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Hybrid Governance of Village Development: Patronage, Procedural Compliance, and Local Village Facilitator Mediation in Serang Regency, Indonesia

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Abstract

This study examines how Local Village Facilitators (*Pendamping Lokal Desa* [PLDs]) mediate tensions between compliance with top-down policies and bottom-up participation in village development in Serang Regency, Banten, Indonesia. It specifically seeks to explain frontline mediation mechanisms that the village governance literature has not adequately addressed. The study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design. It draws on in-depth interviews with PLDs, Professional Facilitators (*Tenaga Pendamping Profesional* [TPPs]), and village government officials and members of the Village Consultative Body (*Badan Permusyawaratan Desa* [BPD]) and analyzes the data thematically. The findings show that village facilitation operates within a hybrid governance configuration. PLDs maintain formal compliance while adapting policy implementation to local conditions; however, substantive responsiveness weakens when administrative burdens increase, facilitation capacity remains limited, and patronage strengthens elite bargaining power within participatory forums. Under high-risk conditions, PLDs use documentation, hierarchical consultation, compromise, and administratively safe measures as risk-mitigation strategies. In contrast, stronger institutional support, greater room for contextual adaptation, cooperative village governments, active communities, and functional BPDs increase the likelihood of substantive participation. These findings highlight the need to simplify regulations, strengthen PLDs' mediation capacity, and improve their institutional protection. The study contributes to the literature by developing the concept of frontline mediation to explain how regulation, discretion, patronage, and participation interact within village governance.

Keywords: frontline mediation; hybrid governance; local patronage; local village facilitators; procedural compliance.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini menganalisis bagaimana Pendamping Lokal Desa (PLD) memediasi ketegangan antara kepatuhan terhadap kebijakan *top-down* dan partisipasi *bottom-up* dalam pembangunan desa di Kabupaten Serang, Banten, untuk menjelaskan mekanisme mediasi garis depan yang belum memadai dalam literatur tata kelola desa. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam dengan PLD, Tenaga Pendamping Profesional (TPP), serta aparat desa/Badan Permusyawaratan Desa dan dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa pendampingan berlangsung dalam konfigurasi tata kelola hibrida. PLD mampu mempertahankan kepatuhan formal sambil menyesuaikan implementasi kebijakan dengan kondisi lokal, tetapi responsivitas substantif melemah ketika beban administratif meningkat, kapasitas pendampingan terbatas, dan patronase memperbesar daya tawar elit dalam forum partisipatif. Dalam kondisi berisiko, PLD menggunakan dokumentasi, konsultasi berjenjang, kompromi, dan langkah-langkah administratif yang aman sebagai strategi mitigasi risiko. Sebaliknya, dukungan kelembagaan, ruang penyesuaian, pemerintah desa yang kooperatif, masyarakat yang aktif, dan BPD yang berfungsi memperbesar peluang partisipasi yang lebih substantif. Temuan ini mengimplikasikan perlunya penyederhanaan regulasi, penguatan kapasitas mediasi, dan perlindungan kelembagaan PLD. Orisinalitas penelitian terletak pada konsep mediasi garis depan yang menjelaskan interaksi antara regulasi, diskresi, patronase, dan partisipasi dalam tata kelola desa.

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Kata Kunci: mediasi garis depan; tata kelola hibrida; patronase lokal; fasilitator desa setempat; kepatuhan prosedural.

INTRODUCTION

Decentralization has positioned villages as a strategic arena for development in Indonesia by expanding local authority, strengthening fiscal capacity, and increasing governmental responsibility at the local level (Holzhacker et al., 2016; Muttaqin et al., 2016; Talitha et al., 2020). The 2024 Village Potential Data Collection (*Pendataan Potensi Desa* [Podes]) recorded 75,753 villages among 84,276 village-level administrative areas in Indonesia (Badan Pusat Statistik [BPS], 2024). The government has accompanied this institutional scale with substantial transfers of public resources. In 2025, it allocated IDR 71 trillion in Village Funds (*Dana Desa*) to 75,259 villages to accelerate development, reduce poverty, improve quality of life, and narrow interregional disparities (Kementerian Keuangan Republik Indonesia, 2025). These extensive powers and resources have transformed villages from mere recipients of government programs into important arenas in which national policies take concrete form through local development. However, this configuration also creates a governance tension (Bunnell et al., 2013). Villages must comply with centrally determined priorities, regulations, and accountability mechanisms, while decentralization simultaneously requires development initiatives to respond to local needs, aspirations, and social conditions (Annahar et al., 2023; Antlöv et al., 2016).

This tension demonstrates that village decentralization does not necessarily produce substantive autonomy in development governance (Muttaqin et al., 2016). Normatively, village development gives village governments and communities room to determine priorities according to local needs. In practice, however, higher-level governments continue to regulate the use of village resources through program priorities, financial governance requirements, reporting procedures, and oversight mechanisms (Aspinall et al., 2025; Syukri, 2024). Lewis (2015) shows that decentralization to the village level faces challenges related to fiscal design, unequal administrative capacity, and the preparedness of financial management systems, all of which can constrain the achievement of decentralization objectives. Antlöv et al. (2016) likewise argue that expanded village authority creates opportunities to improve governmental responsiveness to community needs, but such outcomes depend heavily on institutional capacity, management systems, and citizens' ability to oversee village governments. Annahar et al. (2023) report similar findings, showing that inclusive village governance continues to face institutional constraints and uneven capacity under decentralization. Therefore, the central problem of village development does not concern a choice between top-down and bottom-up approaches. Rather, it concerns how both operate simultaneously: as villages receive greater decentralized authority, they also face stronger demands to align implementation with regulations, programs, and accountability mechanisms established by higher-level government.

This paradox is particularly evident in Serang Regency, Banten Province, which comprises 29 subdistricts and 326 villages. In 2025, the government allocated approximately IDR 347.16 billion in Village Funds to these 326 villages (Adib, 2025). This fiscal and institutional scale requires intensive coordination among higher-level governments, village governments, and local communities (Sinar Banten, 2025). Within this setting, Local Village Facilitators (*Pendamping Lokal Desa* [PLDs]) occupy a strategic position because they work directly at the village level to support governance, development implementation, and community participation. Regulation of the Minister of Villages and Development of Disadvantaged Regions No. 3 of 2025, concerning the General Guidelines for Village Community

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Facilitation, and Decree of the Minister of Villages and Development of Disadvantaged Regions No. 294 of 2025, concerning Technical Guidelines for Village Community Facilitation, further strengthen this role. These regulations assign facilitators responsibilities that include assistance, facilitation, community organization, participation strengthening, and support for village development planning, implementation, and oversight (Kementerian Desa dan Pembangunan Daerah Tertinggal Republik Indonesia, 2025a, 2025b). The regulations also specify facilitation, education, mediation, and advocacy functions, indicating that village facilitation involves more than administrative assistance and also requires facilitators to manage relationships and competing interests among stakeholders (Aziz, 2016; Kementerian Desa dan Pembangunan Daerah Tertinggal Republik Indonesia, 2025b). This institutional position places PLDs at the intersection of higher-level regulatory requirements, the interests of village governments and local actors, and community aspirations. Village facilitation therefore provides an important arena for explaining how frontline actors translate, negotiate, and mediate development policy.

Existing studies have primarily examined village development through the perspectives of decentralization, local autonomy, and participatory governance. Lewis (2015) demonstrates that fiscal decentralization to the village level expands opportunities to improve local service delivery and development, but institutional design, administrative capacity, and inter-village heterogeneity constrain its effectiveness. Antlöv et al. (2016) argue that the Village Law strengthens village authority and creates opportunities for more responsive and participatory governance, although limited institutional capacity, weak accountability mechanisms, and inadequate community oversight continue to constrain implementation. Similarly, Annahar et al. (2023) show that inclusive village governance depends on the quality of local institutions, actors' capacities, and community involvement in decision-making processes. Taken together, this body of literature successfully identifies the structural opportunities and constraints associated with village decentralization, but it pays insufficient attention to frontline actors who directly translate, negotiate, and reconcile policy mandates from above with local needs and community aspirations.

A second strand of literature shows that decentralization and the institutionalization of participation do not automatically eliminate elite domination in local development. Dasgupta and Beard (2007) demonstrate that community-driven development remains vulnerable to elite capture, even when elite involvement does not necessarily reduce the benefits poor groups receive. Fritzen (2007) finds that participatory development arrangements can expand opportunities for nonelite actors, while elite control over decision-making can persist when local accountability mechanisms fail to counterbalance unequal power relations. In the context of Indonesia's Village Fund, Sidik and Habibi (2024) show that formal institutions of participation, transparency, and accountability do not automatically transform local power structures. Village ruling classes can continue to control development resources when economic and political inequalities persist. These findings demonstrate that the quality of participation depends not only on the existence of formal forums and procedures but also on the power relations that determine who can influence decisions and the distribution of resources. However, this literature focuses more extensively on patterns of elite domination than on how implementation actors positioned between the state, village governments, and communities navigate local power pressures in everyday practice.

A third strand of literature focuses on frontline actors and the discretion they exercise when translating policy into practice. Tummers and Bekkers (2014) show that discretion constitutes an important element of policy implementation because frontline actors do not merely execute rules; they also adapt policies to the conditions they encounter. In developing-country contexts, Lotta et al. (2022) argue that scholars need to recontextualize the street-level bureaucracy perspective because

implementation occurs within institutional, social, and political configurations that differ from those in which the theory was initially developed. Gofen et al. (2022) extend this argument by demonstrating that broader institutional environments, including deeply embedded organizational corruption, can shape frontline behavior. Bakkeli (2023) further shows that frontline actors address implementation tensions through strategies of legitimation, interpretation, and protection from institutional pressures. This body of literature confirms that policy implementation constitutes an interpretive and context-dependent process. Nevertheless, scholars have not adequately explained how frontline discretion interacts with procedural compliance and local power pressures in village governance, particularly regarding village facilitators who mediate among the state, village governments, and local communities.

These three strands of literature have largely developed in parallel. Studies of village decentralization emphasize capacity, autonomy, participation, and accountability; studies of elite capture explain how local power structures shape decision-making and resource distribution; and the street-level bureaucracy literature focuses on frontline actors' discretion in translating policy. However, existing scholarship has not sufficiently explained the mediation mechanisms that simultaneously connect these three dimensions, particularly how Local Village Facilitators translate top-down mandates, sustain bottom-up participation under conditions of local patronage, and balance procedural compliance with substantive responsiveness. This gap requires an analytical approach that treats village facilitation as an arena in which regulation, local power, frontline discretion, and participation interact to shape village development governance.

This study argues that Local Village Facilitators do not merely act as policy implementers or participation facilitators. Instead, they function as frontline mediators who continuously negotiate state requirements, village government interests, local patronage relations, and community aspirations. The street-level bureaucracy perspective emphasizes that frontline actors exercise discretion when translating policy because formal rules cannot fully control the resources, demands, and local situations that shape implementation (Lipsky, 2010; Tummers & Bekkers, 2014). In developing-country contexts, Lotta et al. (2022) extend this perspective by showing that frontline actors operate within complex formal and informal relationships and can function as intermediaries between the state and society. Building on this framework, this study argues that PLDs use discretion not only to adapt policies to local needs but also to navigate vertical pressures from state regulations and horizontal pressures from patronage structures. When regulatory and patronage pressures intensify while institutional support for PLDs weakens, facilitators tend to direct their discretion toward risk mitigation and procedural compliance. Conversely, stronger institutional support and broader room for mediation enable more substantive forms of participation. These interactions produce a hybrid form of village governance: an implementation configuration that is neither fully top-down nor fully bottom-up, but rather emerges from the interplay among regulation, frontline discretion, and local power.

RESEARCH METHODS

The unit of analysis in this study is the mediation practices of Local Village Facilitators (*Pendamping Lokal Desa* [PLDs]) in the implementation of village development in Serang Regency, Banten, Indonesia. The analysis focuses on how PLDs interpret regulations and development priorities, facilitate planning and community participation, interact with village governments and local actors, respond to patronage pressures, and exercise discretion when policies do not fully correspond to local conditions. The study also examines the strategies that PLDs use to maintain administrative compliance and the conditions under which facilitation practices produce either procedural compliance or substantive participation.

Accordingly, this study does not treat PLDs merely as individual facilitators. Instead, it examines their mediation practices as the unit of analysis to understand how frontline actors shape village development governance.

This study employs a qualitative case study design to examine PLD mediation practices within the institutional and sociopolitical contexts in which village development policies operate. The study uses a qualitative approach because it focuses on how PLDs interpret regulations, exercise discretion, navigate local patronage, and mediate competing interests in facilitation practices (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The case study design enables the study to examine a contemporary phenomenon in depth within the real-life context in which it occurs (Yin, 2018). The study positions Serang Regency as the case context because its village development dynamics allow the researchers to examine how PLDs negotiate tensions between top-down policy requirements and bottom-up participation in everyday facilitation practices.

The primary data came from 17 informants who participated directly in the planning, implementation, and reporting cycles of village development. The researchers selected informants purposively based on their involvement, experience, and knowledge of village facilitation practices. The informants consisted of 10 Local Village Facilitators (PLDs), three Professional Facilitators (*Tenaga Pendamping Profesional* [TPPs]), and four village government officials and/or members of the Village Consultative Body (*Badan Permusyawaratan Desa* [BPD]). This composition enabled the study to capture perspectives from both facilitation actors and village governance actors who interacted directly during development processes. The researchers continued selecting informants until the data reached saturation, which occurred when additional interviews no longer generated new thematic categories. To protect confidentiality, the study anonymized all informants in the presentation of the findings.

Table 1. List of Research Informants

No.	Initials	Position/Informant Category
1	IM	Local Village Facilitator (PLD)
2	AK	Local Village Facilitator (PLD)
3	LM	Local Village Facilitator (PLD)
4	SR	Local Village Facilitator (PLD)
5	TI	Local Village Facilitator (PLD)
6	KH	Local Village Facilitator (PLD)
7	UO	Local Village Facilitator (PLD)
8	ME	Local Village Facilitator (PLD)
9	LMN	Local Village Facilitator (PLD)
10	SA	Local Village Facilitator (PLD)
11	LM	Professional Facilitator (TPP)
12	AS	Professional Facilitator (TPP)
13	MZ	Professional Facilitator (TPP)
14	IM	Village Government Official
15	AK	Village Government Official
16	LM	Village Government Official
17	SR	Member of the Village Consultative Body (BPD)

The researchers collected the data primarily through semi-structured, in-depth interviews using an interview guide aligned with the study objectives. The interviews explored the informants' experiences in facilitating the planning, implementation, and reporting stages of village development; the alignment between policies and local conditions; participation dynamics in the Village Deliberation Meeting (*Musyawarah Desa*) and Village Development Planning Meeting (*Musrenbangdes*); the influence of patronage and local elites; support for capacity development; and facilitators' working conditions, employment status, and compensation. The researchers used a semi-structured format to keep the interviews focused on the research questions while allowing informants to explain their experiences, considerations, and discretionary practices within specific contexts. The study also used regulations and village facilitation guidelines as contextual materials to understand the formal policy-implementation framework. However, the researchers did not use these documents to triangulate claims concerning administrative compliance at the village level.

The researchers analyzed the data using thematic analysis with a deductive-inductive strategy. The deductive analysis employed sensitizing concepts derived from the study's analytical framework, including discretion, top-down implementation, bottom-up participation, procedural compliance, local patronage, and frontline mediation. At the same time, the inductive analysis identified patterns that emerged directly from the data, including risk-mitigation strategies, employment vulnerability, compensation disparities, and forms of mediation that the initial framework did not fully anticipate. The analytical process followed the stages of data familiarization, initial coding, theme development, theme review, theme definition and naming, and interpretation of findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researchers then interpreted the resulting themes through the street-level bureaucracy perspective to explain how PLD discretion operates under regulatory and local power pressures and how these processes generate procedural compliance, substantive participation, and hybrid configurations of village governance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Translating Policy Amid Local Contextual Mismatches

The findings show that Local Village Facilitators (*Pendamping Lokal Desa* [PLDs]) occupy an intermediary position between higher-level government regulations and village-level development practices. In this position, PLDs receive and interpret regulations and development priorities from governments above the village level, explain these provisions to village governments, and assist their implementation throughout the planning, implementation, and reporting cycles. PLD informants did not regard central government policy mandates as optional requirements. At the same time, they recognized the need to adapt policy implementation to village conditions. IM, for example, emphasized, "Yes, central government regulations and priorities still have to be implemented" (IM, interview, June 10, 2026). This experience shows that facilitation begins with compliance with prevailing regulations, while PLDs work with village governments to identify feasible implementation arrangements that allow policies to operate within local conditions.

Perspectives from other actors reinforce this pattern. Village officials described PLDs as actors who explain regulations, facilitate Village Deliberation Meetings (*Musyawarah Desa* [Musdes]) and Village Development Planning Meetings (*Musyawarah Perencanaan Pembangunan Desa* [Musrenbangdes]), assist in preparing Village Government Work Plans (*Rencana Kerja Pemerintah Desa* [RKP Desa]), Village Revenue and Expenditure Budgets (*Anggaran Pendapatan dan Belanja Desa* [APB Desa]), and Budget

Plans (*Rencana Anggaran Biaya* [RAB]), monitor implementation, and support reporting processes. From the perspective of facilitation coordination, Professional Facilitators (*Tenaga Pendamping Profesional* [TPPs]) also argued that regulatory compliance does not eliminate the need to adapt implementation. MZ explained, "We still have to comply with the rules, but there can be technical adjustments, consultation, or efforts to find an implementation approach that best fits local conditions" (MZ, interview, July 8, 2026). These findings show that PLDs do more than transmit policy information between higher-level governments and village governments. They also interpret policies, facilitate consultation, and make practical adjustments so that general provisions can operate within diverse village contexts.

This intermediary role operates alongside a relatively strong orientation toward maintaining formal compliance with government policy. The interviews show that PLDs and village governments generally treat regulations and Village Fund priorities as binding parameters for planning, budgeting, implementation, and reporting. They therefore do not interpret local adaptation as freedom to disregard regulations. Instead, they seek implementation options that remain within the regulatory framework. Informants across categories consistently expressed this view. MZ, a TPP, stated, "We still have to comply with the rules, but there can be technical adjustments, consultation, and so on" (MZ, interview, July 8, 2026). From the village government perspective, AK likewise stated, "Whatever happens, the rules have to be fulfilled, although we still need to find a moderate way to implement them" (AK, village government official, interview, July 21, 2026). This compliance concerns not only program selection but also documentation and administrative stages. Village government and BPD informants described PLD involvement in preparing the RKP Desa, APB Desa, and RAB, monitoring implementation, and completing reports. SR explicitly described this tendency: "They help with reporting. In the end, I think the work becomes more administrative" (SR, BPD member, interview, July 25, 2026).

When actors perceive a risk of noncompliance, they place greater emphasis on administrative traceability because PLDs and TPPs may use written notes or formal guidance letters as evidence that they provided facilitation and advice. The findings therefore show that formal compliance consistently shapes facilitation practices. PLDs keep programs within permitted priorities, ensure that planning and budgeting documents remain aligned with formal requirements, monitor implementation, and ensure that reporting complies with prevailing procedures.

However, a strong orientation toward formal compliance does not mean that policy priorities always correspond directly to the actual needs of each village. The interview data reveal recurring mismatches between generally formulated policy designs and more diverse local conditions. These mismatches emerge particularly when central government priorities establish relatively uniform program categories, while villages differ in geography, capacity, resources, livelihoods, and community needs. One TPP described this pattern explicitly:

> "Mismatch occurs when central government priorities are uniform, while village conditions, needs, capacities, and characteristics differ" (LM, interview, July 5, 2026).

PLD experiences show that this tension does not remain at the conceptual level. It emerges when villages must implement available programs under local conditions that do not necessarily support the original policy design. In one case, for example, an agricultural policy had to account for land suitability, water availability, community capacity, and the risk of business failure. KH described an alternative approach when a new rice-field development program did not automatically represent the most appropriate option for local conditions:

> "If there is a program such as developing new rice fields, I would consider another option, for example, working through a Women Farmers Group (Kelompok Wanita Tani [KWT]) to grow daily household food needs. This approach carries a lower risk of failure and directly reduces households' daily expenditures" (KH, interview, June 19, 2026).

Other informants also described using surveys and problem-based mapping to identify commodities that residents frequently consume, adapt activities to local topography and water availability, and consider residents' most common skills. Village government actors acknowledged the same mismatch, noting that "some priorities from above do not always correspond to local needs" (IM, village government official, interview, July 18, 2026). These findings indicate that PLDs do not primarily face a problem of rejecting government priorities. Rather, they encounter a gap between available policy categories and the configuration of needs they identify in the field. This gap requires PLDs to explain regulatory boundaries and identify activities that accommodate local conditions without moving village development outside the policy framework.

The mismatch between policy design and local needs does not automatically lead PLDs to disregard government priorities. Instead, the data show that PLDs develop various practical adjustments to reconcile regulatory demands with village conditions. First, they identify policy boundaries and determine where implementation still allows room for adaptation. IM described this approach as an effort to adapt policy while maintaining compliance: "The solution is to adapt it and find a middle ground, as long as we do not go outside the regulatory framework" (IM, interview, June 10, 2026). PLDs also make more formal adjustments through revisions to planning and budgeting documents. AK explained that when villages need to align centrally determined priorities with local conditions, PLDs assist village governments in revising the "Village Government Work Plan and Village Revenue and Expenditure Budget" (AK, interview, June 11, 2026). These data show that adaptation does not necessarily occur outside formal procedures; PLDs can instead use existing planning instruments to accommodate local adjustments.

Other forms of adaptation operate at the substantive program level. LM, for example, used surveys and problem-based mapping to identify commodities that residents consumed extensively yet still sourced from outside the village, and then adjusted activities to suit local topography, water availability, and the skills of most residents (LM, interview, June 14, 2026). Other PLDs redirected implementation toward human resource development, the empowerment of Village-Owned Enterprises (*Badan Usaha Milik Desa* [BUMDes]), connections between local enterprises and potential buyers, or KWT activities when the original options did not match local capacity. Through this pattern, PLDs do not always address community needs by creating entirely new programs. Instead, they identify activities that can still fit within available policy categories and boundaries. When PLDs encounter issues beyond their capacity to resolve independently, they seek consultation as another adjustment mechanism. TI explained succinctly, "My solution is to consult with the TPP" (TI, interview, June 16, 2026).

TPP perspectives reinforce this practice. Higher-level facilitators described PLD responses as a combination of maintaining compliance, making technical adjustments, consulting other actors, and identifying implementation space that matches local conditions. PLDs therefore adapt policy through several layers of action: they explain and interpret regulatory boundaries, revise planning documents, direct villages toward alternative activities, connect local needs with available program space, and use hierarchical consultation when problems exceed their own scope of action. This pattern shows that village-level policy translation constitutes an active process in which PLDs maintain administrative conformity while making policies workable within local contexts.

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This room for adjustment also increases the regulatory demands that PLDs must manage in facilitation practice. When local needs require changes in activities, PLDs cannot simply identify alternative programs. They must also ensure that these adjustments appear in appropriate planning and budgeting documents. AK, for example, explained that adaptation may require revisions to the RKP Desa and APB Desa (AK, interview, June 11, 2026). Compliance responsibilities continue during subsequent stages through implementation monitoring and reporting. From the BPD perspective, this tendency appears particularly strong: "They help with reporting. In the end, I think the work becomes more administrative" (SR, BPD member, interview, July 25, 2026). TPP informants also described situations in which administrative tasks absorb PLDs' time and capacity, forcing them to devote part of their facilitation resources to maintaining procedures, documents, and evidence of assistance. In situations that actors perceive as risky, PLDs may even use written notes or formal guidance letters to document the advice they have provided. Regulatory compliance, therefore, involves more than understanding rules; it entails a chain of administrative tasks that accompany PLDs from planning adjustments through final reporting.

The accumulation of these requirements causes administrative work to occupy an increasingly large share of facilitation practice. The data show that PLDs not only assist with planning and budgeting documents but also monitor implementation, ensure compliance with reporting requirements, remind village officials of procedures, and prevent errors that could lead to administrative problems. Village government and BPD informants increasingly associated the PLD role with administrative completion and reporting (SR, BPD member, interview, July 25, 2026). TPP informants identified the same pattern. AS observed that PLDs who become overly absorbed in administrative work have less room to perform more substantive facilitation functions (AS, interview, July 7, 2026). When a situation involves a potential violation, PLDs also seek to ensure the process is secure by reminding actors of regulations, consulting higher-level facilitators, and documenting the guidance they provide. Increasing compliance requirements therefore shift part of PLDs' facilitation capacity away from addressing substantive village needs and toward procedural control, document completion, and administrative risk management.

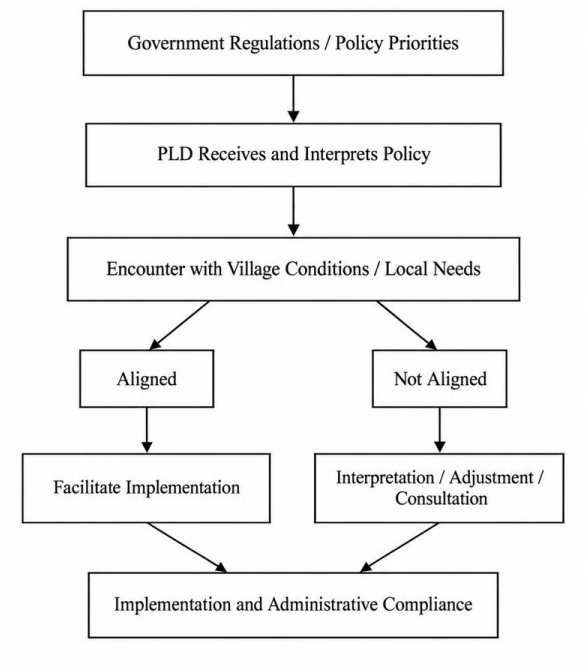
Table 2. Patterns of Policy Translation in Village Facilitation Practices

Policy Requirement	Village-Level Problem	PLD Response	Practical Consequence
Program priorities and the use of Village Funds must comply with government regulations.	Relatively uniform priorities do not always correspond to the needs, capacities, territorial characteristics, and resources of each village.	PLDs explain regulations, map local needs, identify room for adaptation, and direct villages toward activities that remain within the policy framework.	Programs remain formally compliant, while villages adapt implementation to local conditions.
Planning and budgeting documents must remain consistent with implemented programs.	Adjustments to village-level activities do not always correspond directly to previously prepared planning and budgeting documents.	PLDs assist villages in revising activities through amendments to the RKP Desa and APB Desa and provide technical assistance in preparing the required documents.	Local adjustments acquire an administrative basis and remain documented within formal planning mechanisms.

Policy Requirement	Village-Level Problem	PLD Response	Practical Consequence
Implementation and reporting must comply with procedures and remain accountable.	PLDs and village governments face risks of procedural errors, incomplete documentation, and administrative problems during program implementation.	PLDs monitor implementation, remind actors of procedures, assist with reporting, and document facilitation guidance when they identify risks of noncompliance.	Attention to administrative compliance increases, and facilitation work becomes increasingly absorbed by document management and reporting requirements.
Implementation must remain within regulatory boundaries and the facilitators' formal authority.	Some problems require further interpretation or exceed PLDs' capacity to resolve independently.	PLDs consult TPPs, use hierarchical coordination, and prepare written notes or formal guidance letters in high-risk situations.	Implementation becomes more cautious and better documented while remaining within formal regulatory and institutional boundaries.

Source: Primary data from interviews with Local Village Facilitators (PLDs), Professional Facilitators (TPPs), and village government officials/BPD members, June–July 2026; processed by the authors.

Figure 1. Empirical Flow of Policy Translation by PLDs



Source: Primary data from interviews with Local Village Facilitators (PLDs), Professional Facilitators (TPPs), and village government officials/BPD members, June–July 2026; processed by the authors.

Overall, the findings in this section show that PLDs maintain formal alignment between village development implementation and government regulations, but policy translation does not occur through a linear or mechanical process. When centrally determined priorities encounter different local conditions, capacities, and needs, PLDs interpret regulations, revise documents, identify alternative activities, and consult other actors to keep implementation within the regulatory framework. As Figure 1 summarizes, this pattern positions PLDs at the intersection of policy compliance and contextual village needs. However, as procedural, documentation, and reporting requirements increase, administrative risk management absorbs more of PLDs' working capacity, limiting their ability to provide more substantive forms of facilitation.

Negotiated Participation Under the Influence of Local Patronage

Based on the interviews, the study finds that community participation has become a routine component of village development planning through Village Deliberation Meetings (*Musyawarah Desa* [Musdes]), Village Development Planning Meetings (*Musyawarah Perencanaan Pembangunan Desa* [Musrenbangdes]), and other local consultation forums. Community members and the Village Consultative Body (*Badan Permusyawaratan Desa* [BPD]) retain formal opportunities to express proposals, needs, and views regarding development priorities, while Local Village Facilitators (*Pendamping Lokal Desa* [PLDs]) facilitate these forums, maintain the flow of deliberation, and help reconcile competing interests that emerge during the process. Village government officials reinforce this pattern. AK explained that PLDs actively facilitate Musdes and Musrenbangdes and assist village planning processes (AK, village government official, interview, July 21, 2026). A BPD informant similarly stated that community members and the BPD continue to submit proposals through formal forums, while participants discuss decisions through deliberative mechanisms (SR, BPD member, interview, July 25, 2026). From the perspective of Professional Facilitators (*Tenaga Pendamping Profesional* [TPPs]), participatory forums also continue to operate in village development practice (LM, interview, July 5, 2026). These findings confirm that institutions and procedures for participation remain present in village development governance; the more important question concerns the extent to which community presence and aspirations actually influence final decisions.

The existence of participatory forums does not automatically produce uniform levels of substantive involvement. Interview data show that, in some processes, community members actively attend meetings and articulate their needs, yet their influence over final decisions remains limited (IM, interview, June 10, 2026). Variation also appears when participatory forums continue to function but certain actors—particularly village heads or groups with stronger positions—exercise greater bargaining power in determining priorities. ME, for example, explained that participatory forums continued to operate, but in some cases final decisions more closely reflected the village head's preferences (ME, interview, June 21, 2026). Village government officials reinforced this pattern: community members and the BPD formally continued to submit proposals, but decision-making processes did not assign equal weight to all aspirations (IM, village government official, interview, July 18, 2026; LM, village government official, interview, July 22, 2026). These findings reveal a distinction between procedural presence and substantive influence. Participation may continue formally, while the community's ability to alter or determine final decisions depends on the configuration of power within the forum.

Differences in influence become more visible when local elite interests enter participatory arenas. Interview data show that village heads, village government officials, particular groups, and local political networks sometimes possess greater bargaining power than community members in setting development

agendas and priorities. Several PLDs consistently identified village heads as dominant actors, even though villages continued to organize Musdes or Musrenbangdes and allowed community members to submit proposals (SR, interview, June 12, 2026; TI, interview, June 16, 2026; ME, interview, June 21, 2026). Facilitation coordinators also confirmed this pattern. MZ explained that influence does not arise solely from the village head as an individual but may also operate through groups and local political networks that shape decision-making agendas:

> "The power of the village head, particular groups, or local political networks can influence the agenda and final decisions" (MZ, interview, July 8, 2026).

Village government officials described a similar pattern. IM acknowledged that community members and the BPD continued to submit proposals formally, but village heads or influential groups sometimes possessed greater bargaining power in determining priorities (IM, village government official, interview, July 18, 2026). These findings show that patronage and elite influence do not necessarily eliminate participatory mechanisms. Instead, they operate within these mechanisms by creating unequal levels of influence among actors. Consequently, forums may continue to function procedurally while actors with stronger social, political, or institutional positions exert greater influence over final decisions.

Patronage does not always eliminate participatory forums, but it can alter how these forums function. The data show that villages continue to hold Musdes and Musrenbangdes, community members and the BPD continue to submit proposals, and formal deliberative processes continue to take place. However, when village heads or influential groups possess stronger bargaining power, community aspirations do not have equal opportunities to shape final decisions (IM, village government official, interview, July 18, 2026; LM, village government official, interview, July 22, 2026). PLD experiences reveal a similar pattern: in several cases, final decisions reflected the village head's preferences more strongly even though the village maintained participatory procedures (ME, interview, June 21, 2026). Under these conditions, deliberative space does not disappear entirely, but its capacity to redirect decisions becomes more limited. Participatory forums may therefore retain their procedural function as spaces for consultation and collective endorsement while the community's substantive influence over development priorities weakens.

When unequal influence constrains participation, PLDs use several strategies to keep deliberative processes functioning without departing from regulatory requirements. PLD informants described these strategies as explaining rules, reminding actors of procedures, negotiating, seeking compromise, and consulting TPPs when they cannot resolve problems directly (IM, interview, June 10, 2026; AK, interview, June 11, 2026; LM, interview, June 14, 2026; KH, interview, June 19, 2026). TPPs also confirmed that PLDs typically begin by persuading stakeholders, reminding them of regulations, and facilitating compromise before escalating the issue to a higher level of facilitation (LM, interview, July 5, 2026). From the perspective of village government officials, PLDs bring different parties together, explain potential risks, and seek compromises to prevent competing interests from immediately halting the development process (IM, village government official, interview, July 18, 2026). This pattern shows that PLDs do more than manage participatory forums; they actively mediate tensions among regulatory requirements, village government interests, and community aspirations.

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Table 3. Patterns of Local Power Influence on Participation and PLD Responses

Form of Local Dynamics	Manifestation in Village Processes	PLD Response	Effect on Participation
Dominance of the village head or influential groups	Village heads, village government officials, or particular groups possess greater bargaining power in determining development agendas and priorities.	PLDs remind actors of regulations and procedures, use persuasion, and seek opportunities for negotiation.	Community members can still express their aspirations, but their influence over final decisions becomes more limited.
Participatory forums remain open	Community members and the BPD attend meetings, submit proposals, and participate in Musdes and Musrenbangdes.	PLDs facilitate discussions, maintain the deliberative process, and reconcile competing interests.	Participation can become more substantive when village governments remain open, communities actively participate, and the BPD functions effectively.
Unequal weight of aspirations within forums	Forums continue to operate, but actors do not give equal weight to all aspirations; in some cases, decisions more closely reflect the village head's preferences.	PLDs encourage compromise, explain risks, and keep the process within procedural boundaries.	Forums continue to fulfill their formal participatory function, but the community's capacity to alter decisions may weaken.
Conflicts of interest among village governments, local elites, and communities	Competing interests emerge in the determination of development programs or priorities.	PLDs mediate and negotiate, consult TPPs, and escalate cases when conflicts exceed their capacity.	Participatory outcomes depend on the openness of village governments, the power of local actors, the effectiveness of the BPD, community activism, and facilitation support.

Source: Primary data from interviews with Local Village Facilitators (PLDs), Professional Facilitators (TPPs), and village government officials/BPD members, June–July 2026; processed by the authors.

Overall, this subfinding shows that community participation remains procedurally present, but its substantive influence varies according to local power configurations. As Table 3 summarizes, community members and the BPD can attend meetings, submit proposals, and participate in Musdes and Musrenbangdes, but their influence over final decisions weakens when village heads or influential groups possess greater bargaining power. Under dominant patronage conditions, participatory forums may continue to operate without substantively altering the preferences of actors who hold stronger positions. PLDs respond through persuasion, procedural reminders, negotiation, compromise, and consultation with TPPs to preserve participatory space while maintaining working relationships with village governments. This pattern demonstrates that the quality of participation depends not only on the existence of formal forums but also on the distribution of influence within them and on PLDs' capacity to preserve spaces for dialogue within local power structures.

From Substantive Mediation to Risk Mitigation: Conditions Shaping PLD Practices

The study identifies two major tendencies in the practices of Local Village Facilitators (Pendamping Lokal Desa [PLD]). When village governments remain relatively open, communities actively participate, the Village Consultative Body (*Badan Permusyawaratan Desa* [BPD]) functions effectively, communication among stakeholders operates well, and Professional Facilitators (*Tenaga Pendamping Profesional* [TPPs]) provide adequate support, PLDs have greater room to mediate competing interests and strengthen community involvement in decision-making. Conversely, when local patronage intensifies, political pressure increases, regulations become more complex, inspection risks grow, or employment conditions fail to provide PLDs with sufficient security, facilitation tends to shift toward procedural assurance and administrative protection. Under these conditions, PLDs devote more attention to compliance, documentation, and reducing administrative risks than to expanding deliberative space. These findings show that institutional and relational conditions strongly shape the form of facilitation that PLDs ultimately provide.

This tendency closely relates to PLD capacity and the institutional support available throughout the facilitation process. The data show that PLDs can engage in more substantive mediation when they receive TPP support, possess adequate knowledge of relevant regulations, and can consult higher-level facilitators when they encounter problems that they cannot resolve independently. Conversely, informants identified limited training as a constraint on PLDs' ability to address complex village-level problems (UO, interview, June 20, 2026). TPP support therefore functions not only as an escalation channel but also as a source of guidance when PLDs need policy clarification or face potential violations. TPP informants also identified PLD capacity as one of the conditions that distinguishes facilitation that strengthens participation from facilitation that stops at procedural fulfillment (LM, interview, July 5, 2026). These findings demonstrate that greater capacity and access to institutional support expand PLDs' ability to interpret regulations, mediate competing interests, and respond to village problems beyond merely completing administrative obligations.

However, existing support for PLD capacity development does not always adequately address the complexity of village-level problems. PLD informants explicitly identified limited training as one of the conditions that restrict their room for action, particularly when they confront complex regulations, local pressures, and administrative risks. This limitation matters because facilitation requires more than procedural knowledge. PLDs must also persuade stakeholders, reach compromises, interpret conflicts of interest, and determine when to consult TPPs. TPP perspectives reinforce this finding by identifying PLD capacity as one of the conditions that differentiates substantive facilitation from facilitation that largely remains procedural. Therefore, the capacity constraints identified in this study do not refer solely to individual PLDs' competencies. They also concern the extent to which the facilitation system provides sufficient training, guidance, and institutional support to address work demands that combine administrative and relational responsibilities.

These capacity limitations intersect with employment conditions that some PLDs perceive as precarious. Their responsibilities include explaining regulations, facilitating Musdes and Musrenbangdes, assisting with planning and budgeting documents, monitoring implementation, and supporting reporting processes. Within this broad scope of responsibilities, informants also identified uncertain employment status, inspection risks, and low compensation as factors influencing their decisions. LMN, for example, associated concerns about audit risks with employment insecurity (LMN, interview, June 22, 2026). SA's experience illustrates more clearly how compensation conditions can shape facilitation choices:

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> "It becomes risky when the compensation is low, and as a PLD, I choose the administratively safest course of action" (SA, interview, June 25, 2026).

These findings show that employment conditions do not operate separately from facilitation practices. Instead, they shape PLDs' judgments when they confront risky decisions. When facilitation responsibilities coincide with employment insecurity, inspection pressures, and compensation that PLDs perceive as inadequate, they become more likely to prioritize administrative safety.

The vulnerability associated with these working conditions makes risk an important consideration in PLDs' field-level decisions. The data show that PLDs evaluate not only whether a particular action can strengthen community participation but also whether it may create regulatory violations, trigger inspections, undermine administrative security, or damage working relationships with village governments. In cases that PLDs perceive as risky, they tend to strengthen documentation, seek guidance from TPPs, or use written notes and formal guidance letters as evidence that they have provided assistance in accordance with established procedures. Concerns about audits and employment uncertainty also contribute to the tendency to select administratively safer actions. PLD decision-making therefore reflects a dual consideration: preserving room for substantive mediation while reducing the potential risks associated with facilitation decisions.

These considerations produce risk-mitigation strategies within PLD facilitation practices. When PLDs encounter sensitive issues or situations that may generate violations, they tend to strengthen regulatory compliance, ensure procedural completeness, document their guidance, and consult TPPs through hierarchical channels. In high-risk cases, PLDs also use written notes or formal guidance letters as evidence that they have provided facilitation in accordance with established procedures (MZ, TPP, interview, July 8, 2026). PLDs do not take over decisions that fall under the authority of village governments. Instead, they generally use persuasion and compromise before escalating issues to higher-level facilitators. SA's statement that PLDs may choose "the administratively safest course of action" further reinforces this pattern (SA, interview, June 25, 2026). Risk mitigation therefore allows PLDs to maintain their facilitation role while limiting their exposure to administrative, institutional, and relational risks.

Table 4. Conditions Shaping the Orientation of PLD Facilitation Practices

Empirical Condition	When It Supports Facilitation	When It Constrains Facilitation	Likely Outcome
Institutional support and PLD capacity	TPP support is available, consultation is accessible, and PLDs possess adequate capacity.	Training and capacity development remain limited, and PLDs require additional support when problems exceed their capacity.	Facilitation moves toward more substantive mediation or shifts toward procedural fulfillment.
Room for policy adaptation	PLDs can make technical and contextual adjustments without departing from regulatory boundaries.	PLDs perceive regulations as complex, while administrative burdens restrict room for adaptation.	Facilitation becomes responsive to local contexts or shifts toward a stronger administrative orientation.
Relationship between PLDs	Village governments remain relatively open, and PLD–village	Village heads or other local actors dominate, and PLDs struggle to	Dialogue, negotiation, and compromise remain more open or

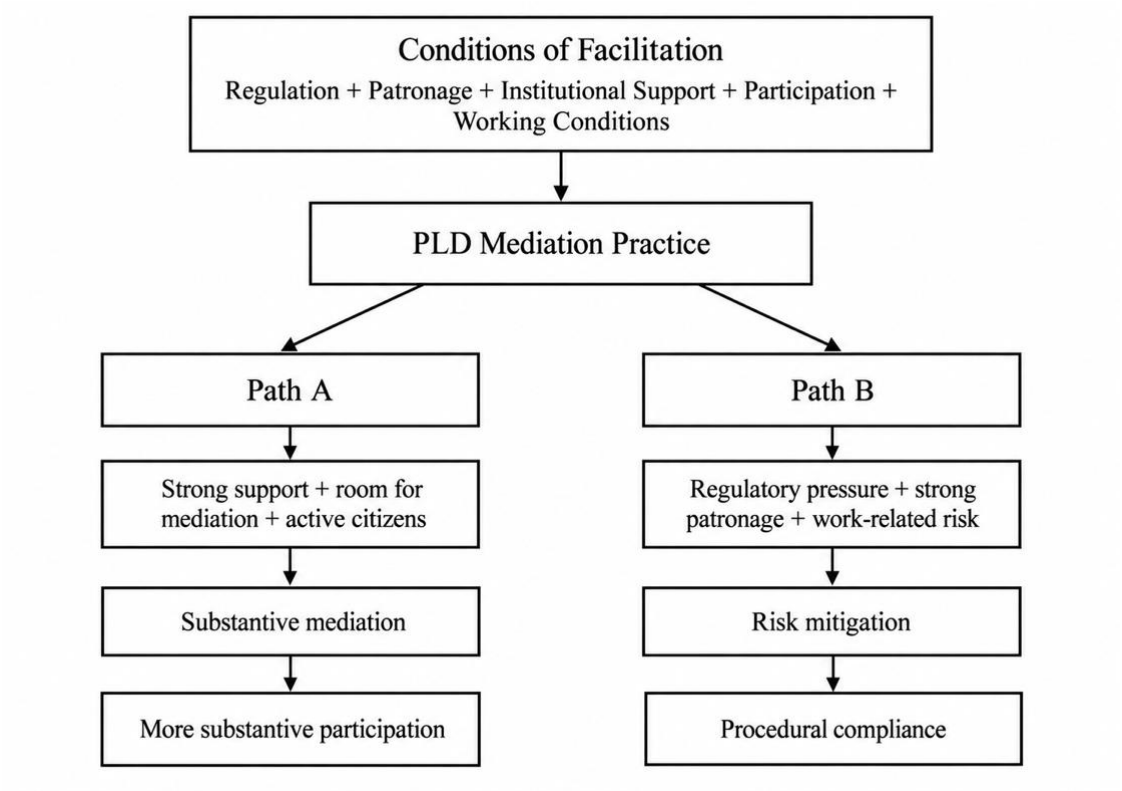
Empirical Condition	When It Supports Facilitation	When It Constrains Facilitation	Likely Outcome
and village governments	communication functions effectively.	establish effective communication.	shift toward risk mitigation.
Community participation and BPD functioning	Community members actively participate, and the BPD functions effectively during deliberative processes.	Community members remain passive, and the BPD functions weakly.	Community aspirations have greater opportunities to influence decisions, or forums become largely formalistic.
Patronage and local elite pressure	Patronage remains relatively limited, and actors can still negotiate competing interests.	Elite domination intensifies through village heads, particular groups, or local political networks.	Participatory mediation becomes more feasible, or community influence over decisions weakens.
PLD employment conditions and risk exposure	Employment-related risks do not dominate PLD decision-making, and PLDs receive support when they encounter high-risk problems.	Audit or inspection risks increase, employment status remains uncertain, and PLDs perceive compensation as inadequate.	PLDs have greater room to mediate or adopt defensive, administratively safer actions.

Source: Primary data from interviews with Local Village Facilitators (PLDs), Professional Facilitators (TPPs), and village government officials/BPD members, June–July 2026; processed by the authors.

The patterns summarized in Table 4 can be further organized into two broad facilitation outcomes that emerge from combinations of regulatory, institutional, relational, and employment conditions. Figure 2 shows that PLD mediation moves in two empirically distinct directions: toward substantive mediation when the facilitation environment provides sufficient support, or toward risk mitigation when regulatory pressures, patronage, and employment-related risks become more dominant.

The distinction between these pathways concerns the priorities that PLDs can pursue within their available room for action. In the first pathway, institutional support and discretion enable facilitators to engage village actors in the substance of decisions, including whose concerns are heard and how competing interests are addressed. In the second, pressures surrounding compliance and employment security make procedural defensibility and the avoidance of administrative risk more prominent priorities. The pathways therefore connect facilitation conditions to the practical orientation of mediation and, subsequently, to the form of participation that these practices support.

Figure 2. Empirical Patterns of Local Village Facilitator Mediation Outcomes



Source: Primary data from interviews with Local Village Facilitators (PLDs), Professional Facilitators (TPPs), and village government officials/BPD members, June–July 2026; processed by the authors.

As Figure 2 shows, PLDs move toward substantive participation when they receive institutional support, retain room to adapt policy implementation, maintain cooperative working relationships with village governments, work with active communities and functional BPDs, and operate in settings where they can still negotiate patronage pressures. Under these conditions, PLDs have greater room to mediate competing interests, bring different actors together, and preserve community influence within decision-making processes. Conversely, when regulatory and administrative burdens intensify, elite domination restricts mediation space, institutional support weakens, and audit risks or employment insecurity become more prominent; facilitation tends to shift toward risk mitigation. PLDs then devote greater attention to procedural certainty, documentation, hierarchical consultation, and administrative security. These findings demonstrate that variation in facilitation outcomes does not arise solely from individual PLD capacity. Instead, regulatory pressures, local power structures, institutional support, levels of community participation, and employment conditions interact to shape the scope of action available to facilitators.

DISCUSSION

The study shows that village development facilitation operates through a hybrid governance model that integrates compliance with higher-level government policies, local needs, village power structures,

and PLDs' risk assessments. First, patterns across informant categories indicate that PLDs can generally maintain formal compliance with regulations, planning documents, budgetary requirements, and reporting procedures. However, such compliance does not always produce substantive responsiveness when uniform policy priorities confront diverse village needs and capacities. Second, the existence of Village Deliberation Meetings (Musdes) and Village Development Planning Meetings (Musrenbangdes) does not automatically ensure meaningful community influence over final decisions. In several cases, village heads, influential groups, and local political networks possessed greater bargaining power, causing processes that formally followed a bottom-up model to shift toward a local top-down pattern. Third, PLDs responded to these tensions through interpretation, negotiation, compromise, and consultation. However, their room for mediation narrowed when regulatory pressures, patronage, administrative burdens, and employment-related risks intensified. Under these conditions, facilitation tended to shift toward risk-mitigation strategies that emphasized documentation, hierarchical consultation, and administrative security. Therefore, individual capacity alone does not determine PLD effectiveness; institutional and power configurations also shape the scope of action available to facilitators.

This hybrid governance pattern emerges because village policy implementation takes place under several layers of pressure that operate simultaneously. Regulations and program priorities from higher levels of government first require PLDs to maintain compliance, but relatively uniform mandates then confront heterogeneous village needs, capacities, and resources. This condition requires PLDs to interpret and adapt policy during implementation, consistent with studies that identify heterogeneity and local capacity as major constraints on village decentralization (Antlöv et al., 2016; Lewis, 2015). However, PLDs do not exercise this adaptive space within a politically neutral arena. When implementation enters village power structures, patronage, village-head dominance, and unequal bargaining power among actors shape the extent to which community aspirations can influence decisions. This pattern aligns with previous findings that participatory procedures can continue to operate under local elite control (Fritzen, 2007; Sidik & Habibi, 2024). At this point, PLDs must simultaneously interpret regulations and negotiate local interests, reinforcing the importance of frontline discretion in policy implementation (Lotta et al., 2022; Tummers & Bekkers, 2014). When regulatory and local power pressures intensify while the space for mediation narrows, PLDs may continue to maintain administrative compliance, but participatory forums lose some of their capacity to generate substantive participation. Hybrid governance therefore represents more than the coexistence of top-down and bottom-up mechanisms; it emerges from the interaction among regulatory pressures, local power structures, and frontline mediation practices.

The findings both confirm and extend the literature on decentralization and participatory governance at the village level. Lewis (2015) shows that fiscal decentralization can improve local services and responsiveness, but institutional design, administrative capacity, and inter-village heterogeneity constrain its effectiveness. Antlöv et al. (2016) similarly argue that the Village Law's expansion of village authority does not automatically yield more responsive governance, as outcomes still depend on institutional capacity, accountability mechanisms, and communities' ability to oversee village governments. Annahar et al. (2023) likewise identify the quality of local institutions, actors' capacities, and community involvement as essential conditions for inclusive village governance. The present study supports these arguments but identifies a more specific mechanism: formal village authority does not automatically produce substantive responsiveness because frontline PLD practices mediate the translation of authority into implementation. When PLDs have room for adaptation, adequate capacity, institutional support, and cooperative working relationships, they can reconcile regulatory mandates with local needs more responsively. Conversely, when such support weakens, and administrative or local

political pressures intensify, formal village autonomy can become confined to procedural compliance. This study therefore identifies PLD mediation as an important mechanism linking formal decentralization to substantive responsiveness.

The findings on local patronage also confirm previous research showing that institutionalized participation does not automatically eliminate elite domination in village development. Dasgupta and Beard (2007) show that community-driven development remains vulnerable to elite capture, while Fritzen (2007) demonstrates that expanded participatory spaces do not necessarily reduce elite control when power inequalities persist, and local accountability mechanisms remain weak. In the Indonesian context, Sidik and Habibi (2024) similarly show that formal institutions of participation, transparency, and accountability can function without automatically transforming local power structures. The present study supports this pattern but extends it by demonstrating that patronage operates not only through control over resources or budget priorities. Patronage also shapes deliberative processes by creating unequal influence among actors, allowing forums to continue procedurally while limiting communities' capacity to alter decisions. At the same time, the dominance of village heads, particular groups, and local political networks limits PLDs' ability to shift participation from formal involvement to substantive influence. Elite capture in this study therefore concerns not only who controls resources but also who can shape agendas, limit changes to decisions, and determine how far facilitators can pursue substantive mediation.

The findings extend the street-level bureaucracy perspective by showing that frontline actors use discretion not only to interpret and adapt policies but also to mediate pressures from multiple directions. Lipsky (2010) conceptualizes discretion as a consequence of policy implementation under conditions in which authorities cannot fully regulate frontline demands and resources from above, while Tummers and Bekkers (2014) show that discretion allows frontline actors to adapt policies to concrete situations. In developing-country contexts, Lotta et al. (2022) emphasize that implementation takes place within more complex formal and informal relationships. This study advances these arguments by showing that PLDs face vertical pressures from regulations, program priorities, reporting requirements, and inspection risks while simultaneously confronting horizontal pressures from patronage, village-head dominance, elite interests, and community aspirations. PLDs therefore use discretion not only to adapt policies but also to maintain working relationships, negotiate local power dynamics, avoid violations, consult higher-level facilitators, and document guidance in written notes or formal letters when risks increase. This pattern supports the concept of frontline mediation, which refers to the practices through which frontline actors reconcile regulatory mandates, local power structures, and participatory demands. Under high-risk conditions, this mediation can take the form of defensive mediation, in which frontline actors primarily use discretion to manage regulatory and political risks and protect administrative security rather than maximize substantive responsiveness.

This configuration produces ambivalent consequences for village facilitation. On the one hand, PLDs maintain connections between higher-level policies and local implementation, help village governments understand regulations, reduce administrative errors, and sustain participatory forums. On the other hand, the findings reveal a risk of bureaucratizing facilitation when document completion, reporting requirements, procedural safeguards, and evidence-gathering increasingly absorb PLDs' time and energy. This pattern corresponds with Pascoe et al. (2023) and Bakkeli & Breit (2022), who show that standardization, accountability requirements, and risk management can shift frontline work toward cultures of compliance and documentation while reducing room for substantive engagement. Proceduralization can also affect participation: participatory mechanisms do not guarantee an equal distribution of benefits or influence, as Musadat (2023) demonstrates in a study of participatory budgeting

in Indonesia. Work pressures can further strengthen defensive orientations. Mikkelsen et al. (2024) and Darveau & Hannon (2017) find that stress among frontline actors is associated with greater reliance on routines and more rigid rule compliance, while Hastings and Gannon (2022), Goldsmith & Yang, (2026) and Lambert & Haley (2021) show that resource constraints encourage frontline workers to develop a range of coping mechanisms. In the present study, this tendency manifests in hierarchical consultation, documentation of facilitation guidance, and administratively safe choices as risks increase. The central problem therefore extends beyond individual PLD competence and concerns an institutional design that places substantial mediation responsibilities on frontline actors without always providing commensurate room for action, capacity development, support, and employment protection.

The policy implications of these findings require a shift from strengthening facilitation primarily through administrative compliance toward strengthening PLDs' mediation capacity. Government institutions should simplify and harmonize regulations, establish feedback mechanisms that allow PLDs to communicate implementation problems, and strengthen training in conflict mediation, deliberative facilitation, community empowerment, and the navigation of local power relations. TPPs should support this process by providing clear channels for consultation and escalation. Institutional protection also requires clearer boundaries of responsibility, formal escalation mechanisms for elite pressure and potential violations, and improvements in employment security and compensation. In addition, performance indicators should extend beyond administrative completeness and assess the quality of deliberation, community involvement, follow-up on citizens' proposals, management of conflicts of interest, and alignment between programs and local needs. These reforms would reduce incentives for PLDs to select only the administratively safest actions and would expand their capacity to move from defensive procedural compliance toward substantive participatory governance.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that village development in Serang Regency operates within a hybrid governance configuration that combines top-down policy demands, bottom-up participatory processes, and local power structures. Within this configuration, Local Village Facilitators (Pendamping Lokal Desa [PLDs]) act as mediators who interpret regulations, adapt implementation to local conditions, facilitate participation, and negotiate competing interests. PLDs generally maintain formal compliance with regulations, planning documents, budgeting requirements, and reporting procedures, but formal compliance does not always produce substantive responsiveness. Mismatches between policy priorities and village conditions, administrative burdens, patronage, elite dominance, limited capacity, and employment-related risks can narrow PLDs' room for mediation. When these pressures intensify, facilitation tends to shift toward risk mitigation and procedural compliance. Conversely, institutional support, cooperative working relationships, room for policy adaptation, active communities, and functional Village Consultative Bodies (Badan Permusyawaratan Desa [BPDs]) increase opportunities for more substantive mediation and participation. These findings show that the quality of village governance depends not only on policy design or the existence of participatory forums but also on the conditions that shape frontline actors' scope of action.

This study makes empirical, conceptual, and theoretical contributions. Empirically, it demonstrates how PLDs operate at the intersection of state regulation, village governments, local elites, and communities in everyday development practices. Conceptually, the study proposes frontline mediation as a mechanism that explains how frontline actors negotiate tensions between top-down demands and bottom-up aspirations during implementation. Theoretically, the findings extend the street-level

bureaucracy perspective by showing that frontline actors use discretion not only to adapt policies to beneficiaries' conditions but also to navigate vertical regulatory pressures and horizontal pressures from patronage and local power structures. When regulatory and political pressures increase while institutional support weakens, mediation can take the form of defensive mediation, which prioritizes administrative protection, documentation, hierarchical consultation, and risk mitigation. Hybrid village governance therefore emerges from the interaction among regulation, frontline discretion, and local power structures rather than from a mechanical coexistence of top-down and bottom-up approaches.

This study has several limitations. First, the research focuses only on Serang Regency, Banten, so the findings cannot be directly generalized to all village contexts in Indonesia. Second, the data primarily reflect the perspectives of PLDs, Professional Facilitators (*Tenaga Pendamping Profesional* [TPPs]), village government officials, and BPD members, whereas the study did not directly examine those of community members as program beneficiaries. Third, the study mainly reconstructs administrative compliance from informants' accounts and does not systematically verify these claims through analyses of Village Government Work Plans (*RKP Desa*), Village Revenue and Expenditure Budgets (*APB Desa*), Musdes and Musrenbangdes records, or facilitation documents. Finally, the qualitative design does not seek to measure the prevalence of the identified patterns or the strength of relationships among variables. Future research should compare regions with different configurations of patronage and institutional capacity, incorporate community perspectives—including those of women, youth, and marginalized groups—and combine interviews with systematic analyses of planning, budgeting, and facilitation documents. Comparative research should also examine the conditions that produce substantive rather than defensive mediation, so that scholars can more robustly establish the empirical boundaries and analytical reach of the frontline mediation concept.

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