

## Social Construction: The Role of Community Empowerment Institutions (LPM) in the Village Fund-Based Development Process

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**Keyword:**  
Participatory  
Governance;  
Institutional  
Legitimacy;  
Community  
Empowerment.

**Abstract:** This study examines the dynamics of challenges, strategies, and institutional implications in realizing participatory development in Gunung Sari Ilir Village, with a particular focus on the role and legitimacy of the Community Empowerment Institution (LPM) as a central actor in local governance. The research explores how structural power relations, administrative capacity, and citizen participation interact to shape the effectiveness and social credibility of participatory institutions. Using a qualitative-descriptive approach supported by thematic and inferential analysis, the study employs in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis to capture the complex social realities of community participation. The data were analyzed through a combination of thematic coding and interpretive synthesis to identify the patterns of legitimacy construction, governance challenges, and adaptive institutional responses. The findings reveal that participatory development in Gunung Sari Ilir is constrained by persistent elite influence, limited administrative professionalism, and weak transparency mechanisms that collectively undermine trust and inclusiveness. Despite these barriers, local actors employ adaptive strategies such as community consultation, leadership strengthening, and information openness to enhance institutional legitimacy and promote collaborative development practices. The study concludes that participatory governance is not a linear process but an evolving negotiation between institutional structures and social actors, where legitimacy is continuously constructed through transparency, accountability, and communicative engagement. This research contributes to the broader understanding of local governance by highlighting the interdependence between institutional capacity, social trust, and participatory sustainability.

### INTRODUCTION

Participatory development requires harmonious collaboration between the government and the community, where citizen participation becomes a crucial component in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of development programs (Kartika Aprilya & Tohawi, 2024). In the context of village-level governance, the Community Empowerment Institution (LPM) plays a strategic role as a mediator between the village administration and the community. This role has become increasingly important since the implementation of the Village Fund policy, which allocates resources from the central government to strengthen area-based development. The Village Fund emphasizes principles of participation, accountability, and planning that are responsive to local needs, thereby positioning the LPM as a key actor in realizing inclusive and contextual development policies (Khaerunissa et al., 2023; Rahadi, 2023).

Although regulations provide formal guidelines regarding the duties and responsibilities of the LPM, their implementation in practice often shows significant variation. In some villages, the LPM is actively involved from the planning stage through to reporting, ensuring that community aspirations are accommodated to the fullest extent (Khadikah & Muljanto, 2025). In other cases, the LPM functions merely as an administrative complement, performing formal roles without substantive involvement in the development process. This phenomenon indicates that the effectiveness of the LPM is not solely determined by regulations or institutional structures, but also by the social constructions that evolve among local actors, including LPM leaders, village

administrations, community figures, and program beneficiaries. Social legitimacy, trust, local leadership, and community norms are crucial factors that influence the extent to which the LPM can fulfill its role as a facilitator of participatory development (Bachruddin et al., 2023).

Gunung Sari Ilir Village in Balikpapan City serves as a relevant case study for understanding this dynamic. Since 2019, the Village Fund has been implemented in this area with the aim of empowering the community through local funding and participatory planning mechanisms (Anisa et al., 2024). This village has a high degree of social and economic diversity, as well as varying levels of citizen participation, making the implementation of the Village Fund both a challenge and an opportunity for the LPM to demonstrate its capacity as an effective mediator. The role of the LPM is constructed through complex interactions among various stakeholders, each bringing different expectations, priorities, and experiences to the development process. Therefore, an empirical analysis of the practices, perceptions, and interactions of the LPM is essential to understanding the mechanisms of operationalizing participatory development at the local level.

The effectiveness of the LPM largely depends on its ability to navigate formal responsibilities while simultaneously building social legitimacy in the eyes of the community. LPM leaders who are respected and trusted by residents tend to foster higher levels of community participation, whereas LPMs perceived as merely representing government interests often face limitations in engaging citizens. In addition, LPMs are required to manage Village Funds transparently and accountably. This demands internal competence, effective leadership, and strong coordination with village administrations and community leaders. External factors such as political support, resource availability, and the level of community trust also influence the performance of the LPM (Karnowati & Yuwono, 2023). In other words, the success of the LPM is the result of the interaction between formal institutional capacity and the social constructions that develop within the community.

The role of the LPM is also shaped by residents' perceptions of the institution. Community participation in the planning, monitoring, and evaluation of development projects is strongly influenced by the extent to which residents view the LPM as a credible and responsive mediator (Hefifah, 2023; Sulistiyono & Sukmana, 2024). Where the LPM enjoys high social legitimacy, citizen participation tends to be more active and the resulting projects are more relevant to community needs. Conversely, negative perceptions or citizen indifference can limit community involvement, thereby preventing the participatory goals of the Village Fund from being fully achieved. Therefore, analyzing social interactions and community perceptions is key to assessing the success of participation-based development at the village level (Heriyanti & Rabbani, 2025).

The LPM operates within a layered institutional context, where coordination with the village administration and other local actors becomes a critical factor. The effectiveness of governance depends on role clarity, effective communication, and a shared understanding of each party's responsibilities (Azzahara et al., 2025; Citra et al., 2024; Namira et al., 2024; Sofyani et al., 2020). Role misalignment or conflicts of interest can lead to inefficiency, duplication of efforts, or failure to achieve program objectives. This underscores that the effectiveness of the LPM depends not only on formal structures and internal capacity, but also on its ability to negotiate roles, build consensus, and maintain collaborative relationships at the local level.

The case of Gunung Sari Ilir illustrates that the practices of the Community Empowerment Institution (LPM) cannot be separated from the historical, cultural, and social contexts that shape local dynamics. This village has a heterogeneous socio-economic background, resulting in significant variations in the interaction patterns between the community and the LPM. Residents with a tradition of collective decision-making expect the LPM to actively facilitate dialogue, deliberation, and public participation in the design and implementation of development programs. These expectations require the LPM to function not only as an administrative body but also as a mediator capable of bridging citizens' aspirations with the policies of the village administration (Helman & Zubaidah, 2024). However, field realities show that the ability of the LPM to meet these expectations is not always consistent. Some LPM administrators face capacity limitations, whether in terms of technical competence, organizational experience, or access to the information needed to support participatory planning processes. These conditions affect the

LPM's effectiveness in encouraging citizen engagement, particularly in the formulation of development project priorities.

Communities with more individualistic tendencies tend to engage with the LPM only to a limited extent, often only when they perceive direct benefits from the programs being implemented. This attitude poses a challenge for the LPM in fostering broad and inclusive participation (Nelly, 2024). Uneven participation can affect the social legitimacy of the LPM, as residents hold diverse perceptions of its role, some regard the LPM as a credible facilitator, while others see it merely as a formal bureaucracy. These differing perceptions influence deliberation and decision-making processes, where citizens' voices are not always proportionally represented, resulting in programs that do not fully reflect community needs (Farah Adelya Putri, 2025).

Local political dynamics also serve as a determining factor in the implementation of the LPM's role. The influence of community leaders, informal networks, and interactions with the village administration shape project priorities and resource allocation (legiman, prasetyo indra, 2021). In several cases, development projects that are intended to be participatory tend to follow the interests of certain groups or are determined by local elite networks. This creates tension between the objectives of formal regulations and the social practices that develop within the community. As a result, although the Village Fund regulations emphasize participation and transparency, their implementation in Gunung Sari Ilir often encounters structural and social barriers. Understanding the role of the LPM in this context requires an analysis that takes into account the complex interactions between formal regulations, social dynamics, cultural practices, and local political influences, since the success of participatory development depends not only on written rules but also on the LPM's ability to navigate existing social and cultural conditions (Permana et al., 2024).

This research holds both academic and practical urgency. Academically, it contributes to filling the literature gap on community-based governance, particularly at the village level, as well as the mechanisms of operationalizing participatory development in Indonesia. Practically, it offers insights for policymakers and practitioners regarding practices that can enhance the effectiveness of the Village Fund, including strengthening the capacity of the LPM, improving coordination strategies, and fostering more responsive mechanisms for citizen participation. By analyzing the perceptions, practices, and interactions of local actors, this study emphasizes that the success of participatory development is determined not only by formal regulations but also by social legitimacy, trust, and the collaboration built between government and the community.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

In Putra & Robert Rianto Widjaja, (2025) This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive-exploratory case study design to understand the social construction of the role of the Community Empowerment Institution (LPM) in the implementation of the Village Fund in Gunung Sari Ilir, Balikpapan City. A qualitative approach was chosen because the phenomenon under study is complex and contextual, focusing on the meanings, perceptions, and interpretations of local actors, including LPM administrators, village government officials, and beneficiary communities (Putra & Robert Rianto Widjaja, 2025). The case of Gunung Sari Ilir was chosen intrinsically because of its unique social and institutional characteristics, as well as its distinctive experience in implementing the Village Fund. A constructivist paradigm is applied to emphasize that the role of the LPM is not a static entity determined solely by formal regulations, but rather the result of social negotiation, collective practices, and the perceptions of local actors. With this design, the study seeks to reveal how the LPM shapes, negotiates, and carries out its role within specific social and policy contexts, while also assessing the effectiveness of participation, empowerment, and local collaboration in implementing a policy that is top-down in nature yet demands a bottom-up participatory approach.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

The results and discussion section presents a comprehensive analysis of the empirical findings that reveal the complex interactions between institutional structures, social perceptions, and community participation in the implementation of the Village Fund program through the Community Empowerment Institution (LPM) in Gunung Sari Ilir Village. The discussion is structured around three core themes that represent the dimensions of social construction, legitimacy, and institutional dynamics within participatory development. Each sub-section provides a nuanced examination of how the LPM operates in a multilayered social and political environment, reflecting both the strengths and the constraints that shape its ability to mediate between the state and local communities. The findings highlight not only the formal responsibilities of the LPM but also the lived realities of community engagement, leadership dynamics, and the socio-cultural factors that define the participatory development process at the village level (Awuni et al., 2022).

The first sub-section explores the dynamics of the LPM's role in the Village Fund-based development process, emphasizing how institutional practices and community engagement evolve through negotiation, trust-building, and shared responsibilities (Hurd & Stanton, 2023). The discussion reveals that the LPM's effectiveness depends largely on its capacity to align formal duties with informal community expectations, which often requires adaptive leadership and flexible coordination mechanisms. The empirical evidence demonstrates that participation does not emerge automatically from regulation but is socially constructed through everyday interactions among actors who bring diverse interests, perceptions, and power relations into the governance process. The analysis thus captures how the LPM navigates bureaucratic demands while simultaneously maintaining its legitimacy within the social fabric of the village.

The second sub-section examines the social construction of legitimacy surrounding the LPM and how community perceptions influence the institution's ability to function as a credible mediator. Legitimacy, as revealed by field data, is deeply rooted in trust, transparency, and responsiveness (V. Schmidt & Wood, 2019). When the community perceives the LPM as accountable and inclusive, participation increases, and development outcomes tend to reflect local priorities. In contrast, limited transparency and perceived favoritism diminish collective engagement and weaken the institution's social authority (Lee, 2020). This discussion underscores that legitimacy is not an inherent attribute of institutions but a relational construct continuously shaped by communicative practices, leadership behavior, and community values that define the moral basis of governance in the local context.

The third sub-section addresses the challenges and strategic implications of institutional performance in realizing participatory development in Gunung Sari Ilir. The findings reveal multiple constraints, including limited administrative capacity, overlapping roles with village government, and the influence of local elites in decision-making processes. These conditions often generate tension between normative ideals of participation and the practical realities of governance. Despite these barriers, the LPM exhibits adaptive strategies through collaboration, deliberation, and community mobilization efforts that aim to reconcile top-down policy frameworks with bottom-up aspirations. The discussion concludes that the sustainability of participatory development depends not only on institutional capacity but also on the ability of local actors to foster trust, negotiate interests, and construct shared meanings of development that resonate with the community's collective aspirations.

### **Dynamics of the Role of Community Empowerment Institutions**

The dynamics of the Community Empowerment Institution (LPM) within the framework of Village Fund-based development reflect a complex interplay between formal institutional mandates and informal community expectations that shape the overall trajectory of participatory governance at the village level. The LPM operates as a pivotal intermediary between the village government and the local community, tasked with facilitating participatory planning, implementation, and evaluation of development programs. Its role, however, extends beyond administrative coordination and regulatory compliance. It embodies a social function rooted in trust, legitimacy, and the capacity to mobilize collective action. The empirical realities in Gunung Sari Ilir demonstrate that the LPM's performance is not solely determined by formal regulations

but rather by the social construction of its role, as influenced by leadership quality, community engagement, and contextual power relations. The institution's effectiveness is therefore contingent upon its ability to navigate between bureaucratic structures and local cultural norms, aligning state-driven objectives with community-driven aspirations in the development process (Fu et al., 2025; Yuhannan, 2024).

The Village Fund program, as a national policy initiative, delegates significant financial and administrative authority to village-level institutions, thereby increasing the responsibility of the LPM to ensure inclusivity, transparency, and accountability in development practices (Istifazhuddin & Mardiyanta, 2025). In Gunung Sari Ilir, this shift in governance dynamics has compelled the LPM to assume broader responsibilities, including identifying local needs, coordinating participatory planning forums (*musyawarah desa*), and overseeing the implementation of community projects. The participatory framework envisioned by the Village Fund policy presupposes that community members play an active role in determining priorities, yet this ideal is often mediated by the LPM's institutional capacity and its leaders' competence in fostering inclusive dialogue. Empirical findings reveal that where the LPM demonstrates strong leadership and organizational coherence, community participation is more substantive, project implementation is more transparent, and developmental outcomes are perceived as equitable (Rotondi et al., 2024; Zamil et al., 2023). Conversely, when the LPM is characterized by weak internal coordination or limited social legitimacy, participatory mechanisms tend to be reduced to formalities, resulting in development outcomes that fail to reflect local needs.

The dynamic role of the LPM also manifests in its negotiation of overlapping authorities with the village administration and informal local power structures. The dual pressures of administrative accountability and social representation often create institutional tensions that the LPM must reconcile through strategic communication and adaptive governance practices. In Gunung Sari Ilir, the LPM's capacity to mediate between conflicting interests—such as those of the village elite, government officials, and marginalized community groups—becomes an indicator of its institutional maturity. Effective LPM leaders are those who can balance technical compliance with state regulations and responsiveness to grassroots demands. They engage in practices of deliberation, consensus-building, and information sharing that reinforce community ownership of the development process. The success of these interactions reflects the LPM's function as both an institutional and social actor, whose legitimacy depends on its ability to sustain trust, transparency, and inclusivity across various stages of development (Spanuth & Urbano, 2024).

The dynamic nature of the LPM's role is further influenced by contextual factors such as socio-economic diversity, local political configurations, and cultural patterns of participation. In heterogeneous communities like Gunung Sari Ilir, variations in education, income, and social capital affect the extent to which citizens engage in development processes. The LPM must therefore adopt a flexible approach that accommodates these differences, ensuring that participatory mechanisms remain representative and equitable. Moreover, the institution's success in mobilizing participation depends on its ability to frame development initiatives as collective endeavors rather than administrative obligations (Trudeau, 2018; Wakkee et al., 2019). When the LPM effectively communicates the tangible benefits of participation—such as improved infrastructure, enhanced social cohesion, and economic opportunities—it strengthens the community's sense of ownership and responsibility toward development outcomes. The dynamics of the LPM's role in Village Fund-based development thus illustrate that participatory governance is not a static process but a continuous negotiation of interests, expectations, and power relations. This reinforces the understanding that sustainable development at the village level requires not only institutional capacity and regulatory compliance but also the cultivation of social legitimacy and community trust as the foundation of effective governance.



institutional legitimacy—suggesting that the way LPM interacts with citizens, rather than merely the outcomes of its actions, defines its perceived credibility. In essence, the discourse reflected in this visualization aligns with broader governance theories asserting that participatory effectiveness depends as much on communicative rationality and social inclusion as on procedural compliance and resource distribution.

Taken together, the word cloud encapsulates a multidimensional portrait of the LPM as both a technical-administrative institution and a socially embedded actor. The figure demonstrates that perceptions of the LPM are shaped by the interplay between transparency, communication, and power relations within the village context. The prominence of evaluative terms—ranging from “trust” to “dominance”—illustrates that public attitudes toward the LPM are contingent upon its ability to balance authority with accessibility and responsiveness. From an academic standpoint, this visualization serves not merely as a descriptive representation but as an entry point for deeper thematic analysis. It reflects how language used by community members constructs the legitimacy, credibility, and social meaning of the LPM’s role in participatory governance. Ultimately, the figure exemplifies how visual text analytics can reveal the underlying social narratives that quantitative metrics alone cannot capture, thereby enriching the interpretive understanding of institutional dynamics in community empowerment frameworks (Debnath et al., 2020).

### **Social Construction and Public Perception of the Legitimacy of LPM at the Local Level**

The social construction and public perception of the legitimacy of the Community Empowerment Institution (LPM) at the local level reflect the complex interplay between institutional behavior, cultural expectations, and the lived experiences of community members (Tampubolon, 2020). Legitimacy, in this context, cannot be understood solely as a legal or administrative attribute derived from state regulation; rather, it emerges from the continuous interaction between formal governance mechanisms and the informal norms of the community. The LPM operates within a social environment where trust, participation, and accountability are negotiated through daily practices and communicative exchanges. As such, legitimacy becomes a socially constructed phenomenon—shaped by how citizens perceive the transparency, inclusiveness, and responsiveness of the LPM’s actions in facilitating development and decision-making. When the institution successfully aligns its formal mandates with community values and expectations, it gains symbolic authority that extends beyond bureaucratic compliance, reinforcing its position as a trusted intermediary between the state and the public.

Public perception plays a decisive role in sustaining or undermining the legitimacy of LPM. Empirical observations suggest that community members tend to evaluate the institution’s credibility based on visible and tangible indicators of governance performance—such as the clarity of financial reporting, the fairness of resource allocation, and the consistency of participatory forums. The more the LPM demonstrates transparency and equitable representation, the more it is perceived as legitimate and worthy of trust (Irvita & Asriani, 2025; Panigrahi et al., 2025; Wirendra & Lutfi, 2024). Conversely, when decision-making appears exclusive, or when leadership is dominated by local elites, perceptions of legitimacy decline, giving rise to skepticism and reduced public engagement. This indicates that legitimacy is not static but fluid, continuously reinforced or weakened by the institution’s ability to fulfill its moral and practical obligations toward the community. It is, therefore, both a relational and performative construct—rooted in shared understandings of what constitutes fairness, openness, and communal benefit (Buil et al., 2019; Nielsen et al., 2017).

At the broader theoretical level, the legitimacy of the LPM reflects the dynamic negotiation between formal structures of governance and the informal social logics of rural society. The institution’s authority depends not merely on state-sanctioned recognition but on the community’s voluntary acceptance of its role as a facilitator of participatory development. This process underscores the communicative and discursive foundations of legitimacy, whereby meaning is co-created through dialogue, symbolic action, and collective interpretation. In this light, the LPM’s success in maintaining legitimacy depends on its ability to translate administrative procedures into socially intelligible and morally acceptable practices. By fostering continuous



interaction, transparency, and reciprocity, the LPM strengthens its legitimacy as a local governance actor capable of harmonizing bureaucratic imperatives with communal aspirations. Ultimately, legitimacy at the local level becomes both an outcome and a precondition of effective participatory governance, sustaining the moral coherence and social trust upon which inclusive development relies.

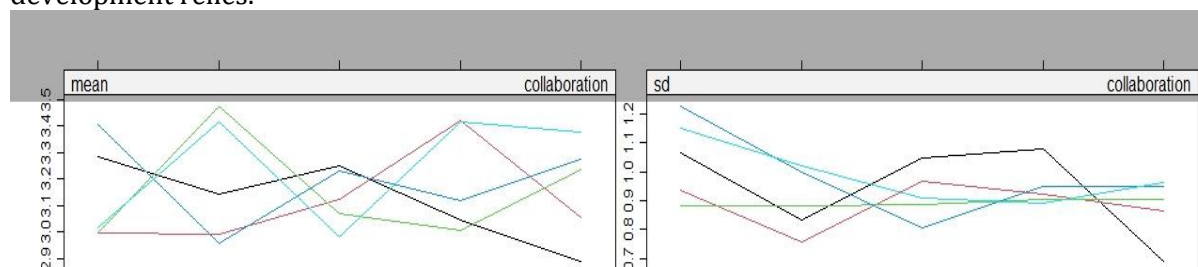


Figure 2 Exploratory Analysis of Complex Mechanisms of Social Construction  
Sources Processed By The Author

Figure 2 depicts the Social Construction and Public Perception of the Legitimacy of Community Empowerment Institutions (LPM) at the Local Level. This mixed-methods approach integrates quantitative modeling, qualitative text analysis, and network-based insights to explore the complex mechanisms through which institutional legitimacy is socially constructed and publicly perceived in the context of local governance. This design demonstrates that legitimacy is not simply a legal or administrative designation, but rather a socially embedded phenomenon that emerges from the interaction between institutional practices, community values, and communication dynamics. This analytical model combines multilevel quantitative estimation, latent variable modeling, and discourse-based text mining to capture both measurable and interpretive dimensions of legitimacy formation within Community Empowerment Institutions (LPM).

The first dimension of this analytical design involves measuring and modeling the latent constructs underlying citizens' perceptions of legitimacy. This code employs Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) using the lavaan and blavaan packages to operationalize abstract constructs such as trust, transparency, leadership, and legitimacy into latent variables that can be empirically tested. By conceptualizing these variables as interrelated dimensions of institutional perceptions, this analysis seeks to uncover the structural relationships that determine how citizens evaluate the moral and functional authority of LPMs. CFA ensures that the observed indicators (survey items) validly represent the intended constructs, while the SEM component models the causal pathways through which institutional attributes influence perceived legitimacy. Furthermore, the inclusion of Bayesian estimation methods (via brms) provides a probabilistic understanding of uncertainty, allowing for the assessment of legitimacy perceptions across hierarchical data structures such as villages. This multilevel approach recognizes that local contexts shape institutional experiences differently, meaning that perceptions of legitimacy depend on varying socio-political and cultural environments. Through a Bayesian perspective, this analysis not only estimates the strength of associations but also measures the credibility of these relationships under uncertainty, thus providing a more nuanced interpretation of legitimacy formation in decentralized governance (Curry, 2025; Li & Chen, 2024).

The second dimension of the analytical model focuses on latent classes and discourse-based segmentation of public perceptions. Using Latent Class Analysis (LCA), the model categorizes respondents into typologies based on their cognitive orientations and evaluative tendencies toward LPMs. This clustering approach reveals whether citizens perceive legitimacy through moral recognition, pragmatic effectiveness, or procedural justice. In addition to numerical classification, the code integrates textual analysis using Structural Topic Modeling (STM) to examine how legitimacy is discursively constructed within community narratives. This qualitative extension processes open-ended responses to identify recurring linguistic patterns, prominent themes, and semantic structures that represent collective meanings surrounding the institution. For example, dominant topics such as "transparency and reporting," "elite dominance," or



"participatory facilitation" demonstrate linguistic manifestations of legitimacy and trust. By linking topic prevalence to demographic or institutional variables (e.g., gender, education, or village), the model reveals how social attributes mediate the construction of institutional legitimacy. The integration of STM within this quantitative framework bridges the interpretive gap between statistical inference and meaning-making, positioning legitimacy not only as a measurable outcome but also as a discursive product continually negotiated in social communication (Spitzmüller, 2015; Sulistiyono & Sukmana, 2024).

The third dimension of this analytical framework emphasizes data triangulation and the synthesis of mixed methods findings. The use of multiple imputation (rats) ensures that the data remain robust and statistically representative despite the inevitable omissions in community-level survey responses. Quantitative outputs, including factor scores and posterior estimates, are combined with textual topic proportions to construct a "shared view" that visually aligns statistical indicators with thematic narratives. This technique reflects the methodological principle of complementarity, where quantitative models explain existing relationships, while qualitative analysis explains why those relationships exist. Furthermore, the integration of network analysis through igraph and ggraph further enriches the framework by mapping the relational structures among governance actors, thus linking perceptions of legitimacy to the social architecture of participation and collaboration. The resulting model offers a holistic view: legitimacy emerges as a function of institutional behavior (measured), social interactions (mapped), and discursive meanings (interpreted). Through this triangulated approach, the analytical design transcends the limitations of a single methodology, presenting legitimacy as both an empirical construct and a lived social reality embedded within the governance ecosystem (CHIPIMO et al., 2025; Kinder et al., 2022).

In short, the figure orchestrates a comprehensive methodology grounded in mixed-methods research epistemology and the sociology of institutional legitimacy. It demonstrates how modern computational tools can model the multidimensional nature of public perception—linking trust, transparency, and participation with symbolic processes that generate authority and acceptance. This framework aligns with constructivist theory, which views legitimacy as a product of discourse negotiations and interactions, while adhering to the statistical modeling rigor required for empirical validation. By integrating Confirmatory Factor Analysis, Bayesian multilevel modeling, latent class segmentation, and structural topic modeling within a single analytical continuum, this design provides a blueprint for studying the moral, cognitive, and relational foundations of legitimacy in decentralized governance. Ultimately, this analytical approach reaffirms that LPM legitimacy is not an inherent attribute of the institution, but rather an evolving construct—maintained through transparency, communicative engagement, and the community's collective recognition of its social value (Afieroho et al., 2023; Johnston & Lane, 2019; Lee, 2020).

### **Challenges, Strategies, and Institutional Implications in Realizing Participatory Development in Gunung Sari Ilir Village**

The realization of participatory development in Gunung Sari Ilir Village faces a range of structural and procedural challenges that reflect broader tensions within Indonesia's decentralized governance framework. Despite the institutionalization of community participation through mechanisms such as the Village Fund and the Community Empowerment Institution (LPM), the translation of participatory ideals into practice remains uneven. One of the central challenges lies in the persistence of bureaucratic rigidity and elite dominance, which often constrains open deliberation and equitable decision-making. Village elites and long-standing power brokers tend to influence priority-setting processes, shaping outcomes in ways that reinforce existing hierarchies rather than empowering marginalized groups. In addition, limited administrative capacity and insufficient technical knowledge among local actors impede the LPM's ability to design and implement inclusive development programs effectively. This situation is compounded by weak transparency and communication mechanisms that hinder the dissemination of information to citizens, thereby reducing public trust and engagement in collective decision-making.

In response to these challenges, several adaptive strategies have been employed by both institutional actors and the broader community to foster more inclusive and participatory governance practices. The LPM, as an intermediary body between the state and citizens, has sought to strengthen its facilitative role by enhancing transparency through public consultations, participatory budgeting, and community monitoring. These initiatives are designed to rebuild trust and ensure that community members can actively contribute to the identification, planning, and evaluation of development priorities. Leadership training and capacity-building activities have also been introduced to improve the competence of LPM members, enabling them to bridge the gap between formal administrative procedures and the dynamic needs of the village population. Furthermore, digital tools and social media have begun to serve as alternative platforms for communication and accountability, allowing for broader engagement among youth and marginalized residents. While these strategies indicate progress toward participatory governance, their effectiveness remains contingent on sustained institutional commitment and the willingness of local elites to accommodate plural voices in policy deliberations (Bua & Escobar, 2018; Bullon-Cassis et al., 2025; Pek et al., 2023).

The institutional implications of these challenges and strategies extend beyond the operational efficiency of the LPM, touching upon the deeper question of legitimacy and sustainability in local governance. Participatory development in Gunung Sari Ilir cannot thrive solely through formal procedures; it requires the cultivation of a governance culture grounded in reciprocity, accountability, and shared ownership of development outcomes. The LPM's legitimacy, therefore, depends on its ability to maintain transparency, balance authority with inclusivity, and demonstrate responsiveness to the community's aspirations. Institutional reform must focus on embedding participatory norms within the everyday practices of governance, ensuring that community input becomes a routine aspect of decision-making rather than an exceptional event. Moreover, sustainable participatory development demands inter-institutional collaboration, where the LPM works synergistically with village government, local organizations, and citizens to co-produce development agendas. In this way, Gunung Sari Ilir can serve as an illustrative microcosm of how participatory governance, when institutionally supported and socially legitimized, contributes not only to more democratic decision-making but also to more equitable and contextually grounded development outcomes.

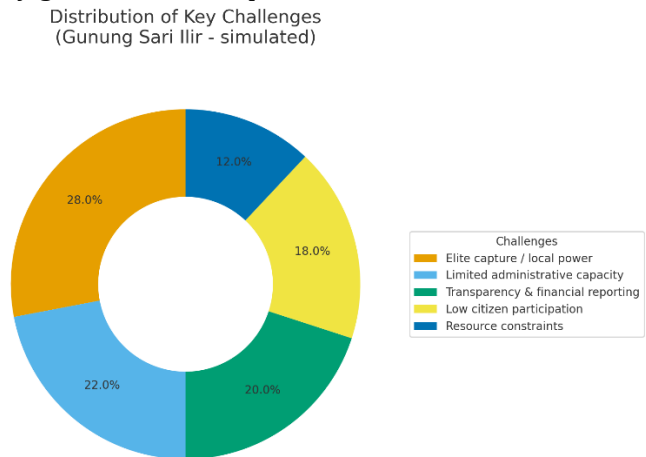


Figure 3 Distribution Of Key Challenges  
Sources Processed By The Author

Figure 3 shows the proportional distribution of the main challenges faced in realizing participatory development in Gunung Sari Ilir Village. The diagram summarizes the relative importance of five interrelated issues that collectively shape the institutional and social dynamics of local governance: elite capture and dominance of local power, limited administrative capacity, financial transparency and reporting, low citizen participation, and resource constraints. Each segment of the diagram represents the estimated proportion of influence or prevalence of these challenges in the participatory development process, symbolizing the extent to which each factor

hinders or complicates the implementation of inclusive governance. The donut format was deliberately chosen to emphasize the interconnectedness and circularity of governance challenges, where each component not only stands alone but also interacts with each other to shape the overall legitimacy and performance of participatory development institutions such as the Community Empowerment Institute (LPM).

The largest portion of the graph, occupying approximately 28% of the total, corresponds to elite capture and dominance of local power, indicating that hierarchical power structures and patron-client relationships continue to play a decisive role in shaping development priorities in Gunung Sari Ilir. These findings are consistent with broader governance studies in Indonesia, which show that decentralization often reproduces pre-existing local power asymmetries rather than dismantling them. In this context, decision-making authority tends to be concentrated among a small group of influential actors—village elites, traditional leaders, or local bureaucrats—who exercise control over resource allocation and the formulation of village development plans. Such dominance limits genuine community participation, as deliberative spaces become performative rather than participatory. Thus, the persistence of elite influence undermines the egalitarian ideals of participatory development, transforming what should be an empowerment process into one of symbolic obedience. These structural challenges also erode the legitimacy of the LPM, as the perceived impartiality of these institutions is crucial for fostering trust and sustained engagement from the wider community (Gatanaga et al., 2025).

The second major challenge identified, representing approximately 22%, concerns limited administrative capacity, reflecting the operational weaknesses of local institutions in translating policy mandates into effective programs. Despite formal empowerment structures, many village officials and LPM members lack the technical knowledge, managerial training, and procedural literacy necessary to implement participatory planning effectively. These deficits often result in suboptimal program delivery, implementation delays, and inadequate monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. Similarly, issues of transparency and financial reporting—which account for approximately 20% of the total—highlight the procedural opacity that continues to plague local governance. The absence of clear and publicly accessible financial information creates distrust among citizens, reinforcing perceptions of mismanagement or corruption. Together, these factors contribute to what can be termed an "accountability gap," where institutional structures exist on paper but fail to achieve their intended democratic functions in practice. Addressing these internal weaknesses requires sustained investment in administrative reform, human resource development, and public oversight mechanisms that can ensure procedural integrity and foster an ethos of openness and accountability (Boufounou et al., 2024).

18% of the population is related to low citizen participation, reflecting broader sociocultural and psychological barriers that prevent citizens from actively engaging in governance processes. Participation is often hampered by factors such as political apathy, lack of access to information, and the perception that citizens' voices have minimal impact on final decisions. Furthermore, participation tends to be unequal, with youth, women, and marginalized social groups often excluded from formal consultations. This asymmetry perpetuates a cycle of disengagement: when citizens perceive participatory mechanisms as tokenistic, they withdraw from civic life, thus reinforcing elite dominance and institutional inertia. The final component of the graph, accounting for 12%, represents resource limitations, both financial and infrastructural, that limit the scope and sustainability of participatory programs. Resource scarcity not only limits the operational capacity of LPMs but also reduces opportunities for training, outreach, and innovation in participatory methodologies.

Overall, the figure demonstrates the systemic interconnectedness of these challenges, demonstrating how structural, administrative, and social factors combine to shape the success or failure of participatory governance in Gunung Sari Ilir Village. Rather than existing as isolated issues, each component dynamically interacts with the others, creating feedback loops that reinforce exclusion or promote inclusion, depending on how they are managed. From an analytical perspective, this visualization underscores the need for an integrative strategy that addresses these constraints simultaneously—through strengthening institutional capacity, ensuring

transparency, reducing elite dominance, and expanding meaningful citizen engagement. The diagram's circular structure visually conveys this integrative vision, reminding academics and practitioners that participatory development is not a linear sequence of activities, but rather a continuous process of negotiation, adaptation, and learning. Essentially, the diagram encapsulates the persistent tension between the ideal of democratic governance and the practical realities of power, capacity, and trust in the evolving landscape of local community empowerment (Bailey & Pill, 2015; Biancone et al., 2024; Brinkerhoff, 2008).

The overall findings from the analysis of participatory development in Gunung Sari Ilir Village reveal a deeply embedded set of institutional and social challenges that influence the legitimacy and effectiveness of the Community Empowerment Institution (LPM). The empirical and qualitative evidence underscores that participatory governance in this context operates within a complex web of local power relations, administrative limitations, and societal expectations. The predominance of elite influence, as indicated in the data and visualized through the donut chart, demonstrates that power asymmetry remains the most persistent obstacle to genuine participation. This phenomenon, often referred to as elite capture, transforms participatory mechanisms into instruments of legitimacy for local power holders rather than vehicles for collective decision-making. Consequently, the participatory process becomes performative—appearing inclusive in structure but exclusionary in practice—thereby diluting the transformative potential of decentralized governance. This aligns with theoretical perspectives on local governance which posit that decentralization, when inadequately institutionalized, can reproduce hierarchical authority under the guise of community engagement (Desai & Imrie, 1998).

The interplay between administrative capacity and procedural transparency further shapes the community's perception of institutional legitimacy. The limited managerial competence of LPM officials and the absence of robust monitoring systems lead to inefficiencies in planning, implementation, and evaluation of development programs. Transparency deficits, particularly in financial reporting and communication, erode public trust and reinforce suspicion toward the motives and practices of local governance institutions. The findings suggest that legitimacy is not merely a function of formal compliance with regulations but an outcome of perceived accountability and fairness in institutional behavior. When the public perceives that decision-making processes lack openness and equitable representation, legitimacy declines, resulting in reduced civic engagement and weakened social cohesion. In this sense, transparency serves as both a procedural requirement and a symbolic resource—signifying the moral credibility of the institution and its alignment with the community's normative expectations (Ebrahim, 2009; Garsten & Jacobsson, 2011; Suchman, 1995).

At the same time, the analysis reveals that social participation remains uneven and often exclusionary, reflecting structural barriers within the community itself. Low levels of civic engagement among marginalized groups—such as women, youth, and the economically disadvantaged—illustrate that participatory development is not equally accessible to all social actors. This pattern is not solely the result of institutional neglect but is also rooted in socio-cultural norms and perceptions of political efficacy. The belief that individual participation has little impact on collective decisions discourages involvement and perpetuates passive citizenship. Moreover, resource constraints exacerbate this disengagement, as limited financial and infrastructural support restricts the LPM's ability to conduct outreach, facilitate training, or establish participatory forums. The findings thus point to a cyclical relationship between institutional weakness and societal apathy: weak institutions fail to mobilize participation, and low participation, in turn, prevents institutions from gaining the social legitimacy required to function effectively (Adams, 2018; Johnson et al., 2006; V. A. Schmidt, 2013).

The cumulative implications of these findings extend to both governance theory and practical policymaking. From a theoretical perspective, the study reinforces the argument that participatory development cannot be sustained through procedural reforms alone; it requires a deeper transformation in institutional culture and community consciousness. Strengthening the LPM's role in Gunung Sari Ilir demands a multidimensional strategy that combines structural reform, capacity building, and inclusive dialogue mechanisms. Institutional legitimacy must be cultivated through transparency, accountability, and responsiveness, ensuring that citizens

perceive participation as meaningful rather than symbolic. Practically, this involves fostering a governance ecosystem where authority is exercised collaboratively, resources are managed equitably, and communication between the state and citizens remains open and reciprocal. Ultimately, the findings underscore that participatory development is an evolving process of negotiation between institutional structures and social actors—a process in which legitimacy is not granted once but continuously constructed through everyday practices of trust, inclusion, and accountability (Newcomer, 2020).

### CONCLUSION

The study concludes that the realization of participatory development in Gunung Sari Ilir Village is a multidimensional process shaped by structural, administrative, and social dynamics that collectively determine the legitimacy and effectiveness of the Community Empowerment Institution (LPM). The persistence of elite dominance, limited institutional capacity, and weak transparency mechanisms illustrates that the promise of participatory governance remains constrained by entrenched power asymmetries and procedural deficiencies. At the same time, the uneven participation of community members reflects deeper issues of social exclusion and civic disengagement that undermine the democratic essence of local development. Addressing these interconnected challenges requires more than regulatory reform; it demands the cultivation of institutional trust, moral credibility, and communicative inclusion through sustained dialogue, capacity enhancement, and equitable resource governance. The case of Gunung Sari Ilir thus reaffirms that participatory development is not merely a technical undertaking but a continuous process of legitimizing authority through reciprocal relationships between institutions and citizens, where transparency, accountability, and inclusion become the core foundations of sustainable local governance.

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