

BREAKING BARRIERS AND BUILDING BRIDGES: EXPLORING GENDER EQUALITY INITIATIVES IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT UNITS

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the gender equality initiatives of the local government units in Maguindanao Provinces which breaks barriers and builds bridges. A qualitative approach particularly phenomenology research design was used in the study. Participants were interviewed deeply using validated open-ended interview guide. There were 15 key informants participated in the study. Data underwent thematic analysis to expose global and basic themes as answers for the research questions. Results of the study revealed that the initiatives of the LGUs in gender equality are described in the themes such as awareness campaigns, empowerment programs, and inclusivity campaigns. To ensure inclusivity in gender equality initiatives, the LGUs advocate gender equality in leadership positions, consultation and participation, unity in diversity, and equal access. This study also accounted from the participants their perceived impact and outcomes of the gender equality initiatives of the LGUs. The themes are divided into impacts and outcomes in terms of social change which have themes such as economic empowerment, social justice and equity, and strengthened community ties and family relationships. The perceived impact and outcomes in terms of gender equality awareness is themed with reduced gender-based violence, and increased representation and participation. The influence of cultural norms, traditions, and community perceptions in designing and implementing gender equality initiatives is described in the themes: contextualized gender equality and inclusivity initiatives; and enhanced community participation. The policy brief was introduced as part of the study. It laid the foundation on the importance of gender equality in society.

Keyword (Font-12, Bold): - *Gender equality initiatives , Local Government Units.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Gender equality is a fundamental human right and a cornerstone of sustainable development. Recognizing its significance, nations worldwide have committed to advancing gender equality and empowering women through various international agreements and conventions. Within the context of local governance, Local Government Units (LGUs) play a pivotal role in translating these global commitments into actionable initiatives that can foster gender equality within their communities.

The Philippines, a country known for its rich cultural diversity and complex social fabric, is no exception to the global pursuit of gender equality. Gender disparities, stereotypes, and biases persist in many facets of society,

affecting women's access to resources, participation in decision-making processes, and overall well-being. The promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment has been integral to the country's policy framework, as reflected in the Magna Carta of Women (Republic Act No. 9710) and the creation of Gender and Development (GAD) focal points within LGUs.

The locale of the study represents a microcosm of the country's challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality. It is a region marked by diversity in culture, religion, and tradition, which can either act as a catalyst for gender inclusivity or serve as a barrier to progress. Understanding the dynamics of gender equality initiatives in LGUs provides valuable insights into the broader efforts to break down barriers and build bridges toward gender equality nationwide.

This comprehensive study, titled "Breaking Barriers and Building Bridges: A Comprehensive Study of Gender Equality Initiatives in Local Government Units," seeks to delve into the intricate tapestry of gender equality initiatives within the LGUs of Pagalungan, Pandag, Buluan, Datu Paglas, Mangudatu, and Datu Montawal. It aims to assess the effectiveness of these initiatives, identify existing challenges and barriers, and draw lessons that can inform policies and practices not only within the mentioned municipalities but also in other LGUs across the Philippines.

As we embark on this journey of exploration and discovery, we acknowledge the complex interplay of social, cultural, economic, and political factors that shape the landscape of gender equality. By shedding light on the experiences and achievements of LGUs, we aspire to contribute to the ongoing global discourse on gender equality, fostering a deeper understanding of the challenges faced and the bridges built towards a more equitable and inclusive society.

Through rigorous research, data analysis, and the voices of the individuals and communities directly impacted by these initiatives, this study seeks to highlight the importance of local governance in promoting gender equality and the potential for LGUs to serve as beacons of progress in the broader movement towards gender equity. Thus, this qualitative study employing phenomenology aims at identifying the experiences of LGUs in Maguindanao del Sur in its implementation of gender equality initiatives.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study explored gender equality under the premise of qualitative research design, specifically phenomenology. Phenomenology is a qualitative research approach that explores individuals' lived experiences and perspectives regarding a particular phenomenon. Using this research design, the researcher aims to gain a deep understanding of how LGUs perceive, experience, and make sense of gender-related phenomena. These phenomena could be related to workplace experiences, family dynamics, educational settings, or any other context of gender equality. This study was conducted in the Municipalities of Pagalungan, Pandag, Buluan, Datu Paglas, Mangudatu, and Datu Montawal. These municipalities are landlocked in the coastal province of Maguindanao. A structured questionnaire, voice recorder, and cellphone gathered the needed data. The participants of the study are the GAD Focal Person; GAD Committee Chair and or member of the LGU offices; NGOs who work on gender equality projects; VAWC Desk offices; and residents of the municipalities mentioned whose work is related to gender equality. The informants of the study were chosen purposively. Data were gathered using interview, focus group discussion. The gathered data were transcribed, translated, and presented using tables with themes and core ideas. The data were presented to the participants for confirmatory purposes.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Key Gender Equality Initiatives Implemented by LGUs

The LGUs ensure equality initiatives in their respective locality. These initiatives are described in themes as presented in table 1. These themes representing the global theme, initiative on gender equality, are: awareness campaigns, empowerment programs, inclusivity campaigns which are all discussed in the preceding sections.

Awareness campaigns

This initiative by the LGUs to ensure gender equality encompasses different programs and activities which are all geared towards awareness of the community on gender equality, anti-discrimination, programs related to gender equality, raising awareness on GAD programs and celebration of women's month and its related activities. These programs serve as educative process of mainstreaming gender equality in the society.

Based on the results of the study, it can be gleaned that this initiative of raising awareness on GAD by Local Government Units (LGUs) demonstrates a comprehensive approach to promoting gender equality within the community. By raising awareness, implementing programs, integrating gender perspectives into development initiatives, and celebrating the contributions of women, the LGUs are working to create a more inclusive and equitable society where all individuals could thrive regardless of gender. Conducting awareness campaigns help deconstruct certain representations of masculinity and femininity (Essig, & Soparnot, 2019).

Empowerment programs

Another initiative of the LGUs is the conduct of empowerment program encompassing capacity building activities, community engagement programs, advocacies on solo parents, and other forms of women empowerment programs. These are done by the LGUs to ensure that gender received equal treatment as they are all empowered to perform their respective roles in the society without being discriminated.

The conduct of capacity building for all groups is one of the manifestations that the LGUs implement empowerment programs. Capacity building initiatives are participated by women, youth, persons with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ individuals. By equipping these groups with the necessary skills and resources, LGUs empower them to advocate for their rights, participate in decision-making processes, and access opportunities for personal and professional growth.

The results show that the LGUs are implementing initiatives for gender equality which are centered on empower of different genders in the society. By centering their initiatives on the empowerment of individuals of all genders, LGUs demonstrate a commitment to promoting gender equality and creating more inclusive and equitable communities where everyone has the opportunity to thrive.

Table 1. Themes generated from the initiatives of LGUs on Gender Equality

Global Themes	Basic Themes	Core Ideas
Initiatives on Gender Equality	Awareness Campaigns	Gender equality campaigns Anti-discrimination campaigns Women’s Month Celebration Gender equality programs and processes Raising awareness on GAD Programs
	Empowerment programs	Capacity building activities Community engagement programs Advocacies on solo parents Women empowerment programs
	Inclusivity Campaigns	Equal access to services Campaigns on inclusive practices and policies

Inclusivity campaigns

Gender equality initiatives of LGUs can be described also in their inclusivity campaigns. This is done by ensuring that there is equal access to services for all gender.

Equal access to services is given by the LGUs to ensure that different groups receive equal treatment when availing social services.

Inclusivity campaigns play a vital role in fostering a culture of respect, acceptance, and belonging where all individuals are valued and could participate fully in society. By promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion, these

campaigns contribute to building stronger, more resilient, and cohesive communities. For Taukobong (2016), gender equality initiatives in Philippine LGUs are essential for advancing women's rights, reducing gender disparities, and promoting inclusive and equitable development.

How LGUs Ensure Inclusivity in Gender Equality Initiatives

LGUs also employ various strategies of ensuring inclusivity in gender equality initiatives. In the themes presented in table 2, these initiatives are: gender equality in leadership positions, consultation and participation, unity in diversity, and equal access.

Gender Equality in Leadership Positions

For the LGUs, gone are the days when women do not take part in the leadership positions in the politics and at work since men are considered more powerful and perform better than women.

In terms of gender equality and leadership positions, LGUs ensure that women have freedom to run in government office to any political party.

Gender equality in leadership positions is crucial for fostering inclusive, representativeness, and effectiveness in decision-making processes. The findings suggest that the LGUs are making efforts and initiatives to ensure gender inclusive society.

Human Resources (HR) is responsible for ensuring that women and minorities have equal opportunities within organizations, according to Bernardin and Russell (2013). HR professionals have taken on the duty to advance equal opportunities by recognizing and addressing hidden biases.

Consultation and Participation

Another initiative by the LGUs is to practice inclusivity through consultation and participation. They specifically do this by recognizing different groups in the society and by finding out the needs of these groups.

As gender inclusive locality, the LGU recognized LGBTQ+ Community.

Based on the result, the LGUs ensure inclusivity by implementing gender-inclusive practices through consultation and participation involves actively involving individuals of all genders in decision-making processes and ensuring that their perspectives and needs are considered. For Hunt, and Brouwers (2013), shared ownership of goals and approaches is more probable when there's a direct correlation to existing policies and commitments made by partners regarding women's equality. This is done through consultation and shared decision making. Hence, there is a need to establish a common vision and clear agreement on gender equality goals aligned with the development initiatives.

Unity in diversity

The LGUs which participated in the study have also ensured unity in diversity. This means, despite differences in culture, ethnicity, religion, or other characteristics, they owe strength of the society from the cohesion of various groups. One of the ways in which diversity is shown with unity is in celebrating cultural festivals of which according to participants, the celebrations are participated by the different groups in the community.

Based on this generated theme, it can be deduced that the LGUs involved in the study have supported unity in diversity by promoting cohesion among various groups within the community. Despite differences in culture, ethnicity, religion, or other characteristics, they recognize the strength that coming solidarity among diverse groups. In contemporary societies, diversity or multiculturalism is ubiquitous, with individuals embracing and coexisting with various systems of values and beliefs, often with overlaps (Ernaningrum, 2022).

Equal access

Ensuring inclusivity in the LGUs is also done by ensuring equal access regardless of group affiliation and gender. Specifically, this is about equal access to education, employment, healthcare and social services. When it comes to employment, the LGUs mandates different institutions in support to national goals that no one should be discriminated due to gender. The healthcare, housing, social support and other services for all can be accessed in the LGUs and they claimed that they are giving these social services regardless of gender, ethnic affiliations and other personal background as long as you are from the same LGU.

As shared by the participants coming from various LGUs, they ensure inclusivity by promoting access to different services intended for the people of the community. By prioritizing access to these services, LGUs aim to create a more inclusive and equitable society where everyone can participate fully and benefit from the resources

and opportunities available. Local jurisdictions are tasked in transforming their available financial and human resources into public service delivery outcomes that meet the needs of the community (Boex, 2016). Doing so, consequently provides free access for all regardless of gender.

Table 2. Themes on how LGUs ensure inclusivity in their gender equality initiatives

Global Themes	Basic Themes	Core Ideas
Strategies in ensuring inclusivity	Gender Equality in Leadership Positions	Freedom to run in any government office
	Consultation and Participation	Equal selection process for any office position Recognized LGBTQ+ Community
	Unity in diversity	Finding out the needs of different groups in the society Celebrating cultural festivals
	Equal access	Promoting respect and understanding Equal access to education, employment, healthcare and social services

Impacts and outcomes of gender equality initiatives

This study also accounted from the participants their perceived impact and outcomes of the gender equality initiatives of the LGUs. The themes are divided into impacts and outcomes in terms of social change which have the themes such as economic empowerment, social justice and equity, and strengthened community ties and family relationships. The perceived impact and outcomes in terms of gender equality awareness is themed with reduced gender-based violence, and increased representation and participation.

Impacts and Outcomes in terms of Social Change

The participants have pointed out that the impact and outcome of the gender equity initiatives can be felt through the social change experienced in the community. These changes are economic empowerment, social justice and equity and strengthened community ties and family relationships.

Economic Empowerment. One of the social changes observed by the participants is the livelihood opportunity equally accessed by all gender in the society. As earlier mentioned, the LGUs are providing services that give the people the opportunity to earn such as different projects like bag making and *alamang* making to mention a few. For the participants, this programs have improved the lives of the beneficiaries.

Social Justice and Equity. Social justice and equity are fundamental principles that aim to ensure fairness, equality, and opportunity for all members of society, regardless of their background, identity, or circumstances. Social change is also manifested by social justice and equity because of the LGUs gender equality practices.

As noted by the participants, there is a decrease in discriminatory practices which is shown in unfairly treating individuals or groups differently based on certain characteristics, such as race, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, disability, or socioeconomic status.

Strengthened Community Ties and family relationships. The gender equality initiatives have strengthened community ties and family relationships. By fostering a culture of inclusivity and respect, these initiatives can bring community members together, strengthen social bonds, and promote solidarity among diverse groups. According to one of the participants:

As shown in the result, social change is one of the impacts and outcomes of gender equality initiatives. Changes in the lives of the people, having social justice and stronger community ties are observable impact of the initiative. Findings suggest that these elements may be also practiced in her work setting.

Impacts and Outcomes in terms of gender equality awareness

The impact of gender equality initiative in terms of the gender equality awareness is described by the themes such as: reduced gender-based violence, and increased representation and participation.

Reduced Gender-based Violence is one of the observed impact of the initiative. As described by one of the participants:

Since we conduct awareness campaigns, so there is now a decrease in the violence against women. Of course, this could happen because women are aware of their rights. Men also know about this already. IDI-P13

Table 3. Themes on Impacts and outcomes of gender equality initiatives

Global Themes	Basic Themes	Core Ideas
Impacts and Outcomes in terms of Social Change	Economic Empowerment	Livelihood opportunities for all gender Genderized participation to income generating activities
	Social Justice and Equity	decreased discriminatory practices Decreased gender stereotyping
	Strengthened Community Ties and family relationships	Good relationship in the community Stronger family ties
Impacts and Outcomes in terms of gender equality awareness	Reduced Gender-based Violence	Decreased cases of violence against women Decreased cases of violence among LGBTQs
	Increased Representation and Participation	Gender participation to programs and activities Equal political and leadership opportunities for all gender

Increased Representation and Participation. This theme is explained by the idea that for the participants, there is already an increase in the gender participation to programs and activities.

Interestingly, there is also an equal political and leadership opportunities for all gender. For instance, women are not usually seen on political gatherings as they do not secure positions but for the participants:

It can be gleaned from the result that gender equality awareness initiatives can lead to shifts in attitudes and beliefs towards gender roles, norms, and expectations as individuals may become more open-minded, tolerant, and supportive of gender equality initiatives. By reshaping cultural attitudes and behaviors, these initiatives of the LGUs create an environment that is more supportive of gender equality.

Influence of cultural norms, traditions, and community perceptions in designing and implementing gender equality initiatives

The influence of cultural norms, traditions, and community perceptions in designing and implementing gender equality initiatives is described in the themes presented in table 4. These themes are: contextualized gender equality and inclusivity initiatives; and enhanced community participation.

Contextualized gender equality and inclusivity initiatives

Since culture is part of society, initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality often intersect with cultural norms, values, and practices. For the participants, this results to contextualized initiatives as local traditions and values should be respected.

The LGUs ensure that the cultural norms and traditions related to gender equality are also considered. LGUs collaborate with cultural institutions, religious organizations, and indigenous groups, to promote gender equality.

On the same point, the activities and programs on gender equality are ensured responsive to different groups. Celebrating cultural festivals or events that promote gender-inclusive values and showcasing local role models who challenge traditional gender norms are done through consultations.

Indeed, the community is influential to the LGU when they design and implement gender and equality initiatives. This ensures that these efforts are responsive, inclusive, and effective in addressing the diverse needs and priorities of community members. By working collaboratively with the community, LGUs can promote meaningful social change and advance gender equality at the local level.

Table 4. Themes on Influence of cultural norms, traditions, and community perceptions in designing and implementing gender equality initiatives

Global Themes	Basic Themes	Core Ideas
Influence of cultural norms, traditions, and community perceptions on gender equality and inclusivity initiatives	Contextualized gender equality and inclusivity initiatives	respecting local traditions and values
	Enhanced community participation	responsive programs and activities Community consultation-based policies Better implementation outcomes

Enhanced community participation

Cultural norms, traditions, and community perceptions also influenced community consultation-based policies. This means, policy to be implemented is based from the consultation in the community. LGUs recognize and respect the cultural norms and traditions of the community.

Since community people are considered, there would be better implementation of the policies. The more that will support the initiatives after they have thoroughly understood this. For the LGUs, community involvement provides opportunities for ongoing feedback and evaluation of policies as they are implemented.

Through active participation in the policy development process, community members gain a better understanding of the rationale behind the policies and their potential impact on their lives. When community members are engaged in the policy development process, they often become advocates for the initiatives within their community. They will contribute to planning and decision-making.

Policy Brief

Introduction

Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right but also a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable world. Achieving gender equality is essential for achieving sustainable development and building a more just and equitable world.

Continued research and evaluation of gender equality initiatives are essential to assess their effectiveness and identify areas for improvement. By conducting rigorous research and evaluation, policymakers and stakeholders can better understand the impact of these initiatives and make informed decisions about future interventions.

Furthermore, staying updated on recent developments and policy changes is crucial for understanding the current landscape of gender equality initiatives in Philippine LGUs. This includes monitoring changes in laws, policies, and programs related to gender equality, as well as keeping abreast of emerging issues and trends.

Overall, a concerted effort is needed to advance gender equality in Philippine LGUs, and ongoing research, evaluation, and awareness-building are essential components of this effort. By working together and remaining vigilant, achieving gender equality and promoting the rights and well-being of all individuals in society can be attained.

Challenges, Issues and Concerns on Policy Implementation

Despite progress in recent years, gender disparities persist in various spheres, including education, employment, healthcare, and political representation. Addressing these inequalities requires comprehensive policy interventions that promote equal rights, opportunities, and treatment for all genders.

In the effort to promote gender equality, there are challenges, issues and concerns that are worth tackling. Resistance to change is of the barriers in promoting equality.

Resistance. Deep-rooted societal norms and cultural beliefs may intervene in the efforts to promote gender equality. Traditional gender roles and stereotypes can be deeply ingrained, leading to resistance to changes in policies and practices that challenge these norms.

Insufficient resources. Moreover, insufficient funding and resources allocated to gender equality initiatives can hinder their implementation. Without adequate financial support, it may be challenging to carry out activities such as awareness campaigns, training programs, and support services for marginalized groups.

Balancing universal and local principles. It is also notable that balancing universal principles of gender equality with cultural sensitivity and local context can be challenging. Policies and programs must be tailored to the specific cultural norms and traditions of communities while still promoting principles of equality and human rights.

By acknowledging and actively working to overcome these challenges, policymakers and stakeholders can advance gender equality and create more inclusive and equitable societies.

Implications For Practice

A comprehensive gender mainstreaming policy is essential, mandating the integration of gender perspectives into all aspects of LGU planning, budgeting, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. This ensures a holistic approach to gender inclusion across all operations.

Creating a specific Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Plan is another key strategy. This plan should outline clear goals, targets, and actions designed to address gender disparities and promote inclusivity across all sectors of the LGU. Such a focused approach helps set measurable benchmarks for progress.

Gender-responsive budgeting is a crucial practice to ensure equitable resource allocation. Conducting gender analysis of budget allocations, setting aside funds for gender equality initiatives, and monitoring expenditure to track gender-related outcomes all contribute to addressing the specific needs of different genders.

Gender-sensitive legislation plays a vital role in promoting gender equality and protecting the rights of women and gender minorities. Enacting laws on gender-based violence, equal pay, non-discrimination, and reproductive rights helps to create a legal framework that supports gender inclusivity.

Another key strategy involves the establishment of mechanisms for collecting, analyzing, and utilizing gender-disaggregated data. This data informs policy and decision-making, identifying gender disparities and guiding the design and targeting of programs and services.

Regular training and capacity-building programs for LGU staff on gender equality, women's rights, and LGBTQ+ inclusion is important to ensure staff have the knowledge and skills to mainstream gender considerations in their work.

Gender-responsive service delivery should be prioritized, including establishing gender-sensitive healthcare facilities, providing gender-responsive education and social services, and improving access to justice for survivors of gender-based violence.

Stakeholder engagement and participation are crucial for ensuring diverse voices and perspectives in decision-making processes. Collaborations with civil society organizations, women's groups, LGBTQ+ organizations, and other stakeholders can lead to more inclusive and effective program implementation.

Robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are necessary to assess the impact of LGU programs on gender equality and inclusivity. Conducting gender-sensitive evaluations, collecting feedback from beneficiaries, and adjusting strategies based on lessons learned ensures continuous improvement.

Lastly, advocacy campaigns and public awareness initiatives are key to promoting gender equality, challenging stereotypes, and fostering a culture of respect and inclusivity within the LGU and the broader community. This multi-faceted approach can lead to meaningful and sustainable progress towards gender equality.

4. IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

This study explored the gender equality initiatives of the Local Government Units in Maguindanao. In particular, it determined how the LGUs ensure inclusivity, the perceived impacts and outcomes of the gender equality initiatives and the influence of the cultural norms, and perceptions of the community on gender equality initiatives. It also presented a policy brief based on the results of the study.

Qualitative research was employed as research design. The in-depth interviews were conducted to 15 representatives from the LGUs. These participants were selected through purposive sampling. The data from the interviews that were recorded were transcribed and analyzed thematically.

Through qualitative exploration, it is established in the study that the LGUs have undertaken initiatives in promoting gender equality, with a focus on themes such as awareness campaigns, empowerment programs, and inclusivity campaigns. These initiatives aim to ensure inclusivity by advocating for gender equality in leadership positions, promoting consultation and participation, fostering unity in diversity, and ensuring equal access to opportunities.

This study also highlighted the perceived impacts and outcomes of LGU gender equality initiatives, including themes such as economic empowerment, social justice and equity, strengthened community ties, and family relationships. Additionally, there were noted impacts on gender equality awareness, such as reduced gender-based violence and increased representation and participation of women and marginalized groups. Recognizing and respecting cultural diversity is essential for ensuring the effectiveness and relevance of these initiatives.

Conducting this study has enabled the researcher to be more exposed to different realities in forging gender equality in different communities of diverse human beings. This study has provided the researcher with invaluable insights into the diverse realities and challenges associated with promoting gender equality across different communities. By engaging with various stakeholders and examining the experiences and perspectives of individuals from different backgrounds, the researcher has gained a deeper understanding of the complexities involved in advancing gender equality.

This exposure has enabled the researcher to recognize the unique cultural, social, and economic factors that influence the implementation of gender equality initiatives in different contexts. By acknowledging and understanding these realities, the researcher is better equipped to develop contextually relevant approaches to promoting gender equality.

Furthermore, the study has fostered a greater appreciation for the importance of inclusivity in gender equality efforts. By recognizing the diverse experiences and needs of individuals from marginalized communities, the researcher is better positioned to advocate for inclusive policies and programs that address the intersecting forms of discrimination and inequality faced by different groups.

Implications

Gender initiatives of the LGUs are explored in this study. Results of the study revealed that the initiatives of the LGUs in gender equality are described in the themes such as awareness campaigns, empowerment programs, and inclusivity campaigns. This implied that the local government have established programs championing gender equality in support to their mandate as a government office.

As a constitutional mandate, highlighted is the 1987 Constitution of the Philippines, which contains provisions advocating for gender equality. Particularly, Article II, Section 14, articulates that "The State acknowledges the pivotal role of women in nation-building and commits to ensuring the essential equality before the law of both women and men." The Republic Act No. 9710, commonly referred to as the Magna Carta of Women,

ratified in 2009 establishes a legal framework for gender parity in the Philippines. It serves as a comprehensive policy outline for safeguarding and advancing women's rights. It mandates government entities, including local government units, to integrate gender perspectives into their plans and initiatives to combat gender bias and foster gender equity.

LGUs play a crucial role in raising awareness about gender equality issues within their communities. By organizing and implementing awareness campaigns, they can educate community members about the importance of gender equality, address harmful stereotypes and attitudes, and foster a culture of respect and inclusivity. By continuing to prioritize these efforts and collaborating with stakeholders, LGUs can contribute to building more equitable and inclusive communities for all individuals.

However, this study also suggests that the LGUs may explore other gender equality initiatives aside from those that are generated in this study. Since the study was done qualitatively with limited participants, doing the study in quantitative design may account other initiatives especially those that are constitutionally mandated.

The OECD report highlights some suggestions that LGUs may consider. Programs tailored to advance gender equality, particularly those aimed at empowering local women's organizations to define and pursue their own equality goals, demonstrate the most impactful and lasting transformations in gender dynamics. Successful approaches involve bolstering women's abilities in analysis, networking, and organization, as well as facilitating collaborative advocacy efforts between women and men within local political and social structures. Ensuring governmental accountability to civil society is pivotal in advancing gender parity (Hunt, & Brouwers, 2003).

Similarly, Taukobong (2016) suggested that further research is necessary to understand the mechanisms through which gender-specific interventions operate and the contexts in which they are effective. While certain Local Government Units have implemented their own Gender and Development Codes, detailing their dedication to advancing gender equality and the precise steps they will undertake to realize these objectives. These codes frequently encompass provisions concerning gender mainstreaming, gender-sensitive planning, and the establishment of Gender and Development offices within LGUs.

Meanwhile, this study also shows that to ensure inclusivity in gender equality initiatives, the LGUs advocate gender equality in leadership positions, consultation and participation, unity in diversity, and equal access. This suggests that LGUs recognize the importance of diverse representation in leadership roles to ensure that the needs and perspectives of all genders are considered. Additionally, they prioritize consultation and participation to engage community members in decision-making processes, fostering a sense of ownership and inclusion. This study also implied that LGUs are committed to advancing gender equality through inclusive approaches that prioritize representation, participation, diversity, and equal access to opportunities.

The importance of fostering consultation and participation in the community is emphasized in the model proposed by Bell and Reed (2022). Based on their model, community development frequently entails facilitating participatory decision-making processes. Engaging in such processes holds the promise of enhancing the transparency, accountability, fairness, and effectiveness of public administration in serving the most disadvantaged members of society. As a result, several scholars and professionals have explored theories and practices aimed at empowering marginalized groups through participatory decision-making.

Furthermore, LGUs emphasize unity in diversity, acknowledging the importance of respecting and celebrating differences among individuals and communities. By promoting equal access to opportunities, they work towards breaking the barriers and creating a more inclusive society where everyone can feel fairness and not constrained by their gender preferences and personal backgrounds.

Part of this study was also to account from the participants their perceived impact and outcomes of the gender equality initiatives of the LGUs. The themes are divided into impacts and outcomes in terms of social change which have themes such as economic empowerment, social justice and equity, and strengthened community ties and family relationships.

Impact in terms of social change highlights the multifaceted nature of gender equality initiatives underscoring the broader societal implications of LGU-led gender equality efforts. It can be drawn from the study that understanding the economic empowerment resulting from these initiatives speaks to the potential for improving individuals' financial independence and overall well-being.

Similarly, the emphasis on social justice and equity reflects efforts to address inequalities and promote fairness and inclusivity within communities. For Killen et al. (2021), social justice encompasses the advocacy for fairness, equality, equity, and rights across various dimensions of society, encompassing economic, educational, and workforce realms.

Additionally, the focus on strengthened community ties and family relationships underscores the importance of fostering supportive networks and nurturing healthy relationships to promote social cohesion and well-being. Social relationships fulfill essential human needs by offering individuals a sense of belonging, social

support, and significance (Allison et al., 2014). For Putnam (2001), social capital pertains to the characteristics of social organization, such as networks, norms, and trust, which enable coordination and cooperation for mutual advantage. Hence, the LGUs will never go wrong of ensuring strengthened social relationships in implementing initiatives for gender equality.

In terms of the perceived impact and outcomes to gender equality awareness, it is themed with reduced gender-based violence, and increased representation and participation. Johnson (2005) stated that gender-based violence is a significant issue in the lives of urban adolescents. Youth experienced gender-based violence in several contexts and roles, and many of their responses concluded that such violence was sometimes acceptable. In the same study, they recommended that prevention strategies should start early and address the spectrum of youths' experiences. With the LGUs initiative, it can be gleaned from the result of this study that the issue is addressed.

By acknowledging both social change and equality awareness dimensions, LGUs and policymakers can better tailor their efforts to address the diverse needs and priorities of communities, ultimately contributing to positive social change and inclusive development.

Based on the study, it suggests that since the perceived impact and outcomes were generated based on the interviews from LGU personnel, a survey may be done in order to check the generalizability of the findings and take the answers from the community people themselves.

This study also accounted the influence of cultural norms, traditions, and community perceptions in designing and implementing gender equality initiatives which is described in the themes: contextualized gender equality and inclusivity initiatives; and enhanced community participation.

The implications drawn from this study highlight the importance of acknowledging and incorporating the influence of cultural norms, traditions, and community perceptions in designing and implementing gender equality initiatives. By accounting for these factors, policymakers and stakeholders can ensure that initiatives are contextually relevant, culturally sensitive, and effectively address the needs and priorities of diverse communities.

The identification of themes such as contextualized gender equality and inclusivity initiatives underscores the need to tailor interventions to the specific cultural context and social dynamics of each community. This approach acknowledges that gender equality is not a one-size-fits-all solution and requires nuanced strategies that resonate with local values, beliefs, and traditions.

Furthermore, the emphasis on enhanced community participation highlights the importance of engaging community members as active partners in the design, implementation, and evaluation of gender equality initiatives. By involving stakeholders at all stages of the process, LGUs can foster a sense of ownership and accountability, build trust, and ensure that initiatives are responsive to the needs and aspirations of the communities they serve.

The findings suggest that community's perception is influential in the gender equality initiatives of the LGUs; hence, it is further recommended that the LGUs may conduct needs assessment in the community so other gender and development initiatives may be considered for implementation.

Implication for Future Research

Implications

Future researchers may conduct similar research with the use of quantitative research design and use the themes in this study as indicators of the variables measuring gender equality initiatives of LGUs.

From the results of the study, the policy brief was introduced as part of the study. It laid the foundation on the importance of gender equality in society. However, since there are posing challenges and issues, recommendations were also presented. DeMarco, and Tufts (2014) highlighted that policy briefs are reports intended to be short and easy to use, containing information that can be reviewed quickly by policy makers.

The introduction of the policy brief as part of the study not only raises awareness about the importance of gender equality but also provides a roadmap for addressing challenges and implementing solutions. This approach facilitates informed decision-making and underscores the commitment to fostering a more inclusive and equitable society for all genders.

The implication derived from this study highlights the significance of introducing a policy brief as part of the research process. This brief serves as a foundational document that underscores the importance of gender equality within society, providing a framework for understanding the key issues and challenges at hand.

Moreover, the recognition of existing challenges and issues within the realm of gender equality underscores the need for actionable recommendations. By identifying and addressing these obstacles, policymakers and stakeholders can work towards overcoming barriers and advancing gender equality initiatives effectively.

Concluding Remarks

This study explored the gender equality initiatives of the Local Government Units in Maguindanao. In particular, it determined how the LGUs ensure inclusivity, the perceived impacts and outcomes of the gender equality initiatives and the influence of the cultural norms, and perceptions of the community on gender equality initiatives. It also presented a policy brief based on the results of the study.

Qualitative research was employed as research design. The in-depth interviews were conducted to 15 representatives from the LGUs. These participants were selected through purposive sampling. The data from the interviews that were recorded were transcribed and analyzed thematically.

Through qualitative exploration, it is established in the study that the LGUs have undertaken initiatives in promoting gender equality, with a focus on themes such as awareness campaigns, empowerment programs, and inclusivity campaigns. These initiatives aim to ensure inclusivity by advocating for gender equality in leadership positions, promoting consultation and participation, fostering unity in diversity, and ensuring equal access to opportunities.

This study also highlighted the perceived impacts and outcomes of LGU gender equality initiatives, including themes such as economic empowerment, social justice and equity, strengthened community ties, and family relationships. Additionally, there were noted impacts on gender equality awareness, such as reduced gender-based violence and increased representation and participation of women and marginalized groups. Recognizing and respecting cultural diversity is essential for ensuring the effectiveness and relevance of these initiatives.

Conducting this study has enabled the researcher to be more exposed to different realities in forging gender equality in different communities of diverse human beings. This study has provided the researcher with invaluable insights into the diverse realities and challenges associated with promoting gender equality across different communities. By engaging with various stakeholders and examining the experiences and perspectives of individuals from different backgrounds, the researcher has gained a deeper understanding of the complexities involved in advancing gender equality.

This exposure has enabled the researcher to recognize the unique cultural, social, and economic factors that influence the implementation of gender equality initiatives in different contexts. By acknowledging and understanding these realities, the researcher is better equipped to develop contextually relevant approaches to promoting gender equality.

Furthermore, the study has fostered a greater appreciation for the importance of inclusivity in gender equality efforts. By recognizing the diverse experiences and needs of individuals from marginalized communities, the researcher is better positioned to advocate for inclusive policies and programs that address the intersecting forms of discrimination and inequality faced by different groups.

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