



## Optimizing Village Fund Allocation through Strengthening Leadership and Institutions in the Midst of Local Political Constraints Case Study of Village Governance in West Java, Indonesia

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### Abstract

**Background.** The management of village funds in Indonesia has become an important foundation in strengthening community-based development. However, in practice, the effectiveness of budget allocation often faces complex local challenges.

**Purpose.** This study aims to examine how village head leadership and local institutional strength can encourage the optimization of the use of village funds amid political pressure stemming from local rivalry after the village head election. This study was conducted in Mekarsari Village, Selaawi District, Garut Regency, a village with economic characteristics of the community that is mostly engaged in bamboo weaving crafts and has a strong social structure but is vulnerable to political polarization.

**Method.** Using a qualitative approach with the main method of documentation study, this study utilizes official documents, namely RPJMDes, RKPDDes, APBDes, and village deliberation minutes. Interviews are only conducted on a limited basis to strengthen the interpretation of document data.

**Result.** The results of the analysis show that even though the village head has prepared a development plan according to the applicable rules and stages, the implementation of the program has faced obstacles by political resistance and subjective perceptions from some communities. However, strengthening participatory and transparent village institutions is able to withstand this pressure and maintain the direction of village development in accordance with the medium-term vision contained in the RPJMDes.

**Conclusion.** This study recommends the need for a local political management strategy based on open dialogue and the strengthening of village institutions as a protector against short-term conflicts of interest.

**Implementation.** These findings contribute to the village governance literature and demonstrate the importance of a balance between leadership, institutions, and local dynamics in village fund management.

**Keywords:** Village Fund, Leadership, Institutional, Local Politics, Governance



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## **INTRODUCTION**

Since the enactment of Law No. 6 of 2014 concerning Villages, the Indonesian government has given extensive authority to villages to manage finances, resources, and local development planning. One of the main instruments in the implementation of village autonomy is the Village Fund (DD) which aims to encourage participatory development and strengthen institutional capacity at the grassroots level. However, the optimization of the use of village funds in various regions in Indonesia is inseparable from various structural and socio-political challenges, including in Mekarsari Village, Selaawi District, Garut Regency. The village has a distinctive characteristic: the majority of its inhabitants are bamboo weaving craftsmen, with a fairly strong social network and microeconomic community. However, the village development process often does not run smoothly due to local political influences, especially after the election of village heads which leaves disharmony between competing parties. In this condition, the village head is faced with political pressure from political rivals and some residents who assess their performance subjectively.

However, the village head and the institutions in the village have administratively carried out the RPJMDes and RKPDes in accordance with the applicable procedures. The development programs carried out also refer to the principles of transparency, participation, and synergy with supra-village programs, namely district, provincial, and central governments. However, technical success is often not enough to stem negative perceptions and criticism based on local political conflicts. This situation raises a fundamental question: the extent to which the role of leadership and institutions can maintain the stability and effectiveness of village development in the midst of local political pressure.

### **Problem Formulation**

Based on the above background, this study formulates several key questions as follows:

1. How do village heads manage village funds in the context of local political pressure?
2. To what extent do village institutions function in supporting the implementation of development programs?
3. What are the forms of obstacles that arise from political rivalry, and how do institutional and leadership strategies deal with them?

4. What is the interaction between formal planning (RPJMDes and RKPDes) and socio-political realities in society?

### **Research Objectives**

This research aims to:

1. Analyzing the influence of village head leadership on the effectiveness of village fund management;
2. Examining the role and capacity of village institutions in overseeing the planning and implementation of development;
3. Identify political obstacles that arise and strategies of village heads and village institutions in overcoming them;
4. Provide a link between development policies and local socio-political dynamics.

### **Research Benefits**

Theoretically, this research contributes to strengthening the study of village governance, especially in the perspective of the relationship between local political actors, institutions, and development.

Practically, these findings can be a reference for local governments and central governments in policymakers to formulate strategies to strengthen village institutions and improve the quality of local leadership that is adaptive to political pressure.

### **Authenticity and Significance of Research**

Unlike previous studies that generally highlighted the management of village funds from a technical administrative perspective, this study emphasizes the aspect of interaction between local political pressure and village institutional response. The focus on Mekarsari Village, whose community is dominated by bamboo handicraft economic actors, with development challenges that are often overshadowed by political rivalries, provides a unique local dimension that is rarely revealed academically. This is where the original significance and contribution of this research lies—reading village fund governance not only as a matter of planning, but also as a non-negotiable micro-political arena between formal structures and social forces.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### The Theory of Democratic Participation

Citizen participation is the main foundation in local democracy. Within the framework of democratic participation theory, Robert A. Dahl (1961) emphasized the importance of citizen involvement in decision-making as a means of political education as well as control of power. Dahl said that a democratic society is characterized by the level of responsiveness of the government to the will of its citizens through openness, transparency, and representation mechanisms. In the village context, this participation is realized through village deliberation forums, involvement in the planning of RPJMDes and RKPDes, and supervision of the realization of the APBDes. This theory is relevant to the conditions in Mekarsari Village, where formal deliberations are often criticized by some residents who are fragmented due to political rivalry. High citizen involvement not only reflects substantive democracy, but also contributes to the legitimacy of the village development process.

### Transformational Leadership Theory

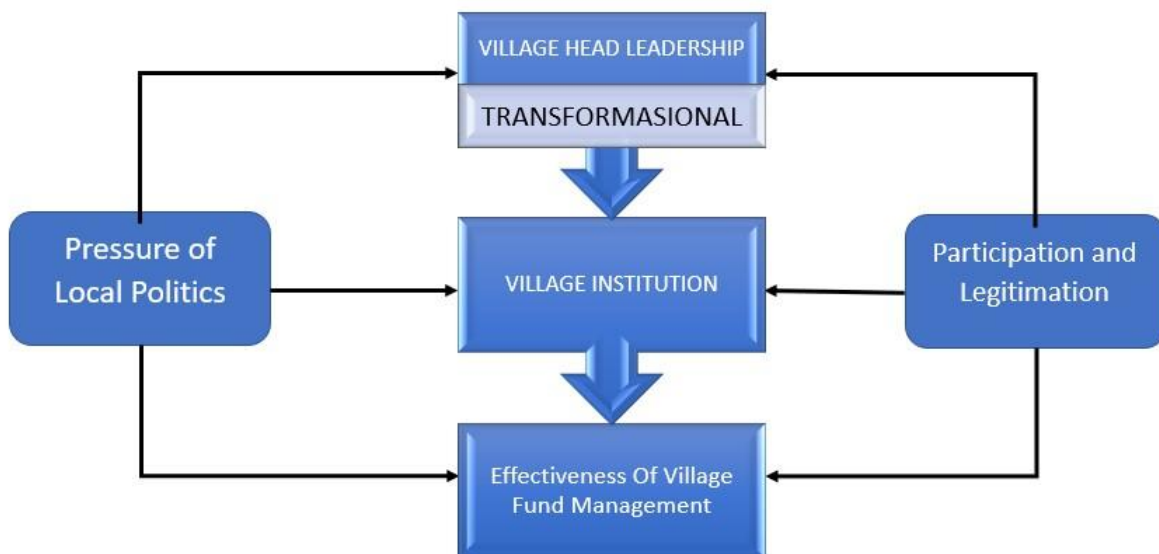


Figure 1. Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership introduced by James MacGregor Burns (1978) focuses on the leader's efforts to transform the values, aspirations, and commitments of his followers in order to achieve a common goal. Transformational leaders don't just exchange interests (as in transactional leadership), but lift collective morale through long-term vision, exemplary, and inspiration. The four main elements of this model are: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. In the context of Mekarsari Village, the village head plays the role of a transformational leader when he maintains the direction of development in accordance with the RPJMDes and maintains alignment with the supra-village program, despite facing pressure from political opponents. His ability to maintain the stability of village planning in the midst of political sentiment shows a leadership capacity that is not only administrative, but also visionary.

**Neo-Institutionalism Theory**

March and Olsen (1984, 2006) developed a theory of neo-institutionalism, which sees institutions not as mere formal structures, but as actors who shape behavior through internalized norms, values, and expectations. Institutions are considered capable of directing political and social actions based on the "logic of appropriateness", not just strategic rationality. In the context of village governance, institutions such as BPD, LPM, RT/RW, and local artisan groups, play the role of informal controllers over the decisions and implementation of village programs. In Mekarsari Village, these institutions are often a conflict reducer or conversely, a conduit for the expression of political opposition, depending on their capacity and independence.

**Integration of the Three Theories**

Aspects	Grand Theory (Dahl, 1961)	Middle Theory (Burns, 1978)	Applicative (March & Olsen, 1984, 2006)
Main focus	Citizen involvement	Influence and inspiration of leaders	Function of norms and institutional structures
Relevance of Mekarsari Village	Participation in deliberations	The village head as a moral leader	BPD & rural institutions face political pressure

**METHOD**

## **Approaches and Types of Research**

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach, with the aim of understanding in depth the process of managing village funds in Mekarsari Village, Selaawi District, Garut Regency. The main focus is placed on the interaction between village head leadership, local institutions, and political pressure from the rivalry after the village head election. This approach was chosen because it is able to reveal socio-political dynamics that cannot be explained through numbers or statistics alone.

The type of research used is a case study, which allows contextual tracing of certain phenomena (i.e. the dynamics of village fund management) in one typical location. The researcher does not attempt to take broad generalizations, but rather to explore a comprehensive understanding of the real cases experienced by the village.

## **Research Focus**

The focus of the research is directed at three main dimensions:

1. Village head leadership in compiling and implementing RPJMDes and RKPDes-based programs;
2. The role of village institutions in overseeing the transparent and participatory governance of village funds;
3. The influence of local political pressure, especially from political opponents of village heads, on the sustainability of development programs.

These three focuses are analyzed with a theoretical framework that combines the theories of democratic participation (Dahl), transformational leadership (Burns), and neo-institutionalism (March & Olsen).

## **Data Collection Techniques**

This study prioritizes documentation studies as the main method, while interviews are only used as a complement to corroborate or clarify data from documents.

The documents analyzed include:

1. RPJMDes and RKPDes Mekarsari (2020–2028),
2. APBDes and realization reports,
3. Minutes of village deliberations (Musdes),

4. Village institutional structure (BPD, LPM, Youth Organization),
5. Reports of physical and non-physical development activities.

Documents are obtained through official requests to village officials and access to available public archives.

The interview was conducted in a semi-structured manner with:

1. Village heads and key officials,
2. Chairman of BPD and community leaders,
3. Village Community Institutions.

However, this interview is not intended as a primary source, but only to confirm, clarify, or provide additional illustrations of the documentation data.

### **Data Analysis Techniques**

Data is analyzed through the following qualitative stages:

1. Data reduction: filtering the content of documents based on research focus (leadership, institutions, local politics);
2. Categorization: grouping data based on theory (Dahl, Burns, March & Olsen);
3. Contextual interpretation: comparing real data with theoretical concepts to find patterns;
4. Conclusion: formulate a scientific narrative that explains the relationship between the variables studied.

### **Research Location**

The location of the study is Mekarsari Village, which was chosen because:

1. Has a distinctive economic base (bamboo weaving craftsmen),
2. Have prepared RPJMDes and RKPDes according to the regulatory stages,
3. Experiencing local political dynamics after the elections, where political rivalry produces pressure on the implementation of development programs,
4. It has a complete institutional structure, but in its implementation there is a test of polarized social conditions.

## **DISCUSSION**

## **Overview of Mekarsari Village**

Mekarsari Village is one of the villages located in Selaawi District, Garut Regency, with lush rural geographical characteristics and the majority of the population works as farmers, bamboo weaving craftsmen, and small-scale farming actors. The social structure of the Mekarsari Village community is communal with strong kinship ties, as is commonly found in agrarian communities in rural West Java (Prasetyo et al., 2021). In addition, the existence of informal family-based and religious groups also strengthens citizens' social networks in daily life. However, in recent years, especially since the village head election (Pilkades), this village has experienced significant socio-political dynamics. The current village head is the result of competitive political contestation, which leaves a political residue in the form of social fragmentation among the residents. Pressure from opposing political groups often arises in the form of symbolic resistance or negative assessments of village development policies, even though these policies have been formulated through legal-formal processes such as RPJMDes and RKPDes.

This phenomenon shows that citizen participation in development is not always substantive. In line with the theory of Robert Dahl (1989), the quality of participation is determined more by the legitimacy of the process and the openness of the dialogue space, rather than just physical involvement in the deliberative forum. The subjective perceptions formed by past political affiliations have shifted the focus of the community from the substance of policy towards the personalization of village heads. This model shows that citizen participation becomes non-linear and prone to political bias if the sociopolitical conditions of the village are not managed in an inclusive manner (Damanik & Nugroho, 2022). In addition, according to the neo-institutionalism approach (March & Olsen, 2006), village institutions such as BPD, LPM, and Karang Taruna are also an arena for contesting the meaning and interpretation of power. If not managed in a neutral and professional manner, these institutions can become a means of prolonging political conflicts, instead of being a forum for strengthening participation and transparency. Thus, local political dynamics in Mekarsari Village directly or indirectly help shape the pattern of participation and effectiveness of the village development program as a whole.

## **Development Planning Implementation: RPJMDes and RKPDes**

The implementation of development planning in Mekarsari Village is based on the Village Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMDes) and the Village Government Work Plan (RKPDDes) which are prepared in a participatory and tiered manner. The preparation of the RPJMDes has referred to the principles stipulated in Permendagri No. 114 of 2014 concerning Village Development Guidelines, as well as Permendesa PD TT No. 21 of 2020 which is updated every year as the basis for the priority use of Village Funds. All stages of planning have gone through the process of Hamlet Deliberation (Musdus), Village Deliberation (Musdes), and the formation of the RPJMDes Drafting Team, in accordance with a deliberative planning approach that emphasizes the involvement of residents as a whole (Sulistiyani, 2022).

The focus of the development program is directed at meeting basic needs and strengthening the village economy. This is reflected in the priorities of infrastructure development such as the repair of farming roads, the construction of waterways, and the artesian water system with pipes considering that Mekarsari Village is a drought-prone area during the dry season. In addition, the village government also develops the potential of tourist villages through capital participation in BUMDes, as well as organizing entrepreneurship training based on local crafts, especially bamboo weaving, as a characteristic of the village economy.

The annual RKPDDes document is prepared as a derivative of the RPJMDes and ratified through the Village Regulation (Perdes). The process of drafting it procedurally has met the principles of accountability and formal legality. However, at the implementation level, village governments often face social obstacles in the form of narrative resistance from opposition groups stemming from post-election political rivalries. The criticism conveyed was not aimed at the substance of the program, but at the perception of the figure of the village head and his political affiliation. In this context, citizen participation is not solely measured by technical involvement, but is also strongly influenced by social sentiment and political trust (Damanik & Nugroho, 2022). If not responded to wisely, this situation has the potential to shift the focus of the village government from the substantive work of development to a response to political pressure and public opinion. This is in line with the view of March and Olsen (2006) in the neo-institutionalism approach which explains that institutions are not only formal-structural, but also an arena of political interpretation that can strengthen or weaken the legitimacy of policies depending on the perceptions of citizens and local elites. Thus, even though the planning has followed applicable regulations and procedures, the effectiveness of implementation is still determined by the ability

of the village government to maintain open communication, maintain public trust, and manage socio-political pressures constructively.

### **Village Head Leadership Performance**

Based on the results of the study of planning documents and the implementation of development, as well as clarification through limited interviews, it can be concluded that the head of Mekarsari village has carried out his role administratively in accordance with the provisions of the applicable law. All stages of village governance, from planning, budgeting, implementation, to reporting, are carried out openly. This transparency is shown through the delivery of information through village bulletin boards, citizens' deliberative forums, and annual performance reports that can be accessed by the public. This shows the strong commitment of village heads in realizing the principles of accountability and participatory governance (Damanik & Nugroho, 2022). When viewed in the framework of transformational leadership theory developed by Burns (1978), the leadership pattern of the Mekarsari village chief contains transformational elements. First, the village head is able to maintain the direction and stability of village development despite facing political pressure from opposition groups after the elections. Second, the vision of medium-term development contained in the RPJMDes document is not only administrative, but also describes the direction of structural change that is to be achieved with the community. Third, the village head showed active efforts in carrying out a dialogical approach to bridge political differences and rebuild the social solidarity of villagers. However, the achievement of this transformational leadership still faces challenges, especially in the aspect of idealized influence or the ideal influence of the figure of the village head who should be a collective role model. Political polarization that has not fully recovered still leaves moral resistance from some residents who view village leadership subjectively. In this context, as explained by March and Olsen (2006), local leaders are not only required to carry out administrative functions, but must also be able to manage symbols, values, and public perceptions that are often dynamic in the institutional social space. Thus, although the village head has normatively demonstrated good performance in running the wheel of village governance, strengthening symbolic and ethical leadership capacity remains a crucial aspect to build long-term legitimacy in sustainable village governance.

### **Village Institutional Dynamics: Representative Functions and Social Filters**

In the village government structure, institutions such as the Village Consultative Body (BPD), Rukun Warga (RW), Rukun Tetangga (RT), Community Empowerment Institution (LPM), as well as youth and professional organizations such as Karang Taruna and artisan groups have a strategic role as intermediaries between the village government and residents. In Mekarsari Village, the existence of these institutions not only carries out administrative functions, but also becomes an important actor in maintaining social cohesion and managing public communication. BPD, in some contexts, plays a key role in bridging public perceptions that tend to be critical of village government. Through informal and formal forums, BPD is able to build a more neutral discussion space and facilitate dialogue between the opposition and the village government, especially after the Pilkades which caused social fragmentation. This is in line with the view of March and Olsen (2006), that institutions do not only function as formal legal structures, but also as an arena for processing norms, values, and socio-political practices that develop in society.

Village institutions in Mekarsari show a role as a social filter, especially in the face of political narratives that emerge from opposition groups. Through inclusive deliberations and open publications on the realization of village programs, these local institutions seek to create transparency and strengthen social accountability (Sulistiyani, 2022). Nevertheless, the effectiveness of these representative functions and social control is greatly influenced by the internal political constellation of the institution itself. Not infrequently, some members of the institution actually have political affiliations with former village head candidates or part of the opposition network. This partiality can affect the institutional position in taking attitudes, and in some cases lead to information distortion and inhibition of the collective oversight function. In this context, the role of village institutions as pillars of local democracy requires strengthening the values of neutrality, transparency, and institutional ethics so that they do not become practical political instruments that are counterproductive to village development (Damanik & Nugroho, 2022).

### **Strategies for Dealing with Political Pressure**

After the competitive Pilkades contest, Mekarsari Village faces socio-political tensions that have the potential to hinder the implementation of development programs. In situations that

are vulnerable to horizontal conflicts, village heads take a number of adaptive strategies to maintain government stability and the continuity of the village development agenda.

The first strategy is to increase information transparency, especially in terms of budget management and program implementation. Information is conveyed openly through visual media such as APBDes banners, project information boards, and public announcements at strategic points in the village. This effort is in line with the principle of public accountability put forward by Damanik & Nugroho (2022), namely that information disclosure can be an instrument to build trust in a politically polarized society.

The second strategy is the preparation of development programs based on objective needs identified through the Hamlet Conference (Musdus). This approach reflects an inclusive participatory planning model, as emphasized in Permendagri 114/2014 and emphasized by Sulistiyani (2022) that the legitimacy of planning is obtained through citizen involvement from the early stages of identifying needs. Thus, the resulting program is not only administratively valid, but also has the social carrying capacity of residents who feel that they also determine the direction of village policies.

The third strategy is a relational approach that prioritizes personal and institutional communication. Village heads establish intense relationships with community leaders and village institutions such as BPD, LPM, and Karang Taruna, as an effort to reduce potential conflicts and rebuild social cohesion. This reflects the principle of transformational leadership theory (Burns, 1978), in which leaders not only act as administrators, but also as moral agents who maintain social integration and the collective direction of society.

Although these three strategies do not completely eliminate the remaining political resistance, they are empirically able to maintain the sustainability of village programs and minimize horizontal friction. The success of this strategy indicates the importance of responsive and dialogue-based leadership, especially in the context of villages that are still in the process of post-election recovery.

### **Theoretical Reflection**

Reflection on the dynamics of participation, leadership, and institutions in Mekarsari Village shows a strong relevance between the field findings and the theoretical framework used in this study. Three main theoretical approaches—democratic participation, transformational

leadership, and neo-institutionalism—provide a complementary lens for understanding the complexities of village governance.

First, Robert Dahl's (1961) theory of democratic participation states that public participation does not have to be uniform or linear, but rather depends on the legitimacy and openness of the decision-making process. In the context of Mekarsari, the participation of residents is often influenced by political polarization and perceptions of the figure of the village head. Although formal forums such as Musdes and Musdus have been implemented, the substantive involvement of some citizens is still limited by past political preferences. This confirms Dahl's argument that the quality of local democracy is determined more by deliberative processes than mere quantity of attendance (Dahl, 1989; Sulistiyani, 2022).

Second, the transformational leadership model of James MacGregor Burns (1978) is relevant to explain how village chiefs are able to maintain the collective direction of development despite political pressure. The village head not only carries out administrative functions, but also seeks to build the collective morale of the community through dialogue communication and the formulation of a medium-term vision outlined in the RPJMDes. However, idealized influence has not been fully achieved because social fragmentation after the Pilkades still leaves distrust from some residents (Damanik & Nugroho, 2022).

Third, the approach to neo-institutionalism as developed by March and Olsen (2006) highlights how village institutions not only act as formal structures, but also as battlegrounds for meaning and interests. In Mekarsari, institutions such as BPD, LPM, and Karang Taruna play a dual role—on the one hand as a reinforcement of development legitimacy, but on the other hand they also become channels for articulating political resistance when co-opted by certain interests. Institutions that are not neutral can create bias in the implementation of representative and supervisory functions.

These three theories not only provide a complete framework for understanding the empirical conditions in the village, but also open up space for reflection for strengthening village governance based on political ethics, institutional inclusivity, and social legitimacy.

## CONCLUSIONS

### Conclusion

This study reveals that the management of village funds in Mekarsari Village, Selaawi District, Garut Regency runs within a planning framework in accordance with formal regulations, but is faced with real political challenges. The leadership of the village head has been proven to carry out its functions administratively and visionarily, by compiling RPJMDes and RKPDes through a legal-formal participatory process. However, political resistance from the losing party in the Pilkades created social fragmentation that hindered the effectiveness of village development, at least in public perception.

Village institutions such as BPD and LPM play an important role as conflict mediators and intermediary liaison. However, its effectiveness depends heavily on the political neutrality and capacity of its members. Village heads who are able to practice transformational leadership styles (Burns, 1978), as well as build communication across groups, have a greater chance of maintaining the stability and effectiveness of development programs.

Dahl's (1989) theory emphasizes the importance of authentic participatory democracy, while March & Olsen (2006) argues that local institutions are a reproduction arena of values and power, not merely a formal procedure. The three theories used show that village governance is strongly influenced by the interaction between formal structures, moral leadership, and socio-political dynamics.

### Implementation

#### Recommendation for the Mekarsari Village Government:

1. Proactively increase transparency and public communication so that development information can be widely understood;
2. Encourage the further strengthening of non-formal institutions, such as artisan groups, as an alternative path of participation;
3. Involving residents from various backgrounds in planning forums to create a sense of ownership of village development.

#### Recommendation for Local Governments:

1. Conducting institutional neutrality training for BPD and LPM so as not to be dragged into local conflicts;

2. Providing a space for dialogue between village political groups as a form of post-election reconciliation.

### **Recommendation for future researchers:**

1. Expansion of the study to other villages with different socio-political typologies to enrich the understanding of the relationship between local politics and the success of village development;
2. Follow-up research with ethnographic approaches or social network analysis to explore more stable power dynamics.

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