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Making Local Development Councils Work

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Local Development Councils (LDCs) are the bodies through which provinces, cities, and municipalities decide which development projects to fund. A national survey of 5,319 respondents in 458 local government units (LGUs) across 18 regions, assesses LDC functionality based on their influence on budget and development priorities, integration of Local Project Monitoring Committee (LPMC) monitoring and evaluation results into planning and budgeting, and challenges affecting effectiveness.

Findings show high self-reported LDC influence, with 95.6% reporting moderate-to-high influence on budget decisions. At the same time, almost a third (31.4%) said their councils use LPMC findings inconsistently or not at all in planning and budgeting. Most respondents (85.5%) identified at least one challenge that limit their Council, most often are limited CSO participation (24.4%) and poor link between plans and the budget (22.0%).

The study groups the regions into four distinct regional profiles, **Needs Comprehensive Support, Active but Constrained, Needs Activation, and Established Practice**, to guide differentiated institutional support.

This policy brief offers the following recommendations: (1) expand the Seal of Good Local Governance (SGLG) assessment of LDC functionality by assessing whether Council decisions are acted upon; (2) institutionalize a national LDC technical capacity program through the Local Government Academy (LGA), with municipalities as a priority; (3) strengthen LPMC-to-LDC reporting protocols and protect participation from political capture; and (4) target support based on reported challenges, LGU context, and the four regional profiles, including peer learning between Regions IV-A and IV-B and technical support to Bangsamoro institutions for an LDC strengthening track during the transition period.

Keywords: *Local Development Council, Local Project Monitoring Committee, Local Government Unit*

POINTERS FOR PRACTITIONERS AND POLICYMAKERS

1. **Look beyond self-reported performance.** High reported budget influence and M&E integration coexist with widespread constraints. LDC assessment should therefore consider the conditions that enable Councils to function, not only reported levels of influence.
2. **Use regional evidence to differentiate interventions.** Regions differ significantly in challenge burden and M&E integration, particularly in governance-related challenges. A single LDC strengthening model may not

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address the different conditions observed across regions.

3. **Strengthen LDCs as working institutions.** Support should focus on strengthening the links among planning, monitoring, participation, and budgeting, while activating less functional Councils and facilitating peer learning among LGUs with more established practices.

POLICY CONTEXT

The Local Development Council is the primary mechanism through which local governments plan, prioritize, and link development programs to the budget. Under the Local Government Code of 1991 (Republic Act No. 7160), every province, city, and municipality must maintain a functioning LDC. The Council is responsible for formulating the Comprehensive Development Plan (CDP) and the Local Development Investment Program (LDIP), while ensuring civil society participation in local development decision-making. The Code requires that civil society organizations (CSOs) make up at least one-fourth of the fully organized Council and that the Council meet at least once every six months (Republic Act No. 7160, 1991, §§ 108, 110).

While the Code establishes these functions and requirements, how effectively LDCs carry out their planning role may differ across LGUs. Juco et al. (2024) point to differences in planning and institutional capacity and broader political economy constraints that shape how local governments perform their functions. Against this backdrop, this brief presents national evidence on LDC functioning based on the perspectives of officials and personnel from LGU offices and departments. While earlier studies have focused mainly on CSO participation in these Councils (Medina-Guce & Galindes, 2017; Medina-Guce et al., 2025), the analysis examines LDCs' influence on budget allocation and project prioritization, the use of monitoring and evaluation results in planning and budgeting, and challenges affecting their functionality.

The analysis' main source is a national survey conducted by the Center for Local and Regional Governance (CLRG), University of the Philippines National College of Public Administration and Governance (UP NCPAG), as part of its study of the Seal of Good Local Governance (SGLG) for the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG). The survey ran from March 12 to May 30, 2026, covering 482 LGUs (68 provinces, 108 cities, and 306 municipalities) across all 18 regions. Respondents were department heads or representatives from LGU offices responsible for each SGLG governance area.

The sample size was set at a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. LGUs were selected in proportion to their SGLG performance from 2014 to 2024. Of the 482 LGUs targeted, 458 participated, yielding 5,319 respondents across provinces (709), cities (1,201), and municipalities (3,409).

Respondents were asked to assess (a) the LDC's influence on budget allocation and the prioritization of projects for the AIP, using a four-point scale from none to high; (b) the extent to which the LDC uses LPMC monitoring results to inform planning and budgeting, using a five-point scale from not at all to fully integrated; and (c) the challenges limiting LDC functionality, with multiple responses allowed, from six predefined options: lack of technical capacity or planning skills; political influence or domination; irregular meetings or lack of quorum; limited or token CSO participation; lack of data or evidence for planning; and poor link between plans and budget.

In addition to the survey, the brief draws on the statutory framework governing local development planning, principally Republic Act No. 7160, or the Local Government Code of 1991, as well as published literature on participatory local governance and LDC performance in the Philippines.

National percentages are based on all respondents. Comparisons across LGU types, income classes, and regions use the average response in each LGU, so that LGUs with more respondents do not count more. Differences between groups were tested with standard nonparametric tests (Kruskal–Wallis, Mann–Whitney U, and Spearman correlation) at the 5% significance level.

KEY FINDINGS

LDC Influence on Budget Decisions

The distribution is heavily concentrated at the top of the scale: 53.8% reported high influence, where LDC recommendations are prioritized in the budget, and 41.8% reported moderate influence, where some recommendations are funded. Only 4.4% reported low (3.4%) or no (1.0%) influence.

The concentration at the moderate and high levels produces a ceiling effect, limiting the measure's ability to differentiate among LGUs and reducing its diagnostic value. This tendency toward more favorable assessments is also evident in other studies of local governance. The 2025 PIDS baseline study of 168 LGUs, for example, found that LGUs consistently rated CSO participation in their Councils more positively than CSO members rated it themselves, with the largest gaps observed in provinces and municipalities (Medina-Guce et al., 2025).

The findings from the CLRG survey similarly suggest a gap between perceived and assessed performance. At least 87.8% of officials rated their LGU's performance as good or excellent across all SGLG governance areas, while 93.9% gave a good or excellent rating for social protection, which includes the LDC indicator. These figures are substantially higher than the actual SGLG pass rates.

Use of LPMC Findings in Planning and Budgeting

Use of monitoring results varies considerably. While 25.1% of respondents said LPMC results are fully integrated into planning and budgeting and 43.5% said they are used regularly, 31.4% reported that results are used only sometimes (17.5%), occasionally (11.6%), or not at all (2.3%). Thus, for nearly one-third of respondents, monitoring results are not consistently used to inform planning and budget decisions.

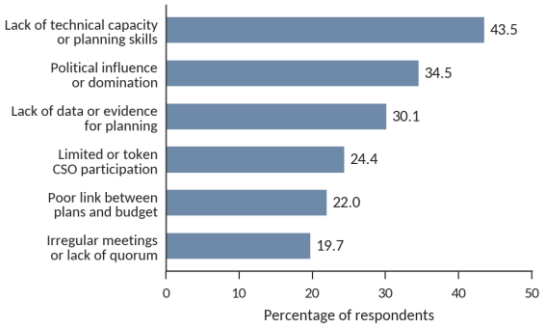
This suggests that the presence of formal LDC mechanisms does not necessarily translate into their substantive use in planning and budgeting. In the SGLG, LDC functionality is assessed through formal requirements, including CSO representation and Council meetings. SGLG records show that these requirements are largely met: in 2023, 87% of LGUs had Councils whose CSO representation met or exceeded the one-quarter minimum, while 85% of Councils met in both semesters (Medina-Guce et al., 2025). Taken together, these findings point to a distinction between formal LDC functionality and the extent to which LDC mechanisms inform actual planning and budgeting decisions.

Challenges to LDC Functionality

Respondents were asked which of six problems limit their Council. The most common were lack of technical capacity or planning skills (43.5%) and political influence or domination (34.5%), followed by lack of data or evidence for planning (30.1%). About one in four cited limited or token CSO participation (24.4%) or a poor link between plans and the budget (22.0%). Irregular meetings or lack of quorum was the least common (19.7%; Figure 1).

Figure 1.

Distribution of Responses on Challenges Limiting LDC Functionality



Note. Values are percentages of respondents (n = 5,319). Respondents could select more than one problem. CSO = civil society organization.

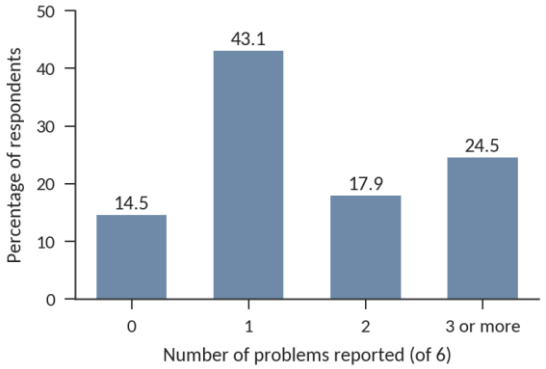
Both leading challenges have been documented in earlier studies. Weak performance of local special bodies has been linked to clientelist politics, in which local politicians may be reluctant to cede discretion to participatory bodies (Manasan et al., 1999; Yilmaz & Venugopal, 2013, as cited in Medina-Guce et al., 2025). Capacity constraints have also emerged in the PIDS study, where both CSO and LGU respondents called for stronger knowledge and skills among CSO members, particularly in budgeting (Medina-Guce et al., 2025). These findings point to persistent political and capacity-related constraints on LDC functioning.

The survey also shows that these constraints are often experienced in combination. Only 14.5% of respondents reported none, 43.1% reported one, and 24.5% reported three or more (Figure 2). On

average, respondents checked 1.74 of the six problems.

Figure 2.

Distribution of the Number of Challenges Reported per Respondent



Note. Values are percentages of respondents (n = 5,319). "3 or more" combines respondents reporting three (11.7%), four (6.8%), five (3.2%), and six (2.9%) problems.

The number of problems reported differs by LGU type [$H(2) = 15.13$, $p < .001$, $\varepsilon^2 = .03$]. On average, officials in municipalities reported 1.86 problems, compared with 1.74 in provinces and 1.56 in cities. The significant difference was between municipalities and cities; provinces did not differ significantly from either. Across income classes, differences were not statistically significant [$H(5) = 8.37$, $p = .137$; first- to sixth-class LGUs, $N = 458$]. Because provinces, cities, and municipalities are classified using different income thresholds, income classes were also compared within each LGU type. No clear income pattern emerged among municipalities or cities. Among provinces, lower-income provinces reported somewhat more problems (Spearman $\rho = .33$, $p = .010$), but this finding is based on only 62 provinces, few of which fall in the lower income classes. These results suggest that LGU type is more clearly associated with the number of challenges reported than income class. Income class alone may therefore not be a sufficient basis for targeting support to LDCs.

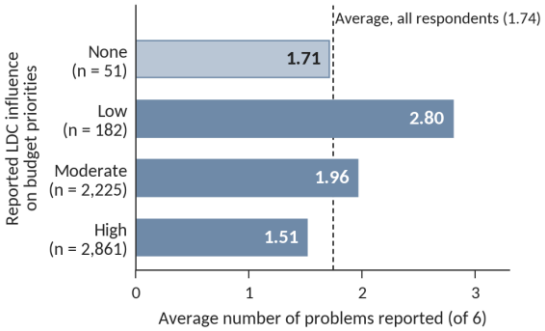
The municipality–city difference is also consistent in DILG's 2023 record on LDC functionality ratings. Among the LGUs assessed, 62% of cities were classified as having highly functional Councils, compared with 50% of municipalities. Cities also showed better compliance with the process for reconstituting local special bodies (Medina-Guce et al., 2025).

Councils With Limited Influence Report More Problems. Respondents who rated their Council's influence as low reported an average of 2.80 problems, compared with 1.96 among those reporting moderate influence and 1.51 among those reporting high influence (Figure 3). Respondents who reported no influence cited fewer problems (1.71), but this group was small, comprising only 51 respondents (1%).

The pattern suggests that Councils reporting some but limited influence may face a wider range of constraints than those reporting moderate or high influence. However, the data cannot determine whether these constraints limit the Council's influence or whether limited influence is itself a reflection of broader inactivity or other constraints. Either way, the concentration of reported problems among low-influence Councils points to these LGUs as potential entry points for targeted technical assistance.

Figure 3.

Average Number of Problems Reported, by Reported Level of LDC Budget Influence



Note. Averages are based on respondents (n = 5,319). The dashed line marks the average for all respondents.

REGIONAL FINDINGS

Regions differ significantly in both the number of challenges reported and the extent to which LPMC monitoring results are used in planning and budgeting. However, reported LDC influence on budget allocation and project prioritization does not vary significantly by region, suggesting that the generally high level of reported influence is a broader national pattern. Among the challenges, political influence and CSO participation showed greater variation across regions, whereas lack of technical capacity or planning skills was reported more consistently across regions.

Four Regional Profiles

The regions are then classified according to whether their reported challenge burden and M&E integration fall above or below the respective national averages. These positions are plotted to produce four regional profiles (Figure 4), each reflecting a distinct combination of challenges and M&E use. The resulting four profiles point to different support needs (Table 1). Because several regions are positioned close to the national averages, the typology should be treated as a guide rather than a definitive classification.

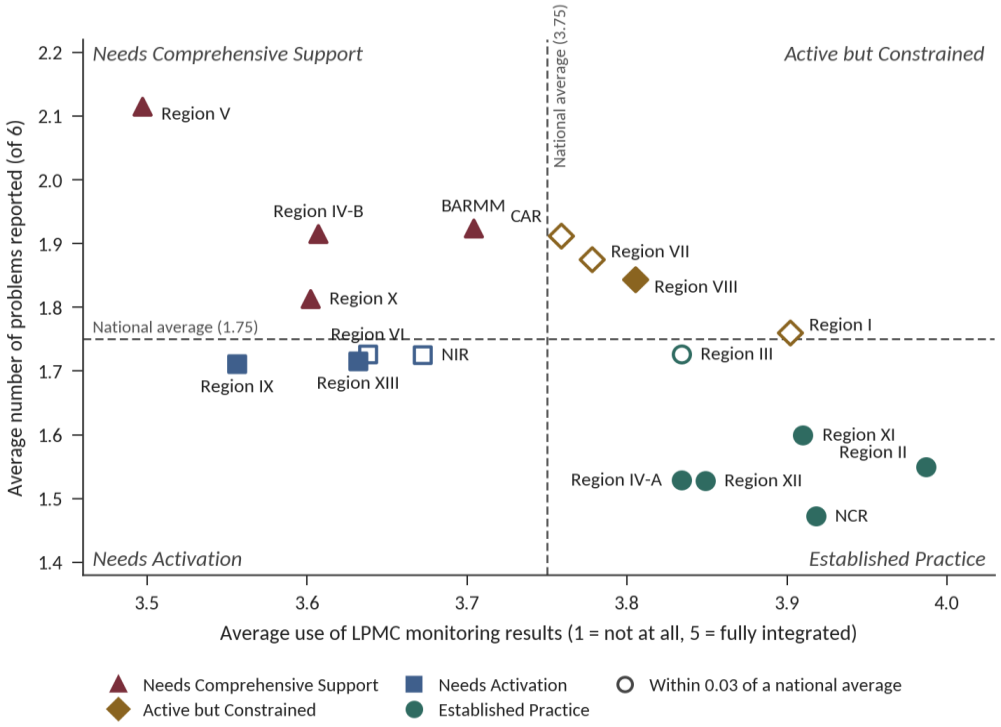
Table 1. Regional Profiles and Suggested Support

Regional Profile	Regions	Suggested Support
Needs Comprehensive Support *More problems; less use of monitoring results*	IV-B, V, X, and BARMM	Address reported challenges and strengthened the use of monitoring results in planning and budgeting
Active but Constrained *More problems; more use of monitoring results*	CAR; I, VII, and VIII	Address political influence and participation constraints, alongside targeted capacity-building
Needs Integration *Fewer problems; less use of monitoring results*	NIR; VI, IX, and XIII	Strengthen regular LDC processes, CSO participation, and the link between LPMC monitoring and planning
Established Practice *Fewer problems; more use of monitoring results*	NCR; II, III, IV-A, XI, and XII	Document and share practices that may be adapted by other regions

Note. Profiles are based on each region's position relative to the national averages shown in Figure 4 and are named according to the type of support each needs.

Regional averages range from 1.47 problems in NCR to 2.12 in Region V. Figure 5 shows how often each problem is reported in each region. Lack of technical capacity is the most common problem in 16 of the 18 regions and does not differ significantly between them, suggesting a national response. Political influence and limited CSO participation, by contrast, vary significantly by region and call for responses fitted to local conditions.

Figure 4
Regional Profiles by Use of Monitoring Results and Number of Problems Reported



Note. Each point is a regional average of LGU averages (N = 458 LGUs in 18 regions). Dashed lines mark the national averages (3.75 for use of monitoring results; 1.75 problems). Hollow markers show regions within 0.03 of a national average, whose profile could change with small differences in the data.

Notes on selected regions

The following describe patterns in what respondents reported. They are not assessments of regional or LGU performance, and regional figures rest on different numbers of participating LGUs.

Region V: Region V reports a mean challenge count of 2.12, with 34.5% of LGUs reporting three or more challenges. Political influence (46.6%) and poor plan-budget linkage (32.4%) are among the reported challenges, pointing to the need to address governance and budgeting practices alongside technical capacity.

Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR): CAR reports political influence or domination as a challenge for 48.0% of respondents, alongside above-average M&E integration. This suggests that monitoring arrangements are in place, but political pressure may affect the extent to which findings inform decisions.

BARMM: BARMM reports irregular meetings or lack of quorum among 31.4% of respondents and falls within the Needs Comprehensive Support profile.

National Capital Region (NCR): NCR reports a mean challenge count of 1.47, alongside Q1 and Q2 mean scores of 3.63 and 3.92, respectively. The NCR sample is composed predominantly of Highly Urbanized Cities and may reflect differences in capacity and institutional processes.

Figure 5

Percentage of Respondents Reporting Each Problem, by Region

		Technical capacity	Political influence	Lack of data or evidence	Limited CSO participation	Poor plan–budget link	Irregular meetings
Needs Comprehensive Support	Region V	48	**48**	35	27	**32**	21
	BARMM	48	33	32	29	20	**31**
	Region IV-B	48	43	37	20	25	19
	Region X	43	39	32	21	27	19
Active but Constrained	CAR	40	**52**	24	34	20	21
	Region VII	50	38	32	25	25	17
	Region VIII	47	30	31	30	25	21
	Region I	47	27	28	30	22	23
Needs Activation	NIR	47	35	32	16	24	20
	Region XIII	48	38	26	22	21	18
	Region VI	45	37	30	20	23	17
	Region IX	46	32	32	21	21	19
Established Practice	Region III	41	32	34	25	21	18
	Region XI	43	34	26	23	19	16
	Region II	41	33	22	27	17	15
	Region XII	36	32	25	20	20	21
	Region IV-A	40	30	31	19	17	16
	NCR	32	30	28	19	22	16
	All respondents	*43.5*	*34.5*	*30.1*	*24.4*	*22.0*	*19.7*

Note. Values are regional averages of the percentage of respondents in each LGU who reported the problem; the bottom row shows the percentage for all respondents. Darker cells indicate higher percentages. Outlined values are at least 10 percentage points above the all-respondent figure. Regions are grouped by profile (Table 1) and, within each profile, ordered from most to fewest problems reported.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are for consideration by the DILG and align with its existing mandates and functions related to LGU support, local development planning, and Local Development Councils (LDCs).

National Recommendations

Expand the SGLG indicator on LDC functionality to capture whether Councils' decisions are acted upon.

The current SGLG indicator relies primarily on records. It checks the Council's composition, executive committee, secretariat, LPMC, and other committees; meetings in both semesters; CSO attendance and inputs as reflected in the minutes; and the approved development plan, LDIP, and

AIP (DILG, 2024). These records establish that a Council is organized and active, but do not show whether its decisions shape the budget or whether it acts on monitoring findings. The survey suggests that this gap matters: 95.6% of officials reported that their Council influences the budget, yet nearly one-third reported that monitoring results are used inconsistently or not at all.

DILG, as the implementing agency of the SGLG and Secretariat of the Council of Good Local Governance (CGLG), may consider proposing to the Council a revision aligned with the reform directions in CLRG's assessment of the SGLG. First, retain the existing checks as the basic requirements for a functional Council. Second, add measures of use, such as the share of AIP projects traceable to LDC resolutions and the number of LPMC reports presented to and acted upon by the Council. Third, introduce these measures initially as profiling items, recorded but not counted toward the passing threshold, during the first cycle of the proposed SGLG transition period, allowing DILG to test their feasibility before deciding whether to incorporate them into scoring. Fourth, draw the evidence from records that LGUs already maintain, such as minutes, resolutions, and the AIP, to avoid creating new documentary requirements.

This approach is consistent with Republic Act No. 11292, which directs the Council to develop indicators that reflect performance-based outcomes and to consider that LGUs are not similarly situated (Sec. 5).

Institutionalize a National LDC Technical Capacity Program.

Lack of technical capacity or planning skills is the most commonly reported challenge nationally (43.5%) and is reported across all regions. LGA should institutionalize a national capacity-building program as a regular offering rather than a one-time project, and target both LDC members and secretariat staff to strengthen their technical capabilities needed to carry out the Council's planning and coordination functions.

Strengthen LPMC-to-LDC reporting protocols.

Almost a third of respondents (31.4%) reported that monitoring results are used inconsistently or not at all. LPMCs are part of the Regional Project Monitoring and Evaluation System established by Executive Order No. 376 (1989), as amended by Executive Order No. 93 (1993), and DILG has issued guidelines on their organization through DILG Memorandum Circular No. 2019-188. DILG should build on this existing guidance by requiring LPMC findings to be presented to the LDC at every regular meeting and documenting the actions taken in response. Because LPMCs form part of the monitoring system led by DEPDev, DILG may consult DEPDev in developing the guidance.

Strengthen governance safeguards and meaningful participation.

About one in three respondents (34.5%) reported political influence or domination, with substantial variation across regions. Training alone is unlikely to address this constraint. The LDC Playbook should set clear standards for CSO participation, open deliberation, and feedback to Council members, building on the Local Government Code's provisions on the role of people's and nongovernmental organizations and their representation in LDCs (Republic Act No. 7160, 1991, §§ 34, 108). Studies of Philippine participatory bodies indicate that they function better when civic space is protected and deliberation is fair, and that a formal mandate alone is insufficient (Medina-Guce et al., 2025; Saguin & Medina-Guce, 2024).

Prioritize municipalities in LDC strengthening efforts.

Municipalities reported more problems than other LGU types, consistent with evidence that capacity constraints in devolved functions vary across LGUs (Juco et al., 2024). A dedicated municipal track within the national program proposed in Recommendation 2 could provide more targeted support.

Use reported problems, alongside income class, as basis to target LDC support.

Income class remains relevant to the SGLG as a whole: pass rates are lower among lower-income municipalities, and CLRG's assessment of the SGLG supports considering income class in the award. For LDC support, however, reported problems do not differ clearly by income class. DILG's technical assistance for LDCs should therefore consider the specific problems reported

by Councils and their regional profiles, alongside income class, to better target support.

Regional Recommendations

Differentiate LDC support according to regional profiles.

DILG Regional Offices should tailor technical assistance to the needs reflected in the four regional profiles.

- **Needs Comprehensive Support (Regions IV-B, V, and X; BARMM):** Address the specific problems reported by Councils and strengthen the use of monitoring results in planning and budgeting.
- **Active but Constrained (CAR; Regions I, VII, and VIII):** Address participation constraints and strengthen safeguards that allow monitoring findings to inform decisions.
- **Needs Activation (NIR; Regions VI, IX, and XIII):** Strengthen regular meetings, active CSO participation, and the link between LPMC findings and LDC decision-making before providing more specialized assistance. Civil society representation is a legal requirement of the Council and a basis for participatory planning (Medina-Guce et al., 2025; Republic Act No. 7160, 1991).
- **Established Practice (NCR; Regions II, III, IV-A, XI, and XII):** Document effective practices and facilitate their sharing with other regions.

Pilot a peer-learning exchange between Regions IV-A and IV-B.

The exchange should document how LDCs operate in the two regions and identify practices that can be adapted by LGUs facing similar conditions.

Support an LDC strengthening track designed by Bangsamoro institutions.

Irregular meetings and limited CSO participation in BARMM call for an approach suited to the region's institutional context. Because local governments in BARMM operate under the Bangsamoro Government (Republic Act No. 11054), Bangsamoro institutions should design and lead the track. DILG and LGA can provide technical support to the Bangsamoro Ministry of the Interior and Local Government if the Ministry decides to develop it.

CONCLUSION

Taken together, the findings show that LDCs are broadly active but uneven in their functioning. While 95.6% of respondents report moderate or high influence over budget decisions and 68.6% report regular or full use of LPMC monitoring and evaluation results, 85.5% identify at least one challenge. Technical capacity or planning skills (43.5%) and political influence or domination (34.5%) are the most frequently reported. The number of challenges varies by LGU type and region, but not clearly by income class.

These results have limitations. They reflect the views of LGU technical officials, who also prepare their LGU's SGLG requirements and may therefore rate their own Councils favorably. Their responses were not independently verified against Council records. The survey was conducted only once, from March to May 2026, so it identifies associations rather than causal relationships, and each topic was measured using a single question. Several regions are close to the national averages, while the income-class comparison is limited because provinces, cities, and municipalities are classified using different thresholds. The results are therefore best used to inform the design and targeting of support rather than to rate individual LGUs, and should be interpreted alongside records-based assessments and interviews with local chief executives conducted as part of the same study.

The four regional profiles provide a basis for differentiating support according to the conditions Councils face. The aim is not simply to improve self-assessment scores, but to strengthen LDCs as functioning institutions that use evidence and enable citizen participation in local development, consistent with their statutory role.

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