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# National paradigms in decentralized development: Evaluating bottom-up resilience strategies for achieving sustainable development goals

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) leaves a significant exploration space in the context of regional autonomy development. With less than 5 years remaining towards the target, regional autonomy, especially in the smallest villages, continues to be encouraged as a space for creating sustainable development that starts from the bottom. Through official state regulations in laws and ministerial regulations as well as Village Medium-Term Development Plan/*Rencana Pembangunan Jangka Menengah Desa (RPJMDes)*, a development model that looks participatory and inclusive has become a reference, but cannot be separated from several restrictions that make the need for a review of the inclusiveness of the model. **Methods:** This study uses a descriptive-qualitative method through a systematic review of policy documents and scientific literature. The data processing involved three systematic stages: reduction, categorization, and interpretation to synthesize the political implications of decentralized development in achieving SDGs under the framework of regional autonomy in Indonesia. **Findings:** The findings indicate that there are still significant challenges in establishing a truly participatory development model, despite indications that Indonesia already possesses sufficient institutional and political capacity to implement bottom-up approaches in development programs/policies. Furthermore, the analysis reveals that deeply rooted institutional and social cultures continue to hinder the shift from technocratic to participatory views, resulting in a decentralization process that remains partially democratic and often pseudo-participatory. **Conclusion:** This study concludes that development in Indonesia is not merely a technocratic-administrative matter, but rather a political process fraught with negotiations of interests. **Novelty/Originality of this article:** The novelty of this research lies in its critique of the traditional dichotomy between top-down and bottom-up approaches in the context of regional autonomy in Indonesia.

**KEYWORDS:** bottom-up approach; development; politics in development; SDGs; villages.

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## 1. Introduction

Both theoretically and in practice, the implementation of development policies in a country requires a thorough deepening of the complexities and dynamics that occur at all levels of society, starting from the bottom. This includes economic, social, and of course political factors. Cross-sectoral collaboration involving the government, private sector, and civil society is often seen as the key to successful, holistic, and sustainable development policies, as written by Sufianto (2020). Civil society is often a determinant of the success of

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development programs, especially in getting the context of localization by engaging in the identification of needs and maintaining inclusiveness (Al-Hamdi et al., 2024).

But ironically, the findings of previous studies show that if development with different strategies in each country, for example, Indonesia, which emphasizes agricultural development, there are always groups who want to exploit. The perception that people living in rural areas tend to experience poverty, which has an impact on health conditions and education, is increasingly formed with the development of culture. In fact, the state, through the government, chose to be absent and let the view be increasingly widespread in the layers of society (Pranadji et al., 2021).

This phenomenon is also known as the growth of ignorance. This means that the systematic growth of knowledge is directly proportional to the growth of ignorance. Development is not just a neutral process that brings social and economic progress, but also a political and epistemological process. Often, failure in undertaking development projects is not always due to lack of technology or resources, but rather to failure to understand the way local communities think and act (Hobart, 1993). The development paradigm is increasingly shifting to be decentralized and done starting from the regional level. Research conducted in 2024 shows that the application of both is a basic principle of sustainable development of a country (Suriadi et al., 2024).

Indonesia is a country that is not exempt from the declaration of decentralization of development. Over the past two decades, development that only targets economic growth and its negative impacts, has tended to encourage the creation of sustainable development that harmonizes various aspects, including the environment and society (Mulyadi et al., 2024). Law Number 23 of 2014 has binding rules that give wider powers to local governments, or more commonly known as regional autonomy in making decisions related to development in the area. The implementation of regional autonomy is not solely based on legal reference, but also the implementation of global demands that need to be empowered by giving wider, real and responsible authority to the regions. Especially in the context of organizing, digging and utilizing the potential of resources in the region (Ristanti & Handoyo, 2017).

The policy in the development program has also indicated that there is a reconfiguration of the approach to be used. Argumentation from Dasandi, Marquette, and Robinson (Dasandi et al., 2016) managed to open a new view where the need for small and gradual change-based approaches in various development contexts will be in harmony with increasingly complex realities, including forming coalitions of common interests. The view that development policy/program has evolved in complexity in the relationship between sectors and stakeholders increasingly requires a structured and complete foundation, so it needs a politically informed approach. The integration of political context with development policy/program has been recognized as fundamental, so that stakeholders focus not only on goals but also on management steps.

The question is, can development start from the village? As the smallest territorial space in Indonesia, villages have complex social and economic issues. Often, the village is considered an evidential basis for knowing and identifying various problems in development programs (Prabowo, 2013). The root of development problems in Indonesia can be said to be in the village. If social and economic problems in the village can be resolved, then most of the development challenges in Indonesia will be resolved. This can happen because the village is a source of problem identification. Villages are still lagging behind when compared to cities in development programs. Let's say the poverty rate is still higher, and also the largest percentage of the population has lower levels of health, purchasing power, and education compared to urban areas. That is why, in improving human development strategies, improving the quality of welfare and the economy of the community in advancing Indonesia, it must start from the village (Iskandar, 2020).

The declaration of the village SDGs in Indonesia since 2020 and continues to run until now has become a grand design of integrated development in villages throughout Indonesia, and can be an actualization of the principle of 'Think Globally, Act Locally'. This phrase encourages development planning that is based on world knowledge but starts from the

smallest and gradual elements. Kelsall and Hickey (2020) reviewed how the necessity for gradual and change-based approaches in various development programs that align with the local political context, potentially increasing their impact and sustainability. Development that starts from the village, and is strengthened by holistic and participatory planning that prioritizes the local context, can potentially support the acceleration of SDGs Achievement in Indonesia.

The arguments presented by Mcloughlin et al. clearly imply that everything related to development is a political thing. And development programs, as SDGs, cannot really be adopted without political influence (Mcloughlin et al., 2024). In their book titled *The Politics of Development*, Mchloughlin et al. explains about Three I's Framework yaitu institutions, interests, ideas *sebagai tiga kuasa sosial yang selalu ada setiap kali muncul kontestasi terhadap upaya pembangunan*. Wherever resources, rights, and powers are contested, the three pillars of the framework are inevitably involved. This means that in formal and non-formal structures, there are actors in various institutions with competing interests, while carrying the idea of what is right.

Therefore, it is essential for Indonesia, as a country participating in the SDGs, to examine the direction of its sustainable development policies more deeply. With decentralization-based development that starts from the village, the Three I's Framework can be a measure of the effectiveness produced by the policy. This study aims to examine and test the feasibility of integrating politics into development policy through a bottom-up approach, to determine whether it can be effectively applied as a whole in Indonesia.

## 2. Methods

This study was conducted using descriptive-qualitative methods, and prepared through an approach based on scientific literature and documents. The analysis that forms the basis of this research is an examination of the policy and politics of development, which not only tests the theory but also investigates the phenomenon to produce a conceptual synthesis. All data used as sources in this manuscript are secondary data, which are analyzed based on three main sources: public policy documents in the form of laws, presidential regulations or ministerial regulations, official government data in the form of reports, and scientific literature in the form of journal articles and books.

The basis of this article refers to the concept of the Politics of Development, Bottom-up Approach, and Governing the SDGs. All three contain arguments that underlie this research: the inextricable link between political practices and development programs, the urgency of adopting a decentralized approach, also known as a bottom-up approach, for development programs, and the SDGs as the most relevant benchmark for sustainable development programs. All data are collected and processed through a systematic review of policy documents and literature, utilizing the document and literature analysis process. Stages undertaken in reviewing all data include reduction, categorization, and interpretation. The three functions are to sort out relevant data, develop relationship patterns that integrate the political context in development programs with a bottom-up approach to achieving the SDGs, and interpret the political meaning and implications of development.

## 3. Results and Discussion

### 3.1 General context of regional development in Indonesia

In September 2025, the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Indonesia decided to reduce transfer funds to the regions/*Transfer ke Daerah (TKD)* in the state budget/*Anggaran Pendapatan dan Belanja Negara (APBN)* for 2026. Although the ministry said that the policy is temporary due to fiscal limitations (Ramalan & Setiawan, 2025), various parties, mainly from local governments, consider that the reduction in *TKD* for the regional budget/*Anggaran Pendapatan dan Belanja Daerah (APBD)* of up to 29.34% has the

potential to disrupt the course of local government, including its direct impact on regional spending (Akbar, 2025).

This situation will undoubtedly have a profound impact not only on the region, but also on the village. This cannot be separated from the fact that at least 10% of the total allocation of village funds/*Alokasi Dana Desa* (ADD) is still sourced from the APBD, as specified in Regulation of the Minister of Home Affairs No. 37 in 2007. The APBD itself, in addition to consisting of local revenue (*Pendapatan Asli Daerah/PAD*) but also relies on part of the central and regional financial balance (Permendagri, 2007). Development programs in regions and villages are affected by the policy. We can take an example from what happened in Boyolali, East Java, where the ADD in 2026 dropped to 39.9 billion rupiah when compared to last year (Prihatsari, 2025). A similar incident occurred in Jepara, Central Java. National policies related to trimming TKD require the Jepara Regency government to adjust its fiscal capabilities in conjunction with the infrastructure acceleration program. For the record, Jepara experienced a reduction in TKD of 232 billion rupiah (Shani, 2025).

Budget is not the only issue that needs to be considered in the context of regional development, particularly in rural areas. If using the village SDGs as a benchmark for sustainable village development, there are still serious challenges that need to be considered. One thing to note is the institutional capacity and human resources in the village, where there are still gaps in interpreting the principles of sustainability into the Village Development Plan document, or the Village Medium Term Development Plan/*Rencana Pembangunan Jangka Menengah Desa (RPJMDes)*. Observing the development, the annual routine approach remains the primary direction of development policy in most villages, where design is based solely on momentary needs.

The pattern is still used at the wider regional level administratively and even at the provincial level. For example, based on the West Java province SDGs report 2023, this region still faces serious challenges where actors involved in development, both government and private, still do not have a good understanding of the goals, targets and indicators of the SDGs. This is because the government apparatus at the provincial and district/city levels is still carrying out development programs based on the vision and mission of regional leaders, without an understanding of their relation to the achievement of the SDGs (Bappeda West Java, 2023). This phenomenon certainly needs to be a major concern if you want to align regional development with the SDGs at the village level, because in practice, there are still many *RPJMDes* that adjust to the regional Medium-Term Development Plan/*Rencana Pembangunan Jangka Menengah Daerah (RPJMD)* (Ratnawati et al., 2021), although with a different timeframe, which is within 6 years.

The second problem is that overlapping regulations from various ministries and institutions still exist in relation to village development. Although the coordinator in all matters related to village affairs is still under the Ministry of Villages and Development of Disadvantaged Regions (*Kemendes PDTT*), using the foundation of sectoral regulations, several relevant ministries, such as the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Ministry of Social Affairs, to the National Planning and Development Agency/*Badan Perencanaan Pembangunan Nasional (Bappenas)* often release guidelines and program references that are not necessarily aligned (Hakim & Hanif, 2025). If the content in substance in the released ministerial regulation intersects with each other, it can potentially cause a conflict of norms at the Ministerial Regulation level. Moreover, if the provisions related to coordination between ministries are not listed in the content to guide the village (Retnowati et al., 2022). The context described above is certainly a case study; empirical data have not been found to accurately compare the performance of rural sustainable development in every region in Indonesia. However, with the issuance of Law No. 6 of 2014, the village has had a paradigm shift in development by becoming a subject and object simultaneously (Assajid et al., 2024).

### 3.2 Institutions: Structure and mechanism of village institutions

Institutions can be likened to rules in the social layer, they are concepts that form habits and norms in society. Both formally and informally, institutions can also be rules and precedents that structure political behavior, including through government structures. It is these structures that can ultimately shape up to limit development policy choices in a variety of ways. Many researchers argue that policy networks also have a strong influence on development policy by bringing together actors outside of government (Gauvin, 2014). Policy networks serve to regulate the course of effective governance through cooperative action between the government, private sector, and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in order to overcome public problems (Salamon, 2002).

The key role of institutions in development policy is evident in their position as strong, stable, inclusive, and accountable institutions. The journey to form such an institution is often seen as a major challenge in any development (Fukuyama, 2014). In the context of Rural Development in Indonesia, one aspect that is strong in participation but weak in implementation is inclusiveness. These aspects are carried out at the development planning stage, and are often referred to as Village Development Planning deliberations. Regulation of the Minister of Villages, development of disadvantaged regions, and Transmigration number 21 of 2020 has clearly stated that the village development planning meeting or *musrenbang desa* is a meeting involving village instruments, namely the Village Consultative Body/*Badan Permusyawaratan Desa (BPD)* and the village government, with community elements to set priorities in each village development program and activity. Regardless of whether or not people actively participate, the urgency of their involvement is already emphasized in the law.

In the implementation flow, *musrenbang desa* is one of the stages of activities in preparing the *RPJMDes*. This stage is carried out after a review of the results of the alignment of the Village Development Planning Policy direction, and then compiled into the *RPJMDes* plan, which is discussed in the *musrenbang desa*. The results of the village *musrenbang* are then presented to the village council for discussion, agreement, and determination of the *RPJMDes*, which will be valid for the next six years.

If we return to the ideal institutional indicators, the development planning stage at the village level has largely met most of the development requirements, utilizing a bottom-up approach. It can be seen from the role of the village government, which acts as a facilitator rather than a single formulator, that planning begins at the lowest level, namely the village, through the village *musrenbang*, to the involvement of BPD and the village community in the deliberation. All of them are regulated in the ministerial regulation as outlined earlier. However, what also needs to be emphasized is that, although comprehensive as any indicator used in formulating development based on a bottom-up approach, its implementation must still align with development planning at a higher administrative level –in this case, the district/city. This is regulated in the same ministerial regulation that regulates the bottom-up approach in the village. Article 26, paragraph 1, states in detail that the preparation of the *RPJMDes* is carried out in accordance with the direction of the Regency/City Development Planning Policy. Thus, although the design process at the village level is carried out in a participatory and inclusive manner, there is a tendency for the process to be merely formal, as it still needs to consider broader regional development. It can also be concluded that institutionally, there is room for a bottom-up approach in village development policy by departing from what is truly needed by the community, but government structures still impose certain limits.

### 3.3 Interests: Actors in village development

In the process of understanding interest as the second pillar in development based on political principles, it is necessary to proceed from the understanding that each person or part of a group has different interests in order to achieve a goal. It is also important to remember that the foundation of any political activity is the struggle for power. Those in

power will continue to conspire to maintain their positions, while those in opposition will be increasingly marginalized. Similarly, in a status quo situation, it is likely that certain groups have an interest in maintaining the status quo because it can give them an advantage. Albert Weale once wrote that if wherever humans are can always be collectively rational, then humanity will achieve more in the common good (Weale, 2004).

The same model also occurs in the context of development, including in the village. Interest which is defined as the agenda of a group of people, elected officials, government employees, researchers, and policy entrepreneurs (Pomey et al., 2010) reflects common assumptions about development policy and its choices. Such assumptions include that the policy is driven by real interests or that various stakeholders want to perceive. This includes the groups within the government, and their desire to influence the policy process in order to achieve two things: their personal goals, as well as power relations between stakeholders and the government (Peters, 2002).

A group of people or an individual with an interest in the political process is called an actor. In social mapping, actors are entities that play significant roles in their involvement with societal issues and problems. Actors are also closely tied to various interests, which have both positive and negative impacts, reflecting their actual actions. With their knowledge and networks, actors also often have significant influence, enabling them to shape societal movements (Yunindyawati et al., 2022). With actors from various backgrounds, including political figures, community leaders, and scholars, it is highly likely that there will be a cross-pollination of interests in formulating and planning village development. The interests of these actors are divided into several spectrums that directly affect village development, such as economics through ADD, politics that attach importance to the legitimacy of an actor in the village area, and social aspects, by aiming for recognition so that they occupy strategic positions at the community level. The concept of collaborative governance can serve as a tool to find common ground among these diverse interests. Processes in collaborative governance include involving various actors and stakeholders who pursue their respective interests in achieving common goals (Hartman et al., 2002).

Emerson et al. (2012) has developed a framework capable of integrating differences of interest through three main mechanisms in collaborative governance. All three must fill the space for the creation of dialogue, trust and mutual commitment. Each actor has an equal opportunity to express his interests and listen to the interests of other actors. It's about working cooperatively instead of competitively. The existence of a dialogue space also fosters a sense of mutual trust that builds gradually through repeated interactions. Finally, once differences in interests are reconciled, each actor can commit to undertaking collective actions for the common good. This commitment serves as the basis for implementing public purposes that cannot be carried out individually or uniformly.

### *3.4 Ideas: Discourse and ideology of village development*

Ideas and discourses are fundamental to understanding why each actor has different interests. Again, human behavior can be influenced not only by institutions or actors with material interests, but also by ideas formed from the values, philosophies, ideologies, and beliefs held by each individual. The concept of the idea has proven to hold a great influence in development over the past 20 years, considering the idea is what forms an understanding of political problems, determines solutions and publishes to the public the provisions of the right and fair (Hudson & Leftwich, 2014). Discussion of ideas falls largely under the framework of discursive institutionalism, first proposed by Vivien A. Schmidt in 2008.

Her opinion states that understanding how change, or in the context of development, can occur requires ideational analysis to investigate the person or actor who brought the idea, including the content and discourse used to convey the idea (Schmidt, 2008). Those who adhere to this framework promulgated by Schmidt believe that all institutions are sustained by normative ideas and beliefs, since the affiliated actors within each of them consider themselves to be correct. The idea is not only contained in the rules issued by the institution, but is an element that actively shapes its rules. Whenever there is a need to

legitimize and mobilize collective action through persuasion, those in power circles will tell stories that contain ideas. The story or discourse can provide a necessity or reason behind a certain action, including making the people involved in it actors (Mayer, 2014).

The two official state documents that are most widely referred to as the foundation of development, or all policies related to villages, are Law Number 6 of 2014 on villages and the regulation of the Minister of Villages, development of disadvantaged regions, and Transmigration/*Peraturan Menteri Desa dan Pembangunan Daerah Tertinggal (Permendesa)* number 21 of 2020 on guidelines for Village Development and Village Community Empowerment. Especially in laws that have a higher position when compared to ministerial regulations, many include visions of rural communities. Many terms and rhetorical narratives are used, such as democracy, participation, and cooperation, which are contained there and, at a glance, indicate the direction of a more democratic Village policy formulation. However, not only is the term used less clearly, but the disclosure of its legal provisions also contains many statements that are utterances of fact rather than legal provisions. The term, as mentioned earlier, also does not provide clarity as to whether it is intended as a statement of fact, a depiction of shared ideal values, or a legal obligation (White, 2017).

On the other hand, *Permendesa* No. 21 of 2020 indicates the use of the SDGs as the ultimate goal in every development planning. The SDGs serve as a normative and technical framework in their planning, but these rules also operate through the use of data instruments as the primary stream. This indicates the dominance of another paradigm besides the SDGs, which is technocratic, that makes the size, synchronization at every level of government, and administrative format when compared with local political relations. The participatory principle has also been guaranteed, as discussed in the previous sub-chapter, with the obligation to conduct a participatory census as a form of data collection and *musrenbang* involving actors from multisectors. This also demonstrates an effort to balance participatory interests with the needs of the State Administration, to be reported in accordance with national mechanisms.

### 3.5 Political dynamics in village development

In the sub-chapter on institutions, it was briefly mentioned how the pillar has not been implemented using a comprehensive bottom-up approach in Indonesia. However, regarding the suitability of the Three I's Framework, which is based on a bottom-up approach that is suitable for use in Indonesian development policy, it seems to require a synthesis between local political structures and negotiation rooms. An analysis can be conducted from each of the pillars, namely institutions, interests dan ideas. In institutions, its function as an arena that limits political action is largely regulated through formal institutions, such as laws and ministerial regulations, as well as non-formal institutions that include the concepts of mutual assistance and patronage. Participatory implementation is increasingly limited due to the need for adjustments to the direction of regional/city development policy. Thus, institutions at the village level are procedurally open, but still subject to substantive limitations because they are still influenced by vertical bureaucratic policies.

In terms of interests, the interests in developing villages include three dimensions, namely politics through legitimacy of office, economics through ADD and Social through strategic recognition in the community. Although the interests pillar emphasizes the rationality of actors, the negotiation process that occurs is often instrumental due to several factors, including a lack of awareness among the community to actively engage as one of the development actors. This is reflected in several case studies in various regions, such as Sidikalang, based on research by Sigalingging (2014) where people are considered reluctant to participate. Or in Margamukti, Sayati, Ciburial, and Nanjung villages, when community participation is only a formal procedure by looking at physical presence, which does not qualify as a form of active participation (Setiawan et al., 2020).

In fact, it is not impossible when the agenda of contestation, negotiation, and compromise of interests that occur in the village *musrenbang* forum as a forum for drafting,

changes in practice, and meaning in making village development policies. This can occur in situations that are cross-regional in nature and cannot be avoided, such as the finding by (Sobari, 2023) During the COVID-19 pandemic, the village-level deliberation forum is no longer a consultation and negotiation room, and its purpose is limited to clarifying and approving village development policies that have been directed by regional-level governments and cities. This also reinforces the previous findings that village laws and all related regulatory instruments exhibit significant differences, which can hinder village deliberations by reducing the representation of the community and other actors in decision-making.

The third dimension, ideas, refers to the discourse that shapes the meaning and legitimacy of political action. Official state documents, as previously reviewed, also found many terms such as cooperation, participation, and democracy that serve more as formal legitimacy than clear substantive guidance. Furthermore, the implementation of the SDGs framework at the village level has strengthened the dominance of the technocratic paradigm. Thus, there is a tendency for the dimension of ideas in the context of village development to reflect the state's discourse more than the result of public debate and compromise. Its function is more of a hegemonic instrument to assemble development in a sustainability narrative, but it still requires community participation for administrative compliance.

As presented by Mcloughlin et al. in *The Politics of Development*, politics is an inevitable process of contestation in development, leading towards a desired alternative future. In this process, various institutions, interests, and ideas compete with each other. And through compromise or domination, differences that can be resolved or not, the result can be accepted as something more or less legitimate. Contestation can be better understood if it is studied in relation to the essence of the Three I's framework. How institutions establish formal and non-formal rules, the interests and incentives of the community, leaders and other actors, and the fundamental ideas that drive community behavior. In the context of Indonesian local politics related to development, the process that occurs is often pseudo-bottom-up, where the community is involved in the socialization and formulation of plans, but decisions are still dominated by development directives and designs at the regional and national levels.

### *3.6 Implications for achieving the SDGs*

Scientific studies have suggested that implementation development programs are often designed to involve local actors in the area as the main actors of development (Booth & Unsworth, 2014). It is essential to emphasize that, according to Indonesia's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) report published in 2023, the government can no longer rely on a business-as-usual approach to accelerate development programs based on the SDGs. Both programs and activities need to be focused on priority areas and vulnerable community groups (*Badan Perencanaan Pembangunan Nasional, 2023*), showing the urgency of initiating grassroots development programs with bottom-up policies, so that the SDGs can become an integral part of the business process and the real work of all parties involved.

The objectives of the village SDGs are derived from the National SDGs objectives, which are divided into 18 development focus areas. This section will examine the achievements of the SDGs at the village level, based on the latest report released by the Central Bureau of Statistics, specifically the SDGs indicators for people's welfare 2024. Not all indicators will be reviewed; however, the main ones are indicators related to welfare, specifically SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities). The table below presents a description of the achievements of these indicators, along with an interpretative analysis that provides a conceptual understanding of the relationship between the Central Bureau of Statistics/*Badan Pusat Statistik* (BPS) data and socio-political factors.

Table 1. SDGs achievements based on village classification

SDGs	Main Indicators (BPS version)	Village Achievement	Analysis and Root Cause
SDG 1 – No Poverty	- House ownership	- High house ownership: 92.90% but low quality	Structural village poverty
SDG 2 – Zero Hunger	- Inadequate food consumption - Food insecurity	- Not enough food: 10.26% - Food insecurity level: 4.06%	The main problem lies in access to distribution and purchasing power
SDG 3 – Good Health and Well-Being	- Young marriage age - Birth attendant - Smoking behavior	- Young marriage rate: 9.91% - The rate of childbirth with medical personnel: 95.40% - The rate of smoking behavior: 31.51%	- Access to health and low literacy - Cost that relatively high burden village
SDG 4 – Quality Education	- School participation - Literacy - Completion of high school level	- School participation rate (junior high school level): 87% - Literacy rate: 94.6% - Completion of high school level: 57.72%	Inequality in educational infrastructure and aspirations in villages
SDG 6 – Clean Water and Sanitation	- Access safe water - Awareness of hand washing - Proper sanitation	- Safe drinking water level: 49.87% - Achievement level of decent hand washing facilities: 76.76% - Achievement level of decent sanitation: 82.93%	- Urban biased basic infrastructure - Uneven distribution
SDG 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities	- Settlements are decent and affordable	- Housing achievement level of houses feasible in the village: 63.83%	Houses in the village tend not to meet the 4 criteria, namely area, material, water, and sanitation

(BPS, 2024)

Data from *BPS* show that, although about 90% of households in villages have their own housing, the quality of housing tends to be lower compared to cities. This can result from limited access to building materials, large areas, and inadequate water and sanitation facilities. Inadequate food consumption in the village reaches 10.26%, higher than the city's 6.41%. This can be an indication that poverty in villages is structural, both related to limited productive assets, basic infrastructure, and economic opportunities. Several key indicators still reveal inconsistent gaps between villages and cities, including access to safe drinking water (villages: 49%; cities: 40%), proper sanitation (villages: 82%; cities: 84%), and inadequate food consumption (villages: 10%; cities: 6%).

In terms of achieving the SDGs at the village level, villages with participatory political structures can consistently demonstrate better development outcomes compared to those relying solely on vertical instructions from local or central governments. This argument is in line with the findings of Rosyadi et al., in 2024, the participatory involvement of village development actors, including the Village Development Board (VDB), comprising village governments and BPDs, reinforced by a strong, inclusive legal and practice framework, can contribute significantly to sustainable village development. Villages can also play an active role as development participants at the national level. (Rosyadi et al., 2024). Such participation not only serves to strengthen social legitimacy but also accelerates the achievement of several key SDGs indicators in the areas of poverty (SDG 1), decent work (SDG 8), and strong institutions (SDG 16). The Tabel 2. presents the results of research by

Rosyadi et al., which compares case studies and the effectiveness of VDB in implementing development programs in several villages.

Table 2. A Case study of the role of VDB and its effectiveness for village development

No.	Case Studies	Summary of Effectiveness	Remarks
1.	Mekarharja Village, Banjar City, West Java Province	Medium Effectiveness	Effective in planning and implementation but needs improvement in resource management and member training
2.	Golo Manting Village, East Nusa Tenggara Province, Indonesia	Medium Effectiveness	Showing potential for improvement with ongoing capacity-building efforts
3.	Panasen Village, Minahasa District, North Sulawesi Province, Indonesia	Low Effectiveness	Poor performance due to inactive VDB members and inadequate role understanding
4.	Karanganyar Village, Central Java Province, Indonesia	Low Effectiveness	Severely hampered by corruption and governance issues, leading a hiatus in VDB operations

(Rosyadi et al., 2024)

The implementation of good governance at the village level can also be a key bridging factor between national policies and local needs. Kurniawati et al. (2024) found that the principles of participation, accountability, and transparency in Village Fund Management are closely related to the successful achievement of the village SDGs. If villages adopt open governance practices, they tend to have stronger social innovation, as well as higher levels of public trust, thereby maintaining continuity in development programs. This aligns with the findings that achieving the village SDGs is highly dependent on collaboration among the village government, the community, academics, and the private sector. All forms of collaboration can increase the effectiveness of cross-sector communication and strengthen the sense of ownership of the Sustainable Development agenda (Saputri et al., 2025).

Proficiency in utilizing information technology also plays an important role in measuring the achievement of sustainable development in the village. The application of the smart governance concept can strengthen the relationship between community participation and data-based governance. Oktarina, in 2023, emphasized that the digitization of administrative systems and the use of microdata, such as data from BPS and Village SDGs, can increase the capacity of village governments to conduct evidence-based planning. Through such support, villages can design evidence-based policies that match the social and economic characteristics of their region (Oktarina et al., 2023). An important point of this approach is that it can make the decentralized model of development not only administrative but also adaptive to local knowledge-based. In accelerating the achievement of Village SDGs, strategies should be directed to strengthening local institutions such as participatory VDB, implementing adaptive decentralized models with smart governance, and integrating data from BPS and Village SDGs systems into planning that has a strong evidence base.

### 3.7 The role of the village as a local transformation space

When viewed in terms of territoriality, rural areas in Indonesia account for about 91% of the entire country's territory, if reviewed based on a report from the Ministry of Villages (Kemendesa, 2021). The distribution of the national population also underlines that the Indonesian people are dominant, namely, around 70.5% have an ID card in the village area (Agusta, 2024). These data show that the village holds a strategic position in national development. In fact, the village proved to be a resilient social entity in the face of the crisis,

particularly in its social and economic aspects, where the village's resilience in both aspects is indeed greater than that of the city. Therefore, it becomes very reasonable for the development policy to depart from the village, considering that the village is a pillar of national social and economic resilience, which is a key strength of Indonesia.

With all these influences, it can be said that the village is still marginalized in position and is not a priority in the context of economic development, even since post-independence until the reform era (Amalik, 2013). Policies set by the central government did not indicate much in favor of the people in the village (Mariana, 2013). Iskandar explained in his 2020 book that the village is an entity that predates even the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia/*Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia (NKRI)*, making it natural that the original composition and entity of the village cannot be contested. This means that it is the state's obligation to recognize the existence of the village, both contextually and constitutionally.

Then, is the current development model in the village able to meet the village development achievement indicators? Based on a report from the national team for the acceleration of poverty reduction/*Tim Nasional Percepatan Penanggulangan Kemiskinan (TNP2K)* in 2020, village development is guided by *RPJMDes*, *RPJMN*, and macro indicators, including the Village Development Index/*Indeks Pembangunan Daerah (IPD)* and the Village Development Index/*Indeks Desa Membangun (IDM)*. All of them are five indicators, namely the availability of basic services, infrastructure conditions, accessibility/transportation, public services, and governance (Harry et al., 2020). When the political dimension, which departs from the Three I's Framework, is linked to existing development achievement indicators, including the village SDGs, a structural mismatch arises between practice and measurement.

Of the three pillars of development based on political principles, namely, institutions, interests, and ideas, there are still three main challenges that need to be examined more deeply in order to form a truly participatory and sustainable development. (1) Decentralization is not yet fully democratic: This is a challenge to the pillars of institutions. Rigid planning hierarchies create inequalities in institutional capacity between regions. When development planning at the village level must be subject to *RPJMD* and *RPJMN*, then village autonomy becomes relative and not substantive. In fact, participatory development requires independence in setting priorities based on direct needs in the community. This challenge demonstrates that decentralization in Indonesia has not yet enabled community participation to become a significant political force for development. (2) Weak collective bargaining: The involvement of the village community is often limited only to ceremonial in the village *musrenbang* forum, with no deliberative space to negotiate collective interests. This becomes very unfortunate, because in the Three I's Framework, the interests pillar is supposed to serve as a space of negotiation and contestation between various actors aimed at achieving the public purpose. The practice of collaborative government tends to be considered a relevant solution to this challenge. Through open, inclusive dialogue, trust-building, and mutual commitment, each actor can integrate differences of interest into collective action that serves the public interest. However, this condition can only be achieved if the social and political capacity of the village community has been strengthened through political education and community empowerment. (3) Dominance of the technocratic paradigm: The last challenge is the weak ideology of development that departs from public discourse and the experience of rural communities. The idea of development, which was supposed to be the result of social debate at the local level, was replaced by the discourse of a hegemonic and technocratic state. This can result in community participation, which is often interpreted as administrative compliance with the reporting mechanism, rather than a manifestation of the village community's political awareness and engagement. In an effort to foster a bottom-up approach to overall development politics, a repositioning of development discourse from a technocratic to a deliberative direction is needed, placing rural communities as producers of ideas and discourses, not just policy recipients.

Table 3. Integration of political development with village development indicators

The political dimension	Dynamics of Village Development	Relations to Development Achievement Indicators	Critical Analysis
Institutions (structure and rules)	- Hierarchically arranged through the village and the Permendesa law - <i>RPJMDes</i> is prepared in a participatory manner, but must be in sync with RPJMD and RPJMN	- Governance - Infrastructure condition	Institutional infrastructure in development is a formality. The bottom-up approach is limited only to technical planning, not strategic decisions.
Interests (interests of actors)	- VBD as the main actor, including the village community - ADD becomes the arena for negotiating the interests of physical, social, and political development	- Economic infrastructure - Public participation	Financial dependence on local governments strengthens the position of local elites close to power
Ideas (discourse and ideology of development)	- Participation, mutual assistance, and SDGs become discourse and indicators-basic services - The application is technocratic, focusing on formal reporting and indicators	- Basic services - Governance	Development ideology is still centered on administrative efficiency, not political empowerment of the community

### 3.8 Is a bottom-up approach really suitable for Indonesia?

The findings from this study, along with various references, highlight that the bottom-up approach, although normatively participatory and inclusive, does not automatically ensure effectiveness in every development context. Kaiser (Kaiser, 2020) argues that although bottom-up institutions and programs, such as NGOs and microfinance, emerged as alternatives to the failures of top-down development, their success remains conditional. In many developing countries, bottom-up approaches can only thrive if supported by enabling institutions and adequate financial mechanisms. This is particularly relevant for Indonesia, where village governments depend heavily on fiscal transfers and regulatory frameworks from higher administrative levels.

Drawing on scholars such as Parfitt (Parfitt, 2002), Pieterse (1998) & (2000), and Mansuri & Rao (2004), the emphasis of bottom-up development prioritizes participation, accountability, and ownership. And yet, it often faces structural limitations, particularly in societies where local elites hold disproportionate power in decision-making. In this sense, the experience of Indonesian villages shows that pseudo-bottom-up practices (where participation exists formally but lacks substantive empowerment) mirror the critiques expressed in Kaiser's analysis. Mansuri and Rao's concept of the enabling institutional environment is central here: without institutional and cultural readiness, participatory development risks being reduced to procedural compliance.

Kaiser also highlights that development effectiveness depends not on choosing between top-down or bottom-up approaches, but on harmonizing both. The idea of mainstream alternative development (Pieterse, 1998) explains that hybrid models, where local initiatives are integrated within state-supported frameworks, tend to be more sustainable. This perspective aligns with Indonesia's current experience, where village development plans (*RPJMDes*) are formulated participatorily but must conform to district

and national policy directions. In this case, Indonesia exemplifies what Kaiser refers to as triangular cooperation between local actors, the state, and broader development networks, a configuration that acknowledges both the agency of communities and the strategic role of the state.

While the bottom-up approach has conceptual legitimacy in Indonesia's decentralization framework, its practical success depends on several interdependent factors: political will at higher levels, institutional consistency, and community empowerment that goes beyond administrative participation. The synthesis of Kaiser's and other scholars' arguments suggests that Indonesia requires a contextualized bottom-up model, one that preserves the spirit of local initiative while being supported by coherent top-down guidance to ensure equity, capacity building, and sustainability.

#### **4. Conclusions**

Development policy, regardless of its location and scope, cannot be separated from its political dimension. The findings and discussion indicate that Indonesia has sufficient institutional and political capacity to implement bottom-up approaches in development programs/policies. However, the implementation cannot be separated from the limitations that are rooted in institutional and social culture, which hinder shifting views from technocratic to participatory. Development cannot be interpreted solely as a technocratic affair with an administrative framework; it remains embedded in a political process that involves power, the negotiation of interests, and ideological discourse. The findings also show that, despite providing space for public participation, decentralization in Indonesia remains partially democratic, thereby hindering the realization of bottom-up development politics.

It becomes clear that no single approach, either top-down or bottom-up, can ensure the success of sustainable development. The Indonesian experience demonstrates that the bottom-up model, though normatively aligned with decentralization, often remains pseudo-participatory due to hierarchical dependencies and weak local institutional capacities. Therefore, the ideal path for Indonesia is not to abandon the bottom-up framework, but to reform it into a contextualized hybrid model that combines the inclusiveness of bottom-up participation with the strategic direction of top-down support.

Realizing a truly participatory politics of development requires repositioning rural communities as active agents in shaping their own developmental futures, rather than passive recipients of policy. Villages must be understood as local transformation spaces, where social resilience, local knowledge, and political negotiation converge to produce adaptive and sustainable outcomes. Ultimately, the success of Indonesia's sustainable development agenda will depend on how effectively politics in development can be managed in participatory, inclusive, and deliberative ways, ensuring that the spirit of 'development from below' becomes not just procedural, but genuinely transformative.

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