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## CHALLENGES IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF LAND USE PLANS IN DIGOS CITY, DAVAO DEL SUR

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### ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to identify the challenges in the implementation of land use plans in Digos City, Davao del Sur. A qualitative research method using key informant interviews (KIIs) and desk review was used to identify and lay out the challenges of the implementation of land use plans. The thematic analysis resulted in two (2) major themes of the challenges in the implementation: Inadequate Human Resources and Land Constraints. This study also aimed to provide policymakers, urban planners, and stakeholders with valuable insights and strategies for improving Digos City's sustainable land use development.

**Keywords:** Comprehensive Land Use Plan, Digos City, Local Government Unit, Thematic Analysis, Challenges

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

The City of Digos is the capital of the province of Davao del Sur with a land area of 28,710 hectares. It is composed of 26 barangays with a total population of 188,376 based on the 2020 census by the Philippine Statistics Authority. The location of Digos City is at the center of two (2) major cities of Mindanao: General Santos City and Davao City. With its strategic location and vast economic potential, the city has experienced rapid urbanization and population growth over the years. One way of ensuring the city's sustainable development is to formulate land use plans to guide development activities and properly allocate land for various purposes such as residential, commercial, and agricultural.

Since its conversion from a municipality into a city on September 8, 2000, the legislative body of the city has been tasked to generate and maximize the use of resources and revenues to prioritize the development plans of the city with particular attention to its growth and progress. One of its key highlights, as stated in Art. IV, Sec. 10 of the Republic Act No. 8798 of July 15, 2000, also known as "An act converting the municipality of Digos, Davao del Sur province, into a component city to be known as the City of Digos", the legislative body should adopt a Comprehensive Land Use Plan (CLUP) for the City and that, the formulation, adoption or modification of said plan shall be in coordination within the approved provincial comprehensive land use plan.

The CLUP aims to provide a foundation for managing past, current, and projected land use of the whole territory of a city. Its main purpose is to identify the needs of a community and develop goals and policies to address these needs. However, the updating and the subsequent enforcement of CLUPs pose challenges for municipal and city planning administrators as it is complex to develop (Lech & Leppert, 2018). Formulating this vision into plans can be a lengthy and difficult process as it is highly dependent on the cooperation of different agencies that are not yet systematic which hampers a consistent alignment of plans and the process may be longer due to possible issues in the review and approval of CLUP.

Out of 1,634 Local Government Units (LGU) in the Philippines, 580 or 35% of LGUs have updated CLUPs, 894 or 55% of LGUs have CLUPs for updating, and 160 or 10% of LGUs have no CLUPs (Tinio, 2023). As a result, this study aims to investigate the challenges in implementing land use plans or CLUPs, particularly in Digos City. By identifying the obstacles hindering the implementation of CLUPs, this study can provide policymakers, urban planners, and stakeholders with valuable insights and strategies for improving Digos City's sustainable land use development.

### 2. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research method using key informant interviews (KIIs) from experts with extensive knowledge or experience that can provide insight into the challenges of the implementation of land use plans in Digos City, Davao del Sur. Semi-structured interviews and desk review of related documents were conducted with the four (4) key informants from the City Planning Development Office (CPDO) of Digos City. The sample included the Assistant City Planning and Development Coordinator and unit heads from different sectors. Interviews were conducted in English and the local language, audio-recorded with consent, and were then transcribed and translated accordingly. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the interview transcripts and organized them into broader themes to capture the challenges in their land use implementation.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the study's findings. The thematic analysis resulted in two (2) major themes of the challenges in implementing land use plans in the case of Digos City. The themes were (1) Inadequate Human Resources, and (2) Land Constraints. A summary of key identified challenges to land use plan implementation is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Challenges in the Implementation of Land Use Plans in Digos City, Davao del Sur

Theme	Challenges in the Implementation of Land Use Plans
1. Inadequate Human Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of manpower/personnel especially in disadvantaged areas.</li> <li>• Increasing manpower is difficult due to insufficient budget to fund additional hiring.</li> <li>• Majority of the employees do not have permanent positions, limiting their ability to address long-term issues.</li> <li>• Organizational restructuring increased the functions and services of the office, further straining the limited human resources.</li> </ul>
2. Land Constraints	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited space can hinder urbanization</li> <li>• Strict protection zones and environmental considerations.</li> <li>• Unique land and geological profile, and encroachment of properties.</li> </ul>

#### Theme 1: Inadequate Human Resources

All of the interviewees emphasized the lack of manpower as a major challenge in implementing land use plans and this involves low budget and lack of permanent employees. As much as they want to cover up the entirety of the city, an inadequate number of personnel makes it hard for them to speed up the implementation of projects in far-flung locations, especially in Geographically Isolated and Disadvantaged Areas (GIDAs). Increasing the manpower can be a challenge if there is an insufficient budget to fund the additional hiring. Some employees do not hold a permanent position thus limiting their function to address immediate issues. It was also mentioned that there is a modification of the organizational structure to accommodate the needed workforce for the Devolution Transition Plan (DTP) increasing the functions and services of the city in serving the community. In summary, the capacity gaps mentioned can be categorized as inadequate human resources, and pose a major challenge in the effective implementation of land use plans. This affirms the study of Osumanu, I. K. (2022) wherein it highlighted inadequate manpower as one of the factors that affected the implementation and management of urban land-use plans in the City of Ghana. Most developing cities do not have qualified urban and spatial planners to manage the implementation and management of their plans. This result was also similar to the research findings of Delphin et al. (2022) where they identified insufficient financial and human resources as one of the main challenges in developing and speeding up the implementation of land use plan in the case of Paraguay.

#### Theme 2: Land Constraints

One person pointed out that urbanization in the city cannot be hastened due to limited space. Strict protection zones, land profiles, and encroachment of properties are some of the concerns that cause area constraints in urban planning. Environmental issues are slowly emerging in the implementation of projects such as proposed roads in strict protection zones as Digos City is known for being the home of the majestic Mount Apo Natural Park (MANP), the largest land use in the city with a total of 16,355.24 hectares according to Digos City Comprehensive Land Use Plan 2021 – 2030 Volume III, where strict regulations are imposed. Another person explained that the land profile of the urban area of the city is relatively flat depressed zones making drainage design and discharge planning quite difficult to execute. There also exists a fault line in the city which can limit infrastructure developments in the area. In summary, the interview responses underscored land constraints as another major challenge in the careful planning and practices in implementing land use plans. This result was similar to the article of Enoguanbhor et al. (2021) where they addressed spatial conflicts and lack of interdepartmental coordination as key challenges in facing land use planning that might have contributed to inconsistencies in spatial urban expansion on land designated for non-urban development, particularly, productive forestry and intensive agriculture, to improve environmental sustainability. Osumanu, I. K. (2022) also highlighted in his study land title insecurity, encroachment of public lands,

multiple sales of lands, and general land market indiscipline as challenges associated with the inability of land sector agencies to effectively implement and manage land use plans.

#### 4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study identified inadequate human resources and land constraints as the primary challenges in the implementation of land use plans in Digos City, Davao del Sur. It became evident that insufficient manpower, limited technical staff, and budget limitations hindered the city's ability to implement its land use plans effectively. In addition, land constraints, such as strict protection zones, geological features, and conflicts over land ownership further add complexity to the planning process and limit urban development. To address these challenges and improve the implementation of land use plans in Digos City, there is a need to prioritize capacity development in terms of hiring and training additional personnel to bolster the effective implementation of land use plans. There's also a need to establish systematic harmonization between government agencies involved and regulatory improvements to review plans and policies, provide clear guidelines, and ensure land use plans are properly executed without overlapping the responsibilities assigned in each agency. With increased resources and streamlining systematic planning practices, Digos City can work toward enhancing the implementation of its land use plans and promote more effective and sustainable land use development.

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