

Sustainability of the Village Owned Enterprises Program in Sumedang Regency, Indonesia: The Role of Government, Village Administration, and Voe Directors

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Abstract

This study investigates the sustainability of Village-Owned Enterprises (VOEs) in Sumedang Regency, West Java, Indonesia, focusing on the roles played by central government agencies, village administrations, and VOE directors. Employing a qualitative case study approach, the research draws on in-depth interviews, document analysis, field observations, and focus group discussions to explore stakeholder influence on the implementation and longevity of VOE programs. The findings reveal that while government policies and funding schemes provide foundational support for VOE development, their sustainability is frequently compromised by inconsistent program implementation, political interference, underqualified management, and business models that do not align with local socio-economic contexts. In contrast, VOEs demonstrate greater resilience and long-term viability when managed by professional directors and supported through continuous institutional engagement. Given the urgent need to revitalize rural economies and reduce dependency on state aid, the study recommends targeted interventions such as salary subsidies for VOE directors and establishing Integrated VOE Units (VOETs) to enhance operational capacity and governance structures. This research contributes to the broader discourse on rural development and local economic empowerment by identifying critical gaps and practical solutions for strengthening VOE sustainability. The findings offer valuable insights for policymakers, local governments, and development practitioners aiming to foster inclusive and durable rural enterprise ecosystems in Indonesia and similar contexts.

Keywords:

actor; director; implementation; program.

Introduction

In pursuit of improved public welfare, governments around the world have implemented various development programs (Kurniati et al., 2015; Nuraflah, 2020). However, these efforts often encounter persistent challenges, particularly in terms of implementation and sustainability (Reich et al., 2016). Among the most prominent challenges are spatial and socio-economic disparities, particularly in underdeveloped, frontier, and outermost regions (Malgorzata & Grzebyk, 5244; Wamukoya et al., 2020).

In Indonesia, President Joko Widodo's administration introduced the *Nawacita* (literally "nine aspirations") development agenda, which places strong emphasis on peripheral development, including rural and village-based initiatives. A central pillar of this agenda is the

Village-Owned Enterprise (VOE) program, which aims not only to improve rural infrastructure but also to strengthen local economic institutions as a foundation for self-reliant development.

Previous research highlights that the sustainability of local economic institutions depends heavily on the involvement and coordination of key actors (Gliedt et al., 2017; Warneryd et al., 2020). Programs such as VOEs are intended to stimulate local economies and reduce rural poverty by supporting entrepreneurship and collective business ownership (Farahani & Bayazidi, 2017). Nonetheless, across many developing countries, such programs often fall short of their objectives due to institutional weaknesses, lack of policy continuity, and limited local capacity (Howes et al., 2017; Eisenmenger et al., 2020). The failure to ensure program continuity also risks wasting public investment and weakening physical and social capital, thereby exacerbating rural poverty (Conceição et al., 2016; Dehghani et al., 2018).

In Indonesia, two local economic institutions have historically played a role in promoting village-based economic growth: Village Unit Cooperatives (VUCs) and Village-Owned Enterprises (VOEs). However, recent government policy has shifted away from VUCs—often perceived as overly socially driven and inefficient—towards the more business-oriented VOEs (Hendriani, 2016; Choiri, 2023). VOEs are expected to achieve both economic viability and local empowerment (Watts et al., 2021).

By 2021, there were 51,134 VOEs established across Indonesia, with 1,852 adopting e-commerce platforms for marketing. By July 2022, 7,902 VOEs had acquired legal status—an increase from just 2,628 in January 2022—although this still represents only 10.55% of the country's 74,961 villages (Kepmendagri No. 050-145/2022). As of 2021, there were 57,273 VOEs in total, of which 45,233 were active. These enterprises employed over 20 million individuals and generated approximately IDR 4.6 trillion in turnover.

International experience shows that the sustainability of rural economic institutions is often contingent on several factors: consistent government support (Liu, 2019), shared values and vision (Yang, 2015; Jwa, 2018), active community participation and strong leadership at both institutional and governmental levels (Fourie & Malan, 2020). Similar dynamics have been observed in the Indonesian context, where VOE sustainability has been associated with professional leadership (Sofyani et al., 2019), committed village heads (Alfirdausi & Riyanto, 2019; Purnomo et al., 2020), and continued governmental facilitation (Srirejeki, 2018; Kusmulyono et al., 2023).

Sumedang Regency has established 270 VOEs, categorized as 29 Independent, 22 Basic, 136 Developing, and 83 Advanced. However, inclusion in the “Independent” category does not guarantee long-term sustainability. Institutional fragility, inconsistent policy support, leadership turnover, and overdependence on central government funding continue to pose major risks. Like the now-dormant VUCs, VOEs face a precarious future if not supported by stable policy frameworks, professional management, and sustained local engagement.

The core problem, therefore, is how to ensure the long-term sustainability of the VOE program, particularly given the substantial public investment already committed. While many studies have focused on technical or institutional dimensions, limited attention has been paid to how actors—especially government officials, village leaders, and VOE managers—shape the continuity of such programs over time. Leadership change, though natural in democratic systems, often disrupts existing initiatives, making actor consistency a critical but underexplored dimension of policy sustainability.

This study seeks to fill this gap by examining the role of actors in the sustainability of the VOE program in Sumedang Regency. More specifically, it addresses two questions: (1) Who are the key actors and what roles do they play in influencing the sustainability of VOEs? and (2) Under what conditions do VOEs achieve sustained performance and impact?

To answer these questions, this research adopts a qualitative case study approach. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), participant observation, and document analysis. The study focuses on capturing both the formal and informal roles of actors involved in VOE implementation and explores how institutional and contextual dynamics shape program continuity.

Actor Conceptualization and The Policy Process

The policy process is inherently multifaceted and dynamic, shaped by the active participation of various actors that span both formal and informal institutional boundaries. These actors—comprising individuals, groups, and organizations—ranging from elected officials and bureaucrats to interest groups, expert communities, and ordinary citizens—play distinct, often evolving roles across the policy cycle, encompassing agenda-setting, formulation, implementation, and evaluation (Hill & Varone, 2021). The diversity of participants involved in these stages significantly influences the direction and outcomes of public policy.

Consistent with the complexity of the policy process, the role of policy actors is neither static nor uniform. While some actors may dominate certain stages, others become more prominent in response to changing political, institutional, or societal conditions. Rahmawati (2025) identifies five primary categories of policy actors: politicians (decision-makers), bureaucrats, interest groups, epistemic communities, and citizens. This framework offers a useful heuristic for understanding the different ways in which actors influence and contribute to policymaking.

Politicians are central to the policy process, particularly in agenda-setting and decision-making. They articulate public preferences, aggregate societal interests, and define governmental priorities. Their roles span a range of activities, from proposing and legitimating policies to directing administrative agencies in implementation. Politicians also respond to policy evaluations and political feedback, adjusting policies based on expert analysis, public opinion, and electoral considerations. Their involvement is crucial for ensuring that policies reflect democratic values and public priorities.

Bureaucrats, often seen merely as neutral implementers, in fact exert significant influence beyond the traditional conception of their role. Operating within state institutions, bureaucrats are engaged at multiple stages of policy, from initiation to enforcement. MPR (2017) emphasizes that bureaucrats can act as policy entrepreneurs—drafting legislation, shaping agendas, and ensuring compliance with formal decisions. Policy implementation literature (Matland, 1995) highlights the discretionary power bureaucrats possess, which can sometimes alter or even subvert the original intentions of policy. This autonomy places bureaucrats at the heart of policy formulation and outcome, often making their contributions less visible yet essential.

Interest groups, particularly economic and professional associations, seek to embed their preferences into policy outputs. Their influence is most notable during the agenda-setting and policy formulation stages, though they also engage in advocacy-driven evaluations (Purna & Didin, 2022). Amin et al. (2023) dan Suwitri (2014) classify interest groups into economic, professional, and public interest groups, with business lobbies often wielding considerable power. By leveraging institutional access and resource advantages, these groups frequently secure privileged positions in the policymaking process.

Epistemic communities—networks of technical experts from academia, think tanks, and research institutions—contribute to policymaking by offering evidence-based recommendations and analytical insights (Luthfi, 2011). Their involvement is most prominent in policy design and evaluation stages. However, the impact of epistemic communities is often constrained by the politicized nature of policy environments, where evidence may compete with ideological beliefs, vested interests, and institutional limitations (Kippin & Cairney, 2022). Dunlop (2017) argues that the process of generating new evaluative knowledge can undermine prior claims, thus limiting the long-term influence of these communities.

Citizens, traditionally considered passive recipients of policy, also exert significant indirect influence. Through electoral participation, protest movements, and public opinion, citizens shape the policy agenda by signaling societal priorities and legitimizing political actions. Public sentiment can create “windows of opportunity” for policy change (Kiess & Portos, 2024). As such, responsiveness to citizens’ preferences remains both a normative and functional cornerstone of democratic policymaking.

Actors and The Policy Process: Implementation Perspectives

The role of actors in policy implementation is widely explored in the literature, with various terms employed to describe these individuals. Edward III (in Mubarok et al., 2020) refers to them as implementers, while Grindle uses the term “actors,” and Mazmanian and Sabatier (in Mubarok et al., 2020) introduce the concept of “implementation agents.” Despite differences in terminology, these scholars agree that the success of policy implementation hinges on the capacity and willingness of actors to translate policy goals into practice.

Edward III (in Mubarok et al., 2020) asserts that effective implementation not only requires actors to understand the tasks at hand and possess the requisite skills but also demands that they are motivated to carry out the policy. Grindle expands on this by proposing that implementation should be analyzed through two lenses: the contents of the policy (resources, objectives, and responsible actors) and the context of its implementation (institutional settings and strategies). Mazmanian and Sabatier (in Mubarok et al., 2020) emphasize the importance of coordination and integration among agents to achieve desired policy outcomes.

Richard E. Matland (1995) synthesizes the top-down and bottom-up models of policy implementation (Matland, 1995). The top-down model focuses on the dominance of central actors (e.g., policy formulators), with local actors serving mainly as implementers. In contrast, the bottom-up model grants local actors greater autonomy, with central actors providing broad policy guidelines. Matland’s synthesis illustrates that central actors assume political roles while local actors perform administrative functions, thus reducing the potential for any one set of actors to dominate the process.

Empirical studies examining actor roles in policy implementation highlight the diversity of these roles. Notable studies include:

- 1) Mclaughlin (1987), who introduced a third-generation implementation model integrating macro- and micro-level actors.
- 2) Kartodihardjo (2008), analyzing the dynamics of actor involvement in Indonesia’s forestry policy.
- 3) Nisak (2009), applying actor-orientation theory to explore government-society dynamics in policy processes.
- 4) Singgalen (2016), investigating how actor perceptions, social capital, and power relations influence tourism policy.

- 5) Sari & Kismartini (2017), exploring actor involvement in Village-Owned Enterprises (Bumdes).
- 6) Corte & Roose (2018), focusing on social workers as key actors in policy implementation.
- 7) Ali (2020), examining actor relationships in secondary education policy.
- 8) Setiawan & Nurcahyanto (2020), analyzing stakeholder roles in maternal mortality reduction policies.
- 9) Aisya et al. (2021), investigating actor synergy in the governance of Village-Owned Enterprises (VOEs) from a good governance perspective.

To further understand actor roles, Thompson (in Sandy, 2020) proposes a typology based on power and interest, categorizing actors into four groups:

- 1) Subjects: High interest but low power. These actors can influence policy by forming strategic alliances but require nurturing.
- 2) Key Players: High interest and high power. These actors must be actively involved in policy design, decision-making, and evaluation.
- 3) Crowd: Low interest and low power. Although often overlooked, these actors may shift over time and should be monitored.
- 4) Contest Setters: High power but low interest. These actors may present risks and require careful management, as changing circumstances could elevate them to key players.

Yakin et al. (2013) identifies four factors in evaluating actor effectiveness in policy implementation:

- 1) Participation: The degree of engagement in executing policy actions.
- 2) Perspective: How actors perceive and interpret the program.
- 3) Accessibility: The level of access actors have to resources and decision-making.
- 4) Decision-making: The extent of influence actors have in shaping policy actions.

While research into actor dynamics is growing, comprehensive studies examining the roles of actors in implementing Village-Owned Enterprises (VOEs) are still limited. Research on multi-level governance and its impact on the sustainability of VOEs remains especially underexplored. This study aims to address this gap by identifying key actors involved in the implementation and continuity of VOE programs, exploring how their roles either promote or constrain sustainable local development.

Method

This study investigates the roles of various actors in sustaining the Village-Owned Enterprise (VOE) program in Sumedang Regency. Specifically, it examines the involvement of actors from the central, provincial, district, and village governments, as well as those engaged in the operational implementation of VOEs.

Both primary and secondary data were utilized in this study. Primary data on actor roles in sustaining the VOE program were collected through semi-structured interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). These data provide insights into the roles played by central, provincial, district, and village government actors, as well as the operational implementers of VOEs. Secondary data, providing context on Sumedang Regency's socio-economic landscape and the roles of actors at the central, provincial, and district levels, were sourced from official reports (e.g., *Sumedang Regency in Figures*) and a review of relevant legal frameworks, books, scholarly articles, and online media.

Key informants in this research included the Head of the Department of Community Empowerment and Village Development (DPMD), the Head of the Planning and Development Agency (Bappeda), the Head of Economic Empowerment, Development, and Village

Cooperation, five village heads, six VOE directors, two heads of the Village Consultative Body (BPD), four VOE operational executors. Additionally, five experts were invited as FGD speakers to provide specialized insights, management science experts (on VOE management), public administration experts (on VOE policy implementation), government practitioners from Bappeda and DPMD (on VOE development), village heads (on successful VOE development experiences)

To complement the interview and documentation data, the researcher conducted direct observations within the research context, enriching the data with firsthand insights.

Qualitative data from in-depth interviews and FGD recordings were transcribed and organized into thematic categories aligned with the research objectives. These themes were subsequently discussed and analyzed. The interview data were triangulated with findings from the documentation study and observational notes, which enhanced the validity and reliability of the research. The FGDs, involving all key informants as both speakers and participants, further contributed to verifying the consistency of the data.

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data, allowing for a structured interpretation within the context of the research questions. This method facilitated the identification of patterns and insights regarding the roles of various actors in the sustainability of VOEs.

Results and Discussion

1. Introduction to Research Findings and Discussion

The sustainability of Village-Owned Enterprises (VOEs) is heavily influenced by a combination of government policies, leadership at the village level, and the management practices of VOE directors. This section presents the findings from the study on the role of government in the sustainability of VOEs in Sumedang Regency and explores how these findings align with or diverge from previous research in the field.

The Bumdes profile is classified into Basic Bumdes, Developing Bumdes, Advanced Bumdes, and Independent Bumdes. In Sumedang Regency, in reality there are only three categories, namely Advanced Bumdes, Developing Bumdes, and Basic Bumdes . Types of Bumdes in Sumedang Regency could see at Table 1.

Table 1. Types of Bumdes In Sumedang Regency

No.	Clasification of Bumdes	Amount
1.	Advanced Bumdes	5
2.	Developing Bumdes	73
3.	Basic Bumdes	146

Source: Village Community Empowerment Office, Sumedang, December 2022

The analysis begins with an overview of the government's involvement in supporting VOEs, examining the strengths and weaknesses of existing policies and their actual implementation. It also evaluates the role of village governments, particularly the village head, in fostering VOE sustainability and the impact of their leadership on VOE success. Finally, the discussion highlights the significance of professional management and the critical role of VOE directors in ensuring long-term viability, offering comparisons with relevant studies to contextualize the findings.

2. The Role of the Government in VOE Sustainability

As outlined in several regulations, such as Regulation of the Minister of Villages No. 4 of 2015, the government plays a central role in shaping VOE policy and providing resources. The central government is responsible for setting the norms, standards, procedures, and criteria

for VOE establishment. Provincial and district governments, including those in Sumedang Regency, are tasked with implementing these policies, providing technical assistance, and monitoring the progress of VOEs. Despite this comprehensive regulatory framework, the practical implementation has been inconsistent.

This study finds that while the central government has allocated substantial funds for VOE development, with Sumedang Regency receiving IDR 1 billion for 10 VOEs, the actual impact of these funds on long-term sustainability has been minimal. A key issue identified is the government's focus on short-term outputs, such as funding disbursements and program activities, rather than long-term development goals. This aligns with previous studies by Kasim (2013) and Choi & Storr (2018), who highlight the limitations of a "project mentality" in development initiatives. They argue that such an approach leads to a failure in addressing underlying structural issues that affect sustainability.

In the case of Sumedang, the findings show that out of 114 VOEs that received initial funding, only 27 are still operational, indicating a significant failure in sustaining the investments made by the government. The loss of these VOEs can be attributed to the lack of ongoing support, monitoring, and guidance after the initial funding phase. This finding resonates with the observations of Ratnaningtyas et al. (2020), who emphasize that post-establishment support and capacity building are critical for ensuring the long-term success of VOEs.

3. The Role of Village Government in Ensuring VOE Sustainability

The village government, particularly the village head, plays a pivotal role in the sustainability of VOEs. As Ratnaningtyas et al. (2020), strong leadership at the village level is essential for VOE success. The village head is responsible for integrating VOE programs into the Village Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMD), allocating village funds for equity participation, and overseeing the establishment of VOE businesses. In Situraja Utara Village, for example, the village head's active support contributed to the success of the VOE, which has been classified as an Independent VOE due to effective management and community involvement.

However, the study also highlights significant challenges faced by village heads in other areas of Sumedang, such as Cibungur and Awilega Villages, where many village heads are either unwilling or unsure about how to proceed after the establishment of VOEs. This lack of clarity and commitment often leads to stagnation, as observed in several villages where VOEs have failed to thrive.

This challenge is consistent with research by Karim et al. (2020) and Alfadh et al. (2022), who argue that leadership and local government commitment are the most influential factors in ensuring the success of community-based enterprises. These studies suggest that local leaders must have a clear understanding of their role in supporting VOEs and must be willing to invest time and resources to ensure their success.

4. The Role of VOE Directors in Sustainability

The professionalism of VOE directors is a critical factor in the success or failure of these enterprises. As Aritenang (2021) and Sofyani et al. (2019) note, directors with managerial expertise and full-time commitment tend to manage VOEs more effectively. In Berdikari VOE, the director's prior experience in business management played a crucial role in the enterprise's success. By investing personal capital and working full-time, the director ensured the profitability and growth of the VOE.

However, in many cases across Sumedang, the appointment of directors is not based on professional qualifications, but rather on personal connections or political affiliations. This has led to high turnover rates and instability in leadership, as seen in Lugerta VOE and Pancar

Mandiri VOE, where directors left due to personal reasons or better job opportunities. This issue is in line with findings by Hidayati (2015), Sofyani et al. (2019), and Akadun (2022) who emphasize that professional management is crucial for VOE sustainability.

The study suggests that to improve sustainability, directors should be incentivized with salary subsidies and performance-based bonuses, ensuring they remain committed to the VOE. Additionally, creating a Village-Owned Enterprise Group (VOET), where multiple VOEs collaborate, could enhance efficiency and foster a more sustainable model.

5. Categorization of VOEs and Tailored Development Strategies

A significant finding from this study is the importance of categorizing VOEs based on their performance and maturity. By categorizing VOEs into Basic, Developing, Advanced, and Independent, local governments and other stakeholders can implement more tailored development strategies. For example, new and developing VOEs may require more intensive capacity-building programs, while more advanced VOEs could benefit from strategic partnerships and market expansion opportunities.

This approach aligns with the recommendations of Regulation of the Minister of Villages No. 3 of 2021, which stresses the importance of individualized strategies for each VOE category. The research also highlights the need for ongoing monitoring and evaluation, as well as targeted interventions to address specific challenges faced by VOEs at different stages of their development.

6. The Importance of Pentahelix Collaboration for VOE Sustainability

The pentahelix collaboration model, which involves government, academia, business, community, and media, has proven to be an effective approach in promoting VOE sustainability. In Sumedang, partnerships with universities and businesses have helped improve governance, enhance marketing strategies, and expand the market reach of VOE products. This approach is supported by the work of Purnomo et al. (2020), who argue that collaboration between diverse stakeholders is essential for the long-term success of rural enterprises.

However, the study also reveals that collaboration needs to be more structured and sustained, with clearer roles for each stakeholder. The findings suggest that policy-makers should facilitate regular dialogues and create platforms for collaboration that enable stakeholders to share resources, expertise, and market opportunities.

The importance of pentahelix collaboration in developing BUMDes capacity is supported by Wulandari (2020), who found that efforts to enhance the capacity of BUMDes in Malang Regency demonstrate the effectiveness of the pentahelix model—particularly in addressing challenges related to human resources and inconsistent policies. However, for such collaboration to be sustainable and effective, it requires a clear structure, well-defined stakeholder roles, supportive policies, and permanent platforms such as regular consultation clinics and district-level management training.

Conclusion

This study directly addresses why many Village-Owned Enterprises (VOEs) in Sumedang struggle to achieve long-term sustainability despite a solid regulatory framework. The findings reveal that inconsistent implementation, lack of sustained government support, weak village-level leadership, and the absence of professional management are critical barriers to VOE success. To address these issues, the study recommends a multifaceted strategy: prioritizing long-term capacity building and professional training for VOE directors, enhancing the role of village governments in integrating VOEs into development planning, strengthening Pentahelix collaboration to expand access to expertise and markets, and providing incentives such as

salary subsidies and performance-based rewards to attract and retain qualified leaders. Additionally, implementing a tailored development approach based on VOE categorization and targeted interventions will better address the diverse needs of each enterprise. Future research should explore comparative case studies across regions to evaluate the effectiveness of these strategies in different local governance contexts and assess the long-term impact of professionalization and institutional support on VOE sustainability.

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