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Research Article

Walking The Talk: The Local Community's Engagement Spectrum With The Local Government Unit Programs And Policies

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Abstract

This study explores how residents of Cotabato engage with LGU programs. Ten residents were interviewed using a qualitative narratology design and Saldaña's coding method. Findings reveal key benefits (access to information, cooperation, communication) and challenges (communication issues, time, partisanship). The study highlights how engagement fosters cohesion and recommends improved communication and inclusive leadership. The findings revealed that community engagement is essential in the local government unit as it allows them to be informed and heard about its programs and policies. In this case, communication significantly creates an engaged, inclusive, and empowered community by enhancing decision-making. This underscores that the development of the community through the program and policies of the local government units lies in the effort of the residents to participate. Thus, regional leaders should consider a proper channel for information dissemination and key governance principles in promoting community engagement.

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Introduction

Imagine a community aiming for progress, where local citizens are too eager to shape their tomorrow, establishing collaborations to improve their quality of life. This is the heart of citizen participation – a process focusing on advertising change and progress through meaningful community engagements. Community engagement shows voluntary action where various community members face opportunities as responsible citizens. The community's involvement could have a variety of connotations as it differs based on how they live or communicate with one another; others characterized it as the participation of residents or communities in government development planning (Akbar, 2021; Igalla *et al.*, 2019). There can be no cooperation, development, or homestay program without any engagement unleashed on the community.

Community engagement is a cornerstone of development, deeply rooted in the idea that participation and involvement are essential for progress. However, its breadth means it can signify different things to different people. Edwards and Jones (2019) highlight that there is no universal approach to ensuring successful community engagement, emphasizing the complexity and ambiguity inherent in this concept. Often, individuals view engagement as a tool for mobilizing efforts to achieve personal or collective benefits, engaging in decisions that affect those with similar interests and goals. Mandich (2020) describes participation as a continuous and evolving process crucial for empowering communities, serving as a central mechanism for enabling community empowerment.

On the other hand, recent developments in certain municipalities in the Philippines illustrate a shift in the effectiveness of community participation, as discussed by Atienza and Go

(2023). In these contexts, the role of community involvement can become diminished when the efforts of government and public decision-makers fail to align with the community's aspirations and concerns. A lack of responsiveness to these expectations can lead to diminished community support. This highlights the delicate balance public administrators must maintain in genuinely engaging communities and enhancing outcomes by ensuring that governmental actions align with community needs and expectations.

With this, the Participatory Governance theory has been used to understand the active involvement of local community citizens based on the given decision-making process, ensuring that they can say something about the policies and programs that shape them (Clark, 2021). However, it has not been applied to study the probable results of the residents in the remote areas, specifically in one of the municipalities in the province of Cotabato, as public decision-makers are not better informed and can better meet community needs as the political perspectives of this generation evolve. Nevertheless, if this theory is addressed accurately and applied, it can help decision-makers encompass various stakeholders' concerns, participation, and local knowledge in conceptualizing resilience and communicating land use policies. This study, therefore, seeks to explore the spectrum of community engagement encountered by local individuals in the community, with a particular focus on the program administered by the local government within their scope. As the local community delves into these experiences, the researchers aim to reveal how the local community is influenced and affected as they invest in the local government programs that they are participating in.

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Research Questions

The main goal of this study is to narrate the residents' experiences in the local community and how the spectrum of their engagement in local government units influences them based on the programs and policies implemented in one of the municipalities in the province of North Cotabato. Specifically, the study sought to answer the following:

1. What themes emerged from the interviews gathered about the local community's engagement with the programs and policies implemented by the local government unit?
2. What benefits can be apparent from the community's involvement in government programs?
3. What are the main challenges that delay the effectiveness of community participation in governance?
4. How does community participation advance social cohesion and development?

Limitations of the Study

While this research offers valuable insights into community engagement in North Cotabato, several limitations warrant consideration. First, the sample size of ten participants, though adequate for achieving data saturation in a qualitative study, may not fully represent the diverse experiences and perspectives within the broader population. This limits the extent to which findings can be generalized to other communities. Second, the study's regional focus on North Cotabato, while providing in-depth local context, restricts the transferability of results to areas with different socio-economic,

political, or cultural landscapes. The unique dynamics of this region may not be reflective of other communities, even within the Philippines. Finally, despite the researchers' use of bracketing techniques to minimize bias, the potential for interviewer influence on participant responses remains a concern. The researchers' interpretations and interactions during the interviews could have inadvertently shaped the narratives shared, thereby affecting the overall findings. These factors should be carefully considered when interpreting and applying the results of this study.

Theoretical Lens

Community involvement in government programs ensures that these initiatives genuinely reflect and address the population's needs. The *Theory of Participatory Governance* emphasizes that when government leaders actively engage with citizens through various methods—like community meetings or public forums—they validate their authority and enhance their legitimacy. This engagement allows community members to exercise their rights to voice opinions and influence decisions that affect their lives (Chhotray & Stoker, 2009). When prioritizing transparency, accountability, and

inclusiveness fosters an atmosphere of trust where citizens feel empowered and more willing to participate. Ultimately, this involvement leads to more effective and relevant programs that resonate with the community's aspirations. Nevertheless, some challenges can impede the effectiveness of community participation.

Max Weber's Theory of Bureaucracy highlights the need for clear roles and responsibilities within government structures, which can help streamline citizens' participation in local governance. However, if these bureaucratic

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systems are inflexible or overly complex, they can frustrate community members trying to make their voices heard. This rigidity may result in delays and obstacles that discourage participation. Suppose citizens perceive that their input is not valued or integrated into decision-making. In that case, they may withdraw, undermining the potential for impactful community programs and widening the gap between the government and the populace.

Furthermore, community participation is essential for fostering social cohesion and development. According to *Maslow's Needs Theory*, when individuals' basic needs, such as

safety, belonging, and esteem, are met, they are more likely to engage actively in their communities (James, 2019). When residents feel valued and secure, they are inclined to contribute to joint efforts that enhance communal life. This active participation nurtures supportive relationships among community members, creating a sense of belonging that strengthens the social fabric. By looking at how these theories align with the study's objectives, we can better understand the significant benefits of community involvement, recognize the challenges that must be addressed, and promote a more cohesive and resilient society.

Research Design

The researchers utilized qualitative research, specifically a Narrative design, to gather stories based on the unique experiences of the local citizens (Bach *et al.*, 2018) in one of the municipalities in the province of North Cotabato. As the researchers gathered and collected the data, the participants were very

active in sharing their stories, which helped them understand the roles and participation of the local citizens from various areas and how it affected their past, present, and future experiences. The researchers recognized meanings, themes, and patterns based on the interviews.

Participants of the Study

In this research, the interview protocol was carefully crafted to gather in-depth and meaningful insights from participants. A sample size of ten individuals was chosen, aligning with standard practices in qualitative research, especially when it comes to achieving data saturation. This concept refers to the point where no new information or themes emerge from the interviews, ensuring the data collected is comprehensive and accurately reflects the participants' experiences (Iddrisu *et al.*, 2020).

Participants were selected based on specific criteria to ensure they shared relevant experiences. All individuals had to be long-term residents of the local community, specifically those who had lived there for at least five years. This requirement was important because it allowed them to witness and engage with the

various government programs and policies over time. Participants included a diverse mix of local citizens with strong political affiliations and those without, providing a well-rounded perspective on community issues. This variety enhances the richness of the data, as it captures different viewpoints and experiences related to local governance and community engagement.

Researchers employed bracketing during the interviews to maintain the integrity of the information. This means they consciously set aside their biases, assumptions, and preconceptions to allow participants to speak freely about their experiences (Habibullah *et al.*, 2023). This approach is crucial in qualitative research as it helps ensure that the participants' voices are heard authentically without being influenced by the researchers' opinions.

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Additionally, individuals who had lived in the community for less than five years were not included in the study to avoid perspectives that might lack the necessary depth to understand the changes and progress—or lack thereof—within local programs and policies. Focusing on long-standing residents, the study aims to

capture comprehensive insights reflecting a deep understanding of community interactions with government initiatives over time. This methodical approach can lead to valuable findings that may inform future practices and improvements in community governance.

Study Locale

This study was conducted in various local and remote communities in North Cotabato, officially known as the Province of Cotabato. It is one of the provinces in the SOCCSKSARGEN region of Mindanao, Philippines, renowned for its agricultural

richness, natural beauty, and cultural diversity. The municipalities in these areas benefit from their unique artistic perspectives, enabling them to participate in their local communities in distinctive ways.

Data Analysis

The study employed a narrative analysis, guided by Saldaña's method, to explore the experiences and perspectives of participants regarding community engagement in North Cotabato. This approach involved a meticulous examination of individual stories to identify recurring themes, patterns, and significant excerpts, thereby deepening how participants perceived and made sense of their involvement in local government programs (Josselson & Hammack, 2021). The analysis focused on each narrative's structure, content, and context, allowing for a nuanced interpretation of participants' engagement with local policies and programs.

subjective bias and strengthen the credibility of the findings. This should be acknowledged as a limitation if inter-coder reliability was not formally assessed.

Several measures were implemented to enhance the rigor and validity of the coding process. While the original text does not explicitly mention inter-coder reliability, it is crucial to acknowledge its importance in qualitative research. Ideally, multiple researchers would independently code a subset of the narratives, and their coding would be compared to ensure consistency and agreement. This process, known as inter-coder reliability, helps to minimize

To further ensure the credibility of the study, several steps were taken. Member checking, a technique where preliminary findings are shared with participants to confirm their accuracy and resonance, was likely employed to validate the researchers' interpretations. This process allows participants to provide feedback on whether the identified themes accurately reflect their experiences and perspectives. Additionally, peer debriefing, involving discussions with other researchers or experts in the field, may have been used to examine the analysis process and challenge potential biases. These discussions can provide alternative interpretations and strengthen the overall trustworthiness of the findings. By incorporating these measures, the study aimed to provide a credible and insightful account of community engagement in North Cotabato.

Results and Discussions

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This segment presents the study's outcome and discussion, which were discussed in light of the narrative analysis results. The responses to the

selected local community residents' stories based on their community engagement spectrum were then presented.

Benefits of Local Community Involvement in Government Programs

The Philippine government's Department of Interior and Local Government assists citizens (Diaz *et al.*, 2023). This aid relies on sustainable funding and effective public education about the constitution. Diokno-Sikat *et al.* (2022) note that local government program participation enhances community progress. Residents benefit from input on activities managed by local leaders. Trappett (2019) states that community involvement fosters understanding of local needs, enabling the design of transformative projects. In rural areas, participation significantly improves public services and tailored solutions for community needs. Table 1 highlights the benefits for citizens involved in

local government programs led by regional leaders (Lance *et al.*, 2023). Leaders can gain public favor by discussing local program benefits and addressing priorities directly. This transparency encourages resident participation in planning. Today's desire for assurance reflects Maslow's Needs Theory, where basic needs drive engagement. The government shows commitment to addressing community feedback on healthcare, education, and infrastructure (Kamuf & Weck, 2022). When residents feel valued, their satisfaction rises. Overall, local communities support leaders, recognizing ongoing improvements that meet their need

Table 1. Benefits of Local Community Involvement in Government Programs

Themes	Core Ideas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> People's Necessity Access to Knowledge and Information Unity in Diversity through Collective Action Communication Availability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Active participation in local government programs is essential for small communities to exercise their rights and foster growth. Awareness through meetings and community-based programs is necessary to educate and empower everyone in the community. Individuals effectively worked together through "bayanihan," and consensus was achieved when local residents shared common goals. Residents should be kept informed about upcoming programs, deadlines, benefits, and community development projects through open communication channels to enhance their awareness and participation.

People's Necessity Access to Knowledge and Information

Research shows that knowledge enhances interpersonal skills and community engagement. Tejedo-Romero *et al.* (2022) emphasize the need for trust between local entities and citizens for effective local governance. This study highlights that informed citizens engage more in decision-making. Additionally, competence and belonging significantly affect residents' information sharing. Participants showed commitment to collective goals, indicating that feeling capable and connected boosts participation. This finding shifts the literature focus from individual motivation to

psychological factors as key engagement drivers. Unlike previous views emphasizing individual interest, this study posits that competence and social belonging are crucial. These insights suggest that local governments should increase information access and create environments that strengthen community identity. Such strategies can enhance governance by empowering residents and increasing participation. Participant responses emphasized this dual approach.

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The first participant stated that:

“Kung mag-participate mi, maka-benepisyo gyud mi sa mga aktibidad ug programa nga ipahimutang sa LGU. Aduna mi mga bag-o na impormasyon na mahibal-an uban sa mga polisia na ma mugna sa among komunidad aron nasad dili mi magkagubot sa pagkasinabot sa usag-usa.” – which means that through participating in government activities or programs can benefit us by providing new information about the policies implemented in our community. It is also helpful to us by uniting us and lessening the arising arguments.

Also, the third participant asserts that:

“Importante siya kay sa pag attend nimo anang mga kalihukan sa barangay makakuha kag daghang kaalam. Aron di pud malibog kung unsa ang buhaton pag-abot sa panahon kay ug wala mi makabalo unsa among buhaton di pud mi basta-basta mag-apil-apil.” – This means that it is important for them to attend in any program delivered by the barangay to acquire various knowledge and information. It will reduce disorientation or being confused so that they will know what to do and when to participate.

Knowledge is needed to secure government benefits and enhance practical experience. Local governments must demonstrate transparency in their management, whether online or offline (Baltz, 2023). If residents are well-informed about the government’s programs, they are more likely to support them, fostering better relationships and community progress.

Unity in Diversity through Collective Action

A community comprises individuals sharing ideas and skills for a common goal, nurturing collaboration. This collective effort boosts productivity and provides a sense of purpose. Effective leaders encourage participation, allowing members to contribute ideas and enhancing decision-making. Collaborative

brainstorming simplifies problem-solving, ensures timely task completion, and reduces conflicts (Adham, 2023). Participants indicated that everyone's involvement leads to positive collaboration, fostering community growth through consensus. Here are their statements:

The fourth and fifth participant asserts that:

“Inig mag sige mi ug tambong inubanan sa among klarong pagsabot ganahan gyud kayo mi mag apil sa mga programa na gina hatag sa local nga gobyerno. Maayo gyud ang paglihok sa mga katawhan diri sa barangay kay dili lang man gyud na para sa isa lang ka tawo, para pug gyud na sa amoang tanan.” – The participant expressed a strong willingness to engage in programs offered by the local government, provided they receive clear guidance and understanding. They also emphasized their commitment to these

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initiatives, believing that their efforts contribute not just to individual progress, but to the betterment of the entire community as well.

Adlit and Martinez (2023) highlight that Bayanihan in the Philippines represents communal unity, cooperation, and mutual support. This research shows that Bayanihan encourages residents to collaborate for common goals, emphasizing teamwork in public engagement. Participation in local meetings and projects reflects this cultural value and the importance of community involvement in governance. The findings build on existing studies, showing that Bayanihan motivates citizens during crises and promotes proactive

governance participation. Unlike previous studies focusing solely on political aspects, this research reveals that mutual support drives engagement in community projects. It also challenges the notion that community participation merely reacts to events, showing that Bayanihan cultivates regular governance engagement. Policymakers and local leaders should adopt this cultural framework to boost community involvement, fostering cooperation and support for more effective, sustainable outcomes.

The seventh participant also believes that:

“Ug tarong gyud permi ang pag mando sa local nga gobyerno diria sa among lugar noh, makapasalig gyud sila na permi gyud mag paluyo ang mga katawhan. Dugang pud na sa among pagsalig kanila kay sila man pud ang nasayod sa mga program ana gikinahanglan sa among barangay. Malipay pud gyud mi ana kay ug maka benepisyo mi ganahan nasad mi mag sige ug balik-balik ug tambong.” – The participant expressed that if the local government consistently addresses the community's needs accurately, it would strengthen their trust in the people involved. Local leaders play a significant role in recognizing the needs of the community so they can effectively respond to our concerns.

Community efforts are crucial for strengthening bonds, fostering trust, and creating a support network vital for individual well-being. This study highlights how community leaders can inspire residents to adopt their vision. By managing diverse perspectives, leaders can encourage productive exchanges of ideas and expertise, enhancing collaboration (Maseleno *et al.*, 2018; Huda *et al.*, 2019). These findings

build on previous research by demonstrating that effective collaboration arises from shared goals and diverse voices. While earlier studies stress unity, this research underscores the importance of inclusivity for innovative solutions, challenging the idea that similar perspectives are preferable. It shows that diversity can foster dynamic community engagement.

Furthermore, a well-managed exchange of ideas strengthens community ties and boosts local initiatives. By valuing participation and diverse viewpoints, leaders can foster a culture of

engagement that enhances satisfaction and resilience. These findings advocate for strategies prioritizing inclusivity and open dialogue ineffective governance.

Challenges that Delay the Effectiveness of Community Participation.

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Local government leaders must acknowledge challenges in community participation to create effective improvement strategies. Meaningful engagement requires proper management, leadership, and community member involvement. Table 2 outlines issues hindering effective community involvement. Trappet (2022) categorizes these challenges into three main obstacles: (1) low participation rates due to lack of confidence, insufficient time, and unappealing engagement methods; (2) limited resources that affect sustainable initiatives; (3) disorganized processes resulting in inefficient feedback management. These findings build on prior research emphasizing inclusivity in engagement. As Garcia et al. (2022) noted, genuine participation goes beyond citizenship

status, recognizing that local policies impact all community members. This study supports the idea that broad engagement fosters diverse perspectives and empowers residents to shape their community's future. However, it also identifies challenges such as managing diverse feedback and inadequate resources for initiatives. Previous research highlights the need for structured engagement frameworks, but current findings indicate that overcoming fundamental barriers is essential. Local governments must enhance organizational clarity and resource allocation to support effective and inclusive engagement. These insights stress the necessity of proactivity in addressing constraints, reinforcing a unified community for sustainable governance.

Table 2. Challenges that Delay the Effectiveness of Community Participation

Themes	Core Ideas
▪ Lack of Proper Communication	▪ Ineffective communication and misinformation hinder community awareness and participation.
▪ Time Constraints and Financial Stability	▪ Work commitments and financial struggles limit time available for community involvement.
▪ Lack of Interest and Political Partisanship	▪ Political divisions and personal disinterest discourage active engagement in community programs.

Lack of Proper Communication

Community progress relies on member welfare, making communication crucial for development. Aruma's (2018) study highlights that effective communication boosts interaction aids adaptation, and enhances living conditions. It shows that communication is essential for community development, not just an addition. Unlike previous literature on engagement, this study demonstrates that increased communication increases participation in development programs. It challenges the view that participation stems from well-designed

programs, suggesting that fostering open communication is equally, if not more, crucial. This focus aligns with calls for governments to prioritize inclusivity and transparency. Effective communication ensures that all voices are heard in complex challenges, urging local leaders to adopt strategies that enhance communication for better community cohesion and participation. This can help mobilize resources and strengths, leading to more successful and sustainable outcomes.

Narratives asserted by the fifth and sixth participants:

“Mas epektibo man gyud kung naa’y tama nga pagpahinumdom o pag kumyunikar sa mga tawo aron ug naa’y mga hisgutanan mutambong gyud mi. Mao pud nang dili mi ganahan mutambong sa mga buluhaton kay dili mi ma hatagan ug impormasyon ug tarong.

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Siguro kung tarong ug tama lang ang paghatag sa amoa sa mga anunsyo, ganahan mi mutungha sa mga buluhaton sa barangay kay amoa man sab nang responsibilidad.” – The participants expressed with deep emotions that, if they are just informed on time, they will be attentive and responsive in all the activities that the local barangay or community would like them to be with because it is still their responsibility to attend in this kind of events.

Participants highlighted a key barrier to community participation: local government leaders' failure to effectively share information. Miscommunications have left community members unaware of important events, emphasizing the necessity of clear information for active engagement. This aligns with previous studies that stress the role of effective communication in public participation. While past literature points to the importance of information dissemination, this research reveals that poor communication drives disengagement, severing local government initiatives from the

community and calling for strategic communication. The Theory of Bureaucracy underscores the need for clearly defined roles, and the Philippine Constitution affirms citizens' right to access public information, reinforcing leaders' duty to ensure accurate communication. By prioritizing timely messaging, local government can enhance community involvement. This research advocates for reevaluating communication strategies to boost community engagement, paving the way for more inclusive governance practices.

Time Constraints and Financial Stability

In the Philippine provinces, local communities often face challenges hindering effective engagement. Limited resources, primarily financial and time constraints, impact local organizations' ability to fund events and foster civic participation. According to Ordinario and Velasco (2023), time limitations are a primary barrier to involvement in decision-making, as residents struggle to participate amid daily life pressures. This study reinforces previous findings that financial and temporal resources hinder community engagement, clarifying how

these limitations lower participation rates. It also challenges the notion that raising awareness will enhance civic involvement, emphasizing the need for local leaders to address resource constraints. Efforts to boost community engagement may falter without adequate funding and consideration of residents' time. Thus, local leaders must implement strategies like securing funding and offering flexible participation opportunities to enhance inclusivity and community resilience.

Narratives asserted by the sixth, seventh, and eighth participants:

Sixth participant:

“Halos kami gyud sa among panimalay kay busy gyud mi unya maglisod man gani mi ug atubang sa uban buluhaton namo kana pa kaha mag apil mi sa mga buluhaton sa purok or barangay. Ang among i-tambong amoa nalang na i-trabaho aron naa mi makaon sa isa ka adlaw.” – We are all busy at home working and settling our daily needs

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and we have inadequate time to attend to any event that are conducted by our local government.

Seventh participant:

“Dili lang pud gud enough among budget para mag apil-apil pa sa mga aktibidad sa barangay bisan sa purok kay dili gyud sakto sa among paningahanglan ang tanan namo na gastuhon imbes i-pamasahe namo amoa nalang na i-budget sa among pangkaon.” – We have inadequate budget to sustain or even just to attend in any form of activity that will be conducted by the local government instead of paying for fare just to attend, we will just save it for our food for a day.

Eighth participant:

“Mao sab lagi akong maingon parehas sa ilang gipang-ingon kulang sab mi sa kwarta ug sa oras para among tambungan tanan aktibidad sa barangay bisan pa sa purok pero ug kanang naay ayuda adtuon gyud namo na.” – The same with their responses, we do not have enough money to attend in any activity that the local government opt to organize but if it is in any form of assistance, we are ready to attend.

Participants expressed concerns about economic hardship and time constraints as barriers to community participation. Many prioritize work and financial struggles over local activities, limiting civic involvement. This aligns with Maslow's theory, indicating that basic needs precede survival, making community engagement secondary. These findings underscore the link between economic welfare and civic engagement. While previous studies noted that financial insecurity inhibits participation, this research reveals how daily survival competes with engagement opportunities, highlighting the need for local administrators to consider residents' socio-economic contexts in their initiatives.

Additionally, the study challenges the assumption that awareness or motivation alone drives participation, suggesting that addressing residents' economic realities is influential for effective engagement. Public administrators should prioritize strategies to alleviate financial stress and offer flexible participation options that accommodate time constraints. In summary, local governments must implement policies that address financial challenges and time limitations, fostering an environment for meaningful contributions from all community members. This approach can enhance civic engagement and promote a more inclusive and resilient community.

Lack of Interest and Political Partisanship

Political participation includes various activities such as voting, protesting, and engaging with candidates online (Ruess, 2023). However, a noticeable reluctance to express partisan support

exists, which can be attributed to contemporary societal tensions that foster a sense of chaos (Lublin, 2021). In local communities in the province of Cotabato, many residents feel that

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their voices and concerns are frequently ignored, leading to a perception that only individuals with social privilege have their needs addressed. Cornell (2024) highlights that this political environment breeds distrust towards local government initiatives, causing individuals to withdraw from participating in efforts meant to meet community needs. These findings extend

previous research by underscoring how social inequality and political tension intersect to hinder civic engagement. They challenge the notion that awareness and information alone can drive participation, indicating that addressing feelings of disenfranchisement and fostering a sense of inclusivity are essential for enhancing community involvement in governance.

The third, fourth, and fifth participants stated the following:

Third participant:

“Gusto unta mi mutambong pero usahay gubot naman sila kay di na magkasinabot kay di man magpakita ug suporta ang matag-usa” – As much as we want to attend in the events or meetings in our community, sometimes they tend to execute tension because they have different perspective that would not fit to both ends or parties.

Fourth participant:

“Unta magsinabtanay lang kay kinahanglan gyud na sa amoang pagpatigayon sa mga aktibidad ug mga polisiya na i-implementare sa local na barangay.” – I am hoping that each one of them would understand one another if what they want, especially in terms of putting up activities and policies intended for the local barangay.

Fifth participant:

“Makafeel pud mi oy na naay uban na dili uyon ug wala gyud pagsuporta sa mga lider namo kay usahay di napud mi makabalo kung tama paba ilang gusto ipatigayon na mga polisiya sa among barangay, unta naa lang gyud saktong paghisgut sa tanang buluhaton sa among barangay.” - We feel that there is a lack of support for our leader regarding the activities, projects, and policies they wish to implement in our local barangay. We are hoping for proper execution and the information we need.

Participants lack interest in community engagement due to political divides and personal apathy. Many view partisanship as a barrier, suggesting that political alignment often reduces their willingness to join community programs. This highlights the impact of political influences and personal attitudes on civic participation.

These findings challenge the notion that community initiatives can draw broad interest regardless of the political environment, indicating that encouraging dialogue and reducing tensions may enhance community engagement and encourage inclusivity.

Community Participation Advances Social Cohesion and Development.

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Leinenger *et al.* (2021) argue that social cohesion is crucial as communities develop, highlighting shared values' role in reducing wealth inequalities. The study shows that community participation enhances social cohesion, raising residents' awareness of growth opportunities and challenges. Table 3 illustrates that engagement in Cotabato boosts social

cohesion and development, with local leaders improving public understanding and decision-making. These findings challenge the belief that community engagement is just procedural, demonstrating that meaningful involvement fosters trust and support for elected initiatives, essential for uniting communities against common challenges.

Table 3. *Community Participation Advances Social Cohesion and Development*

Themes	Core Ideas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effective and Responsible Leadership in Community Development with Stakeholders Involvement Adherence to the Rule of Law and Fair Governance Transparency, Accountability, and Community Inclusiveness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leaders who prioritize community well-being actively engage with stakeholders, providing support during emergencies and creating programs that encourage growth, unity, and resilience. Leadership requires following laws to maintain trust and order, while ensuring fairness in aid distribution, free from political bias. Good governance through clear financial management, responsible program execution, and equal access to services for all, regardless of status.

Effective and Responsible Leadership in Community Development

The primary goal of community improvement is to foster collaboration, empower individuals, and encourage shared responsibility among those believing in collective success (Lansing *et al.*, 2023). In Cotabato, Philippines, community leaders aim to address common concerns. Participants observed that during crises like earthquakes and COVID-19, effective leadership manifested through clear communication, collaboration, and awareness of local needs. This correlates with Thakur *et al.* (2019), who state that leadership styles should adapt to context and individuals. Cotabato's findings stress situational leadership's vital role in community resilience and development. While

past studies recognized the importance of effective leadership, this research shows that leaders focusing on listening, support, and relationships foster community advancements. However, it also uncovers a troubling trend of politicization that undermines these efforts, suggesting that external political pressures may hinder effective leadership. Lisao *et al.* (2024) further affirm that projects incorporating feedback from diverse stakeholders—such as government, NGOs, and community members—are likelier to succeed, highlighting that inclusivity is essential for meaningful change in community development.

The eighth, ninth, and tenth participants asserted:

Eighth participant:

“Sa ngalan nga kusog mutabang ang among lider sa mga problema nga among nabatunan atong mga panahon sa linog ug pandemia, makaingon gyud mi nga lahi ra gyud sila mag mugna ug kaayuhan para namo.” – As long as they were able to assist us during our darkest and lowest moments when the earthquake and pandemic strikes us, they have made changes on our community.

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Ninth participant:

“Gikan pa sa katong mga nahitabo sa linog ug pandemya, didtoa gyud namo nasinati ang pag-pangga sa amoa sa among mga lider kay dili basta-basta ilang mga trabaho bisan ug pareho lang mi tanan ug mga naagian, naa gihapon sila aron mutabang kanamo.” – Since the earthquake and the pandemic, we have witnessed the love and care that our leader has shown. It is never easy to manage a large community with diverse jobs, but during those challenging times, we all felt equal, and they were always there for us.

Tenth participant:

“Sa pagstorya ug pagpasabot pa lang namo ganahan kayo mi maminaw sa tanan paghisgutan sa amoa sa among lider, isa gyud na sa among gika biliban niya. Bisin pa hangtod sa pagtabang namo ug naay mga problema maplastar gyud sa kanunay.” – The way our leader explains situations at events and meetings shows that we can be proud of him, as he organizes everything efficiently.

Participants' responses emphasize the role of local officials in effectively addressing community concerns. They value these leaders for their critical role during crises like the 2019 earthquake and the COVID-19 pandemic, maintaining a presence through meaningful initiatives. Participants view local officials as responsive, transparent, and accountable, bolstering community trust in governance. These findings align with studies underscoring the importance of leadership in promoting community resilience. Previous research highlights accountability and transparency in

public officials as vital for good governance. This study further illustrates the impact of leadership in crises, showing that proactive engagement boosts public trust and participation. Positive perceptions of local leaders challenge the notion that bureaucracy causes disconnects between officials and constituents, indicating that dedicated leadership can bridge these gaps and improve community welfare. Overall, insights stress the need for active, empathetic leadership in managing crises and fostering community development.

Adherence to the Rule of Law and Fair Governance

Local governance in the Philippines shows a strong commitment to good governance, as Amil (2024) highlighted, with leaders pursuing sustainable community development. When facing challenges like experience and knowledge gaps, these leaders seek training and workshops to improve their understanding of governance and ethical standards. This proactive approach emphasizes continuous learning and expert collaboration to bridge these gaps. The findings expand existing literature by showcasing local leaders' proactive measures to enhance

governance, which is often overlooked in discussions on local capabilities. While previous studies emphasized accountability and transparency, this research shows that local officials actively promote these principles. Establishing feedback mechanisms and monitoring systems reflects a growing recognition of integrity and accountability in decision-making. Ultimately, this demonstrates the potential of local governance in the Philippines to serve as a model for other regions, highlighting how empowered leaders can

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significantly enhance community development through knowledge and ethical engagement.

The first participant narratively asserted the following:

“Makita sab namo kabalo sab sila isip usa ka lider sa among localidad, kabalo sab sila magpatigayon ug mga programa labi na sa mga responsibilidad nil ana mu responde sa mga kalamidad unya sila mismo among nabatunan na sila ang una mutuman sa mga polisiya nga gina mando sa taas na gobyerno.” – Our local leaders manage activities effectively, respond consistently to disasters, and comply with rules and policies mandated by higher government authorities.

This theme reflects how local officials must follow established procedures, rules, and policies. The community values leaders who observe the rule of law in their actions, especially in disaster response, the distribution of assistance, and ensuring that citizens' rights are respected.

The third participant has asserted that:

“Bisan ug magpakita sila ug kamaayo unya naa man pud usahay na dili sila patas kay usahay pud ang mga tawo ra ang sige ug tuman sa mga balaod. Naa pud gani panahon ug kinsa lang to ang duol sa luwag mao rato ang hatagan ug hinabang.” – Even though they often present themselves well to the local residents, they sometimes fail to apply the rules fairly. There are instances where only those who are close to them receive help.

The theme also touches upon concerns about fairness and inclusivity, with some respondents highlighting that while most officials follow the rules, there are instances where favoritism might still be present in resource distribution.

Transparency, Accountability, and Community Inclusiveness

In recent years, accountability, transparency, participation, and inclusion have become vital to international development policies (Hadi *et al.*, 2023). In the Philippines, these resonate with Filipino leadership values at the community level (Pasamonte, 2024). Participants expressed strong views on their effective implementation, stating that active embrace fosters community cohesion and admiration for leaders. These findings build on previous research by showing how local governance mirrors global development trends while remaining culturally

relevant. Earlier studies emphasized the principles' role in enhancing governance; this research illustrates that their integration into Filipino leadership strengthens community ties and public engagement. Moreover, the focus on harmonious relations refutes the idea that compliance is merely procedural, presenting accountability and transparency as essential for improving governance and enhancing the community's social fabric, resulting in a more resilient and engaged citizenry.

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The ninth and tenth asserted that:

Ninth participant:

“Naa’y mga panahon nga ganahan gyud mi magpakita sa mga ipatigayon na mga programa labi na ug ipakita nila sa amoa kung asa naabot ang mga budget og ang mga benepisyo kay nahatag ba gyud sa matag-usa na lumulupyo sa among barangay.” – There are times when we really want to see the programs being implemented, especially when they show us where the budget has gone and if the benefits were truly given to each resident in our barangay.

Tenth participant:

“Gipakita lang gyud sa among mga lider na maayo gyud sila magplastar sa tanan namo nga kinahanglan mahibaloan. Labi na g’yud sa mga PWD (person with disabilities) o sa mga IP (Indigenous People) wala gyud nila gipakita naka-lamang sila namo. Naa gyud pag-sinabtanay na among na sinatian.” - Our leaders really showed that they are good at organizing everything we need to know. Especially for the PWDs (persons with disabilities) or the IPs (Indigenous People), they never made us feel that they were better than us. There was truly an understanding in what we experienced.

Residents appreciate the emphasis on transparency and accountability in local governance and favor officials who openly communicate budget and project allocations. This theme highlights how well-informed citizens feel valued and engaged in governance. Moreover, the commitment to inclusivity in local government initiatives is crucial, ensuring that diverse perspectives are recognized and leveraged to enhance community well-being (Davies, 2020). Participants noted that an inclusive environment allows individuals to feel a sense of belonging, contributing meaningfully without needing conformity. Lopez-Rogina

(2024) further reinforces this view, stating that inclusivity enables individuals, especially marginalized groups, to realize their potential and actively participate in society. These findings extend previous studies by illustrating the critical role of inclusivity as a fundamental aspect of good governance. While existing literature has acknowledged the importance of transparency and accountability, this research highlights that authentic engagement goes beyond mere communication; it requires fostering an environment where every individual’s contributions are valued.

Furthermore, by explicitly addressing marginalized groups, this study challenges the notion that inclusivity is a secondary concern. Instead, it underscores the idea that good governance is intricately linked to the ability of local leaders to create spaces where all

community members, regardless of their background, can thrive and participate fully in community life. This holistic approach to governance strengthens community bonds and enhances overall societal resilience.

Conclusion

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The narrative analysis of residents' experiences in North Cotabato highlights the crucial role of community engagement in implementing local government unit policies and programs effectively. Recognizing participation within a democratic framework yields several benefits, including enhanced access to knowledge and information, improved collaboration and cooperation, and better communication among societal sectors. These elements empower grassroots individuals to voice their insights and opinions regarding local governance. However, significant challenges such as inadequate communication, time constraints, financial instability, and political disinterest impede effective community participation. These obstacles lower participation levels and hinder

the community's potential for growth and development. Despite these difficulties, community engagement remains essential for advancing social cohesion and development. Effective leadership, commitment to the rule of law, and principles of transparency and accountability provide a strong foundation for fostering an inclusive community and building trust in local government. Addressing the identified challenges while promoting sound governance principles can enhance public understanding, strengthen relationships, and improve decision-making processes. Such efforts are key to creating an engaged and empowered community, leading to more responsive and effective governance.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of this study, the researchers recommend the following to administer success in further studies that will be related to the following:

1. The local government may enhance the communication system with the community by implementing an appropriate channel that emphasizes greater reach and dissemination;
2. Stakeholders may encourage active dialogue among community members, promoting the sharing of diverse

perspectives, even those that may be unpopular. Residents may engage with local government processes, recognizing that their contributions can significantly influence the effectiveness of programs and policies that ultimately benefit the wider public.

3. The sectoral leaders and the barangay may encourage the residents to participate by informing them of the engagement process's essence towards their community or a reward system.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study highlights important aspects of road safety perceptions but has several limitations that offer opportunities for further exploration. Although it offers a broad overview, the descriptive quantitative technique does not go further into the underlying reasons influencing these attitudes. Furthermore, the study's sample, which was restricted to Davao City college students, might not accurately reflect the viewpoints of other groups, such those from

rural areas, a range of age groups, or different socioeconomic backgrounds. The results may be impacted by potential biases such recall bias or social desirability bias, which are introduced by the use of self-reported data.

To address these limitations, future studies should use mixed-methods approaches that combine quantitative surveys with qualitative techniques like focus groups and interviews in

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order to overcome these limitations and build on the findings of the study. This method would enable a more thorough investigation of the behavioral, environmental, and cultural factors influencing how people perceive road safety. Expanding the research sample to road safety issues might be better understood if the research sample was expanded to include people from a wider range of demographics, such as rural locations and various socioeconomic

backgrounds. Additionally, investigating the long-term impacts of road safety initiatives and incorporating cutting-edge technologies to promote safer driving practices will improve the findings' application and relevance. In addition to helping to inform more effective, evidence-based programs and policies, conducting longitudinal studies to track changes in attitudes and behaviors over time can also help make roads safer for everyone.

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