Preparedness (Flores, 2019).

To sum up, administrative capability is the epitome of development at the grassroots level. The female barangays’ very high rating of administrative capability is attributed to their moral values. This implies that the high regard and respect by the

personnel and stakeholders for the female punong barangays was due to their commitment, passion, and accountability in executing their duties and functions to bring sustainable development to their localities. The female punong barangays are teambuilders, and the barangay officials, personnel, and constituents work closely together to improve their barangay.

Lived Experiences of Women Punong Barangay

Motivations in Entering Politics

Women punong barangay were a rare breed for a long time because men dominated most local government units as barangay chairmen. Politics is still male dominated despite the increased number of women being voted into public office (Valente & Moreno, 2014), but the world has changed. Women are now striving to be on the same level.

The study identified three (3) distinct themes from the participants' responses as to the motivation for entering politics. The motivations to enter politics and be public servants in the barangay included the following themes: (1) public service is familial succession; (2) public service is vox populi, and (3) public service is a public trust. These motivations helped the study participants to be in power and continue what they ought to do – providing service to their constituents.

Public service is familial succession. The first motivation for familial succession is an isolated case. However, since this has been a trend in Philippine politics, it can be considered a motivation to run for public office. Familial succession in politics is one of the most common motivations for entering public service. Family connections drive the political background of public servants as they want to resume and maintain the 'legacy' of the previous relative who ran for public office.

It can be noted that familial ties are significant in the political circles in the Philippines. As supported by the claims of the barangay captains, they proceeded to run for office to continue their family's political heritage and pursue other programs that their predecessors had initiated.

This is parallel to the study of Valdez-Macaraeg (2021), where it was observed that two among three lady public servants, in the name of former Mayor Mary Jane C. Ortega and second district representative Sandra Y. Eriguel, succeeded the position through familial chain.

Public service is vox populi. More so, six (6) out of ten (10) participants believed that the voice of the people made them decide to enter politics. This belief follows the maxim "*vox populi, vox dei*", which means that the voice of the people is the voice of

God. Indeed, the participants believe they were encouraged to join politics because people trusted them to deliver quality services.

Most respondents believed that the people chose them; thus, the Divine utilized them to materialize their destiny in public service. The respondents believed they were voted for because they were chosen to be the voice of the unheard. They are selected to ensure that every right of their constituent is being protected and their fundamental right to live is being met.

Public service is public trust. Furthermore, three (3) participants were motivated to enter the political sphere because they aimed to improve the status of their respective barangays. People in their respective barangays wanted them to introduce changes in their barangays. In addition, five (5) of the participants revealed that service to the community is their primary reason for joining politics. Service to stakeholders is the main ingredient of why these participants engage in politics. They also shared that their top priority is to help the people in their community.

Successful Stories

Regarding the victorious accounts of the public servants, three (3) notable accomplishments were recognized as themes, including: (1) Improving Communities, (2) Personal Fulfillment, and (3) Influencing Social Change.

Improving Communities. The eight (8) participants shared their successful stories, which were attributed to their desire to implement Infrastructure Projects in their respective barangays, like the construction of roads, bridges, farm-to-market roads, sea walls, barangay halls, day care centers, health and wellness centers, pathways, covered courts, streetlights, and a chapel. Moreover, four (4) respondents also shared their sentiments that planning and implementing various Income-generating projects (IGPs) also contributed to the lives of the participants' constituents.

The results suggest that if the punong barangays invest in worthwhile projects, including infrastructure and IGPs, their constituents will be more trusting in authentic leadership. This transformation is not only of the facilities, but also among other project initiatives of the barangay, establishing complete confidence in the government, which ensures that the taxes are being used effectively and efficiently.

Personal Fulfillment. Being recognized by award-giving bodies is another achievement of a barangay that reflects how work is being done. Two (2) study respondents also identified the accolades that brought their local community into the

limelight. Some awards also provide cash incentives to provide additional budget to the various barangay projects.

It only shows that there is a need for the local communities and their leaders to have the motivation to pursue greater heights. Recognizing their efforts is only one of the alternatives to continue their oath to do good. Providing them cash incentives can be an extra to assist their local projects that benefit their development.

Influencing Social Change. To strengthen the sense of community among the local constituents of the barangay, it is significant that they can build collaboration and empathy among themselves. Thus, the three (3) respondents also pride themselves on founding and launching non-government associations that can represent the marginalized groups and plan programs, activities, and projects that will uplift the lives of the people in their communities.

It can be marked that the local government, specifically the barangays, holistically caters to the needs of its constituents. It means that they form local organizations to strengthen not only the constituents' relationship but also to fortify the foundation of the barangay and successfully implement all its mandates.

Frustrations and Setbacks

Everyone has an opinion. Regarding the frustrations and setbacks, six (6) respondents shared one similar theme that emerged from their responses. They have reiterated that there will always be a sense of discontent among the constituents about the public service the punong barangays provide. The respondents mentioned that people will always have something to say, positive and negative, that can make or break the local community.

Most of the stories of disappointment came from their constituents' dissatisfaction with public services and the heavy expectations of the job. This is most common in Philippine politics, which is an unacceptable culture. However, it is different in the study of Valdez-Macaraeg (2021), which states that most respondents expressed their disturbance by the macho politics of the country and the lack of women's participation in political processes. In this study, women punong barangay are very concerned and challenged by their people. There is a heavy pressure. Possibly, since it was mentioned that the people selected them, they must provide a flawless public service without any taint of malpractice and abuse of power.

Political Aspirations

Genderless Society. As to the political aspirations, five (5) participants shared the same sentiment, and only one sentiment that gender and development have been

championing. It was themed as (1) men and women are equal. Cliche as it may sound, but this has been the political trend. Research shows that there has been an increasing number of women participating in politics. The study participants asserted that political leadership does not choose gender, as it can be for all.

The study implies that women and men are equal partners in achieving a more successful governance without considering gender as a hindrance to outstanding leadership. However, traditional perspectives among women in terms of politics still exist in this progressive world. This is culturally and socially embedded in them, as various factors can also be considered. Nevertheless, men and women are equal in terms of their political participation, regardless of the gender to which they belong. It can be noted that good leadership that provides good governance matters most to the constituents they are sworn to protect. This study is in congruence with Valdez-Macaraeg (2021), which states that their ideals for their community include equal opportunity for men and women. Both said that a modern leadership philosophy based on equal opportunities and free of gender discrimination may foster a great work environment.

Discussion

The study's findings underscore the dominance of the democratic or participative leadership style among women Punong Barangays, with 84.6% demonstrating a collaborative approach in managing their barangays. This leadership style, rooted in Participative Theory, emphasizes inclusiveness in decision-making, valuing the input of barangay officials and community members. Such leadership fosters transparency, accountability, and stronger community involvement, aligning with the Philippine Commission on Women's (2019) advocacy for gender-inclusive governance. In contrast, a smaller percentage (15.38%) employed a delegative style, indicating a preference for shared authority but limited individual decision-making. While this aligns with laissez-faire leadership tendencies, it also highlights the women leaders' conscious choice to avoid minimal involvement, possibly to challenge prevailing gender stereotypes and assert their capability and presence in political spaces (Macaraeg, 2021).

The level of performance of women Punong Barangays across multiple governance domains also paints a portrait of competent and committed leadership. The outstanding mean rating of 5.00 signifies a strong command of anti-drug campaigns, barangay records, and community security structures like BPATs in safety, peace, and order. These findings align with the goals of the Local Government Code

of 1991 and underscore the importance of peace and order in fostering socio-economic development (Bayan, 2011).

In financial administration and sustainability, a very satisfactory mean of 4.49 was recorded, with full compliance with the Barangay Full Disclosure Policy rated as outstanding. This finding points to the respondents' deeply rooted transparency and fiscal responsibility culture. Their effective budget management and proactive conduct of assemblies' support findings by Floranza (2021) reinforce Nonet and Selznick's Theory of Responsive Governance, highlighting decentralized, participatory, and accountable administrative practices.

Disaster preparedness showed another area of exceptional performance (mean of 4.92), with functional BDRRMCs and early warning systems in place. These findings demonstrate women's active role in ensuring community resilience and adherence to RA 10121. Their initiatives, such as quarterly meetings and fund allocation, reveal compliance and concern for constituents' well-being during emergencies.

On social protection and sensitivity, the average mean of 4.75 indicates effective gender-responsive governance. With functional VAW Desks and accessible health and welfare services, women Punong Barangays actively advance women's and children's welfare, supporting the principles of participatory governance (Fisher, 2012). The establishment of GAD programs and kasambahay desks further reflects their sensitivity to marginalized sectors.

Regarding business-friendliness and competitiveness, women barangay leaders demonstrated exemplary performance with a 4.77 mean. Their responsiveness to enacting ordinances, issuing permits efficiently, and generating revenues beyond IRA dependence shows how they effectively merge administrative efficiency with entrepreneurial leadership (Panadero, 2004).

Environmental management likewise received an outstanding rating of 5.00, highlighting women leaders' importance in sustainability. Their implementation of materials recovery facilities, waste segregation ordinances, and BESWMCs embodies the principles of Nonet and Selznick's responsive governance, where local government adapts to community needs and environmental challenges.

Their administrative capability received a high rating (4.62), confirming that gender does not hinder leadership effectiveness. Women barangay leaders often outperform expectations through strong moral values, collaborative governance, and strategic planning, as seen in their commitment to infrastructure, fiscal responsibility, and community involvement. This finding affirms previous studies (Rodil et al., 2020;

Agustin et al., 2017; Noble-Nur, 2018), which validate women's competence in governance.

Qualitative data revealed that women leaders are motivated by familial succession, public trust, and community voices, challenging the male-dominated nature of politics (Valdez-Macaraeg, 2021). Their success stories, such as infrastructure development, personal recognition, and community empowerment through NGOs, point to transformative leadership. Despite frustrations stemming from unrealistic expectations and public scrutiny, these women continue to thrive, asserting that gender should not limit political participation. Their vision of a genderless society in political leadership reflects evolving norms and their strong advocacy for inclusive, value-based governance.

In sum, this study highlights that women Punong Barangays exhibit administrative capability and policy compliance, emotional intelligence, transformational leadership, and a deep commitment to service, ultimately redefining grassroots leadership in the Philippine context.

Conclusion

With the findings revealed in the preceding section, this research concludes that: the women punong barangay were politically mature to assume the leadership role; the women punong barangay acknowledge the importance of involvement and participation of the people in planning, implementing and decision-making in carrying out the functions and delivery of quality services to the community; the women punong barangay have an excellent performance in executing their functions and responsibilities; the women punong barangay were effective and efficient in the administration or management of the human and financial resources; the women punong barangay were the catalyst of change in their respective barangays; integration of gender perspectives in good governance assist not only to the enhancement of people's lives but also to achieve positive outcomes or goals of political institutions. Specifically, it increases gender equality and women's morale; the lessons derived were love for service which instigated their productivity in coming up with projects, programs, activities, and services which also lead them to perform well, and public administration knows no gender. These ensure women's involvement in the arena of politics.

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