

**TRANSFORMATION TOWARDS GENDER-
RESPONSIVE GOVERNANCE:
The Case of Sasmuan, Pampanga**

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Revisiting Sasmuan

The town of Sasmuan lies on the southern portion of the province of Pampanga. It has a total land area of 9,175 hectares consisting of twelve barangays and three sitios with a total population of 23,359.

Sasmuan has its hispanized origin from the word “Sasmuan” which tradition holds out to mean “Tabnuan”, a Pampango word which means meeting place. The etymological importance of the name “Sasmoan” is that it is in this place where a band of patriotic Pampangos from nearby towns used to assemble and plan attacks against Chinese and Spanish insurgents. Across the years, the name “Sasmuan” was changed to “Sesmoan”, and centuries later upon the arrival of the American colonizers it was renamed as “Sexmoan”. The town’s name became a source of embarrassment to the residents because of its sexual connotation. In 1991, through Republic Act 4160, Sexmoan was reverted to its original name, Sasmuan (Provincial Planning and Development Office:259).

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Sasmuan used to be surrounded by rich natural resources like swamps, rivers, creeks and other water tributaries and a wide coastline of more than four kilometers along Manila Bay. Households derived their income from fishing. The marshlands and swamps are abundant with trees locally known as *bakawan* (mangrove), *culasi*, *palapat*, *buta-buta*, etc. marine plant species like *sasa* (nipa palm), *lagulu*, *dalawari*, and reeds like *balangot*, *tikiw*, *apulid*, *tambo* and others. These serve as natural habitats for various local birds like *pipit*, *denas*, *tarat*, etc., and sanctuaries for migratory birds like wild ducks, herons and others. However, a very large portion of these forest resources had been indiscriminately converted into fishponds causing the banishment and possible extinction of a big number of the local fauna and flora. Also, the present condition of these resources is so degraded that subsistence fisherfolk no longer fully rely on these for livelihood as most of the fishing grounds are not only silted but also polluted. Worst, a substantial portion of these had been encroached upon by unscrupulous fishpond owners (Garcia: 3).

Over the last decades, floods have become more frequent in low-lying areas of Pampanga especially in Sasmuan. The indiscriminate dumping of garbage and domestic wastes into the river system and the siltation by debris from the 1991 Mt. Pinatubo eruption are commonly blamed for the worsening flood in Sasmuan and other neighboring towns. During the rainy season, most of the barangays in Sasmuan are submerged in flood water.

In the past, the political participation of women in Sasmuan was very limited. In fact, the first woman mayor who is now the present local chief executive of the town was elected only in May 2001. The first female vice mayor was elected in 1980 under the Marcos regime. The second female vice mayor is the present vice mayor of the municipality who is on her second term for the second highest position of the town. The recent

local election last year produced three women municipal councilors in the Sangguniang Bayan. At the barangay level, only one woman barangay captain chair has been elected.

The Organization

Like other local government units in the country, the 1991 Local Government Code gave the Municipal Government of Sasmuan, Pampanga greater powers to act as a political subdivision of the national government and as a corporate entity that represents the inhabitants of the municipality of Sasmuan. The Code has bestowed to the local government certain powers and functions that are needed to ensure an efficient and effective governance.

The present municipal government aspires for a municipality where its citizenry are united, empowered and enjoying a better quality of life. To attain this, the local government unit (LGU) seeks to provide an efficient and responsive delivery of basic services to its constituents to develop Sasmuan's natural resources and to undertake programs and services that uplift the quality of life of the less privileged, particularly the fisherfolk.

Structure and Financial Capacity

As a political unit, the municipal government serves the residents of twelve barangays. The municipal mayor heads its local executive branch and has direct supervision over ten departments or offices (e.g., Office of the Municipal Engineer, Office of the Treasurer). The local legislative body, otherwise known as the Sangguniang Bayan, is composed of the vice-mayor and eight councilors.

For Fiscal Year 2002, the municipal government has a total operating budget of P24 million. Around 79% of this amount comes from the internal revenue allotment (IRA), 8% from local

sources and 12% from national aid. Most of the LGUs' budget goes to personal services at 56% followed by the 20% community development fund and statutory obligations at 12%. Maintenance and other operating expenditures (MOOE) accounts for only 8% of the total budget.

The Project

A road less traveled

In August 2001, the GAD Access Program of Guaranteed Best Management and General Services (GBest) adopted a strategy to influence LGUs of the National Capital Region to mainstream gender by providing technical assistance through the creation of a gender equality focal point. Simultaneous with this strategy was the desire to bring the gender mainstreaming technology to one of the localities of the technical officers. The municipality of Sasmuan in Pampanga was chosen over the cities of San Pablo and General Santos due to its proximity and income classification as a fifth class municipality. (It became fourth class this year not because it met the requirements but merely because the fifth class categorization had been phased out).

The local elections held in 2001 produced a woman official in the Sangguniang Bayan. Only in her early twenties, this neophyte politician emerged as the no. 1 councilor. Like many other women elected officials, she comes from a political family, being a daughter of a late legislator. Mary Grace Laxa became the chairperson of the *Sangguniang Bayan* Committee on Women and Family Affairs. The meeting between Gbest and Councilor Grace was very timely. The councilor was deeply thinking about how to concretize her political platform of serving her women and children constituents as she promised during the campaign period. GBest was looking for a potential GAD sponsor. When

the idea of gender equality was broached to her, she believed in the project right away and persistently ensured its implementation. The commitment and sincerity of the two parties were evidently the factors that secured the project's implementation. Beyond this, both understood and ensured that the most crucial role in concretizing or breaking the project lay with the local chief executive. Getting the most sought after approval and support of the mayor was easier than tracking her down for an appointment.

Subsequently, the Sanggunian Committee on Women and Family Affairs, composed of Councilors Homer B. Sunga, Carmina S. Alejo, Ceferino M. Velasco and Luciano L. Gatdula, sponsored a resolution on gender equality after a series of committee hearings with the technical help of GBest. On September 24, 2001, the municipality by virtue of Resolution No. 30-S-2002, accepted its responsibility and accountability for securing gender equality for its constituents. This is a resolution implementing the gender equality program of the municipality as an affirmative action in response to the Philippine government's gender equality policy. Tasked to formulate a three-year gender equality program as embodied in the resolution, the *Sanggunian* Committee on Women and Family Affairs conducted consultations with the departments and the DILG. Thus, the municipality's GAD program entitled "Transformation Towards Gender-responsive Governance" began.

Part of this program has been given funding support by the Canadian International Development Agency's (CIDA) Gender Equality Fund I.

Creation of the Municipal Gender Equality Focal Point (MGEFP)

To substantiate the aforecited resolution, the Sanggunian enacted Ordinance No. 4-S-2022, creating and constituting the

Municipal Gender Equality Focal Point (MGEFP). Prior to its passage, a committee hearing was conducted and participated in by the heads or representatives of the departments, the DILG, the Department of Education, the Philippine National Police and several non-governmental organizations. These departments and organizations then were the proposed members of MGEFP who eventually became the legitimate members of the Focal Point through a legislative act. The MGEFP also convened a forum, Gender Equality in the Local Government: Insights Effecting Sustainability, on April 15, 2002.

*The Results to be Achieved:
Capacitating the Municipal Government,
Empowering its Women and Men Constituents*

The project was crafted to build and carry on a gender-responsive leadership and delivery of services and at the same time an empowered citizenry equally participating and enjoying their right to development processes of a transparent, accountable and gender-responsive municipal government. The table on the next page captures how the results of this project will be realized by the stakeholders.

Project Activities

Component I: Setting Favorable Conditions for the Implementation of the Gender Equality Program. This consists of activities that would lay the groundwork for gender equality and its acceptance and ownership by the municipal government as a fundamental value in the promotion of general welfare and effective governance. The activities lined up includes the following: preparation and passage of a resolution implementing the gender equality policy of the government in the municipality; a

Table 1. Determination of Key Results and Performance Measures

Narrative	Expected Results	Performance Measurement
<p>Project Purpose:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To build and strengthen the capacity of the municipal government to enforce the gender equality policy in its over-all operations 2. To empower and mobilize the women and men constituents at the barangay to pressure the municipal government to assert their right to gender-responsive leadership and increase their participation in decision-making processes 	<p>Outcomes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increased capacity of the municipal government to perform its responsibility in promoting gender equality in its political territory 2. Empowered women and men fully aware and enjoying their right to participate in the decision-making processes of the municipality 	<p>Performance Indicators:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. regular functions and 3 major PPAs of each department enhanced and being implemented 2. GAD plan formulated and implemented by each department and barangay 3. 3 gender-responsive policies, ordinances and resolutions enacted and enforced 4. 12 barangay created Gender Equality Focal Points made functional 5. support mechanism implemented enabling women to participate in the development and implementation of the GEC 6. gender balance in the executive and legislative branches of the municipal government 7. municipality and 12 barangay implementing the GAD budget policy 8. 100% of the GAD funds utilized 9. Gender Equality Resource Center (GERC) established and operational 10. 30 trainers organized, undergone training and functional
<p>Input</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 55 days of technical assistance (P279,010.50) - 18 training days (P367,958.00) - 12 barangay consultations (P71,020.00) - 5 public hearings (P18,750.00) - construction of GERC (P500,000.00) 	<p>Outputs</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Customized gender mainstreaming technology provided by gender consultant 2. Municipal officials and staff acquired and possessed skills in gender 3. Women and men constituents aware of and enjoy their rights in a gender-fair partnership in the family, workplace and community 4. Increased and improved participation of women and men in the local development processes 	<p>Performance Indicators</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Localized concepts, tools and workshops 2. Trained officials and staff in place 3. 12 barangays participated in the formulation and implementation of the Gender Equality Code 4. GERC constructed and made operational

series of consultative conferences on and enactment of an ordinance creating the Gender Equality Focal Point (GEFP); the preparation for the integration of gender equality in the budget policy statement for 2003; the conduct of a forum on “Gender Equality in the Local Government: Insights Effecting Sustainability”; an orientation on the gender equality program for the municipal stakeholders; a series of consultations for the integration of the gender equality program in the work and financial plan/budget proposals of the departments; and finally, the consultation, enactment and follow-up of resolutions: (1) requesting assistance from all Senators for the construction and operationalization of a Gender Equality Resource Center; a one-stop shop, not only in this region but in the entire Luzon island as well, showcasing programs, services and facilities that ensure women and men throughout their lifecycle equally contribute to and benefit from local and national development efforts; (2) requesting assistance from Sen. Luisa Ejercito for the operationalization of a Healing Sanctuary, a facility that will provide support services to both victims and offenders of gender-based violence whose aim is to break the cycle of violence and reintegrate both victims and perpetrators into the mainstream of society. Meetings of the Gender Equality Focal Point are also part of this component.

Component II: Building Institutional Capacity—These are activities involving the application of a customized gender mainstreaming technology and its institutionalization in the development agenda and practices of the municipal government. The desired transformation toward gender equality focuses on the individuals (organizational and client-based), the municipality and its institutions and systems. The tools and mechanisms for gender mainstreaming shall be tailor fitted within the context and needs of the stakeholders and integrated in the human

human resource development program of the municipality and its institutions. This is to ensure continuity and sustainability even if there is a frequent turnover of government officials and staff, and the constituency come and go. The major activities are:

Assessment of major policies, systems and programs, projects, activities (PPAs) and the integration of gender therein—This comprises reexamining the gender-responsiveness, gender-blindness or gender bias of the municipality; identifying the areas for gender-responsiveness; and mainstreaming gender in the policies, systems and PPAs not only of the departments of the municipal government but also in the service delivery of the Philippine National Police and the Department of Education.

Formulation of a Municipal Gender Equality Code and Implementing Rules and Regulations—This involves the identification by the stakeholders of the special and differential needs of women and men throughout their lifecycle and how to address these needs to attain gender equality, and monitoring and evaluation of the differential impact gender-responsive interventions at the barangay/community level, not only at the municipal level. This time, the municipal government will go down to the barangay constituents, especially the poor/disadvantaged women who have been deprived of gender consciousness training with men, government services and active participation in the development process. The grassroots will become empowered participants, not mere recipients/beneficiaries, charting and living their very own Gender Equality Code and Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR). The capacity of the grassroots women and men to plan and undertake their own Gender Equality Code is being built through training. It will also involve mobilizing and strengthening barangay-based

organizations of women which are assisted by the Department of Agriculture and Social Welfare and Development, which are to be the frontliners in this gender equality undertaking.

Development and Deepening of Gender Consciousness— At this point, building the strong foundation for the operation of the Gender Equality Resource Center is about to take place. This comprises a series of training geared to make gender equality a lifestyle for the entire municipality. It involves customizing the gender training, strengthening the pool of gender equality trainers, training by the pool of gender equality trainers, application of GAD training in the family, workplace and community, monitoring and evaluation, and mentoring services. Policies and legislation infusing the modules in the Human Resource Development Program of the municipality will be enforced and monitored at this stage.

Component III: Enforcement of the Municipal Gender Equality Code – This component is made up of activities for the full blast implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the local Gender Equality Code that focuses on the participation of grassroots women and men. It also includes the full operationalization of the Gender Equality Resource Center. Networking with other government and non-governmental organizations outside Sasmuan shall be established to spread and learn from each other's experiences.

Method of Implementation

As the head of the municipal government, the mayor shall supervise the implementation of the project. She will also chair the Municipal Gender Equality Focal Point (MGEFP) which was created through Ordinance No. 4, Series of 2002. The co-chairperson of the MGEFP, who is also the chairperson of the *Sanggunian* Committee on Women and Family Affairs, shall assist the mayor in the implementation of the project and ensure that the outputs are being achieved.

The MGEFP's mandate is the formulation, enforcement, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies, legislation, delivery of basic services, provision of facilities and programs, projects and activities (PPAs) geared toward the advocacy for and attainment of gender equality. It shall initiate and propose to the *Sanggunian* the enactment of legislative measures on gender equality. It is also the lead advocate of women's empowerment, and the catalyst and implementer of gender mainstreaming and authority on GAD.

Within the MGEFP is the Technical Working Group which is composed of the department heads. The group is so designed to ensure that all departments have accountability in the implementation of GAD initiatives within their individual powers, functions and PPAs. Each department head is expected to recommend strategies on how to mainstream and institutionalize the gender perspective within the office's mandate, to ensure the implementation of laws, policies and PPAs on GAD in his/her office and provide technical support to the department in the formulation of the GAD Plan. The department heads are responsible for ensuring that their staff acquire and possess the necessary knowledge and skills on GAD.

The Pool of Gender Trainers will assist the Focal Point in providing training and skills enhancement to local officials and personnel. The trainers will also conduct special orientation sessions for communities and civil society. A gender practitioner will be tapped to provide technical assistance in the implementation of the program.

The project involves the application of a customized gender mainstreaming technology, which will be institutionalized in the municipality of Sasmuan. Consequently, mainstreaming will permeate the municipality—the people, institutions, policy and legislative arena, mechanisms, processes and systems—to work towards its goal of gender equality.

Monitoring of project implementation will be done by the Executive Committee (ExeCom) with the assistance of the Pool of Gender Equality Trainers. The monitoring report shall be prepared monthly. The Technical Working Group (TWG) shall submit its activity report to the ExeCom a week after conducting an activity. Monitoring and reporting of project implementation shall always be on the agenda of the Gender Equality Focal Point (GEFP) meetings.

What has been done

Among the major activities of the second component, Building Institutional Capacity, the three-day Gender Sensitivity Training for the Municipal Gender Equality Focal Point (MGEFP) was completed.

The subproject, Gender Analysis of major PPA, policies and legislations, has three major activities, namely, (1) research in conducting rapid scanning of the PPAs, policies and legislations to be assessed; (2) gender analysis to be conducted by gender consultants; and (3) consultations with the department heads.

The initial stages of the research started August 2002. From a rapid scanning, it has been redesigned to study both the mandates and practices of the three institutions with the aim of enabling the MGEFP to institutionalize gender mainstreaming in its operations.

The gender analysis framework used was also redesigned to make the MGEFP active participants, since this is more an effective process with the gender consultant/s as facilitators. As a result, a seven-day training was conducted and completed for conceptual clarification, grounding and application of GAD, gender mainstreaming, gender analysis and GAD planning and budgeting. Concepts and applications were localized and easily

Table 2. Extent of Meeting Targets: Key Result Areas

Expected Results	Actual Results
Knowledge and skills of the municipal officials and personnel on GAD concepts and gender analysis being applied in their work	Members of the MGEFP are applying in their personal life and workplace the knowledge and skills on GAD concepts and tools they acquired after the GST and the 7 day training <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 2 training sessions conducted to raise and deepen consciousness on GAD - 1 joint committee hearing conducted between the <i>Sanggunian</i> Committee on Women and Appropriations to ensure gender mainstreaming in the budget proposals of the departments and the <i>Sanggunian</i> and the enactment of the GAD budget policy to fund project implementation for 2003 - 5 departments prepared their GAD Plan using gender analysis which are being reviewed by the ExeCom - All municipal officials and personnel are fully aware of the project being implemented
Regular functions and PPAs of the municipal government that were made gender-responsive being implemented	The operations that include the functions and selected PPAs of the municipality as well as the PNP and the DepEd are being reviewed and assessed in the ongoing research <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 8 departments whose functions were integrated with gender - 5 departments made their PPAs gender-responsive which are reflected in their budget proposal for 2003 - Criteria formulated in choosing the PPAs, legislation and policies to be assessed.
A Municipal Gender Equality Code (MGEC) and its Implementing Rules and Regulations formulated and implemented	Newly elected barangay officials are aware of the project especially their involvement in the formulation of a MGEC <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1 advocacy meeting conducted by DILG on the project and the GAD budget policy
At least thirty trainers on GAD concepts and gender analysis formed and functional	Preparations are being made in choosing the composition of the pool of trainers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - initial identification of the trainer are the barangay health workers
A Gender Equality Resource Center (GERC) established and made operational	Sourcing of external funds for the construction of the GERC <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 24 resolutions were enacted by the <i>Sanggunian</i> and submitted to the Senate for funding the construction of the GERC
Annual GAD Plan and budget formulated and made integral to the annual work and financial plan of the municipal government	Enactment of an appropriation ordinance for the GAD budget policy for 2003 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - agreement by the 2 committees: Women and Appropriations
A process documentation of the project experience developed and disseminated	Documentation of the GST and regular meetings of the MGEFP <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1 documentation report - 9 documentation reports for MGFP meetings
A province-wide forum to share project experience convened	Provincial DILG made aware of its responsibility to convene the forum in support of the project <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1 meeting with local DILG conducted - 1 meeting between local and provincial DILG

understood by the stakeholders who readily identified with the explanations, examples, caselets and workshops.

Consultations with the department heads were done during the regular and special meetings of the MGEFP in July-August 2002.

Building on the Insights to Capture Results

The project has experienced constraints from which a wealth of learning has emerged. The facilitating factors were brought about by the following.

- The concerted support of the mayor, vice-mayor, *Sanggunian* and department heads in terms of policies, legislation, and resource allocation in implementing project activities.
- The openness and political will of the municipality in utilizing its available funds to provide for some items that were either not funded or insufficiently provided by CIDA.
- As a neophyte politician, the chairperson of the *Sanggunian* Committee on Women persistently believes that she can make a difference in the lives of women and children through the GEP by advocating and ensuring its implementation.
- The presence and commitment of a private sector-led organization that focuses its corporate social responsibility on gender equality by advocating and providing appropriate technical assistance to the municipality in implementing its GEP.
- The private-sector-led organization also provided logistical support to push through with the seven-day training.
- Customized GAD concepts, tools and workshop designs to fit the local setting made learning and transfer of skills easier, facilitative and more fun.

- Roles and responsibilities of the MGEF in Ordinance No. 4, Series of 2002, are clearly defined and delineated.
- Inclusion of all departments as well as the local PNP (Philippine National Police) and DepEd (Department of Education) in the MGEFP to conform to the concepts and principles of gender mainstreaming.
 - Realization that:
 1. The acquisition of gender perspective is a long, tedious and painstaking process as it is transformational.
 2. Uplifting the lives of women and men could truly happen through GAD as practices and mandates of the municipal government could address both and at the same time their practical need and strategic gender interest.
- Leadership by example, i.e., leaders are role models in practicing gender equality.

The factors that hindered implementation are the following:

- Sasmuan and neighboring municipalities are prone to disasters.
- Incomplete attendance of some members of the MGEFP in the seven-day training due to distractions posed by the venue (municipal hall).
- Treasury and budget personnel failed to attend the seven-day training, making them more confused on how to apply GAD in their functions and making their budget proposals for FY 2003 gender-responsive.

- Non-delegation of shared responsibilities in the preparatory, actual conduct and post project activities.
- Project issues and concerns are not discussed openly among the stakeholders and are always initiated by the gender consultant.
- Weak advocacy on the relevance of the completed activities to the Mayor by the MGEFP.
- The chairperson who is the present co-chairperson only convenes the MGEFP in meetings requested by the gender consultants.
- Differing orientation and perspective of elected officials tend to slow down project implementation.
- Inconsistent support of elected officials demoralized the hard core gender advocates among the stakeholders.

**Implications for poverty reduction,
environment, and compatibility
in the cultural context**

Poverty Reduction

Poverty alleviation programs of the municipal government when integrated with GAD will no longer be palliative but will uplift the lives of the poor and the marginalized especially the women and men in the barangay and in the municipality level. This will become a fundamental process in these programs. Allocating resources equally and equitably to women and men clients will be established. Moreover, these programs though short term, in response to an immediate need of women and men, could be made gender-responsive to meet strategic gender

interest at the same time through the issuance of policies/ guidelines governing these programs.

Environment

As a disaster-prone area, the municipal government in using the tools of gender analysis with its clientele could formulate its disaster management program considering the differential and special needs of women and children. A gender-responsive program will empower the women to take an active part in the preparatory, actual and post-disaster management.

Compatibility in the cultural context

The Pampango culture is highly patriarchal. Resistance emerges in the form of patronizing women. Digging deeply, however, the men are explicitly receptive in shared household chores but outwardly threatened in shared decision making/ shared power. Gender-sensitive women find it difficult and some consider the task of imparting the new consciousness they have regarding gender equality with their husbands as a heavy burden.

What is to be done?

The challenge for the Sasmuan municipal officials is to keep alive the vision in building a gender-responsive governance to ensure that the women and men constituents of their locality will have equal opportunity in contributing and sharing the gains of development. The municipal government has indeed taken a few steps forward toward that direction, but still, immeasurably more remains to be done.

The success and effective implementation of the project *Towards Gender-Responsive Governance* largely depends on the continuous support given by the local officials. The factors which

facilitated the initial implementation of the program must be further strengthened and sustained and the hindering factors must be addressed to avoid delay in project implementation. Despite the political differences and differing orientation of local officials, they must continue to fully commit themselves and play a key role in translating the project objectives into concrete action to make a difference in the lives of ordinary female and male constituents of Sasmuan.

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