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Strengthening Participation through Public Policy Networks for Village Financial Accountability

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze actor participation in the public policy network of village financial management in Lebao Village, East Solor District, East Flores Regency. This study focuses on three research questions: (1) the level of actor participation in the public policy network of village financial management, (2) the factors influencing actor participation, and (3) the mechanisms for strengthening participation within the public policy network of village financial management. This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design. Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews, direct non-participation of observation, and documentation, which were subsequently analyzed using the interactive analysis model of Miles and Huberman. The study involves four key informants selected through purposive sampling: the Village Head, members of the Village Consultative Body (BPD), a neighborhood head (RT), and a female representative. The results indicate that actor participation in the public policy network of village financial management in Lebao Village is formally high through village deliberation forums. However, participation remains influenced by the dominance of key actors, particularly the village government and the BPD. Factors affecting participation include individual motivation, community literacy capacity, information transparency, leadership style, and power structure within the policy network. Mechanisms for strengthening participation are carried out through active community involvement in deliberation forums, transparent information dissemination, capacity building, and implementing open evaluation forums. The main challenges identified are the limited availability of public information media and the suboptimal involvement of external actors in the policy network.

Keywords: Participation, Policy Network, Good Governance, Information Transparency, Village Finance.

I. Introduction

Village financial management is a strategic aspect of village governance because it is directly related to the capacity of local governments to promote equitable, transparent, and accountable developments. Since the enactment of Law Number 6 of 2014 concerning Villages, later amended by Law Number 3 of 2024, villages in Indonesia have been granted broader authority to regulate and manage local community interests



based on rights of origin, customary values, and local needs recognized within the national governance system. In this context, village autonomy requires not only administrative capacity but also financial governance that is participatory, transparent, and publicly accountable. Community participation is therefore a crucial instrument that enables citizens to engage in the planning, implementation, supervision, and evaluation of village development. Accordingly, village financial accountability cannot be separated from the quality of public participation as a mechanism of social control in village governance (Lazar et al., 2024).

However, community participation in village financial management often remains formal and procedural. Citizen involvement is frequently limited to attendance at village deliberation forums without meaningful engagement in decision-making, budget oversight, or evaluation of development outcomes. This condition is reflected in several cases of village financial mismanagement, which indicates weak community-based control over public funds. For instance, the alleged misuse of housing assistance funds for uninhabitable houses in Lamawohon Village, Ile Bura District, illustrates that public oversight mechanisms have not functioned effectively (Florespedia 2021). Another case involved the misuse of village funds by the Head of Wailebe Village, West Adonara District, East Flores Regency, resulting in financial losses amounting to IDR 670,441,464 (Jahadu & Hartik, 2024). These cases suggest that community participation has not fully operated as an effective instrument of public accountability. Consequently, village financial management remains vulnerable to domination by certain actors and may fail to reflect the principles of transparency, accountability, and broader community interests.

Weak community participation should not be understood merely as low attendance in village forums but also as a consequence of ineffective relationships among actors within the public policy network at the village level. Public policy networks explain the interactions among various actors involved in the formulation, implementation, and oversight of public policy, including village governments, Village Consultative Bodies, community leaders, women's groups, and other local stakeholders. Frans Van Waarden, as cited in Sudirman, Thahir, and Suryadi (2022), emphasizes that public policy networks reflect relationships among actors within a policy arena who influence one another. Similarly, Marsh and Rhodes (1992), as cited in Noor, Suaedi, and Mardiyanta (2022), conceptualized policy networks as structures of interdependent relationships among actors in the policy process. This perspective is important because participation is not determined solely by an individual's willingness to attend village forums but also by power relations, information distribution, access to decision-making processes, and the capacity of actors to influence village policy.

This issue is also evident in Lebao Village in the East Solor District of the East Flores Regency. The main problem lies in the domination of certain actors in the decision-making process related to village financial management. Such domination has resulted in limited information distribution to the community, low involvement of non-elite groups such as women and ordinary citizens, and participation that tends to be formal rather than substantive in nature. Empirically, this condition is reflected in the 2024 Village Government Work Plan deliberation, where community attendance reached only approximately 33.7% (90 out of 267 invited residents). This low level of participation is significant because Lebao Village has been classified as an advanced village with a Village Development Index score of 0.7144. This indicates that improved village development status does not automatically lead to higher-quality public participation in development planning and oversight. From an institutional perspective, the limited capacity of village officials to manage inclusive participation remains a challenge. The Head of Lebao Village, Maria Magdalena K. Teluma (2025), stated that although village officials have participated in training and technical assistance programs, their capacity to involve the community actively and equitably still needs to be strengthened to achieve more participatory and accountable village financial governance.

Previous studies have examined community participation in village financial management; however, most have treated participation as an administrative variable measured through indicators such as attendance, involvement in deliberation forums, and compliance with formal procedures. Such an approach does not fully explain how actor relations, power distribution, and access to information shape the quality of participation in village financial governance. Thus, an analytical gap remains in understanding participation as a relational phenomenon formed through the configuration of public policy networks at the village level.

Although prior studies have addressed actor roles, access to information, and deliberation forums, few have comprehensively analyzed the patterns of interaction among actors, the relationship between information flows and power distribution, and collaborative mechanisms for creating village financial accountability. This gap is important because village financial accountability depends not only on the completeness of administrative procedures but also on the extent to which actor networks can create equal, inclusive, and substantive participatory spaces.

Based on this gap, the present study has both theoretical and practical significance in several ways. Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of public policy network studies by positioning community participation as a relational phenomenon influenced by actor structures, power distribution, and access to information in village financial governance (FG). Practically, this study is expected to provide recommendations for village governments and local stakeholders to strengthen participatory mechanisms that are not merely formal but are capable of promoting substantive financial accountability. Therefore, this study aims to describe the structure of relationships among actors in the public policy network of village financial management in Lebao Village, analyze how relational structures, power distribution, and access to information influence the quality of actor participation, and explain the mechanisms for strengthening participation within public policy networks to promote substantive accountability in village financial management.

II. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1. Concept of Public Participation

Public participation is a fundamental element of village financial governance because the success of village development is determined not only by the capacity of the village government but also by the quality of community involvement in policy planning, implementation, supervision, and evaluation. In the regulatory context, Article 68, paragraph (2) of Law No. 6 of 2014 concerning Villages affirms that village communities are obliged to participate in development activities. However, in public administration studies, participation cannot be reduced to citizen attendance in formal forums. Meaningful participation requires space for citizens to influence decisions, access information, and monitor the implementation of village governance policies. Theoretically, Arnstein's (1969) Ladder of Citizen Participation provides an important foundation for distinguishing between symbolic and substantive participation. Arnstein places participation within a spectrum of power, ranging from manipulation to citizen control. In the context of village financial management, this theory is relevant for assessing whether community members merely attend village deliberation forums as passive listeners or genuinely influence budget priorities, program implementation, and the oversight of village funds. Thus, the quality of participation should not be measured only by the number of citizens present, but also by the extent to which they gain access to the decision-making process.

The framework developed by Wilson and Wilde (2003, as cited in Istanto, Apsari, & Gutama, 2020) enriches the analysis of participation through four main dimensions: influence, inclusivity, communication, and capacity. These dimensions show that public participation cannot be separated from the social and institutional structures that shape citizen's engagement. Influence refers to the ability of the community to affect final decisions; inclusivity emphasizes the involvement of vulnerable groups, such as women, youth, and low-income citizens; communication reflects the openness of information channels between the village government and the community; and capacity refers to citizens' ability to understand information, express aspirations, and participate actively. In this study, participation is understood as a relational process that takes place not only in deliberation forums but also within actor relationships that determine who is able to speak, who is heard, and who has influence over village financial management.

2.2. Concept of Policy Networks

Policy networks are an important approach for understanding that public policy is not produced by a single actor but through interactions among various interdependent actors who exchange resources and negotiate within a policy arena. Rhodes, as cited in Noor, Suaedi, and Mardiyanta (2022), emphasized that the policy process is the result of relationships among actors with different interests, capacities, and power positions. Accordingly, public policy should not be understood merely as a formal government decision but as a product of relational dynamics, power distribution, and resource exchange among actors. From Van Waarden's perspective, policy networks emerge from the interdependence among actors in the formulation and implementation of policy. Frans Van Waarden, as cited in Sudirman, Thahir, and Suryadi (2022), explains that administrators require political support, legitimacy, information, coalitions, and implementation assistance, while interest groups seek access to policymaking processes. This exchange of needs creates networks that may become institutionalized over time. This approach is relevant in the village context because village financial management involves multiple actors, including the village government, the Village Consultative Body, community leaders, women's groups, neighborhood heads, and citizens. Van Waarden's (1992) policy network model serves as the main analytical framework because it systematically explains the structure of relationships among actors. Rulinawaty (2020) explains that Van Waarden identifies seven dimensions of policy networks: actors, function, structure, institutionalization, rules of conduct, power relations, and actor strategies. However, in the context of village financial management, the most relevant dimensions are network structure, power relations, rules of conduct, and access to information. Network structure is used to examine patterns of relationships among actors; power relations explain domination and the distribution of influence; rules of conduct indicate the norms and formal mechanisms that regulate interaction; and access to information explains how policy and financial information is distributed in the community. Through this framework, participation can be analyzed not merely as an individual action but as the outcome of the configuration of power relations, communication, and access within the village policy network.

2.3. Concept of Good Governance

Good governance provides a normative framework for assessing whether village financial management is conducted transparently, participatively, responsively, and accountably. The UNDP (1997, as cited in Handayani & Nur, 2019) defines governance as the exercise of political, economic, and administrative authority to manage public affairs at various levels of government. Meanwhile, the World Bank (1992, as cited in Hayat, 2018) emphasizes governance as the way power is used to manage economic and social resources for development. These perspectives indicate that good governance is not only related to administrative effectiveness but also to the relationship between the government and society in controlling the exercise of public authority. The principles of good governance developed by the UNDP, the World Bank, and Crescent (2003, as cited in Hayat, 2018) emphasize participation, transparency, accountability, effectiveness, equity, and responsiveness. In this study, good governance is not positioned as the main theory but as an evaluative framework for assessing whether public policy networks at the village level are capable of producing sound financial governance. The primary focus is on participation, transparency, accountability, and responsiveness of the government. Participation refers to citizen involvement in the policy process; transparency concerns openness of information; accountability emphasizes the responsibility of the village government to the community; and responsiveness reflects the village government's capacity to respond to citizens' needs.

In the context of village financial management, good governance is relevant because accountability cannot be achieved merely through complete administrative reports. Accountability requires meaningful citizen participation, adequate access to information, and effective social oversight mechanisms. Therefore, in this study, the principles of good governance are used to assess the extent to which village policy networks

can create inclusive participatory spaces, distribute information transparently, and encourage village government accountability in managing the Village Revenue and Expenditure Budget.

2.4. Concept of Information Disclosure

Information disclosure is a key prerequisite for participation and accountability in village financial management. Noor M. U. (2019) argues that public information disclosure is one indicator of a democratic state because it enables citizens to exercise control over government. In the context of public policy, information is a critical resource that determines whether citizens can understand policies, express their aspirations, and oversee budget use. Without adequate access to information, community participation risks becoming merely procedural, as citizens lack the knowledge base required for substantive involvement. Zainal, Ahmad, Arwulan, Musridwan, and Mulyawan (2024) emphasize that information disclosure is a crucial element in building good governance because it enables citizens to actively participate in public policy and promotes a clean and effective government. From a regulatory perspective, Law No. 14 of 2008 concerning Public Information Disclosure also affirms citizens' right to know the plans, processes, and decisions involved in public policy-making. In village financial management, information disclosure includes the provision of information regarding village budget planning, implementation, reporting, and accountability. In this study, information disclosure is not positioned as a stand-alone concept but as a factor that bridges the relationship between participation and accountability within public policy networks. Open, accessible, and understandable information enables citizens to evaluate policies, monitor the use of village funds, and influence decisions more rationally. However, the effectiveness of information disclosure depends heavily on communication media, communication quality, community literacy, and the willingness of the village government to open dialogue spaces. Thus, information disclosure is not only administrative but also political because it is related to the distribution of knowledge and power within the village policy network.

2.5. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study is based on the assumption that the quality of community participation in village financial management is shaped by the structure of public policy networks. Village financial management, which includes the planning, implementation, reporting, and oversight of the Village Revenue and Expenditure Budget, requires effective interaction among the village government, the Village Consultative Body, community members, women's groups, neighborhood heads, and other local actors. These actor relationships are not neutral, as they are influenced by power distribution, information access, institutional rules, actor capacity, and shared goals in village financial governance. Within this framework, public policy networks are arenas that determine the quality of participation. Actor relationships show patterns of communication, cooperation, and interdependence in the village policy-making process. Power distribution explains who has a dominant influence on decision-making. Information flows indicate the extent to which a community receives information about village policies and finances. Rules and institutions describe the norms, procedures, and forum mechanisms that regulate the relationships among actors. All these dimensions influence whether community participation is merely formal or genuinely substantive.

The quality of community participation has implications for village financial accountability. Inclusive and substantive participation enables citizens to express their aspirations, influence decisions, oversee budget use, and evaluate the accountability of the village government. Conversely, participation that is merely formal tends to weaken social control and create space for the domination of certain actors. Therefore, this study positions public policy networks as an analytical framework for explaining the relationship between actor relations, power distribution, information disclosure, quality of participation, and village financial accountability. This approach is expected to provide theoretical contributions to public policy network studies and practical contributions to strengthening village financial governance that is more participatory, transparent, and accountable.

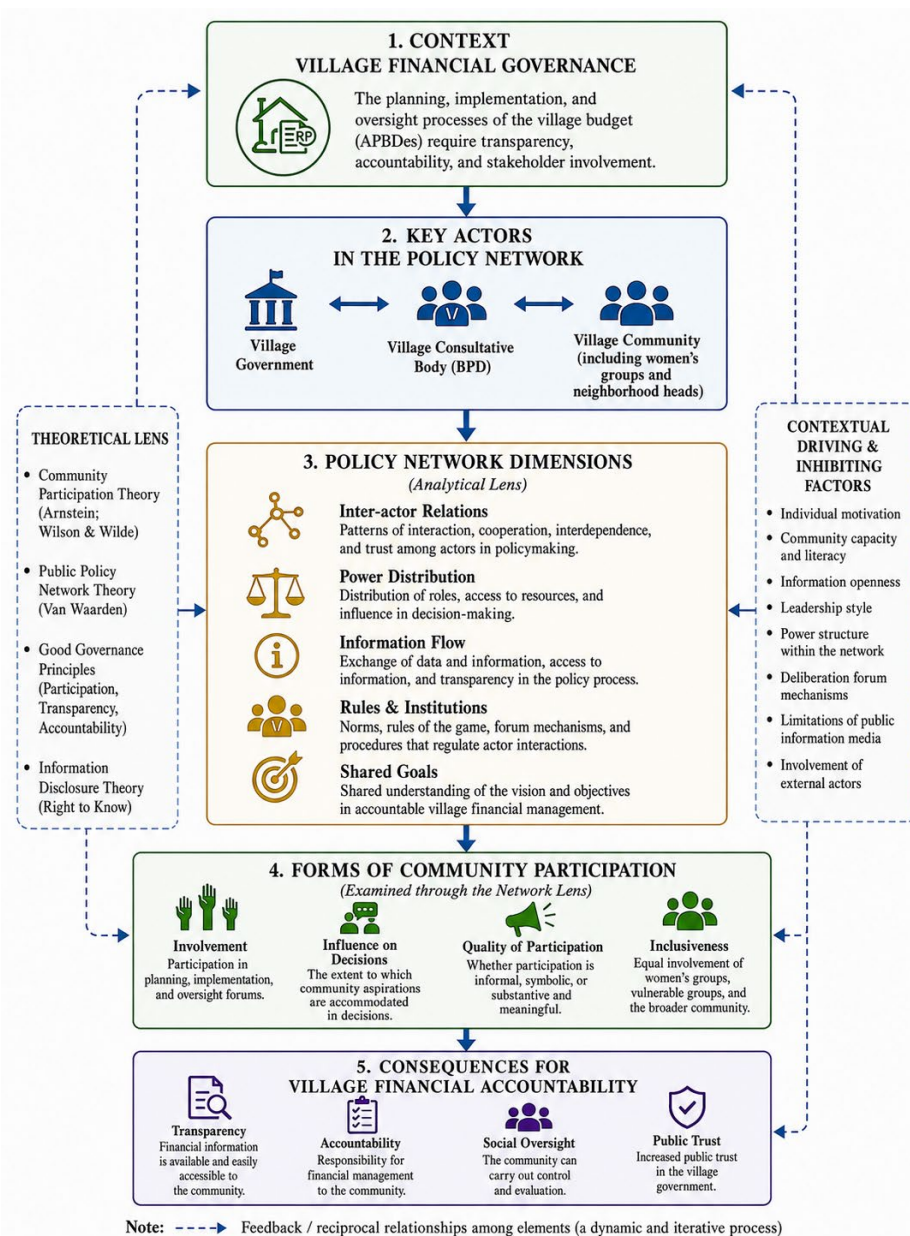


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

III. Research Method

3.1. Research Design and Approach

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design to examine how relationships among actors within public policy networks influence participation and accountability in village financial management in Lebao Village, East Solor District, East Flores Regency, Indonesia. A qualitative case study was considered appropriate because this research focused on understanding the dynamics of actor relations, power distribution, information flows, and participatory mechanisms within a specific village governance context. This design enabled an in-depth exploration of how the structure of public policy networks shapes the quality of actor participation and how strengthened participation may support substantive accountability in village financial governance.

3.2. Research Site and Period

The research was conducted in Lebao Village, East Solor District, and East Flores Regency. Lebao Village was selected because it provides a relevant empirical context for examining public policy networks, capacity development, participation, transparency, and village budget management. In 2024, based on the Village Development Index measurement and standard operating procedures for village development status assessment, Lebao Village was categorized as an advanced village. This status makes the village an important case for analyzing whether institutional progress is accompanied by substantive public participation and accountable financial governance. Fieldwork will be conducted from January to May 2025, or until the primary data required to answer the research questions have been sufficiently obtained.

3.3. Data Sources

This study used both primary and secondary data to obtain a comprehensive understanding of participation and accountability in village financial management. Primary data were obtained directly through in-depth interviews and through field observations. In line with Sugiono (2016), primary data refer to data collected directly from sources and provided to researchers. In this study, primary data were used to identify the actors involved in the public policy network of village financial management, map the patterns of relationships among actors, and understand the distribution of power and information flows within the policy process. Primary data also captured actors' perceptions and experiences regarding formal and substantive participation, as well as the mechanisms for strengthening participation in village financial governance. Secondary data were obtained from official village documents and archives relevant to the village's financial management. Following Arikunto S. (2010), secondary data refer to data collected by other parties and accessed by researchers through relevant sources. The secondary data used in this study included documents such as the Village Government Work Plan, Village Revenue and Expenditure Budget, meeting minutes, attendance lists, village deliberation records, and 2024 Village Development Index data. These documents were used to verify the interview and observation findings, especially regarding participation levels, planning and budgeting processes, formal accountability mechanisms, and public information disclosure.

3.4. Participants and Sampling

Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their direct involvement, formal position, social role, and knowledge of village financial management. This sampling technique was chosen because the study required informants with relevant information about actor participation, policy networks, and accountability practices in Lebao Village. The study involved four key informants: the Head of Lebao Village, one member of the Village Consultative Body, one neighborhood head, and one women's representative. These informants represented the village government, village oversight institution, local community structure, and women's participation in village governance. The inclusion criteria required informants to have a formal position in the village government or a social role in the community, direct involvement in the planning, implementation, or oversight of village financial management, and knowledge or experience related to participation and policy networks in Lebao Village. Informants were also required to have at least one year of experience in village governance or community participation, be willing to participate through informed consent, and be able to reflect on their roles and experiences in the context of public participation. Data collection continued until the information obtained showed recurring patterns and was sufficient to answer the research questions, particularly regarding actor relations, factors influencing participation, and mechanisms for strengthening participation in the public policy network.

3.5. Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, non-participant direct observation, and document analysis. In-depth interviews served as the primary method for exploring informants' understanding, experiences, and perspectives on actor participation in the village financial management policy network. The interviews used a semi-structured guide containing open-ended questions derived from the research focus of the study. This format allowed the researcher to maintain consistency across interviews while remaining flexible in exploring emerging issues. Non-participant direct observation was conducted by observing village activities related to financial management without becoming involved in decision-making or other village activities. The researcher observed village forums and governance processes, including deliberations on the Village Government Work Plan, the determination of the Village Revenue and Expenditure Budget, and community oversight practices. These observations enabled the researcher to examine the patterns of interaction among actors, role distribution, information access, information flows, and the level of community involvement in village policy forums. Documentation was used as a secondary data collection technique and as a tool for triangulating the interview and observation findings. Village documents were examined to verify the consistency between the informants' statements and the available administrative evidence. Meeting minutes and village deliberation records were used to examine the decision-making processes and actor interactions. Attendance lists were used to assess formal community participation in the village forums. The Village Government Work Plan and Village Revenue and Expenditure Budget were used to trace the planning, budgeting, and accountability processes. The 2024 Village Development Index data were used to describe the general conditions of the village, particularly in relation to social capacity and participatory indicators.

3.6. Instruments and Measures

The main research instruments consisted of a semi-structured interview guide, observation notes, document recording forms, an audio recorder used with the informants' consent, and field notes. The interview guide was developed based on the key dimensions of public policy networks and village financial accountability. It covered actor participation, policy network structure, communication patterns, information distribution, power relations, rules of interaction, institutional support, factors influencing participation, inclusivity, mechanisms for strengthening participation and accountability practices. The instrument mapping linked each research question to the relevant constructs and indicators. The first research question focused on actor participation and policy networks by examining attendance, involvement, contribution, influence in decision-making, core and peripheral actors, communication patterns, information distribution, actor domination, rules of interaction, and institutional support. The second research question examined factors affecting participation, including information access, motivation, capacity, citizens' time constraints, elite domination, social support, women's involvement, non-elite participation, and equality of access. The third research question focused on the mechanisms for strengthening participation and accountability, including village forums, transparency, two-way communication, education, capacity building, inter-actor collaboration, public oversight, and village government accountability.

3.7. Data Analysis Techniques

Data were analyzed using a qualitative interactive analysis model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. The analysis was conducted cyclically and continuously from the beginning of the data collection until the completion of the study. Coding was used as part of the data reduction process to identify the concepts, categories, and patterns that emerged from the interviews, observations, and documents. This process followed the analytical logic of Miles and Huberman (1994), in which data analysis involves systematic reduction, organization, and interpretation of the field data.

The analysis began with interview transcription, followed by coding to identify the relevant concepts and categories. Open coding was used to identify the initial keywords and concepts from the data. Axial coding was then applied to connect related codes into broader categories, and selective coding was used to determine the main themes corresponding to the focus of the study. The categorized data were then organized into narrative descriptions, matrices, tables, or analytical displays to identify the relationships among the themes. Conclusions were drawn gradually and verified throughout the research process to ensure that the findings were grounded in the data and were responsive to the research questions.

3.8. Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of the data was ensured through credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability, following the qualitative validity principles described by Moleong (2007). [insert references] Credibility was established through source and method triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information from the Head of Lebao Village, a Village Consultative Body member, the neighborhood head, and a women's representative. Method triangulation was performed by comparing the interview data with the observation results and official village documents. For example, claims regarding community participation in village deliberation forums were verified using attendance lists, meeting minutes, and direct observation of the Village Government Work Plan Forum. Dependability was maintained through an audit trail documenting the entire research process, including the interview and observation schedules, interview transcripts, field notes, coding processes, and categorization procedures. This documentation ensured that the research process could be traced and assessed logically. Confirmability was strengthened by ensuring that the findings were grounded in the field data rather than the researcher's subjective interpretation. This was done using direct quotations from informants, comparing interview results with documentary evidence, and rechecking the data obtained during fieldwork. Transferability was supported by providing a contextual description of Lebao Village, including its social conditions, institutional village structure, and dynamics of community participation in village financial management. This contextual description allows readers to assess the relevance of the findings to similar village governance settings in China. In addition, a negative case analysis was conducted by identifying findings that differed from or contradicted the dominant patterns in the data. For instance, differences between the village head's view that participation was relatively adequate and the Village Consultative Body member's view that participation remained formal and dominated by certain actors were analyzed to enrich the interpretation and reduce bias in drawing conclusions.

3.9. Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to several ethical principles throughout the research process. Informants were informed about the purpose, procedures, and academic use of the study before participating, and their consent was obtained through informed consent. Some informants explicitly agreed to have their identities disclosed in the research report; nevertheless, the researcher maintained ethical caution by not revealing any sensitive information. The study was conducted with permission from the local village government. All data collected in this study were used solely for academic and research purposes only.

IV. Results and Discussion

4.1. Analysis Result

a. Actor Participation in the Public Policy Network of Village Financial Management

The findings indicate that village financial management in Lebao Village is formally centered on the village government, particularly the Village Head, who holds authority over village financial management. The Village Head is responsible for determining financial management policies, while the village secretary and treasurer provide administrative and technical support in the implementation process. However, financial governance is not conducted solely by the village government. The Village Consultative Body also plays a strategic role in providing oversight, consideration, and representation of community aspirations. As stated by the Village Head, financial management is carried out by the village government, but its processes require coordination and accountability to the community. This statement confirms that the core network of village financial governance primarily consists of the village government and the Village Consultative Body.

The structure of actor involvement shows that the public policy network in Lebao Village remains largely internal to the village. Coordination between the village government and the Village Consultative Body is routine and relatively effective, but there is no formal communication forum involving external actors, such as non-governmental organizations, the media, academic institutions, or supravillage actors. The Village Head stated that communication has so far been limited to internal coordination between the village government and the Village Consultative Body. Field observations and village deliberation documents also show that interactions in village forums are still dominated by internal village actors, while community members tend to participate as forum attendees rather than as actors with equal decision-making influence.

Table 1. Actor Participation in the APBDes/RKPDes Cycle

Actor	Planning	Implementation	Reporting	Evaluation	Main Evidence
Village Head	Leads deliberations	Directs programs	Presents reports	Leads evaluation	Interview, official records
Secretary/Treasurer	Prepares documents	Manages administration	Prepares financial reports	Documents activities	Interview, APBDes documents
Village Consultative Body	Provides consideration	Conducts monitoring	Oversees reports	Evaluates policy	Interview
RT/RW	Mobilizes residents	Coordinates citizens	Limited role	Channels aspirations	Interview
Community leaders	Provide input	Participate in activities	Limited role	Offer criticism and suggestions	Interview
Women's representatives	Attend deliberations	Limited involvement	Limited role	Limited involvement	Interview, observation
General community	Attend forums	Participate in activities	Limited role	Provide input	Attendance lists, observation

The table shows that actor involvement in village financial management is hierarchical and uneven across the stages. The village government, especially the Village Head and village officials, play a dominant role in planning and evaluation. The Village Consultative Body functions mainly as a supervisory and advisory actor, while RT/RW, community leaders, women's representatives, and general community members are more involved in planning and evaluation. Community participation is relatively strong in terms of attendance but

remains limited in reporting and final decision-making. Women’s participation is also more formal than substantive, as women are present in deliberation forums but have limited influence on policy outcomes.

b. Level and Quality of Community Participation

The study found a distinction between administratively recorded participation and perceived participation based on the interviews. Administrative data from the 2024 Village Government Work Plan deliberation showed that community attendance reached 33.7% (90 of the 267 invited residents). In contrast, the interview data suggested a perceived participation level of 75–80%. This difference reflects two distinct bases for measurement. Administrative data refer to the proportion of formal invitees who attended, whereas interview-based data reflect the perceived involvement of actors who were active in forums. Therefore, the two figures do not necessarily contradict each other; rather, they reveal the difference between formal administrative and perceived practical participation. Village deliberation serves as the main forum for participation in Lebao Village. The forum discusses the planning, implementation, determination of programs, and evaluation of village activities. According to the Village Head, participation in village deliberations involves village institutions, education figures, women leaders, community leaders, and community members. This was supported by the women’s representative, who stated that the planning process ran smoothly and that community members were actively involved. Field documentation from the 2025 Musrenbangdes also showed that more than 80 participants attended, including village officials, the Village Consultative Body, RT/RW, and general community members.

Despite this relatively strong formal participation, the findings indicate that participation has not fully reached a substantive level in this case. Community members have opportunities to provide suggestions and evaluate village programs, but their influence on the final decisions remains limited. The Village Head emphasized that the village government provides space for citizens to ask questions, offer suggestions, and evaluate whether proposed activities are appropriate. However, observations show that participation is still concentrated in attendance and discussion, while decision-making authority remains centered on the village government and the Village Consultative Body (VCD). This indicates the dual character of participation in Lebao Village: procedurally inclusive but substantively unequal in terms of influence.

c. Factors Influencing Actor Participation

Several factors influence actor participation in the public policy network of village financial management in Lebao Village. The first factor is actor capacity, which includes education level, awareness, motivation, and personal conditions. The Village Head stated that although the educational level of some residents remains limited, this does not prevent them from participating. However, the data show that the educational structure of the village may affect the quality of participation, particularly in understanding financial information and policy processes, as follows:

Table 2. Educational and Occupational Characteristics of Lebao Village Residents

Category	Classification	Number
Education	Not yet/no schooling	112
	Elementary school/MI	253
	Junior high school	80
	Senior high school	51
	Bachelor’s degree	10
Occupation	Private employees	21
	Farmers	294
	Entrepreneurs	6
	Unemployed/not working	218

The data indicate that most residents have low educational attainment, with a large proportion having no schooling or only elementary-level education. This condition affects residents' ability to understand village financial documents, budget information, and accountability reports. From an occupational perspective, most residents work as farmers, which creates time constraints and limits their ability to consistently attend village forums. The high number of residents categorized as unemployed or not working does not automatically translate into active participation because participation is also shaped by motivation, awareness, information access, and power relations within the village policy network. The second factor is the institutional factor. Lebao Village has participatory mechanisms, such as village deliberation forums and RKPDes meetings. However, these forums have not fully encouraged active involvement in decision making. Field observations show that discussions are dominated by certain actors, particularly the village government and the Village Consultative Body. Information delivery is still concentrated in deliberation forums and has not been optimally supported by other media, such as village information boards or digital communication platforms. Consequently, residents who do not attend the forums have limited access to detailed information on village financial management.

The third factor is political relationships. The findings show that conflicts of interest and leadership dynamics influence participation. An RT/RW representative acknowledged that conflicts of interest occur in village decision-making and need careful management. A Village Consultative Body member also stated that leadership style affects community comfort and willingness to participate in the program. According to this informant, when leadership is perceived as authoritarian or distant from village life, it may create apathy among the residents. These findings indicate that participation is not only affected by individual willingness but also by the quality of relationships, trust, openness to criticism, and communication between the village government and the community.

d. Mechanisms for Strengthening Participation

The findings show that Lebao Village uses both formal and informal mechanisms to strengthen community participation. Formal mechanisms include village deliberations, Musrenbangdes, RKPDes forums, APBDes discussions, and pre-LKKPD evaluation forums, among others. Through these forums, the village government communicates planning, budget ceilings, program realization, and financial accountability. The 2025 Musrenbangdes record shows that the forum discussed and agreed on several priority programs, including the continuation of village hall development, extreme poverty alleviation through village fund cash transfers, improvement of health services, food security programs, and other sectoral priorities. These forums demonstrate that participatory mechanisms are institutionally available and are administratively implemented. The Village Consultative Body also functions as a formal channel for receiving and communicating community aspirations outside the main deliberation forums. This role is important because the Village Consultative Body acts as a balancing institution between the village government and the community. In addition, the village government coordinates with local and subdistrict village facilitators to strengthen administrative capacity and ensure that financial management follows applicable rules and community needs.

Informal mechanisms also play an important role in strengthening participation in the program. RT/RW actors encourage residents to attend village meetings through direct invitations and personal communication. This approach is significant because it uses existing social relationships to reach residents who may not respond to formal invitations. The women's representative also confirmed that residents are often directly invite by RT officials to attend village meetings. Therefore, participation in Lebao Village is built not only through formal procedures but also through social and cultural relationships that help mobilize community involvement. Nevertheless, this study has several limitations. Participation is still dominated by core actors, especially the village government and the Village Consultative Body. Information access remains uneven because information is mostly delivered through forums. External actors are not significantly involved,

making the policy network relatively closed and internally oriented. These limitations indicate that the mechanisms for strengthening participation have worked procedurally but still need to be improved to produce more equal, inclusive, and substantive participation.

4.2. Discussion

a. Formal Participation and the Limits of Substantive Influence

The findings indicate that community participation in Lebao Village has been formally implemented through village deliberation forums, Musrenbangdes, RKPDes discussions, and program evaluation meetings. However, this participation has not yet fully reflected substantive involvement, as the community's influence over the final decisions remains limited. This condition is consistent with Arnstein's (1969) Ladder of Citizen Participation, which emphasizes that participation should not be measured merely by citizens' attendance but by the extent to which they have the power to influence public decisions. In the context of Lebao Village, community participation is closer to the consultative level because citizens are given space to express their aspirations, but they do not yet have equal influence in the decision-making process. This finding can also be interpreted through the participation dimensions proposed by Wilson and Wilde (2003, as cited in Istanto, Apsari, & Gutama, 2020), namely, influence, inclusivity, communication, and capacity. Lebao Village has made progress in communication and procedural inclusivity because deliberation forums are open to various community elements. However, the dimensions of influence and capacity remain suboptimal. Not all citizens have sufficient confidence, knowledge, or social position to actively express their views. Women, youth, and citizens with lower educational backgrounds still face barriers to articulating their interests equally in public forums. This condition is in line with the findings of Welean, Mantiri, and Pati (2021) and Sulistyowati and Nataliawati (2022), who show that village community participation often depends on leadership characteristics, access to information, and encouragement from the village government. This means that participation has not yet been fully institutionalized as an equal civic right but remains strongly influenced by the political will of key actors. Therefore, high community attendance at forums does not automatically guarantee deliberative participation.

b. Policy Networks, Core Actor Domination, and Power Relations

From a policy network perspective, public policy is not produced by a single actor but through interactions among interdependent actors who share resources within a particular structure (Marsh & Rhodes, 1992, as cited in Noor, Suaedi, & Mardiyanta, 2022). The findings show that the policy network of village financial management in Lebao Village is still dominated by internal actors, particularly the village government and the Village Consultative Body. This domination is reflected in agenda control, financial information control, and influence over final decisions. According to Kickert et al. (1997, as cited in Gedeona, 2013), relationships within policy networks are shaped by interdependence and resource exchanges. In Lebao Village, interdependence exists, but resource exchange remains unequal. The village government controls strategic resources such as budget authority, regulations, documents, and administrative legitimacy, whereas the community largely depends on information delivered through village forums. This imbalance places community participation in a consultative position rather than an equal deliberative partnership.

This finding strengthens the study by Lestari and Sayidah (2019), which shows that in many village fund management practices, communities are often mobilized to legitimize decisions rather than being engaged as equal actors in deliberation. This study also extends the findings of Dwijokusilo and Shafiyah (2020), who emphasized strong participation in infrastructure program implementation but did not examine the structure of actor relationships. In the context of Lebao Village, participation in program implementation exists, yet the policy network structure still shows the dominance of core actors. Furthermore, the absence of external actors such as non-governmental organizations, academics, local media, or independent facilitating

institutions indicates that the policy network in Lebao Village has not yet developed into a cross-sector collaborative arena. Stone (2012, as cited in Rohman & Kurniawan, 2023) emphasized that local policy effectiveness is strongly influenced by the involvement of diverse actors with different perspectives and resources. Without actor diversity, village policy risks being trapped in administrative logic and becoming less responsive to community dynamics.

c. Information Disclosure and Village Financial Accountability

Information disclosure is an important factor influencing the quality of participation and accountability in village financial management. The findings show that the Lebao Village Government has communicated information on planning, budget ceilings, program implementation, and financial accountability through village deliberation forums and pre-LKKPD meetings. This practice indicates the existence of a procedural transparency. However, information disclosure remains concentrated in face-to-face forums, meaning that citizens who do not attend these forums have limited access to this information. This finding is consistent with Law No. 14 of 2008 concerning Public Information Disclosure, which affirms that access to public information is a citizen's right and a government's obligation. Noor M. U. (2019) states that public information disclosure is a sign of democratic governance because it enables citizens to exercise control over government. Zainal, Ahmad, Arwulan, Musridwan, and Mulyawan (2024) also emphasize that information disclosure is essential for building clean, effective, and participatory governance.

However, the case of Lebao Village shows that information disclosure has not fully developed into substantive transparency in practice. Information is indeed delivered, but not all citizens have equal access to obtain, understand, and use that information in oversight processes. The absence of village digital media, strategic budget information boards, and alternative communication channels is an obstacle to expanding information access. Thus, transparency should not be understood merely as the delivery of information in formal forums, but should also include accessibility, clarity, equitable distribution, and citizens' ability to use information as a basis for social control. Within the framework of good governance, this indicates that Lebao Village has fulfilled some principles of sound governance, particularly procedural participation and transparency. However, substantive accountability must be strengthened. UNDP and the World Bank, as discussed by Handayani and Nur (2019) and Hayat (2018), emphasize that good governance is not only related to administrative effectiveness but also to participation, transparency, accountability, and government responsiveness to society. In the context of Lebao Village, village financial accountability will be stronger if information disclosure is not merely formal but also capable of encouraging active social oversight.

d. Capacity, Inclusivity, and Barriers to the Participation of Vulnerable Groups

The findings indicate that community capacity is an important factor in determining the quality of participation. The low educational level of many Lebao Village residents affects their ability to understand village financial issues, read budget documents, and provide relevant inputs. In addition, the fact that most residents work as farmers creates time constraints that limit their attendance at village forums. This shows that participation does not occur in a neutral space but is influenced by citizens' social position, economic conditions, educational background, and access to information resources.

Women's participation continues to face obstacles. Although there are more women than men in Lebao Village, their involvement in discussions and decision-making remains limited. These barriers are related to domestic responsibilities, low confidence in public forums, and the domination of discussions by specific actors. This finding shows that open forums do not automatically produce equal participation rates. Inclusivity requires social and institutional conditions that enable structurally disadvantaged groups to gain access, a voice, and equal influence. This finding strengthens Putri et al.'s (2021) finding that participation can enhance community empowerment. However, this study adds that empowerment through participation can only occur when citizens have adequate capacity, equal access to information, and equal opportunities to

influence decision-making. Therefore, strengthening participation in Lebao Village should be directed toward improving village financial literacy, providing community training, supporting women's groups, and creating forums that are more accessible to non-elite groups in the village.

e. Mechanisms for Strengthening Participation in Village Policy Networks

Participation-strengthening mechanisms in Lebao Village have been developed through a combination of formal and informal channels. Formal mechanisms include community involvement in village deliberation forums, Musrenbangdes, RKPDes discussions, APBDes approval, and evaluation. These mechanisms are consistent with Siregar (2020) and Theresia et al. (2020, as cited in Selfia, Afifuddin, & Sekarsari, 2020), who emphasized that strong participation requires access to information, capacity, and inclusive two-way communication spaces. Informal mechanisms also play important roles. The role of RT/RW, community leaders, and women leaders in encouraging residents to attend forums shows that participation is not built solely through formal rules but also through social relations and local norms. This finding supports Uceng, Ali, Mustanir, and Nirmawati (2019), who argue that participation is influenced not only by structural factors but also by social support and local norms that create a participatory environment.

However, these strengthening mechanisms have limitations. From the perspective of Marsh and Smith (2000), an effective policy network requires equal information exchange, actor diversity, and a balanced distribution of resources. In Lebao Village, the network remains local and internalized. Village facilitators have begun to play a role in strengthening their capacity and technical oversight. However, the involvement of other external actors is insignificant. This limits the diversity of perspectives, innovation capacity, and social control beyond the village's internal structure of the village. Compared with the findings of Anggraeni, Theorupun, and Triatmaja (2023) and Lazar, Tokan, and Niron (2024), Lebao Village has demonstrated relatively comprehensive participatory practices through formal forums, open evaluation, and social coordination. However, the institutionalization of public information systems, capacity strengthening for vulnerable groups, and expansion of cross-sector networks remain important agendas. This study also reinforces the findings of Wiralestari, Arum, Wijaya, Friyani, and Sam (2023), which state that strengthening the capacity of village officials is important for improving financial management. Nevertheless, this study emphasizes that capacity building should not target only village officials but also the community as policy participants and oversight actors.

f. Scientific Contribution of the Findings

The main contribution of this study lies in its use of the public policy network perspective to explain community participation in village financial management. Unlike previous studies that tend to view participation as attendance in forums or administrative involvement, this study shows that participation is shaped by actor relations, power distribution, information access, community capacity, and institutional mechanisms. Therefore, participation cannot be understood only through attendance figures but must be analyzed by asking who has access to information, who controls the agenda, who speaks in forums, and to what extent community aspirations influence decisions. The findings also show that Lebao Village's status as an advanced village does not guarantee substantive participation. Although participatory forums have been implemented, the quality of community involvement remains influenced by capacity gaps, domination by core actors, limited information media, and weak external actor involvement. Therefore, strengthening village financial accountability requires a transformation from procedural to substantive participation.

Practically, this study emphasizes that strengthening participation in village financial management should be directed toward expanding public information channels, improving community literacy regarding the Village Revenue and Expenditure Budget, strengthening the role of the Village Consultative Body as a bridge for aspirations and oversight, encouraging the involvement of women and non-elite groups, and opening collaborative spaces with external actors. Thus, village financial accountability depends not only on

administrative reports from the village government but also on the quality of policy networks capable of transforming citizens from passive participants into active actors with access, voice, and influence in decision-making.

V. Conclusion

This study concludes that actor participation in the public policy network of village financial management in Lebao Village has been procedurally strong, particularly through village deliberation forums involving the village government, the Village Consultative Body, and the community at large. However, this participation has not yet become fully substantive and inclusive because community influence in the decision-making process remains limited and is dominated by core actors. Community capacity, institutional mechanisms, information disclosure, leadership style, and power relations interact to shape uneven participation quality. Participation-strengthening mechanisms through village deliberations, information transparency, capacity building, and open evaluation have been established, but they have not fully developed cross-actor collaborative participation because information distribution remains uneven, the involvement of women and vulnerable groups is still limited, and external actors have not been significantly involved in the village policy network.

Theoretically, this study reinforces the view that participation in village financial management cannot be understood merely as community attendance in formal forums but must be analyzed as the outcome of relational structures, power distribution, information access, and actor capacity within public policy networks. Thus, this study contributes to the development of public policy network studies at the village level by positioning participation as a relational phenomenon, rather than merely an administrative procedure. Practically, the findings emphasize the need for village governments to strengthen substantive participation by providing more open and accessible information on the Village Revenue and Expenditure Budget, adjusting deliberation schedules to community conditions, and creating more inclusive deliberative spaces for women and vulnerable groups. The Village Consultative Body also needs to strengthen its role as a bridge for community aspirations and as an oversight institution, while local and central governments need to support budget literacy and strengthen the role of village facilitators in promoting more collaborative participation in village development planning.

This study has limitations because it was conducted in only one location, namely Lebao Village, East Solor District, East Flores Regency; therefore, the findings are contextual and cannot be generalized to villages with different social, political, and institutional characteristics. In addition, the data were mostly obtained through interviews with key informants, supported by observation and documentation; therefore, the interpretation of the findings may still be influenced by the subjective perspectives of the informants. Another limitation lies in the limited observation period and the study's focus on internal village actors, which means it has not fully captured network dynamics involving external actors, such as local governments, village facilitators, non-governmental organizations, the media, or academics. Therefore, future research should involve external actors in policy network analysis, employ comparative designs across villages, and extend the observation period to provide a more comprehensive understanding of variations in participation, power distribution, and village financial accountability.

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