



Rethinking Dynamic Collaboration in Village Fund Management: Addressing Human Resource Disparities, Cultural Contexts, and Multi-Stakeholder Coordination in Karo Regency

Meliasta Hapri Tarigan¹, Arwanto Harimas Ginting¹, Elly Nurlia²

¹Faculty of Government Politics, Institut Pemerintahan Dalam Negeri, Jatinangor- Sumedang, West Java, 45363, Indonesia

²Faculty of Government Politics, Universitas Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa, Pabuaran-Serang, Banten, 42163, Indonesia

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CORRESPONDENCE

Name: Meliasta Hapri Tarigan
Email: hapritarigan@ipdn.ac.id

A B S T R A C T

Village Fund management requires collaboration among government institutions, village actors, communities, and non-state stakeholders, yet existing studies have paid limited attention to how actor-capacity disparities, institutionalization, and local cultural contexts shape collaborative dynamics. This study examines multi-stakeholder collaboration in Village Fund management in Karo Regency, Indonesia. Using a qualitative approach, data were collected from 23 purposively selected informants representing local government, village government, Village Consultative Bodies, community representatives, NGOs, academics, village facilitators, and journalists through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observation. Thematic analysis was guided by the collaborative governance framework of Emerson, Nabatchi, and Balogh and complemented by Salganci's collaboration assessment model. The findings show that collaboration remains weakly institutionalized, with unequal stakeholder capacities, information access, resources, and decision-making influence constraining principled engagement, shared motivation, and capacity for joint action. At the same time, culturally embedded institutions such as Merga Silima, Tutur Siwaluh, and Rakut Sitelu shape trust, reciprocity, legitimacy, and collective relations within the collaborative process. The study contributes theoretically by highlighting actor-capacity asymmetry and cultural embeddedness as important contextual conditions of collaborative governance. Practically, it suggests strengthening institutionalized coordination, information sharing, capacity development, and culturally responsive participation in Village Fund governance.

INTRODUCTION

The Village Fund serves as a strategic public policy instrument within the framework of decentralization and locally-based development in Indonesia. Its significance lies not merely in the transfer of fiscal resources from the central government to villages, but in the shift of the village's role from a passive object of development to an active agent of governance and development—one possessing the authority, resources, and scope to make decisions tailored to local needs and characteristics. From a public policy perspective, the Village Fund thus functions as a government intervention tool designed to strengthen village governance capacity while simultaneously addressing issues related to development, public services, community empowerment, and inter-regional inequality. This article analyzes the management of the Village Fund in Karo Regency through the lens of the collaborative dynamics framework proposed by Emerson, Nabatchi, and Balogh (2011).

Collaborative governance has become a popular term in public administration literature (Emerson, Nabatchi and Balogh, 2011). At least in the last two decades, collaborative governance has emerged as an approach that provides a breakthrough in improving governance and public policy implementation.

The presence of collaborative governance is like a "cure" that can heal various "diseases" in the formulation and implementation of public policy, whether caused by the politicization of policy, budget bloat or limitations, or failure in the implementation of public policy (Ansell and Gash, 2008).

Agranoff (2003) refers to collaborative governance as a new strategy in public management in the era of collaboration. In the views of (Frederikson, 1991; Jun, 2002; Kettl, 2002; Sirianni, 2009), collaborative governance is a new paradigm in democratic government. The emergence of collaborative governance is driven by various factors, but there are two main ones. First, the increase in "wicked problems" or difficult problems, such as in the domestic environment: educational poverty, the judicial system, traffic congestion, and even global issues such as climate change. Solving wicked problems is difficult or impossible for a single organization acting alone, but requires the involvement of other parties. The second factor is the increasingly complex context of governance, where the environment and complexity of problems demand changes in governance (Emerson, Nabatchi and Balogh, 2011).

The study by Goldsmith and Eggers (2004) shows that governments do not always have sufficient resources to address public issues. Limitations in fulfilling the completeness of these resources mean that the government needs to form alliances with other parties, even across sectors, to implement the planned programs. These resource limitations also underlie O'Leary and Vij's (2014) statement that collaborative governance is an important option for improving the implementation of public policy in a country.

The limitations of state capacity and the need to build networking in a democratic government system, in turn, require collaborative governance so that community involvement in decision-making and policy design can empower, enlighten, and

involve the community in the governance process itself, as stated by Sirianni (2009) and Booher (2004). In line with Sirianni and Booher, Schwab (2016) also states that one of the impacts of the Industrial Revolution 4.0 on the government sector is a shift in roles and power within a country from the dominant government to non-governmental actors. Furthermore, Ansell and Gash (2008) argue that collaborative governance is a form of government in which one or more public institutions directly involve non-governmental stakeholders in formal decision-making to achieve goals through mutual agreement and deliberation in the formulation and implementation of public policy.

Based on the context described above, Ansell and Gash (2008:544) define collaborative governance as: "A governing arrangement where one or more public agencies directly engage non-state stakeholders in a collective decision-making process that is formal, consensus-oriented, and deliberative and that aims to make or implement public policy or manage public programs or assets."

However, in the practice of governance, the collaborative process does not necessarily run by itself. There are six important criteria in a collaborative governance process, namely: 1) the forum is initiated by a government agency, 2) participants in the forum include non-governmental agencies, 3) participants are directly involved in decision-making, not merely 'consulted' by government agencies, 4) formal organization, 5) the forum aims to make decisions through consensus, and 6) the focus of collaboration is on policy and public service issues (Ansell and Gash, 2008).

Furthermore, important criteria in a collaborative governance process require prerequisites which, according to Ansell and Gash (2008:543), begin with starting conditions, including pre-history concerning cooperation or conflict, basic levels of trust, and social capital or incentives that become sources or drivers of participation for collaboration, institutional design, facilitative leadership, and the collaboration process.

Empirical studies conducted through various previous studies emphasize that the context, prerequisites, and main factors/criteria for collaborative governance are an ideal new approach to governance and public management. Some successes of collaborative governance include: Collaborative governance strategic environmental assessment in practical planning in the Netherlands (Buuren and Nootboom, 2010); Collaborative governance in clean water supply in California (Kaliss, Kiparsky and Norgaard, 2009); Collaborative governance in the formulation of forest management policies in Queensland, Australia (Brown, 2002); Collaboration in the development of education and health in West Java (Jatti, 2015); Collaborative governance in disaster tourism management in Yogyakarta (Zaenuri, 2018). Collaborative governance also produces outputs and outcomes that adapt to changes in the Collaborative Governance Regime (Emerson, Nabatchi, and Balogh: 2011) and increase political legitimacy and public trust in government performance (Sirianni, 2009).

Despite its successes, collaborative governance is not a perfect model or strategy for governance. Mukhlis's (2018) study shows the failure of policy implementation formulated through a collaborative process, namely the failure of the collaborative process in the policy to relocate the Lampung Provincial Government in 2014-2016. This failure was caused by the violation of the idealism of the collaborative process, the

dissensus of collaborators against the agreed consensus, and the dominance of a procedural approach over a substantive approach.

Matthews and Missingham's (2009) study on the failure of collaborative governance in the management of Australia's Wombat Forest was caused by the failure of collaborative governance due to the relationship between Community Forest Management (CFM) and the bureaucracy, the lack of support from the government, leadership factors, and the lack of clarity regarding the objectives and authority of CFM.

Village funds are one of the government's breakthrough programs aimed at improving the welfare of rural communities. Village funds began in 2015 as a measure to enhance regional development and increase the degree of decentralization in Indonesia. Each year, the government allocates large sums of money for the village fund program. These allocations are used to finance various development projects in villages, such as infrastructure, health, education, agriculture, economic improvement, and community empowerment. Village funds are distributed directly to villages through transfers to village accounts. Each village has the freedom to manage these funds according to local needs and priorities. Villages are also required to involve the community in the planning, implementation, and monitoring of fund use. The existence of village funds is expected to increase the capacity of villages to empower themselves.

The management of village funds is correlated with public policy and administration. The management of village funds involves various stakeholders, which is a form of public policy management with a collaborative approach. At least in the last two decades, collaborative governance has emerged as an approach to improving public policy governance and implementation. Collaborative governance has become a popular term in public administration literature (Emerson, Nabatchi and Balogh, 2011). The presence of Collaborative Governance is like a "cure" that can heal various "diseases" in the formulation and implementation of public policy, whether caused by the politicization of policy, budget bloat or limitations, or failure in the implementation of public policy (Ansell and Gash, 2007). Agranoff (2003) refers to collaborative governance as a new strategy in public management in the era of collaboration.

Referring to the views of Ansell and Gash (2008: 544), which emphasize six important criteria in a collaborative governance process, the management of village funds as a form of public policy implementation can be analyzed through this theoretical concept.

The six important criteria in Village Fund Management as a form of policy implementation with a collaborative governance approach can be described as follows:

1. The forum is initiated by a government agency. This is reflected in the existence of formal forums in the formulation of programs financed by Village Funds, starting from hamlet deliberation forums, village deliberation forums, and village development planning deliberation forums (Musyawarah Desa dan Forum Musyawarah Perencanaan Pembangunan Desa or abbreviated as Musrenbangdes);
2. Participants in the forum include non-governmental institutions. The involvement of various non-governmental participants in every stage of Village Fund Management, particularly in planning, implementation, and supervision, involves village assistance teams, Internal Government Supervisory Apparatus (Aparat Pengawas Internal Pemerintah/APIP), Regional Work

Units (Satuan Kerja Perangkat Daerah/SKPD), Law Enforcement Apparatus (Aparat Penegak Hukum/APH), NGOs, journalists, community groups, and village-level implementation teams;

3. Participants are directly involved in decision-making, not merely "consulted" by government agencies. Participants involving non-governmental actors are actively involved in the planning, implementation, and supervision of Village Funds.
4. Formal organization. The existence of various regional legal products and forums established for the management of Village Funds indicates the existence of formal organization.
5. The forum aims to make decisions through consensus. The tiered deliberation forum is essentially an effort to build consensus starting from the village, sub-district, and district levels.
6. The focus of collaboration is on policy and public service issues. This is reflected in the various guidelines for the use of Village Funds issued by the government and the direction of local government policies that are oriented towards strategic regional policies and support the improvement of public service quality.

The existence of Collaborative Governance is driven by various factors, with two main factors being "wicked problems" or social unrest issues such as: educational poverty, judicial system chaos, transportation congestion, global issues such as climate change, and weather problems. Solving complex problems is indeed a little difficult for a particular organization to solve independently. It requires the involvement of many parties to collaborate with each other so that complex problems can be resolved completely. The second driving factor is the increasing complexity in the context of government. The complexity of issues in the community demands more effective and efficient governance (Emerson, Nabatchi and Balogh, 2011). The Industrial Revolution 4.0 has also encouraged a shift in the role of government and encouraged the involvement of actors outside the government (Schwab, 2016).

The relationship between the collaborative governance process in village fund management and the potential vulnerabilities that arise is, in particular, the opening up of opportunities for stages that are the internal domain of the government to negate the results that have been achieved collaboratively in the previous stages. As an illustration, Sudibyo's (2014) study in the Corruption Eradication Commission (2015) mentions several vulnerabilities in the management of Village Funds, namely:

1. At the planning stage, particularly in the preparation of the Village Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJM Desa), Village Work Plan (RKP Desa), and Village Budget (APB Desa), there is a risk of elite capture, for example, budget allocation policies that do not comply with regulations: 70% for development, 30% for operations;
2. During the implementation stage, particularly in the budget allocation for development, governance, and empowerment, there is a risk of nepotism, lack of transparency, and corruption;
3. In the procurement of goods and services, distribution and management of Village Funds, there is a risk of mark-ups, lack of transparency, manipulation and corruption;

4. In the accountability stage, there is a risk of fabricated/fictitious reports, lack of transparency, and corruption;
5. In the monitoring and evaluation stage, there is a risk of administrative formalities and late detection of corruption.

These critical stages, as studied by Sudibyo (2014), cannot be traced if we rely solely on administrative reports. Administrative reports, particularly the consolidation of Village Fund disbursements from the regional treasury account (RKUD) to village accounts in Karo Regency from 2015 to 2017, show a very high percentage of achievement, close to 100%.

The high achievement of the Village Fund absorption output shows that the administrative procedures for the disbursement of Village Funds (98%) are running well. The verification process for the disbursement of Village Funds, as stated by the Head of the Karo Regency BPKAD, the potential for elite capture, mark-ups, and fictitious reports as stated by Sudibyo (2014) are certainly difficult to detect if not investigated further. This is the situation in Karo Regency. Although administratively the absorption (realization) of Village Funds shows a very high level of achievement, in practice the management of Village Funds does not run smoothly without problems.

Several complaints from residents about the low quality of work funded by Village Funds can be an entry point in looking at the phenomenon of Village Fund management in Karo Regency. Some of these complaints include complaints from residents of Sigenderang Village, Juhar District, on the Ministry of Home Affairs' Sapa application regarding the low quality of the physical construction of the "Losd" (meeting hall) carried out in 2017 and the specifications of the work that did not match the published activity plan and budget.

Waardenburg et al. (2019) identify three challenges in collaborative governance: 1) Substantive problem-solving challenges; 2) Collaborative process challenges; and 3) Multi-relational accountability challenges. In terms of process or collaboration dynamics challenges, one of the first steps in any problem-oriented collaborative governance activity is to reach a common understanding of the objectives and approaches to be used (Ansell and Gash, 2008; Emerson et al., 2011). Usually, there are underlying interests of the parties involved that lead to collaboration to solve a particular problem. In this context, there are overlapping elements such as values, goals, and commitments, but there are also very different elements. The more parties involved, the more difficult it is to find common ground (Provan and Kenis, 2008). However, it should be emphasized here that there is a difference between collaboration and conflict (Crosby et al., 2017). Therefore, the main challenge here is how to transform negative "antagonistic" conflict into positive "constructive" conflict, which can later expand the goals of all parties and produce solutions to the problems to be resolved.

Along with the process of formulating a common foundation for goals, collaborators need to gain the trust of all parties. This trust is usually an informal element that can encourage cooperation (Ring and Van de Ven, 1994). Trust is a key element in collaboration (Emerson et al., 2012). If there is no trust or goodwill from the collaborators and the capacity to do so, it can hinder the success of the endeavor (collaboration goals) (Das and Teng, 2001). The prerequisites for collaboration are that all parties are trustworthy, credible, and compatible, and that there is mutual dependence on one another (Emerson et al., 2012). Once this trust has been established, the collaborators must formulate

a mutual commitment between all parties (Ansell and Gash, 2008; Bardach, 1998; Bryson et al., 2015).

Collaborators sometimes have arbitrary or prejudiced tendencies in their efforts to build collaboration. It is important to remember that the process of building trust is key to building effective partnerships, which is also sometimes the most complex challenge of all in collaboration (Bryson et al., 2006; Thomson and Perry, 2006). If there is a high level of distrust at the beginning of a collaboration, it is necessary to build trust through the involvement of all parties (Ansell and Gash, 2008; Emerson et al., 2012). Another part of building trust is building mutual commitment. The obstacles that usually arise are competition between collaborators and other parties, reluctance to participate fully due to busy schedules, uncertainty about the results, or concern that their interests/opinions will be ignored (Ansell and Gash, 2008). To overcome these obstacles, it is necessary to work together to create an environment that focuses on mutual benefit for all parties, both professionally and personally (Ansell and Gash, 2008; Thomson and Perry, 2006).

The empirical phenomena that illustrate the problems in the dynamics of village fund management collaboration in Karo Regency can be described as follows:

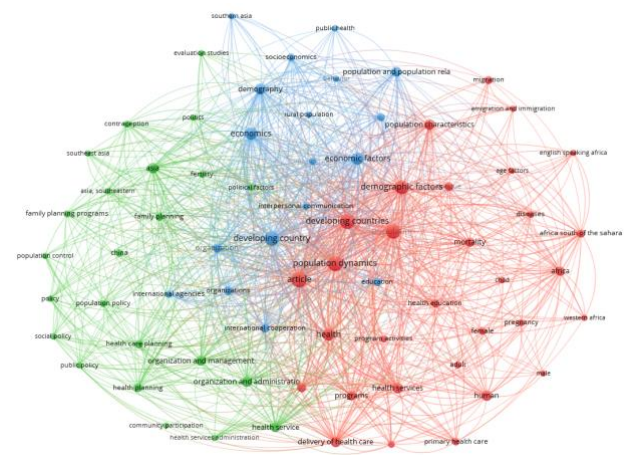
1. Public complaints about the poor quality of physical work financed by village funds, both those published in the media and verbal complaints to internal supervisory officials (Inspectorate).
2. As of 2023, there have been three former village heads convicted in court. This could be the tip of the iceberg, as there may be more village heads with legal problems.
3. There is no formal basis or procedure for some stakeholders involved in village fund management, so collaboration tends to be spontaneous.

Based on the issues outlined above, it is important to further examine the dynamics of multi- stakeholder collaboration in village fund management in Karo Regency.

The shift in governance paradigms is a logical consequence of changes in socio-political interactions among government, the private sector, and civil society. Traditional governance, which was oriented toward hierarchical, top-down relationships, has gradually transformed into a more horizontal and interactive pattern of relations (Kooiman, 2012; Schwab, 2016). Scholars have advocated for the involvement of non-governmental actors in various areas of public affairs through different conceptual frameworks, including Network Government (Provan, 2000), Partnership Governance (Munro, 2008), Dynamic Governance (Neo and Chen, 2007), Polycentric Governance (Ostrom, 2020), and Collaborative Governance (Ansell and Gash, 2008; Emerson, Nabatchi, and Balogh, 2011). The participation of non-governmental actors in public sector affairs is now widely recognized as inevitable.

Collaborative governance itself contains several critical points that determine its success. Ansell and Gash (2008) emphasize the importance of multi-actor collaborative processes, while Emerson, Nabatchi, and Balogh (2011) refer to this as the dynamics of multi-actor collaboration. Salignac (2019) further develops a measurement instrument to demonstrate the importance of collaborative dynamics as a crucial element of collaborative governance.

Figure 1. Bibliographic Mapping in Village Fund Management



In order to find a research gap in the dynamics of village fund management, Researcher use Vos-Viewer to do bibliographic mapping in this discussion. On the Scopus literature search page, keywords are then linked with Boolean operators (AND, OR) and the keywords produced by the researcher are: TITLE-ABS-KEY (village fund AND dynamics AND collaborative). 70 literature sources on the topic emerged as a. Bibliometric analysis was then carried out using VOS-Viewer version 1.6.18 to visualize the results of the literature mapping.

Based on the literature mapping (figure 1), there are three themes that really often discussed in the village fund discussions. First, economic and demographic aspects in the village fund management. Second, program allocation in the village fund discussions. Third, the external influence in the village fund management. In the external influence themes, several researcher usually discuss about population and international agencies that influence various aspects in the village fund management.

However, there is no research that really discuss other influence such as human resource disparities or cultural context in the village fund management. Researcher find that the dynamic of village fund management collaboration is important in the village fund discussions. This research then want to explore deeper about the dynamic of village fund management collaboration. This study addresses gap by examining how actor-capacity disparities, institutionalization, and socio-cultural embeddedness shape the dynamics and health of collaboration in Village Fund management.

This study offers a novel perspective on collaborative governance in Village Fund management by demonstrating that collaboration dynamics can not be adequately explained solely through formal multi-stakeholder arrangements. Drawing on the case of Karo Regency, the study identifies actor-capacity disparities and culturally embedded social institutions as critical contextual mechanisms shaping principled engagement, shared motivation, and capacity for joint action. By integrating the Collaborative Governance Regime framework with local institutional arrangements rooted in Karo indigenous knowledge, this study proposes a contextualized collaborative governance perspective for Village Fund management in Indonesia.

METHOD

The research on the dynamics of multi-actor collaboration in the management of Village Funds in Karo Regency used qualitative research. This type was chosen because it sought to explore the meaning of the phenomenon of collaborative dynamics in the management of Village Funds in the field. This is

based on the opinions of Creswell (2009), Ritchie and Lewis (2003), and Denzin and Lincoln (2003), that qualitative research is research that aims to analyze in depth a phenomenon or case related to the focus of research explored in the field.

Karo Regency was selected as the research site based on the following considerations: 1) regarding the dynamics of collaboration in Village Fund management over the six-year period from 2015 to 2021, budget absorption consistently exceeded 98% in terms of administrative procedures, and only three Village Heads were convicted of wrong doing related to Village Fund management during that time; and 2) the collaborative dynamics of Village Fund management in Karo Regency are inextricably linked to cultural elements and local wisdom known as Merga Silima, Tutar Siwaluh, Rakut Sitelu, and Perkade-kaden Sepuluh Dua Tambah Sada. The selected villages represent those located at short, medium, and long distances from the administrative center in Kabanjahe.

Informant's Profile

The selection of informants was based on their involvement, substantive knowledge, institutional position, and relevant capabilities regarding the collaborative governance of Village Fund management in Karo (Lewis, 2015; Takona, 2024). Purposive sampling was employed because the study required informants possessing extensive experience and knowledge—as well as direct involvement—to articulate the dynamics of collaboration; this strategy is particularly appropriate when informants are selected based on specific intentions or objectives rather than statistical representativeness (Palinkas et al., 2015).

Table 1. List of Research Informant

No	Institution	Informant Name and Brief Profile	Number/Code Informants
1	Regional Government of Karo Regency	Head of BPKPAD, experienced in regional and village financial management as well as village governance policy formulation	1 person / AT
2	Department of Community and Village Empowerment (DPMD), Karo Regency	Head of DPMD, experienced in village fund management and facilitation of village and sub-district governance development	1 person / DMG
3	Sub-district Government	Head of Kabanjahe Sub-district and Head of Tigapanah Sub-district	2 persons / SS, DMG
4	Village Government	Village Heads of Rumah Kabanjahe, Lau Simomo, and Kandibata	3 persons / AB, MS, PT

5	Village Consultative Body (BPD)	Chairpersons or members of the Village Consultative Body	3 persons
6	Village Community	Representatives of the village community	6 persons
7	Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)	Ate Keleng Foundation, Pijar Podi Foundation (Yapidi)	2 persons
8	Academics	Academics with expertise in village governance/public policy	2 persons
9	Village Facilitators	RT, TB, MT	3 persons
10	Journalist	(PJTK)	1 person / RT
Total			23 persons

Furthermore, Creswell (2009) argues that qualitative research is conducted to: 1) Explore specific meanings, 2) Understand and explore context, 3) Identify unexpected phenomena, 4) Understand the processes behind these phenomena, 5) Construct causal explanations (explanatory causes), and 6) Describe patterns. Based on these six considerations, this qualitative research was designed and used to deeply uncover the phenomenon of the dynamics of collaboration in the management of Village Funds in Karo Regency.

This research is exploratory in nature, attempting to gather in-depth data and present what was obtained in the field, such as information, opinions, ideas, attitudes, and actions of the informants. The informants in this study were determined using a purposive technique, namely the selection of informants specifically to reveal the views of actors involved in village fund management in Karo Regency. Research informants numbered 23 people, divided into groups involved in village fund management either directly or indirectly.

Data Collection and Analysis Methods

Data collection in this qualitative study was conducted through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and participant observation. The researcher carried out in-depth interviews with various stakeholders selected through purposive sampling. Additionally, focus group discussions were organized to capture the views and experiences of the broader community. These methods enabled the researcher to obtain concrete data regarding public perspectives on the collaborative dynamics of Village Fund management. Once the data was collected, the researcher proceeded with thematic analysis. Brandler and Roman (2007) state that thematic analysis is a qualitative research method aimed at identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data. This process helps the researcher understand the meaning of the collected data and relate it to the research questions. Brandler and Roman (2007) also note that the thematic analysis process typically involves several steps: 1) familiarization with the data; 2) data coding; 3) searching for

themes; 4) reviewing themes; 5) defining and naming themes; and 6) writing the report.

The qualitative research method utilizing thematic analysis offers an in-depth approach to understanding the collaborative dynamics of Village Fund management within the context of local wisdom in Karo Regency. The method's flexibility in data collection and analysis allows the researcher to capture social nuances and the rich experiences of the local community. Through the systematic steps of thematic analysis, the researcher can formulate findings that contribute positively to sustainable tourism development—one that prioritizes local wisdom and community participation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The dynamics of collaboration in the management of Village Funds in Karo Regency were analyzed using the Collaborative Governance approach developed by Nabatchi et al. (2011). In a context system, Collaborative Governance is driven by various external factors that exert pressure on the Collaborative Governance Regime (CGR) process as the institution authorized to establish policies for carrying out collaboration dynamics through shared motivation, principled engagement, and capacity for joint action. These three components of collaboration dynamics work together to produce collaborative actions.

Principled Engagement Dimension

Principled engagement is a forum where people with differing content, relational, and identity goals work across their respective institutional, sectoral, or jurisdictional boundaries to solve problems, resolve conflicts, or create value. relationship levels, and identities work together across their respective institutional, sectoral, or jurisdictional boundaries to solve problems, resolve conflicts, or create value (Cahn in Emerson et al., 2011). There are at least two important points to note, namely diverse stakeholders and working across jurisdictional boundaries.

Diverse stakeholders in the management of Village Funds in Karo Regency can be identified as coming from various agencies/institutions, namely: government agencies, law enforcement agencies (APH), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the village government itself. Normatively, a number of regulations govern the involvement of these stakeholders in the management of Village Funds, such as Law No. 6 of 2014 concerning Villages, which has been revised by Law No. 3 of 2024 concerning Villages.

However, the collaboration model is still spontaneous and not yet institutionalized, especially for stakeholders from non-governmental organizations and the mass media. This is a weakness because it is highly dependent on the individuals involved. This is also in line with the findings of Nuh and Darwin (2005) in the Dynamics of Collaboration between Stakeholders in Anti-Trafficking Strategies in Bandung City, where the collaboration model has not been formally institutionalized. On the other hand, Nuh and Darwin (Masini et al., 2021) see that this type of collaboration model has advantages in that the parties are not burdened by the process of cooperation with administrative obstacles.

Table 2. Actors' Motivations for Collaborating

No	Institution/Affiliation	Motivation/ Principles Underlying Involvement
1.	The Karo Regency Local Government, including Inspectorate Community and Village Empowerment Agency Regional Financial and Asset Management Agency	Mandate of laws and regulations
2	Tanah Karo Police	Supervisory and oversight functions
3.	Karo District Attorney's Office	Supervisory and oversight functions
4.	Village Government, Association of Village Officials throughout Indonesia (Papdesi) Karo Regency	Mandate of laws and regulations
5.	Village Consultative Body	Mandate of legislation
6.	Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as the Pijar Podi Foundation (Yapidi) and the Ate Keleng Foundation (YAK)	Social control function for community strengthening and empowerment
7.	Village Facilitators	Mandate of laws and regulations and social control function
8.	Mass Media/Journalists: Karo Land Journalists Association (PJTK)	Social control function

Source. compiled based on interview results, 2025

The dynamic process of collaboration in the management of Village Funds in Karo Regency was examined with a focus on the dimension of principled engagement. The stakeholders involved were expected to set aside their individual interests in favor of the common good; this is the important meaning of principled engagement. However, in practice, from the outset, the actors involved have not been able to set aside their respective interests in the management of Village Funds. The dominance of the roles of the regional government and village government is still very strong, so it does not reflect equality of influence among stakeholders in collaboration. Equality of influence is an absolute requirement for collaboration, which prioritizes function over structure.

In line with the development of an increasingly democratic society, advances in information and communication technology, and increased levels of education and public awareness in community life and governance, in order to realize principled involvement in the management of Village Funds that concern the common interest, it is necessary to provide a broader and more inclusive space for stakeholder involvement so that the community can exercise their rights and obligations to the fullest extent.

The dominant role of the government needs to be reduced and distributed to stakeholders in order to achieve a balanced role. Several empirical phenomena in the field that reveal the difficulty of implementing principled involvement can be described as follows. First, asymmetry of interests. This phenomenon is

evident from interviews and field observations, particularly among stakeholders from within the local government and outside the government. Those within the government tend to adhere to the principles of administrative order, digital-based governance, and refraining from fraud to avoid legal problems. However, more specifically within the internal government itself, there are still those who believe that the limited competence of village fund managers provides an opportunity to sell influence, offer document processing services, or engage in less than honorable practices such as intimidation or exploiting administrative errors as a gateway to transactional working relationships.

Differences in internal interests that color principled involvement also occur among external parties, particularly village communities, NGOs, the press, and law enforcement officials. Most external parties adhere to the principle that village funds will inevitably be misappropriated by village officials because the political costs of village head elections are quite high, the bureaucratic management process requires coordination (coordination costs), and there are support costs for operators and individuals who complete the administration. Through assumptions that view village funds as a "shared pot," generally only a few external parties pay attention to guidance. Most of the support, attention, or guidance that is claimed to be given to village officials is actually just another name for "asking for a share" in order to engage in collective corruption. It is difficult to prove the existence of such practices, but the statements of informants implicitly reveal this phenomenon.

Second, information asymmetry. When the interests of the actors involved in the management of village funds are not aligned, the next consequence is information asymmetry. Parties who control information, especially related to village funds, such as regulations, technical guidelines/guidelines for the use of village financial applications, and financial transaction systems, use the information they have as bargaining power.

This phenomenon can be found, for example, in the preparation of reports and the audit process of village financial reports conducted in conjunction with regional financial reports. If the main officials, namely the Village Head, Village Treasurer, and Activity Implementation Team (TPK), are technically confirmed, they generally direct technical information requests to the village fund operator. Uniquely, village operators who do not have adequate sources of income take advantage of this information asymmetry as an effort to increase their income, among others, by: requesting services to prepare accountability reports, fostering relationships with goods/service providers in order to obtain rewards for every transaction directed in the completion of administrative tasks. In speaking, information asymmetry actually encourages covert or overt practices of illegal levies in the form of services, coordination fees, or logistical support.

Third, the bureaucratization of villages. Since the introduction of the village fund policy, which is transferred directly to the Village Fund Management Unit (RKUDes), villages, as part of the state/regional financial management regime, are treated the same as Regional Work Units/Regional Governments in terms of preparing planning documents, budgets, and financial reports. This is an excessive demand, as village government entities, which have long been marginalized and far removed from the hustle and bustle of government bureaucracy, are now preoccupied with administrative technicalities, financial application instruments, and the

formalization of village democracy as a forum for guided deliberation.

Shared Motivation Dimension

The second dimension of the dynamics of collaboration is the shared motivation of stakeholders in the management of Village Funds in Karo Regency. This section will examine the extent to which interpersonal elements or social capital between stakeholders can be built. There are four elements that will be described, namely: building a shared spirit of mutual trust, mutual understanding, internal legitimacy, and strong commitment.

Trust is an important part of collaborative governance. This trust will be built through transparency, accountability, active involvement of all parties, and respect for differences. Trust enables various parties to work together more effectively. When there is mutual trust between the government and other stakeholders, they tend to work constructively, share information, and respect each other's opinions and interests. This enables productive collaboration in formulating policies and addressing complex issues.

Regarding the management of Village Funds in Karo Regency, stakeholders have provided mixed responses. As stated by informants, the management of Village Funds should be a mutual agreement. Although there are still shortcomings and limitations, these can be understood and used as material for evaluation in the future. As a mutual agreement, all Village Fund management activities must be directed towards existing plans or agreements.

Informant RT from PJTK stated that since the beginning of Village Fund management, there has been no spirit of mutual trust; on the contrary, there is suspicion, as stated:

"We actually have a social control function in the management of the Village Fund. We also have a moral obligation to participate and contribute to monitoring so that the objectives of the Village Fund can be achieved for the welfare of the community. However, our presence is often suspected of being for certain interests. We also do not deny that there are individuals who take advantage of opportunities for pragmatic individual interests. The village government considers journalists to be more inclined to intimidate the village government, especially village heads who have made mistakes."

An informant from the Community Empowerment Office, MG, believes that the process of managing Village Funds should have a shared motivation in the sense of having a common vision to build a better Karo Regency in the future, starting from the villages. However, in practice, each stakeholder has different views and concepts depending on their knowledge, experience, and the issues they are familiar with. Meanwhile, the SKPDs involved in the management of Village Funds, namely the Community and Village Empowerment Agency, the Inspectorate and the Sub-district, as well as the Village Government, have a mainstream mindset that the management of Village Funds is in accordance with existing guidelines, so that all stages in the management of Village Funds refer to existing regulations.

Another informant, EB from the Pijar Podi Foundation (Yapidi), stated:

"We actually have a service duty to help strengthen community capacity, build

community awareness of their rights. Our community is a farming community, so for them, if they don't do their farming work, their needs will not be met. The community considers government activities to be the government's business."

A shared motivation in the management of village funds is needed as an aggregate of a shared spirit of mutual trust, mutual understanding, internal legitimacy, and strong commitment.

In practice, observations show that it is still difficult to build mutual trust, mutual understanding, internal legitimacy, and strong commitment from all stakeholders. At the time of data collection for this study, informants from the law enforcement agency group (APH), for example, still found it difficult to provide information on the progress of legal cases or prevention efforts that had been carried out. There is a reluctance to disclose public information, especially information that falls under the domain of law enforcement officials in the management of village funds.

For example, when meeting with the Head of the Corruption Unit of the Tanah Karo Police, information regarding the management of village funds that had been investigated or reported by the community for investigation was answered diplomatically. There is an impression that public complaints and ongoing investigations may be communicated in such a way as to prevent them from being pursued legally. On the one hand, this effort gives hope that village fund managers will not hesitate or even fear in carrying out their duties. However, on the other hand, this also has the potential to result in other forms of fraud, particularly transactional coordination and collaboration.

The conditions described above further highlight the difficulty of building shared motivation among stakeholders when there is still asymmetry of interests, asymmetry of information, and different treatment by law enforcement agencies towards similar cases occurring within the village administration, particularly in the context of village fund management.

Capacity for Joint Action

The final dimension of collaboration dynamics relates to the capacity for joint action among stakeholders in the management of Village Funds in Karo Regency. This section will examine the extent to which joint action has been formed, considering the capabilities, leadership, and resources possessed by each stakeholder that can be synergized through a mutually understood procedure to produce a force that cannot be generated by stakeholders acting alone.

Unlike the two previous dimensions, which are more non-physical in nature, this dimension is more tangible. This means that what is built in the process of principled engagement and shared motivation is concretized in the form of actions that can be felt and seen with the naked eye.

There are four elements described, namely institutionalized action procedures, leadership, knowledge, and resources.

First, the institutionalized procedure for integrating actions is actually accommodated in all stages of village fund management, particularly in deliberations on preparation, budgeting, implementation, and supervision. The inclusive institutional model, participatory governance, and various support teams that have been formed are actually intended to ensure that all stakeholders participate from start to finish. This

collaborative process is a procedural requirement in the preparation of the RPJMDes, APBDes, and the implementation and reporting of the budget so that everything is accessible to the public, especially the village community. However, in reality, the imbalance of resources, information inequality (information asymmetry), and asymmetry of interests contribute to the distortion of the actions of stakeholders.

Field observations show that parties outside the village, such as NGOs, journalists, and goods/service providers, are more intense in finding out or identifying all the dynamics of village fund management than the villagers themselves. Generally, the reasons given by residents for not being too concerned about village fund management include: there are already too many actors involved; we are all connected by family ties in this village; let the village head and officials deal with it, they will tire themselves out; the truth will come out on its own. The reasons given by the villagers reveal that collective action is difficult to achieve because the villagers have become apathetic towards the financial management of their village.

Second, leadership at all levels and in all communities. At the village level, the leadership of the village head is certainly decisive as the hub of all levels of the community, including hamlets, neighborhoods, and RT/RWs. Leadership at the village level is also known as collective leadership through the BPD, the Hamlet Head, who represents the residents in formulating policies, implementing them, and supervising their implementation.

However, bureaucratization and differences in interests distort the construction of leadership in villages, segregating elected officials (village heads) and appointed officials (BPD and/or hamlet heads). Village heads feel they have more legitimacy and are formally legally positioned as holders of village financial management authority, giving them the mandate to determine strategic village policies. This condition also encourages the Village Head to often become a single player and face problems alone when issues arise in village financial management. Still related to the leadership of the Village Head, particularly his position as an official who is directly elected by the citizens. This position as a directly elected official also has very complex consequences for both the village and the village head personally. The map of voters who are for and against the village head after the village head election is still difficult to separate when the village head election is over.

This conflict becomes a latent conflict, at least for the next election period. This is one form of latent conflict that is a weakness of participatory democracy at the village level in a communal society that is not accustomed to contestation. This context also affects the village head personally, particularly in terms of their vulnerability to lawsuits from various parties, which is a form of resistance from the political contestants they defeated in the village head election.

In fact, upon closer examination, all criminal cases related to the management of village funds stem from the failure of each village head in their respective areas to manage these latent conflicts. This was confirmed by the Head of Special Crimes at the Karo District Attorney's Office.

"All of these village fund cases initially began with complaints from villagers facilitated by NGOs and journalists for the purpose of negotiating with the new village head. As the situation developed, due to the lack of compromise and the difficulty of establishing communication, the cases were pursued through legal proceedings."

The statement by the Head of Special Crimes at the Karo District Attorney's Office emphasizes that communication is actually the key to resolving various issues in villages, especially those related to village funds. However, when communication channels are blocked or even impossible to access, legal action becomes the residents' option for resolving all their problems, including those related to the management of village funds.

Third, knowledge about village funds. The capacity of stakeholders to understand all the rules, mechanisms, and governance of village funds also determines their collective actions. When knowledge about the substance of village fund management is not the same, collaboration is difficult because there is no common basis for thinking and acting among stakeholders. When someone is expected to be involved in an issue about which they have very little knowledge, it is certainly difficult to produce actions that are in line with other actors who are already established in the entire range of activities. This also occurs in the management of village funds, especially as not all internal actors within the village government have the same knowledge of the mechanisms, substance, and duties and responsibilities involved in management. Moreover, with the tendency for all administrative, technical, and financial accountability work in the village to be outsourced, it is difficult to expect all village stakeholders to have the same level of knowledge.

Fourth, the resources of the actors managing village funds are also unequal. The lack of capacity of village heads and village officials in managing village funds is as stated by HT:

"We village heads come from various backgrounds, including farmers, former drivers, traders, and so on. Our educational backgrounds are also not the same. Meanwhile, in this village, there are many rules that we must understand, from the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Ministry of Villages, the Ministry of Finance, and local government regulations. As a result, many of my fellow village heads are reluctant to learn these rules because of their inability to do so. In the end, we have a saying, 'just do what the PMD says,' meaning that as long as it has been directed and approved by the PMD (Pemberdayaan Masyarakat dan Desa/Community and Village Empowerment Agency), it must be in accordance with all existing regulations. We admit that on average, the quality of us village heads and officials is still lacking. There are actually training programs organized by the sub-district and the PMD to improve our quality, in other words, to educate us."

When resources are not equal, it is difficult for stakeholders to take joint action because their power to contribute or benefit will not be the same. For example, physical work in villages is generally handled by residents who have greater financial capacity or are accustomed to having connections with entrepreneurs/providers. Other residents with limited financial capacity generally become workers in every physical activity funded by village funds in their area. With such vastly different resource structures among residents, the initial intention of village funds to drive the village economy has not been fully realized in the practice of village administration. Despite the

various development outcomes achieved through the village fund policy, the establishment of inclusive village institutions, the democratization of village financial management, and the strengthening of collaborative governance at the village level have not been fully realized.

Salignac et al. (2019) created a measurement tool for the health of public sector collaboration human resources, shared authority, shared accountability, comprehensive agreement systems, communication flows, adaptive capacity, and environmental stakeholders/authorities. Based on the results of interviews and observations, the assessment of multi-stakeholder collaboration dynamics in village fund management in Karo Regency is outlined in the following table:

Table. Measuring the Dynamics of Collaboration in the Management of Village Funds in Karo Regency using Salignac Model 2019

Dimension	Sub-dimension	Measure
Common goals	Common goals	Common Goals
	Understanding shared challenges	Stakeholders in village fund management do not yet understand and share a common awareness of the importance of collaboration in addressing problems.
	Understanding of a shared approach	Stakeholders in village fund management do not yet have a clear understanding of what approach is needed in collaboration.
Shared resources	Adequate resources to coordinate infrastructure	Only some stakeholders from the government have a budget to coordinate collaborative activities, while stakeholders from NGOs and the mass media do not have a budget to coordinate collaborative activities.
	Shared data	Not all stakeholders can access the data they need; there is still information asymmetry between

		stakeholders in accessing data.
	Financial support	Not all stakeholders have sufficient funds to maintain collaboration operations for the next 2 years.
	Shared capacity	Stakeholders lack the skills/expertise/specialization to achieve collaboration goals. There is still an imbalance in stakeholder capacity for collaboration.
	Mutually beneficial	Normative considerations that are more demanding obligations underlie some stakeholders' decision to remain and work in the collaboration, while some stakeholders remain in the collaboration process due to moral responsibility.
Shared authority	Participation in decision-making	Decision-making is still dominated by stakeholders from the government. The role of stakeholders from NGOs and the mass media is still minimal in decision-making.
	Authority to commit	Generally, stakeholders have sufficient authority to commit their organizations to decisions, except for stakeholders from the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources and NGOs, who have limited authority.
Accountability	Tracking progress and impact	Stakeholders do not yet have a system in place to achieve measurable progress

		measurable goals.
	Shared responsibility	Each stakeholder's area of responsibility is clear and understood.
	Shared ownership of the final results	Stakeholders have ownership of the final results of their work
	Tracking health collaboration	There is no system in place to measure how well the collaboration in managing village funds has been implemented.
Comprehensive agreement system	Stakeholders/community as stakeholders	All stakeholders are affected by issues arising from the village fund management collaboration process, either directly or indirectly
	Response based on needs	Community needs form the basis for stakeholder collaboration responses.
	Diversity of stakeholders	Collaboration involves various members from local government, village government, law enforcement agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the mass media.
Communication flow	Data evaluation dissemination	Stakeholders in the collaboration review and share their findings both directly and Indirectly sharing a common understanding.
Adequate external communication	This collaboration is more internal in nature and has not yet led to a strategy to help achieve common goals.	Adequate external communication

	Common language	Stakeholders use common languages, both Indonesian and Karo Regional Language, to describe the joint approach.
Adaptive capacity	Commitment to seeking innovative approaches	Stakeholders seek different perspectives to find alternative solutions.
	Learning culture	Stakeholders have internal reflection practices to ensure they remain in the process of while collaborating.
Environmental authorization holders	Generating support	Stakeholder collaboration continues to build support at the higher levels of leadership
	Level of urgency	There is no shared understanding of the clear urgency within the community to address the issue
	Security	This collaboration designs a safe environment where disputes and conflicts between stakeholders can be discussed

The measurement of collaboration dynamics using the Salignac et al. (2019) model indicates that Village Fund management in Karo Regency has established a multi-stakeholder collaborative structure, but the collaboration has not yet developed into a fully integrated and institutionalized system. The main weakness lies not in the absence of actors, but in the quality of relationships among them. Differences in stakeholder capacity, unequal access to information and resources, varying levels of participation in decision-making, and the absence of shared mechanisms for accountability constrain the development of collective action.

The findings also indicate that collaboration remains largely dependent on formal administrative arrangements rather than on strong interdependence among stakeholders. Although government institutions, village governments, communities, and other actors participate in Village Fund management, their involvement does not necessarily produce shared goals, shared authority, shared resources, and shared accountability. Consequently, collaboration tends to operate in a fragmented manner, with each actor performing its respective institutional role rather than functioning as an integrated collaborative system.

These findings suggest that strengthening collaboration in Village Fund management requires a shift from stakeholder involvement toward stakeholder integration. Collaboration should therefore be institutionalized through clearer mechanisms for information sharing, joint decision-making, capacity development, resource sharing, and collective accountability. In the context of Karo Regency, this institutionalization should also accommodate local social and cultural structures as relational resources capable of strengthening trust, reciprocity, and collective action among stakeholders.

Factors Affecting Collaboration Dynamics

Field observations show that there are still systemic contexts that serve as other driving factors and need to be elaborated upon in order to create collaborative governance or form a collaborative governance regime, namely: political education of the community, professional bureaucracy, and Karo culture. Each of these factors is elaborated further in the following sections.

1. Political Education of the Community

Political education of the community relates to the awareness of the community as citizens who have the freedom to make the best choices for their lives. Political education of the community refers to efforts to increase the understanding and political participation of the community. Broadly speaking, Damsar (2010: 189-190) categorizes public participation in the public policy process into three types: gladiator, transitional, and spectator. The gladiator or fighter type is a community that actively involves itself in the public policy process, advocating, criticizing, and participating in monitoring policy implementation even though it is not directly related to personal or group interests. The gladiator type has a high awareness that participating in the public policy process is their right and responsibility as citizens, so they have high idealistic values.

The transitional or pragmatic type is a community that will only involve itself in the public policy process when it relates to personal or group interests. This becomes the motivation or driving force to fight for their interests so that they can be included in the government's institutional agenda. This group fights with all its might to become a group that benefits from government policies. The last type is the spectator or apathetic type, which is a community that does not care at all about the ongoing public policy process. This group takes a position outside the public policy system, merely observing what is being done by the authorities and stakeholders in the public policy process.

Public education plays a major role in encouraging collaborative dynamics in the public policy process, including in the management of Village Funds. People with high awareness will play an active role in voicing their aspirations and interests so that they can become an effective pressure group. Conversely, communities with low awareness will tend to be less concerned or indifferent to the public policy process. Community awareness of involvement in the public policy process is influenced by their level of education, experience, access to information, and motivation. With improved quality of education, increased experience, easier access to information, and strong motivation, community awareness will also increase.

With regard to the management of Village Funds in Karo Regency, the level of political education of the community is still limited to the transitional and spectator types. If there are personal interests that are considered important to fight for in the

series of stages of village financial management, the residents involved will try to ensure that their interests are accommodated. Others prefer to be spectators, even considering the management of village funds to be the domain of the Village Head and Village Treasurer, who are fully responsible for all consequences.

2. Professional Bureaucracy

The existence of bureaucracy at the village government level, regional government level, and supporting institutions such as law enforcement agencies (particularly the police and prosecutors) should professionally guarantee that the collaborative process in village financial management can run smoothly. In reality, not all actors within the government bureaucracy or law enforcement prioritize professionalism. Observing the dynamics of the ongoing collaboration, the limitations of stakeholders at the village level have, for the most part, encouraged a weakening of bureaucratic professionalism.

This is evident from the division among bureaucratic officials in maintaining the sustainability of village fund management into two camps: those who are serious and professional in providing guidance, and those who take advantage of the situation for personal gain. This situation is inevitable because the ecosystem formed in the management of village funds tends to provide more room for negotiation than pure professionalism. A simple statement that describes this situation can be heard in the confession of a Village Secretary, "no matter how good we are at administration, sir, if the coordination is wrong, everything will be in vain." This simple expression shows how difficult it is to create bureaucratic professionalism in an ecosystem that is not supportive.

3. Culture

Culture, as defined by Geertz (1989) as an accumulation of values, worldviews, and practices in community life, greatly influences the dynamics of collaboration. The Karo people, whose culture strongly emphasizes social harmony, actually contribute to permissive practices in village fund management as long as it does not cause conflict in the village.

The Karo community's culture, which is bound by an extensive kinship scheme through *merga silima tutur siwaluh rakut sitelu*, is a supporting factor in maintaining social harmony.

Local wisdom (local genius) manifested in the creed "*merga silima, tutur siwaluh, rakut sitelu*" is the cultural philosophy and ethical code of the Karo community in building their civilization. This philosophy and ethical code recognizes five clans, eight kinship lines, and is bound together through three bonds of brotherhood. In short, the Karo people strongly encourage the coexistence of every human thought, body, heart, and feeling/will to be one with the universe.

Balance and harmony are very strong in the philosophy and ethics of the Karo people's way of life. Origin (genealogy), position, role, and social responsibility can be traced through the creed "*merga silima, tutur siwaluh, rakut sitelu*". Simply put, through knowledge of one's clan, one can trace the origins of one's birthplace, one's position in relation to other clans, whether through blood ties or marriage, including one's role and responsibilities towards "*sangkep nggeluh*" which is manifested in *rakut sitelu* (three knots) *senina, kalimbubu, anak berui*.

The five clans (Karo-Karo, Ginting, Tarigan, Perangan-angan, Sembiring) form the basis of the taxonomy of social relations. The taxonomy of social relations can be endogenous (based on blood ties) or exogenous (based on marriage). This taxonomic basis

allows all clans to experience changes in their roles and positions in Karo customs, reflecting a democratic and rotating cycle.

Tutur siwaluh is a concept of kinship in Karo society, which is related to speech, consisting of eight groups: *puang kalimbubu, kalimbubu, senina, sembuyak, senina sipemeran, senina sepengalon/sedalanen, anak beru, and anak beru menteri*.

Rakut sitelu means *sangkep nggeluh* (completeness of life) for the Karo people, consisting of three groups, namely: *kalimbubu, anak beru, senina*. *Kalimbubu* is defined as the family that gives a wife, *anak beru* is the family that takes or receives a wife, and *senina* is the family of the same lineage or the core family. Simply put, the local wisdom model of "*merga silima, tutur siwaluh, rakut sitelu*" is constructed in narrating the reality of government and can be referred to as a model of "customary government".

An important question to be answered is how to "extract" this local wisdom so that it can be used as a model in developing concepts and regulations that can provide solutions to a series of governance issues.

To answer this question, we will explain what is meant by local wisdom (local genius), what is the body of knowledge, and how to translate the reality of governance into easily understandable abstractions.

Local wisdom certainly determines three important things in building a body of knowledge, namely the way of viewing reality (ontology), the way of obtaining knowledge about reality (epistemology), and the value of use in life (axiology). In certain cases, local wisdom can even surpass that of scientists. However, in methodological terms, local wisdom is often considered unscientific.

The term local wisdom (local genius) can be equated with local knowledge or indigenous knowledge, referring to the views of Gail McClure in *Indigenous Knowledge Systems*:

"Implications for Agriculture and International Development, published by Iowa State University, that "Indigenous knowledge systems are learned ways of knowing and looking at the world. They have evolved from years of experience and trial-and-error problem solving by groups of people working to meet the challenges they faced in their local environments, drawing upon the resources they have at hand."

Thus, the term local wisdom for McClure (1989) is more accurately referred to as indigenous knowledge. A similar point is made by the authors in the book edited by Siti Syamsiyatun and Nihayatul Wafiroh (2013) entitled *Philosophy, Ethics, and Local Wisdom for the Construction of National Morality*, published by Globethics.net. For the authors of this book, local wisdom is equated with philosophy and ethics that have been institutionalized throughout the archipelago. Referring to this argument, the Karo people, as one of the ethnic groups inhabiting the archipelago, certainly have a form of local wisdom, philosophy, or ethics that underlies their way of thinking, acting, and managing their lives together, including interpreting the administration of government.

A stronger affirmation is conveyed by Kharisma Nugroho, Fred Carden, and Hans Antlov (2018) in their book, which is the result of collaborative research between Bappenas, the Knowledge Sector Initiative (KSI), and the Australian Government. The research team's key recommendation is the use and promotion of local knowledge in policy-making in Indonesia. By presenting ten case studies related to public policy formulation from various regions in Indonesia, it can be

understood that local knowledge is not inferior in terms of the quality of public policy formulation and implementation that is acceptable to the affected communities. In other words, a simple sentence by Naseem Nicholas Taleb (2010:7) seems to adequately represent the power and importance of local knowledge: "The problem with knowledge is that there are many books about birds written by bird experts rather than books about birds written by birds or books about bird experts written by birds."

The assertion summarized by referring to the views of experts and research results is that local knowledge or local wisdom has the same capabilities as scientific knowledge when used in the field of public policy.

To explain this, it is necessary to describe how the local wisdom of "merga silima, tutur siwaluh, rakut sitelu" became a contextual body of knowledge (philosophy, science, art, and technology). Furthermore, this conceptual analysis will be compared with existing regulations to see the harmony or even imbalances that need to be corrected.

Examining the local wisdom of the Karo people, "merga silima, tutur siwaluh, rakut sitelu". This concept is often associated with Karo customs in tracing kinship between one person and another, between one family and another, and even between residents of one village and residents of another village. This means that when most people refer to "merga silima, tutur siwaluh, rakut sitelu," the concept that immediately comes to mind is limited to the issue of "terombo keturunan" (lineage), position in customs (senina, kalimbubu, anak beru), or the broad cosmopolitan concept that in Karo society, everyone is family.

The modeling of the local wisdom of the Karo people through "merga silima, tutur siwaluh, rakut sitelu" becomes the basis of "customary government" to make the practice of government a "customary government." These customary norms regulate the patterns of interaction between the Karo cultural system, which can be equated with the systemic patterns of input, process, and output. Through the input of "merga silima", processed in the social order of "tutur siwaluh", the cohesion and solidarity of Karo customs culminate in "rakut sitelu".

In simple terms, it can be said that "merga silima" is the input in the process of social interaction that is dialectical through "tutur siwaluh," and the output is reflected in the intimacy of "sangkep nggeluh" (completeness/wholeness of life) of the Karo people as "rakut sitelu." Sangkep nggeluh is a kinship system in Karo society which broadly consists of senina, anak beru, and kalimbubu. The center of sangkep nggeluh is sukut as an individual, family, or certain merga surrounded by senina, anak beru, and kalimbubu. This means that in every implementation of certain customs in Karo society, whether marriage, death, moving into a new house, or other celebrations (happy or sad), sangkep nggeluh will be immediately known when it is clear who the sukut is in the event. For example, in marriage customs, the sukut are the people getting married and their parents. The sukut's family will be surrounded by their senina, anak beru, and kalimbubu. This is sangkep nggeluh in the customs of life and traditional life in the Karo community, also known as "rakut sitelu" – three components in one bond.

Through sangkep nggeluh, the process of tutur siwaluh will determine who is senina, senina sipemeran, senina siparibanen, senina sendalanen, kalimbubu, puang kalimbubu, anak beru, and anak beru menteri. The dialectic of siwaluh in turn determines the merga silima (Karo-karo, Ginting, Tarigan, Sembiring, Perangin-angin) roles in their respective positions of as senina, kalimbubu, or anak beru. This is a form of harmonious and

democratic co-existence that reflects egalitarianism and cosmopolitanism in Karo society.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that multi-stakeholder collaboration in Village Fund management in Karo Regency remains only partially institutionalized. Although government institutions, village governments, communities, NGOs, facilitators, and other actors are involved in the governance process, their participation does not automatically produce integrated collaboration. Differences in knowledge, access to information, resources, institutional authority, and decision-making influence create actor-capacity asymmetries that constrain principled engagement, shared motivation, and capacity for joint action. These conditions are further shaped by differences in bureaucratic professionalism and levels of community participation.

The findings extend understanding of collaborative governance by demonstrating that the quality of collaboration depends not only on the presence of multiple stakeholders or formal participatory arrangements, but also on the distribution of capacities among actors and the socio-cultural relationships within which collaboration takes place. In the Karo context, *Merga Silima*, *Tutur Siwaluh*, and *Rakut Sitelu* provide culturally embedded relational resources that can support trust, reciprocity, legitimacy, and collective responsibility. At the same time, these cultural relationships may also encourage conflict avoidance and social accommodation that can limit critical participation. Cultural embeddedness should therefore be understood as a contextual condition that may both enable and constrain collaborative governance rather than as an inherently positive resource.

Practically, strengthening Village Fund governance requires moving beyond administrative participation toward more institutionalized and capacity-sensitive collaboration. This includes clearer mechanisms for information sharing, more balanced participation in decision-making, continuous capacity development for village-level actors, shared accountability mechanisms, and coordination procedures that clarify the roles and responsibilities of participating stakeholders. Such institutional arrangements should also recognize locally embedded social relations so that formal governance mechanisms can work more effectively within the socio-cultural context of Karo communities.

This study is limited to a qualitative examination of Village Fund governance in Karo Regency and therefore does not seek to generalize its findings to all village governance settings in Indonesia. Future research could employ comparative, mixed-method, or longitudinal designs to examine how actor-capacity asymmetry, institutionalization, and cultural embeddedness influence collaborative governance across different institutional and socio-cultural contexts.

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CRedit authorship contribution statement

Meliasta Hapri Tarigan: Conceptualization, Data curation, Investigation, Project administration, Formal analysis, Methodology, Writing – original draft. Arwanto Harimas Ginting: Conceptualization, Supervision, Validation, Writing – review & editing. Elly Nurlia: Conceptualization, Methodology, Supervision, Validation, Writing – review & editing. All authors have reviewed and approved the final manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this article.

Ethical Statement

This study was conducted in accordance with established ethical standards for research involving human participants and was approved by the Ethics Committee of Institute of Home Affairs Governance. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their involvement in the study.

Data Availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Declaration of Generative AI Use

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used Grammarly to assist with language editing, improving grammar, clarity, readability, and the overall presentation of the manuscript. All AI-generated outputs were carefully reviewed and revised by the authors. The authors take full responsibility for the scientific content, originality, accuracy, and integrity of this article.

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