



Child Friendly Local Governance In The Municipality Of Victoria, Tarlac

Mary Jaefredeeen Viernes

College of Public Administration and Governance

Tarlac State University, Romulo Blvd. San Vicente Tarlac City, Tarlac 2300

Abstract: The study analyzed the child-friendly local governance in the Municipality of Victoria, Tarlac along with: Survival, Development, Protection, Participation, and Governance using quantitative descriptive research design. Based on the data gathered and analyzed by the researcher the following findings were drawn from the study. First, the percentage of Fully Immunized Children (FIC) declined in 2022 indicating potential flaws in the LGU's vaccination campaigns among children aged 12 months. On the other hand, the rate of malnutrition did not change from 2021 to 2022 indicating that more effort has to be done by the local government officials to address children's food insecurity in order to improve their nutritional status. Second, From the two thousand sixty-two (2,062) population of children aged three (3) to four (4) years in the municipality, only 14.21% percent of them were enrolled in ECCD. Also, the municipality of Victoria managed twenty-eight (28) cases of Children in Need of Special Protection (CNSP), attained a score of 7.00 in case management report preparation with a corresponding ratio of 100 percent (100%) from 2021 to 2022, and established one (1) referral network. Fourth, the child representatives in the municipality were selected by virtue of Executive Order No. 5 Series of 2022 and through the Children's General Assembly. Lastly, for 2021 to 2022, the children's database received a score of 5.00, the Annual Local State of Children Report received a consistent rating of 2.00, and the budget allocation obtained a remark of three million six hundred twenty-six pesos (-3,626,000). In line with this, recommendations such as: appeal to the national government to prioritize uninterrupted delivery of immunization schedules and basic health nutrition care services in line with the Department of Health (DOH) Memorandum No. 2020-0150; Strictly enforcing the Milk Code which forbids the unethical promotion of milk formula; sufficient funding be allotted for Barangay Health Stations and Rural Health Units; Investments in education to deliver services reaching the children who need it most may be recognized by the government; and expand the opportunities available for OSCY programs where there is insufficiency, alternative education strategies including the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) should be explored were drawn.

Key words: *Child Friendly, Local Governance*

1.INTRODUCTION

Child engagement in governance, as outlined in Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, has drawn increasing attention in the last three decades, according to the United Nations Children's Fund (2017). Efforts to promote child participation have increasingly centered on local governance. UNICEF country offices have been actively working to advance child participation at the local level. However, meaningful participation still faces challenges such as tokenism, exclusion of vulnerable groups, and limited evidence of its impact. Recognizing the specific challenges and opportunities within local governments is essential for fostering effective and sustainable child participation.

Additionally, Sustainable Development Goals 16 emphasizes that participation is essential to realizing sustainable development and maintaining good governance. Local government services and policies perform better, and local budgets are used more efficiently when children participate in local governance. Participation is relevant not only as a right in itself, but also as an enabling factor for the realization of other rights. With

an emphasis on the local level, states should encourage significant youth participation in the creation, execution, and oversight of laws, regulations, services, and initiatives that impact the lives of adolescents. Children involved in their local community participate in national decision-making processes and are aware of what appeals to other children. Child participation mechanisms are being enshrined in the legal frameworks of numerous states around the world, suggesting that local authorities may play a key role by promoting and facilitating child participation efforts.

Local governments are likewise indispensable in providing children with basic rights and services – food, water, education, sanitation — especially for those who are discriminated against and excluded. Yet, most local governments are not equipped to resource and know what every child needs. Governments are unable to promote higher quality and broader reach of the goods and services they provide, because of limited resource availability, coordination challenges and lack of data on children's well-being. Consequently, children and youth rarely have the ability of impacting decisions on their lives.

UNICEF has been instrumental in several initiatives, including budget development in Senegal, Albania, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, and Mongolia. In Senegal, budgets were developed for birth registration, educational infrastructure, youth empowerment, civic engagement, and climate change. In Albania, a financing formula was developed, enabling over 200 municipal officials to develop social care plans for vulnerable families. In Bhutan, a new database system was developed, and child-friendly local governance was assessed. In Sri Lanka, a budget consultation with children led to a dedicated allocation of 2 billion Sri Lankan Rupees in 2021. In Mongolia, UNICEF and local government set a goal to become the first smog-free city by 2022 (Social policy and local governance. (n.d.)).

Child-Friendly Local Governance Audit (CFLGA) is an annual review of child-friendly policies, initiatives, and services that began in 2014. It examines the effectiveness of cities and municipalities using factors such as child-friendly facilities, budget allocation, kid representation, and program participation. To pass the audit, LGUs must have an overall passing percentage of 80%, with a minimum score of 12 in Survival, Development, Protection, and Participation, and 32 in Governance.

Local government units (LGUs) are now being evaluated by the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) on how they pursue child-friendly programs as well as interventions that support children welfare under the 2022 Child-Friendly Local Governance Audit (CFLGA).

Furthermore, "The administration of President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos, Jr. gives great importance to the protection and welfare of our Filipino children. "Sa pamamagitan ng CFLGA, tinitiyak nating tutulong ang mga LGU sa pagpapatayo ng isang lipunang pangkaligtasan kung saan magagampanan nila ang kanilang karapatan at masisiguro ang kinabukasang iniuupuan nila," ani DILG Secretary Benjamin "Benhur" Abalos, Jr.

The result of our CFLGA has a great impact on the eligibility of LGUs to one of the most prestigious awards — Presidential Award for Child-Friendly Cities and Municipalities, and the Seal of Good Local Governance (SGLG). He again underscored the role of LGUs in protecting their children, while also assuring them that national government will always back them up.

In 2023, thirteen local government units in Pampanga were granted the 2022 Seal of Child-Friendly Local Governance Audit Passer by the DILG. Rosa, San Simon, Masantol, Angeles City and the City of San Fernando which were submerged under 1-meter up to 2 meters floodwaters. Among the 75 passers in Central Luzon are Tomas, Mexico and Angeles City (Arcellaz, 2023).

Meanwhile, Carmona Mayor Dahlia Loyola revealed that Carmona secured the top spot in the recently concluded 2022 Child-Friendly Local Governance Audit conducted by the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) and the Council for the Welfare of Children (CWC). She emphasized that this accomplishment reflects the local government's strong commitment to fostering a child-sensitive and child-friendly community, demonstrating its dedication to promoting the health, development, and well-being of its young citizens (Taculao, 2023).

The Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) in Tarlac Province announced that it has actively promoted child-friendly governance at the local level. Last year, 14 out of 18 local government units (LGUs) in the province received the Seal of Child-Friendly Local Governance. This accomplishment sets the stage for more consistent achievements in the future. Aiming for a 100 percent passing rate by 2024, the DILG is implementing provincial-led initiatives to support LGUs in ensuring that their means of verification (MOVs) are properly prepared and relevant for assessment. In pursuit of this goal, the department is dedicated to building communities where children feel safe and enjoy better lives.

The researcher is presently serving as a Municipal Councilor for Victoria, Tarlac. In this role, she oversees multiple committees, including the Committee on Education, the Committee on Appropriation, and the Committee on Women and Family.

Her extensive experience in governance, particularly her involvement in ensuring the municipality adheres to child-friendly local governance standards, makes her well-qualified to conduct this study. Moreover, her leadership position in the Committee on Women and Family emphasizes her expertise in effectively engaging with families and children, encouraging their active involvement in local governance. The study analyzed child-friendly local governance in the Municipality of Victoria, Tarlac, focusing on key areas such as Survival, Development, Protection, Participation, and Governance. Furthermore, the study identified challenges faced by the municipality that impact its child-friendly governance and proposed measures to address these issues.

2.METHODOLOGY

The study analyzed the child-friendly local governance in the Municipality of Victoria, Tarlac along with: Survival, Development, Protection, Participation, and Governance using quantitative descriptive research design.

Through the quantitative approach, the researcher aimed to uncover patterns, trends, and relationships within the data that might not have been apparent through qualitative methods alone. By utilizing statistical techniques such as descriptive statistics, the researcher could identify key factors influencing policy outcomes and evaluate the effectiveness of the policy in achieving its objectives.

In the context of this study, the non-experimental design enabled the researcher to objectively observe and analyze the child-friendly local governance in the Municipality of Victoria, Tarlac along with: Survival, Development, Protection, Participation, and Governance. By employing this design, the researcher could gather comprehensive data on various aspects and identifying areas for improvement.

The respondents of the study includes twenty six (26) principals, fifty-four (54) teachers, two (2) district supervisors, twenty six (26) Barangay Captains, twenty six (26) Councilor on Education & Social Welfare, twenty six (26) Barangay Health Workers, two (2) Municipal Health Officers, four (4) DILG Officers, one (1) Budget Officer, one (1) Local Chief Executive, twenty-six (26) Barangay Nutrition Scholar, three (3) MPDC, and four (4) MSWD with a total of two hundred one (201) respondents.

Lastly, the method of survey questionnaire, documentary analysis, and interview were used to ensure the sufficiency of data to obtain meaningful study results.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter shows the data gathered in this research. The answers to the questions promulgated in the study are analyzed, interpreted, and are presented.

1. Description and Analysis of the child-friendly local governance in the Municipality of Victoria, Tarlac

The table below presents the analysis of the child-friendly local governance in the Municipality of Victoria, Tarlac along with: survival, development, protection, participation, and governance.

1.1. Survival

The right to life begins the moment a child is born. Children have the right to be cared for and protected by providing the necessities essential for their survival. The survival of children depends on the availability of health services provided to them by their locality. Thus, the support of local government plays a pivotal role in safeguarding these rights for children to thrive and have access to basic services in line with their best interests.

Table 1 presents the key health indicators for children and adolescents covering the period from 2021 to 2022. It includes data on the number of fully immunized children aged twelve (12) months old, the prevalence of malnutrition among children aged zero (0) to fifty-nine (59) months old, the number of pregnant adolescents with prenatal services, and the number of pregnant adolescents with postpartum services. This indicator obtained a grand mean of 5.00 or equivalent to 95-100%.

Table 1
Survival

Statement	2021		2022		Grand Mean	Level of Accomplishment
	Number	Mean Score	Number	Mean Score		
Number of Fully Immunized Children aged 12 months old	1,303	5.00	1,013	5.00	5.00	95-100%
Prevalence of malnutrition among children aged 0-59 months old	5,732	1.00	5,707	1.00	1.00	60-110%
Number of pregnant adolescents with prenatal services	77	3.00	28	3.00	3.00	80-100%
Number of pregnant adolescents with postpartum services	37	1.00	28	2.00	1.50	70-79.99%

Source: Child-friendly Local Governance Audit (CFLGA) Data Capture Form for 2021 and 2022

In the definition provided by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) in 2016, Fully Immunized Children (FIC) refers to infants who received one dose of Bacillus Calmette-Guerin (BCG), three (3) doses each of Oral Polio Vaccine (OPV), Diphtheria, Pertussis, and Tetanus (DPT), and Hepatitis B vaccines, and one dose of measles vaccine to prevent children's exposure from any form of disease. These vaccines are intended for children below one (1) year old to protect them from the possible harm brought by diseases.

Out of the total population of children aged twelve (12) months, the municipality of Victoria has successfully equated vaccines to its young members of society through its vaccination program. In 2021, Victoria has recorded one thousand three hundred three (1,303) fully immunized children aged twelve (12) months, garnering a perfect score of 5.00 or equivalent to 100 percent (100%). This means that all children from this age group received doses of vaccines from the Local Government Unit (LGU) of the municipality. The result indicates that the Municipality of Victoria is dedicated in advocating for children's survival, especially the most vulnerable members of its locality. The municipality attained a very satisfactory level of satisfaction in providing basic healthcare services to children aged twelve (12) months old through the availability of vaccines to strengthen children's immune system and develop children's natural defenses to fight Vaccine-Preventable Diseases (VPDs).

However, in 2022, the table shows that data from the previous year dropped from one thousand three hundred three (1,303) to one thousand thirteen (1,013) in the following year. There is a variation of 25.04% percentage gap from the numbers provided between 2021 and 2022. By examining the decline in number, a remark of two hundred ninety (-290) was obtained. It is clear that over a year, the municipality acquired a lower degree of satisfaction in its vaccination program in 2022. Therefore, the probability of child survival among children aged twelve (12) months is much higher in 2021. This decline may reflect concerns regarding possible obstacles to vaccination accessibility in the municipality which include shortage of vaccines or difficulties reaching target populations. Based on the results, it is seen that children of poor economic status must be provided with the most necessary vaccines to protect them from diseases. Therefore, the causes of this decline must be looked into by the local government officials of Victoria and focused measures be put in place.

Another statement present in the data is the prevalence of malnutrition in Victoria, Tarlac. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), malnutrition refers to deficiencies or excesses in nutrient intake, imbalance of essential nutrients or impaired nutrient utilization. In the record of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), ninety-five (95) children in the Philippines die from malnutrition every day, and twenty-seven (27) out of one thousand (1,000) Filipino children do not get past their fifth birthday. The survival and development of children in the Philippines are threatened not just by high rates of malnutrition, but also by low to zero regular access to clean water and inadequate sanitation facilities close to the communities. This indicator obtained a grand mean of 1.00 or equivalent to 60-110%.

In the case of Victoria, Tarlac, the prevalence of malnutrition among children aged zero (0) to fifty-nine (59) months old remained relatively stable from 2021 to 2022 both receiving a score of 1.00. Out of the six thousand one hundred seventy (6,170) total population of children aged zero (0) to fifty-nine (59) months old in Victoria, Tarlac, five thousand seven hundred seven (5,707) of them are weighed by the Operation Timbang (OPT) Plus in 2021. From the recorded data of OPT, it turned out that seven hundred seventy-eight (778) children are categorized based on the three (3) broad groups of malnourished condition: 6.05% percent or an equivalent of three hundred forty-seven (347) children are identified as stunted or those who have low height for their age; 2.04% percent or one hundred seventeen (117) children are wasted or defined as those who have low weight for their height; and 5.48% percent or a total of three hundred fourteen (314) children are categorized as overweight and obese or those who have excessive weight over their height and age.

These findings indicate that the Municipality of Victoria has estimated 13.57% percent of cases of malnutrition out of the total number of children's population aged zero (0) to fifty-nine (59) months old weighed by the OPT. The result of this study also implies that the existence of malnutrition in the municipality is at high risk. Factors such as poverty, poor maternal health, insufficient access to nutritious food, and frequent illness are contributors associated with the prevalence of malnutrition in Victoria, Tarlac.

Meanwhile, the actual number of children aged zero (0) to fifty-nine (59) months old weighed in 2022 decreased to five thousand seven hundred seven (5,707). From seven hundred seventy-eight (778) reported cases of malnutrition in 2021, it increased in 2022 with an addition of three hundred fifty-three (353) children. In total, one thousand one hundred thirty-one (1,131) children in Victoria are categorized as having poor nutritional status. Whereas, 9.36% percent or five hundred thirty-four (534) children are reportedly stunted, 3.82% percent or two hundred eighteen (218) children are identified as wasted, and 6.64% percent or three hundred seventy-nine (379) children are categorized as overweight and obese. From the data given, it shows that the case from 2021 relatively increased from 13.57% percent to 19.82% percent with a percentage gap of 6.25% percent or a remark of twenty-five (-25). The dramatic increase in the number over the past year of malnourished children under age five (5) means that progress has been insufficient. The municipality's efforts to combat malnutrition have remained steady indicating an urgent concern of risks associated to child mortality. This result draws attention to the urgency to focus on cost-effective and high-impact interventions to prevent the possible occurrence of death rate in the municipality, especially the newborns.

In terms of the number of pregnant adolescents with prenatal services in Vicotria, Tarlac, the data shows that seventy-seven (77) female adolescents in 2021 were pregnant while there were twenty-eight (28) in 2022. This decline indicates that the number of pregnant adolescents decreased from seventy-seven (77) to twenty-eight (28) in 2021 and 2022 respectively, thus affecting the number of those who received prenatal services from the local government health centers. The municipality of Victoria has a total population of twelve thousand eight hundred thirty-one (12,831) female adolescents aged ten (10) to nineteen (19), and seventy-seven (77) or an equivalent of 0.60% percent from this age group are pregnant adolescents. Seventy-six (76) of them are aged fifteen (15) to nineteen (19) while the other one (1) is aged ten (10) to fourteen (14). To note, seventy-seven (77) out of seventy-seven (77) pregnant adolescents of the municipality had at least four (4) prenatal services in their local healthcare centers receiving a perfect score or an equivalent of 100 percent (100%). This indicator obtained a grand mean of 3.00 or equivalent to 80-100%.

This result has obtained a remark of forty-nine (-49), comparing the figures collected from 2021 to 2022. Therefore, these findings stipulate that the local government of Victoria, Tarlac, is committed to providing healthcare services or outreach initiatives designed specifically for maternal care.

The last statement presented in the table refers to the number of pregnant adolescents with postpartum services. In 2021, the number of pregnant adolescents in the municipality is thirty-seven (37). It decreased to only twenty-eight (28) in 2022 with an increase of points from 1.00 to 2.00. In 2021, only 77.08% percent or thirty-seven (37) out of the forty-eight (48) pregnant adolescents aged ten (10) to nineteen (19) are given at least two (2) postpartum services by the LGU. On the other hand, eleven (11) pregnant adolescents were not given postpartum services of any local health centers. This means that child survival of at least one (1) time visit to doctor during pregnancy is higher than no visit during pregnancy of mother at all because mothers who sought prenatal care during their pregnancy are well aware about the utilization of existing health facilities and they can properly use such facilities when needed for their child.

On the other hand, an increase in the percentage coverage of pregnant adolescents with postpartum services from 77.08% percent to 100 percent (100%) was obtained in 2022. All of the twenty-eight (28) recorded pregnant adolescents in the municipality were provided with at least two (2) postpartum services. The increase received a percentage coverage of 100 percent (100%) or an equivalent of 2.00 point. From the data given, a remark of nine (-9) was conferred. Although the number of pregnant adolescents lowered by nine (9), the study found that parent's awareness about prenatal care has been identified to be the most important socio-

economic predictors of child survival. In addition, promoting the well-being of adolescent mothers which requires the implementation of free and advanced prenatal services has substantial effect on lowering the risk of difficulties during the postpartum period. This indicator obtained a grand mean of 1.50 or equivalent to 70-79.99%.

Overall, the health factors important for the survival of children and adolescents in Victoria, Tarlac from 2021 to 2022 shows several changes about the municipality's healthcare performance system for two consecutive years. The number of fully immunized children (FIC) saw a decline with a remark of two hundred ninety (-290), indicating potential gaps in the LGU's vaccine immunization program, while the prevalence of malnutrition remained the same for two (2) years with a remark of twenty-five (-25), highlighting sustained efforts to address nutritional deficiencies and food insecurity among children to improve their nutritional status, and the minimal inconsistency in prenatal and postpartum services for pregnant adolescents with a remark of forty-nine (-49) and nine (-9) respectively, underscore the importance of improving access to maternal and child health services.

1.2 Development

The table contains data on the following indicators affecting the children's rights to development. This includes the following: (1) number of children aged three to four (3-4) years old provided with early childhood care and development (ECCD) services, both public and privately managed, and may be center, home, or community-based; (2) number of barangays with at least one (1) ECCD service; (3) number of accredited or recognized center-based ECCD services; (4) number of children who have dropped out from school that were reintegrated in the academic year being audited and; (5) number of OSCY registered/enrolled to schools, ALS, or other flexible learning options. This indicator obtained a grand mean of 3.50 or equivalent to 90-94.99%.

Table 2
Development

Statement	2021		2022		Grand Mean	Level of Accomplishment
	Number	Mean Score	Number	Mean Score		
Number of children aged 3-4 years old provided with early childhood care and development (ECCD) services, both public and privately managed, and may be center, home, or community-based	2,390	5.00	1,769	2.00	3.50	90-94.99%
Number of barangays with at least one (1) ECCD service	26	3.00	26	3.00	3.00	100%
Number of accredited or recognized center-based ECCD services	26	3.00	27	3.00	3.00	100%
Number of children who have dropped out from school that were reintegrated in the academic year being audited	47	2.50	14	2.50	2.50	90-100%
Number of OSCY registered/enrolled to schools, ALS, or other flexible learning options	55	2.50	59	2.50	2.50	90-100%

Source: Child-friendly Local Governance Audit (CFLGA) Data Capture Form for 2021 and 2022

Based on the given data, the number of enrollees enrolled for 2021 are as follows: public centers enrollees were one thousand three hundred eleven (1,311) or an equivalent of 54.85% percent; private centers enrollees were two hundred three (203) or an equivalent of 8.49% percent; and community-based enrollees were eight hundred seventy-six (876) or an equivalent of 36.66% percent. Children who were enrolled in public centers are much higher compared to those who were in private centers and community-based. The numbers from 2021 show that the local government support of Victoria for early childhood care and development whether public and privately-managed, or community-based attained a perfect number of combined percentages. Regardless of their socioeconomic background, children had an equal opportunity to be at school at their appropriate age.

However, the number of enrolled children decreased to one thousand seven hundred sixty-nine (1,769) in 2022, receiving a lowered score of 2.00. From the two thousand sixty-two (2,062) population of children aged three (3) to four (4) years in the municipality, only 14.21% percent of them were enrolled in ECCD. One thousand three hundred eleven (1,311) or an equivalent of 74.11% percent were enrolled in public centers; sixty-eight (68) or an equivalent to 3.84% percent were enrolled in private centers; and three hundred ninety (390) or an equivalent of 22.05% percent were enrolled in other modalities implemented by the LGU which includes public kindergarten. The number of children enrolled in public centers remained the same in 2021 and 2022; however, the number of children enrolled in private centers decreased by 66.50% in 2022, and the number of children enrolled in other modalities dropped by 55.48% percent in 2022. By examining the changes in numbers, difficulties of parents in maintaining student's allowance and school fees, the lack of LGU's financial and educational support, and the proximity of schools were deemed factors as to why students who were previously enrolled in private centers and community-based reduced.

From the registration list provided, a difference of one thousand seventy-nine (1,079) from the two thousand three hundred ninety (2,390) total number of ECCD enrollees in 2021, and one thousand three hundred eleven (1,311) in 2022 was obtained. From the data presented, a remark of six hundred twenty-one (-621) was measured. Aside from the difficulties encountered, other factors contributing this decline may imply that several students in 2021 have already moved to a higher grade level in 2022 or resulted in a significant drop in enrollment due to the potential challenges in access or utilization of ECCD services or the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on early childhood programs.

As underscored in the Philippines' Early Years Act of 2013, otherwise known as Republic Act 10410, investing in early childhood care and development (ECCD) can address various aspects of children's growth, including their cognitive, physical, emotional, and social development. Access to early childhood development without hampering the valuable experiences of children in education is significant determinant of an improved academic performance which sets up the child for future success in the workplace, decreased reliance on family and community, and lowered rate of criminal activity. This table also shows that twenty-six (26) barangays in the municipality had at least one ECCD services in both 2021 and 2022, maintaining a score of 3.00 in each year with a corresponding ratio of one hundred percent (100%). The consistency in numbers may imply that every barangay shared a fair number of available ECCD services as shown for two (2) consecutive years. Based on the data presented, a remark of zero (0) was attained following the difference derived from twenty-six (26). This indicator obtained a grand mean of 3.00 or equivalent to 100%.

In a span of year, between 2021 and 2022, one (1) center-based ECCD was added to the initial number of facilities the LGU has. Overall, there were twenty-seven (27) center-based ECCD services recognized and accredited in 2022 from its original number in 2021. The result implies that the municipality responded to the educational needs of children through the provision of additional ECCD facility in its locality addressing the growing needs of community access to effective and conducive learning opportunities. If the municipality can establish one ECCD facility each year, school enrollees' rate will also increase in the next couple of years. In this way, the probability for children's development increases as school properties have direct influence on a child's well-being. Therefore, ECCD facilities are prerequisites of a child-friendly community. From the comparisons made with the collected data from 2021 to 2022, a remark of one (-1) was attained. This indicator obtained a grand mean of 3.00 or equivalent to 100%.

In terms of the number of children who have dropped out from school that were reintegrated in 2021, the data saw a decline from forty-seven (47) to fourteen (14) school dropouts. In 2021, forty-seven (47) students aged five (5) to seventeen (17) years were reintegrated in formal schools. This means that 93.62% percent of the total number of school dropouts in the municipality were re-enrolled by the LGU, with a corresponding point of 2.50. In 2022, fourteen (14) records of school dropouts were also reintegrated in formal school. It stipulates that one hundred (100%) of the total population of dropouts returned to school, gaining a perfect score of 2.50 and a remark of thirty-three (-33). The decline in rate of school dropouts implicates that the municipality strived and made use of its various resources in aiding the problems brought about by the

numbers of out-of-school children and youth in 2022. Most importantly, the LGU successfully reinstated a considerable number of school dropout cases amidst pandemic. This indicator obtained a grand mean of 2.50 or equivalent to 90-100%.

In the Philippines, many Filipinos are unable to enroll and complete their basic education in secondary and tertiary schools due to a variety of reasons. While some people live in communities without access to education, others drop out of school. Since every Filipino is entitled to free basic education, the government created Alternative Learning System (ALS) to give everyone the opportunity to get access to and finish basic education in a way that best suits their individual requirements. It refers to a parallel education system that offers a useful substitute for formal education when it is not available or cannot be accessed in schools. Both informal and non-formal sources of learning and expertise are included in ALS. It is typically held at libraries, community learning centers, or barangay multipurpose halls supervised by ALS coordinators and learning facilitators.

While maintaining a score of 2.50, the number of out-of-school children and youth (OSCY) and registered/enrolled to schools, ALS, or other flexible learning options climbed significantly from fifty-five (55) in 2021 to fifty-nine (59) in 2022 with a remark of (-4). This gain denotes that factors affecting out-of-school youth including but not limited to low primary school retention rates, insufficient leaning environments, and low financial income, if addressed properly, can mitigate these barriers from successfully transitioning to school. Although the increase in enrollment is encouraging, more all-encompassing approaches are required to reach and assist OSCY who could encounter obstacles in their pursuit of formal education. Recognizing these factors is not only crucial for school re-entry programs but has implications on LGU's workforce status and employment competitiveness. This indicator obtained a grand mean of 2.50 or equivalent to 90-100%.

Therefore, the result of this study provides that the creation of ALS centers helps in catering OSCY who has neither attained any level of education nor finish primary school. It is clear that from the provided data, there was an apparent progress in terms of the education attainment in the municipality of Victoria. For instance, youth with no education were referred to ALS and those who stopped their education for years were significantly sent back to school. Through investments in flexible Alternative Learning Systems and other community-based learning centers, it is possible to give out-of-school youth and children the chance to further their education and allow them to broaden the necessary skills needed for both their personal and professional growth. With adequate resources, there is a movement towards reducing the increasing rate of students dropping out from schools over time.

1.3. Protection

One of the fundamental rights children must enjoy is the right to protection. This right includes their freedom to feel safe and secure from all forms of harm including violence, abuse, and exploitation. Apart from their parents, it is the responsibility of local governments to ensure that such right is maintained and observed within its locality. Policies pertaining to child protection are vital as they discuss problems affecting the state of children's safety and well-being.

The table provides data on the status of children's protection in Victoria, Tarlac for the periods 2021 and 2022. Specifically, it focused on analyzing the protection services provided by the municipality. The statements shown in the table include the number of cases managed, the preparation of case management reports, and the establishment of a referral network.

Table 3
Protection

Statement	2021		2022		Grand Mean	Level of Accomplishment
	Number	Mean Score	Number	Mean Score		
Number of Case Managed	28	5.00	22	5.00	5.00	100%
Case Management Report preparation	28	7.00	28	7.00	7.00	100%
Established referral network	6	3.00	6	3.00	3.00	100%

Source: Child-friendly Local Governance Audit (CFLGA) Data Capture Form for 2021 and 2022

In 2021, Victoria, Tarlac managed twenty-eight (28) cases of Children in Need of Special Protection (CNSP), earning a 5.00 point or an equivalent of one hundred percent (100%). In the definition provided by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), the term "CNSP" refers to all individuals under the age of eighteen (18), as well as those who are older than eighteen (18) but are incapable of taking care of themselves due to a physical or mental medical condition. It also includes those who are susceptible to or have been the victims of abuse, neglect, exploitation, cruelty, discrimination, violence, or other similar situations that are detrimental to their development. From these numbers, the results of this study demonstrate that the municipality has a high number of CNSP cases in their locality. It is realized that the primary laws addressing child abuse were not strictly implemented, legal frameworks were deemed weak, and penalties for violators of such acts were inadequate for public awareness.

Whereas, in 2022, the number of cases managed in the municipality dropped to twenty-two (22), while the score remained at 5.00. Of the twenty-two (22) cases managed, a total number of seven (7) CNSP were recorded by the Local Social Welfare and Development Office (LSWDO) of the municipality. The LSWDO is a local agency responsible for overseeing CNSP cases. Based on the numbers provided, a total of 314.29% percent was accumulated as the total percentage coverage of cases managed for the year 2022. Despite the decline in number of the CNSP cases managed in 2022 compared to 2021, the accomplishment percentage of case management shows that the LGU strengthened its policy guidelines in terms of attending to children's needs and combatting the CNSP cases through the protection services they had provided over a year. In spite of this gain, it is still important to note that as long as there are cases reported, the fight for child protection continues and should not be overlooked at any level. This indicator obtained a grand mean of 5.00 or equivalent to 100%.

With that being said, funding child protection must be prioritized as it is an integral component of children's well-being. Preventive measure like this may lower poverty, mitigate criminal rate, and promote personal growth of children in the future. Ensuring that children have access to health, safety, and basic protection services will increase their potential for employment opportunities. In this way, providing social security to children raises the possibility that neglect and abuse are unlikely to be passed down through generations. Through the comparisons made from the collected data from 2021 to 2022, a remark of six (-6) for number of cases managed was accumulated.

Case management refers to overseeing services from different social agencies. Typically, a single agency has main responsibility for the client and appoints a case manager who arranges services, speaks up for the client, occasionally manages resources, and makes service purchases on the client's behalf (Barker, 2003). According to the Legal Services National Technology Assistance Project, a case management system includes the intake or report information loop, but at its heart is a collection of tools designed to assist with case handling itself, particularly litigated cases. This indicator obtained a grand mean of 7.00 or equivalent to 100%.

In Victoria, Tarlac, the data on case management report preparation attained a score of 7.00 with a corresponding ratio of 100 percent (100%) from 2021 to 2022. The result is an indication that the municipality follows the procedures in preparing case management reports (CMR) associated with recording and filing significant case information within its jurisdiction. Its practices in standards and procedures in preparing CMR are indicated by these three factors: (1) *prepared and signed by a trained registered social worker*; (2) *prepared and signed by a registered social worker* and; (3) *prepared and signed by a trained public social development worker*. The accumulated score in case management report preparation presented in this table highlights the importance of attention to detail.

Another statement presented in this table is the establishment of a referral network to ensure that children's protection considered and placed on the top priority lists of the municipality. At its most basic level, establishing a child protection referral network requires leaders, practitioners, and local government to make the appropriate decisions about when, how, and why to intervene when a child's safety is at risk. As suggested by the Child Rights Research Center, it is encouraged that community groups must establish and fortify a Child Protection Referral System (CPRS) to effectively implement the legal, policy, and procedural frameworks of a country. This indicator obtained a grand mean of 3.00 or equivalent to 100%.

The number of established referral network in Victoria received a score of 3.00. This means that the municipality has six (6) developed referral networks established by its respective local government unit in 2021. These networks are Local Social Welfare and Development Office (LSWDO), Women and Children's Protection Desk (WCPD) or Women and Children Protection Unit (WCPU), School Child Protection Committees (CPC), City/Municipality Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC), Barangay Council for the Protection of Children (BCPC), and Violence against Women and their Children (VAWC) Desk.

Based on the description written by the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) in 2023, Local Social Welfare and Development Office offers first-hand services focused on social welfare and social protection. Meanwhile, the Women and Children's Protection Desk (WCPD), sometimes known as the Women and Children Protection Unit (WCPU), is a quick-response unit that specializes in enforcing legislation pertaining to the protection of women and children. Likewise, the School Child Protection Committees (CPCs) is responsible in developing programs for disseminating information and planning of events anchored at protecting children's rights against abuse, bullying, and violence with incorporation of school-based monitoring systems. Other referral network established by the LGU refers to City/Municipality Licensed professional counselors which offers mental health services to individuals, families, and vulnerable groups in the community.

At the barangay level, the Barangay Council for the Protection of Children made up of the barangay chair, the chairs of the committees on health, education, and family, the barangay secretary, a child representative, and relevant government agencies is in charge of organizing and carrying out child protection-related activities. Lastly, the Violence Against Women (VAW) Desk is a barangay-level facility providing legal assistance for victim-survivors who face physical, sexual, and psychological violence as defined by the Philippine Commission on Women (PWC).

The result of this study implies that the LGU of Victoria is equipped with more than five (5) referral networks responsible in overseeing and monitoring the peace and order of the community. To safeguard all children, the community leaders of Victoria and child protection advocates formed alliances and networks with one another to stop the escalation of crimes concerning children and guarantee the most suitable response to strengthen child protection systems. These alliances also include official programs run by Nongovernmental Organization (NGOs) or voluntary groups that can aid in the development of coping strategies and resilience to heal the psychological wounds of victims and rebuild their social structure after a critical situation.

In 2022, the number of established referral networks in the municipality of Victoria remained unchanged. This underscores the necessity of sustained efforts to improve coordination with external providers and increase the availability of resources for children's protection. While keeping up a well-established referral network is important, looking into ways to further expand relationships with trusted service providers can help the children to have wider access to protection services anytime and anywhere. To summarize the data in this table, the number of cases managed by the LGU received a remark of six (-6) accumulated from the difference of twenty-eight (28) in 2021 and twenty-two (22) in 2022, while both the numbers in case management report preparation and established referral networks obtained a remark of zero (0) which is an indicative of consistency and stagnated numbers from both 2021 to 2022.

1.4 Participation

Children are important members of society. They have the right to voice out their thoughts and opinions in the environment they live in. Most importantly, they have the right to participate in the activities of their community contributing to a positive communal change. The participation of children in the community increases their sense of inclusivity or feeling of belonging, free from any form of discrimination and prejudice.

The table shows data on the different statements concerning the status of children's participation in Victoria, Tarlac.

Table 4
Participation

Statement	2021		2022		Grand Mean	Level of Accomplishment
	Number/ Resolution	Mean Score	Number/ Resolution	Mean Score		
Child Representative in the City/Municipality Local Council for the Protection of Children (LCPC)	EO No. 21, series of 2021	1.00	EO No. 05, series of 2022	1.00	1.00	100%
Child Representative Selection Process at the City/Municipal LCPC	Through Children's General Assembly	4.00	Through Children's General Assembly	4.00	4.00	100%

Child Representative in the Barangay LCPC	26	3.00	26	3.00	3.00	90-100%
Development of policy and programs, projects, and activity (PPAs) with children's participation in the planning, implementation or monitoring phase	5	3.00	7	3.00	3.00	90-100%

Source: Child-friendly Local Governance Audit (CFLGA) Data Capture Form for 2021 and 2022

Specifically, it focused on Child Representative in the City/Municipality Local Council for the Protection of Children (LCPC), Child Representative Selection Process at the City/Municipal LCPC, Child Representative in the Barangay LCPC, and Development of policy and programs, projects, and activity (PPAs) with children's participation in the planning, implementation or monitoring phase, covering the periods from 2021 to 2022.

In the municipality of Victoria, the number of child representatives for its City/Municipality Local Council for the Protection of Children (LCPC) stays at 1.00 from 2021 to 2022. As defined in the previous table, LCPC guarantees that the welfare and rights of children are incorporated into the LGU development plans at every level. It also helps the government keep an eye on how laws and national policies pertaining to children are being applied locally. In 2021, the child representation of Victoria, Tarlac is aligned to the municipality's Executive Order No. 21 Series of 2021. The executive order guarantees that children have a say in the decision-making process at the city/municipality level by requiring the inclusion of child representatives in LCPCs and promote child participation in various activities of the community and safeguard children's rights. The provision also emphasizes the empowerment of child representatives inside LCPCs, going beyond simple representation. It lays out the rights and obligations of child representatives and provides them with the information and tools they need to participate in participatory local governance processes. This indicator obtained a grand mean of 1.00 or equivalent to 100%.

In 2022, the municipality applied the provision of Executive Order No. 5 Series of 2022. By virtue of the executive order, child representatives in LCPCs allowed the incorporation of the children's perspectives in the formulation of policies, design of programs, and enforcement of child protection efforts in Victoria, Tarlac. The provisions stated in Executive Order No. 05, series of 2022 made capacity-building programs relevant for child representatives to carry out their duties inside LCPCs in a feasible manner. It also paved way for advocacies aligned with child-friendly environments promoting children's participation.

Having the same point of 1.00 from 2021, the formal structure and the designated role of the child representatives within the City/Municipality LCPC have remained unchanged. This result necessitates the LGUs to provide a wider holistic approach in catering to the well-being of children and amplifying their voices as important stakeholders in the municipality. This includes full execution of an increased support for child representatives within LCPCs. Moreover, it is through the Children's General Assembly where child representatives in the municipality are selected to represent their community. The general assembly attended by the children provides basis for the selection process of child representatives in LCPCs. It covers qualifying requirements, nomination processes, and the child's capacity to participate in the decision-making process.

On the other hand, the selection process received a continuous rating of 4.00 for the two (2) consecutive years. The findings state that the method of selecting a child representative was deemed adequate or reliable from 2021 to 2022. It appeared that the Children's General Assembly is a relevant and stable method for choosing child representatives in Victoria, Tarlac, highlighting its consideration for inclusivity and efficiency in children's participation. However, this does not apply to every child in the municipality. Some children were well-represented and excluded in some decisions, thus children grew to be skeptical of adults. Therefore, even if consulting or including children has many advantages, it can be challenging to put into practice.

With a score of 3.00, equivalent to one hundred percent (100%), the municipality assembled twenty-six (26) child representatives in the Barangay LCPC from 2021 to 2022. This means that each barangay of Victoria has one (1) designated child representative. It implies that each barangay is included in the decision-making process of the municipality's future initiatives through the participation of child representatives. By looking at the data, the number remained steady, indicating a stable level of representation at the Barangay LCPC. However, the municipality may look into rooms for feasible improvements while there is a reasonable level of efficiency or satisfaction in relation to child representation at this level.

Lastly, the number of cases where children are involved in the creation of projects, programs, and activities (PPAs) rose from five (5) in 2021 to seven (7) in 2022, while the effectiveness rating of these PPAs stayed at

3.00 equivalent to one hundred percent (100%). The implemented PPAs in the municipality are as follows: (1) Crafting of Children's Sectoral Plan; (2) National Children Month's Celebration; (3) Immunization Program; (4) Educational Assistance; (5) Nutrition Program; (6) Health Programs and; (7) IEC Activities. This indicator obtained a grand mean of 3.00 or equivalent to 90-100%.

The crafting of children's sectoral plan includes Children's Congress in which child representatives reported the achievements of the LGU of Victoria for the year 2021, emphasizing the LGU's role in ensuring the participation, survival, and development of the children. The National Children Month's Celebration in the municipality of Victoria also highlighted the children's valuable contributions through children's summit. This annual activity has the aim of raising children's awareness of their significance in society.

Furthermore, these activities meant to help children feel like they belong in the community and respect shared values and experiences of different individuals. By collaborating with numerous organizations, children were given voice to partake in local government and opportunity to discuss issues that matter to them as citizens. Local governments saw these activities as a chance to engage the youth of the municipality and foster a new sense of civic engagement. This type of participation recognizes that each child has knowledge, experience, and insights that can inform decision making leading to brighter outcomes.

On the other hand, the LGU adapted the immunization program originally initiated by the Department of Health (DOH) to guarantee that mothers and infants in the municipality have free and regular access to vaccines intended for them. Educational assistance program to help students succeed academically through granting them access of school supplies and other learning materials was carried out by the LGU of Victoria.

A nutrition program was also initiated in addition to aiding educational challenges. Serving meals or snacks to children, especially those with severe cases of malnutrition is one of the activities included in this program. In connection, health program which includes the provision of health kits was delivered to children to ensure that every child has access to basic hygiene essential for their well-being. This was made possible through the supervision of the officials of LGU. Lastly, the municipality also prioritized information education and communication (IEC) which is anchored on creating awareness. It entails a process of collaborating with people, groups, and civil society to create communication plans that encourage positive behavior that is acceptable for their community.

The increased numbers of PPAs in Victoria, Tarlac made readily available and accessible to community implies that children have been more actively engaged in the municipality's execution of policies and programs throughout the years. In addition, the perfect rating of 3.00 from 2021 to 2022 also inferred that program involving children led to a better quality of services leveraging the welfare of children. However, the LGU of Victoria may still review the implementation of these programs, projects, and activities by examining its capacity and flexibility, noting that the number of available PPAs in their locality has not changed considerably.

If the municipality remains consistent in the pursuit of promulgating interdisciplinary legal frameworks that will benefit its citizens through the initiation of its local government officials, the community will prosper highlighting the importance of collaborative involvement. Working with children and adolescents and letting them share decision-making responsibilities with adults affects the impacts and outcomes of various programs, projects, and activities.

1.5 Governance

Governance is an integral component of a society. It highlights the importance of the common good by giving emphasis and importance to transparency, accountability, and people-centered initiatives. With this in mind, youth involvement is essential towards achieving good governance as they play a huge role in the decision-making process. Younger generations also possess higher expectations from the community they live in.

Table 5
Governance

Statement	2021		2022		Grand Mean	Level of Accomplishment
	Number/Status	Mean Score	Number/Status	Mean Score		
Established and updated database on children	5	5.00	5	5.00	5.00	100%
Annual Local State of Children Report	1	2.00	1	2.00	2.00	100%
Available and implemented local plans for children	2	4.00	3	6.00	5.00	100%
Updated Local Code for Children (LCC) contextualizing/adopting recently issued national laws on children	5	5.00	8	5.00	5.00	100%
Functional City/Municipal LCPC	Mature	3.00	Mature	3.00	3.00	100%
Functional Barangay LCPC	26	3.00	26	3.00	3.00	100%
Child Friendly Facilities in all Barangays	26	2.00	26	2.00	2.00	100%
Budget allocation for children's PPA	11,033,000	2.00	7,407,000	1.00	1.50	70-79.99%
Utilization of budget for children's PPAs	9,664,825.49	2.00	7,227,281.25	3.00	2.50	80-89.99%

Source: Child-friendly Local Governance Audit (CFLGA) Data Capture Form for 2021 and 2022

The table shows indicators on the role and level of governance in Victoria, Tarlac as an integral determinant of children's right.

The following statements are as follows: (1) Established and updated database on children; (2) Annual Local State of Children Report; (3) Available and implemented local plans for children; (4) Updated Local Code for Children (LCC) contextualizing/adopting recently issued national laws on children; (5) Functional City/Municipal LCPC; (6) Functional Barangay LCPC; (7) Child Friendly Facilities in all Barangays; (8) Budget allocation for children's PPA and; (9) Utilization of budget for children's PPAs.

For 2021 to 2022, the children's database received a score of 5.00. The consistency in rating shows that the database of the LGU is up-to-date and absolute, indicating a high degree of accuracy and sense of completeness. The following disaggregated information on children's database includes age, sex, ethnicity, disability, and school status. This information is deemed important in the collection processes of primary and necessary data in assessing children's differing status and needs through an evidence-based approach. This indicator obtained a grand mean of 5.00 or equivalent to 100%.

Furthermore, the Annual Local State of Children Report received a consistent rating of 2.00 in two consecutive years. This report pertains to the basic collection of household information, the total number of children by age and sex, and children's access to health services. Such reports are delivered and presented

during the National Children's Month Celebration where the accomplishments of children are recognized and acknowledged. One of its purposes is to support the local government of Victoria and its other relevant offices in putting children's programs into action. It highlights important data gaps and aids in the production of evidence to enhance the oversight of children's rights. This indicator obtained a grand mean of 2.00 or equivalent to 100%.

For the availability of implemented local plans for children, the municipality has recorded two plans (2) in 2021. These plans are the Local Development Plan or Local Action Plan for Children and the Comprehensive Local Juvenile Intervention Program (CLJIP). Crafting a suitable environment for children is the goal of the Local Development Plan or Local Action Plan for Children. This goal is aligned with its provisions and guidelines. On the other hand, the Comprehensive Local Juvenile Intervention Program is planned in accordance with the procedures in regulating and overseeing children's rights. In the Philippines, each LGU is required to implement national laws concerning the welfare of children in their community. This indicator obtained a grand mean of 5.00 or equivalent to 100%.

From the two (2) plans implemented by the LGU in 2021, the rating significantly improved from 4.00 to 6.00 in 2022. The Comprehensive Emergency Program for Children was incorporated into the Local Disaster Risk Reduction Management (LDRRM) plan and budget which increased the municipality's efforts to handle complaints and incidents of child labor, child trafficking, and other types of abuse and exploitation. This result indicates that the preparation and execution of child-focused projects in Victoria, Tarlac has improved over the years.

With four (4) and above LCC, the number of updated Local Codes for Children (LCC) increased from five (5) in 2021 to eight (8) in 2022, attaining a score of 5.00. In 2021, the list of updated LCC is as follows: (1) Children's Emergency Relief and Protection Act (RA 10821); (2) National Mental Health Policy (RA 11036); (3) Masustansyang Pagkain para sa Batang Pilipino (RA 11037); (4) Kalusugan at Nutrisyon ng Magnanay Act (F1KD, RA 11148) and; (5) Special Protection of Children Against Child Abuse, Exploitation and Discrimination Act (RA 9231).

Meanwhile, in 2022, other laws were added to the list and these include: (6) Early Years Act (RA 10410); (7) Children's Safety on Motorcycles Act (RA 10666) and; (8) Special Protection of Children in Situations of Armed Conflict Act (RA 11188). Early childhood care and development (ECCD) is supported by the Early Years Act (RA 10410), which also targets the cognitive, physical, emotional, and social development of children. On the other hand, the Children's Safety on Motorcycles Act (RA 10666) prohibits any children from sitting in front of a motorcycle. This law is applicable to all public highways in the country and enforced by the Land and Transportation Office (LTO). Aside from these laws, the Special Protection of Children in Situations of Armed Conflict Act (RA 11188) also recognizes the vulnerable status of children when they are involved in armed conflict.

The result of this study shows that the municipal rules in Victoria, Tarlac are implemented in accordance with the laws and regulations of the national government, strengthening the legal foundation for child welfare and protection. Furthermore, with a score of 3.00, the City/Municipal LCPC of the municipality was categorized as "ideal" from 2021 to 2022. This means that the municipality complied to the requirements needed to attain this level. At the barangay level, all twenty-six (26) barangays in Victoria, Tarlac are labelled as "barangays with mature functionality." From being categorized as "basic," these barangays eventually received a rating of "progressive" and further evolved as "mature" over the years. This indicator obtained a grand mean of 3.00 or equivalent to 100%.

Moreover, in 2021, there was major improvement observed in the functionality of the municipality as all of its twenty-six (26) barangays met all the indicators for Seal of Good Local Governance Barangay Council for Protection of Children (SGLG BCPC). The SGLG is a system of progressive performance evaluation and recognition that seeks to recognize and honor barangays that exhibit exceptional performance based on varying indicators. It also aims to support barangays in their ongoing efforts to provide effective, fair, and high-quality public services. It prioritizes morality and excellence as the cornerstones of significant local autonomy and growth. Based on the data provided by the LCPC Functionality Assessment Report and the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) City/Municipal Field Office, "ideal" is the final stage in identifying LCPC functionality.

With a score of 2.00, the availability of child-friendly facilities is consistent across all barangays in the two consecutive years. In 2021 and 2022, twenty-six (26) barangays of the LGU of Victoria were identified as barangays designated with play/recreational areas and library/reading centers within their locality. The availability of these facilities highlights the importance of children's right to enjoy free, safe, and accessible places to play and learn. This indicator obtained a grand mean of 2.00 or equivalent to 100%.

Aside from the availability of ECCD facilities and services, budget is the key actor of change in the community. Budget allocation is crucial because it is through the local governments may plan and manage its financial resources to support the implementation of various programs and projects that best promote community development. The budget allows LGUs to set priorities and implement plans, programs, and activities while adhering to financial limitations imposed by the state of economy.

In terms of the municipality's budget allocation for children's PPAs in 2021, Victoria has a total budget of eleven million thirty-three thousand pesos (Php 11,033,000.00) or an equivalent of 4.23% percent of the LGU's total budget. In 2022, the budget allocated for children's PPAs decreased to seven million four hundred seven thousand pesos (Php 7,407,000.00) or an equivalent of 3.23% percent out of its two hundred twenty-nine million six hundred fifty-six thousand two hundred seventy-eight pesos (Php229,656,278.00) total budget. Comparing the budget allocation from 2021 to 2022, a remark of three million six hundred twenty-six pesos (-3,626,000) was obtained. The result indicates that there was a decline in score from 2.00 to 1.00, and the budget allocation of the municipality for children-related initiatives dropped consequently. The budget cut for children's PPAs possibly faced numerous difficulties in striking a balance between sufficiency in funds allocation and decisions made by the LGU in planning and implementing child-focused policies addressing the primary needs and concerns of children. This indicator obtained a grand mean of 1.50 or equivalent to 70-79.99%.

In terms of the budget utilization of the municipality in 2021, the LGU of Victoria spent nine million six hundred sixty-four thousand eight hundred twenty-five and forty-nine centavos (Php 9,664,825.49) for children's PPAs. In 2022, the LGU of Victoria spent seven million two hundred twenty-seven thousand two hundred eighty-one and twenty-five centavos (Php 7,227,281.25) for children's PPAs. From the numbers provided, a difference of two million four hundred thirty-seven five hundred forty-four and twenty-four centavos (2,437,544.24) was accumulated as the remaining public fund intended to be used for the programs, projects, and activities of the municipality. By looking at the data, it is seen that the local government of Victoria is moderately efficient in managing their expenses due to observed insufficiency or lack of strategic planning for achieving its financial targets. This indicator obtained a grand mean of 2.50 or equivalent to 80-89.99%

During this period, it is also important to understand the challenges brought by the pandemic among local communities. This phenomenon is regarded as one of the factors affecting the reduction of fund allocation for children PPAs. This result highlighted that the downturn of available programs, projects, or activities in a municipality could also lower youth engagement and diminish children's meaningful contributions to the society they live in. Thus, funding public services intended for public welfare must be similar to the number of services provided to children, especially to the most vulnerable members of the community. In this way, fairness and equality are felt by all citizens in the municipality regardless of their age, gender, roles, and socio-economic conditions. Children and adults as both inhabitants of the municipality, will gain a shared understanding of their specific roles in the society without having to compare themselves with one another.

Altogether, survival, development, protection, participation, and governance had direct influence on a child's general welfare. These are important determinants of the roles they play in society. For survival, the number of Fully Immunized Children (FIC) decreased, suggesting possible weaknesses in the LGU's vaccine immunization programs. The prevalence of malnutrition, on the other hand, remained stagnant for two years, necessitating continued efforts to address food insecurity among children to improve their nutritional status. The minimal variations in postpartum and prenatal services for pregnant adolescents highlight the significance of enhancing access to maternal and child health services.

For development, investments in adaptable Alternative Learning System (ALS) and other community-based learning facilities can provide out-of-school youth and children with the opportunity to continue their education and expand their skills essential for their personal and professional growth. For protection, community leaders and child protection advocates are deemed helpful in creating networks and alliances that would prevent child crimes from getting worse and ensure that the best possible response would be taken to fortify child protection systems. For participation, given that there are more PPAs in Victoria that are easily accessible to the community, it suggests that children have been more actively involved in the municipality's implementation of policies and programs throughout time.

Lastly, for governance, the LGU of Victoria may analyze the implementation of its projects, programs, and activities by accessing its capability and flexibility by the appropriate and efficient allocation and utilization of its annual budget.

2. Problems encountered by the municipality which affects their child -friendly local governance

Table 6 presents the problems encountered by the respondents which affects the child -friendly local governance in the Municipality of Victoria, Tarlac.

Table 6
Problems Encountered

Problem	<i>f</i>	%	R
There was a shortage of school facilities, education investments, and qualified workforce to accommodate the growing number of reintegrated out-of-school youth and children in the municipality	196	98	1
Child-friendly policies were inadequate resulting in poor cooperation between local government and children	173	86	2
Insufficient supply of vaccines and the unavailability of doses are deemed detrimental to children's health	145	72	3.5
High number of malnutrition cases categorized by Operation Timbang Plus as stunted, wasted, and overweight, with stunted getting the highest number of cases.	145	72	3.5
Inadequate prenatal and postpartum services in the municipality	108	54	5
Some of the early childhood care development programs are not designed to fit the context and environment of the children	98	49	6
OSCY programs in the municipality were limited and outdated	84	42	7
The municipality's child protection laws were not properly implemented due to lack of funding	80	40	8
Lack of financial assistance to out-of-school youth to support their education	55	27	9
PPAs were not sufficiently and consistently funded by the local government unit of the municipality	45	22	10

The shortage of school facilities, education investments, and qualified workforce to accommodate the growing number of reintegrated out-of-school youth and children in the municipality was considered as the topmost problem encountered by the respondents. The availability of school staff and conducive learning facilities to form wholesome bond with children define quality in early childhood programs. The apparent shortage of educational services in the field today indicates the municipality needs to place a high priority on making significant investments in hiring qualified workforce and establishing facilities to cater the reintegrated out-of-school youth and children.

This was followed by the inadequate Child-friendly policies which resulted to poor cooperation between local government and children. The result of this study emphasized the need for adults, local government, and other stakeholders to have a thorough understanding of how they may relinquish some of their power to effectively work with children and to prioritize their rights and voices when developing and putting into practice child-friendly policies.

While Insufficient supply of vaccines and the unavailability of doses are deemed detrimental to children's health. This is because the number of Fully Immunized Children (FIC) dropped by 22.26% imposing a high-risk factor for many health problems such as respiratory difficulties and cardiovascular diseases which are critical for early childhood or to children aged 12 months old. Also, the high number of malnutrition cases categorized by Operation Timbang Plus as stunted, wasted, and overweight, with stunted getting the highest number of cases. Urgent government action to halt the increase in the number of children becoming undernourished due to hunger and food insecurity affected by socioeconomic conditions and lack of proper hygiene among children is regarded as one of the problems encountered by children aged 0 to 59 months old both garnered 3rd rank.

While inadequate prenatal and postpartum services in the municipality. Pregnant adolescents lacked awareness of proper maternal health due to low access to maternal services provided by the local healthcare centers. Measures to address such problems should therefore be focused on women of this age group to ensure proper fetal growth and development.

In addition, problems related to the early childhood care development programs which are not designed to fit the context and environment of the children was also considered as a problem. These are not properly carried out in an environment that is welcoming and safe aimed at promoting the children's social-emotional and cognitive development.

Moreover, the OSCY programs in the municipality were limited and outdated. One of the problems that require immediate attention from the local government is understanding the impact that limited OSCY programs on alternative education and training, re-entry to formal education is making in reaching those who have been left out or dropped out from the formal education and training processes.

Then, the municipality's child protection laws were not properly implemented due to lack of funding. Legal frameworks and policies concerning child protection are weakened by the municipality's limited resources, inadequate public awareness, and cultural barriers that hinder multiple avenues to report cases of child abuse.

Furthermore, one of the problems encountered by the out-of-school youth was lack of financial support to support their education. Financial constraint is one of the identified barriers influencing the transition of primary school students to secondary school leading to lowered access to quality education.

Lastly, PPAs were not sufficiently and consistently funded by the local government unit of the municipality. Lack of strategic planning in fund allocation and utilization for children's programs, projects, and activities (PPAs) is one of the problems encountered by the LGU in terms of budgeting and financing child-centered initiatives.

3. Proposed Measures to enhance the child -friendly local governance in the Municipality of Victoria, Tarlac

Table 7 presents the Proposed Measures to enhance the child -friendly local governance in the Municipality of Victoria, Tarlac.

In terms of the problem relative to Insufficient supply of vaccines and the unavailability of doses are deemed detrimental to children's health. The possible measure suggested was to Strengthen the municipality's immunization program and extend the delivery of vaccination services to the isolated parts of the community. By way of employing healthcare providers and physicians in each barangay to ensure equitable access to healthcare services. This is to increase the number of Fully Immunized Children in Victoria, Tarlac by 25%. To wit, all children, including the most vulnerable age group will now be vaccinated and the number of risks associated with child mortality will reduce.

Table 7
Proposed Measures

Problems	Measures	Strategies	Objectives	Office in Charge	Expected Output
Insufficient supply of vaccines and the unavailability of doses are deemed detrimental to children's health	Strengthen the municipality's immunization program and extend the delivery of vaccination services to the isolated parts of the community	The local government should employ healthcare providers and physicians in each barangay to ensure equitable access to healthcare services	To increase the number of Fully Immunized Children in Victoria, Tarlac by 25%	Department of Health (DOH)	All children, including the most vulnerable age group will now be vaccinated and the number of risks associated with child mortality will reduce

The municipality has a high number of malnutrition cases categorized by Operation Timbang Plus as stunted, wasted, and overweight, with stunted getting the highest number of cases	Delivery of Ready-to-Use Therapeutic Food for severely malnourished children of the municipality	The Department of Health (DOH) with the participation of the LGUs should strengthen its partnership with the United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF) to ensure supporting efforts to end child stunting and wasting	To eradicate the case of malnutrition in the municipality by 25%	Department of Health (DOH) and United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF)	The municipality will have no record of children who are categorized under the severe condition of malnutrition and poverty incidence in the municipality will lessen
The prenatal and postpartum services were inadequate in the municipality	Investments in high quality healthcare equipment and facilities that provide prenatal and postpartum services to local community	The Department of Health should initiate possible programs to cater the needs of pregnant adolescents in the municipality in collaboration with United Nations Population Fund Philippines (UNFPA), and different Community-Based Pregnancy Counseling Unit	To respond to the needs of pregnant adolescents and equipped them with maternal counseling services	Department of Health (DOH), United Nations Population Fund Philippines (UNFPA), and Community-Based Pregnancy Counseling Unit	The delivery of appropriate prenatal and postpartum services will now be closer and accessible to community and increased awareness of pregnant adolescents is expected
Some of the early childhood care development programs are	Review and make necessary adjustments in the implementation of the government's ECCD System	By examining the existing mechanisms of ECCD services at	To outline a curriculum aligned with the children's	Department of Education (DepEd) and Early Childhood Care and	Reviewed ECCD policy framework will provide an excellent starting point

not designed to fit the context and environment of the children		the municipal and barangay level based on needs-assessment, renewed integration of various development programs in children's education will be realized		Development (ECCD) Council	and a rich context for looking at the current state of the municipality
There was a shortage of school facilities, education investments, and qualified workforce to accommodate the growing number of reintegrated out-of-school youth and children in the municipality	Revamp learning facilities in primary and secondary schools	The School Building Program under the Basic Educational Facilities Fund of the Department of Education (DepEd) shall address the classroom gaps in the municipality to cater the increasing numbers of re-enrolled students	To provide immediate action in addressing OSCY needs through modifying the municipality's educational system and preparing necessary requirement for the construction of school buildings	Department of Education (DepEd), Alternative Learning System (ALS) and Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH)	Improved quality of education will be accessible to students regardless of their socio-economic conditions
OSCY programs in the municipality were limited and outdated	Implement frameworks aimed at addressing the diverse and complex educational needs of the OSCY	The legislative shall draft long-term OSCY programs subject to the approval of the executive department	To provide sustainable and inclusive programs for out-of-school youth	Alternative Learning System (ALS) and Department of Education (DepEd)	The numbers of available OSCY programs will increase and no students will be left behind in terms of quality education
The municipality's child protection laws were not properly implemented due to lack of funding	Prioritize the cooperation between government agencies and support budget allocation for child protection laws	The Department of Social Welfare and Development shall review its Child Protection System and the	To mobilize and integrate human, financial, and methods available to LGU's needs	Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) and Department of Budget and Management	Child Protection System in the municipality will improve and stakeholders will understand relevant

		Department of Budget and Management shall allocate funds to local government			policies and responsibilities associated with child protection
Child-friendly policies were inadequate resulting to poor cooperation between local government and children	Ensure equitable and inclusive community engagement approach to public decisions	Local governments can engage their community members in a robust and equitable manner to carry out key functions of government	To craft and implement laws, budgets, plans, directives, and strategic visions for children	Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD)	People will be given more control over the decisions that affect their lives and their communities
Lack of financial support to education	Encourage OSCY to return to school through interventions such as conditional cash transfers and abolishing school fees	The Department of Education may provide monetary assistance to at-risk and vulnerable youth until they finish their education	To provide links between education and wider opportunities while eradicating financial constraints	Department of Education (DepEd)	Alternative means of continuing education in non-formal education programs will be provided in the municipality
PPAs were not sufficiently and consistently funded by the local government unit of the municipality	Allocate at least 20% of the LGU's budget for the creation of programs, policies, and activities intended for children	The DILG shall review its budget allocation and utilization to measure its efficiency in managing its fiscal activities	To outline appropriate resource allocation for children's initiatives and increase the municipality's available PPAs while understanding the factors of funding constraints	Department of Budget and Management (DBM) and Department of the Interior and Local Government	More PPAs will be provided to children especially the vulnerable groups of the municipality and active engagement of children will be realized

Second is, the high number of malnutrition cases categorized by Operation Timbang Plus as stunted, wasted, and overweight, with stunted getting the highest number of cases. It was suggested that, the municipality may engaged in delivering Ready-to-Use Therapeutic Food for severely malnourished children of the municipality. This can be achieved through the partnership of Department of Health (DOH) and LGUs with the United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF) to ensure support to end child stunting and wasting. Through such initiative, the municipality will have no record of children who are categorized under the severe condition of malnutrition and poverty incidence in the municipality will lessen.

Third, the prenatal and postpartum services were inadequate in the municipality. It was suggested that Investments in high quality healthcare equipment and facilities that provide prenatal and postpartum services to local community. This can be done through the help of Department of Health who should initiate possible programs to cater the needs of pregnant adolescents in the municipality in collaboration with United Nations

Population Fund Philippines (UNFPA), and different Community-Based Pregnancy Counseling Unit. This is to respond to the needs of pregnant adolescents and equipped them with maternal counseling services. In return, the delivery of appropriate prenatal and postpartum services will now be closer and accessible to community and increased awareness of pregnant adolescents is expected.

Fourth, Some of the early childhood care development programs are not designed to fit the context and environment of the children. To solve such, the LGU may consider Reviewing and making necessary adjustments in the implementation of the government's ECCD System. By way of examining the existing mechanisms of ECCD services at the municipal and barangay level based on needs-assessment, renewed integration of various development programs in children's education will be realized. To wit, such action may help in providing excellent starting point and a rich context for looking at the current state of the municipality.

Fifth, there was a shortage of school facilities, education investments, and qualified workforce to accommodate the growing number of reintegrated out-of-school youth and children in the municipality. This can be possibly solve by way of revamping learning facilities in primary and secondary schools. This can be done by implementing the School Building Program under the Basic Educational Facilities Fund of the Department of Education (DepEd) which shall address the classroom gaps in the municipality to cater the increasing numbers of re-enrolled students.

Sixth, OSCY programs in the municipality were limited and outdated. There should be implementation of frameworks aimed at addressing the diverse and complex educational needs of the OSCY.

Seventh, the municipality's child protection laws were not properly implemented due to lack of funding. This can be possibly solve by way of Prioritizing the cooperation between government agencies and support budget allocation for child protection laws.

Eight, the Child-friendly policies were inadequate resulting to poor cooperation between local government and children. The Local governments may consider to engage their community members in a robust and equitable manner to carry out key functions of government. Which may result to, People will be given more control over the decisions that affect their lives and their communities.

Ninth, lack of financial support to education, this may be solved by way of encouraging OSCY to return to school through interventions such as conditional cash transfers and abolishing school fees.

Lastly, PPAs were not sufficiently and consistently funded by the local government unit of the municipality. It was suggested that, allocating at least 20% of the LGU's budget for the creation of programs, policies, and activities intended for children

Implications of the study to Public Administration

The study of public administration incorporates the implementation of government policies and programs to serve the interests of the public. It includes the management, coordination, and implementation of public policies and services of government agencies at all levels to meet societal needs and promote common good. It plays a crucial role in translating these policies into action set by various policymakers to improve the quality of life of all citizens, most especially the vulnerable groups in society.

By analyzing the local governance practices in Victoria, Tarlac, this study can identify gaps in service delivery to children and propose feasible interventions to ensure better and improved access to essential services such as healthcare, education, and social welfare programs. Through an in-depth understanding of the municipality's local governance structures, the study can provide insights towards the creation of child-friendly services that cater to the special needs and rights of the younger population. Furthermore, this study highlighted the importance of cooperation between agencies in child service delivery which fosters coordination among various government departments and stakeholders to provide comprehensive and integrated services align with children's holistic needs and best interests.

Through the results of this study, recommendations for improving citizen engagement in decision-making processes and instilling a sense of responsibility can be integrated into how the local government unit of Victoria is being managed. This may improve the municipality's local government processes, indicating areas for improvement in terms of transparency, accountability, and responsiveness in its government procedures. With capacity-building measures, this study may assist the local government officials and personnel of Victoria in efficiently managing and delivering child-friendly services based on assessments of their leadership skills and governance capacities. Moreover, from assessing the fiscal management procedures of the municipality's local government, findings of this study can provide information on streamlining resource allocation for child-friendly programs and services ensuring that limited resources are executed efficiently to meet the demands of children. This research can find areas for increasing financial accountability systems within the local government to guarantee that financial resources are managed effectively and in accordance with laws and regulations to enable long-term service delivery.

Finally, the study on assessing the child-friendly local governance practices in the municipality of Victoria has far-reaching implications for improving service delivery systems, improving its local administration, and promoting sound fiscal management while ensuring the well-being and rights of children in the community.

Conclusions

The following conclusions were based on the findings of the study:

1. The number of fully immunized children (FIC) declined in its numbers indicating potential gaps in the LGU's vaccine immunization program, while the prevalence of malnutrition remained the same for two (2) years highlighting sustained efforts to address nutritional deficiencies and food insecurity among children to improve their nutritional status, and the minimal inconsistency in prenatal and postpartum services for pregnant adolescents respectively, necessitates the needs for maternal and child health services.
2. It is clear that from the provided data, there was an apparent progress in terms of the education attainment in the municipality of Victoria. For instance, youth with no education were referred to ALS and those who stopped their education for years were significantly sent back to school.
3. The high number of cases managed by the LGU of Victoria in 2021 and 2022 underscores the necessity of sustained efforts to improve coordination with external providers and increase the availability of resources for children's protection.
4. The availability of well-maintained early childhood care development programs, facilities, and services were substantial determinants of children's success in education.
5. Budget allocation is crucial because it is through the local governments that may plan and manage its financial resources to support the implementation of various programs and projects that best promote community development. The budget allows LGUs to set priorities and implement plans, programs, and activities while adhering to financial limitations imposed by the state of economy.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions of the study the following recommendations were drawn.

1. The local government of Vicotria may appeal to the national government to prioritize uninterrupted delivery of immunization schedules and basic health nutrition care services in line with the Department of Health (DOH) Memorandum No. 2020-0150. The directive was issued to local government units (LGUs), health service providers, and partner nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to ensure that vulnerable and marginalized groups, particularly infants, continue to receive essential and high-quality healthcare services.
2. Strictly enforcing the Milk Code which forbids the unethical promotion of milk formula and stepping up the implementation of national health and nutrition policies and guidelines that support optimal feeding practices for infants and young children referring to National Cluster Advisories issued by the National Nutrition Council (NNC) should be strictly implemented and monitored.
3. To provide children, pregnant adolescents, and lactating mothers with high quality healthcare services including mental wellness, mental health, and psychological support (MHPSS), it is imperative that sufficient funding be allotted for Barangay Health Stations and Rural Health Units. Prioritizing the training and preparation of facility and community-based health and nutrition workers to deliver non-discriminatory services, including sexual and reproductive health services to youth and adolescents is also essential.
4. Investments in education to deliver services reaching the children who need it most may be recognized by the government. To safeguard their psycho-social and intellectual development, children with impairments and those who experience social marginalization and discrimination must have access to early intervention selections. All children shall have an equal opportunity to start school at the right age regardless of their sociocultural background.
5. The greatest influence on the development and readiness for academic success is influenced by parents, community programs, and professionally staffed early childhood services who take part in children's education. Ensuring growth-promoting policy measures in school and community-based settings, along with a variety of parent education, family support, early care and education, and intervention services can contribute significantly to the achievement of this goal.
6. To expand the opportunities available for OSCY programs where there is insufficiency, alternative education strategies including the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) should be explored. For this to happen, policy and legal frameworks are necessary to mainstream and promote such activities within the current systems of instruction and training. There should be clear pathways

connecting the OSCY program to formal education tracks. The abilities that employers are looking for changes over time, hence, conventional education and training institutions like ALS need to adapt accordingly.

7. To mitigate the issues of child abuse, ongoing efforts are needed to create new programs and the application of current legislation. Through the Children Protection Networks (CPNs), which include the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) and Philippine National Police (PNP), government agencies and civil society may collaborate in awareness campaigns and enhanced training for law enforcement and social workers.
8. When considering child-friendly initiatives as a whole, it is clear from how they are presently managed that the municipality needs a coordination unit that is well versed about children's rights and participation to help in creating programs that are respectful of children's interests. Involving disabled children in community-based activities is also essential as they are most suited to discuss what functions and how things may be made better for both themselves and their community.
9. Reducing the financial barriers to secondary schooling is one of the strategies that the local government should take into consideration to increase the supply of education services, as access to education is one of the main factors affecting the transition of students from primary school to secondary school. Educational assistance and the provision of free learning materials can make significant contributions to increase children's learning opportunities.
10. To enhance the caliber of programs, projects, and activities (PPAs) for children, it is essential to include a variety of stakeholders who are positioned strategically at the local, national, and international levels. For these programs to succeed, government support is a must. Government support could include development frameworks that would guarantee effective and high-quality service delivery within the municipality.

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