

Women Leaders in Sorsogon: A Case Study

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Abstract— A qualitative case-study methodology was used for this research. In-depth interviews were conducted with four women who were identified as primary participants and fifteen subordinate participants. This article identifies two primary objectives: (1) To describe the profile of women leaders in national government agencies in Sorsogon, Philippines, and (2) To describe their accomplishments in their various organizations. All of the women leaders interviewed demonstrated the same educational level and work experience. Each woman leader was a holder of a post-graduate degree, and they had continually demonstrated a commitment to developing their careers by continuing to develop professionally in their respective field. They demonstrated innovations in institutions, developed their organization, and implemented programs across Education, Public Information, Trade & Industry, and Indigenous Peoples Rights. Therefore, the women leaders described in this article demonstrate that there is an association between competent, morally characterized individuals committed to public service and substantial transformations within an institution. Additionally, it has been shown that women working in provincial government agencies can be key agents in implementing significant transformations in institutions.

Keywords— accomplishments, educational qualifications, professional experience, Sorsogon, women leaders.

I. INTRODUCTION

This section is organized into four sections that form the basis of the research. The first section discusses the role of women's leadership in global governance, followed by an examination of gendered stereotypes in leadership. It then presents the legal foundations of women's leadership in the Philippines governance and, finally, provides an overview of women who have held leadership positions across provincial agencies in Sorsogon.

A. Understanding Women's Leadership in Global Governance

Women as leaders have contributed to the development of many countries and economic prosperity throughout history. The decision-making capacity of women as leaders has also added diversity to the communities they serve and developed a greater sense of community. Therefore, the World Bank and the United Nations agree that to achieve sustainable development and good governance, women need to be involved as leaders (World Bank, 2021; U.N., 2015).

The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) present an opportunity for promoting gender equality, and specifically, SDG 5 calls for

governments to create opportunities for women to participate and take part in leadership roles in both the public, political, and economic sectors (United Nations Development Programme, 2020). Many global surveys indicate a growing trend of women in leadership; however, the gap between the number of women who hold decision-making positions and the number of men remains large (World Economic Forum, 2023). Research has shown that while women in leadership exhibit a transformational, participative, and collaborative leadership style that emphasizes integrity, inclusiveness, and responsiveness (Eagly & Carli, 2018), women in leadership continue to experience barriers due to social norms and institutional practices (Dagostino & Rubin, 2018).

Research provides evidence to support the idea that when women are included in the decision-making process in political governance, the result is a higher quality of governance and more equitable social outcomes (Rakgwata & Ramatswi, 2025). Women who successfully lead in governance generally possess higher educational attainment and a larger amount of professional experience than their male counterparts, in addition to possessing the attributes of

transformational leadership such as integrity, empathy, and team-building.

B. Breaking Gender Stereotypes in Leadership

The Global Gender Gap Index reported that women represented 30.6 percent of all leadership positions in the world and 43.4 percent of the total labor force. Despite this, women comprise significantly fewer than a third of those in top leadership positions (Dimockhino, 2026). As of 2025, only 29 countries had female heads of state or government. Women hold 26.9 percent of the seats in the national legislatures of the world. Current trends indicate that it will take until 2063 for parity to be reached in legislative representation (UN Women, 2025).

The Philippines ranked 16th overall in the World Economic Forum's 2024 Global Gender Gap Report and ranked first in Southeast Asia for its level of gender equality, where women hold 53 percent of management jobs. However, the Philippines ranked 56th in terms of the percentage of women serving in national parliaments (at 26.2%) and 58th in terms of the percentage of women serving in local governments (at 29.1%). These rankings illustrate that while the Philippines has made strides in achieving formal equality for women in some areas, it still has significant structural inequities in other areas.

Transformational leadership has become an increasingly prominent form of leadership among female leaders. A recent study by Tremmel and Wahl (2023) concluded that even though gender stereotypes continue to influence perceptions, women are significantly more likely than men to be viewed as practicing more participatory and transformational leadership practices.

C. Legal Foundations of Women's Leadership in Philippine Governance

The legal foundations of women's leadership in Philippine governance are based on the 1987 Constitution and important legislative enactments such as the Magna Carta of Women (Republic Act No. 9710) and the Women in Development and Nation-Building Act (Republic Act No. 7192). The enactment of these laws is due to the fact that the Philippines adheres to international conventions, which include

the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

Article II, Section 14 of the 1987 Philippine Constitution provides that the State shall protect and advance the right of women to participate fully in the country's economic, political, and social life. Republic Act No. 9710 directs the Philippine Government to create and implement policies to encourage the participation of women in the decision-making process and directs the use of gender mainstreaming throughout institutions.

The Local Government Code of 1991 (RA 7160) provides for the inclusion of women as part of the composition of local legislative councils and mandates that they be included at the local level. Together, these statutes provide evidence that women's leadership is a statutory requirement of the Philippine system of governance, rather than simply being an issue of equity.

D. Women Leaders Across National Agencies in Sorsogon

Women are significantly underrepresented in leadership positions in government agencies throughout the Philippines. Although the Philippines constitutionally affirms gender equality, women still make up only 24% of all elected officials in the Philippines, illustrating a vast gender divide in government and politics (PIDS, 2025).

Sorsogon Province is a perfect example of how male-dominated systems exist throughout the Philippines. All of the provincial leaders (the executive branch) are men, and the provincial legislative body has only one female representative. There are four main agencies at the provincial level with women as lead executives. These four agencies are significant because of the large number of female executives they contain, given the lack of women in leadership positions throughout the governance structure of Sorsogon.

The general objective of this study is to determine the profile, accomplishments, challenges, strategies, and leadership feedback of women leaders in Sorsogon's national government agencies. Specifically, it aims to: (1) describe the profile; (2) describe the

accomplishments in their respective organizations; (3) identify the challenges; (4) describe their strategies; (5) examine the feedback on leadership; and (6) propose a coffee table book on women leaders.

II. METHODOLOGY

This section presents the systematic methodology used to investigate women's leadership in Sorsogon, detailing the research design, data sources, ethical considerations, research instrument, data collection procedures, and analytical techniques employed.

A. Research Design

The multiple-case study design was employed to conduct a multi-faceted and multi-dimensional analysis of Women's Leadership in the national agencies of Sorsogon. Using multiple leaders in this analysis increases the reliability and robustness of the data compared to using a single case study (Yin, 2018). The multiple-case study design also provides the opportunity for the researcher to document the diversity of intersectional identities of women in Sorsogon (Stake, 2006).

B. Source of Data

Both primary and secondary participants' data were used along with supplementary documentation. The primary participant group consisted of four (4) females who held executive-level administrative positions in national government agencies in Sorsogon Province.

The secondary informant group was comprised of fifteen (15) employees working under the women leaders, whose responses served as a validation of the responses of the primary participants. To protect the identity of respondents, pseudonyms were created for each participant: Sophia (knowledge), Veritas (truth), Pax (peace), and Justitia (justice).

C. Data Collection and Analysis

The study employed two semi-structured interview guides as the main tools for data collection. The interviews lasted approximately 45–60 minutes each and were recorded with permission to allow for verbatim transcription. Data gathering took place over four months, from March 2025 through July 2025. The primary method for analyzing the data was Braun and Clarke's (2022) thematic analysis process, consisting

of six phases, combined with within-case and cross-case synthesis.

III. RESULTS

This section describes the women leaders in Sorsogon Province, covering their profiles and accomplishments.

A. Objective 1: Profile of Women Leaders

The first objective was to describe the profile of women leaders as to their age, marital status, years in service, educational qualification, relevant trainings attended, and affiliation with civic or professional organizations.

Case 1: Leader Sophia

Sophia a President of a state university in the Philippines. At 54 years old, married, and currently holds the top position at Sorsogon. With over twenty-two years of service, she has gained an immense amount of knowledge to help her perform her job. As an example of her continued desire for professional development, Sophia pursued and obtained a Doctorate of Education Degree in Educational Leadership and Management from Bicol University. This action demonstrates that Sophia has a strong commitment to continuing to grow professionally and navigating the complexities of the current higher education systems across the Philippines. She has proven this commitment by attending conferences, training, convergence, and strategic planning workshops. These diverse experiences demonstrate that as a leader, she consistently utilizes best practices, both domestically and internationally.

Case 2: Leader Veritas

Veritas is 55 years old and single. With thirty-three years of service, Veritas represents a strong example of long-time institutional knowledge and commitment to public service via governmental communications. Veritas also earned a Master's degree in Instructional Materials at Saint Louise de Marillac College, Sorsogon. This educational background provides a foundational understanding of how to design instruction and educational methodologies that can be used when creating plans for public education campaigns. She attended training and workshops related to governmental communication. She serves as

Secretary of the Sorsogon Communication Network, as well as Adviser to the PPO Press Corps and Advisor to the Lesbian Community of Sorsogon. These roles demonstrate inclusive leadership and advocacy on behalf of marginalized groups.

Case 3: Leader Pax

At age 58, Pax is married. For 34 years, Pax has worked for Sorsogon as the Provincial Director. The length of time she has been working in this position exceeds all three of the other study cases. This shows a lifetime commitment by Pax to improving the development of commerce and industry within the province. Pax has earned a Master of Arts in Business Administration degree from Saint Louise de Marillac School in Sorsogon. This educational background will assist with her planning for trade and industry-related programs.

As an additional learning opportunity, Pax has attended training under the Supervisory Training Program and the Institutional Learning System provided by the Agency Academy. The Institutional Learning System offers training to all provincial directors, including training on agency policies and programs as well as best practices. Additionally, Pax serves as the president of the Relief Society of the LDS Church. As such, she can provide volunteer service that supports her professional responsibilities.

Case 4: Leader Justitia

Justitia is 47 years old and married. She has worked as a Community Development Officer III in a national agency in Sorsogon Province for fourteen years. While she may be the youngest of the four leaders studied, her position involves some of the most sensitive and difficult issues dealing with indigenous peoples' rights, ancestral domain management, and the preservation of culture. Justitia holds a Master of Science degree in Environmental Science from the University of the Philippines, Los Baños — directly connected to her work in managing ancestral domains and environmental sustainability.

Justitia has completed an additional 32 units of supervisory training with the civil service commission and received GIS and mapping training essential for the technically driven task of determining the

boundaries of ancestral domains. Her involvement in the Sarong Banggi socio-cultural organization exemplifies her personal commitment to preserving Bicolano culture, which aligns with her professional responsibility to advocate for and protect the rights and traditions of indigenous cultural communities.

B. Objective 2: Leadership Accomplishments of Women Leaders

The accomplishments of women leaders in Sorsogon's national government agencies are closely aligned with the mandates of their respective institutions, exemplifying their ability to promote successful organizations and inclusive governance through their initiatives, programs, and reforms.

Case 1: Leader Sophia — State University

In accordance with Republic Act No. 8292, also known as the Higher Education Modernization Act of 1997, the achievements of Sophia are based upon the Four-Fold Mandate for State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) that includes: instruction, research, extension, and income/profit generation.

In instruction, the university achieved 100% Certificate of Programs Compliance (COPC) in four campuses (Bulan, Castilla, Magallanes, and Sorsogon City). CHED approved new programs, including BTVTED in computer servicing, BS Agriculture and BS Agribusiness, BS Marine Biology, and a planned BS Nursing program. The Professional Regulation Commission ranked the university as one of the top seven schools nationally in the September 2024 licensure exam for professional teachers, and the Excellence in Quality Assurance in Teacher Education Award was presented to the university by CHED.

In research, the university established 10 specialized research centers on each campus. Between 2022–23 and Q1 of 2024, it had 329 active research projects, with 185 completed and 32 research articles published in Scopus-, ACI-indexed, and CHED-recognized journals. EduRank ranked the university as Top 81 among 299 Philippine Universities and Top 1 among all Bicol State Universities and Colleges in 2024. The university received a 3-Star institution rating from the QS Stars Rating System with 5 Stars for Good Governance and 4 Stars for Teaching and Facilities.

In extension, the university established 44 new partnerships by Q4 2023, exceeding its internal goal. The 4-day Southeast Asian Multidisciplinary Research Expo and Extension Conference (SEAMREEC) was held in March 2023 with over 200 participants, generating sustained benefits including institutional partnerships and faculty-student exchange programs. The university received the Vulcan Award from DSWD Region V in 2024 for exceptional support to the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program.

In production, the university achieved a 99.98% budget allocation rate for CY 2023 and 99.25% for CY 2024. Income-generating programs were revitalized, including the operationalization of a dormtel, academic regalia manufacturing, and installation of water refill stations. The university received the 2024 Agila Award from the Bureau of the Treasury for excellence in leadership and operational efficiency.

Case 2: Leader Veritas — Information Agency

Veritas demonstrates the systematic application by an agency of its mandate through its core functions: government communications and public information; relations with stakeholders (government departments/organizations); media/documentation support; advocacy campaign work; and interagency cooperation.

Routine mechanisms have been established by Veritas to provide timely access to government-related information through its use of social media, press releases, and real-time emergency messages. The Kapihan programs and Talakayan sessions were developed to act as participatory communication platforms - informal discussions among media representatives and members of the general public with government officials regarding issues related to the public good. The development of these two types of platforms provided a means for the implementation of the agency's goal of increasing citizen involvement in democratic processes. Advocacy campaigns were conducted by the agency on the subjects of gender equality, women's empowerment, and climate change adaptation. Campaigns directed toward the recognition of the roles of women in climate resilience recognized women as agents of climate resilience in their localities, thus changing traditional stereotypes of

gender. The agency also supported the Magna Carta of Women to help assure that all Filipino citizens, specifically women, would be aware of their rights under this legislation. Examples of key leadership initiatives include conducting a community survey of public perceptions of police performance in Sorsogon Province, developing long-term, trust-based relationships with media organizations/broadcasters, developing long-term interagency working relationships, and enhancing the professional networks for journalists in Sorsogon Province to enhance professionalism, improve ethics, and better disseminate information in the public interest.

Case 3: Leader Pax — Trade and Industry

Pax's most significant achievement was the opening and operation of the first-ever Negosyo Centers established in Sorsogon Province, a result of Republic Act 10644 (Go Negosyo Act). The Negosyo Centers provided MSMEs with business registration, business advice, business matching, information, and advocacy services. These centers assisted aspiring entrepreneurs in business name registration, Barangay Micro Business Enterprise (BMBE) registration, providing tax exemptions, and one-on-one business advisory services.

Pax implemented Entrepreneurship Training Programs covering business planning, financial management, marketing strategy, product development, and regulatory compliance. Start-up kits with industry-specific equipment were distributed to emerging entrepreneurs in order to bridge capital constraints for MSMEs' access to high-cost equipment, such as food processing equipment and garment manufacturing machinery, through Shared Service Facilities (SSF). Market access was enhanced through trade fairs at provincial, national, and international levels, allowing Sorsogon MSMEs to extend their market reach. The Manila Buyers to Sorsogon Sellers reverse trade mission brought buyers from Manila to meet MSMEs of Sorsogon, thereby creating access across geographic and capital barriers. The KMME program and Micro Mentorship for Entrepreneurs program provided large corporations with long-term market access and supply chain

integration to MSMEs. Consumer protection was strengthened by regular price monitoring under Republic Act No. 7581 (Price Act), Diskwento Caravan, which provides essential goods at reduced prices in underserved areas, and consumer education campaigns on rights, safe products, and fair trade.

Case 4: Leader Justitia — Commission on Indigenous Peoples

Justitia's accomplishments are categorized under the requirements of the IPRA mandate: Ancestral Domain Delineation and Titling, Development Planning and Territorial Protection, Legal Recognition and Certification, Educational Access Advocacy, Comprehensive Community Service Delivery, Rights Awareness and Advocacy, and Cultural Documentation.

The major accomplishment included facilitating CADT mapping for the Indigenous Peoples in Sorsogon Province. A CADT is the official mechanism used by the government to recognize that Indigenous Peoples have the right to title to their lands. Through Justitia, Indigenous Peoples navigated the technically complex process of defining boundaries of their ancestral domain, including several months of field work; establishing relationships with various levels of communities; coordinating with multiple agencies within the Philippine Government; and preparing all necessary technical information. In addition to the titling process, Ancestral Domain Sustainable Development and Protection Plans (ADSDPPs) were developed. These plans are an overarching plan for the sustainable development, management and protection of ancestral domains based on the vision and priorities of each Indigenous Community, addressing such issues as: natural resource use; livelihood opportunities; environmental protection; cultural preservation; and infrastructure needs, as well as protection against threats from outside.

Certificates of Confirmation were also issued for the settlements of Indigenous Peoples in Sorsogon Province. These certificates provide formal written proof of an individual's or family's status as an Indigenous Person. This documentation serves as an entry point into the various governmental services,

programs, and protections available to them. Educational scholarships were also supported for Indigenous Peoples through partnerships with higher educational institutions and/or local municipalities. Health, education, and livelihood programs were provided across Sorsogon Province. These programs exemplified a holistic approach to community development.

IV. DISCUSSION

All four women leaders obtained advanced degrees and professional experiences that confirm Becker's (1993) Human Capital Theory, which states that investments in education/training will create increased professional value. All four leaders' formal educational backgrounds — Leader Sophia has a Doctorate in Educational Leadership, Veritas has a Master's Degree in Instructional Materials, Pax has a Master of Arts in Business Administration, and Justice has a Master of Science in Environmental Science indicate that women in leadership roles in Sorsogon have pursued formal educational preparation that is relevant to their governing responsibilities. Research conducted by Madsen (2012) shows that educational credentials serve as a legitimacy marker for women in senior leadership positions to address/counter skepticism regarding their competence based on gender. As was evident in the experiences of all four leaders, a formal educational background combined with years of direct hands-on experience created the capital base to facilitate their accomplishments (objective 2) and career advancements.

Each of the four women leaders' achievements exemplifies Transformational Leadership Theory (Bass, 1985), where each of the four women leaders served as an agent of transformative change who encouraged their followers to accomplish extraordinary results. Sophia transformed a provincial college into a globally recognized research university. Veritas utilized participatory platform technology to modernize government communication systems. Pax developed a comprehensive MSME support system. And Justice systematically protected indigenous people's rights. Therefore, each of these leaders' initiatives represented transformative effects that went beyond standard organizational operations.

Comparing across cases demonstrates that while women leaders in national government agencies in Sorsogon produced meaningful institutional changes, they also provided necessary skill sets such as empathy, inclusion, resilience, and collaborative decision-making that are essential when working within complex institutional settings. These characteristics reflect the expanding literature base documenting that women leaders utilize transformational and inclusive forms of leadership grounded in integrity (Eagly & Carli, 2018; Buss et al., 2024).

V. CONCLUSION

This study identified the profiles and achievements of four women leaders from national government agencies located in Sorsogon Province. These four women are all highly qualified professionals who have demonstrated great success in their careers as transformational leaders. They have been able to use some of their key strengths, including integrity, empathy, inclusiveness, and collaborative decision-making, to successfully implement various programs at a local level. Additionally, this study found that their achievements were primarily related to innovation at the agency level, community empowerment, organizational growth/development, and program implementation. As such, the results of this study clearly indicate that leadership is not based on one's gender; rather, it is about what qualities and attributes one possesses as a person. Further, the fact that these four women were able to function as effective leaders demonstrates that a person can be an excellent leader regardless of whether they are a man or a woman. These four women also had several common profile characteristics (i.e., advanced degrees, extensive experience in their fields, and continued professional development), which allowed them to achieve the significant institutional outcomes documented in this study across the domains of education, information and communications, trade and industry, and indigenous peoples' rights. Some possible recommendations for relevant stakeholders may be as follows: Policymakers and/or government agencies may consider revising existing or developing new gender responsive leadership models that incorporate transformational leadership practices into each

institution's culture. This may include practices such as mentoring, creating inclusive environments, and empowering local communities. The National Government may fund and provide technological tools and personnel support to enhance the effectiveness of the work conducted by women who are leading these initiatives. In addition, the National Government may enact policies aimed at increasing gender representation among decision-makers at all levels of government and establishing infrastructures designed to support women in their roles through providing additional training opportunities and peer networking.

Future researchers may conduct comparative research studies that compare the achievement and performance of both men and women in leadership positions throughout similar organizations/agencies to determine if successful leadership is driven by competency rather than gender. Researchers may also wish to investigate longitudinally how women's leadership affects organizational performance over time, as well as the positive impact of women's leadership on community development.

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