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# A 'Paradox' of Governance Performance: the Case of Barangay 872, Manila, Philippines

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## Abstract

This descriptive single-case study is a glimpse of barangay governance performance vis-à-vis the recurrent governance challenges confronting a local community mired in chronic poverty, in Manila, Philippines. The case of Barangay 872 shows an incongruous claim of 'good' governance performance juxtaposed alongside the constituents 'limited access to services, resources, and opportunities. With the implementation of the Barangay Governance Performance Management System (BGPMS) and the Enhanced Barangay Governance Performance Management System (E-BGPMS) as a management approach, the narratives and self-conducted performance assessments of the Barangay Council from the Year 2013-2017, extract a 'paradox' of governance performance. Over time, the apparent 'strength' of the Barangay Council in the governance and administrative performance sector co-exists with a stagnant economic development and lags behind the relatively slight improvements in the social services and environmental management sectors. In this light, this paper poses the question: "What accounts for the Council's inconsistent governance performance?" Employing Blumer's symbolic interactionism as a theoretical lens, in the eyes of the Council, the 'paradox' emanates from the prevalence of the 'weak-performing' sectors over the 'strong-performing' sectors, which they attribute to three persistent factors: 1]. the barangay's limited economic resources and stagnant agriculture; 2]. implementation of poverty targeting policy as a 'structural strain'; and 3]. limited institutional support from the local government units.

**Keywords:** Barangay Governance Performance; Chronic Poverty; Economic Development

## 1.0. INTRODUCTION

The barangay, as the basic political unit in the Philippines, serves as "the primary planning and implementing body of government policies, plans, programs, projects, and activities for local constituents" (The Local Government Code of 1991, Sec. 384). Central in the realization of this noble agenda behind the crucial role of the barangay in strengthening governance is how the barangay, through the functions of the Barangay Council, performs in the different sectors of governance vis-à-vis the delivery of basic services to the local constituents.

Going through pertinent local literatures, I have not, unfortunately, encountered any grounded, community-context studies in the Philippines that highlights the importance of looking into the relevance of governance performance at the barangay level. Studies on local governance are inclined to elevate research efforts and

agenda on the 'higher' local government units (LGUs) of the Philippine bureaucracy. Interestingly, the study of Adriano & Estimada (2014) corroborated the effectiveness of the Local Governance Performance Management System (LGPMS), as a management tool in improving governance on the municipal level.

However, my paper takes on a different research focus on the study of governance performance. It 'keeps an eye' on how the officials of the Barangay Council 'interpret on their own' governance performance in the context of the 'reality of the barangay,' vis-a-vis the performance assessment results and outcomes of the Barangay Governance Performance Management System (BGPMS) and the Enhanced Barangay Governance Performance Management (E-BGPMS), from Year 2013-2017 (Department of the Interior and Local Government [DILG], 2017). With these contexts as my 'take-off point,' this study is a 'glimpse' of the case of an urban community in a state of chronic poverty - - Barangay 872 of Pandacan, Manila, Philippines.

Proceeding from my group discussions, interviews, and documentary data research, it appears that with the relative strength of the Council in governance lies a 'paradox of performance.' What goes with the apparent administrative competency of the Council are a state of stagnant economic development; constraints in the delivery of social services; and challenges in environmental management confronting the barangay. It sparks curiosity on the question: "Over time, what explains the prevalence of these relatively 'weak-performing' areas in governance performance over the 'stronger' ones?" The succeeding portions of this paper uncover the contributing factors behind the 'paradox' as articulated by the Council in their narratives, with symbolic interactionism of Blumer (1969) as my theoretical lens.

This paper, however, is not an exhaustive discourse on the performance of each governance sector in a five-year timeline. It is not an attempt to critically appraise the effectiveness of the BGPMS/E-BGPMS and does not impose any normative evaluation of the competency of the Council, nor question the reliability of the 'self-conducted' performance assessments. Subsequent or future studies, however, may take on these research angles to explore any interests on the 'paradox' of governance performance. My goal, as I proceed with my sociological inquiry, is to describe and theorize as it emerges from the grounds succinctly; draw a few implications of the 'paradox'; and generate some insights on barangay governance performance in the Philippines.

## **2.0. RESEARCH METHODS**

### **2.1. The Research Site and Contexts**

Barangay 872 of Pandacan, Manila Philippines, was designated as a small area during the initial year of the Martial Law Era in 1973 by the virtue of Proclamation No. 1081. The official designation of the community as "Barangay 872, Zone 95, District VI" came into existence in 1978, with a 'depressed' economic status. The barangay is a residential urban community without any major commercial establishments with a total land area of about two hectares with seven sub-areas. Only small-scale businesses flourish which include sari-sari stores, street food stalls, and a few computer shops.

Common types of dwellings are made of low-cost, non-resilient semi-concrete materials. Its population is an even mix of children, males and females, youth and adults, and a few senior citizens. Marginalized groups of the community include the urban poor, either unemployed or self-employed; the elderly or senior citizens; the women and the children; and the out-of-school youth. The majority have resided in the barangay for several years now, with household size ranging from 4-7 members. To date, it has a population of 2,386 residents with 244 households (The 2017 State of Barangay Governance Report).

### **2.2. The Barangay Council**

The Council of Barangay 872 is composed of elective positions which include the Chair, who has served the barangay for three consecutive terms since the Year 2010, and seven Councilors, the Council Secretary and the Council Treasurer in appointive positions, sixteen volunteers as security enforcers, a volunteer health worker, a day care teacher, and two street sweepers. The Council basically disposes of resources and direct efforts to

implement programs and/or projects on garbage disposal, waste segregation, and collection, peace, and security, education and health services, etc.

In cooperation with the City Government of Manila and the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), the Council implements family planning, responsible parenthood, maternal care and breastfeeding program for women, and health and nutrition program for children. The barangay also houses a daycare center and offers a sports development program for the youth. With the intervention of the DILG, seminars, and training on disaster preparedness are also held in the barangay at least twice a year.

Under the dynamic leadership of the Chair, the Council and the Barangay 872 have been awarded by the DILG for four consecutive years now. In the Year 2018, the Council once again received some recognition from the DILG for effectively enacting the rules and implementing guidelines of the Duterte administration's Antidrug Operations (DILG, 2017). The DILG also recognized the Council's efforts in implementing a Rehabilitation Program for the 'drug surrenderees' of the barangay, which merited the barangay the status of a "drug-free community." The Council is also awarded for their competence in the administration of Barangay Justice, particularly in resolving cases of conflicts and disputes, through the Council Committee on Barangay Justice, locally known as the "Lupon ng Katarungang Pang-Barangay."

### **2.3. The BGPMS/E-BGPMS**

All barangays create their respective committees to implement the Barangay Governance Performance Management System (BGPMS) as a management and accountability tool in governance (Executive Order No. 001, Series of 2014). In the Year 2016, it was revised to "Enhanced Barangay Governance Performance System (E-BGPMS)," with a modified assessment tool, but maintains the same rationale behind this 'top-bottom' checking/control mechanism of the DILG on the barangay units. The Barangay Council assesses 'on their own' their performance in governance and administration, social services, economic development and environmental management sectors of barangay governance using the assessment tool provided by the DILG.

This self-assessment is facilitated by working on a 'checklist' of required documents as performance evidences. Scores/ratings are software-generated on the basis of the number of evidences 'checked' and submitted for each performance area. It employs the 5-point Likert scale (with 5 as the highest score; and 1 as the lowest score), and the percentage grading scale in measuring performance. From the assessment results, the Council identifies their 'strengths' and 'weaknesses' per performance area, and focuses attention on the weak-performing sectors, extracts contributing factors, and deliberates on the courses of action for implementation in the succeeding performance cycle. A State of Barangay Governance Report (SBGR), due for submission to the DILG, is then prepared by the Council after consolidating all the required documents, project reports, the accomplished checklist, assessment results, and the Council's recommendations (The Local Government Code of 1991, Sec. 16 & 17).

### **2.4. Research Strategies**

I conducted this single-case study from September of 2017 to December of 2018 that generated field and documentary data on the Barangay Council's governance performance as I engaged the Council members in focus group discussions on the research agenda, alongside their project implementation; governance challenges they face; and their prospects for development. I also asked the Council to suggest remedies or solutions to the issues and challenges they themselves articulated. As requested by the Council officials, the discussions were conducted in Filipino to allow them to reveal spontaneously and comfortably their views and sentiments, as they share their 'stories' (Krueger, R.A., Casey, M., Donner, J., Kirsch, S., & Maack, J.N., 2001).

With the informed consent from the Council, I accessed and critically examined the Council's SBGRs from the Year 2013-2017, the focal point of which is the Council's self-assessment of each performance sector and sub-sector in the BGPMS/E-BGPMS. I was able to access five SBGRs from the Council for the Year 2013-2017. The 2018 SBGR is still being processed by the Council, and thus, unavailable at the conduct of my research. I also did subsequent interviews with the Council Chair and the Council Secretary on matters arising from the

SBGRs. I then integrated the results of the focus group discussions, interviews, and documentary data research to generate the emergent themes and to show how the narratives of the Council officials and the assessment results 'meet halfway' in seeking answers to the research questions.

### 2.5. Symbolic Interactionism as a Mode of Analysis

In examining the Barangay Council's narratives and self-assessed governance performance, the employment of Herbert Blumer's theory of symbolic interactionism (1969), provides a potent mode of analysis with the following fundamental assumptions:

- “1. Human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them;
2. The meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows; and
3. These meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he/she encounters.”

With my social constructionist epistemology, I shall focus attention on how local governance performance is viewed and evaluated by the Council officials themselves as active and creative actors, and espouse a reflexive investigation on how these 'actors' present, view, and contextualize situations of co-presence with others in a social setting. Crucial in my core analysis is how the officials interpret their 'negotiations' with their constituents and the local government units, among other institutions lending support (or not) to the community, and how these nuances translate to governance performance and self-assessment.

In this light, how the Council officials attach or attribute meanings, define and deal with the emergent challenges in governance, likewise influences their behavior, decisions, practices in governance performance. How the Council evaluates performance 'on their own,' with their interpretations of their functions as public servants and community leaders, shapes their extent and quality of performance in the delivery of basic services to their constituents, particularly for the welfare of the poor and the marginalized sectors of the barangay.

## 3.0. DISCUSSION

From the narratives of the Barangay Council, and with reference to the BGPMS/EBGPMS performance assessment results and outcomes, let me now briefly present the 'paradox of governance performance,' via a cluster of emergent themes in the curious case of Barangay 872.

### 3.1. The Council's 'Strengths' in Governance

The strength of the Council of Barangay 872 lies in the governance and administration performance sector. In fact, the Council's performance in all service areas, using the BGPMS, are marked "excellent" in three consecutive years from 2013-2015, except for citizen's participation and revenue generation, as shown in Table 1.0 which the Council deems 'problematic' in a poverty-stricken community. From the viewpoint of the Chair, the weak participation of the constituents is attributed to the implementation of the DILG's poverty targeting policy that limits the number of project recipients, and the reluctance of some constituents to participate in the barangay assemblies. The Council also argues on the feasibility of revenue generation as the barangay lacks the resources and opportunities to do so.

**Table 1.0. Scores for Governance & Administration in the Year 2013-2015**

Performance & Service Areas	2013	2014	2015	Description
Governance	4.57	4.83	4.77	Excellent
Local legislation	4.83	5.00	5.00	Excellent
Transparency	5.00	5.00	5.00	Excellent
Citizens' participation	3.67	4.55	4.33	Very Good
Administration	4.50	4.83	4.82	Excellent

Development planning	5.00	5.00	5.00	Excellent
Revenue generation	2.60	4.20	4.20	Very Good
Revenue allocation/ Utilization	5.00	5.00	5.00	Excellent
Fiscal accountability	5.00	5.00	5.00	Excellent
Facilities & customer Service	4.83	4.83	4.86	Excellent
HR management & Development	5.00	4.87	4.87	Excellent

However, with the E-BGPMS, as shown in Table 1.1, the Council maintains its ‘good’ performance status except for organizational development, citizen’s participation, and development legislation. Paradoxically, as stated in the SBGRs, the Council’s overall performance rating was ‘excellent’ for three consecutive years (2013-2015), and yet ‘low compliant’ to date (2016-2017), with the revised performance tool. The Council laments that they cannot do much in organizational development and development legislation sectors since they lack the resources and support in honing their skills and competencies in these two performance areas.

**Table 1.1. Ratings for Governance & Administration in the Year 2016-2017**

Performance & Service Areas	2016	2017	Description
Administrative systems and procedures	82%	82%	Moderately compliant
Organizational development	74%	74%	Low compliant
Barangay administration	89%	89%	Moderately compliant
Citizen’s participation	78%	78%	Low compliant
Transparency	100%	100%	High compliant
Legislative services	86%	86%	Moderately compliant
Secretariat services	100%	100%	High compliant
Development legislation	78%	78%	Low compliant

Moreover, the Council asserts that the implementation of BGPMS/E-BGPMS has helped the Council improve governance performance and raise their awareness of accountability. But with the limited resources, opportunities, and support, the Council’s capacity is sometimes constrained in their performance as a political unit, and in the delivery of basic services. From their end, the problem is that, over time, some of the recommendations forwarded by the Council to the DILG, have not translated to concrete action and policy reform ‘from the top.’ This is, however, subject to further scrutiny in a subsequent, future study.

### **3.2. Constraints in the Delivery of Basic Social Services**

It appears that the Council is ‘good’ and ‘compliant’ in rendering health services for the vulnerable groups, particularly the women and the children. However, the absence of an information and reading center and recreational facilities in the community explains the Council’s ‘weaker’ performance in the education service area, as shown in Tables 2.0 and 2.1. Apparently, the Council has competency in maintaining public safety and is ‘compliant’ in the area of disaster-preparedness. However, the Council laments on the need for more tangible resources and adequate support from the local government units and agencies.

In the eyes of the Council, the allotted barangay budget is oftentimes inadequate, and sometimes unavailable, for them to scout for other external sources of finances and resources. Projects for the community are implemented in the delivery of basic services, but budgetary constraints would sometimes delay, paralyze, if not halt the implementation. The Council also complains about the limited supply of resources, particularly in the area of disaster preparedness, for the relatively big population of Barangay 872.

Moreover, as asserted by the Council, the distribution of basic goods and services is, again, in line with the poverty targeting approach, which is primarily based on the constituents' poverty or economic status. The Chair insisted that the unemployed, deemed as the 'poorest of the poor,' are the Council's top priority. Only about forty to fifty constituents are selected as program or project recipients, which is contingent on the adequacy of the available resources and opportunities. The selection is strictly observed upon the directive of the City Government of Manila, the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), for the Council to limit the number of participants in the conduct or delivery of program/project activities and services. The Council admits that this 'selective' practice constitutes a 'structural strain' that defeats the goal of program inclusiveness, and that, the only option for them is to 'follow the rules from the top.'

**Table 2.0. Scores for Social Services in the Year 2013-2015**

Performance & Service Areas	2013	2014	2015	Description
Social Services	4.16	4.23	4.23	Excellent
Health & nutrition	3.25	3.50	3.50	Good
Education & culture	3.50	3.50	3.50	Good
Women & children	5.00	5.00	5.00	Excellent
Public safety & disaster risk reduction	4.92	4.92	4.92	Excellent

**Table 2.1. Ratings for Social Services in the Year 2016 -2017**

Performance & Service Areas	2016	2017	Description
Social Services	86%	86%	Moderately compliant
Health & nutrition	94%	94%	Moderately compliant
Education/culture/sports	70%	70%	Low compliant
Peace, security & disaster preparedness	88%	88%	Moderately compliant

### 3.3. Stagnant Economic Development and Agriculture

Agriculture development is the 'most problematic' performance sector, on the Council's belief that, since the barangay is situated in the metropolis, the industry of farming and agriculture cannot flourish due to space issues, the community's limited geographic conditions, and the overcrowding of physical structures. Moreover, viewing it as the community's weakness, the absence of agricultural development also goes without any agricultural skills training and allocation of funds.

In this light, it appears that the barangay's agriculture is a 'non-performing' sector without any given assessment scores in five consecutive years, as shown in Tables 3.0 and 3.1.

It is lamentable to note that entrepreneurship, business, and local industry promotion are likewise stagnant over time. In the absence of a micro-business enterprise for the community due to limited budget allocation, the Council has initiated efforts to implement livelihood programs, encouraged people's participation in job fairs, and conducted fund-raising activities to build up as well the Council's financial capacity. However, the Council admits that despite their efforts, unemployment remains a recurrent development and governance challenge for the barangay.

**Table 3.0. Scores for Economic Development in the Year 2013-2015**

Performance & Service Areas	2013	2014	2015	Description
Economic development	4.00	3.00	3.00	Fair
Agriculture & fisheries Development				
Entrepreneurship, business & local Industry promotion	4.00	3.00	3.00	Fair

**Table 3.1. Ratings for Economic Development in the Year 2016- 2017**

Performance & Service Areas	2016	2017	Description
Economic development	43%	43%	Low compliant
Entrepreneurship & local industry promotion	75%	75%	Low compliant
Urban agriculture development			

The Council also claims that Barangay 872 is a community of the ‘middle lower-class’ urban poor and other vulnerable groups for several decades now, and attributes the ‘depressed’ status of the barangay to the presence of informal settlers, and the lack of community resources in the past several years. However, with the implementation of Housing Relocation Program of the National Government for Informal Settlers (Executive Order No. 83, series of 2009), and the Council’s project accomplishments over time, the Council asserts that the status needs to be re-assessed by the DILG.

### **3.4. Challenges in Environmental Management**

The Ecological Solid Waste Management Act of 2000 (Republic Act No. 9003, 2000) provides that local government units are responsible in implementing the provision of the law, and that, it is their responsibility to collect and segregate waste of the barangays. Waste management is carried out by the Council's Ecological Solid Waste Management Committee responsible for the preparation of the Solid Waste Management Plan. City ordinances on solid waste management are enacted and directed at a regular garbage collection and segregation at source, maintenance of sewerage and drainage canals, and a bi-monthly estero clean-up.

With the enactment of the “City Ordinance on Waste Management” (Ordinance No. 8323, 2014), the Council implements a Waste Reduction Program in the barangay. The Council, however, complains that waste management is problematic as some constituents do not segregate wastes despite labelling the garbage bins as “*nabubulok*” (biodegradable) and “*hindi nabubulok*” (non-biodegradable), inasmuch as they see the garbage collectors segregating them. The constituents may be aware of their responsibility, but they seem not to have the discipline to follow the rules in waste segregation.

This scenario manifests problematic values that could inhibit or paralyze any noble undertakings to protect, preserve, and enhance the environment. This could also undermine their capacity and social responsibility to act as environmental stewards. However, with this recurrent, irresponsible practice of the constituents, the Council admits that program monitoring was not strictly observed that resulted in a weak, and sometimes, aborted implementation of the program. Improved efforts in re-implementing and reinforcing the program several times, while asserting the need for a well-defined waste management are then claimed by the Council.

In adherence to the principles of natural resources management, the Council has conducted advocacy activities on Republic Act No. 9729, otherwise known as “The Climate Change Act of 2009,” and adopted a barangay climate change mitigation action plan via the implementation of a Clean and Green Program, and a Green Brigade. There is, however, an absence of a tree/mangrove preservation program due to the narrow geographic space in the community.



With the limited geo-ecological space of the barangay, only a mini-ecological park is set up in a small space near the barangay hall. The Council asserts that they cannot do much, and do not have any concrete plans on how to manage the community's limited natural resources and spaces. These scenarios somewhat explain the Council's inconsistent performance for this sector as reflected in Tables 4.0 & 4.1 with 'excellent' scores from 2013-2015, and yet, 'low compliant' ratings in the last two recent years (2016-2017).

**Table 4.0. Scores for Environmental Management in Year 2013- 2015**

Performance & Service Areas	2013	2014	2015	Description
Environmental Management	4.71	4.71	4.71	Excellent
Natural Resource Management	5.00	5.00	5.00	Excellent
Waste Management & Pollution Control	4.43	4.43	4.43	Excellent

**Table 4.1. Environmental Management Ratings in Year 2016-2017**

Performance & Service Areas	2016	2017	Description
Environmental Management	65%	65%	Low compliant
Natural Resources Management	86%	86%	Moderately compliant
Waste Management	54%	56%	Low compliant

With these 'self-articulated' constraints and challenges underlying the Council's governance performance underlying the seemingly stagnant and inconsistent performance from 2013-2017, the Council *still* hopes to obtain greater budget allocation, support, and access to resources and opportunities, and strengthen their coordination with the City Government of Manila, the DSWD, the DILG, and some NGOs in addressing the barangay's agenda on health services, agriculture development, and employment generation, among others.

#### 4.0. CONCLUSIONS

In spite of the Barangay Council's 'strengths' in governance and administration as reflected in the self-assessed performance reports and 'claims' of the Council, the economic development, social services, and environmental management sectors have, *unfortunately*, relatively lagged behind. Economic development is the 'weakest-performing' governance performance sector due to the organization's limited resources, the barangay's stagnant agriculture, and the weak support of government units, among other constraining factors.

Setting the Council's performance against the 'reality of the barangay,' many have, in fact, remained unemployed, if not are self-employed, deprived of the basic essentials and 'comforts' of life. As chronic poverty in the community persists, the poor had to survive on meager incomes and resources, with limited access to quality health, education, housing, and other basic social services. I argue that the benefits of 'good' governance performance of the Council of Barangay 872 are offset by the stagnant economic development sector of the barangay while undermining poverty reduction efforts.

However, the Council still claims performance improvements and accomplishments over time particularly in the sector of social services, but efforts are constrained as they lack institutional support and economic/financial resources. With the limited capacity and resources of the Council comes the limited number of program/project recipients. This is, in some sense, due to the Council's strict observance of a selective poverty targeting strategy that apparently yields social exclusion. Ideally, this strategy must operate within a universal anti-poverty

framework, contained in a pro-poor development policy, and sustained in a socially inclusive environment (Africa, Raquiza, Ursua, & Jimenez, 2017).

The environmental management sector, on the other hand, is relatively performing 'okay' but security, risk reduction, and disaster preparedness stay as pressing concerns in this community mired in poverty, much as the Council cannot simply ignore the poor's vulnerability and adaptive capacity to climate change (Mercado, 2016; Atienza, Eadie & Tan-Mullins, May 2018). The Council is likewise driven to ensure the protection of the barangay's health environment with the adoption of best practices in ecological waste management. However, local officials, city mayors, and other government units held responsible for making decisions and reforms for this concern must help the barangay foster environmental security and sustainability (NAPC, 2016).

In the end, with the constraints and challenges behind the 'paradox' of governance performance, the Council of Barangay 872 is driven to work conscientiously on the 'weak-performing' sectors to enhance governance performance, not just in the assessments to come, but in the actual delivery of basic services, and provision of resources and opportunities to the poor constituents. The Council *still* 'hopes against hope' to obtain greater budget allocation, coordination, and support, particularly from the City Government of Manila, the DILG, the DSWD, and other units or agencies of government, without which, they cannot do much. Only then can anyone expect the 'paradox of performance' to diminish over time, perhaps, at some future time.

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