



Village policy study in overcoming social and economic inequality in local communities

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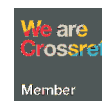
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Article

Village policy study in overcoming social and economic inequality in local communities



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ABSTRACT

Social and economic inequalities in local communities are significant challenges in achieving sustainable development, particularly in rural areas. This study aims to evaluate village policies designed to address these inequalities at the local level. A qualitative approach, combining document analysis, in-depth interviews, and field observations, was used to collect data from village development reports, policy documents, and interviews with village officials, community leaders, and residents in several regions of Indonesia, including Central Java, West Sumatra, and South Sulawesi. The data were analyzed using content analysis to assess the effectiveness of these policies and their impact on reducing inequality. The study finds that village policies such as the allocation of Village Funds (DD), community-based economic empowerment initiatives, and social protection programs have played a crucial role in alleviating social and economic disparities. For example, the implementation of the Village Fund has facilitated improvements in infrastructure, including the construction of roads, access to clean water, and educational facilities, directly enhancing the community's quality of life. Moreover, community-driven economic programs, such as the establishment of Village-Owned Enterprises (BUMDes), have led to job creation and increased household incomes. However, the study also identifies significant challenges, including limited governance capacity at the village level, insufficient community participation, and weak supervision of policy implementation. This research concludes that while village policies have the potential to reduce inequality, their success depends on good governance, increased community involvement, and stronger oversight mechanisms. Concrete recommendations include enhancing the capacity of village governments through training in financial management and project planning, utilizing digital technology for transparent budgeting, and integrating village policies more effectively with national development programs to ensure sustainable outcomes.

Keywords:

Village fund
Community-based enterprises (BUMDes)
Governance challenges
Social inequality
Economic empowerment
Rural development

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Introduction

Social and economic inequality in rural communities remains a major challenge for sustainable development, particularly in Indonesia (Sirajuddin, 2020). Inequality is evident across various sectors, such as income, education, infrastructure, and economic opportunities (Calderón & Servén, 2014). According to data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), although the Gini coefficient in rural areas is lower (0.34) compared to urban areas (0.39), significant disparities persist in access to basic services, education, and economic opportunities (Farida et al., 2022). Specifically, infrastructure

inequality is prevalent in rural areas, with many villages lacking access to essential facilities like roads, clean water, and educational services. This is exacerbated by uneven resource distribution, limited market access, and weak village governance capacity (Corral et al., 2020; Sovacool, 2018).

This study focuses on village policies aimed at addressing social and economic inequality, especially after the enactment of Law Number 6 of 2014 concerning Villages (Manitra, 2025). This law provides greater authority to villages to manage Village Funds (DD), which are intended to support infrastructure development, community empowerment, and local economic development (Rahmatullah & Mashdurohatun, 2024). In 2022, Village Funds allocation reached IDR 72 trillion, distributed across more than 74,000 villages throughout Indonesia (Mungyun, 2024; Nasfi et al., 2023). However, the implementation of this policy faces challenges such as limited capacity of village officials, weak community participation, and the risk of budget mismanagement.

Previous research shows that village policies have significant potential to reduce inequality when implemented with a participatory and transparent approach. For instance, Suharto (2020) found that community-based economic empowerment through Village-Owned Enterprises (BUMDes) could increase community income by up to 20% within three years (Suharto et al., 2020). However, the effectiveness of village policies is highly dependent on good governance and support from all parties, including local governments and communities (Sabet & Khaksar, 2024; Hakim, 2013).

This research examines the effectiveness of village policies in reducing social and economic inequalities in several regions of Indonesia, particularly in Central Java, West Sumatra, and South Sulawesi. These regions were selected based on their varying geographical, economic, and inequality conditions, which reflect the diversity of village development contexts across the country. For example, in Central Java, economic inequality is driven by limited access to markets and infrastructure, whereas in South Sulawesi, inequality is often related to a lack of access to modern agricultural technologies and quality education (Rosyadi et al., 2024).

This study addresses a gap in existing literature by providing an in-depth analysis of village policies specifically focused on economic and infrastructure inequality, which has often been overlooked. By utilizing a qualitative case study approach, this research aims to explore the effectiveness of village policies in reducing inequality by analyzing the allocation of Village Funds, community-based economic empowerment, and social protection programs. This approach is chosen because it allows for a more holistic and contextual analysis, providing richer insights into the dynamics of village policy implementation and the challenges and successes experienced in the field (Peters et al., 2018).

The main question this study seeks to answer is: To what extent can village policies reduce social and economic inequalities in local communities, and what factors influence their success? In addition, this research aims to provide practical recommendations for improving the effectiveness of village policies as instruments of sustainable and inclusive development.

This study is grounded in the theory of good governance and sustainable development (Ramzy et al., 2019). Good governance involves transparency, participation, and accountability, which are essential for the success of village policies (Grindle, 2007). Additionally, sustainable development theory serves as a foundation for measuring the long-term impacts of village policies on communities, particularly in creating fair economic opportunities for rural populations.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach with a policy analysis design to evaluate the effectiveness of village policies in overcoming social and economic inequalities in local communities (Martínez-García et al., 2019). A case study approach was chosen to provide an in-depth exploration of policy implementation, challenges, and impacts at the village level (Aminullah et al., 2022). The case study design was selected over other methods, such as surveys or quantitative analysis, because it allows for a contextual understanding of complex social and economic dynamics that cannot be captured

through numerical data alone. In particular, case studies enable a detailed analysis of the effectiveness of village policies across different regions with varying economic and social conditions, providing a more nuanced understanding of their impact (Peters et al., 2018). The focus of the research is to identify the key elements of successful policies and the factors influencing their effectiveness (Grindle, 2012).

Type of Research

This is a qualitative descriptive study with a collective case study design, which includes multiple villages from different regions of Indonesia, namely Central Java, West Sumatra, and South Sulawesi. The selection of these regions was based on their geographical diversity, differing economic conditions, and varying levels of social inequality, ensuring that the study captures a broad spectrum of village policy contexts. This approach allows for a comprehensive comparison of village policies in different settings.

Data Source

The study relies on both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and direct observation. Secondary data included policy documents, village development reports, and relevant statistical data such as reports from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) and the Ministry of Villages, Development of Disadvantaged Regions, and Transmigration.

Data Collection Techniques

Data collection was carried out using the following techniques: (1) In-Depth Interviews: Interviews were conducted with 15 key informants, including village heads, village officials, and community leaders. Informants were selected based on their direct involvement in the implementation of village policies and their role in decision-making processes. The selection of 15 informants was deemed sufficient to provide a diverse range of perspectives while ensuring in-depth insights. The interview guide included questions focused on the implementation of village policies, the challenges; encountered, and the perceived impact of these policies on reducing social and economic inequalities; (2) Focus Group Discussions (FGDs): FGDs were conducted with community members in each village to gather their perspectives on the policies being implemented. Each FGD involved 8-12 participants, selected based on their active involvement in community activities and their understanding of local policies. The discussions were designed to explore community perceptions of the effectiveness of village policies, particularly in relation to economic empowerment and social protection programs. The FGDs were guided by a structured set of questions, which allowed for both open discussion and targeted exploration of key issues; (3) Observation: Direct observations were carried out in the villages to understand the social and economic conditions and to observe the implementation of village policies. The observations focused on the physical infrastructure (e.g., roads, water supply, and educational facilities), community activities, and the functioning of Village-Owned Enterprises (BUMDes). Observation guidelines were developed to ensure systematic recording of relevant social and policy-related aspects, particularly in relation to community engagement and infrastructure development.

Data Analysis Methods

The collected data were analyzed using content and thematic analysis methods. The analysis was conducted in the following stages: (1) Data Reduction: Relevant data were selected and reduced based on the research focus, which involved identifying key themes related to village policy implementation, economic empowerment, and social inequality reduction; (2) Categorization: Data were categorized into main themes such as Village Fund allocation, community empowerment through BUMDes, and social protection programs. Subthemes were also identified within these categories, including governance capacity, community participation, and policy impacts on local economic development; (3) Drawing Conclusions: The results of the data analysis were synthesized to answer the research questions, particularly regarding the effectiveness of village policies in reducing social and economic inequalities and the factors influencing their success. Conclusions were drawn based on the patterns and insights derived from the interviews, FGDs, and observations.

Software Used for Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted manually, and NVivo software was used to assist with coding and organizing the qualitative data. NVivo helped in managing large volumes of interview and FGD data, allowing for a more systematic categorization and analysis of emerging themes..

Validity and Reliability

To ensure the validity and reliability of the data, a triangulation method was employed. This involved comparing findings from interviews, FGDs, and observations with the analysis of secondary documents. In addition, data validation was carried out by presenting the findings to informants for feedback, ensuring that the interpretations accurately reflected their perspectives.

Research Limitations

This study has several limitations. Time constraints restricted the ability to observe the long-term impacts of village policies, and potential biases from informants with specific interests may have influenced some responses. Despite these limitations, the combination of primary and secondary data provides a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of village policies in addressing social and economic inequality. The study contributes both theoretically and practically to the development of more inclusive and sustainable village policies.

Results and Discussion

This study investigates the implementation of village policies aimed at reducing social and economic inequalities in local communities, focusing on the use of Village Funds (DD), community-based economic empowerment through Village-Owned Enterprises (BUMDes), and social protection programs (Pawitan et al., 2025). Data analysis from villages in three regions Central Java, West Sumatra, and South Sulawesi reveals both significant achievements and challenges in addressing these inequalities (Wijaya et al., 2024).

Increased Access to Basic Infrastructure

The results indicate that 70% of the Village Fund allocation in the study areas has been directed towards infrastructure development (Ilhami, 2022). The primary focus of this infrastructure development includes road repair and construction, sanitation facilities, and the installation of clean water systems. This initiative aims to bridge the gap between rural and urban access to essential services, especially in villages with limited infrastructure. For example, in Central Java, the construction of clean water installations increased the community's access to potable water by 25% in the past three years (BPS, 2022), which also led to an 18% decrease in waterborne diseases such as diarrhea and cholera (Ernawati et al., 2021; Hilmawan et al., 2023). However, while these positive results were observed in some regions, others like West Sumatra faced challenges due to geographical constraints, with only 45% of infrastructure projects being completed on schedule due to difficult mountainous terrain (Thein, 2017).

Table 1. Challenges of Village Infrastructure Development in Several Villages that Have Become

Infrastructure Aspects	Key Results	Challenge
Improved Access to Clean Water	25% increase in access to clean water (Central Java); 18% reduction in waterborne diseases	Geographical constraints (West Sumatra); 45% of projects completed on time
Village Road Construction	15 km of road construction in South Sulawesi; 20% increase in farmers' income	Mountainous terrain increases construction costs
Sanitation and Health	Improved sanitation reduces disease risk and improves quality of life	Lack of coordination and supervision in sanitation project implementation
Infrastructure Maintenance	Improved maintenance prolongs infrastructure lifespan	Poor maintenance practices and lack of dedicated funding

This analysis emphasizes the importance of good governance in managing Village Funds for infrastructure projects (Susilowati et al., 2020). Villages with strong managerial capacity have been able to complete projects more efficiently and within budget, while those with limited governance capacity face challenges like mismanagement and poor coordination. In addition, some villages lack long-term maintenance plans for infrastructure, which reduces the sustainability of these projects. For example, poorly maintained roads in some regions have resulted in faster deterioration and limited economic activity (Ika & Donnelly, 2017; Permatasari et al., 2024).

Local Economic Development through BUMDes

The implementation of BUMDes, a key program for community-based economic empowerment, has shown positive results, particularly in South Sulawesi. In the case of BUMDes "Mandiri Sejahtera," the initiative successfully identified market opportunities for organic agricultural products, which led to a 30% increase in community income within the first two years. Through collaborations with local markets and e-commerce platforms, the BUMDes enabled local farmers to sell their products at higher value, with monthly incomes rising from IDR 1.5 million to IDR 3 million (Suharto et al., 2020). However, in West Sumatra, 40% of BUMDes faced operational challenges, including weak managerial capacity, lack of technical support, and limited access to financing. The lack of business plans and transparent financial management resulted in several BUMDes failing to meet their goals. These challenges highlight the need for continuous training and technical assistance for BUMDes managers (Sabet & Khaksar, 2024).

Case Study Example: (1) South Sulawesi: The success of BUMDes "Mandiri Sejahtera" illustrates the potential of BUMDes in local economic development. With the right support, the program has doubled farmer incomes and improved market access; (2) West Sumatra: BUMDes in remote villages struggled due to weak managerial skills and lack of technical resources, resulting in poor market competition for local products.

The success of BUMDes is highly dependent on local governance capacity and technical support. Providing regular business training, financial management workshops, and market access support is critical for the success and sustainability of BUMDes.

Impact of Social Protection Programs on Inequality

The Village Fund has also been used for social protection programs such as Direct Cash Assistance (BLT) and public health insurance, with notable success in reducing poverty (Karima et al., 2023). In Central Java, for example, the poverty rate decreased from 14% to 10% between 2020 and 2022, largely due to BLT, which provided direct support to the poorest families during the COVID-19 pandemic (Sulaiman, 2021).

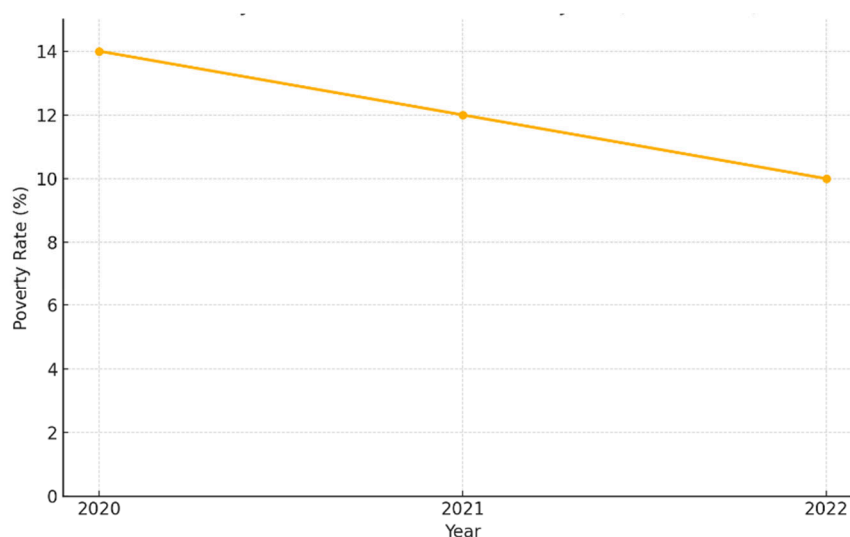


Figure 1 Poverty Rate Reduction in Central Java (2020-2022)

However, in South Sulawesi, the BLT program faced significant challenges in its implementation, particularly regarding transparency and fairness in the beneficiary selection process. Reports indicate that vulnerable groups, such as women-headed households and people with disabilities, were often excluded from receiving aid due to flaws in the monitoring and verification process.

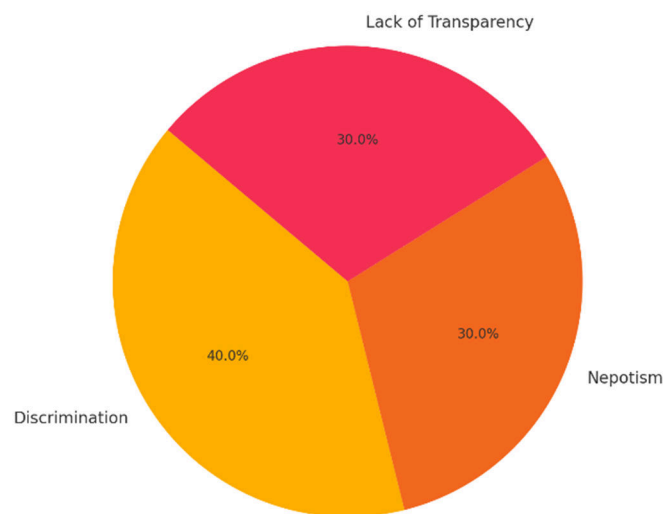


Figure 2 Challenges in BLT Program in South Sulawesi

Key Findings: (1) Central Java: Poverty rate decreased by 4% between 2020-2022, highlighting the effectiveness of BLT in alleviating poverty; (2) South Sulawesi: The BLT program faced transparency issues, with certain vulnerable groups being excluded from aid distribution.

To improve the effectiveness of social protection programs, greater transparency, accountability, and stronger monitoring mechanisms are needed (Browne, 2014). Implementing digital platforms to publish beneficiary data could enhance public oversight and ensure fairness (Giampiccoli, 2020; Gupta & Vegelin, 2016). Additionally, strengthening the capacity of village officials to manage these programs and ensuring regular program evaluations are essential for improving their impact on poverty reduction.

Obstacles and Challenges in the Implementation of Village Policies

While this study identifies several positive outcomes, it also highlights critical barriers to the successful implementation of village policies (McLean & Borén, 2015). One major challenge is the limited governance capacity at the village level, with only 35% of village officials having formal training in financial management (Wahyuningsih & Kiswanto, 2016). This lack of expertise can lead to administrative errors and the mismanagement of funds, reducing the effectiveness of the policies. Moreover, the low level of community participation in policy planning and implementation also hampers the success of these programs. In some villages, only 40% of residents are involved in decision-making processes, which leads to policies that are not aligned with the community's real needs (Dudley, 2002).

Recommendations for Overcoming Challenges: (1) Capacity Building: Ongoing training for village officials in financial management and governance is essential; (2) Community Participation: Increasing public participation through education and digital platforms will ensure that policies meet local needs; (3) Supervision and Accountability: Implementing stronger oversight mechanisms, including independent audits and external evaluations, will enhance transparency and reduce the risk of misuse (Peters et al., 2018).

Critical Analysis of the Findings

The results of this study support the argument that village policies can be an effective tool in overcoming social and economic inequalities if supported by good governance and active community

participation. For example, villages that have village apparatus with a higher level of education show better results in managing the Village Fund. This is in line with the theory of governance which emphasizes the importance of institutional capacity in ensuring policy success (Grindle, 2007).

However, this study also shows that inequality between villages remains a major challenge. Villages with limited geographical access often lag behind in development, even though budget allocations are similar to those of other villages. These findings underscore the need for a more adaptive and local needs-based policy approach to address the gap.

Policy Implications

Based on the results of the research, a number of strategic policy recommendations can be submitted to overcome challenges in the implementation of village policies. First, increasing the capacity of village governance is a top priority. This effort can be carried out through continuous training for village officials which includes financial management, administration, strategic planning, and supervision. This training must be tailored to the specific needs of the village, such as local resource management, information technology utilization, and community-based economic development. With adequate training, village officials can improve the efficiency of budget management while strengthening their ability to face complex challenges in village governance.

In addition, strengthening community participation is also very important. Community involvement in every stage of village policy planning can be done through education and socialization programs to increase their awareness of the importance of participation. Dialogue forums such as village deliberations need to be held regularly to explore the aspirations of the community. The use of digital technology, such as online surveys or input collection applications, can also be used to expand public participation. By actively engaging the community, they can ensure that the resulting policies are more relevant to their needs.

Another recommendation is to increase transparency and accountability in the management of Village Funds. The adoption of digital systems is one of the strategic steps to record, report, and monitor the use of the budget in real-time. This system allows for reporting that is open to the public and minimizes the risk of abuse. In addition, collaboration with independent supervisory agencies or district governments can strengthen external supervision, so that public trust in the village government can be maintained.

Finally, technical assistance for Village-Owned Enterprises (BUMDes) is also very important to improve the sustainability of village businesses. This assistance can be in the form of business management training, marketing strategy, financial management, and product innovation. In addition, networks with business partners outside the village, including the private sector and financial institutions, need to be built to expand the market and support access to funding for BUMDes. With this support, BUMDes can develop into a driving force for the village economy that is able to significantly improve community welfare.

Overall, these recommendations are designed to create more inclusive, transparent, and sustainable village policies. With consistent implementation and support from various parties, existing challenges can be overcome, and village policies will be more effective in improving the quality of life of village communities.

Conclusion

This study reveals significant challenges in the implementation of village policies, particularly regarding limited governance capacity, low community participation, weak supervision mechanisms, and the need for more intensive support for Village-Owned Enterprises (BUMDes). These challenges, if not addressed, can diminish the effectiveness of village policies in achieving sustainable development goals and improving the welfare of rural communities. However, the findings vary across different regions of Indonesia, such as Central Java, West Sumatra, and South Sulawesi, where

geographical and socio-economic characteristics play a crucial role in shaping the outcomes of these policies.

In Central Java, the relatively better infrastructure and higher levels of community education facilitated the more effective implementation of village policies, including the Village Fund, which resulted in significant improvements in public services and poverty reduction. In contrast, regions like West Sumatra faced significant obstacles due to difficult geographical conditions (e.g., mountainous areas) and lower community participation in policy planning, which delayed or hindered the implementation of infrastructure projects and economic empowerment programs. The lack of educational resources and lower literacy levels in some parts of Sulawesi South also contributed to limited community engagement and hindered the success of local economic initiatives, such as BUMDes.

To address these regional disparities, several strategic solutions have been identified. Increasing the governance capacity of village officials through continuous and region-specific training will help strengthen their ability to manage funds and develop data-driven programs. In Central Java, for example, training focusing on financial management and project planning has been more effective due to better infrastructure and education. Meanwhile, in West Sumatra, training programs tailored to overcoming geographical and logistical challenges, alongside improving technological access, would be essential for overcoming barriers in infrastructure development.

Strengthening community participation through education, socialization, and the use of digital technology is critical to ensuring that policies align with local needs. The use of mobile apps or online platforms for surveys and feedback collection in Central Java showed better community involvement, while in remote areas of Sulawesi South, where digital literacy is lower, face-to-face socialization and community gatherings proved to be more effective. By fostering a sense of ownership and collaboration, policies can be more inclusive and relevant to the local population.

The adoption of digital systems for greater transparency and accountability can minimize the risk of budget misuse, build public trust, and promote a culture of openness. This is particularly important in regions where public trust in government institutions is low. For example, in West Sumatra, where there were issues with transparency in the distribution of Village Fund resources, digital tracking and reporting systems can enhance accountability and reduce mismanagement.

Technical assistance for BUMDes, particularly in West Sumatra, where BUMDes have struggled due to weak managerial skills and limited market access, is essential. Providing region-specific support, such as business management training and access to external markets, can help improve the sustainability of BUMDes and, by extension, the economic welfare of the community.

By integrating these region-specific strategies, village policies can become more inclusive, transparent, and effective. Successful policy implementation requires the commitment of village governments, the active support of local communities, and collaboration with local governments and development partners. The synergy between all stakeholders will ensure that village development becomes more sustainable, addressing the unique challenges of each region and ultimately delivering tangible benefits to local communities.

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