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Reforming Local Government Roles and Apparatus Structure in Indonesia

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A B S T R A C T

This study aims to analyze the evolving role of local governments and the structuring of regional apparatuses within the framework of regional autonomy in Indonesia. Guided by Law Number 23 of 2014 on Regional Government, decentralization has positioned local governments as key actors in delivering effective, efficient, and participatory public services. However, despite this expanded authority, the implementation of regional autonomy continues to face substantial challenges, particularly in the institutional structuring of local government apparatuses that often remain misaligned with the diverse needs and characteristics of each region. Employing a qualitative research design with a policy analysis approach, this study draws on secondary data from policy documents, government evaluation reports, and academic literature published between 2020 and 2024. The findings reveal a significant gap between the normative frameworks established by national regulations and the practical realities at the local level. Many regional apparatuses are structured rigidly, mirroring centralized bureaucratic models, which undermines their ability to respond effectively to local socio-economic dynamics. The study proposes an ideal role model for local governments that integrates three core functions: as facilitators of development, providers of public services, and enablers of community participation. Additionally, it recommends restructuring regional apparatuses based on principles of flexibility, responsiveness, and actual regional needs. Practical strategies include strengthening institutional capacity through targeted training, conducting periodic organizational evaluations, and fostering collaboration between central and local governments. These efforts are essential to ensure that decentralization not only transfers authority but also enhances governance quality, reduces regional disparities, and supports the achievement of inclusive and sustainable development goals across Indonesia.
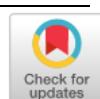
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INTRODUCTION

Decentralization has become a cornerstone of governance reform in Indonesia, especially since the post-reform era. It is seen as a strategy to bring government closer to the people, enhance administrative efficiency, and accommodate the diverse socio-cultural characteristics of the Indonesian archipelago. Law Number 23 of 2014 on Regional Government formalizes this vision by delegating broader authority to regional governments. This policy shift represents a fundamental transformation in how power and responsibilities are distributed between the central and local governments.

The rationale behind decentralization lies in improving the effectiveness of public services and promoting democratic governance at the local level. With increased autonomy, local governments are expected to plan, implement, and evaluate development programs that align with their specific regional needs. Furthermore, decentralization is intended to strengthen public participation in decision-making processes and ensure that development outcomes are more inclusive and equitable (Mutaqin, 2022).

Despite these promising goals, the implementation of decentralization has not always led to optimal governance outcomes at the regional level. Several studies indicate that many local governments struggle to fulfill their expanded mandates due to limitations in human resources, budget management, and institutional capacity (Setiawan & Nugroho, 2023). This misalignment often results in inefficiencies in planning and delivering public services, especially in underdeveloped or remote regions.

One of the key institutional challenges lies in the structuring of regional apparatuses. These apparatuses comprising various administrative and functional units within local governments serve as the main implementers of public policy and service delivery. Ideally, they should be designed based on the unique needs and characteristics of each region and adhere to principles of good governance. However, in practice, many regions tend to replicate centralized bureaucratic structures, leading to inefficiencies, redundancies, and poor accountability (Yuliani, 2021).

Additionally, the relationship between regional leaders and local apparatuses has not evolved into a fully strategic partnership. Local heads and DPRD members often focus on short-term political interests rather than institutional strengthening. As noted by Dwiyanto (2020), without visionary leadership and a strong commitment to reform, efforts to restructure regional apparatuses are likely to become mere administrative exercises with minimal impact.

In response to the growing complexity of regional governance, there is an urgent need to redefine the role model of local governments. Rather than functioning merely as administrators of central directives, local governments should act as facilitators of inclusive development, providers of public services, and enablers of community empowerment. This multi-dimensional role requires adaptive, responsive, and collaborative governance practices supported by a robust institutional structure (Anwar & Siregar, 2023).

However, the current structuring of regional apparatuses remains a major obstacle in realizing this ideal model. Many local governments still lack a systematic approach to aligning their organizational structures with development priorities and community needs. There is also limited use of data and evidence in designing apparatus reforms, which reduces the effectiveness of decentralization policies at the operational level. This situation highlights a persistent research gap in understanding how structural reforms at the regional level can enhance governance performance.
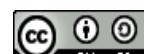
Therefore, this study seeks to analyze the ideal role model of local government in the context of decentralization and examine how the structuring of regional apparatuses can be optimized to support this role. Using a qualitative approach and policy analysis, this paper aims to provide strategic insights and recommendations to strengthen local governance through needs-based planning, organizational reform, and enhanced institutional capacity.

METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative research design with a policy analysis approach to examine the role model of local governments and the structuring of regional apparatuses within the framework of decentralization in Indonesia. The use of this approach is based on the need to understand complex governance dynamics, institutional relationships, and the contextual implementation of decentralization policies. The research relies entirely on secondary data collected from various credible and relevant sources. These include legislative and regulatory documents, government evaluation reports, and peer-reviewed academic literature. Specifically, the key sources reviewed in this study comprise:

Policy Documents and Legal Frameworks: These include Law Number 23 of 2014 on Regional Government and its derivative regulations, which provide the legal foundation for regional autonomy and structuring of regional apparatuses.

Government Evaluation Reports: These are sourced from institutions such as the Ministry of Home Affairs and Bappenas, particularly documents that assess the implementation and outcomes of decentralization and local government performance.

Scientific Publications: Journal articles, books, and academic reports published between 2020–2024 that discuss themes related to decentralization, regional governance reform, public service delivery, and institutional restructuring in Indonesia.

The selection of these sources was guided by relevance to the research objectives, publication credibility, and focus on post-2014 decentralization practices. The materials were critically reviewed to extract insights that are directly related to the role and capacity of local governments, as well as structural challenges in regional apparatus governance.

To analyze the data, the study employed a thematic analysis method, which allows for the identification of key patterns, recurring issues, and emerging themes from the collected literature. The analysis focused on three major themes: (1) the evolving role of local governments in decentralized governance, (2) challenges in the structuring and performance of regional apparatuses, and (3) the implications of decentralization on public service delivery at the local level.

This method enabled the researcher to synthesize findings across different sources, align them with relevant public administration theories, and propose policy-oriented recommendations grounded in both academic evidence and regulatory practices in Indonesia.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study identifies and analyzes the role of local governments within the framework of decentralization as well as strategies for structuring regional apparatuses in Indonesia. Through literature review and policy analysis, several key findings were revealed, illustrating how decentralization and the organization of regional apparatuses are implemented across various levels of government, along with the challenges faced by local governments in exercising their autonomous functions.

Local Government's Role in Decentralization

Since the enactment of Law No. 23 of 2014 on Regional Government, the role of local governments in the decentralization process has become increasingly significant, granting greater authority to manage local affairs. However, this role is not always effectively translated into practice in all regions, particularly those with limited resource capacity. Based on an analysis of the regional autonomy implementation evaluation report (Bappenas, 2022), many regions still struggle to perform their expanded roles, especially in terms of budget management, oversight, and public service delivery. For instance, some regions outside Java, such as East Nusa Tenggara and Papua, exhibit imbalances in managerial capacity and infrastructure needed to meet public demands (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2023).

Furthermore, the role of local governments as facilitators of regional development, particularly in delivering efficient and effective public services, is often hindered by bureaucratic complexity and non-transparent budget management. Dwiyanto (2020) argues that hierarchical bureaucracy frequently obstructs local government initiatives and creativity in responding swiftly to community needs.

Structuring Regional Apparatus for Efficiency and Effectiveness

Organizing regional apparatuses is a strategic measure to improve the effectiveness of local governance. This process involves evaluating organizational structures and the distribution of tasks within local government units. The findings indicate that the structuring of regional apparatuses is often influenced by varying political and administrative factors across regions. Setiawan and Nugroho (2023) note that several local governments still employ outdated and inefficient structures, causing overlapping responsibilities among agencies.

An evaluation by the Ministry of Home Affairs (2023) in several provinces revealed that selective structuring based on actual community needs can improve public services. For example, in East Java Province, restructuring efforts guided by needs-based analysis led to significant improvements in public service quality and regional budget management. This reflects the importance of tailoring organizational reforms to local priorities rather than merely adhering to nationally mandated formal structures.

However, the primary challenge in restructuring regional apparatuses is resistance to change at the local government level. Many officials within local agencies perceive the reforms as threats to their authority or influence, resulting in obstacles to policy implementation. This study identifies the crucial role of local leadership in driving structural changes to ensure successful implementation (Yuliani, 2021).

Impact of Decentralization Policy on Public Services

The decentralization policy has significantly influenced the quality of public services in several regions, though its impacts vary depending on the capacity of local governments to manage autonomy. Based on data from Bappenas (2022), improvements in education and healthcare services were observed in areas with strong managerial infrastructure and sufficient budgets. In contrast, regions with limited human and financial resources often experience stagnation in service quality.

A notable example is the disparity between Jakarta Province and Papua in terms of access to and quality of healthcare services. Jakarta, with better resource capacity, can provide more equitable and higher-quality health services, while Papua continues to face serious challenges in distributing healthcare facilities and trained medical personnel. This reflects the fact that the role of local governments under decentralization is highly dependent on local conditions, including infrastructure and human resource capacity.

Challenges and Recommendations

This study also identifies several challenges still faced by local governments in implementing regional autonomy, particularly in terms of inter-agency coordination and transparent budget management. One of the main issues is the mismatch between national policies and local capacities. As noted by Anwar and Siregar (2023), discrepancies between central policies and local characteristics often result in suboptimal policy implementation.

As a recommendation, this study suggests that the central government should enhance support for local governments in managerial capacity and budget management, as well as strengthen regular monitoring and evaluation systems to ensure that decentralization policies function effectively. Additionally, it is essential for local governments to continuously restructure their apparatus based on real needs and development priorities.

This section will further discuss the research findings by linking them to public administration theories and decentralization policy frameworks. The discussion will also offer perspectives on how the role of local governments and the structuring of regional apparatuses can enhance public service quality, as well as highlight the remaining challenges in the implementation of decentralization in Indonesia.

The Role of Local Governments within the Framework of Decentralization

Since the implementation of the decentralization policy in Indonesia, reinforced by Law No. 23 of 2014 on Regional Government, the role of local governments has undergone a significant transformation. Previously, local governments had limited functions in managing local affairs; however, they are now granted greater authority in governing matters such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure. Nevertheless, despite major empowerment efforts, many regions still face serious challenges in exercising this authority.

This study finds that the role of local governments is not always well translated into public service delivery, especially in areas with low managerial capacity. Dwiyanto (2020) argues that the effectiveness of decentralization greatly depends on the quality of local government apparatuses. A prominent example is the inability of some regions to formulate effective development plans due to limited human resources and inefficient financial management. This situation leads to poor public service quality, despite the central government's efforts to improve local capacity through various training and mentoring programs.

In addition, local governments are also confronted with coordination problems with the central government and between regional administrations. In many cases, the implementation of decentralization policies is hampered by a mismatch between central government policies and local conditions. Anwar and Siregar (2023) reveal that the divergence of priorities between central policies and regional needs often becomes a major obstacle to the

optimal implementation of decentralization. Local governments, particularly those in remote and underdeveloped areas, often feel that the policies imposed are not in line with their local context, thus hindering swift and accurate decision-making.

Structuring Regional Apparatus and Government Efficiency

The structuring of regional apparatuses is a critical step in efforts to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of local governments. This analysis finds that in some areas, the process is still heavily influenced by political factors, rather than being based on the real needs of public services. Suboptimal structuring processes often result in a misalignment of responsibilities among government agencies and overlapping functions between various regional departments and agencies (Setiawan & Nugroho, 2023).

Effective structuring of regional apparatuses must consider several factors, such as financial capacity, human resources, and the specific needs of the region. In East Java Province, for example, regional apparatus structuring was carried out using a data-driven approach, analyzing the specific needs of local communities and optimizing the use of regional budgets. As a result, the quality of public services in the region has improved significantly, particularly in healthcare and education services (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2023). This data-based approach enables local governments to focus on priorities that genuinely meet community needs, rather than merely adhering to an existing structure without considering its effectiveness.

However, despite the potential for improving efficiency, the restructuring of regional apparatuses faces major challenges, particularly resistance from government employees who feel threatened by structural changes. Yuliani (2021) notes that in several regions, organizational changes are often met with resistance from civil servants who perceive that their positions or influence may be diminished. This resistance can hinder the implementation of restructuring policies and reduce the effectiveness of the intended changes.

Decentralization and Public Service Quality

One of the main goals of decentralization is to improve the quality of public services at the regional level. However, the findings of this study show that while there has been improvement in some regions, not all areas have experienced significant enhancement in service quality. Research by Bappenas (2022) shows that regions with strong managerial capacity and transparent financial systems tend to deliver better public services, whereas those with weaker capacity continue to struggle.

For instance, the Province of Jakarta, with its greater human resource and budget capacity, is able to provide more equitable and higher-quality healthcare and education services. Conversely, in more remote regions like Papua, public services remain limited due to a lack of infrastructure and professional personnel. This indicates that decentralization does not automatically ensure the equal distribution of service quality, especially if regions lack adequate capacity.

Moreover, the decentralization process—which involves the division of authority between central and regional governments—requires a strong supervision system to ensure that the delegated authority is used optimally. Without proper oversight, there is a risk of abuse of authority or budget mismanagement, which can harm public welfare. Dwiyanto (2020) emphasizes that central government oversight of regional policy implementation is crucial to ensuring the effectiveness of decentralization.

Challenges in Decentralization Implementation

The biggest challenge faced by local governments in implementing decentralization is the issue of capacity. Many local governments lack sufficiently skilled or trained human resources to manage broader autonomy. This study shows that regions with limited budgets and infrastructure often struggle to plan and implement development programs aligned with community needs (Yuliani, 2021). Furthermore, inequality in fiscal allocation between wealthier and poorer regions exacerbates disparities in public service delivery.

For example, in Papua and East Nusa Tenggara, despite receiving substantial budget allocations from the central government, geographical challenges and limited infrastructure severely restrict the delivery of public services. This has a direct impact on the low quality of

education, healthcare, and access to other basic services in these regions. Therefore, it is essential to enhance local government capacity in terms of managerial skills and budget management, as well as to improve infrastructure to support more effective decentralization implementation.

The implementation of decentralization in Indonesia has revealed a number of systemic challenges faced by local governments, particularly in regions with limited institutional and managerial capacity. Despite the authority granted through Law No. 23 of 2014, many local governments still struggle to deliver effective public services due to unstructured apparatus, overlapping functions, weak accountability, and a lack of adaptability to regional contexts. Evaluation reports from the Ministry of Home Affairs and Bappenas show that regional structuring often imitates centralized bureaucratic models without considering local socio-economic realities. Moreover, resistance from civil servants toward restructuring efforts and a disconnect between central policies and local needs exacerbate the problem. These gaps not only hinder optimal service delivery but also contribute to disparities between regions, such as the service quality divide between urban centers like Jakarta and remote areas like Papua or East Nusa Tenggara.

To address these issues, this study proposes a conceptual model that redefines the role of local governments in three integrated functions: as facilitators of development, providers of public services, and enablers of community participation. Structuring of regional apparatuses must shift from a compliance-based framework to a needs-based and performance-oriented one. This includes institutional reform driven by data, periodic organizational evaluations, and leadership commitment at the local level. A successful restructuring model should be flexible, responsive, and rooted in regional priorities. Furthermore, central government support must go beyond policy issuance by providing capacity-building programs, equitable fiscal allocation, and improved supervision mechanisms. Bridging the gap between regulatory design and local execution is essential to ensure that decentralization fulfills its objective of delivering inclusive and efficient governance across Indonesia.

CONCLUSIONS

This study reveals that while decentralization policies in Indonesia provide broader authority to local governments, significant implementation challenges persist, particularly in regions with limited human and financial resources. The uneven capacity of local governments has led to disparities in public service delivery, with more developed areas like DKI Jakarta achieving better outcomes compared to underdeveloped regions such as Papua and East Nusa Tenggara, highlighting the need for a differentiated approach based on regional characteristics and institutional readiness. A critical factor influencing decentralization success is the structuring of local government apparatuses, yet restructuring efforts are often hindered by political interests and a lack of data-driven planning, resulting in inefficiencies, overlapping functions, and weak accountability due to the replication of centralized bureaucratic models without local adaptation. To address this, continuous organizational evaluation, flexibility, and alignment with real development priorities are essential. Strengthening local government capacity—particularly in public financial management, planning, and oversight—requires the central government's support through targeted training, mentoring programs, and equitable fiscal transfers, while restructuring must be data-based and supported by committed local leadership. Enhancing public participation and strengthening accountability mechanisms are also vital to ensure transparency and service alignment with community needs. Furthermore, stronger collaboration models between central and local governments are needed to close performance gaps and reduce disparities. Future research should explore region-specific success stories of apparatus restructuring, assess the long-term impacts of decentralization on welfare outcomes, and investigate the role of digital transformation in improving local government responsiveness and adaptability. Ultimately, achieving the objectives of decentralization demands ongoing institutional reform at both local and national levels to ensure more inclusive, effective, and equitable governance across Indonesia.

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