



# Regional Performance for the Sustainable Development Goals Among Provinces in Central Luzon, Philippines

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**Abstract:** This study assessed the regional performance for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Central Luzon, Philippines, using a convergent mixed-methods research design. Quantitative data were obtained from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) SDG Watch database using the Core Regional SDG Indicators (CoRe-SDGIs) to evaluate and classify SDG performance across selected social goals. A survey was also administered to Provincial, City, and Municipal Planning and Development Officers to measure the extent of mainstreaming of the SDGs into local development plans and strategies. Qualitative and perception-based data from open-ended survey responses were analyzed thematically, while institutional insights from the Department of Economy, Planning, and Development (DEPDev) Regional Office III and the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) Regional Office III and PSA Tarlac Provincial Office were used to contextualize findings and support triangulation.

Results indicate uneven SDG performance across the region. SDG 1 (No Poverty) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) show improving performance, while SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being), SDG 4 (Quality Education), and SDG 5 (Gender Equality) remain lagging. Although the extent of SDG mainstreaming into local development plans and strategies is generally moderate to high, integration is largely procedural and compliance oriented. SDG implementation is primarily operationalized through existing sectoral programs, with limited evidence of cross-cutting or transformative interventions.

The study identified opportunities related to fiscal support, institutional capacity, political commitment, and partnerships, alongside challenges involving resource constraints, data limitations, and coordination gaps. The findings suggest that SDG localization in Central Luzon remains at a transitional stage, highlighting the need for adaptive, integrated, and transformational governance approaches to achieve sustainable development outcomes.

**Keywords:** Sustainable Development Goals, Regional Performance, SDG Mainstreaming, SDG Localization, Public Administration

## I. INTRODUCTION

Since the release of the 1987 Brundtland report, sustainable development has been a major influence on global and national governance frameworks (De Jong & Vijge, 2021). The most extensive global governance framework for sustainable development is the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 associated targets which were adopted by the world leaders of 193 UN member states in September 2015. The goals are universal, integrated, and indivisible, balancing the three dimensions of sustainable development: social, economic, and environmental, with the principle of leaving no one behind. The 2030 Agenda succeeded the 2000 Millennium Declaration, which introduced the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the initial comprehensive global governance framework aimed at sustainable development.

The SDGs are utilized globally by various stakeholders to assess the effectiveness of development policies. At the halfway point towards the 2030 target for the SDGs, the 2023 SDG Summit in New York highlighted significant stagnation. Only 12% of the goals are on track, facing setbacks from crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and climate change (Braun, 2023). The challenge of effectively measuring, assessing, and comparing the progress and trends of the SDGs, established by the United Nations (UN), across different countries has been a concern to address (Huan et.al, 2019).

As one of the UN member states, the Philippines in line with its commitment to achieving the SDGs, actively monitors the indicators of achieving the SDGs through the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), the official repository of the Philippine SDG indicators, by reporting the baseline data, target data, and latest data. Through the PSA Board Resolution No. 12, Series of 2019, the Core Regional Sustainable Development Goals Indicators (CoRe-SDGI) were established by the PSA to enable sub-national comparisons in tracking the accomplishment of the SDGs.

Local governments are best positioned to facilitate and expedite the implementation of goals and programs from the international sphere and higher government authorities (Chakas, 2022). The Mandanas- Garcia ruling providing the LGUs with greater funding resources to finance their development programs and projects would mean a more comprehensive SDG- aligned local development initiatives according to Benjamin Abalos Jr., then Secretary of DILG.

In a study released by the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS, 2019), there is a need to intensify efforts to track and meet the implementation of the SDGs at the local level. It is found that only 37 percent on average of priorities of LGUs are aligned with the SDGs according to a study of Charlotte Justine Diokno-Sicat. PIDS calls for grassroots approach to monitoring and advancing SDG goals. According to Androff & Damanik (2023), no previous work has surveyed social development's contribution to the SDGs.

A significant challenge in achieving the SDGs is bridging the gap from the international to the local levels (Roldan, 2018). The rationale for this study stems from the critical need to understand and improve the performance of regions in achieving the SDGs and bridging the gap between national policies and local implementation. Central Luzon, being one of the key regions in the Philippines, plays a significant role in the nation's overall development.

While numerous studies have focused on SDG implementation at the national and global levels, there is a notable gap in research concerning the localized assessment of SDG performance, particularly in Central Luzon, Philippines. The rationale for this study stems from the critical need to understand and improve the performance of regions in achieving the SDGs and bridging the gap between national policies and local implementation.

### 1.1 Statement of the Problem

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide an integrated framework for addressing complex social, economic, and governance challenges through coordinated and evidence-based approaches. They support policy alignment, performance monitoring, and strategic planning across governance levels, particularly at the regional and local levels where implementation is most critical.

However, SDG implementation remains uneven, especially at the subnational level. In the Philippine context, regional disparities persist, and monitoring systems are often weakly linked to planning and decision-making processes. In Central Luzon, despite the presence of SDG frameworks and data systems, there is limited empirical assessment of regional performance, insufficient integration of SDGs into local development plans, and a lack of comprehensive approaches that connect indicators with governance processes.

Thus, this study seeks to assess the regional performance of SDGs in Central Luzon by examining selected social goals, the extent of SDG mainstreaming, the PPAs implemented, and the opportunities and challenges influencing implementation. The findings aim to inform more effective SDG localization and regional development planning.

### 1.2 Research Questions

The primary objective of this study is to assess the progress of SDG implementation in Central Luzon, Philippines, by analyzing key indicators and identifying opportunities, challenges, and strategies for improving regional sustainability and development. Specifically, it sought to answer the following:

1. How is the regional performance of Central Luzon, Philippines for the Sustainable Development Goals be assessed along with:
  - 1.1. no poverty
  - 1.2. zero hunger
  - 1.3. good health and well-being
  - 1.4. quality education
  - 1.5. gender equality
  - 1.6. peace, justice, and strong institutions
2. What is the extent to which SDGs are mainstreamed into local development plans and strategies in provinces, cities and municipalities?
3. What programs, projects, and activities (PPAs) have been implemented in support of these SDGs?
4. What are the opportunities and challenges toward achieving the SDGs?
5. What framework can be proposed to improve the regional SDG performance in Central Luzon?

## I. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Research Design

This study employed a convergent mixed-method research design, in which quantitative and qualitative data were collected during the same phase of the research process, analyzed separately, and integrated at the interpretation stage to provide a comprehensive assessment of SDG regional performance in Central Luzon.

### 2.2 Population and Sample

The respondents of the study consisted of Provincial Planning and Development Officers (PPDOs) and City/Municipal Planning and Development Office (C/MPDOs), anchored on their statutory mandate under Republic Act No. 7160, which designates them as the primary technical officers responsible for local development planning, coordination, and monitoring. Using convenience sampling, forty-nine (49) respondents participated, representing approximately 36% of the target population of 137 PPDOs and C/MPDOs in Region III. Methodological studies indicate that response rates of 30–40% are acceptable for specialized populations (Holtom et al., 2022). Institutional inputs were also obtained from the Chief Economic Development Specialist of Department of Economy, Planning, and Development (DEPDev) Region III and the Chief Statistical Specialists of Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) Region III and Tarlac Provincial Office. These institutional perspectives were used not for comparative analysis, but to contextualize regional SDG performance and explain data gaps in the quantitative assessment.

**2.3 Research Instruments**

The Core Regional SDG Indicators (CoRe-SDGIs) in Central Luzon were used to assess SDG performance in the social dimension due to the absence of available provincial-level data. A researcher-developed survey questionnaire, administered via Google Forms, measured the extent of SDG mainstreaming among LGUs. It included closed-ended items on key components—awareness and understanding, integration into planning, prioritization and gap identification, collaboration, participation, monitoring, and perceived effectiveness—rated on a four-point Likert scale (4 = Strongly Agree to 1 = Strongly Disagree), as well as open-ended questions on programs, projects, and activities (PPAs), opportunities, and challenges.

The instrument underwent expert content validation, and revisions were made accordingly. Following endorsement from DILG Region III, the survey was administered online, and responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

**2.4 Data Collection**

This study utilized both secondary and primary data sources.

For the secondary data, a formal request was submitted to PSA Central and Regional Office III for data access and clarification on monitoring processes. Responses confirmed that SDG data management and consolidation are centralized at the regional level.

For the primary data, they were collected through a structured Google Forms survey administered to PPDOs and C/MPDOs. The instrument included (1) closed-ended items using a four-point Likert scale to assess the extent of SDG mainstreaming in local plans, and (2) open-ended questions on programs, projects, and activities (PPAs), opportunities, challenges, and proposed measures. The survey distribution was facilitated through endorsement from DILG Region III. Additional institutional inputs from DEPDev Regional Office III, PSA Regional Office III and Tarlac Provincial Office were gathered to contextualize SDG coordination and planning processes, supporting triangulation.

**2.5 Data Analysis**

To analyze the data gathered, the following appropriate statistical tools were employed:

*For quantitative data analysis*

A Composite SDG Performance Index was constructed to assess regional performance in Central Luzon. Social SDGs (1–5 and 16) were selected based on data availability. Indicators were classified as forward (higher = better) or inverse (lower = better) and normalized using the min–max method to a 0–100 scale to ensure comparability. Inverse indicators were transformed to maintain directional consistency.

Normalized indicators were aggregated using the arithmetic mean to generate SDG-level scores, assuming equal weights. Scores were interpreted using equal-interval categories:

Aggregate Interval	Adjectival	Interpretation
75.01 – 100.00	Leading	High relative performance and sustained positive trajectory; institutional and policy mechanisms appear effective.
50.01 – 75.00	Improving	Moderate but advancing performance; measurable gains observed, though structural gaps remain.
25.01 – 50.00	Lagging	Limited progress or slow improvement; institutional, fiscal, or governance constraints may impede advancement.
00.00 – 25.00	Urgent	Critically low performance and weak or unstable trends; requires immediate and comprehensive intervention.

The extent of SDG mainstreaming was assessed using a four-point Likert scale (1–4). Mean scores were computed for each statement and dimension, and interpreted using equal interval scaling:

Mean Score Range	Extent of Mainstreaming	Interpretation
3.00 – 4.00	High	SDG mainstreaming is strong, systematically embedded, and institutionalized within governance structures.
2.00 – 2.99	Moderate	SDG mainstreaming is partially integrated but remains uneven across planning, budgeting, and implementation mechanisms.
1.00 – 1.99	Low	SDG mainstreaming is weak or minimally integrated into institutional processes.

*For qualitative data analysis*

Open-ended responses were analyzed using thematic analysis, with codes grouped into themes on opportunities, challenges, and proposed measures.

Findings were triangulated using SDG indicators (PSA), survey results, qualitative responses from LGU planning officers, and institutional inputs from DEPDev and PSA offices, strengthening validity across data sources.

**2.6 Ethical Considerations**

The study adhered to strict ethical standards. Approval to conduct data collection was secured from the relevant authorities prior to the administration of the survey to PPDOs and C/MPDOs. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents after they were briefed on the purpose, procedures, and use of the study.

Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained by ensuring that no personal identifiers were included in the dataset, and all responses were securely stored and accessible only to the researcher. Respondents were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. The study complied with applicable data protection and ethical research standards to safeguard the rights, welfare, and integrity of all participants.

**2.7 Conceptual Framework**

This study adopts an Input–Process–Output (IPO) conceptual framework to systematically assess the regional performance and implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Central Luzon, Philippines. It is composed of three major components:

1. **Input:** Consists of both quantitative and qualitative datasets that serve as the foundational evidence for analysis.
2. **Process/Intervention:** This outlines the systematic procedures for transforming raw data into meaningful findings through rigorous analytical methods. Data collection involves both primary and secondary sources.
3. **Output/Outcome:** This presents the synthesized results of the analysis, which are directly linked to policy and governance implications.

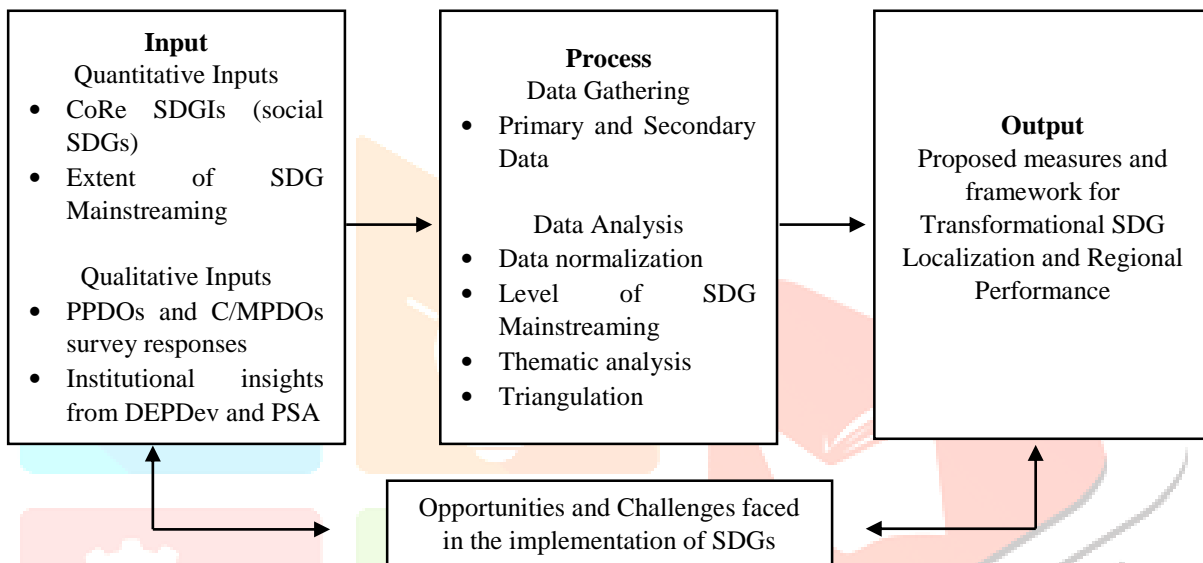


Figure 1. Research Paradigm on the Regional Assessment for the SDGs among Provinces in Central Luzon, Philippines

**III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This section of the study presents and interprets the findings of the study through systematic analysis of quantitative and qualitative data. Results are organized according to the research objectives and are examined through triangulation to explain patterns of SDG performance in Central Luzon.

**3.1 Regional Performance for the SDGs**

This section presents a regional-level assessment of selected social SDGs in Central Luzon based on PSA’s Core Regional SDGIs from 2015-2023, providing quantitative baseline data.

Table 3.1: Regional Performance for the SDGs in social dimension

SDG	Aggregate Score	Adjectival
SDG 1 No Poverty	58.10	Improving
SDG 2 Zero Hunger	48.81	Lagging
SDG 3 Good Health and Well-being	49.46	Lagging
SDG 4 Quality Education	45.22	Lagging
SDG 5 Gender Equality	48.27	Lagging
SDG 16 Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions	56.76	Improving
<b>Mean Aggregate</b>	51.10	Improving

Across the selected social SDGs, SDG 1 and SDG 16 are classified as improving, while, SDG 2, SDG 3, SDG 4, and SDG 5 remain lagging, pointing to persistent challenges in food security and nutrition, health outcomes, learning quality, and gender equality. Despite these disparities, the mean aggregate score of 51.10, categorized as improving, suggests that the region is making incremental progress overall, although uneven across sectors.

From a systems perspective, the coexistence of improving outcomes in poverty reduction and governance alongside lagging performance in human capital and social equity dimensions suggest a development imbalance between enabling systems (governance and poverty reduction) and outcome-based social sectors (health, education, nutrition, and gender equality).

The findings highlight that multidimensional poverty remains a central development challenge in the region. While income poverty is declining, deficits in nutrition, health, education, and gender equality continue to constrain overall well-being and human capital formation.

### 3.2 Extent of SDG Mainstreaming

Table 3.2 Extent of SDG Mainstreaming into Local Development Plans and Strategies in Central Luzon

Dimensions of SDG Mainstreaming	Mean	Extent
Awareness and Understanding of the SDGs	3.11	High
Mainstreaming of SDGs into local development plans and processes	3.01	High
Prioritization and Gap Identification	2.97	Moderate
Multi-Sectoral Collaboration and External Networks	2.92	Moderate
Community and Youth Participation	3.18	High
Monitoring, Evaluation, and Sustainability	3.06	High
Perceived Effectiveness	3.12	High
<b>Grand Mean</b>	<b>3.05</b>	<b>High</b>

The overall assessment of SDG mainstreaming in Central Luzon reflects a generally high level of engagement, with a grand mean of 3.05. This indicates that local government units in the region have made substantial progress in integrating the SDGs into governance processes, particularly in terms of awareness, planning alignment, monitoring mechanisms, and perceived effectiveness.

However, the moderate level of prioritization suggests that while LGUs are able to identify relevant SDGs, this process is often constrained by limited data availability, weak analytical capacity, and reliance on existing programs. Similarly, the moderate performance in multi-sectoral collaboration indicates that institutional coordination across agencies, sectors, and stakeholders remains fragmented.

The results suggest that SDGs are visible in plans, understood by actors, and recognized as important, but are not yet fully embedded in core governance functions such as data-driven prioritization, intersectoral coordination, and adaptive policymaking.

### 3.3 Programs, Projects, and Activities (PPAs) Implemented in support of the SDGs

Table 3.3 PPAs Implemented in support of the SDGs

Program	Project	Activity	SDG Aligned	Type
<b>Health Sector</b>				
1. Nutrition Program	1. Municipal Health Centers	1. Supplemental Feeding	SDG 2, 3	DIST, SERV, INF
2. Universal Health Care Program	2. Dialysis Centers, District Hospitals, Dental Equipment	2. Medical Services, Hospital Construction, Dental Services		
3. Maternal & Child Health Program	3. Primary Health Care Facilities	3. Immunization & Screening		
4. Mental Health Program	4. Local Health Initiatives	4. Counseling & Check-ups		
5. Wellness Program	5. Sports Facilities	5. Padyak, Takbo, Lakad		
<b>Education Sector</b>				
1. Literacy Program	1. Barangay Learning Hub	1. Distribution of School Supplies	SDG 4,5	CAP, DIST, INF
2. Scholarship Program	2. Community/City Colleges	2. Educational Assistance		
3. Education Program	3. Classrooms / Day Care / SPED	3. Infrastructure + Seminars		
4. Capacity Development	4. Training Facilities	4. Youth & Women Training		
<b>Economic Development</b>				
1. Livelihood Program	1. OTOP / Nutri-Saka	1. Livelihood Training	SDG 1,2,8	CAP, DIST
2. Sustainable Livelihood	2. Agri-Fisheries	2. Input Distribution & Technical Support		
3. Skills Development	3. Training Centers	3. Skills & Entrepreneurship		
4. Support to Marginalized	4. TESDA Programs	4. Job Training		
<b>Social Welfare and Inclusion</b>				
1. Social Pension Program	1. Pension System	1. Pension Distribution	SDG 1,5,10,16	SERV, CAP, DIST
2. GAD Program	2. GAD Offices	2. Awareness & Training		
3. Gender-Based Violence Prevention	3. Protection Units	3. Training & Reporting		
4. Child Protection	4. VAWC Desks	4. Case Management, Advocacy Activities		
5. Support to Marginalized	5. Social Welfare Centers	5. Assistance Services		

<b>Environmental Sector</b> 1. Solid Waste Management 2. Reforestation Program 3. Environmental Protection 4. Coastal Clean-Up 5. DRRM Program	1. Material Recovery Facilities (MRFs) 2. Mangrove and Terrestrial Restoration 3. Solar Facilities & Streetlights Installation 4. Linis Program 5. DRRM Systems	1. Waste Segregation & Collection, Zero Waste Challenge 2. Tree Planting 3. Installation & Awareness 4. Coastal Cleanup 5. Disaster Preparedness Training & Emergency Response	SDG 7,11,12,13,15	ENV-MGT, INF, CAP
<b>Governance</b> 1. Infrastructure Development 2. Peace & Order 3. Anti-Drug and Smoke-Free Programs 4. Community Peacebuilding 5. Governance Program	1. Farm-to-Market Roads 2. Police Stations 3. Rehab Facilities 4. Barangay Peacekeeping Action Teams 5. Bahay Silangan	1. Road Construction 2. Patrols & CCTV 3. Awareness & Enforcement 4. Mediation 5. Legal & Social Services	SDG 3,9,11,16	SERV, INF, REG

*Legend: Service Delivery (SERV), Capacity Building (CAP), Distribution (DIST), Infrastructure (INF), Environmental Management (ENV-MGT), or Regulatory/Policy (REG)*

The analysis of PPAs across sectors in Central Luzon shows a generally consistent pattern of SDG-aligned but service-heavy and short-term interventions, complemented by selective infrastructure and capacity-building efforts.

In the health sector, PPAs are predominantly service delivery-oriented, supported by infrastructure and limited distribution initiatives. Programs aligned with SDG 3 and SDG 2 focus on preventive care, nutrition, and universal health care. While initiatives like supplemental feeding and health services address immediate needs, and UHC-related infrastructure strengthens system capacity, the overall approach remains reactive. Emerging innovations such as nutrition-linked agriculture (e.g., NutriSaka) demonstrate stronger integration of health and local economic systems, but long-term investments in workforce development and health system strengthening remain limited.

In the education sector, interventions combine distribution (scholarships, school supplies), infrastructure (classrooms, SPED facilities), and capacity-building programs. These align with SDG 4 by improving access and learning environments and supporting skills development. However, the sector remains largely access-focused, with weaker emphasis on systemic quality reforms such as curriculum enhancement, teacher development, and digital learning transformation.

The economic development sector is largely capacity-building driven, supported by distribution-based livelihood and agricultural inputs. Programs under SDG 1, 2, and 8 prioritize entrepreneurship, skills training, and MSME development (e.g., OTOP, TESDA training, Nutri-Saka). These reflect a strong human capital and value chain approach, enhancing local livelihoods and productivity. However, scaling, market integration, and institutional support mechanisms remain areas for strengthening.

The social welfare sector is dominated by distribution and service delivery programs, including pensions, child protection, and marginalized assistance, aligned with SDGs 1, 5, 10, and 16. While these improve immediate welfare and inclusion, many interventions remain compliance- and assistance-based, with limited transformative or preventive systems strengthening, particularly in gender mainstreaming and child protection.

The environmental sector, though less extensive, shows growing alignment with SDGs 7, 11, 12, 13, 14, and 15 through waste management, reforestation, climate adaptation, and renewable energy initiatives. Innovative practices such as circular economy programs and PPP-based environmental projects indicate progress, but overall environmental governance remains uneven and still emerging at the LGU level.

In governance-related PPAs, infrastructure and service delivery dominate, focusing on peace and order, anti-drug campaigns, and public safety systems under SDG 16. While these enhance operational governance and security, most interventions remain enforcement- and service-oriented rather than reform-driven or institutionalized governance innovations.

The LGUs in Central Luzon demonstrate clear SDG alignment across sectors through a mix of service delivery, distribution, infrastructure, and capacity-building interventions. However, development strategies remain largely incremental and short-term, with limited integration of long-term institutional reforms, system-wide innovation, and sustainability-oriented transformation. Promising localized innovations exist, but these are not yet fully scaled or embedded into broader governance systems.

### 3.4 Opportunities in the SDG Implementation

Table 3.4 Opportunities in the SDG Implementation

Themes	Codes
1. Financial and Resource Mobilization Opportunities	1.1 National and Local Fiscal Support 1.2 External and Private Resource Leveraging
2. Local Capacities and Endogenous Development Assets	2.1 Institutional and Human Capacity 2.2 Economic, Geographic, and Environmental Assets
3. Policy, Planning, and Institutional Alignment for SDGs	3.1 SDG Integration in Plans and Policies 3.2 Institutional Support for Evidence-Based Governance

4. Political Commitment and Coordinative Governance	4.1 Political will and leadership 4.2 Coordinative Governance Mechanisms
5. Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships and Participatory Governance	5.1 Institutional and Cross-sectoral Partnerships 5.2 Community and Civic Engagement

The findings reveal significant opportunities that can strengthen SDG localization in Central Luzon. These include fiscal support mechanisms, institutional and human capacities, favorable economic and geographic conditions, policy alignment, political commitment, and expanding multi-stakeholder partnerships, all of which create an enabling environment for SDG implementation.

Financial mechanisms such as the GAD budget, SGLG incentives, and national SDG-related allocations provide important funding support. However, financial resources alone are insufficient, as LGUs still tend to prioritize short-term and compliance-driven interventions over integrated and transformative strategies.

The region also benefits from strong endogenous assets, including skilled personnel, local innovations, agricultural resources, tourism potential, and resilient infrastructure. Programs such as Nutri-Saka and OTOP demonstrate emerging cross-sectoral approaches to development. In addition, the integration of SDGs into local planning instruments, the Regional SDG Catch-up Plan, strong political commitment, and partnerships with government agencies, NGOs, CSOs, and the private sector further support participatory and collaborative SDG governance.

### 3.5 Challenges in the SDG Implementation

Table 3.5 Challenges in the SDG Implementation

Themes	Codes
1. Limited SDG Awareness and Weak SDG Mainstreaming	1.1 Insufficient understanding of SDGs
2. Financial Constraints and Resource Dependence	2.1 Limited fiscal resources 2.2 Resource competition
3. Capacity and Human Resource Limitations	3.1 Manpower and Technical Expertise Gaps 3.2 Institutional weakness
4. Data Gaps, Monitoring, and Coordination Issues	4.1 Data availability and Quality Issues 4.2 Weak coordination and monitoring
5. Environmental, Social, and Behavioral Constraints	5.1 Environmental and Geographic Vulnerability 5.2 Behavioral and Cultural Barriers

The findings reveal that despite the presence of enabling conditions, SDG implementation in Central Luzon remains constrained by interrelated institutional, financial, technical, and socio-environmental challenges. Key barriers include limited operational understanding of the SDGs, weak mainstreaming, absence of designated SDG focal persons, fiscal limitations, dependence on the NTA, and insufficient technical and human resource capacities. These constraints weaken institutional continuity and limit the ability of LGUs to translate SDG commitments into concrete and context-specific strategies.

Data gaps, weak monitoring systems, and fragmented coordination mechanisms further hinder evidence-based planning and adaptive governance. Limited access to disaggregated and updated data, inconsistencies in statistical systems, and dependence on national data sources reduce the analytical autonomy of LGUs and often result in uneven prioritization of SDGs. Environmental vulnerabilities, rapid urbanization, and behavioral challenges such as weak community participation and “dole-out mentality” also undermine long-term sustainability and local ownership of development initiatives.

SDG localization in Central Luzon reflects a system with strong enabling foundations but constrained by capacity, fiscal, and data limitations, resulting in progress that is steady but not yet fully transformative.

## 3.6 Proposed Framework for Transformational SDG Localization and Regional Performance

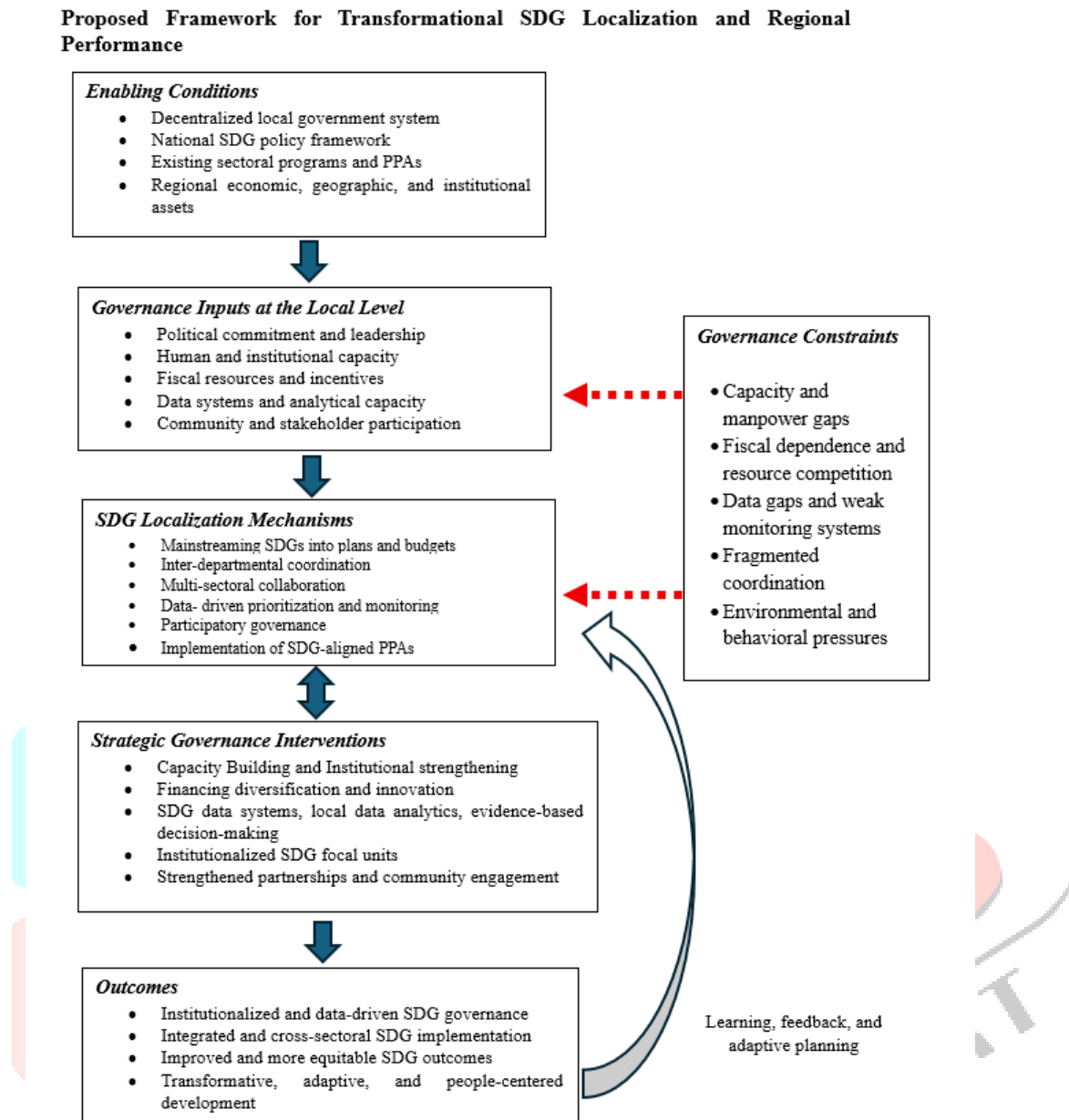


Figure 2. Proposed Framework for Transformational SDG Localization and Regional Performance

SDG localization in Central Luzon operates within a decentralized governance system where national frameworks and local conditions provide the enabling foundation, but do not directly translate into outcomes.

At the core are governance inputs—political leadership, institutional capacity, fiscal resources, data systems, and stakeholder participation—which are present but uneven and weakly integrated, leading to variation in SDG performance across sectors.

These inputs are translated through localization mechanisms such as planning and budgeting integration, coordination, partnerships, data use, and participation.

Their effectiveness is moderated by structural constraints, including fiscal dependence, capacity gaps, weak data systems, and fragmented coordination, which explain the persistent gap between policy alignment and actual SDG outcomes.

To shift toward transformational SDG localization, the framework emphasizes strengthening institutional capacity, improving data and analytical systems, enhancing coordination, and embedding SDG-responsive budgeting within an adaptive, feedback-driven governance system.

Transformation occurs when governance systems move to evidence-based, and adaptive performance-oriented governance.

## IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 4.1 Conclusions

The study concludes that SDG localization in Central Luzon remains uneven and largely sectoral, with progress concentrated in specific areas such as poverty reduction, resilience, and governance, while human development outcomes in food security, health, education, and gender equality continue to lag. Although LGUs have increasingly integrated SDGs into local plans and programs, localization remains largely procedural and compliance-driven rather than transformative, with interventions often short-term and service-oriented.

The findings further reveal that governance capacity, data systems, and coordination mechanisms are critical determinants of SDG performance, as persistent institutional and technical constraints limit effective implementation despite strong political commitment. SDG localization in the region is at a transitional stage, requiring more adaptive, integrated, and collaborative governance approaches to achieve transformative and sustained development outcomes.

#### 4.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are recommended by the researcher. Specific actions to strengthen SDG localization include institutionalizing SDG governance through the creation of focal units, SDG councils, ordinances, and the integration of SDG priorities into local planning and budgeting processes. LGUs should also strengthen capacity-building, data systems, and financing mechanisms through regular SDG training, budget tagging, establishment of SDG databases, quarterly indicator tracking, and improved access to national, climate, and PPP funding. Moreover, stronger multi-sectoral coordination and participatory governance should be promoted through formal partnerships, regular stakeholder meetings, behavior change campaigns, and active engagement of communities, CSOs, and youth in SDG monitoring and implementation.

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