

Research Article

The Development of a Village Bureaucratic Reform Model Based on Mutual Cooperation: A Study on the Development of Underdeveloped Villages in East Nusa Tenggara

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Abstract.

Bureaucratic reform is needed not only at the national level but also at the village level. Since 2014, Indonesia's development focus has been directed towards villages, yet the performance of village-level bureaucracy is still considered weak. Many villages have not been able to optimize their local potential due to a lack of collaboration and integration of communal values, such as gotong royong (mutual cooperation), within the village bureaucratic system. This study aims to formulate a model for measuring village-level bureaucratic reform based on gotong royong in East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) and Lebak Regency, Banten. The research emphasizes the importance of community participation in village bureaucratic collaboration, particularly in the Komodo District, West Manggarai Regency, which faces challenges in human resource empowerment and technological limitations. Despite having tourism potential, the villages in this area have not fully benefited from bureaucratic reform and village autonomy. In Lebak Regency, as of 2023, there were 78 underdeveloped villages where efforts toward bureaucratic reform was hindered by limited capacity of village officials and the low utilization of information technology. Moreover, some villages struggle with effectively managing village funds. This study employs a qualitative approach, enabling an in-depth exploration and development of a village-level bureaucratic reform model, particularly in villages classified as underdeveloped according to the Village Development Index. The findings suggest the implementation of a more collaborative bureaucratic reform, grounded in local wisdom, such as gotong royong in NTT and Lebak, to enhance village development effectiveness. Community empowerment and the integration of local wisdom into village governance are key factors in overcoming these challenges, aiming to improve village bureaucratic performance and maximize local potential.

Keywords: bureaucratic reform, collaboration, gotong royong (mutual cooperation), underdeveloped villages

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1. Introduction

Since 2014, Indonesia's development priorities have shifted toward village development. One of the government's priorities, as stated in the third "Nawacita" (nine priorities) program, is to build Indonesia from the periphery by strengthening regions and villages within the framework of the unitary state. This reflects that village development is expected to foster self-reliance, especially through local economic growth driven by the community.

In accordance with the mandate of Law No. 6 of 2014 on Villages (1), village development aims to improve the welfare and quality of life for rural communities. Villages are considered a significant issue in peripheral development, and therefore, village development is expected to help strengthen the regions. Villages are not only seen as objects of development but are placed as subjects and the spearhead of development to improve community welfare. On the other hand, the government's efforts to enhance regional development include increasing transfers of funds to regions and villages each year. In line with the Village Law, villages need to be protected and empowered to become strong, advanced, and self-sufficient.

The government has designated underdeveloped regions to promote economic development equity. With this, the government can identify areas that need serious attention to ensure better outcomes. According to the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) data in 2021, East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) province is categorized as an underdeveloped region. NTT has 1,192 islands, of which 432 are named and inhabited, 42 are inhabited but unnamed, and 1,150 are uninhabited (2). Based on BPS data, in 2019, there were 31 severely underdeveloped villages, which decreased to 6 in 2020 and 4 in 2021 (3). Additionally, the number of underdeveloped villages decreased from 1,532 in 2019 to 1,121 in 2020, and further to 951 in 2021. These figures indicate that NTT ranks as the second most underdeveloped region nationally, with a considerable number of underdeveloped districts (4). NTT's underdevelopment is largely due to poor education quality.

On the other hand, the Village Development Index (IDM) classifies villages into five categories based on different thresholds. Severely underdeveloped villages have an IDM score of <0.491 , underdeveloped villages score >0.491 and <0.599 , developing villages score >0.599 and <0.707 , advanced villages score >0.707 and <0.815 , and self-sufficient villages score >0.815 . Based on these criteria, NTT was categorized as an underdeveloped province in 2019, with an IDM score of 0.5596, which slightly improved

in 2020 to 0.5804, and again to 0.5885 in 2021. By 2022, the score increased to 0.6104 (5), categorizing it as a developing province, and in 2023, the score rose to 0.6210, maintaining its developing status (6). The scoring is based on the Social Resilience Index, Economic Resilience Index, and Ecological Resilience Index of villages. The goal of this index is to establish the progress and self-sufficiency of villages and provide basic data and information for village development.

Despite NTT's abundant natural resources, village communities face numerous challenges. Many villages lack essential infrastructure such as roads, electricity, clean water, and telecommunications, preventing residents from accessing essential services. For instance, the clean water crisis in Pana Village, South Central Timor, NTT, leads to widespread drought during the dry season, negatively impacting agricultural yields, which are crucial for the population. Farmers cannot plant or harvest due to the water shortage, disrupting food supplies and the local economy (7). Additionally, poverty levels in NTT are high, especially in rural areas, indicating a pressing need for improved economic welfare. The lack of basic infrastructure in most villages is a major issue hindering progress. Many villages lack roads, electricity, and affordable clean water systems, directly affecting daily life and impeding economic growth and quality of life.

Moreover, poverty rates in NTT are significantly higher in rural areas. In 2023, the poverty rate increased by 9,500 people, with a 0.28% increase in urban areas and a 0.1% decrease in rural areas (8). Despite the reduction in rural poverty, it still accounts for 23.76% of the population, posing a significant barrier to village progress. Many households live below the poverty line and lack adequate access to education, health-care, and employment opportunities. This social and economic inequality creates an environment that hinders village community development and growth.

One major issue in NTT villages is the lack of access to healthcare and education services. High stunting rates are not only due to malnutrition but also the difficulty in accessing healthcare services (9). As of 2017, many healthcare facilities remained unaccredited. Of the 394 community health centers (puskesmas), only 122, or 31%, were accredited, while of the 50 hospitals, 32, or 64%, had received accreditation (10). Compared to the standard of one accredited puskesmas per subdistrict, only 38.2% of subdistricts had an accredited health center. Although not yet half, this represents progress toward meeting existing standards. For hospitals, the standard is that each district/city must have at least one accredited general hospital. Of the 22 districts/cities, 12, or 54.5%, had an accredited general hospital. Accredited healthcare services automatically improve service quality. However, in places like Tilir Health Center

in Manggarai, NTT, residents expressed dissatisfaction with the services provided, citing limited facilities, poor staff attitudes, and inadequate administrative services (11).

The high poverty and inadequate healthcare services significantly impact NTT residents' productivity. For example, despite the high tourist interest in Labuan Bajo, tourism has not contributed significantly to local community empowerment efforts. Furthermore, human resources in the tourism sector remain underdeveloped (12), and local entrepreneurs lack the capital to market creative economy products and protect intellectual property rights. NTT's rich natural resources, including cultural traditions and marine and fisheries potential, present significant economic opportunities. However, only 16% of the province's annual fisheries potential of 393,360 tons is utilized, and only 11,000 hectares of the available 52,000 hectares of salt land are developed (13). NTT's abundant natural resources stand in stark contrast to its impoverished human resources, making it essential to optimize the management of these resources with support from the community and government for maritime development (14). Effective collaboration among stakeholders and the implementation of local government regulations to utilize natural resources will contribute to community development.

Bureaucratic reform is needed not only at the national level but also at the village level. Bureaucratic reform at the village level is important because the quality of bureaucratic performance in Indonesia is still considered poor, especially at the village government level (15). The bureaucracy plays a crucial role in running the government at all levels, including village governments. However, many village-level organizations still fail to meet expectations. Common issues include low work ethic, lack of punctuality, and the tendency for officials to prioritize personal interests over their duties. One of the main reasons for poor village bureaucracy is the inadequate competence of human resources, both in terms of regulations and the use of technology to support their work. Bureaucracy is essential for organizations as it provides a rational framework for decision-making. In Indonesia, bureaucracy is often seen as ineffective, especially in public services, which are frequently criticized for being overly complicated, slow, and burdensome. Therefore, bureaucratic reform is necessary to create competent state apparatuses and improve public services, leading to greater satisfaction among citizens.

Village-level bureaucratic reform is a crucial step toward improving local governance and enhancing the well-being of rural communities. By reducing excessive bureaucracy and streamlining administrative processes, villages can use resources and time more efficiently. This allows them to focus more on delivering better services to residents and managing village affairs more effectively.

Additionally, bureaucratic reform enhances transparency and accountability in financial management and public services at the village level. With more open reporting mechanisms and easier access to information, residents can better monitor village government performance and public fund use. This fosters greater trust in village governance and encourages more responsive and efficient governance. The village-level bureaucratic reform process should not only focus on service improvements but also on developing local resources. However, there is still no clear measurement for village-level bureaucratic reform.

According to the National Team for the Acceleration of Poverty Reduction, village development measurement tools, particularly in terms of progress, are designed using a minimum service standard approach, which becomes the responsibility of village governments. However, this approach leaves issues such as “measuring what is not built and building what is not measured.” Village development is aligned with the Ministry of Villages Regulation on the Use of Village Funds, which is updated annually since 2015. The latest regulation is Minister of Villages, PDT, and Transmigration Regulation No. 16 of 2018 on Priority Use of Village Funds for 2019. Village-level development is measured by the Village Development Index (IPD) and the Geographical Difficulty Index (IKG), according to data from the Ministry of National Development Planning/Bappenas in 2015 (16).

2. Theoretical Study

2.1. Bureaucratic Reform

Almond and Powell (17) define bureaucracy as a set of tasks and positions formally organized within a complex hierarchy, subject to formal role-making. Ripley and Franklin (18) state that government bureaucracy is related to public affairs. Furthermore, they explain that the essence of government bureaucracy is to provide public services, advance the economic sector, regulate various activities of the private sector, and redistribute benefits to society. It is evident that bureaucracy is an essential instrument in development, serving as the policy-maker, implementer, and provider of public services. The existence of a professional bureaucracy that delivers excellent services to the public it serves is a prerequisite for improving the quality of life. However, the efforts to establish a professional bureaucracy still face numerous challenges.

Public administration scholars have identified that bureaucracy can also become a developmental issue, such as the dilemma between bureaucracy and democracy, as expressed by Etzioni-Halevy (19), red tape bureaucracy (20), and the iron law of oligarchy (21). Over the past decade, the Indonesian government has made various efforts to improve bureaucracy through bureaucratic reform. However, several obstacles and challenges remain in its implementation. According to a report from the Asian Development Bank and the Partnership for Governance Reform in Indonesia, it was noted that the goals of governance reform undertaken by the Indonesian government—such as restructuring the state governance system, decentralizing government, and reforming state finances—have proceeded fairly smoothly but have not yet achieved the desired outcomes (22). One of the reasons for this failure is the lack of serious attention to organizational culture in bureaucratic reform.

Effendi (23) explains that bureaucratic performance is often associated with poor performance, low efficiency and productivity, and an inability to adapt to changes, which pose challenges in improving the bureaucracy. The Indonesian government has implemented bureaucratic reforms as stipulated in the Minister of Administrative and Bureaucratic Reform Regulation No. PER/15/M.PAN/7/2008 concerning General Guidelines for Bureaucratic Reform and Ministerial Regulation No. 3 of 2023, which amends the 2020-2024 Bureaucratic Reform Roadmap. These regulations state that bureaucratic reform is an essential instrument for accelerating development and is one of the national development priorities.

Bureaucratic reform is closely linked to the President's directives to establish a results-oriented bureaucracy capable of ensuring that policy benefits are felt by the public, as well as a bureaucracy that is agile and swift. This bureaucratic reform has been adopted as a reference for ministries, agencies, and local governments in implementing their policies. The 2014 bureaucratic reform introduced a rule-based bureaucracy, while in 2019, bureaucratic reform shifted towards a results-oriented bureaucracy, supported by performance management and digital governance. The achievements of these bureaucratic reforms offer opportunities for further improvement of government bureaucracy and are highly worthy of adoption and refinement.

A decade of implementing the Village Law provides a foundation for transforming villages toward greater self-sufficiency and substantive progress in addressing village issues. While bureaucratic reform has mainly focused on local governments, this study proposes adopting bureaucratic reform at the village level. Village-level bureaucratic reform is a crucial step in improving local governance and enhancing the well-being of

the community. Villages can reduce excessive bureaucracy and streamline administrative processes, making them more efficient in resource and time utilization.

Village bureaucratic reform should be proposed as an instrument to help villages strengthen the infrastructure of their governance systems. Caiden (24) stated that administrative reform is essentially an aspect of societal reform or change. Caiden adds that administrative reform means an attitude of change toward principles, organization, structure, methods, or procedures to continuously improve administrative processes through evolution rather than revolution. The substance of Caiden's statement can serve as a guide for determining the scope of village bureaucratic reform. It is important to understand that administrative reform and bureaucratic reform are distinct concepts. Bureaucratic reform is part of administrative reform. In this context, the focus will be on village-level bureaucratic reform.

Currently, bureaucratic reform is taking place within ministries, agencies, and central and regional government institutions. Villages should embrace a new era of village governance without abandoning their identity, allowing them to become more accountable and competent in performing their roles and functions. Four key issues in village bureaucratic reform must be considered: 1) strengthening village institutional structures, 2) developing the competencies of village heads and officials, 3) enhancing local potential and community economic development, and 4) improving governance, empowerment, and public participation in village development. Village bureaucratic reform cannot be equated with bureaucratic reform in ministries, agencies, or other government institutions. Villages have their own unique characteristics as the lowest community entities with their own governance systems. The foundation of village governance lies in social and cultural values, which are bound by a spirit of service. Therefore, the aspects of village bureaucratic reform will be formulated based on the village's unique characteristics.

2.2. Village

A village is a region inhabited by a number of people as a community unit, which includes a legal community unit with the lowest level of government organization directly under the sub-district head and has the right to manage its own affairs within the framework of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (25). Referring to this definition, a village represents the smallest government entity and possesses legal legitimacy within the Indonesian governmental system. As the smallest community entity with governance, a

village has an institutional structure filled by individuals who are entrusted with duties and authority to manage the village government. The diversity of villages in Indonesia, such as nagari in West Sumatra, gampong in Aceh, kampung in Kalimantan and Papua, negeri in Maluku, and others, leads to differing structures and systems of governance across villages.

A village is also a legal community unit with the authority to manage its own affairs based on its origin and traditions, recognized by the National Government and situated within a regency. A village is considered a legal community unit with an original composition based on its unique origins. The fundamental principles regarding village governance include diversity, participation, original autonomy, democratization, and community empowerment (26).

According to Law No. 6 of 2014 on Villages, a village, referred to as either a village or a traditional village, is a legal community unit with defined territorial boundaries authorized to manage and administer governmental affairs, local community interests based on community initiatives, origin rights, and/or traditional rights recognized and respected within the governmental system of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia.

In the process of a village's formation, its societal journey, and the administration of its government, villages are heavily influenced by social, cultural, and values that grow and develop within them. Therefore, it is not surprising that institutional structures, governance systems, and the development of villages in Indonesia are highly diverse. Villages (in all their various forms) predate the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia. However, the results of implementing various development policies for villages have not shown significant progress for most of the approximately 75,000 villages. Numerous issues and challenges still plague villages across the archipelago. Law No. 6 of 2014 on Villages offers new hope for the future of villages. A decade of implementing the Village Law has shown some promising achievements, although the overall goals of the law have yet to be fully realized.

Village governance, after the implementation of the Village Law, has not yet fully achieved good village governance. Several strategic issues accompany the complexity of the Village Law's implementation, including: 1) accountability in the use of village funds, particularly regarding misuse of funds, 2) misalignment between programs and activities as manifestations of the Village Law, 3) the village's weak capacity for accelerating development, 4) unaccountable and unprofessional village government bureaucracy, and 5) the need for bureaucratic reform in village governance as a key strategy

for improving village governance. These issues and challenges should not unfairly be placed solely on the village (village heads, village officials, and the community). The essence of village governance is based on social activity and service, which has historically been disconnected from governance theories, concepts, and practices. Villages have traditionally been the object of development policies that often overlook them as key actors in implementation.

Since the Village Law was enacted, with its various administrative systems, it has, whether acknowledged or not, burdened villages with bureaucratic obligations. For villages that are already prepared and advanced in terms of governance, this is not a problem. However, for those villages that have not yet developed good administrative capabilities, the Village Law, with all its mandated systems, becomes a burden in fulfilling the village's role and functions. All obstacles and challenges in village governance need to be addressed and resolved promptly. Numerous studies, seminars, and workshops have been conducted to help villages accelerate their progress towards meeting governance standards under the Village Law regime. Training for village heads and officials is frequently conducted as a fundamental part of building village capacity.

2.3. Village Development

The history of village development cannot be separated from the development paradigms applied by the ruling regime at the national level. During the New Order era, the government prioritized economic growth as the primary indicator of development. This development model was considered a failure, with its main criticism stemming from its inability to empower rural communities. In response to this criticism, a new development paradigm emerged, focusing on people-centered development. This paradigm emphasized that development should not treat individuals as mere objects but as actors “who set goals, control resources, and direct processes that affect their lives” (27). Tjokrowinoto, as cited in Eko (28), described human-centered development with the following characteristics:

- The initiative and decision-making process to meet the needs of society, step by step, must be placed in the hands of the people themselves.
- The main focus is on enhancing the community's capacity to manage and mobilize local resources to meet their needs.
- It tolerates local variations and is flexible enough to adapt to local conditions.

- In implementing development, this approach emphasizes a social learning process, which involves collaborative interaction between the bureaucracy and the community, from planning to project evaluation, based on mutual learning.
- The process of network building between the bureaucracy and non-governmental organizations, as well as self-sufficient traditional organizations, is an integral part of this approach.

The principles of human-centered development have been adopted and codified in Law No. 6 of 2014 on Villages. Village development, as explained in Law No. 6 of 2014, is an effort to improve the quality of life and livelihoods for the greatest possible welfare of rural communities. Enhancing the quality of life and livelihoods cannot be achieved solely through physical development but must also be accompanied by economic, social, cultural, and other aspects of development. The concept of village development, which goes beyond mere physical development, is further elaborated in Article 78 of Law No. 6 of 2014, which states that the goal of village development is to improve the welfare of village communities and the quality of human life, as well as to alleviate poverty by fulfilling basic needs, developing village infrastructure, enhancing local economic potential, and utilizing natural resources and the environment sustainably. In its implementation, village development is expected to prioritize the principles of togetherness, familial values, and mutual cooperation in promoting social harmony and justice.

Over time, village development has often treated villages merely as subjects of development. However, the enactment of Law No. 6 of 2014 has granted villages broad autonomy and provided a solid legal foundation for village governance and development. This law grants greater authority to villages by enhancing their role in managing government affairs and development. Through this authority, villages are expected to independently carry out better and more responsive development, meeting the needs of their communities, increasing public participation in development, and further empowering rural areas.

The law also outlines that village governance should be based on the principles of recognition, subsidiarity, diversity, mutual cooperation, familial values, deliberation, democracy, self-reliance, participation, equality, empowerment, and sustainability. Two principles that hold even greater significance than decentralization are recognition and subsidiarity. These principles grant village governments the freedom to determine the form and direction of their development.

In Law No. 6 of 2014, the principle of recognition is defined as the acknowledgment of origin rights. The recognition granted to villages respects what has long been inherent in village governance. Recognition not only acknowledges and respects the diversity of villages, their status, authority, and origin rights, as well as their governance structures, but, as stated in the law, also involves economic redistribution through the allocation of funds from the national and regional budgets (29). Meanwhile, the principle of subsidiarity in the law is defined as the delegation of authority at the local level and decision-making at the local level in the interests of village communities. The principle of subsidiarity reflects respect for the smallest units within the state structure. This principle is intended to reduce excessive control by higher levels of government over village authorities, recognizing the village as the smallest organizational unit within the community.

3. Methods

This research employs a qualitative approach aimed at developing a “Village Bureaucratic Reform Model,” particularly in villages classified as “Underdeveloped” according to the Village Development Index. The qualitative method is chosen for its ability to provide a holistic analysis, capture descriptive information, and preserve the integrity of data within a case study context (30).

The study was conducted in Village XXX, East Nusa Tenggara, with data collected through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, observations, and secondary data analysis. In-depth interviews were conducted with relevant stakeholders to understand the phenomenon of village bureaucratic reform. The focus group discussions involved local government, community leaders, and representatives to gain insights into development achievements and challenges. Observations provided a comprehensive view, while secondary data was sourced from policy documents, regulations, and village development reports. A snowball sampling technique was used to gather sensitive, relevant data until data saturation was achieved.

Data validity was tested through internal and external validity. Internal validity assessed the accuracy of causal relationships, while external validity ensured the generalization of findings through literature review and data confirmation (31); (32). Data analysis followed the Miles and Huberman (33) model, consisting of four stages: data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The data was

categorized, reduced, and presented in relevant groups, with conclusions drawn based on the organized findings.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Social, Economic, Cultural, and Political Context

The research conducted in Manggarai Barat, Nusa Tenggara Timur (NTT) reveals significant challenges in the socio-political landscape of rural development, particularly within the bureaucratic framework. Villages in Manggarai Barat exhibit potential in terms of tourism and agriculture, but limitations in digital infrastructure and human resource (HR) capacity hinder effective village governance. Local leadership, especially village heads, often face difficulties in implementing reform due to inadequate training and a lack of technological proficiency.

Moreover, the local culture of gotong royong a traditional value emphasizing “mutual cooperation” presents a strong foundation for community involvement in development. Cultural practices such as dodo (collective farming work) and lonto leok (community consensus meetings) reflect the collective mindset that can support reform efforts if effectively harnessed. These cultural values are integral to the proposed reform model, emphasizing that collaborative efforts between the government and local communities can drive successful rural development.

4.2. Gotong Royong Model for Bureaucratic Reform

One of the primary findings of this research is the significance of the gotong royong model as a fundamental approach to bureaucratic reform in villages. This model promotes not only community participation but also governmental transparency and inclusivity in decision-making processes. However, the research findings indicate that while gotong royong is culturally ingrained, its institutionalization within the village governance system remains superficial. Community participation, particularly through the Musyawarah Perencanaan Pembangunan Desa (Musrenbangdes), has often been symbolic rather than fully integrated into decision-making.

For instance, while local governance structures have encouraged discussions on village development plans, there is often a disconnect between the formal processes and meaningful community engagement. This gap is partly due to regulatory constraints,

which centralize authority and limit village autonomy. Another identified issue is the lack of human resource capacity in village administrations. Village officials frequently struggle with modern governance tasks, such as financial management and the use of digital systems, which are essential for executing comprehensive development programs.

4.3. Challenges in Reforming Village Bureaucracy

Several challenges have been identified in reforming village bureaucracy through the gotong royong model:

4.3.1. Dependence on Central Budget Allocations

The heavy reliance on Dana Desa (Village Funds) limits the flexibility of villages in directing resources towards locally determined priorities. Central government policies strictly define the allocation of these funds, often leaving little room for innovation or adjustments based on specific local needs, such as stunting interventions.

4.3.2. Lack of Innovation

Despite the implementation of the Village Law, there has been minimal innovation in village governance. Much of the village development focus remains on infrastructure rather than on fostering local entrepreneurship or socio-economic empowerment. The expected “leap” in village governance and development has not materialized.

4.3.3. Limited HR Capacity

A critical barrier to effective bureaucratic reform is the lack of trained personnel in village administration. The complexity of modern governance, which requires a basic understanding of information technology (IT), financial management, and regulatory frameworks, often overwhelms local officials who lack these skills.

4.4. Recommendations for Strengthening Bureaucratic Reform

To address these challenges, several recommendations emerge from the study:

4.4.1. Capacity Building for Village Officials

Continuous training programs are essential for enhancing the HR capacity of village officials, especially in financial management and digital governance. Developing these competencies will empower village leaders to better manage funds, engage with the community, and implement development initiatives.

4.4.2. Empowering Local Communities Through Gotong Royong

The study emphasizes the need for a deeper integration of gotong royong into village governance. While this cultural value is already present, its role in formal bureaucratic processes remains limited. To maximize its potential, village governments must foster more inclusive decision-making processes, where community members have a substantive role beyond mere participation.

4.4.3. Greater Village Autonomy in Fund Allocation

Increased flexibility in the use of Dana Desa will allow villages to tailor development initiatives to local needs. The current strict budgetary allocations, such as mandatory percentages for certain programs, limit the villages' ability to address their unique challenges and explore innovative solutions.

4.4.4. Strengthening Partnerships with Local Institutions

The involvement of local adat (traditional institutions) is another critical aspect of the recommended reform model. By formalizing partnerships between village governments and traditional leaders, villages can harness local wisdom and communal structures to mediate conflicts and manage communal resources effectively.

4.5. Implications for Future Development

The findings suggest that the success of village bureaucratic reform depends on a holistic approach that leverages local cultural strengths, such as gotong royong, while addressing capacity gaps in governance. Additionally, there is a need for regulatory

adjustments that provide villages with more autonomy in managing their resources and development strategies.

The gotong royong-based reform model holds promise for transforming village governance in Manggarai Barat. However, for this model to be fully realized, significant investments in human resource development, technological infrastructure, and regulatory flexibility are required. These efforts must be aligned with the existing cultural practices to ensure sustainable and inclusive rural development.

4.6. Bureaucratic Reform in Lebak Regency

In addition to the main study in Manggarai Barat, insights from research conducted in Lebak Regency provide a valuable comparative perspective on the challenges and progress of village-level bureaucratic reform in another region of Indonesia. The findings highlight both commonalities and unique challenges in implementing village reform initiatives.

Lebak Regency has made significant strides in improving its Bureaucratic Reform Index (Indeks RB), with an aim to reach level 3. However, similar to Manggarai Barat, several obstacles remain, particularly in underdeveloped villages. As of 2023, 78 of the 340 villages in Lebak are still classified as underdeveloped, with 6 villages categorized as “severely underdeveloped” due to environmental risks such as landslides and floods. The unique case of Desa Kenekes, home to the Baduy indigenous community, showcases the balance between tradition and modern governance. The Baduy community has opted out of receiving Village Funds (Dana Desa) to preserve their cultural and environmental values, despite being regarded as self-sufficient by the government.

One of the significant parallels between Manggarai Barat and Lebak is the limited capacity of village officials. In Lebak, only three officials manage infrastructure and finance for 340 villages, and technical and managerial training is urgently needed to improve governance quality. This echoes the challenges observed in Manggarai Barat, where the lack of human resource capacity hampers the effective implementation of village reforms.

Moreover, both regions face technological challenges. In Lebak, many villages suffer from poor internet access, making it difficult to utilize digital tools like the Siskeudes application, which is intended to streamline financial management and development

planning. Similarly, Manggarai Barat villages struggle with digital illiteracy and lack of infrastructure, limiting their ability to fully adopt modern governance methods.

Lebak has made efforts to stimulate economic development through Badan Usaha Milik Desa (BUMDes), with 266 BUMDes established. However, the results have been mixed, and many BUMDes struggle to meet their operational costs. This finding complements the observation in Manggarai Barat, where village-owned enterprises face challenges in scaling up and tapping into broader markets. In both regions, BUMDes present a promising but underdeveloped avenue for economic growth, requiring stronger support in terms of management skills and strategic partnerships.

In summary, the research in Lebak Regency reinforces several key findings from Manggarai Barat, particularly the need for human resource development, better technological integration, and a more flexible regulatory framework that empowers villages to innovate and address local needs. While the focus on gotong royong in Manggarai Barat emphasizes community engagement, the experience of Lebak demonstrates the critical importance of enhanced governance capacity and infrastructural support in achieving successful bureaucratic reform. Together, these insights provide a broader understanding of the opportunities and challenges facing village reform in Indonesia.

5. Conclusion

This research reveals significant challenges in village bureaucratic reform in both Manggarai Barat and Lebak, particularly regarding human resource (HR) capacity and digital infrastructure. While the cultural value of gotong royong shows great potential to foster community participation in village development, its implementation remains largely symbolic and is not deeply integrated into decision-making processes. In this context, the limited HR capacity poses a major obstacle, especially in financial management and the adoption of digital technologies.

Additionally, the reliance on centrally allocated Village Funds (Dana Desa) restricts the flexibility of villages to direct resources according to local needs. The need for innovation in village governance, particularly in promoting local economic empowerment, remains unmet.

To address these challenges, continuous training programs are essential to enhance the HR capacity of village officials. Furthermore, greater flexibility in the allocation of Village Funds would allow villages to better tailor development programs to local needs.

Strengthening partnerships with traditional institutions and local communities is also necessary to create a more inclusive and sustainable reform model.

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