

# Legislative Competency of Local Legislators in Region I, Philippines: Gender Differences

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**Abstract**—Legislation is a vital component of good governance. As such, members of Legislative bodies must possess the requisite competency to be able to perform their tasks. This study assessed the level of competence of local Legislators along effective communication, influence, policy research and analysis, relationship building, and technical proficiency. The study employed the descriptive-method of research using a questionnaire as the main tool in data gathering. It was adapted from the Competency Framework and Dictionary Manual of the Department of Interior and Local Government. The subjects of the study were the members of the Provincial Board, City and Municipal Councils of the local government units in region I.

The study found out that the Legislators in Region 1 are predominantly male, married and professionals serving their first term in the local Legislative Board/Council. The female Legislators, although outnumbered, contributed significantly by churning out policies promoting women and children welfare and helped in the crafting of a Gender and Development Manual for their respective local government units.

Majority of the Legislators possess adequate competence to perform their Legislative functions. However, they need to level up their proficiency in all the dimensions of Legislative competence. Specifically, the Legislators should acquire the basics of policy research and analysis, learn how to simplify complex issues and develop strategies to effectively articulate the same to their colleagues and constituents. The Department of Interior and Local Government should design more appropriate capability trainings for neophyte Legislators, and more women should be encouraged to ran for Legislative positions for a better and balanced Legislation.

**Keywords**—Local legislation, Legislative competency, assessment.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The role of local Legislators in countryside development cannot be over emphasized. The role they play is very vital since they are tasked with the responsibility of churning out legislations not only to address local concern and issues but more so to provide support to the Local Chief Executives in their pursuit of development agenda. More importantly, the local legislators have the distinct task of enacting the annual budget of the local government units. While this financial plan is prepared through the leadership of the Chief Executives, it has still to be scrutinized and enacted by the

Legislators. Thus, it is important for the Local Executives to nurture a good working relationship with the Legislators.

The task of legislating in the local level is vested in the Sangguniang Panlalawigan in the case of Provinces, Sangguniang Panglungsod in cities, and Sangguniang Bayan for the municipalities. and Sangguniang Barangay for the smallest unit of government. The Sangguniang Panglalawigan, Panglungsod and Sangguniang Bayan is presided by the Vice Governor and City/Municipal mayors respectively. The provinces and cities have ten elected members plus the President of the Association of Barangay Captains and Federated Sangguniang Kabataan President who sit as ex-officio members. In the municipal level, only eight regular members are elected. The other members are the President of the Association of Barangay Captains and the President of the Municipal Sangguniang Kabataan Association who sits in an ex-officio capacity.

Politics is a male dominated discipline. Only very few women dare to set their footprints in the political arena. It was only right after Corazon Aquino was catapulted to the presidency when more women were enticed to try their luck in politics either as Legislator, Governor or Mayor of a local government unit.

Legislating is not an easy task. It is a political exercise that involves too much bickering among politicians chosen by the people. Political affiliation with the powerful people would not suffice for one to be a good Legislator. Competence is a paramount consideration if one is to become a good Legislator. In the national level, most of the Legislators (Senators and Congressmen) are professionals, many of whom are Lawyers. Thus, debates and heated discussions on national issues are common in both Houses of Congress and the Senate.

In the Philippines, many politicians are elected into office by virtue of their wealth, power, influence and popularity. Whether these officials possess the required competency to perform their tasks is not an issue among the electorates. Lately, some aspiring politicians were elected to high positions due to their popularity. The case of actors turned politicians is a good example. Their sheer popularity among the people catapulted them to high level offices. But legislation is not mere acting scripted roles as in the movies. It is a task that required in depth studies, analyses and competent participation in discussions and interpolations. The later requires a good command of communication skills, and the lack of it relegates a Legislator as mere member of

the so called “silent majority” whose participation is limited to the raising of hands. This, consequently, resulted to the popular perception that many incompetents were elected due to their popularity among the mass base of society. The incident that happened during the incumbency of the late Miriam Santiago as Senator is instructive. It should be recalled that the Lady Senator was famous for her high level intelligence, eloquence and wittiness during public discourses. In one occasion, she refused to interpolate or engage a neophyte popular Senator in a debate on a proposed legislation authored by the later. To her, it is too demeaning and unfair to the neophyte Senator whose only credential that yielded him a seat in the highest Legislative Body of the country in his being a popular sportsman. In yet another case, she challenged some Senators who were doing nothing to just stuck their fingers in the wall sockets of the Senate building. In short, she figuratively asked these inutile public servants to commit Harakiri and save millions of pesos in public taxes.

The incompetence of some Legislators was also evident during the impeachment trial of then President Joseph Estrada. During one of the interpolations shown on national television, one senator was seen trying hardly to approximate the weight of the sack of money allegedly given to the President using the weight of fighting cocks as his frame of reference. Incidentally, the Senator is a cock fight aficionado and his expertise must have been limited within the confines of the fight arena and not in the Halls of Congress.

In the local level, many members of Legislative Bodies such as the Sangguniang Panglalawigan, Panglungsod and Sangguniang Bayan are professionals. Many are either Lawyers, Doctors or retired public servants who want to continue their services in the political field. Their stature, however, is not a guarantee of their competence. In many local government units particularly municipalities, it is a common observation that majority of the Sangguniang Bayan members are usually close associates of the Local Chief Executive (LCE). In many cases, they were handpicked to ran under the political party of the incumbent mayor not because of their competence but due largely to their proven loyalty. As such, these people feel morally bound or obliged to support whatever initiatives coming from the Office of the Local Executive when they assumed as Legislators. This scenario is, of course, advantageous on the part of the Chief Executive. On the contrary, the absence of oppositionists in the Local Councils who may serve as fiscalizers would lead to decisions that are not carefully deliberated.

It is precisely the perceived questionable competence of some members of the Legislative Bodies of the Provinces, Cities and Municipalities of Region I that necessitates this study. The objectives of the study are: to describe the socio-economic profile of the members of the Sangguniang Panglalawigan, Sangguniang Panglungsod and Sangguniang Bayan, determine their functional competency along effective communication, influence, policy research and analysis, relationship building and technical proficiency, and determine whether these two variables are significantly related. Likewise, the study will compare the competency of the male Legislators with their female counterparts.

The significance of the study can be seen in terms of the data to be generated which can serve as baseline input for authorities in determining the type and focus of capability trainings and seminars that will enhance the competence of Legislators including the subjects of this study. The wide dissemination of the findings may also help the people in deciding whom to elect as their representatives to the Local Legislative Councils during the local elections. Competent Legislators will result to good laws or policies that will re-down to improved benefits for the people.

## II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study is anchored on the thought that in any task, the one designated of undertaking the same must manifests or possesses some level of competence related to it. The term competence maybe defined in various ways. The Oxford dictionaries (2009) defined competence as the ability to do something successfully or efficiently. It is accompanied by a varying degree of capability, ability, expertise, adeptness, skill, proficiency, talent and mastery. Similarly, the business dictionary ([www.businessdictionary.com](http://www.businessdictionary.com)) defines competence as a “cluster of related abilities, commitments, knowledge, and skills that enable a person (or an organization) to act effectively in a job or situation. Competence indicates sufficiency of knowledge and skills that enable someone to act in a wide variety of situations (Cooper et. Al., 2001). Likewise, it is defined as the skill or ability in a specific field or subject, or being able to do something well ([www.yourdictionary.com](http://www.yourdictionary.com)). This perspective of competence is further elucidated by Wikipedia by describing it as the ability of an individual to do a job properly (<https://en.wikipedia.org>). Thus, competency may be defined as the combination of observable and measurable knowledge, skills, abilities and personal attributes which enhance employee performance and consequently lead to organizational success (Dubois et. al, 2004). Bartram et. al. (2002) viewed competence as a set of behavior patterns that an individual needs to bring to a position in order to perform his tasks and functions to bring about the desired results. It is an individual characteristic that can be manifested to differentiate significantly superior performance from average performance, or between effective and ineffective performers.

Legislative competence or competency, on the other hand, is defined by the English Dictionaries as “the skill, knowledge, qualification, capacity or authority to make, give or enact rules with binding force upon a population or jurisdiction ” (<https://glosbe.com>). It refers to the effectiveness and efficiency of the Legislators to perform their jobs properly. This can be manifested in various forms such as properly crafted ordinances and resolutions that respond appropriately to the needs and aspirations of their constituents, ability to engage others in public discourses particularly during Legislative debates, observance of parliamentary procedures and capacity to conduct policy researches in aid of Legislation.

To further understand the concept of competence, one must have a good grasp of its important components. Knowledge is one of them which refers to a person’s cognizance of facts, truths and principles which may be gained from formal training and experience. The application

and sharing of knowledge is critical to individual and organizational success. Another is skill which pertains to the proficiency or dexterity in mental operations or physical processes. This is usually acquired through specialized trainings. The application of this skill will certainly result to successful performance. Ability is another core component of competence which is the power or aptitude to perform physical or mental activities related to a particular profession or trade like computer programming. Many organizations are good in measuring results, knowledge and skills, but they usually failed to recognize employees' abilities or aptitudes, particularly those employees doing tasks outside of the traditional job design.

The last component is individual attributes which pertain to qualities or characteristics which make an individual unique from the rest of humanity. Personal attributes or characteristics are perceived to have been genetically developed or acquired from a person's accumulated life experiences. Such qualities may include but not limited to openness or receptiveness of a person to others' ideas, ability to work under pressure, just and fair in dealing with others, have no bias and prejudice, possesses a critical mind, selfless and good public relations.

The Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) Competency Framework and Dictionary Manual defines competency as a cluster of skills, attributes and related knowledge that affect an individual's ability to attain job success. It pertains to individual attributes that can be measured to differentiate average from superior performers (Spencer, et al, 1994). The DILG manual further identifies three common competencies namely: core competencies, leadership competencies and functional competencies. Each one describes the work competencies required for the local government officials and employees to perform their tasks. Core competencies relate to the culture, mission and

values of the institution while leadership competencies is associated to the knowledge, skills and behavior required or needed to perform managerial work. Functional competencies, on the other hand, speak of the specific bodies of knowledge and skills necessary to perform the defined activities which include the ability to use procedures, knowledge and techniques of a specialized field. It is this competency that fits well to the nature of the job of local Legislators. Hence, the study will be limited along this area.

The components or parameters of functional competencies specified by the DILG Competency Model are: effective communication, influence, policy research and analysis, relationship building, technical proficiency, managing knowledge and information, and program development and management. The last two parameters, however, are not so much related to legislative functions. Thus, competency will be assessed only along effective communication, influence, policy research and analysis, relationship building and technical proficiency.

### III. METHODOLOGY

The study employed the descriptive method of research. Data were gathered, tabulated, analyzed and interpreted in order to address the objectives of the study.

The subjects of the study were the Members of the Sangguniang Panlalawigan, Sangguniang Panglungsod and Sangguniang Bayan of the provinces, cities and municipalities of Region I. The sources of data were the Legislators themselves, the Vice Governors and Vice Mayors who are the presiding officers of the local legislative bodies and the Secretaries of the Sangguniang Bayan, Panglungsod and Panlalawigan. Total enumeration was employed for the Sangguniang Panlalawigan and Panglungsod while a sample representative was used in the case of municipalities. Convenience and purposive sampling was used in selecting the municipalities. Structured interview and documentary analysis were the main tools in data gathering. Most of the items to measure competence were adapted from the Competency Framework and Dictionary Manual of the Department of Interior and Local Government. Frequency count, percentage, mean and simple regression were the main statistical tools used in analyzing the data.

TABLE I. PROFILE OF THE LOCAL LEGISLATORS

Items	f	%
1. Age		
21 – 30	46	14.98
31 – 40	59	19.22
41 – 50	98	31.92
51 – 60	56	18.24
61 & above	48	15.64
<b>Total</b>	<b>307</b>	<b>100</b>
2. Sex		
Male	249	81.11
Female	58	18.89
<b>Total</b>	<b>307</b>	<b>100</b>
3. Civil Status		
Married	223	72.64
Single	37	12.05
Separated	16	5.21
Widow(er)	31	10.10
<b>Total</b>	<b>307</b>	<b>100</b>
4. Education		
College graduate	239	77.85
Collage level	37	12.05
High school graduate	21	6.84
High school level	10	3.26
<b>Total</b>	<b>307</b>	<b>100</b>
5. Number of term(s) as legislator		
1 term	142	46.25
2 terms	64	20.85
3 & last term	10	3.26
<b>Total</b>	<b>307</b>	<b>100</b>
6. No. of trainings/seminars on Legislation attended		
1-3	134	43.65
4-6	82	26.71
6-9	43	14.01
10 and above	48	15.64
<b>Total</b>	<b>307</b>	<b>100</b>
7. Ordinances/resolutions sponsored/co-sponsored		
1-5	81	26.38
6-10	83	27.04
11-15	36	11.72
16-20	63	20.52
21-25	31	10.10
26 and above	13	4.23
<b>Total</b>	<b>307</b>	<b>100</b>

A great number of the respondents (31.92%) are in their middle adult stage while the least are those who are relatively young (21-30 years old). Majority of the respondents are male (81.11%) indicating that politics in the region is still a male dominated activity, although it is observed that there is an increasing number of women entering politics. Majority (72.64%) are married and have completed a college degree indicating that majority of the Legislators are professionals (77.85%). A great number (46.25%) are first term Legislators and that many of them (43.65%) attended at least 1 – 3 trainings/seminars related to Legislative work. It can be seen in the table that the least (4.23%) sponsored/co-sponsored 25 or more ordinances/resolutions while a substantial number (27.04%) sponsored/co-sponsored 6 – 10 ordinances resolutions. Through interviews and documentary analysis, it was gathered that the women Legislators are not far behind from their male counterparts in terms of performance for they have an average of 4 ordinances/resolutions sponsored or co-sponsored. Many of their bills are related to the promotion of women and children welfare and they have been instrumental in the passage of ordinances/resolutions mandating the local government units to formulate their own Gender and Development (GAD) Manual.

TABLE II. LEVEL OF COMPETENCE ALONG EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Items	Mean
1. The Local Legislators think first about what they want to communicate, organize their thoughts and ideas effectively before communicating.	3.26
2. They have no difficulty in conveying Legislative agenda orally to their colleagues and constituents.	4.11
3. They participate actively in oral discussions and interpolations during Board Sessions.	3.76
4. they adjust the contents and style of their documents and presentations according to the subject matter and purpose.	3.36
5. They can explain complex ideas in a step-by-step manner or logical sequence to facilitate easy understanding.	2.98
6. They ask open ended questions that encourage others to give their point of view or opinion and clarify the message being delivered.	3.34
7. They can translate highly technical information into simple terms to facilitate understanding by target readers/audience.	3.36
8. They actively listen and put themselves into others' position to gain a better understanding of how other people respond to the message they conveyed.	4.02
9. They can express their ideas clearly and effectively when communicating with their colleagues and other people.	3.99
<b>As a whole</b>	<b>3.58</b>

The table shows that the level of competence of the Legislators along effective communication is high as indicated by the mean of 3.58. This tends to show that the respondents have good communication skills. Item 2 obtained the highest mean (4.11) which tends to indicate that the Legislators have no difficulty in articulating their Legislative agenda to their colleagues and constituents. Politicians who are good in public speaking are more likely to win during elections than those who can not articulate their ideas in public. It should be noted that in more advanced societies like the USA, the electorates can be swayed by the performance of candidates during public debates before elections.

Item 5, on the other hand, got the lowest mean which tends to indicate that the respondents have difficulty in simplifying complicated ideas for easier understanding

TABLE III. LEVEL OF COMPETENCE ALONG INFLUENCE

Items	Mean
1. The SP members can highlight or emphasize the advantages and benefits of proposed ordinances/legislations and solicit the support of colleagues and stakeholders.	4.21
2. They always participate actively in rallying the support of colleagues and stakeholders for the approval of new Legislations/Ordinances that are beneficial to the people.	3.99
3. They use direct persuasion to convince their colleagues and stakeholders to accept their ideas or a specific course of action.	3.33
4. They use subtle strategies/methods of persuading colleagues and stakeholders for support particularly in sensitive or high-pressure situations.	3.16
5. They can easily get the support of their colleagues and constituents for their advocacies after explaining to them the benefits/advantages.	4.01
6. They use their authority and impact of their presence to influence key decision makers and stakeholders.	4.15
7. They create a professional and positive impression with other people by dressing appropriately and speaking confidently when interacting with target stakeholders.	3.29
<b>As a whole</b>	<b>3.73</b>

The data show that, as a whole, the level of influence of the respondents is high as indicated by the mean (3.73). This can be attributed to the fact that as elected officials, they wield some power which can be used to influence others. The power to enact the local budget is one example which can be used by the Legislators to influence decision makers like the local Chief Executive. Item 1 obtained the highest mean (4.21 or very high) which tends to show that the respondents are likely to use their Legislative power to solicit the support of their colleagues and constituents. Item 4 obtained the lowest mean (3.16 or moderate) which tends to manifest that pressuring or directly persuading colleagues and constituents for support is not commonly practiced by the respondents.

TABLE IV. LEVEL OF COMPETENCE ALONG POLICY RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS

Items	Mean
1. The Local Council Members can prepare feasibility studies and proposals on policies which can support local government programs.	3.09
2. They review researches and studies to assess which policies are most effective and the specific areas of local government work these would be most relevant.	3.21
3. They are capable of assessing the effectiveness of implemented policies based on program monitoring and evaluation information.	3.11
4. They create monitoring and evaluation framework for effective policy implementation incorporating standards, risk management and impact analysis.	2.99
5. They always assess government activities and recommend proper course of action, and provide advice to stakeholders based on established policies.	3.13
6. They solicit feedback from program implementers and key stakeholders regarding policies being implemented.	3.98
7. They can do basic research on basic issues and topics that can serve as inputs for the development of policies.	2.77
<b>As a whole</b>	<b>3.18</b>

The data in the table show that item 7 solicited the lowest mean (2.77 or low) which tends to indicate that the respondents do not conduct studies as basis in policy formulation. Unlike their counterparts in the national level (Senators and Congressmen), local Legislators are quite familiar with local conditions, thus, basic research or formal studies are not necessary. Soliciting feedback from implementers and constituents is common among Local Legislators as indicated by item 6 which obtained the highest mean. The data or feedback provided may be used as inputs in the formulation of policies.

As a whole, the competence level of the respondents along policy research and analysis is “moderate” as indicated by the mean of 3.18, which tends to imply that the respondents are either not equipped with the basic tool to conduct policy research or they do not simply have the time to do research.

TABLE V. LEVEL OF COMPETENCE ALONG RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

Items	Mean
1. The SP members have developed good relationship among themselves and with their constituents with the intent of achieving delivery of relevant services and effective program implementation.	4.31
2. They maintain a productive and harmonious working relationship with their colleagues and constituents.	4.12
3. They promote a culture of collaborative working with colleagues and various stakeholders.	3.98
4. They mediate between opposing or conflicting parties and create ways to address conflicts.	3.35
5. They help create new opportunities to work with their colleagues and other stakeholders paving the way for effective collaboration.	3.98
6. They have established a wide range of contacts through informal interactions such as unstructured or spontaneous talk on work related topics.	4.06
7. They participate in networking and social events internal and external to the local government unit.	4.11
<b>As a whole</b>	<b>3.99</b>

The data show that, as a whole, the Legislators are good in relationship building as indicated by the mean (3.99) which is high. Politicians are usually proficient along this area to entice more people to vote for them. Item 1 obtained the highest mean (4.31) or very high which shows that the respondents are really good in establishing good relationship with their colleagues and constituents. This can be due to the fact that a Legislator needs the support of colleagues for his/her bill(s) to be passed and approved.

Item 4 obtained the lowest mean (3.35) which is equivalent to moderate. This tends to show that the respondents have the tendency not to meddle with other parties oppose to their ideas, and do not exert enough effort to settle conflicts.

TABLE VI. LEVEL OF COMPETENCE TECHNICAL PROFICIENCY

Items	Mean
1. The SP members use information technology-based tools or technology assisted programs to deliver outputs more efficiently.	2.36
2. They use technical knowledge or skills not easily or quickly learned on the job.	3.09
3. They simplify work systems and find appropriate	3.57

solutions using available Information Technology based tools or technology assisted programs.	
4. They always suggest for the improvement or revision of documents when they observed some deficiencies.	4.13
5. They can accomplish complex tasks without asking for guidance or instructions from others.	3.98
6. They use and understand the technical language of their job as members of the Legislative Body.	4.07
7. They always follow/observe parliamentary procedures during deliberations/meetings/sessions.	4.33
<b>As a whole</b>	<b>3.65</b>

It can be gleaned from the data in the table that, as a whole, the technical proficiency of the respondents is high as indicated by the mean (3.65). This tends to mean that the Legislators are proficient enough with the use of technology in the performance of their functions. Item 7 obtained the highest mean (4.33) which is indicative of the respondents’ very high proficiency in adhering to parliamentary procedures during sessions and meetings. This is so because the procedures can easily be learned. Moreover, there is the presiding officer who can guide the Legislators or correct them whenever they are found to be out of order.

Item 1 obtained the lowest mean which tends to show that many of the respondents are not proficient in the use of ICT based technology to improve their efficiency in the performance of their tasks.

TABLE VII. SUMMARY OF COMPETENCE LEVEL

Items	Mean
1. Effective Communication	3.58
2. Policy Research & Analysis	3.18
3. Influence	3.73
4. Relationship Building	3.99
5. Technical competence	3.65
<b>As a whole</b>	<b>3.63</b>

As a whole, the level of competence of the Legislators is high (3.63) which tends to indicate that they are capable of performing their tasks. The table shows that relationship building obtained the highest mean. This tends to manifest that the Legislators are very good in establishing relationship. This may be so because politicians must know how to maintain or nurture a good relationship with the people. Policy research and analysis, on the other hand, obtained the lowest mean which tends to show that the respondents are not good when it comes to conducting policy research and analysis. Many resort to hiring of experts along this area to do the job for them. While this is an accepted practice, it is still advantageous if the Legislators themselves have knowledge along this task. Thus, they will not entirely depend on their staff’s findings and analysis.

IV. CONCLUDING STATEMENT AND RECOMMENDATION

The Legislators in Region 1 are predominantly male, married and professionals serving their first term in the local Legislative Board/Council. The female Legislators, although outnumbered, contributed significantly by churning out policies promoting women and children welfare and helped in the crafting of a Gender and Development Manual for their respective local government units.

Majority of the Legislators possess adequate competence to perform their Legislative functions, however, they need to level up their proficiency in all the dimensions of Legislative competence. Specifically, the Legislators should acquire the basics of policy research and analysis, learn how to simplify complex issues and develop strategies to effectively articulate the same to their colleagues and constituents. The Department of Interior and Local Government should design more appropriate capability trainings for neophyte Legislators. And finally, more women should be encouraged to ran for Legislative positions for a better and balanced Legislation

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