

VILLAGE LEADERSHIP SYNERGY IN FACING DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES IN PAPUA

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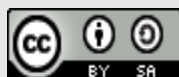
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ABSTRAK

Penelitian kepemimpinan desa di Papua masih terbatas, terutama dinamika kolaborasi antara kepala kampung, tokoh adat, dan aktor informal lainnya dalam menghadapi kompleksitas pembangunan lokal. Sebagian besar studi terdahulu lebih menekankan aspek administratif dan implementasi kebijakan formal, tanpa mengupas secara mendalam interaksi strategis antar pemimpin lokal dalam konteks sosial budaya Papua yang unik. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi sinergi kepemimpinan desa sebagai sistem jejaring kolaboratif dalam menjawab tantangan pembangunan yang berkelanjutan. Metode penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus deskriptif. Data diperoleh melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipasi dan dokumentasi, dengan teknik triangulasi untuk menjamin validasi data. Informan terdiri dari Kepala Kampung, tokoh adat, tokoh agama, aparat desa, perwakilan LSM dan Pemerintah Daerah. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa sinergi kepemimpinan desa masih menghadapi tantangan serius, seperti lemahnya koordinasi, perbedaan visi antar pemimpin, rendahnya partisipasi masyarakat, dan ketiadaan forum komunikasi efektif antara aktor pembangunan. Perencanaan pembangunan cenderung top-down dan kurang mempertimbangkan kearifan lokal, sementara keterbatasan infrastruktur dan sumber daya manusia menghambat penguatan kapasitas desa. Diperlukan perancangan mekanisme musyawarah lintas kepemimpinan di tingkat kampung, penguatan kapasitas kepemimpinan berbasis sosial budaya, serta pelembagaan kemitraan strategis antara desa, pemerintahan Daerah, akademisi, dan sektor swasta untuk membangun tata kelola kolaboratif yang adaptif terhadap konteks Papua.

Kata kunci: Kepemimpinan_Desa; Kolaborasi_Lokal; Tokoh_Adat; Pembangunan_Partisipatif; Papua

ABSTRACT

Research on village leadership in Papua remains limited, particularly regarding the collaborative dynamics between village heads, traditional leaders, and other informal actors in addressing the complexities of local development. Most previous studies have focused on administrative functions and the implementation of formal government policies, without thoroughly exploring the strategic interactions among local leaders within Papua's unique socio-cultural context. This study aims to explore village leadership synergy as a collaborative network system in responding to sustainable development challenges. This research employs a qualitative approach using a descriptive case study design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation, with triangulation techniques used to ensure data validity. Informants included village heads, traditional leaders, religious figures, village officials, NGO representatives, and local government authorities. The findings reveal that village leadership synergy continues to face serious challenges, including weak coordination, divergent visions among leaders, low community participation, and the absence of effective communication forums among development actors. Development planning tends to follow a top-down approach and lacks sensitivity to local wisdom, while limited infrastructure and human resources hinder the strengthening of village capacity. There is a need to design cross-leadership deliberation mechanisms at the village level, enhance leadership capacity grounded in socio-cultural understanding, and institutionalize strategic partnerships among villages, local governments, academics, and the private sector to build collaborative governance that is adaptive to the Papuan context.

Keywords: Village_Leadership; Local_Collaboration; Traditional_Leaders; Participatory_Development; Papua.

INTRODUCTION

Development in Papua is one of the crucial issues that continues to be considered by the government and the community. In this context, the role of the village head as a local leader is very important in overcoming the development challenges encountered (Abijulu 2024; Darlis 2023). The village head is not only functioning as a regulator of village administration, but also as a driver of the community in achieving sustainable development goals (Hulu 2022). This research will discuss the role of the village head in overcoming the challenges of development in Papua and the importance of the synergy of village leadership (Andarista 2023). Although Papua has an abundant of natural wealth of natural resources, the challenges of development in this region are very complex. Infrastructure that is still minimal, low levels of education and health, as well as significant economic inequality is an urgent problem that must be resolved immediately (Hariyanto 2022). In this situation, the role of village leadership becomes very vital to create solutions that can work together with government policies and the aspirations of the local community (Alaslan 2020; Banggu 2022). Village leadership has great potential to become a driver in overcoming various obstacles through a more contextual and participatory approach, because village leaders have a deep understanding of the characteristics and needs of the local community (Wahyudi 2022).

The emphasis on the role of this village leadership is increasingly relevant given the potential of local leaders to build networks and collaboration with other parties, such as local governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), in developing more effective and sustainable development strategies (Rumbiak 2024). With this collaborative approach, it is expected that the development process can run better and more under local conditions and needs (De'e 2023). Research on village leadership in the context of development has been carried out by various researchers. Sutrisno (2018) found that strong local leadership can encourage active community participation in the development process, especially in remote areas. In addition, a study by Riant Nugroho (2020) underlines the importance of collaboration between the central government, regional governments and villages in advancing community based development. In addition, research conducted by Tulung, M., Posumah, J., & Plumiten, N. (2021). Underline that the leadership of the village head has a significant influence on the implementation of development in Tumokang Baru Village. With an R-Squared value of 0.847, research shows that 84.7% of variations in the implementation of development can be explained by the leadership of the village head. The better the leadership is carried out, the better the implementation of development sourced from village funds.

Whereas in research conducted by. Wanimbo, Y., Nayoan, H., & Pioh, N. R. (2017). However that the role of the Head of the Kuari District in implementing the construction of the Jigga-Logga Village Road has not fully met the expectations of the community (Syafitri 2019). There are several weaknesses, such as the control function that has not been going well, a lack of transparency and accountability in the use of the budget, as well as delays in the implementation of development. The community also complained that the workforce used in the project did not involve local potential, which resulted in dissatisfaction among residents. And research conducted by. Krisjuyani, S. (2022). However that the leadership of the village head has a strategic role in the implementation of village development. A good leadership style can direct, motivate, and increase community participation in development (Indah 2022; Rais 2024).

Development in Papua faces various challenges, ranging from limited infrastructure, low quality of human resources, to diverse socio-cultural aspects. In this context, village leadership has a strategic role in

bridging community interests with broader development policies. Good synergy between village leadership, communities, and the government is expected to accelerate the development process in Papua more effectively and sustainably (Salmawati 2022). Development in Papua still faces various complex challenges, including limited infrastructure, access to education and health, and social and economic problems (Nugroho 2021). The government has allocated village funds and various development programs, but implementation in the field is often hampered by geographical conditions, lack of quality human resources, and weak coordination between stakeholders (Ponamon 2022). Village leadership has a strategic role in ensuring the success of development in Papua. Village heads, traditional figures, and local community leaders must be able to build synergy to overcome development challenges (Ngabiyo 2024). However, in reality, village leadership synergy is often hampered by differences in vision, lack of capacity in development management, and limited support from local governments (Siregar, 2021; Sutrisno, 2018). In addition, difficult-to-reach geographical conditions hinder the distribution of resources and public services, such as health and education. Inadequate infrastructure, such as roads, electricity, and communication networks, is the main obstacles that hinder efforts to improve the welfare of village communities. Therefore, strong, collaborative, and adaptive village leadership is needed to ensure that development can run effectively and sustainably (Sarinastiti 2023).

However, research on village leadership in Papua is still minimal, especially that highlights the synergy between local leadership and specific challenges faced in development in the region. Therefore, a more comprehensive and in-depth study is needed to identify how village leadership in Papua can contribute optimally in facing the various challenges that exist (Sadapu 2023). Previous studies have mostly discussed village development in Papua from the perspective of central government policies or regional autonomy, but have not explored the form of village leadership synergy in solving development challenges and there have been no studies that explore the interaction between village heads, traditional figures, and informal leaders in supporting development in Papua (Sendow 2024). The novelty in this study offers a new perspective on village leadership synergy as an alternative approach to development in Papua, providing recommendations based on empirical findings on a more effective leadership model in Papuan development and the novelty of this research also lies in the use of a collaborative approach in the analysis, where village leadership is not only seen as a development actor, but also as a strategic partner who plays a role in creating sustainable solutions that are appropriate to the conditions and needs of local communities.

Research on village leadership in Papua remains limited, particularly in examining how synergistic collaboration between village heads, traditional leaders, and informal actors can collectively address the region's multifaceted development challenges. Most existing studies emphasize administrative roles or government policy implementation but fall short of capturing the dynamic interplay and strategic collaboration needed at the village level. There is a notable gap in analyzing village leadership as a networked system of actors functioning within Papua's unique socio-cultural and geographical context. This study seeks to fill that gap by exploring the synergy of village leadership not merely as a singular role, but as an integrated force that collaborates with various stakeholders to overcome local development barriers and foster sustainable progress.

Thus, this study will provide new insights that can be used as a basis for formulating more inclusive and contextual development policies in Papua. How village leadership can synergize in overcoming development challenges in Papua and provide new strategies in village leadership synergy in Indonesia, especially in Papua.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive case study type, aiming to deeply understand the role of village leadership synergy in facing development challenges in Papua. The qualitative approach was chosen because it is able to explore the meaning, perspective, and experience of the subject in a complex and unique social, cultural, and geographical context, as suggested by Creswell (2014) that qualitative research aims to understand phenomena in the context of real life through narratives and participant perspectives.

Research Location This research was conducted in several villages in Makbon District, Sorong Regency in Southwest Papua Province that face significant development challenges, especially those related to limited infrastructure, low access to education and health, and socio-economic inequality. The location was chosen purposively based on the intensity of development problems and the existence of prominent village leadership practices. The Research Informants were selected purposively, consisting of: Village heads and village officials, Traditional leaders and community leaders, Representatives of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Representatives of local government, Village youth and women leaders. The selection of informants was based on their direct involvement in village development activities and their insights into the dynamics of local leadership and collaboration.

Data collection techniques include: In-depth interviews with key informants to gain an in-depth understanding of their experiences and perceptions related to village leadership and development collaboration. Participatory observation, where researchers are directly involved in village community activities to observe leadership practices and interactions between stakeholders. Documentation studies, such as village planning documents, development reports, and local news, to strengthen primary data. Triangulation techniques are used to increase data validity by comparing results from various sources (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014). Data analysis techniques in this study, namely Data were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques according to the interactive model of Miles and Huberman (1994) which includes three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions/verification. Researchers identified the main themes that emerged from the data, such as forms of leadership synergy, barriers to collaboration, and the impact of leadership on development. The analysis was carried out iteratively with an interpretive approach, to ensure that each data was contextualized in local social and cultural realities. Yin (2018) also emphasized the importance of in-depth exploration in case studies in order to build a rich understanding of complex phenomena.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Forms of village leadership synergy, Synergy of Village, Customary, and Religious Leadership: Building Community Trust

The synergy between the village head, customary leaders, and religious figures serves as a strategic pillar in establishing social legitimacy for village development agendas. Each actor holds symbolic and cultural authority in the Papuan community structure. However, field findings suggest that collaboration among these three leadership pillars remains suboptimal. As one customary leader noted:

"If the church and customary leaders are not involved, people become doubtful. They think it's not a collective decision." (Informant K, Customary Leader).

The analysis indicates that village heads tend to dominate the decision-making process, while customary and religious leaders are often involved only symbolically or entirely excluded. Diverging interests, limited

dialogue, and the absence of consistent deliberative mechanisms hinder the realization of collective leadership. This reflects weak social capital, as conceptualized by Putnam (1993), who emphasized the importance of trust networks and reciprocal norms in fostering civic participation. When key actors fail to act synergistically, communities lose faith in village policies, reducing their engagement in development programs. From a transformational leadership perspective (Bass, 1990), village heads should serve as visionaries who bridge local values with collective development goals. However, in Papua, leadership often manifests as a top-down model that lacks value transformation and cross-group social consolidation. Strengthening inter-leader relations based on trust and respect for cultural authority is essential for fostering inclusive and sustainable development.

Partnership with Local Governments and External Institutions: Toward Adaptive Collaboration.

The relationship between village governments and regional authorities, along with external institutions (NGOs, academics), is largely characterized by top-down approaches. Development planning frequently overlooks local initiatives and aspirations, resulting in programs that are poorly aligned with community needs. This indicates weak collaborative governance, as outlined by Ansell & Gash (2008), which emphasizes deliberative processes grounded in equality, trust, and mutual interdependence.

"We develop village programs, but the district rarely responds—even though they match our needs." (Informant P, Village Head).

Such accounts reveal a lack of two-way communication and participatory space, leading to information gaps and diminished local ownership. Village governments often express frustration when their proposals are excluded from regional planning, while external institutions bring their own agendas that are not always aligned with village realities. Adaptive collaboration requires the establishment of multi-stakeholder forums that facilitate open dialogue among village authorities, regional governments, NGOs, academics, and the private sector. These collaborations should be horizontal, rooted in equal partnerships and mutual trust, rather than mere administrative relationships. This approach can make development more responsive, inclusive, and sustainable by integrating local realities and strengthening village-level institutional capacity.

Community in Development: From Passive to Proactive Participation. Limited community involvement in village planning and development in Papua highlights weak participatory democracy at the local level. Many residents are absent from deliberative forums, either due to lack of invitation or a perceived lack of capacity to contribute. This governance imbalance is illustrated in the following testimony:

"We only find out when the project is already happening. We were never consulted beforehand." (Informant M, Villager)

This situation is exacerbated by low development literacy, limited public communication channels, and bureaucratic cultures that are not yet inclusive. According to Putnam's (1993) theory of social capital, citizen participation is a product of trust networks, reciprocal norms, and social cohesion. When communities are excluded from the early stages, their sense of ownership diminishes, leading to unsustainable projects or even community resistance. Procedural participation without substantive dialogue only reinforces passivity. Therefore, a more transformative participatory approach is needed—one that creates learning spaces, empowers vulnerable groups, and ensures transparent access to development information. Promoting

equitable relationships between village governments and residents enables a shift from mere project implementation to the strengthening of collective community capacity.

Local Economy: Managing Potential Based on Indigenous Knowledge. Papua holds vast local resources—such as sago, marine products, and culturally rooted handicrafts—but these potentials remain underutilized in the village economic development framework. As one local entrepreneur expressed:

"We have sago, fish, and handicrafts—but who will help market them" (Informant S, Local MSME Actor)

Field analysis shows that limited market access, inadequate technology, and low entrepreneurial capacity hinder local products from scaling and sustaining. This points to the absence of an inclusive and adaptive village economic ecosystem. From a transformational leadership lens (Bass, 1990), village heads and local leaders have a strategic role in fostering change through inspirational vision and community empowerment. Transformational leaders do more than manage—they mobilize. They encourage innovation, support enterprise formation, and build external networks with the private sector and support institutions. Furthermore, cross-sector collaboration in strengthening the local economy aligns with collaborative governance principles (Ansell & Gash, 2008). Synergy among village governments, businesses, NGOs, and academia is crucial to building value chains rooted in local potential. Through participatory governance and trust-based partnerships, economic development can generate not only material benefits but also reinforce cultural identity and social sustainability in rural communities.

Education and Human Resources: Preparing the Next Generation. The shortage of qualified teachers, limited learning facilities, and difficult geographic access pose serious challenges for education in remote Papua. As one student noted:

"There are not enough teachers. Sometimes we study alone at home." (Informant T, Junior High Student)

This situation hampers the development of human resources, which in turn restricts community capacity to engage in development. Without foundational knowledge, people struggle to understand their rights, responsibilities, and the opportunities available to them. This gap calls for contextual education interventions, including localized curriculum and vocational training aligned with regional potential. Education should not be confined to formal knowledge transfer but should also build confidence, work ethic, and collective awareness. In line with Putnam's (1993) social capital theory, education is a long-term social investment that strengthens cohesion and civic engagement. Access to quality education equips communities not only to face economic and social challenges but also to foster solidarity and productive social networks. Thus, enhancing human capital through inclusive and locally relevant education is a cornerstone of sustainable, community-based development in Papua.

Strengthening Village Leadership: From Administrative to Transformational Models. Village leadership in Papua often remains bound to administrative and normative bureaucratic roles. Yet, the socio-cultural and developmental challenges facing these regions require a more adaptive and transformational leadership model. Village heads are expected not only to understand formal regulations but also to respond to social dynamics and integrate local values into policy implementation. As one religious leader emphasized:

"If a leader doesn't know the rules, he'll be lost. But he must not ignore tradition either." (Informant R, Religious Leader)

This highlights the need for leaders who inspire, promote innovation, and cultivate collective commitment—core traits of transformational leadership (Bass, 1990). Leadership training should thus go beyond technical skills and foster social and cultural competence. Programs must be contextually tailored, address local challenges, and involve customary and religious leaders as learning partners. Strengthening inter-actor communication and establishing culturally rooted deliberative forums are also key strategies. Within a collaborative governance framework (Ansell & Gash, 2008), village heads serve as mediators between government institutions, communities, and traditional authorities. Consequently, village leadership must evolve beyond administrative functions into a transformative force that harmonizes formal governance with indigenous wisdom in a synergistic manner.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that the synergy of village leadership in Papua—particularly among village heads, customary leaders, and religious figures—continues to face various structural and cultural challenges. Limited coordination, divergent interests among local leaders, and low community participation in development processes are the primary barriers to achieving inclusive and sustainable development. Village leadership tends to be administrative and top-down, while customary and religious leaders retain normative roles without a clear framework for collaboration. As a result, many development programs encounter community resistance, lack of ownership, and even implementation failure. Partnerships between villages and local governments, as well as with external actors such as NGOs, academics, and the private sector, have not functioned optimally due to the absence of effective communication platforms. Development planning remains dominated by bureaucratic agendas, often disregarding local contexts. Meanwhile, limitations in human resources, infrastructure, and market access hinder the strengthening of local economies and the improvement of educational quality. Therefore, it is necessary to design a mechanism for cross-leadership deliberation—between formal and informal leaders—at the village level to reinforce synergy among village heads, customary leaders, and religious figures. Strengthening village leadership capacity should not only focus on technocratic skills but also on socio-cultural understanding and cross-value communication abilities. Community participation must be redefined by establishing open dialogue spaces and enhancing public education about citizens' roles in village development. Finally, development partnerships should be institutionalized through village-district communication forums that strategically involve academics and the private sector in ways that are adaptive to local contexts.

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SHORT PROFILE

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