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BRIDGING POLICY AND PRACTICE: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY ON RESEARCH-INFORMED RURAL PLANNING IN NEW BATAAN, DAVAO DE ORO

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ABSTRACT
This article delves into the gap between theory and practice in rural planning in New Bataan, Davao de Oro. While there are growing empirical knowledge, local government may not be a learning organization in application of research to policy-making. This qualitative case study explores the role of research in local governance, analysing how different actors use evidence-based information. Information from key informant interviews, focus group discussions and document review suggests institutional, political and cultural constraints to research use in planning. Findings identify obstacles such as constraints on capacity, undervaluing of qualitative data, and the predominance of political concerns. Based on them, the study provides some policy implications concerning how to improve the use and application of research in local governance as well as the effectiveness of planning for rural development.

Keywords:
Research-informed policy, rural governance, local government, qualitative study, Davao de Oro.

INTRODUCTION
In growing economies like the Philippines, rural towns have particular problems with planning and governance. One of the biggest is the failure to use research in making policy. Although the national policy landscape promotes evidence-based planning according to (Anderson et al., 2019), the practical experience at local level is inadequate, especially in rural LGUs potentially, including New Bataan, Davao de Oro.
As a result, policy around addressing disparities, vulnerabilities to disasters, and deficiencies in infrastructure is impaired. Even when there are existing data or vulnerability assessments, these are seldom used in planning due to political pressures, institutional failures, or cultural disjuncture (De Guzman, 2020; Santos & Villanueva, 2021).
The study looks into the difficulties in incorporating research in the policy process at LGU-level level, particularly in New Bataan, Davao de Oro. It seeks to determine the structural, political and socio-cultural factors surrounding the use of evidence and to develop context specific, practical strategies to bridge the known gap between knowledge and policy.

OBJECTIVES
To discuss and identify the structural, political and sociocultural determinants of research use in rural planning and governance in the Municipality of New Bataan, Province of Davao de Oro, and to formulate context-specific strategies to improve evidence-informed policymaking at the Local Government Unit (LGU) level.

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METHODOLOGY

Research Design
For the rural governance side, the utilization (or non-utilization) of research was studied using a qualitative case study design. This enabled us to conduct a nuanced, locally specific analysis of policy-making in New Bataan, concentrating on the views and experiences of the local actors.
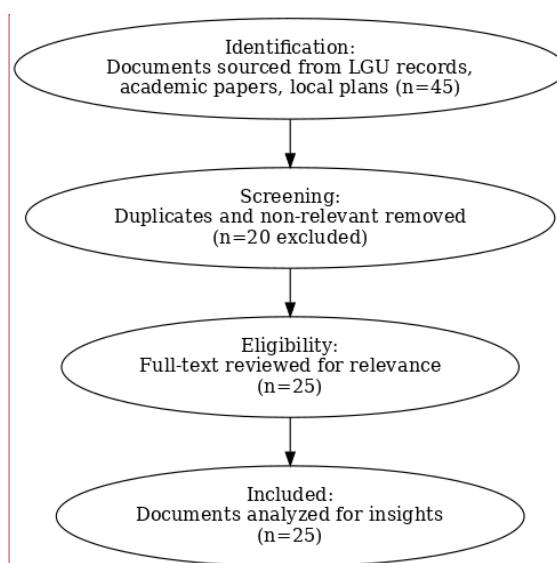
Locale and Participants
New Bataan in Davao de Oro Province was chosen as a pilot area because of the complexity of its governance situation, fragile environment, and work remaining to be done in capacity building. Interviewees were municipal officials, local planners, community leaders and academics and were recruited using purposive sampling.

Data Collection
The researcher collected the data using three key techniques:
1. **Key Informant Interviews (KIIs):** Semi-structured interviews with LGU heads or officers and policy experts to ascertain institutional views.
2. **FGDs (Focus Group Discussions):** Discussion with focus groups composed of various community members to collect public perspectives about governance related issue.
3. **Document review:** Analysis of Municipal Development Plans, land use plans, climate risk assessments, and academic papers.

Table 1. Simplified PRISMA-style flowchart showing the document review process.

PRISMA-inspired flow diagram showing identification (n=45), screening (n=25 after exclusions), and final inclusion (n=25) of documents for review. This visual illustrates a systematic approach to the document review phase of the study.

Data Analysis
A thematic analysis strategy was adopted, which included coding of the transcripts, grouping related codes into higher-order themes, and an interpretive process to develop broader research-policy integration-relevant findings.

Ethical Considerations
All participants were made aware of the objectives of the study and provided written consent. They remained anonymous and the confidentiality of their data was preserved.

Conceptual Framework
This theoretical model outlines how access to research, context-barriers and policy implementation effectiveness work in complex relationship at the local level. It is crafted to illustrate how research-based

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policymaking can enhance rural development outcomes in New Bataan, Davao de Oro. To analyze the extent to which factors affect research utilization in government, at the core, it also draws on aspects of the following:

1. Policy Evidence-Based Planning Theory (PEBP)
2. Policy Feedback Theory, and,
3. Rural Development Planning Theory

The five principle constructs that the model emphasizes are:

Table 2: Key Constructs Table

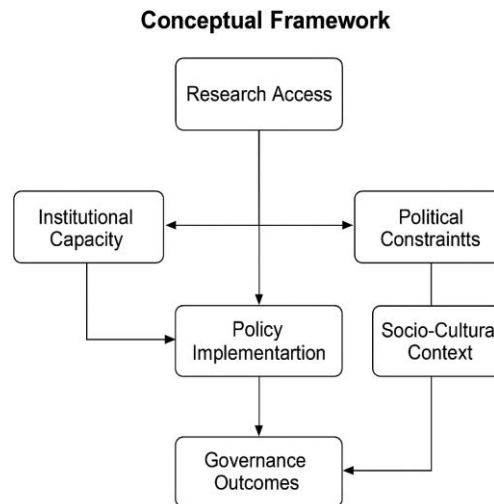| Construct	Description
Research Access and Quality	Availability, relevance, and usability of academic, empirical, and local data.
Institutional Capacity	LGUs' human and technical resources to interpret and apply research.
Political Constraints	Influence of electoral cycles, patronage, and political will.
Socio-Cultural Context	Local values, traditions, and indigenous knowledge that shape governance.
Policy Implementation	The extent to which policies reflect research and respond to real challenges.
Governance Outcomes	Effective rural development: infrastructure, resilience, and livelihoods.

This paper follows a conceptual framework that examines the interplay of research access, institutional and political dynamics and rural policy performance in New Bataan, Davao de Oro. Using insights from Policy Evidence-Based Planning Theory (PEBP), Policy Feedback Theory, and Rural Development Theory, the framework illustrates that the use of research is a product of internal capacities and external governance conditions.

At the heart of the framework is the idea that the availability of pertinent, locally relevant research is a necessary but not sufficient condition for successful policy-making. For research to have a real impact on rural planning, it should be embedded in an empowering environment marked by an institutional capability, political backing, and socio-cultural resonance.

Institutional capacity is defined as the human and resource capacity of the local government unit (LGU) to interpret and use evidence. There are many political constraints, including dealing with electoral cycles, a patronage system and changes in leadership that can ultimately mean long-term planning which often sacrificed for short-term benefit. It is the local context (socio-cultural) that enables or constraints evidence uptake; the social norms, the indigenous systems of knowledge, the role of communities.

These dimensions meet at a very practical level of decision-making: during the process of putting policies in place, these are either evidence-informed or not guided or influenced by evidence. The net result of this process is evident in the effectiveness of governance as evident for example in improved infrastructure, resilient disaster management and sustainable livelihoods.

This framework not only provides a map for theoretical data collection and analysis but is also a tool to identify the discrepancies between research and policy and to develop specific, practical recommendations on ways that these gaps can be closed. A schematic of the model is shown below to depict these relationships.

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Table 3. Conceptual Framework Model

Conceptual Framework

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Low Research-to-Policy Utilization

Stakeholders observed that "evidence-based planning" is frequently referred to in policy documents but that research is rarely utilised beyond point-in-time compliance. Political judgment, donor considerations or executive discretion often play a role in decisions.

Institutional Strength and Lack of Resources

Many local governments do not have departments specialized in policy research. Few people in officialdom are trained to analyze academic data or translate findings into action. This has led to a dependence on contracted consultants whose products are not always attuned to local elements (Reyes & Castillo, 2020).

Political Patronage and Election Periods

Political challenges has become one of the main obstacles. Now they were playing the long game rather than chasing the next election. The product of this research-based, long-term thinking is that South Korea not only has enough testing kits, but enough for everyone in the country who needs one (Carney, 2019; Jones & Villar, 2020). This is inhibitory to evidence-based planning.

Cultural gap between research and Indigenous knowledge

Formal research, it observed, often overlooks "indigenous practices, local narratives and traditional governance structures. Community members observed that externally generated research seldom mirrors the lives of those who live there, and that it contributes more to policy scripted at the national level than to policy relevant to the place in which it was done (De la Peña, 2022).

Community Beliefs about Policy Effectiveness

The general perception was that policies are reactive/externally driven. The participants asked for engagement and context specific research to improve development results.

Discussion

The current research reaffirms previous findings that political, institutional and cultural obstacles are the impediments to the integration of research in local governance (Fernandez & Cruz, 2022; Villanueva, 2021). The New Bataan case illustrates how entrenched these barriers to entrepreneurship tendency are in rural communities.

The thematic results accord with Policy Feedback Theory, which argues that, once in place, bad policies generate feedback that may lead to more and more efficient future informed reform. Additionally, Policy

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Evidence-Based Planning (PEBP) and Rural Development Theory underscore the importance for the policy process in institutional readiness sensitivity concerns cultural in planning and design of implementation.

Furthermore, there is a continued problem with the value placed on qualitative data and local intelligence. As Santos and Ramirez (2019) argued, there is a bias for quantitative measures that after practicing, in detriment of the intangible contributions of ethnographic or participatory research.

Hence, to achieve evidence-informed governance, policymaking should be inclusive and strategic. Knowledge translation systems must be institutionalized in LGUs, and policy guidelines should incorporate local customs and participatory data collection.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

CONCLUSION

The research discovered that the LGU of New Bataan is cognizant of the value of evidence-informed planning; however, the application of research to policy development is hardly evident. There are institutional limits, political motives and cultural divide that preclude efficacious fusion of knowledge in governance.

Building research capacity, promoting participatory governance, and adapting research products to local context are necessary to close the research-policy gap. By taking such steps, local government units such as New Bataan can improve the conduct of rural planning and the nature of development results to be sustainable and inclusive.

Policy Recommendations

1. Institutionalize Research Units in LGUs: Formulate an in-house policy analysis team to lessen reliance on consultants.

2. Localize Knowledge Translation: Create locally targeted materials and make use of Knowledge Transfer and Exchange (KTE) which is an interactive process involving the interchange of knowledge between research users and researcher producers, infographics, and other relevant materials with research findings in user-friendly formats for local leaders.

3. Educate Public Officials: Train development officers to conduct workshops on how to interpret qualitative research.

4. Mainstream Participatory Policy Design: Integrate Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) as instruments in local policy formulation.

5. Bridge Traditional and Formal Knowledge: The incorporation of indigenous knowledge into development planning systems through the adoption of IKSP and community rules.

6. Match Policy with Progress: De-link planning and other activities of the same nature from political tenure to offer incentives for long-term projects.

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