

# Sequential Explanatory Analysis of Stakeholders' Opinion on Public Consultation

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**Abstract** – *The study determined the opinions of various stakeholders regarding public consultation in terms of opportunity to engage, value of consultation, and stakeholder's willingness. This study also analyzed the significant differences on the stakeholders' opinions along with their demographic profile. Qualitatively, the participants' problems, observations, and issues encountered during public consultations were also explored. A mixed-method sequential explanatory approach that includes the combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods of research was undertaken. It utilized a self-made questionnaire formatted in a 4-point Likert scale and guide questions for focus group discussions (FGDs). A total of 398 respondents who were selected using multi-stage sampling procedure composed of 11 city council members, 57 Sangguniang barangay members, 55 from youth sectors, 55 senior citizens, 55 from households, 55 business owners, 55 farmers, and 55 professionals took part of the quantitative study while 5 representatives of each sector comprised the FGD. The gathered data was statistically analysed using fmean (M) and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). Meanwhile, the FGD transcriptions were thematically analysed. Results revealed that participants have positive reactions regarding their opportunity to engage (M=3.25), value of consultation (M=3.26), and willingness (M=3.19). Through ANOVA, differences in the responses were revealed across different groups of stakeholders. Moreover, qualitative data from the FGD indicated problems in the conduct of public consultation that circle around the (1) attitude of the participants (i.e., passive participation, unequal and selective attention, lack of interest and non-cooperation of some stakeholders), and (2) procedures in the conduct of public consultation (i.e., not all stakeholders were represented and invited, limited and confusing explanations, disorganized and unstructured, lengthy discussions, and late to start). Given this, it is recommended to develop a more proactive mechanism in actively involving the various sectors of stakeholders in the conduct of public consultations.*

**Keywords** – *policy making, public consultation, public policy, ordinance, stakeholders' opinion*

## INTRODUCTION

Institutionalizing citizen engagement in the decision-making process like policy making is very important in ensuring that the views and participation of every citizen and other stakeholders are present when decisions are made, and that decisions are better informed as a result. The main goal of public consultation is to improve the transparency, efficiency, and involvement of the public in large or small-scale of projects, laws, and policies. According to Siu (2013), public consultation sessions are open to anyone and everyone. These sessions provide an opportunity for people to voice their opinions and be engaged in the process of public policy development.

The Local Government Code of the Philippines of 1991 enforces significant obligations for public participation, accountability, and openness in decision-

making of local authority. The expected outcome of these provisions is that the community will be included in the decision-making process which is led by the local authorities. A certain part of the code clearly provides for, or may imply, a requirement to consult, and set out the procedural requirements of the special consultative and special order procedures. The most tangible benefit of adequate and appropriate public consultation is that it will help to produce better decisions. Informed policy decisions are more likely to avoid constant reviews and revisions. Good consultations can produce better and sustainable decisions. Public consultation is one of the processes which is supported by democratic principles and enables civil society to be a part of the formulation of policy or any decision-making mechanism. The organized and well-planned public consultations provide an opportunity to make clear the views of the citizens. According to Sergey (2007), public consultation in the



policy-making process includes “informal consultation” which is limited to transparency and accountability; followed by “public notice” which is more open and inclusive and usually more structured and formal; and lastly, “public hearings or public meetings” on a particular regulatory proposal, usually supplements other consultation procedures

The Sangguniang Panlungsod or the City Council, as the legislative body of the Local Government Unit (LGU) of the City of Tayabas, is composed of the Vice Mayor who shall be its presiding officer and twelve (12) regular members. According to the book of Supreme Court Advanced Decisions of 1994, the minimum number of regular sessions shall be once a week for the Sangguniang Panlungsod and all the sessions of the council shall be open to the public or to all the citizens unless a closed door session is ordered by the affirmative vote of majority members of the council for reasons of morality and security.

Local policies, proposed rules or ordinances, zoning and other projects and/or programs affecting their jurisdiction and surrounding vicinity on a particular locality are created by the Sangguniang Panlungsod and different sectors for the maintenance of general welfare in terms of public safety, morals, social, economic, and health concerns of the citizens. Before it may be passed, approved, and implemented, the Sangguning Panglungsod shall conduct a public consultation with the affected citizens as mandated in Local Government Code of 1991. Public consultation is very essential in terms of policy making. As a rule of thumb, if there is a good consultation in every decision-making, it is expected that it will become more effective and efficient when it comes to implementing the policies. More importantly, citizens must need to be engaged or involved to know the essence of public consultation because their ideas, opinions, and suggestions can shed light on the deliberations of concerns and problems.

Clearly, without prior consultation with the affected and concerned community, no policy, projects, and programs shall be implemented by government authorities. Therefore, they must be open and transparent as well as willing to listen to the perspectives of their constituents for the better policy development. Hence, LGUs should develop a mechanism by which concerned stakeholders will be actively involved and well-informed along the process.

#### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

Given the earlier stated premises, this study sought to (1) determine the opinions of various stakeholders regarding public consultation in terms of: (a) opportunity to engage; (b) value of consultation; and (c) stakeholders’ willingness; (2) ascertain the differences in the opinions on public consultation across the different groups of stakeholders; (3) find out the problems, observations, and issues encountered by the stakeholders in the conduct of public consultation.

#### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The study was conducted in Tayabas City, a 6<sup>th</sup> class city in the province of Quezon, Philippines with a land area of 23, 095 hectares and has a total population of almost 100,000 people. It was chartered as a city on July 14, 2007. Tayabas City is composed of 66 barangays, 17 of which were covered in the study. These are composed of 5 urban barangays and 12 rural barangays. Every year, numerous ordinances were passed by the Sangguniang Panglungsod of Tayabas from which some concerns were subject for public consultations.

#### **Research Design**

This study was undertaken using mixed methods—sequential explanatory design as defined in the work of Hanson and his colleagues (2005), this study examined the opinion of various stakeholders in Tayabas City regarding public consultation. It involved a sequential collecting of both quantitative and qualitative. In the quantitative phase of the study, participants were asked to express their opinion through a paper-and-pencil questionnaire. The qualitative phase was conducted to gather more substantial information regarding their observations and concerns with the conduct of public consultation. In this exploratory follow-up, explanations regarding their opinions were revealed.

#### **Participants**

The participants of the study were sampled from the 17 selected barangays of Tayabas City. The selection of the barangay was done using systematic random sampling where every fifth barangay was picked from the alphabetical listing. Each barangay has representation in the groups of stakeholders. The distribution of participants according to barangay includes 16 from each of the following barangays – Angeles Zone I, Augustias Zone I, Lita, San Diego Zone IV, and San Isidro Zone IV; 22 from each of the



following – Alitao, Calantas, and Alsam Ilaya; and 28 from each of the following – Bukal Ibaba, Ipilán, Palale Kanluran, Masin, Pandakaki, Palale Silangan, Wakas, Baguio, and Alsam Ibaba with a total of 398 respondents. The sampling procedure followed the multi-stage technique which refers to the combination of several sampling techniques. In terms of the different sectors, the 398 participants were composed of 11 Sanguinang Panlungsod/ City Council members, 55 Sangguniang Barangay members, 55 from youth sector, 55 senior citizens, 55 representing the households, 55 business owners, 55 farmers, and 55 professionals.

Meanwhile, for the FGDs, 40 stakeholders comprised of 5 members from each of the following sectors – Sanguinang Panlungsod/ City Council, Sangguniang Barangay, youth, senior citizens, households, business owners, farmers, and the professionals.

### Research Instruments

Two instruments were used, both were self-made. The first one is a questionnaire that was used to collect quantitative data on the opinions of various stakeholders regarding public consultation in terms of opportunity to engage, value of consultation, and stakeholder's willingness. It is a fifteen-item questionnaire formatted into a 4-point Likert scale with strongly agree to strongly disagree response options. Each subdomain includes 5 statements. The statements were constructed based on the provisions of Local Government Code of 1991, Sec. 2 (c) and from gathered literature. It is written both in English and in Filipino.

Then the second instrument is the FGD guide. Two sets of FGD guide questions were prepared – one for the city council members and the other one was for the other groups of stakeholders. There were 8 questions with corresponding prompts which sought to identify the problems, observations, and issues encountered during public consultations. Both the survey questionnaire and the FGD guide questions were subjected to expert validation to ensure the trustworthiness of the data.

### Procedures in Data Gathering, Analysis, and Ethical Considerations

Permission for the conduct of the study was secured from the office of the City Mayor. Upon approval, the researchers sought the help of the different barangay officials for the identification of qualified participants and in the distribution of the questionnaires. Data from the questionnaires were then summarized,

tallied, and analyzed. Mean, and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) were performed using a statistical software. Given the initial results of the quantitative part, the researchers sent invitation to concerned stakeholders for the conduct of FGDs. The FGDs were conducted per sector of stakeholders. During the data gathering, the researchers explained and discussed the purpose of the study, informed consent forms were accomplished, and confidentiality of data and anonymity of identity were secured. Voice recordings, which was fully consented by the participants, were converted to text documents for thematic analysis and interpretation. The data gathering was conducted from October 2017 to February 2018. The trustworthiness measures that were conducted to ensure the validity of the qualitative data were member checking and research auditing.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The quantitative data about the stakeholders' opinion on public consultation is presented in Table 1. Responses were summarized using mean (*M*) and average weighted mean (*AWM*) for each subdomain alongside is the corresponding qualitative description (*QD*). In terms of the opportunity to engage in public consultation, various stakeholders strongly agreed that the public consultation gives an opportunity for the residents to speak out and share their opinion and sentiments in the meeting (*M*=3.36) and that there is a need for public announcement inviting the stakeholders to attend (*M*=3.30). On the other hand, they agreed that an advanced copy of agenda is given to stakeholders as an invitation (*M*=3.16), that public consultation encourages a number of residents to take part in the policy formulation (*M*=3.20), and that the public consultation assures the participation of public in policy formulation (*M*=3.22). Collectively, they have highly positive opinions on opportunity to engage in public consultation (*AWM*=3.25; strongly agree).

The work of Michels and De Graaf (2010) which focused on the citizens' perspectives about relationship between citizens and the government emphasized that citizen involvement has a number of positive effects on democracy; not only do people consequently feel more responsibility for public matters, it also encourages people to listen to a diversity of opinions, and contributes to a higher degree of legitimacy of decisions. Therefore, for a healthy democracy at the local level, aspects of democratic citizenship are more important than having a direct say in decision-making.

**Table 1. Stakeholders' Opinions on Public Consultation**

<b>Opportunity to Engage</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>QD</b>
1. Public consultation gives an opportunity for the residents to speak out and share their opinion and sentiments in the meeting.	3.36	SA
2. In public consultation, an advanced copy of agenda is given to stakeholders as an invitation.	3.16	A
3. Whenever there is a public consultation, there is a need for public announcement inviting the stakeholders to attend.	3.30	SA
4. Public consultation encourages a number of residents to take part in the policy formulation.	3.20	A
5. Public consultation assures the participation of public in policy formulation.	3.22	A
<b>Average Weighted Mean</b>	<b>3.25</b>	<b>SA</b>
<b>Value of Consultation</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>QD</b>
1. Public consultation allows the practice of rights of the public to self-determination.	3.26	SA
2. Public consultation provides knowledge about the concept of policy formulation.	3.29	SA
3. Public consultation provides a good and effective plan of procedures to implement the policy.	3.30	SA
4. Public consultation gives another avenue for ideas and inputs from stakeholders who are affected of the policies to be enacted by city council.	3.23	A
5. Public consultation generates a solution on the problem occurring among affected residents.	3.20	A
<b>Average Weighted Mean</b>	<b>3.26</b>	<b>SA</b>
<b>Stakeholders' Willingness</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>QD</b>
1. In public consultation, the stakeholders are willing to speak out and listen in the discussion of the proposed policy.	3.26	SA
2. The stakeholders are willing to give their time and attention just to be aware of what is happening in the consultation.	3.21	A
3. The stakeholders are interested to give their suggestions and opinions during the consultation.	3.20	A
4. The stakeholders are monitoring the progress of the proposed policy after the consultation.	3.11	A
5. In public consultation, the stakeholders are willing to participate in the policy formulation whether they are affected or not.	3.17	A
<b>Average Weighted Mean</b>	<b>3.19</b>	<b>A</b>

*Qualitative Description (QD):*

Strongly Agree (SA) = 3.25 – 4.0

Disagree (DA) = 1.75 – 2.29

Agree (A) = 2.5 – 3.24

Strongly Disagree (SDA) = 1.0 – 1.74

In terms of value of consultation, various stakeholders strongly agreed that the public consultation allows the practice of rights of the public to self-determination ( $M=3.26$ ), that it provides knowledge about the concept of policy formulation ( $M=3.29$ ), and that public consultation provides a good and effective plan of procedures to implement the policy ( $M=3.30$ ). Meanwhile, they agreed that public consultation gives another avenue for ideas and inputs from stakeholders who are affected of the policies to be enacted by city council ( $M=3.23$ ) and that public consultation generates a solution on the problem occurring among affected residents ( $M=3.20$ ). All in all, they have positive

appreciation of the value of public consultation ( $AWM=3.26$ ; strongly agree).

According to Rodrigo and Amo (2006), consultation is important because it increases the level of transparency and it may help to improve regulatory quality by bringing into the discussion the expertise, perspectives, and ideas for alternative actions of those directly affected. Because of this, the stakeholders treat public consultation as an important mechanism to be involved in policy formulation.

Furthermore, on stakeholder's willingness, stakeholders agreed that the stakeholders are willing to give their time and attention just to be aware of what is happening in the consultation ( $M=.21$ ), that stakeholders are interested to give their suggestions and opinions during the consultation ( $M=3.20$ ), that stakeholders are monitoring the progress of the proposed policy after the consultation ( $M=3.11$ ); and that the stakeholders are willing to participate in the policy formulation whether they are affected or not ( $M=3.17$ ). However, various stakeholders strongly agreed ( $M=3.26$ ) that in public consultation, the stakeholders are willing to speak out and listen in the discussion of the proposed policy. In general, the participants of the study have good impression about the stakeholders' willingness to participate in public consultation ( $AWM=3.19$ ; agree). However, it received the lowest average weighted mean as compared with opportunity to engage and value of consultation.

As revealed in the study of Antonini et al. (2015) which was conducted in the State of California, USA, state identification and cost of participation predicted willingness to participate in public policymaking. Californian citizens who perceived higher costs for participation were less willing to participate in public policymaking, whereas stronger state identification predicted more willingness to participate. Fowler and Kam (2007), on the other hand, explained that one of the reasons for the little participation in policy making is that despite enthusiasm for valuable and beneficial public policies, citizens frequently feel that their voice will simply not be heard, and participation will provoke no changes within the government.

It is also interesting to know the differences (or commonality) of the stakeholders' opinion across the different sectors involved in this study. Table 2 presents the analysis of variance (ANOVA) of the participants' opinion grouped according to their sectors.

Table 2. Differences in the Stakeholders' Opinion

Stakeholder's Opinion	Sectors	Mean	F	P-value
<b>Opportunity to engage</b>	City Council	3.76	5.917*	0.000
	Sangguniang Barangay	3.41		
	Youth	3.12		
	Senior Citizens	3.20		
	Households	3.10		
	Business Owners	3.25		
	Farmers	3.21		
	Professionals	3.30		
	<b>Value of Consultation</b>	City Council		
Sangguniang Barangay		2.25		
Youth		3.29		
Senior Citizens		3.30		
Households		3.12		
Business Owners		3.12		
Farmers		3.25		
Professionals		3.34		
<b>Stakeholders' Willingness</b>		City Council	3.31	2.698*
	Sangguniang Barangay	3.25		
	Youth	3.20		
	Senior Citizens	3.16		
	Households	3.00		
	Business Owners	3.21		
	Farmers	3.29		
	Professionals	3.22		

\*significant at 0.05 level

The one-way ANOVA revealed significant differences in the responses of the various stakeholders in terms of opportunity to engage ( $F=5.917$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). With the post-hoc analysis through the mean, it may be inferred that the households ( $M=3.10$ ) rated opportunity to engage in public consultation the lowest, followed by the youth sector ( $M=3.12$ ), then senior citizens ( $M=3.20$ ), farmers ( $M=3.21$ ). Meanwhile, the city council members have the highest rating on opportunity to engage ( $M=3.76$ ) followed by Sangguniang Barangay members ( $M=3.41$ ). Obviously, the conduct of consultation was one of the obligations and functions of the city council members according to the Local Government Code of 1991. The same way, barangay official are commonly consulted on matters concerning their constituents. It means that they are more involved in public consultation. Montesinos and Brusca (2009) reported a high level of awareness on the part of city council members regarding the significance of their roles in public engagements.

On the other hand, there is no significant difference in the response of various stakeholders in terms of value of consultation ( $F=2.190$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ). This implies that there is a commonality in the perceptions of the stakeholders regarding the importance of public consultations. It shows that different stakeholders have similar opinions regarding public consultation and appreciate it the same way. Meanwhile, the study also revealed that there is a significant difference in the responses of the participants in terms of their willingness to participate in public consultation ( $F=2.698$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). The weighted means indicate that households ( $M=3.00$ ) have the lowest level of willingness to engage in public consultation followed by senior citizens ( $M=3.16$ ), then youth ( $M=3.20$ ), business owners ( $M=3.21$ ) and professionals ( $M=3.22$ ). However, the city council members have higher willingness in public consultation ( $M=3.31$ ), followed by farmers ( $M=3.29$ ), and Sangguniang Barangay members ( $M=3.25$ ). This is expected since they are the group of stakeholders who are usually involved in policy formulation given the local context.

Similar to these findings, a local study by Pante (2014) about participatory governance in the cities of Metro Manila particularly San Juan City and Valenzuela City presented problems on willingness and interest of some of their constituents to participate in their projects which requires effective communication and consultation to improve substantive quality of decisions, addressing a particular political problem, and the effort to solve their concerns under considerations.

To further explore the problems and barriers in engaging in public consultation, a series of FGDs were conducted among the different sectors of stakeholders. Table 3 shows the qualitative data of the study. It indicates the major themes and specific codes generated from the analysis of the FGD transcriptions. There were 2 general themes that emerged from cycles of thematic analysis of the problems, observations, and issues on public consultation. These are (1) attitude of the participants/ stakeholders during public consultations and (2) procedures in the conduct of public consultation. Stakeholders' attitude during public consultation was characterized with passive participation of the stakeholders, unequal and selective attention among the audience, and lack of interest and non-cooperation of stakeholders. On the other hand, the problems, observations, and issues on the procedures in the conduct of public consultation revealed that not all stakeholders are invited and represented, limited and confusing

explanations and discussions were evident, disorganized and unstructured, there were lengthy discussions, and public consultation sessions start late.

Table 3. Problems, Observations, and Issues encountered in the conduct of Public Consultation

Themes	Sample Responses/ Verbatim
<b>Attitude of the Participants/ Stakeholders</b>	
Passive participation	- "Wala. Dahil pag gamuonang mga pulong ang mga tao ay nakikinig lamang at sumasang-ayon na lamang sa sinasabi ng tagapagsalita." – Senior citizen - "Umaayon na lang ang ilan sa mas nakakarami... kung бага kung ano ang napagdesisyunan ng nakakarami 'yun ang masusunod. – Business owner
Unequal and selective attention among the audience	- "Madalas ay yung nasa unahan lamang ang tinatanong at yung mga nasa likod ay nakatayo at hindi pinapansin." – Business owner
Lack of interest and non-cooperation of stakeholders	- "May mga taong hindi nakikinig" – Business owner - "Not all people who attend the consultation are mindful and active in the discussion. They are not listening or doesn't come at all." – Business owner - "Hindi rin maiwasan na may mga taong hindi nagkakainteres sa mga patawag na ginagawa namin." – City council member
<b>Procedures in the Conduct of Public Consultation</b>	
Not all stakeholders were represented and invited	- "Sa katunayan bilang isang kabataan hindi po kami naiimbitahan na dumalo sa mga pagpupulong tungkol sa pagbabalangkas ng ordinansa." – Youth - "Hindi po palagi kami naiimbitahan. madalang lamang pero kami naman po ay dumadalo sa discussion kami ay nakikinig lamang." – Household
Limited and confusing explanations and discussions	- "Sa tuwing kami'y may katanungan sa kanila ay di agad sila makasagot at kapag may kasagutan na sila marami pa itong paligoy-ligoy kaya hindi namin maintindihan ng mabuti ang sinasabi nila." – Household - "Nasasagot naman nila (LGU) pero minsan ay kulang at hindi sapat ang paliwanag na binibigay. Tapos sa dami ng nagtatanong hindi po kami mapagbigyan." – Business owner
Disorganized and unstructured	- "Kalimitang magulo dahil sa iba't-ibang opinion ng discussions mga tao at kakulangan sa oras ng pagsasagawa ng nasabing konsultasyon." – Sangguniang Barangay Members
Lengthy discussions	- "Masyadong mahaba ang talakayan at mga sinasabi... kaya'yung ibang tagapakinig ay umaalis na." – Farmers
Late to start	- "Usually they are late, lampas na sa oras mag-umpisa, maingay, at nagugutom na ang ilan." – Business owner

Referring to the attitude of the stakeholders, Fowler and Kam (2007), explained that one of the reasons for the lack of participation in policy making is that despite enthusiasm for valuable and beneficial public policies, citizens frequently feel that their voice will simply not be heard, and participation will provoke no changes within the government

Meanwhile, the work of Morris (2012) offered an explanation why methodologies in public consultation is a factor in public consultation per se. The said study found out that low levels of indigenous community participation and engagement in rural remote indigenous areas in local government decision-making processes was due to poor understanding of effective community engagement methodologies, particularly for engaging hard-to-reach community groups. Furthermore, the exploration of Brackertz and Meredyth (2009) on Community Consultation in Victorian Local Government, revealed that Victorian councils aim to consult to provide a range of outcomes, but there is a lack of clarity about how to choose and use the appropriate combination of consultation tools. It also revealed that councils are unclear about how the outcomes of consultation feed into existing decision-making processes and its implications. Lastly, the study of Michels and De Graaf(2010) which focused on the citizens' perspectives about relationship between citizens and the government showed that the role of citizens on public concerns (i.e., projects) is limited, serving mainly to provide information on the basis of which the government then makes decisions not all relevant groups and interests are represented.

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

By involving stakeholders, governments and public agencies create access to information and resources that build support for their policies. Tayabas City, being one of the 2 chartered city in the province of Quezon, and one of the key cities in Region IV-A, adheres to the provisions of the Local Government Code in the conduct of public consultations on matters concerning the economic, social, safety, peace and order, and health aspects of its constituents. Using mixed method–sequential explanatory approach, the study was able to unfold the opinions of various stakeholders of the city. They positively perceived the opportunities to engage in public consultation and its value. However, they have quite lower regard about the willingness of the stakeholders in participating in public consultation. Furthermore, the participants of the study have varied opinions in terms of opportunities to engage and willingness of stakeholders in the conduct of public



consultation while they have similar impression on the value of public consultation.

In addition, common problems, observations, and issues on public consultation were attributed to the attitude of the stakeholders and the procedures of the consultation. To address these results, the Sangguniang Panlungsod of Tayabas City may develop a mechanism for active involvement and interaction between policy makers and other stakeholders. This can be undertaken through appropriate ways of disseminating information which calls for the attention of the public to attend consultations. Seminars or programs aiming to inculcate the importance of public consultation may be conducted to ensure and encourage all sectors of the community are involved in the policy making process.

However, the researchers asserted the following limitations in this study: (1) it involved homogenous type of participants who came from the same socio-political landscape and cultural context, (2) the study tackles public consultation only in general terms, and (3) the inferential statistics used was limited to causal-comparative purposes. In the light of these limitations, it is also recommended that another study may be conducted exploring the level of participation and engagement of various stakeholders from different locality/ies with emphasis on specific category of ordinances or nature of policies being formulated using other test statistics and research methodology.

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