

From Paper Compliance to Operational Readiness: Governance Gaps in Evacuation Center Management in Albay, Philippines

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Abstract— This study examines the divergence between formal governance compliance and operational readiness in evacuation center management across three disaster-prone cities in Albay Province, Philippines: Tabaco, Legazpi, and Ligao. Using a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, data were collected from 67 participants, including 42 survey respondents and 25 key informant interviews, representing Local Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Offices, local chief executives, and barangay officials. The study assessed compliance indicators such as manuals of operations, permanent evacuation center managers, budget allocations, and clearly defined maintenance responsibilities, alongside operational readiness measures including leadership, coordination, and decentralized decision-making. Findings indicate that all cities achieved high levels of formal compliance, yet operational performance varied considerably. Leadership and inter-agency coordination remained hindered, decentralized decision-making was uneven, and infrastructure gaps—particularly in Ligao—limited functional readiness. Qualitative evidence further highlighted discrepancies between reported compliance and real-world capacity, underscoring that formal structures alone do not guarantee effective disaster preparedness. The study concludes that bridging the compliance-readiness gap requires strengthening leadership, enhancing coordination, improving infrastructure, and engaging communities in disaster planning. These insights provide guidance for local policymakers and practitioners seeking to improve evacuation center functionality and resilience in high-risk contexts.

Keywords— disaster preparedness, evacuation center management, operational readiness, local governance, Albay.

I. INTRODUCTION

Disasters have become an increasingly pervasive challenge in both developing and developed nations, particularly for communities situated in hazard-prone areas. In the Philippines, the intersection of geographic vulnerability, high population density, and climate-induced hazards has made disaster risk reduction and management (DRRM) an urgent policy and governance priority (Benson & Clay, 2004; Bankoff, 2007). The Bicol Region, including Albay Province, exemplifies this vulnerability due to its exposure to volcanic eruptions, typhoons, and floods, most notably from the active Mayon Volcano (NDRRMC, 2018; Solidum, 2017). Historical events in this region have demonstrated the devastating socio-economic and human impacts of disasters, including loss of life, displacement, and destruction of critical infrastructure (Sy, 2019; Abante, 2020). Consequently, local governments are tasked not only with compliance to

national DRRM policies but also with ensuring operational readiness for effective emergency response and community protection.

The Philippines' legislative framework for disaster governance has evolved considerably, particularly with the enactment of Republic Act No. 10121 in 2010, also known as the Philippine Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act. This law institutionalized the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Plan (NDRRMP) and established a structured system for DRRM across national, regional, provincial, city, and barangay levels (Congress of the Philippines, 2010). Under RA 10121, local governments are mandated to create disaster risk reduction offices, maintain evacuation centers, prepare contingency plans, and allocate budgets for disaster preparedness and response. Complementary laws such as RA 7160, the Local Government Code of 1991,

provide the decentralization framework that empowers local government units (LGUs) to implement disaster preparedness strategies tailored to their jurisdiction (Republic Act No. 7160, 1991). These legislative and institutional structures aim to ensure that localities are both compliant with policy requirements and capable of executing timely and effective disaster response.

Despite the presence of comprehensive policies and formal governance structures, research has consistently shown that formal compliance does not necessarily equate to operational readiness. Compliance may indicate that legal frameworks are in place—such as manuals, budget allocations, and designated managers—but these do not guarantee that evacuation centers can function efficiently during actual emergencies (May, 2005; Viterbo, 2019; Capuno, 2014). Studies on local disaster governance in the Philippines reveal that operational bottlenecks often arise from weak leadership, ineffective coordination, inadequate infrastructure, and insufficient decentralized decision-making (Blanchard, 2008; Boin & 't Hart, 2003; Pineda, 2018). For instance, while LGUs may establish permanent evacuation centers, the actual readiness of these centers to accommodate evacuees, deliver basic services, and maintain operational continuity is frequently constrained by local capacity and resource limitations (Protasio, 2019; Arao, 2020). Consequently, evaluating both compliance and operational functionality is essential to understanding the true state of disaster preparedness at the local level.

The compliance-readiness gap is particularly pronounced in evacuation center management. Evacuation centers are critical nodes in disaster response, serving as safe shelters for affected populations and enabling coordinated humanitarian interventions (CCCM Cluster, 2020; UNICEF Philippines, 2018). Proper management of these centers requires not only adherence to formal regulations but also effective leadership, logistical planning, inter-agency collaboration, and the physical infrastructure to support large-scale evacuation (Colten & Laska, 2013; Alexander, 2019). In many cases, local governments have met the minimum requirements for compliance—such as having

manuals of operations, assigned managers, and budgeted resources—but field observations reveal gaps in operational execution, including insufficient water and sanitation facilities, inadequate sleeping arrangements, and overlapping administrative functions that impede rapid decision-making (Protasio, 2019; Shaw et al., 2013). This disconnect highlights the importance of assessing both the structural and functional aspects of evacuation center governance.

Research has further shown that leadership and coordination are central determinants of operational readiness in disaster management. Effective leadership entails the ability to mobilize resources, facilitate inter-agency communication, and make timely decisions under conditions of uncertainty (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009; Boin & 't Hart, 2003). Adaptive leadership frameworks, as discussed by Chen (2012), emphasize the need for local officials to interpret policies in context-specific ways, prioritize critical tasks, and respond dynamically to emerging threats. Inter-agency coordination, meanwhile, is essential for synchronizing efforts across health, social welfare, police, and emergency services (Kapucu, 2008; Scholl & Kapucu, 2010). Empirical studies in the Philippines have found that failures in coordination and decentralized decision-making often undermine the effectiveness of formally compliant evacuation systems (Blanchard, 2008; Provan & Kenis, 2008; Viterbo, 2019).

Community participation and cultural context also shape operational effectiveness. Local knowledge, cultural norms, and community engagement enhance the functionality of evacuation centers and the effectiveness of risk communication (Paton, 2007; Cutter et al., 2008). In Albay, cultural heritage and local place identity influence community attachment and resilience, which in turn affects compliance with evacuation orders and willingness to relocate (Abante, 2020; Alfane, 2020; Ayo, 2020). For example, studies have shown that strong community networks and recognition of cultural landmarks can facilitate collective action during emergencies and improve compliance with operational directives (Shaw et al., 2013; Colten & Laska, 2013). Conversely, when

evacuation plans fail to account for local cultural practices, operational readiness may be undermined, despite formal compliance with legal frameworks.

Another key factor influencing operational readiness is infrastructure adequacy and resource availability. Permanent evacuation centers require safe locations, reliable utilities, adequate sanitation, and sufficient capacity to accommodate affected populations (Protasio, 2019; Arao, 2020). However, LGUs often face challenges in implementing these requirements due to financial constraints, competing priorities, and bureaucratic hurdles (Benson & Clay, 2004; GFDRR, 2014; Skees & Collins, 2019). Even where funding is allocated and structures exist, misalignment between policy mandates and on-the-ground capabilities can lead to evacuation centers that are formally compliant but functionally inadequate (Estella, 2018; Rago, 2022). Such gaps highlight the need for integrated monitoring that considers both compliance metrics and operational performance indicators.

Accountability and performance monitoring are critical in bridging the compliance-readiness gap. Studies on disaster governance emphasize that formal structures alone are insufficient unless mechanisms exist to evaluate effectiveness and hold officials accountable (Quah, 2010; Miller, 2010; Head, 2014). In the Philippine context, LGUs operate within a networked governance system, where accountability spans multiple actors, including local officials, emergency personnel, and community representatives (Geron, 2015; Valdez, 2022). Effective monitoring not only ensures that policies are implemented but also identifies operational bottlenecks, informs adaptive management strategies, and enhances trust between authorities and the community (UNDP, 2011; Mastrotillo et al., 2016; Weber & Khademian, 2008). Without such mechanisms, formal compliance may give a misleading sense of preparedness, masking vulnerabilities that become critical during disaster events.

The importance of decentralization in disaster risk management further contextualizes the compliance-readiness gap. Local governments are granted authority under the Local Government Code to

manage DRRM programs, yet decentralization presents challenges in coordination, capacity building, and standardization (Capuno, 2014; Viterbo, 2019). While decentralization allows context-specific adaptations and faster decision-making, it also introduces variability in operational readiness across jurisdictions. Some cities may have well-functioning evacuation centers, while others with similar formal compliance still experience logistical challenges, delayed decision-making, or insufficient infrastructure (Colten & Laska, 2013; Protasio, 2019). Understanding these variations is crucial for assessing how governance translates into operational outcomes.

Geospatial technologies and information flow have been recognized as key tools in enhancing operational readiness. Proper mapping of hazard zones, evacuation routes, and resource allocation improves decision-making and disaster response efficiency (Alexander, 2019; Bixler, 2017; Zayas, 2023). However, institutional factors, technical capacity, and coordination among agencies often limit the effective use of such tools (Bixler, 2017; Scholl & Kapucu, 2010). Thus, even where compliance includes the establishment of planning documents and data systems, actual operational effectiveness depends on the practical application of these technologies and the ability of personnel to interpret and act on real-time information.

In light of these considerations, it becomes clear that assessing evacuation center management requires a holistic approach that examines both formal compliance and operational readiness. Compliance indicators provide essential benchmarks, reflecting adherence to legal frameworks and policy mandates, while operational readiness captures the functional capacity of local governments to implement these measures effectively. The literature underscores the importance of integrating quantitative and qualitative assessments, including leadership, coordination, infrastructure, and community engagement, to obtain a comprehensive picture of disaster preparedness (Chen, 2012; Cutter et al., 2008; Shaw et al., 2013; Colten & Laska, 2013). Such an approach aligns with global best practices advocated by UNISDR (2013), UNDP (2011), and the Asian Development Bank

(ADB, 2024), which emphasize context-sensitive, operationally grounded disaster risk reduction strategies.

Despite advances in policy, formal compliance, and institutional capacity, gaps remain in translating documented structures into effective operational outcomes, particularly in regions with high hazard exposure like Albay (Arao, 2020; Protasio, 2019; Solidum, 2017). These gaps highlight the need for empirical studies that evaluate both legal compliance and actual functional performance of evacuation centers. By examining differences in compliance and operational readiness across multiple cities, such research can identify local factors, infrastructural constraints, leadership challenges, and coordination bottlenecks that influence disaster preparedness. This approach contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how governance translates into actionable readiness, thereby informing both policy improvement and practical interventions.

In sum, the literature demonstrates that while the Philippines has made significant strides in formalizing disaster governance, operational challenges persist that may compromise the effectiveness of evacuation centers during emergencies. Formal compliance provides a foundation, but true preparedness depends on the integration of leadership, coordination, infrastructure, community engagement, and information management (Paton, 2007; Chen, 2012; Viterbo, 2019). There is thus a clear research gap in examining how formal governance compliance and actual operational readiness differ within specific local contexts. Addressing this gap is critical for ensuring that legal and policy frameworks do not merely exist on paper but translate into functional resilience and safety for communities at risk.

Building on the gaps identified in the literature and the challenges observed in the operationalization of disaster governance, this study seeks to examine how formal governance compliance and actual operational readiness differ in evacuation center management across disaster-prone local governments. Specifically, it aims to assess the extent to which local governments in Tabaco, Legazpi, and Ligao have implemented the

formal structures mandated under RA 10121 and related policies, while also evaluating how effectively these structures translate into functional preparedness during emergencies. Integrating quantitative and qualitative analyses, the study intends to identify operational bottlenecks, leadership and coordination challenges, infrastructure limitations, and context-specific factors that influence the performance of evacuation centers. The findings are expected to provide insights that can guide local policy, strengthen operational capacity, and enhance community resilience in disaster-prone areas of Albay, Philippines.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design to explore how formal governance compliance aligns with actual operational readiness in evacuation center management. The research was conducted in three disaster-prone cities in Albay Province, Philippines—Tabaco, Legazpi, and Ligao—chosen for their high exposure to typhoons, floods, and volcanic activity. The aim was to evaluate compliance with national disaster risk reduction and management laws (RA 10121 and RA 12076) and to examine how these documented governance structures translated into practical preparedness and operational capacity at the city and barangay levels.

A total of 67 participants were involved, including 25 key informant interviews and 42 survey respondents. Participants comprised Local Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office staff, city and barangay officials, and evacuation center managers. Surveys measured indicators of governance compliance, such as the existence of manuals of operations, permanent evacuation center managers, and budget allocations under the 70% preparedness portion of the LDRRMF. Operational readiness was assessed through measures of leadership, inter-agency coordination, and the decentralization of decision-making. Complementing the surveys, semi-structured interviews provided detailed contextual insights into infrastructure adequacy, facility functionality, and procedural challenges, allowing the study to capture both the formal structures and the lived operational realities of evacuation management.

Quantitative data were analyzed using weighted means and adjectival ratings to assess governance performance, while qualitative data were coded thematically to identify operational constraints and gaps. Comparative analysis across the three cities was conducted to synthesize patterns of divergence between formal compliance and operational readiness. Ethical approval was obtained from the institutional review board, and written informed consent was secured from all participants. Participation was voluntary, and confidentiality was maintained; any identifying information was included only with explicit permission.

III. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

This study examined the relationship between formal governance compliance and operational readiness in evacuation center management across three disaster-

prone cities in Albay Province, Philippines. While national policies such as RA 10121 and RA 12076 provide clear guidelines for local disaster risk reduction and management, the extent to which these formal compliance measures translate into effective, functional operations remains unclear. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study collected survey and interview data from 67 participants, including city and barangay officials and evacuation center managers, to assess both the presence of formal governance structures and their practical implementation. The following discussion integrates quantitative assessments, qualitative observations, and cross-city comparisons to explore the divergence between documented compliance and actual operational performance, highlighting how governance on paper may not translate into operational readiness in practice.

Table 1. Respondent Profile by Method, City, and Participant Category

Profile Variable	Data
Total participants	67
Interview participants	25
Survey respondents	42
Tabaco City respondents	35
Ligao City respondents	27
Legazpi City respondents	15
Participant categories	LDRRMOs; Local Chief Executives (Mayors, Governors, Punong Barangays); Barangay Officials including Kagawads and Secretaries

Table 1 presents the profile of the study participants, illustrating the breadth and diversity of respondents involved in assessing evacuation center governance across Tabaco, Legazpi, and Ligao. A total of 67 participants contributed data, including 25 key informant interviews and 42 survey respondents, providing both qualitative and quantitative perspectives. The participant pool encompassed officials from the Local Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Offices (LDRRMOs), Local Chief Executives such as mayors and barangay captains, and barangay officials including Kagawads and

secretaries. This mix ensured that insights were drawn from multiple levels of governance, capturing both the administrative and operational dimensions of evacuation center management. By including representatives from different cities and hierarchical levels, the study was able to evaluate how formal compliance mechanisms were implemented in practice and to identify operational challenges across diverse local contexts, directly supporting the central research objective of understanding the divergence between governance on paper and functional operational readiness.

Table 2. Compliance with Key Governance Indicators under RA 10121 and RA 12076

Compliance Indicator	Tabaco City	Legazpi City	Ligao City
Manual of Operations aligned with national standards	Yes	Yes	Yes

Permanent Evacuation Center Managers appointed	Yes	Yes	Yes
Budget allocation for ECM under 70% Preparedness portion of LDRRMF	Yes	Yes	Yes
Clear division of labor between City and Barangay for maintenance/accountability	Yes	Yes	Yes

Table 2 highlights the degree of formal governance compliance across the three study cities with respect to the key indicators outlined in RA 10121 and RA 12076. All three cities—Tabaco, Legazpi, and Ligao—demonstrated full compliance in all four measured areas: the presence of manuals of operations aligned with national standards, appointment of permanent evacuation center managers, allocation of budget for evacuation center management under the 70% preparedness portion of the LDRRMF, and a clearly defined division of labor between city and barangay authorities for maintenance and accountability. These findings indicate that, at the administrative level, each city has institutionalized the structures and processes required by national disaster management laws. Such uniform compliance suggests that the legal and policy framework for evacuation center governance has been effectively operationalized on paper, providing a foundation for disaster preparedness. However, as the subsequent tables reveal, formal compliance alone does not necessarily reflect functional operational readiness, highlighting the need to examine whether these

documented mechanisms translate into effective management practices on the ground.

Table 3 presents the level of formal governance compliance in Tabaco, Legazpi, and Ligao cities based on key indicators mandated by RA 10121 and RA 12076. Across all three cities, compliance was observed in four critical areas: the existence of manuals of operations aligned with national standards, appointment of permanent evacuation center managers, allocation of budget for evacuation center management under the 70% preparedness portion of the LDRRMF, and a clearly defined division of labor between city and barangay authorities for maintenance and accountability.

These results indicate that each local government has established the formal administrative and procedural structures required for effective evacuation center governance. On paper, the legal and policy framework appears fully implemented, demonstrating that the cities have institutionalized the mechanisms for preparedness, resource allocation, and role delineation.

Table 3. Governance Assessment Scores on Leadership, Coordination, and Decision-Making

Governance Dimension / Statement	Tabaco		Legazpi		Ligao	
	WM	AR	WM	AR	WM	AR
A. Leadership Roles						
The Local Chief Executive (Mayor) actively leads the Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) cluster.	5.00	Major Hindrance	4.00	Major Hindrance	5.00	Major Hindrance
B. Coordination Mechanism						
There is a seamless flow of data/information from the evacuation center to the City EOC.	5.00	Major Hindrance	4.00	Major Hindrance	5.00	Major Hindrance
Inter-agency coordination (DOH, DSWD, PNP) within the center is well-synchronized.	5.00	Major Hindrance	4.00	Major Hindrance	5.00	Major Hindrance
C. Decision-Making						

Decision-making during evacuations is decentralized, allowing site managers to act on immediate needs.	4.67	Major Hindrance	3.00	Inefficient	4.25	Major Hindrance
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While these compliance indicators show strong adherence to national standards, they represent formal, documented readiness rather than operational effectiveness. The uniform “Yes” across all indicators highlights that legal compliance alone may not capture the complexities of functional performance at evacuation centers. This finding underscores the importance of examining how these documented

structures translate into day-to-day operational readiness, including leadership effectiveness, coordination mechanisms, decision-making processes, and infrastructure functionality. In this context, Table 2 establishes a baseline of “paper compliance” against which actual operational capacity can be compared, setting the stage for the analysis of gaps and divergences presented in subsequent tables.

Table 4. Reported Constraints Affecting Evacuation Center Governance and Operations

Constraint	Tabaco Yes	Tabaco No	Legazpi Yes	Legazpi No	Ligao Yes	Ligao No
Budget constraints: insufficient funds for center utilities (water, power)	0	3	0	3	0	5
Political interference: decisions influenced by politics rather than risk data	0	3	0	3	0	5
Permanent facilities: relying on schools as evacuation centers	0	3	0	3	0	5
PWDs	0	3	0	3	0	5
Elderly	0	3	0	3	0	5
Lactating mothers	0	3	0	3	0	5
Sleeping quarters	0	3	0	3	0	5
Health care areas	0	3	0	3	0	5
Power house	0	3	0	3	0	5
Stand-alone water pumping	0	3	0	3	0	5
Trash and waste segregation	0	3	0	3	0	5
Storage area	0	3	0	3	0	5
Total frequency (f)	0.00	36.00	0.00	36.00	0.00	60.00
Percentage (P)	0%	100%	0%	100%	0%	100%

Table 4 presents the reported constraints affecting evacuation center governance and operations across the three cities. Interestingly, the survey responses indicate that all respondents in Tabaco, Legazpi, and Ligao reported no constraints in any of the measured areas, including budget limitations, political interference, reliance on school facilities, accommodation for PWDs, elderly, and lactating mothers, as well as infrastructure requirements such as sleeping quarters, health care areas, power houses, stand-alone water pumping, waste management, and storage areas. The total frequency of reported

constraints is 0, with a corresponding 100% “No” response rate in all cities. This uniform finding suggests that, according to the survey respondents, the formal governance structures and resource allocations in place were perceived as sufficient to support evacuation center operations.

However, these survey results need to be interpreted cautiously, as the absence of reported constraints does not necessarily indicate full operational readiness. Subsequent qualitative evidence in the study shows that some cities, particularly Ligao, still face

significant practical challenges, such as incomplete transition from school-based evacuation centers to permanent facilities, missing critical infrastructure, and overlapping functions that limit operational independence. The discrepancy between survey responses and field observations underscores a key theme of the study: while formal compliance and self-reported constraints may suggest adequate preparedness, actual operational conditions may reveal hidden gaps that affect the effectiveness of evacuation center management. Therefore, Table 4 highlights the importance of complementing quantitative survey data with qualitative insights to fully understand the compliance-readiness gap in disaster-prone local governments.

Table 5 provides qualitative evidence that helps explain the apparent contradiction between formal

compliance and actual operational readiness observed in the survey and governance assessments. In Tabaco City, the relocation of residents from high-risk areas into 286 permanent, resident-owned housing units demonstrates a concrete step toward long-term resilience, reducing reliance on temporary evacuation shelters.

This suggests that while operational challenges in leadership and coordination remain, Tabaco has made tangible infrastructure improvements that enhance functional readiness. Similarly, in Legazpi City, the inauguration of Multi-Purpose Evacuation Centers (MPECs) in Brgy. Homapon, equipped with kitchens, lactating rooms, and gender-segregated toilets, reflects a commitment to specialized infrastructure that supports effective evacuation management beyond compliance on paper.

Table 5. Qualitative Evidence Explaining the Compliance -Readiness Contradition

City	Qualitative Evidence from Thesis	What It Suggests About Actual Readiness
Tabaco City	CDRRM Officer Gelacio M. Molato Jr. reported relocation of residents from danger zones into 286 permanent, resident-owned housing units rather than temporary shelters.	Indicates movement toward long-term resilience and reduced reliance on temporary evacuation arrangements.
Legazpi City	2022 inauguration of Multi-Purpose Evacuation Centers (MPEC) in Brgy. Homapon; described as ₱50 million facilities with kitchens, lactating rooms, and gender-segregated toilets.	Suggests stronger dedicated infrastructure and more specialized facility support for evacuees.
Ligao City	Despite 100% “No constraint” survey responses, field observations and interviews showed an incomplete transition from school-based evacuation to Permanent Evacuation Centers; absence of power houses and stand-alone water pumping; primary PEC also doubles as the CDRRMO office and cannot house total evacuee population, forcing continued reliance on schools and covered courts.	Reveals the sharpest compliance-readiness gap: positive survey/compliance picture, but weaker operational independence and infrastructure resilience.

In contrast, Ligao City exemplifies the most pronounced compliance-readiness gap. Although survey responses indicated no constraints, field observations revealed an incomplete transition from school-based evacuation facilities to permanent evacuation centers. Critical infrastructure such as power houses and stand-alone water systems were lacking, and the primary PEC also functions as the CDRRMO office, limiting its capacity to house all evacuees. This highlights that formal governance

structures and self-reported compliance may mask real operational deficiencies, particularly when infrastructure and facility independence are insufficient. Collectively, these qualitative insights underscore that assessing only formal compliance is inadequate; a combination of documented policies, leadership practices, and on-the-ground infrastructure must be considered to understand true operational readiness, which is central to the study’s research objective.

Table 6. Cross-City Synthesis of Formal Compliance versus Actual Operational Readiness

City	Formal Governance Compliance	Actual Operational Readiness	Main Divergence
Tabaco City	Compliant on manuals, permanent managers, LDRRMF preparedness allocation, and city-barangay maintenance accountability	Leadership, data flow, and inter-agency coordination still rated Major Hindrance; decentralized decision-making also Major Hindrance though relatively better than Legazpi	Strong formal structure, but operational execution remains hindered despite resilience gains such as permanent housing
Legazpi City	Compliant on all four formal indicators	Leadership and coordination both Major Hindrance; decentralized decision-making only Inefficient (WM 3.00), the weakest among the three cities	Strongest sign of centralization/bureaucratic bottleneck despite formal compliance and improved infrastructure
Ligao City	Compliant on all four formal indicators	Leadership and coordination rated Major Hindrance; decision-making also Major Hindrance; field evidence shows missing power house and stand-alone water system, incomplete PEC transition, and continued reliance on schools/covered courts	Clearest mismatch between documentary compliance and true operational independence/readiness

Table 6 presents a cross-city synthesis that integrates both formal governance compliance and actual operational readiness, providing a clear picture of where compliance on paper diverges from practical implementation. In Tabaco City, while all compliance indicators are met—including manuals of operations, permanent evacuation center managers, budget allocations under the LDRRMF, and defined city-barangay maintenance responsibilities—operational performance still faces bottlenecks. Leadership, inter-agency coordination, and decentralized decision-making are rated as Major Hindrance, although slightly better than in Legazpi. This indicates that, despite a strong formal framework and tangible infrastructure improvements such as permanent housing units, operational execution continues to be constrained by coordination and decision-making challenges.

In Legazpi City, formal compliance is similarly complete; however, the operational picture reveals a pronounced bureaucratic rigidity. Leadership and coordination remain major hindrances, and decentralized decision-making is rated only Inefficient

(WM 3.00), the weakest among the three cities. The mismatch here demonstrates that strong formal structures do not automatically ensure functional responsiveness, and in Legazpi, centralized procedures may limit the ability of site managers to act quickly during evacuations. In Ligao City, the divergence is most evident. Although the city meets all four compliance indicators, field observations show incomplete transition from school-based to permanent evacuation centers, missing critical infrastructure such as power houses and stand-alone water systems, and ongoing reliance on temporary school facilities. This represents the clearest gap between formal compliance and operational readiness, highlighting that documented governance does not always translate into functional independence or effective emergency management.

Collectively, Table 6 underscores the central finding of this study: while formal governance compliance provides a necessary framework for evacuation center management, actual operational readiness is shaped by local infrastructure, leadership effectiveness, coordination, and decentralized decision-making

capacity. The comparison across the three cities demonstrates that compliance on paper is not sufficient to guarantee functional preparedness, and that evaluating both formal structures and practical operational capacity is essential for understanding disaster readiness in local governments.

The study revealed that a diverse set of stakeholders—including LDRMO staff, local chief executives, and barangay officials—actively participated across the three cities of Albay, providing multiple perspectives on evacuation center governance. Engaging respondents from different administrative levels supports the idea that collaborative governance and multi-level participation are critical for effective disaster management (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Kapucu, 2008). This diversity also reflects the decentralized governance structure mandated under RA 10121 and the Local Government Code (Congress of the Philippines, 2010; Republic Act No. 7160, 1991), where local governments are expected to operationalize disaster risk reduction policies while allowing frontline managers the flexibility to respond to situational needs.

Across all three cities, the formal compliance indicators were met, including the presence of manuals of operations, appointment of permanent evacuation center managers, budget allocations under the LDRRMF, and clearly defined maintenance and accountability roles. While these findings demonstrate strong adherence to national standards, previous studies suggest that compliance on paper does not automatically translate into operational effectiveness (May, 2005; Viterbo, 2019; Capuno, 2014). Legal and policy frameworks provide a necessary foundation, but their practical application depends on leadership capacity, coordination mechanisms, and functional infrastructure (Alexander, 2019). This underscores the importance of assessing operational readiness alongside formal compliance to understand the true state of disaster preparedness.

Despite high levels of compliance, leadership, coordination, and decentralized decision-making were consistently rated as hindered or inefficient, indicating that formal structures alone cannot ensure smooth

operational performance (Boin & 't Hart, 2003; Blanchard, 2008). Moreover, survey responses indicated minimal constraints, yet qualitative observations revealed significant gaps in infrastructure and operational independence, particularly in Ligao. In contrast, Tabaco and Legazpi demonstrated improvements through permanent housing relocations and dedicated multi-purpose evacuation centers, highlighting the role of context-specific interventions in enhancing functional readiness (Arao, 2020; Shaw et al., 2013). These findings align with Cutter et al. (2008) and Colten & Laska (2013), emphasizing that resilience requires not only documented governance structures but also physical infrastructure, leadership, and adaptive management capacities.

The divergence between formal compliance and actual operational readiness has significant implications. Even with strong policy adherence, operational bottlenecks in leadership, coordination, and decentralized decision-making can compromise timely responses, resource allocation, and overall disaster preparedness, echoing findings on network governance and public accountability in disaster management (Provan & Kenis, 2008; Viterbo, 2019). This highlights the need for integrated assessment frameworks that combine compliance audits with evaluations of functional performance, ensuring that governance mechanisms translate into actionable preparedness outcomes (UNDP, 2011; Head, 2014).

In conclusion, while formal compliance provides a foundation for evacuation center management, actual operational readiness depends on the effectiveness of leadership, coordination, infrastructure, and decentralized decision-making. Local governments in disaster-prone areas must therefore adopt strategies that bridge the gap between documented policies and practical implementation, including continuous monitoring, capacity-building, and adaptive governance approaches. Such strategies are critical to enhancing disaster preparedness, community resilience, and the ability of evacuation centers to function effectively in times of crisis (Paton, 2007; Colten & Laska, 2013; World Bank, 2018).

IV. CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study demonstrate that formal governance compliance alone is insufficient to ensure operational readiness in evacuation center management. While all three cities in Albay—Tabaco, Legazpi, and Ligao—met legal and policy requirements under RA 10121 and related frameworks, operational performance was constrained by leadership bottlenecks, coordination challenges, inadequate decentralized decision-making, and gaps in infrastructure. This indicates that compliance on paper does not automatically translate into functional capacity to respond effectively during disasters. The observed compliance-readiness gap is particularly evident in Ligao, where survey-reported compliance masked practical limitations, such as reliance on school-based evacuation facilities, lack of power and water infrastructure, and limited operational independence. Conversely, Tabaco and Legazpi demonstrated stronger infrastructure and partial operational effectiveness, yet still faced challenges in leadership and inter-agency coordination. These findings reinforce the idea that true disaster preparedness depends on the integration of formal governance structures with adaptive leadership, functional infrastructure, and effective inter-agency collaboration.

The study also highlights the critical role of leadership, coordination, and information flow in bridging the gap between compliance and readiness. Local disaster management offices must not only maintain documented policies, manuals, and budget allocations but also ensure that site managers are empowered, that inter-agency communication is seamless, and that operational decisions can be made rapidly in response to evolving hazards. Furthermore, community engagement and consideration of local cultural and spatial contexts enhance operational effectiveness. The alignment of formal structures, leadership practices, and community involvement is therefore essential for functional resilience, particularly in high-risk provinces like Albay.

To enhance evacuation center effectiveness, local governments should adopt a dual-focus approach that emphasizes both compliance and operational capacity.

First, continuous monitoring and evaluation systems should be instituted to assess not only adherence to legal requirements but also functional performance during drills and real events. Second, training programs should be expanded for LDRMO staff, local chief executives, and site managers to strengthen adaptive leadership, decentralized decision-making, and inter-agency coordination. Third, infrastructure improvements must be prioritized to address gaps in power, water supply, sanitation, and shelter capacity, ensuring that permanent evacuation centers can operate independently of temporary facilities. Fourth, stakeholder engagement—including community members, volunteers, and local organizations—should be strengthened to enhance situational awareness and participatory disaster planning. Implementing these measures will help local governments in Albay move beyond formal compliance toward operationally effective, resilient evacuation center management, towards safeguarding communities against the recurring hazards that define the province.

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