

**Beyond the award: Evaluating the sustainability
of good governance practices among SGLG awardees**

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ABSTRACT

This study evaluated the sustainability of good governance practices among the Seal of Good Local Governance (SGLG) awardees in Kalinga Province, namely Tabuk City, Rizal, and Pasil. Using a multi-method approach, the research combined quantitative assessment and qualitative inquiry to determine the level of sustainability across ten SGLG dimensions and to explore the experiences of local leaders and implementers in sustaining governance reforms. Quantitative findings revealed that all ten dimensions Financial Administration, Disaster Preparedness, Social Protection, Health Compliance, Sustainable Education, Business-Friendliness, Peace and Order, Environmental Management, Tourism and Culture, and Youth Development were rated highly sustainable, indicating strong institutionalization of good governance principles. Qualitative results supported these findings, revealing four major factors that underpin sustainability: institutionalization of policies and systems, leadership commitment and collective accountability, adaptive resource management, and community participation. The study further identified leadership stability, adequate resources, and policy continuity as key facilitators, while political transitions and resource limitations emerged as common challenges. Overall, the research concludes that the sustainability of good governance among Kalinga's SGLG awardees is the result of both structural and cultural integration of governance values. The findings emphasize that the SGLG framework serves not only as a mechanism for recognition but also as a catalyst for institutionalizing transparency, accountability, and participatory governance that endures beyond the award period.

Keywords: Seal of Good Local Governance, sustainability, good governance, local government units, Kalinga Province, institutionalization, transparency, accountability, participation.

Date Submitted: March 9, 2026

Date Accepted: March 16, 2026

Date Published: April 6, 2026

INTRODUCTION

The success and legitimacy of government programs and policies fundamentally depend on the quality of governance. Effective governance ensures that public institutions operate with transparency, accountability, and responsiveness to citizens' needs. It is through good governance that governments maintain credibility, foster trust, and achieve equitable social and economic development. Governance, as a multidimensional concept, is not confined

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DOI: <http://doi.org/10.69651/PIJHSS0502890>

Recommended citation:

Pittong, I. V. B. (2026). Beyond the award: Evaluating the sustainability of good governance practices among SGLG awardees. *Pantao (The International Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences)* 5 (2), 86-102.
<http://doi.org/10.69651/PIJHSS0502890>

to the authority of the state but extends to the interaction of state and non-state actors across the spheres of democracy, transparency, and accountability. Bevir (2022) defines governance as “the process of governing—whether undertaken by a government, market, or network—through laws, norms, power, or language.” Similarly, the World Bank (2023) conceptualizes governance as the manner in which authority is exercised in managing a nation’s resources for development. From these perspectives, governance is both a process and a relationship—a framework for exercising power responsibly and ensuring that decisions and resources advance the welfare of citizens.

In the realm of public administration, good governance has become a cornerstone of sustainable development and institutional performance. Pomeranz and Stedman (2020) emphasize that effective governance provides a normative direction that guides public decision-making and fosters accountability. Within the Philippine context, good governance is a foundational principle of local autonomy, participatory administration, and policy innovation. The Local Government Code of 1991 (Republic Act No. 7160) institutionalized decentralization, empowering local government units (LGUs) to craft policies, mobilize resources, and implement programs responsive to local needs. However, this decentralization also brings forth the challenge of ensuring that autonomy translates into accountable, transparent, and effective governance rather than fragmentation or inefficiency.

To address these challenges, the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) introduced the Seal of Good Local Governance (SGLG) in 2014 as both a policy instrument and a performance-based recognition that promotes excellence in local governance. The SGLG evaluates LGUs across multiple criteria such as financial administration, disaster preparedness, peace and order, business-friendliness, environmental protection, and social protection. It serves as a motivation for LGUs to strengthen internal systems and adopt innovative, transparent, and participatory practices. The Asian Development Bank (2020) observed that the SGLG significantly enhanced transparency, accountability, and efficiency among participating LGUs by establishing a standardized benchmark for governance excellence. Similarly, the DILG supports the SGLG through capacity development initiatives that empower LGUs to meet and sustain governance standards. As Brillantes (2023) noted, governance is the process through which problems are solved and society’s needs are met collectively, with government serving as the primary instrument for this collective endeavor.

The institutionalization of the SGLG through Republic Act No. 11292 (SGLG Act of 2019) further reinforced this framework by mandating all provinces, cities, and municipalities to undergo annual governance assessments. The law shifted the SGLG from a voluntary recognition system to a compulsory national mechanism, emphasizing that good governance must be sustained, measurable, and inclusive. Complementing this policy is Executive Order No. 138, or the Mandanas-Garcia Ruling, which expanded LGUs’ fiscal and functional autonomy by devolving greater responsibilities from the national government. These policies collectively strengthen the expectation that good governance must evolve beyond compliance and recognition toward institutionalization and long-term sustainability.

At the local level, Kalinga Province serves as an important case for examining the sustainability of good governance practices. In 2024, three LGUs in Kalinga Tabuk City, Rizal, and Pasil, were recognized as SGLG awardees. This achievement highlights the province’s progress in strengthening local governance systems, promoting transparency, and institutionalizing participatory mechanisms. These LGUs have implemented programs that enhance fiscal accountability, improve disaster resilience, protect the environment, and promote inclusive growth. Their consistent performance demonstrates local leaders’ commitment to effective service delivery and governance reform. However, while the recognition underscores excellence in governance, it also raises a critical question: to what extent are these award-winning practices sustained beyond the award cycle?

Despite growing literature on local governance performance and recognition systems, there remains a research gap in understanding the sustainability of governance practices among SGLG awardees. Most studies have focused on compliance and short-term performance indicators, but few have examined whether good governance practices are institutionalized and maintained over time. Sustainability in governance implies that reforms and innovations become embedded in the organization's culture, policies, and systems—persisting even after leadership transitions or the expiration of incentives. The case of Kalinga, with its mix of urban and rural LGUs, presents a compelling opportunity to assess how governance practices evolve under varying institutional capacities and socio-political contexts.

Understanding the sustainability of good governance practices among SGLG awardees in Kalinga Province is thus crucial in assessing institutional maturity, accountability, and the long-term impact of governance reforms. It raises important questions about whether SGLG-inspired practices have been integrated into the structures and cultures of LGUs and how these institutions sustain reform momentum in the absence of external incentives. Examining the sustainability of these practices also provides insights into the effectiveness of the SGLG as a governance policy instrument—whether it fosters enduring institutional transformation or temporary compliance motivated by recognition. By focusing on the post-award experiences of Kalinga's SGLG recipients—Tabuk City, Rizal, and Pasil, this study extends the discourse on local governance from attainment to continuity, exploring how governance innovations are maintained, adapted, or diminished over time. In doing so, it contributes to policy dialogues on strengthening local governance mechanisms that embody transparency, accountability, and citizen participation, ensuring that the principles of good governance endure beyond the award and evolve into a sustained culture of integrity and public service.

Statement of the problem

This study was conducted to evaluate the sustainability of good governance practices implemented by Local Government Units (LGUs) that have received the Seal of Good Local Governance (SGLG) award.

1. What is the level of sustainability of good governance practices among SGLG awardees in Kalinga Province along the ten SGLG dimensions of financial administration and sustainability, disaster preparedness, social protection and sensitivity, health compliance and responsiveness, sustainable education, business friendliness and competitiveness, safety, peace and order, environmental management, tourism, heritage, development, culture and the arts, and youth development?
2. How do LGU leaders and implementers describe their experiences in sustaining good governance practices after receiving the SGLG?
3. What factors facilitate or hinder the institutionalization of these governance practices?

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed method research design to evaluate the sustainability of good governance practices among Local Government Units (LGUs) in Kalinga Province that have received the Seal of Good Local Governance (SGLG) award. The multi method approach allowed the researcher to collect and analyze both quantitative and qualitative data using distinct but complementary methods, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of the extent and nature of governance sustainability. The quantitative component assessed the level of sustainability of good governance practices across the ten (10) SGLG dimensions: (a) Financial Administration and Sustainability, (b) Disaster Preparedness, (c) Social Protection

and Sensitivity, (d) Health Compliance and Responsiveness, (e) Sustainable Education, (f) Business Friendliness and Competitiveness, (g) Safety, Peace, and Order, (h) Environmental Management, (i) Tourism, Heritage Development, Culture, and the Arts, and (j) Youth Development. The qualitative component explored the experiences, perceptions, and challenges of LGU leaders and implementers in sustaining their governance practices after receiving the SGLG award. It also identified the institutional, administrative, and socio political factors that facilitate or hinder the continuity and institutionalization of these practices.

The study was conducted among SGLG awardee LGUs in Kalinga Province, specifically the Province of Kalinga, Tabuk City, Rizal, Pasil, and Tinglayan. For the quantitative phase, participants included LGU officials and employees who were directly involved in the planning, implementation, and monitoring of SGLG related programs. These included department heads, planning and development coordinators, budget officers, accountants, SGLG focal persons, and members of the LGU assessment team. A total of 75 respondents were selected using purposive sampling, ensuring representation from all awardee LGUs. For the qualitative phase, key informants included local chief executives, particularly mayors and vice mayors, department heads, and SGLG focal persons, as well as selected civil society organization representatives. This selection ensured that multiple perspectives, from policy decision making to implementation and community participation, were represented.

The population of the study consisted of participants from the selected LGUs, categorized according to their roles. In Tabuk City, the participants included 7 elective officials, representing 9.33%; 7 department heads, representing 9.33%; 7 SGLG focal persons, representing 9.33%; and 7 civil society organizations, representing 9.33%. In Rizal, the participants included 6 elective officials, representing 8%; 6 department heads, representing 8%; 6 SGLG focal persons, representing 8%; and 6 civil society organizations, representing 8%. In Pasil, the participants included 6 elective officials, representing 8%; 6 department heads, representing 8%; 6 SGLG focal persons, representing 8%; and 5 civil society organizations, representing 6.66%. The total number of participants was 75, which comprised 100% of the study population.

The study employed purposive sampling, as the respondents were deliberately selected based on their roles, positions, and direct involvement in the implementation and sustainability of good governance practices related to the Seal of Good Local Governance (SGLG). The respondents were grouped into distinct strata, namely elective officials, department heads, SGLG focal persons, and civil society organization representatives across the selected LGUs, specifically Tabuk City, Rizal, and Pasil. This stratified purposive sampling ensured that key governance actors from both the government and civil society sectors were adequately represented, allowing for a comprehensive assessment of governance sustainability from multiple perspectives.

For the quantitative method, the researcher developed a structured questionnaire anchored on the ten SGLG dimensions. Each dimension contained a set of indicators measured using a five point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Not Sustained) to 5 (Fully Institutionalized). The instrument was validated by governance experts for content accuracy and pilot tested for reliability, yielding a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of acceptable internal consistency prior to deployment. For the qualitative method, a semi structured interview guide and focus group discussion (FGD) protocol were used. These instruments elicited rich, descriptive data on how LGUs sustained good governance practices, the challenges they encountered, and the institutional factors influencing continuity or decline. The guide was likewise subjected to expert review for content validity.

Prior to data collection, permission to conduct the study was obtained from the City and Municipal Mayors of the awardee LGUs. For the quantitative phase, the researcher distributed the structured questionnaire to identified respondents through both face to face and online

formats. The responses were retrieved, tabulated, and encoded for statistical analysis. For the qualitative phase, Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted with selected officials and stakeholders. Each session lasted approximately 45–60 minutes and was audio recorded, with participant consent. Field notes were also taken to capture contextual observations and non-verbal cues. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and verified by the participants for accuracy. After both phases were completed, results were compared and interpreted collectively, with the qualitative findings providing contextual explanations for patterns observed in the quantitative data.

The researcher ensured adherence to ethical research standards throughout the conduct of the study. Written permission to conduct the study was secured from the appropriate LGU offices. All participants provided informed consent prior to participation and were assured of their voluntary involvement, anonymity, and confidentiality. No personally identifiable information was reported, and all data were used exclusively for academic purposes.

For the quantitative data, descriptive statistics such as mean, frequency, and standard deviation were computed to determine the level of sustainability of governance practices in each SGLG dimension. For the qualitative data, thematic analysis was employed following the six phase framework of Braun and Clarke (2006), namely familiarization with data, coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final narrative. Finally, the results from both the quantitative and qualitative methods were synthesized during the interpretation stage to construct a holistic understanding of the sustainability of good governance practices among SGLG awardees in Kalinga Province.

To ensure rigor in the qualitative component of the study, the researcher applied procedures intended to establish credibility, transferability, and dependability. With regard to credibility, the researcher conducted one on one interviews to gather the needed information. After this, the researcher also conducted focus group discussion to consolidate the needed information and to verify, confirm, and check the authenticity of the gathered information and data. Transferability was addressed by providing detailed contextual descriptions of the local governance environments, allowing readers to assess how the findings might apply to other settings. This included outlining the socio economic and political contexts of the awardees' communities. Furthermore, purposeful sampling was utilized to include a range of awardees, ensuring diverse perspectives that reflect different governance challenges and successes. To ensure dependability, the researcher conducted an audit trail by documenting each step of the research process, from data collection to analysis. This transparency allows for scrutiny and replication by other researchers. Implementing a code recode strategy, in which data is reanalyzed after a period, can also enhance dependability by confirming consistent interpretations over time.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results and discussion presented in this section are grounded in the data gathered from 75 participants drawn from SGLG awardee LGUs in Kalinga Province through a mixed method research design. Using purposive sampling, the study engaged LGU officials, department heads, SGLG focal persons, and civil society organization representatives who were directly involved in the planning, implementation, and monitoring of governance programs. Quantitative data were collected through a structured questionnaire anchored on the ten SGLG dimensions and analyzed using mean, frequency, and standard deviation, while qualitative data were generated through Key Informant Interviews and Focus Group Discussions and analyzed using thematic analysis. The discussion interprets the findings directly in relation to the objectives of the study, particularly the level of sustainability of good

governance practices among SGLG awardees in Kalinga Province, the experiences of LGU leaders and implementers in sustaining these practices, and the factors that facilitate or hinder their institutionalization.

The profile of the respondents shows that 25 or 33% came from cities and 50 or 67% came from municipalities, indicating that the majority of participants represented municipal LGUs. In terms of income classification, 25 or 33.3% belonged to 1st Class LGUs, 26 or 35% belonged to 3rd Class LGUs, and 24 or 32% belonged to 4th Class LGUs, showing a fairly balanced distribution across the three classifications, although 3rd Class LGUs comprised the largest group. With respect to population size, 50 or 67% came from small LGUs with less than 50,000 population, while 25 or 33% came from large LGUs with more than 100,000 population. In terms of years as SGLG awardee, 71 or 95% had been awardees for 2-3 years, while only 4 or 5% had maintained the recognition for 4 years and above, suggesting that most respondents came from LGUs with relatively recent but repeated exposure to the SGLG framework. In national tax allocation, 50 or 67% belonged to LGUs receiving less than 10 billion, while 25 or 33% belonged to those receiving 11-50 billion. These distributions indicate that the study largely reflects the perspectives of municipal and smaller LGUs with moderate fiscal resources and recent SGLG recognition, thereby providing a realistic view of governance sustainability in varied but predominantly resource constrained local contexts.

In the dimension of Financial Administration and Sustainability, the findings show a category mean of 3.65, interpreted as Highly Sustainable, indicating that the SGLG awardees in Kalinga Province have institutionalized financial management systems that promote transparency, accountability, and fiscal discipline. Among the indicators, “Our LGU is consistently demonstrates transparency in financial reporting” obtained the highest mean of 3.92 and was described as Highly Sustainable, suggesting strong adherence to the principles of the Full Disclosure Policy and compliance with audit and public accountability standards. “Financial accountability mechanism (e.g audit compliance) are strictly followed” also received a high mean of 3.85 and was interpreted as Highly Sustainable, while “Budget utilization is efficient and aligned with community priorities” obtained a mean of 3.43 and was interpreted as Sustainable. The lowest rated item was “Revenue generation strategies are sustainable in the long term” with a mean of 3.40, also interpreted as Sustainable, indicating that while the LGUs efficiently manage available resources, there remains room to strengthen long term fiscal innovation and local income generation. These results imply that the awardee LGUs have maintained sound fiscal performance and aligned financial management with community priorities, although local revenue generation remains a comparative area for improvement. This pattern is consistent with Batuna and Ordoñez (2025), who found that robust internal controls in LGUs positively influence compliance with SGLG criteria, Santos (2024), who linked digital competencies and e governance in LGU staff to improved fiscal administration and accountability, and the DBM Internal Audit Manual for LGUs (2023), which emphasizes internal audit units as central to sustaining financial discipline and ethical operations. The findings are also supported by Lagura, Junsay, and Santos (2017) and Andaya and Aboejo (2019), who showed that consistent financial reporting and institutionalized disclosure practices strengthen accountability and public trust, as well as by David and Tan (2020) and Lopez and Cruz (2018), who observed that LGUs often perform strongly in budget management but still face difficulty in developing innovative long term revenue strategies.

The findings on Disaster Preparedness reveal a category mean of 3.79, interpreted as Highly Sustainable, signifying that the SGLG awardees in Kalinga Province have successfully institutionalized comprehensive and proactive disaster management systems. The highest rated indicator was “Early warning systems are functional and accessible” with a mean of 3.88 and a qualitative description of Highly Sustainable, reflecting the effectiveness of localized communication mechanisms and community based risk communication strategies. “Disaster

risk reduction activities are regularly conducted and institutionalized” obtained a mean of 3.80 and was likewise Highly Sustainable, while “Our LGU maintains updated disaster preparedness and response plans” received a mean of 3.76 and “Resources for disaster response are adequately allocated and sustained” posted the lowest mean of 3.71, although it was still interpreted as Highly Sustainable. The overall pattern suggests that LGUs in Kalinga Province have established strong institutional and operational capacities for disaster risk reduction and management, with particularly strong systems for early warning and planning. At the same time, the relatively lower mean for resource allocation and sustainability indicates that continued strengthening of funding support, equipment, and logistics remains important. This interpretation aligns with Gumiran, Moncada, Gasmen, Boyles-Panting, and Solidum (2019), who underscored the importance of tailoring community based early warning systems to local ICT capacities and social conditions, and with Reyes and Pagsuyu (2020), who emphasized that consistent financial support is necessary to sustain equipment, drills, and personnel training.

The Social Protection and Sensitivity dimension achieved a category mean of 3.81, interpreted as Highly Sustainable, demonstrating that the SGLG awardees in Kalinga Province have effectively institutionalized inclusive and equitable social protection mechanisms for marginalized and vulnerable groups. The highest rated item, “Social welfare services are accessible and sustained even beyond SGLG evaluation periods,” posted a mean of 3.87 and was described as Highly Sustainable, indicating that social development programs have been embedded into regular LGU operations rather than treated as temporary compliance initiatives. “Gender sensitivity and inclusivity are embedded in LGU programs” obtained a mean of 3.84, while “The LGU allocates adequate resources for social protection programs” had a mean of 3.80, both interpreted as Highly Sustainable. The lowest rated item was “Programs for marginalized and vulnerable sectors are regularly implemented” with a mean of 3.71, which still fell within the Highly Sustainable range. These results show that the LGUs have established enduring systems for social protection, although there remains a need to further strengthen consistency in outreach and implementation for vulnerable sectors such as indigenous peoples, low income families, and persons with disabilities. The findings are consistent with Dela Cruz, Santos, and Bautista (2020), who found that municipalities integrating community consultation and participatory decision making in social protection planning are more responsive to disadvantaged sectors, and with Velasco and Ramos (2020), who emphasized that institutionalized outreach initiatives enhance the resilience and well being of vulnerable groups.

Health Compliance and Responsiveness obtained a category mean of 3.90, interpreted as Highly Sustainable, indicating that the SGLG awardees in Kalinga Province have institutionalized efficient and equitable health governance systems. The highest rated item was “Our LGU effectively responds to emerging health challenges (e.g., pandemics)” with a mean of 3.95 and a description of Highly Sustainable, reflecting strong adaptive capacity in managing public health crises through surveillance, emergency response, and inter agency coordination. “Public health facilities are well-maintained and adequately staffed” received a mean of 3.93, “Health programs (e.g., immunization, nutrition, maternal care) are sustained” posted a mean of 3.89, and the lowest rated item, “LGU ensures equitable access to health services across communities,” obtained a mean of 3.81, though it also remained Highly Sustainable. The results indicate that local health governance is one of the strongest areas of sustainability among the awardees, particularly in crisis responsiveness, yet equitable access across communities continues to require attention, especially for geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas. These findings support the work of Velasco and Delos Santos (2020), who emphasized that integrating health governance with local planning and budgetary

allocations improves accessibility and quality of care, and Torres and Bautista (2020), who noted that local health systems aligned with the Universal Health Care Act (RA 11223) ensure more responsive and accessible services for marginalized communities.

In Sustainable Education, the category mean was 3.57, interpreted as Highly Sustainable, showing that the LGUs have maintained continuous support for accessible, inclusive, and quality education. The highest rated indicator was “LGU collaborates effectively with DepEd and other partners to promote education” with a mean of 3.91 and a qualitative description of Highly Sustainable, suggesting strong inter agency partnerships and shared governance that support infrastructure, learner assistance, and other educational programs. “The LGU supports educational programs for both formal and alternative learning” obtained a mean of 3.64 and was also Highly Sustainable. However, “Educational programs address the needs of disadvantaged learners” had a mean of 3.41 and “Investments in education are consistent and sustained” posted the lowest mean of 3.33, both interpreted as Sustainable. This pattern indicates that while collaboration with DepEd and other partners is highly institutionalized, there is still room to expand resource allocation and strengthen support for disadvantaged learners, especially those in geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas. The findings parallel Hullana (2019), who found that DepEd LGU collaboration improved the quality of basic education in La Union, and DepEd (2021), which reported the significant role of LGUs in supporting digital devices, modules, and training during the COVID 19 pandemic. At the same time, the results are consistent with Partlow (2025), who highlighted the continuing need for stronger partnerships and investments to improve educational access and quality in remote communities.

The Business Friendliness and Competitiveness dimension obtained a category mean of 3.56, interpreted as Highly Sustainable, suggesting that the SGLG awardees in Kalinga Province have institutionalized governance practices that support business friendliness, competitiveness, and local economic development. The highest rated item was “Business licensing and permit systems remain simple and efficient” with a mean of 3.80 and a qualitative description of Highly Sustainable, reflecting compliance with the Ease of Doing Business and Efficient Government Service Delivery Act (RA 11032) and demonstrating transparency, efficiency, and reduced bureaucratic barriers. “Policies encourage competitiveness and attract sustainable investments” also received a Highly Sustainable mean of 3.55. On the other hand, “LGU provides sustained support for local entrepreneurs and MSMEs” obtained a mean of 3.45 and “Investments in economic infrastructure are consistent and long-term” posted the lowest mean of 3.44, both interpreted as Sustainable. These findings suggest that while LGUs have simplified business procedures and cultivated a generally enabling business environment, sustained investment in economic infrastructure and stronger support for MSMEs remain important areas for deepening competitiveness. This interpretation is corroborated by Buenaventura and Calimag (2019), Reyes and Dela Cruz (2021), and the Asian Development Bank (ADB, 2020), all of whom emphasized that simplified procedures and efficient municipal services promote investor confidence and economic development. It is also consistent with Lazo and Del Mundo (2023) and the Department of Finance (DOF, 2024), which underscore the importance of transport, market facilities, digital connectivity, and public private partnerships in sustaining local competitiveness and MSME growth.

Safety, Peace, and Order yielded a category mean of 3.60, interpreted as Highly Sustainable, indicating that the SGLG awardees in Kalinga Province have institutionalized important mechanisms to promote public safety, peace, and community resilience. The highest rated item was “The LGU effectively implements peace and order programs” with a mean of 3.92 and a qualitative description of Highly Sustainable, highlighting strong coordination among local governments, law enforcement agencies, and community stakeholders. “Anti-drug abuse councils and initiatives remain active and sustainable” also received a high mean of 3.87

and was interpreted as Highly Sustainable. However, “Community-based policing strategies are institutionalized” obtained a mean of 3.36 and “Safety programs are consistently funded and implemented” received the lowest mean of 3.33, both interpreted as Sustainable. These results show that peace and order programs are generally embedded in local governance, but deeper citizen participation, stronger grassroots policing, and more consistent logistical and financial support are still needed to enhance long term sustainability at the community level. These findings are supported by Taganas and Gupit (2025), who emphasized trust building and shared responsibility in community based peacekeeping, and by Aydinan and Ayeo-Eo (2022), who found that barangay level peace programs require stronger execution and inter sectoral coordination to move from moderate implementation toward full institutionalization.

The Environmental Management dimension recorded a category mean of 3.64, interpreted as Highly Sustainable, which indicates that the SGLG awardees have sustained strong environmental governance practices aligned with national sustainability frameworks and SGLG environmental criteria. The highest rated indicator was “Tree planting, reforestation, or similar programs are institutionalized” with a mean of 3.85 and a description of Highly Sustainable, reflecting long term commitment to forest and watershed protection. “Environmental protection policies are strictly enforced” obtained a mean of 3.80, and “The LGU maintains sustainable waste management practices” posted a mean of 3.59, both interpreted as Highly Sustainable. The lowest rated item was “The LGU promotes renewable energy and sustainable environmental practices” with a mean of 3.33 and a qualitative description of Sustainable. These results indicate that the LGUs have successfully embedded environmental protection, reforestation, and waste management into their governance systems, but renewable energy and climate smart practices require stronger investments and technical support. The findings resonate with Lozano, Cortado, and Cosep (2025), who highlighted the role of LGUs and communities in sustained National Greening Program implementation, and with Pulhin and De Luna (2022), who argued that participatory watershed management and indigenous ecological knowledge are critical to long term environmental stewardship. They are also consistent with Torres and Estrella (2021), who emphasized that transitioning to sustainable energy systems requires strategic investment and institutional capacity.

Tourism, Heritage Development, Culture, and the Arts obtained a category mean of 3.84, interpreted as Highly Sustainable, indicating that the awardee LGUs in Kalinga Province have institutionalized tourism and cultural initiatives that support both economic development and heritage preservation. The highest rated item was “Tourism development programs are sustained beyond award periods” with a mean of 3.93 and a qualitative description of Highly Sustainable, suggesting that tourism programs have been integrated into long term development priorities rather than treated as short term compliance activities. “Tourism initiatives contribute to both economic and cultural sustainability” posted a mean of 3.87, “Cultural heritage sites are well-preserved and promoted” obtained a mean of 3.80, and the lowest rated item, “LGU consistently allocates resources for arts and cultural programs,” had a mean of 3.77, though it also remained Highly Sustainable. These results affirm that the LGUs have effectively positioned culture and tourism as complementary components of sustainable local governance, although the comparatively lower mean for arts and cultural resource allocation suggests the need for even stronger institutional support. The interpretation is supported by Manalo (2017) and Rebuya and Gasga (2022), who showed that effective tourism policy implementation and strategic tourism planning help institutionalize sustainability in local tourism development, and by Oligo, Smith, and Quinto (2021) and DILG (2025), which highlighted the importance of local government support and formal cultural councils in sustaining arts, festivals, and heritage programs.

Youth Development registered a category mean of 3.85, interpreted as Highly Sustainable, showing that the LGUs have institutionalized comprehensive and well supported youth development programs. The highest rated item was “The LGU allocates adequate resources for youth activities” with a mean of 3.95 and a qualitative description of Highly Sustainable, demonstrating strong prioritization of youth initiatives through the Local Youth Development Plan and Local Youth Development Office in line with the Sangguniang Kabataan Reform Act of 2015 (RA 10742). “The LGU provides regular programs addressing youth leadership and skills” obtained a mean of 3.88, “Youth councils (SK/other groups) are active and supported by the LGU” posted a mean of 3.83, and the lowest rated item, “Programs for youth development are institutionalized and sustained,” received a mean of 3.75, though it also remained Highly Sustainable. These findings indicate that youth programs are strongly supported financially and institutionally, but there are still perceived inconsistencies in how fully sustained and evenly implemented these initiatives are across local settings. The results are consistent with Reyes (2025), who reported that LGUs in the Ilocos region institutionalized youth engagement through the PYDP 2023–2028, and with Raya, Dizon, and Reyes (2022), Tapales and Caingat (2020), and Cruz (2023), who found that strong LYDOs, well funded LYDPs, and sustained youth investments improve youth leadership and civic participation. They are further contextualized by GIZ (2023), IJFMR (2024; 2025), and Bastida et al. (2022), who noted that although institutional mechanisms exist, gaps in monitoring, continuity, and implementation can still hinder full youth program institutionalization.

Taken together, the ten SGLG dimensions all received Highly Sustainable ratings, with Financial Administration and Sustainability at 3.65, Disaster Preparedness at 3.79, Social Protection and Sensitivity at 3.81, Health Compliance and Responsiveness at 3.90, Sustainable Education at 3.57, Business Friendliness and Competitiveness at 3.56, Safety, Peace, and Order at 3.60, Environmental Management at 3.64, Tourism, Heritage Development, Culture and the Arts at 3.84, and Youth Development at 3.85, yielding an Overall Mean of 3.72 interpreted as Highly Sustainable. These results demonstrate that the SGLG awardees in Kalinga Province have effectively maintained and institutionalized good governance practices across all ten dimensions beyond the recognition period. The strongest dimensions were Health Compliance and Responsiveness, Youth Development, and Tourism, Heritage Development, Culture and the Arts, while Sustainable Education and Business Friendliness and Competitiveness posted the lowest category means, although both still remained Highly Sustainable. The overall pattern indicates that governance practices related to public welfare, health, youth engagement, culture, and disaster resilience are deeply embedded in LGU operations, while continued strengthening is needed in education investment, economic infrastructure, and long term local income generation. This supports the view that the Seal of Good Local Governance is not merely a one-time award but a continuing governance framework that encourages institutionalization, as noted by Medina-Guce and Sanders (2024), the DILG, Co (2025), and the case of LGUs such as Quirino Province. It also aligns with broader literature pointing to the systemic and integrated nature of governance sustainability across multiple sectors, including the work of Domingo (2018), AlAmpay (2019), Moral and Estoral (2025), Sandhu (2021), Yap (2008), Cruz (2024), Viray (2025), and the DFA (n.d.). The uniform Highly Sustainable results suggest that in Tabuk City, Rizal, and Pasil, the SGLG framework has moved beyond compliance and has become part of regular administrative culture and organizational practice.

The qualitative findings deepen this interpretation by showing that the sustainability of good governance practices among SGLG awardees in Kalinga Province is both a structural and cultural process. Participants consistently described sustainability as something that extends beyond meeting SGLG criteria and instead depends on embedding transparency, accountability, responsiveness, and participation into the everyday systems and routines of local governments. Four interrelated subthemes emerged from their narratives, namely

institutionalization of systems and policies, leadership commitment and collective accountability, resource limitations and adaptive strategies, and community involvement and ownership of governance programs. These themes show that sustainable governance depends not only on formal structures but also on values, leadership behavior, collective ownership, and citizen participation.

Participants emphasized that institutionalization of systems and policies is essential because it transforms good governance from a temporary compliance driven effort into a lasting organizational practice. As LGU01 explained, “Institutionalization means turning good practices into rules that everyone must follow. Once the system is in place, even leadership transitions cannot disrupt what has already been established.” LGU02 similarly stated, “We made sure that our governance reforms are policy-backed. We passed ordinances on transparency, financial accountability, and community participation so that sustainability is guaranteed,” while LGU03 noted, “Institutionalization gave us direction. It meant that every department knew what to do, and there were clear measures to sustain performance. It became part of our organizational culture.” These accounts show that sustainability is strengthened when reforms are codified into ordinances, routines, and organizational expectations that do not depend solely on particular leaders. The findings align with Brillantes and Fernandez (2013), Capuno (2019), Grindle (1997), North (1990), Meyer and Rowan (1977), Scott (2001), UNDP (2015), and the World Bank (2017), all of which emphasize that formalized systems and stable institutions provide continuity, legitimacy, and predictability in governance.

Another major theme was leadership commitment and collective accountability. Respondents repeatedly stressed that good governance is sustained when leaders model ethical behavior, provide direction, and treat SGLG standards as an ongoing responsibility rather than a one time accomplishment. LGU01 remarked, “Good governance lasts when leaders lead by example. Our mayor continues to promote transparency and teamwork, which inspires us to keep improving our performance.” LGU02 stated, “Leadership commitment means consistency. We’ve had leaders who make sure that SGLG practices continue, not only for awards but because it’s the right thing to do,” while LGU03 emphasized, “Accountability is shared by everyone. The mayor sets the vision, but every office contributes. It’s this sense of ownership that makes good governance sustainable.” These narratives show that ethical and consistent leadership, combined with shared accountability across departments, creates both the moral and operational foundation for sustaining reforms. This interpretation is supported by Denhardt and Denhardt (2015), Kouzes and Posner (2012), Hausler (2018), Tapales, Padilla, and Concepcion (1995), and the World Bank (2017), all of whom underscore the importance of exemplary leadership, shared vision, and coordinated responsibility in sustaining governance reforms.

Respondents also acknowledged that sustainability often unfolds under conditions of limited resources, making adaptive strategies and innovation essential. LGU01 explained, “Budget constraints are inevitable, but we learned to innovate. We build partnerships, prioritize essential programs, and ensure that every peso supports sustainable initiatives.” LGU02 noted, “We don’t let the lack of funds stop us. Instead, we collaborate with other agencies and organizations. We learned that sustainability is about mindset and creativity,” while LGU03 added, “When funds are tight, we focus on impact. We simplify systems, use local resources, and engage volunteers. It’s about being resourceful and practical.” These experiences reveal that governance sustainability is not dependent on financial abundance alone. Rather, it is reinforced by adaptive capacity, creative budgeting, local partnerships, and strategic prioritization. This is consistent with Andrews, Pritchett, and Woolcock (2017), Osborne and Brown (2013), Capuno (2019), and the World Bank (2017), which all point to innovation, collaboration, and local problem solving as central to sustaining governance initiatives in

resource constrained environments. The presence of this theme also helps explain why dimensions such as Sustainable Education and Business Friendliness and Competitiveness, while still Highly Sustainable, posted comparatively lower means than other areas.

Community involvement and ownership of governance programs emerged as the fourth major experience of sustainability. All respondents highlighted that governance programs become more enduring when citizens are involved in their planning and implementation. LGU01 stated, “Our strongest programs are those the people helped design. When citizens understand and believe in them, they take ownership and continue the initiatives.” LGU02 observed, “Community involvement ensures that projects don’t depend on the LGU alone. When people participate, they protect and sustain what we started,” and LGU03 emphasized, “The key to long-term success is participation. We make sure that every program includes consultation, so the people see it as theirs.” These findings show that participatory governance strengthens continuity by building trust, local ownership, and shared responsibility. This is particularly relevant to dimensions such as Tourism, Environment, and Social Protection, where citizen participation is central to successful implementation. The interpretation is supported by Putnam (2023), Brillantes and Fernandez (2023), and the World Bank (2022), all of whom argue that civic engagement fosters social capital, transparency, and the long term sustainability of local governance initiatives.

The study also identified the factors that facilitate or hinder the institutionalization of good governance practices among SGLG awardees in Kalinga Province. The first and most prominent factor was visionary and ethical leadership. Respondents consistently identified leadership as the most crucial enabling factor in institutionalizing good governance, while also warning that weak or shifting leadership priorities can threaten continuity. LGU01 remarked, “Institutionalization starts from the top. When leaders show consistency and integrity, the whole organization follows. The SGLG was just the beginning; what sustains us is leadership that stays true to the values of public service.” LGU02 stated, “Visionary leadership keeps the organization focused. Our mayor always reminds us that awards fade, but systems remain. That mindset makes everyone work toward long-term results,” while LGU03 added, “When leaders set an example—being transparent, accountable, and people-centered—it creates a ripple effect. But when leadership changes and priorities shift, some gains are lost.” These accounts show that leadership acts both as an enabler and a protector of institutionalization. This interpretation is consistent with Denhardt and Denhardt (2015), Kouzes and Posner (2022), Grindle (2020), Brillantes and Fernandez (2023), and the World Bank (2022), all of which emphasize that ethical and continuous leadership is indispensable to embedding reforms into local institutions.

A second factor was policy continuity and administrative stability. Participants stressed that governance reforms become durable when they are documented, codified, and carried by stable administrative teams. LGU01 stated, “Programs become sustainable when policies are protected from political changes. We make sure that good practices are documented and included in ordinances to ensure continuity.” LGU02 observed, “Administrative stability helps a lot. When the same core people remain in the LGU, institutional memory is preserved. They know what works and continue what has been started,” while LGU03 explained, “Sometimes good programs stop when leadership changes. That’s why we make sure that systems are documented and institutionalized. Once written into policy, it can’t easily be reversed.” These narratives show that continuity in policy and personnel preserves institutional memory and shields reforms from political disruption. The findings are supported by Grindle (2020), North (2020), and Capuno (2019), who all argue that stable institutions, codified rules, and consistent administrative structures are essential for maintaining governance reforms over time.

A third factor involved resource availability and institutional capacity. Respondents described financial limitations, staff shortages, turnover, and capacity gaps as major challenges

to institutionalization, even when policies already exist. LGU01 said, “Institutionalization requires investment. You need people, systems, and funds. It’s hard to sustain programs when resources are scarce, but we always find ways to make it work.” LGU02 observed, “We face the challenge of doing more with less. There are times we lack manpower, yet we continue by upskilling our staff and using technology to ease the workload,” while LGU03 noted, “Budget constraints limit our plans. You can institutionalize policies, but without funds for implementation, they remain on paper. That’s the gap we try to fill through partnerships.” These accounts illustrate that institutionalization is not merely a matter of policy adoption but also of capacity to implement and sustain reforms. This is consistent with the World Bank (2020), MDPI (2020), OECD analyses, and global governance literature, all of which emphasize that fiscal constraints, limited human resources, and weak technical capacity can hinder the durable embedding of governance innovations, while capacity building and strategic partnerships can help bridge such gaps.

Finally, political dynamics and stakeholder participation were identified as decisive factors in whether governance reforms are sustained or undermined. LGU01 stated, “Political unity matters. When local leaders and councils share the same vision, it’s easier to pass policies and maintain programs. But when politics gets in the way, institutionalization suffers.” LGU02 emphasized, “Stakeholder engagement is crucial. We involve civil society, youth, and business groups in planning. When they see their role, they help protect programs even during political changes,” and LGU03 added, “The challenge is sustaining reforms beyond politics. We’ve seen cases where priorities shift after elections, and that’s when institutionalization becomes difficult.” These findings suggest that institutionalization flourishes in contexts of political harmony, broad based support, and participatory governance, while partisan shifts and weak collaboration can derail reform momentum. This interpretation is consistent with Takagi (2021) and the experience of Bottom-Up Budgeting in the Philippines, which showed that civic participation and durable local coalitions can help protect reforms from electoral turnover and political volatility.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that SGLG awardees in Kalinga Province exhibit an Overall Mean of 3.72, interpreted as Highly Sustainable, across all ten governance dimensions, indicating that good governance practices have been substantially maintained and institutionalized beyond the award period. Quantitatively, the results highlight particular strength in Health Compliance and Responsiveness at 3.90, Youth Development at 3.85, and Tourism, Heritage Development, Culture and the Arts at 3.84, while also identifying comparatively lower, though still Highly Sustainable, means in Sustainable Education at 3.57 and Business Friendliness and Competitiveness at 3.56. Qualitatively, the narratives of LGU leaders and implementers show that sustainability is reinforced through institutionalized systems, ethical leadership, collective accountability, adaptive resource strategies, and community ownership, but may be hindered by leadership turnover, limited resources, inconsistent policy continuity, and political shifts. Taken together, these results directly address the objectives of the study by demonstrating not only the level of sustainability of good governance practices among SGLG awardees in Kalinga Province but also the lived experiences and contextual conditions that shape their continuation. The findings contribute to the field by showing that the SGLG can function as a catalyst for long term governance institutionalization rather than as a temporary recognition mechanism. They also provide a grounded basis for the next section of the manuscript, where the implications of these findings may be used to frame conclusions, policy recommendations, and future directions for strengthening sustainable local governance.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that good governance among SGLG awardees in Kalinga Province has reached a level of maturity in which sustainable practices have become deeply embedded in the systems, culture, and values of local administration. The findings showed that the Local Government Units have moved beyond viewing the Seal of Good Local Governance as a one-time recognition and have instead sustained its principles through the continued institutionalization of practices across the ten governance dimensions. The consistently Highly Sustainable ratings in Financial Administration and Sustainability, Disaster Preparedness, Social Protection and Sensitivity, Health Compliance and Responsiveness, Sustainable Education, Business-Friendliness and Competitiveness, Safety, Peace, and Order, Environmental Management, Tourism, Heritage Development, Culture and the Arts, and Youth Development indicate that governance excellence has been maintained beyond the award cycle. These results confirm that the LGUs have been able to preserve transparency, accountability, responsiveness, and inclusiveness in their administrative systems and public service delivery mechanisms.

The study further concludes that the sustainability of good governance practices was made possible through the interaction of visionary leadership, strong institutional frameworks, strategic resource management, and active community involvement. The qualitative findings revealed that LGU leaders and implementers perceived sustainability not merely as compliance with SGLG standards but as the transformation of good governance into a lasting organizational culture. Institutionalization of systems and policies ensured that reforms remained stable even amid leadership transitions, while leadership commitment and collective accountability strengthened continuity in implementation. Resource limitations did not completely hinder sustainability because LGUs adopted adaptive strategies, built partnerships, prioritized essential programs, and maximized available local capacities. Community involvement and ownership of governance programs also emerged as a vital foundation of sustainability, particularly in areas where participatory governance was essential to long term continuity and public trust. These findings affirm that when governance is guided by integrity, shared responsibility, and citizen engagement, it becomes more resilient to political, financial, and administrative changes.

At the same time, the study indicates that although governance practices were found to be Highly Sustainable, there remain important areas that require continued strengthening to ensure deeper institutionalization and long term effectiveness. The findings suggest the need to enhance strategic resource allocation and fiscal innovation by adopting transparent and data driven budgeting systems, improving local revenue generation, promoting participatory budgeting, and ensuring multiyear investment programming in order to address inequities and funding inconsistencies. Operational readiness must likewise be strengthened through regular audits, strategic deployment of personnel, upgrading disaster and health equipment, investing in rural economic infrastructure, and reinforcing capacity building programs so that service delivery remains efficient, equitable, and responsive across communities. The study also points to the importance of institutionalizing robust monitoring, evaluation, and feedback mechanisms through a unified monitoring and evaluation system, barangay level tracking tools, community feedback platforms, performance dashboards, and results based monitoring approaches in order to improve program consistency, accountability, and responsiveness.

Moreover, the conclusion drawn from the findings emphasizes that sustainable local development in Kalinga Province will depend on the LGUs' ability to scale up inclusive and future oriented governance initiatives. This includes expanding green governance programs, strengthening support for disadvantaged learners, institutionalizing youth programs more fully, enhancing cultural infrastructure, and supporting MSMEs and tourism development in ways that promote inclusive growth and long term sustainability across governance sectors. The

study likewise concludes that an integrated approach is necessary to strengthen the institutionalization of good governance practices. Such an approach requires promoting leadership continuity and ethical governance through values based leadership programs and succession planning, embedding transparency and accountability more deeply into local systems, reinforcing policy continuity by documenting procedures and establishing clear governance protocols, and maintaining stable administrative personnel to preserve institutional memory. In addition, reforms can be sustained more effectively when LGUs continuously enhance their financial, human, and technical capacities through training, strategic partnerships, and innovative resource mobilization.

In its overall synthesis, the study affirms that the experience of Kalinga's SGLG awardees demonstrates that the true essence of governance excellence lies not in the award itself but in the sustained and meaningful application of its principles long after recognition has been conferred. The findings show that good governance becomes enduring when it is institutionalized within systems, reinforced by ethical and committed leadership, supported by adequate and strategically managed resources, and shared with communities through participatory and inclusive governance processes. Therefore, the study concludes that the long term sustainability of good governance in Kalinga Province will be best secured when LGUs continue to strengthen policy continuity, administrative stability, operational capacity, stakeholder engagement, and community feedback mechanisms. Through these combined strategies, good governance can continue to evolve from compliance into a continuing culture of excellence, resilience, and public trust, ensuring that development gains are protected and expanded beyond the SGLG award cycles.

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