


## Examining the Seal of Good Local Governance Performance of Local Government Units of BARMM, Philippines

Arceli B. Naraga<sup>1\*</sup>, Bai Aljannah S. Macalandong<sup>2</sup>, Marcial C. Arcega<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Political Science Department, College of Arts and Sciences, MSU-Maguindanao, Datu Odin Sinsuat, Maguindanao del Norte, BARMM, PHILIPPINES

<sup>2</sup> Department of Public Administration, College of Public Affairs and Governance, MSU-Maguindanao, Datu Odin Sinsuat, Maguindanao del Norte, BARMM, PHILIPPINES

<sup>3</sup> Information Technology Department, College of Engineering and Computing Sciences, MSU-Maguindanao, Datu Odin Sinsuat, Maguindanao del Norte, BARMM, PHILIPPINES

### \*Corresponding Author:

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the performance then Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) and the current Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) LGUs with the parameters of the Seal of Good Local Governance (SGLG) in the Philippines, which aimed at enhancing local government accountability and transparency to achieve sustainable development goals, and uphold good governance. This paper then profiles ARMM/BARMM LGUs' compliance from 2011 to 2023 across Seal of Good Housekeeping (SGH, Good Financial Housekeeping (GFH), and SGLG criteria, specifically focusing on municipalities in Maguindanao. It also identifies areas where LGUs fall short and examines implications for public accountability. Methodologically, the paper utilizes data such as the Governance Assessment Reports (GARs) from the Ministry of Interior and Local Government (MILG) of the BARMM and the DILG List of Recipients to analyze LGU performance vis-a-vis SGLG criteria. Findings reveal that some local government units have consistently demonstrated commitment with the SGLG criteria. For these municipalities, persistent non-compliance reflects underlying challenges underscoring the need for strategies to achieve sustainable and effective local governance.

**Keywords:** BARMM, Local Government Units, Seal of Good Local Governance, Accountability, Transparency

### INTRODUCTION

In the Philippines, during President Aquino's term, the DILG under Secretary Robredo launched the SGH through Memorandum Circular No. 2011-95 [1]. It recognized LGUs that upheld accountability and transparency, with focus areas including planning, budgeting, procurement, and compliance with the Full Disclosure and Anti-Red Tape Acts. ARMM's five provinces, two cities, and 116 municipalities were included in the SGH assessment. In 2012, SGH was scaled up via DILG Memorandum Circular No. 2012-78 [2], refining criteria around four areas: planning, fiscal management, transparency, and performance monitoring. This version introduced Bronze, Silver, and Gold SGH tiers. Meanwhile, DILG MC No. 2012-134 [3] tailored SGH to ARMM, assessing LGUs on governance accountability, transparency, structure, participation, and public interest. By 2014, the DILG launched the SGLG through MC No. 2014-39 [4], broadening metrics to include disaster preparedness, social protection, peace and order, environmental management, and economic competitiveness. The "three plus one" rule required LGUs to pass all three core areas plus one essential area. Supplemental guidelines through MC No. 2015-16 [5] allowed a year between assessment and conferment. In 2016 and 2017, the system evolved into a "four plus one"

model. Republic Act No. 11292 [6], or the SGLG Act of 2019, institutionalized SGLG, mandating full compliance across all criteria—no longer allowing selective passing. It emphasizes outcomes-based governance and rewards exemplary LGUs. When the BARMM was established in 2019 after the ratification of the Bangsamoro Organic Law, it replaced the ARMM [7]. With about 4 million residents and a 63% poverty rate, it remains among the country’s poorest regions [8]. However, the economic growth of 7.5% in 2021 and 4.3% in 2023 reflects development potential [8]. Strengthening governance and public accountability through SGLG compliance could greatly improve living standards in the region. This paper argues that it is of prime importance to examine their performance and consequently propose a retooling mechanism that may assist them in good governance criteria compliance, thereby enhancing accountability for efficient public service delivery.

**Statement of the Problem**

1. What is the profile of Maguindanao ARMM/BARMM LGUs in terms of the number of municipalities?
2. What is the performance of Maguindanao LGUs from 2011 to 2023 across SGH, GFH, and SGLG criteria?
3. What parameters or indicators have local governments failed to comply with?

**METHODS**

This paper is descriptive, involving a desk review using secondary data. This involves the utilization and examination of secondary data from the DILG and the MILG, specifically on its reports of the SGH for 2011 and 2012, the GFH Awardees for 2014 [10] and 2020 [11], and the SGLG Awardees in 2015 [12], 2016 [13], 2017 [14], 2018 [15], 2019 [11], 2022 [16], and 2023 [17]. In the performance of 2020 – 2021, there were no SGLG assessments conducted due to the pandemic. The Governance Assessment Reports (GARs) of the select Maguindanao LGUs from 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2022 [18], and 2023 [19] are scrutinized and analyzed vis-à-vis compliance with specific criteria or parameters and indicators to identify which criteria these LGUs fell short of or have not complied with. Key Informant Interview (KII) [20] with select LGU officials was also employed. When the not-complied criteria and indicators have been identified, and implications have been recognized, a framework for the courses of action is proposed based on compliant and better-performing LGU practices, governance theories, models, and frameworks for local government executives and leaders, as well as policy makers. The end goal is to provide a guide for LGUs to consequently perform better in governance by creating better structures, mechanisms, and policies to serve their constituents as part of their public service accountability.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

**Part I. Number of BARMM LGUs as of Fiscal Year 2023**

As shown in Table 1, Maguindanao accounts for 36 municipalities, representing 31% of those assessed in the study under SGLG.

**Table 1.** Number of BARMM LGUs as of Fiscal Year 2023.

Province	Number of Municipalities	Percentage (%) [of 116]
Maguindanao	36	31%
Lanao del Sur	39	34%
Basilan	11	9%
Sulu	19	16%
Tawi-Tawi	11	9%
Total	116	100%

Lanao del Sur holds the largest share with 39 municipalities (34%), Basilan and Tawi-Tawi each comprise 11 municipalities (9% apiece). Sulu contains 19 municipalities (16%). As of 2023, 116 municipalities comprised the BARMM. Although a new municipality was added in 2024, this study focuses on the Maguindanao LGUs account for 36 or 31% of the municipalities.

**Part II: Performance of Maguindanao LGUs from 2011 to 2023 across SGH, GFH, and SGLG Criteria**

The performances of Maguindanao LGUs from 2011 to 2023 across SGF, GFH, and SGLG criteria are presented in tables 2, 3, and 4.

**Table 2.** SGH performance of Maguindanao for 2011 and 2012.

Year	Number of LGUs	LGUs Awarded SGH Bronze	% Awarded	LGUs Maintained Compliance (2012)	% Maintained Compliance
2011	36	23	64%	–	–
2012	36	–	–	4	11%

As shown in Table 2, in Maguindanao, 23 of 36 LGUs (64%) received the 2011 SGH Bronze Award, but only four (11%) maintained compliance in 2012. This decline highlights the difficulty of sustaining reforms under stricter criteria of the Silver stage.

**Table 3.** GFH Performance of Maguindanao LGUs in 2014 and 2020.

Year	Total Municipalities	Assessed Municipalities	Excluded Municipalities	Reason for Exclusion	Passed GFH Criteria	Passing Rate (%)	SGLG Assessment Passers
2014	36	30	6	No IRA, security risks, logistical/geographic access issues	10	33%	None passed SGLG
2020	36	36	0	—	36	100%	Not assessed

Table 3 presents that in the case of Maguindanao, six (6) municipalities were excluded from the 2014 GFH assessment. All of which faced conditions that rendered a standard governance assessment unfeasible. As a result, only 30 out of the 36 municipalities in the province were evaluated using the GFH criteria. This limited scope of assessment underscores the complex realities faced by LGUs in conflict-affected and geographically isolated areas, which can impede both governance reforms and monitoring efforts. It also highlights the need for tailored approaches that consider contextual challenges while ensuring accountability and inclusive development.

Focusing specifically on the province of Maguindanao, 30 municipalities were included in the assessment. Of these, 10 municipalities or 33% passed the GFH assessment. In 2020, all 36 municipalities in Maguindanao were recognized as recipients of the GFH award, representing a 100% award rate for that year. It is important to highlight, however, that the GFH award was the only recognition achieved by these municipalities both in 2014 and 2020. In 2014, none of the LGUs in Maguindanao met the qualifications for the SGLG, indicating a gap in broader governance performance at the time. By 2020, while all municipalities achieved the GFH award, the SGLG was not assessed, meaning that their performance in other key areas of local governance was neither measured nor reported. This underscores that the recognition in both years was limited exclusively to GFH criteria and does not necessarily reflect an overall improvement or decline in general local governance standards.

**Table 4.** SGLG Performance of Maguindanao LGUs from 2015 – 2023.

Year	Number of Maguindanao LGU Recipients (n = 36)	
2015	0	0%
2016	2	6%
2017	12	33%
2018	11	31%
2019	14	39%
2020	Only GFH Assessment	
2021	Pandemic	
2022	9	25%
2023	20	56%

Table 4 presents a detailed performance of the SGLG compliance of municipalities within Maguindanao spanning the years 2015 to 2023. During the initial implementation period in 2015 and 2016, the SGLG followed the “3+1” principle as outlined in DILG Memorandum Circular No. 2014-39 [4]. Under this framework, local government units were evaluated based on their compliance with three mandatory core assessment areas: Good

Financial Housekeeping, Disaster Preparedness, and Social Protection. In addition to these, LGUs had to meet the criteria in at least one of the essential assessment areas: Business-Friendliness and Competitiveness, Peace and Order, or Environmental Management. Compliance with this "3+1" framework served as the basis for LGUs to be conferred the SGLG. However, it is noteworthy that in 2015, no LGU from the ARMM, including the province of Maguindanao, successfully met the required criteria. This underscores the significant challenges faced by the region in complying with the criteria during that period, as well as the evolving nature of local governance reforms aimed at fostering more responsive and accountable local governments.

In 2016, within Maguindanao province, only two (2) municipalities achieved SGLG status, accounting for six percent (6%) of the province's 36 municipalities. This low compliance rate reflected the continuing governance and administrative challenges in the region. By 2017, a noticeable improvement occurred. Maguindanao saw a substantial increase with 12 municipalities earning the seal, equivalent to 33% of its LGUs. This uptrend indicated the initial positive impact of local governance compliance. However, in 2018, Maguindanao experienced a marginal decline, with 11 municipalities passing, reflecting a 31% success rate. Despite the drop, the numbers remained significantly higher than those in 2016, showing a relatively stable performance trajectory. The year 2019 marked a significant milestone as the ARMM transitioned into the BARMM following the ratification of the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL). Despite the transition, performance further improved: Maguindanao recorded its success rate with 14 municipalities (or 39%) receiving the award.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, SGLG assessments were affected in the subsequent years. In 2020, only the GFH component was assessed, while the full SGLG evaluation was suspended in 2021 due to ongoing public health challenges. When the full assessment resumed in 2022, performance dropped significantly, with Maguindanao contributing 9 municipalities or 25% to this total. The decline may be attributed to the pandemic's impacts on governance operations and service delivery. In 2023, however, the LGUs demonstrated a strong recovery. In Maguindanao, the improvement was even more pronounced, with 20 municipalities, equivalent to 56% earning the SGLG recognition. This resurgence reflects the increasing institutional capacity, although continued support and reform are necessary to sustain and further improve these gains.

### Part III. Parameters/Indicators Local Governments Failed to Comply with

An analysis of the 2022 [18] and 2023 [19] GARs of select non-passing Maguindanao LGUs reveals compliance gaps under the SGLG framework. Table 5 below reveals the data.

As shown in Table 5, for SGLG component number 1: Financial administration and sustainability, select LGUs failed to achieve revenue collection growth [18, 19]. Also, the failure to comply with the SGLG component number 2: Disaster preparedness component reveals the absence of the following: an approved Comprehensive Land Use Plan; an approved Municipal Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Plan; an approved Contingency Plan; an early warning system in place; an established pre-emptive and forced evacuation mechanism; and an established evacuation management system and resources [18, 19]. These deficiencies highlight the need for municipalities to prioritize disaster risk reduction, invest in planning and infrastructure, and implement comprehensive preparedness systems to safeguard their communities in the face of natural disasters.

**Table 5.** SGLG Components Not Complied by Maguindanao LGUs (2022-2023).

SGLG Components	Parameters/Indicators Not Complied
1. Financial Administration and Sustainability	Local revenue collection growth
2. Disaster Preparedness	Approved Comprehensive Land Use Plan; Approved Municipal Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Plan; Approved Contingency Plan; Early warning System in place; Established pre-emptive and forced evacuation mechanism; Established evacuation management system and resources
3. Social Protection	Seal of Child-friendly Local Governance Awardee; Gender and Development Mechanism; Violence against women and children mechanism; Updated Local Code for Children; Compliance with accessibility law; Functional Persons with Disabilities Affairs Office; Established Senior Citizens' Center; Fund Utilization/completion of PPAs for senior citizens and persons with disabilities; Functional Local Social Welfare and Development Office; Local Issuances on Social Protection; Institutionalized Public Employment Service Office; and Functional Local Development Council
4. Health Compliance and Responsiveness	Household with access to safely managed drinking water services; Proportion of households with access to safely managed drinking water services; Proportion of households with access to safely managed sanitation services; TB case notification rate; and Functional local epidemiology surveillance unit

5. Sustainable Education	Functional Local Board; Collaborative PPAs with external partners; Programs and projects that promote inclusive education; and LGU reforms aligned with local priority education reform areas
6. Business-Friendliness and Competitiveness	Finalist of Most Business-Friendly LGU Award; Updated Citizens Charter; and Streamlined process of doing business
7. Safety, Peace, and Order	Rated highly functional in performance audit, and Firecracker and pyrotechnic devices regulation
8. Environmental Management	Operational/Controlled Dumpsite; Materials Recovery Facility; Functional Materials Recovery Facility; Access to sanitary landfill and segregated collection of wastes; Initiatives contributing to biodiversity conservation and enhancement in inland, wetland, and water bodies; Initiatives on water quality management; and Efforts for the establishment or maintenance of public parks and green spaces
9. Tourism, Heritage Development, Culture, and Arts	Cultural Property inventory conducted; Updated cultural property inventory; and Published narrative of history and culture
10. Youth Development	Functional local youth council, established local youth development office, and LGU support for youth development

For SGLG component number 3: Social Protection, the following were not complied with: Seal of Child-friendly Local Governance Awardee; Gender and Development Mechanism; Violence against women and children mechanism; Updated Local Code for Children; Compliance with accessibility law; Functional Persons with Disabilities Affairs Office; Established Senior Citizens' Center; Fund Utilization/completion of PPAs for senior citizens and persons with disabilities; Functional Local Social Welfare and Development Office; Local Issuances on Social Protection; Institutionalized Public Employment Service Office; and Functional Local Development Council [18, 19]. These deficiencies highlight significant gaps in the implementation of policies and services that are crucial for the welfare of vulnerable groups, such as children, women, senior citizens, and persons with disabilities.

For SGLG component number 4: Health compliance and responsiveness, the following indicators were not complied: Household with access to safely managed drinking water services; Proportion of households with access to safely managed drinking water services; Proportion of households with access to safely managed sanitation services; TB case notification rate; and Functional local epidemiology surveillance unit [18, 19]. The gaps in health compliance identified among the LGUs suggest that many municipalities are struggling to provide essential health services and to meet basic health infrastructure needs, such as access to safe drinking water and sanitation. These deficiencies underscore the need for LGUs to strengthen their health systems.

For SGLG component number 5: Sustainable Education, the LGUs failed to comply with the following: Functional Local Board; Collaborative PPAs with external partners; Programs and projects that promote inclusive education; and LGU reforms aligned with local priority education reform areas [18, 19]. This indicates that non-compliance in this component reflects potential shortcomings in educational governance and collaboration of the LGU.

For SGLG component number 6: Business-Friendliness and Competitiveness component, the following indicators were not complied: as Finalist of Most Business-Friendly LGU Award; Updated Citizens Charter; and Streamlined process of doing business [18, 19]. Non-compliance of LGUs indicate a need for improvements in creating a business-friendly environment.

For SGLG component number 7: Safety, Peace, and Order component, the following indicators were not complied: Rated highly functional in performance audit, and Firecracker and pyrotechnic devices regulation [18, 19]. Non-compliance in this component among LGUs suggests that municipalities might not be fully addressing safety and order concerns.

For SGLG component number 8: Environmental Management, the following indicators were not complied with: Operational/Controlled Dumpsite; Materials Recovery Facility; Functional Materials Recovery Facility; Access to sanitary landfill and segregated collection of wastes; Initiatives contributing to biodiversity conservation and enhancement in inland, wetland, and water bodies; Initiatives on water quality management; and Efforts for the establishment or maintenance of public parks and green spaces [18, 19].

For SGLG component number 9: Tourism, Heritage Development, Culture, and Arts, the non-compliant LGUs failed to conduct a cultural property inventory and even update the inventory, and failed to publish a narrative of the history and culture [18, 19]. Non-compliance in this area suggests a need for more active preservation and promotion of cultural heritage and tourism.

For SGLG component number 10: Youth Development component, some key requirements were not met by the local government units, such as Functional local youth council, established local youth development office, and LGU support for youth development [18, 19] highlighting significant gaps in the support and engagement of the youth in these municipalities. Conclusions

## CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of compliance with SGLG among Maguindanao LGUs from 2011 to 2023 reveals critical insights into the broader implications of public accountability in local governance. Some local government units have consistently demonstrated commitment to transparency, service delivery, and participatory governance, thereby aligning closely with the SGLG criteria. These municipalities have implemented development initiatives that are not only compliant with governance benchmarks but also responsive to the needs of their constituents.

However, a significant number of LGUs have struggled to attain or maintain SGLG compliance. For these municipalities, persistent non-compliance reflects underlying challenges in institutional capacity, financial management, inter-agency coordination, and program implementation. The lack of comprehensive and sustainable governance practices in these areas not only impedes their eligibility for national recognition but also compromises the long-term development outcomes for their communities.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. LGUs must institutionalize accountability as a guiding principle, ensuring that it is not only adopted in policy but embedded in practice.
2. LGUs must adhere to technical adherence to criteria requiring a governance culture that values integrity, transparency, and responsiveness.
3. LGUs should aim to enhance public accountability and improve governance outcomes by addressing the ten (10) SGLG components.
4. LGUs must capacitate themselves to get in tune with the criteria and components of good governance.

## Transparency

The authors confirm that the manuscript is honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

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## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the authorship, submission, and publication of this manuscript. No financial, personal, or professional gain has influenced the research process or the preparation of this paper. All coauthors confirm the absence of any competing interests.

## Supplementary Materials

No supplementary materials are included in this manuscript submission.

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