

# Strengthening the Capacity of Village Apparatus in Supporting the Management Process of Customary Territories in Riau Province

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## **Abstract**

*The management of customary (indigenous) territories in Indonesia remains a critical challenge, particularly in aligning formal governance systems with existing customary institutions. This study aims to examine the capacity of village administrative apparatuses in managing customary territories in Riau Province, focusing on five dimensions: regulatory, administrative, managerial, cultural, and conflict resolution. A qualitative descriptive-analytical approach was employed, with data collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis involving village officials, customary leaders, and relevant stakeholders. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns across capacity dimensions. The findings indicate that the capacity of village apparatuses is still suboptimal and uneven. Major weaknesses are found in regulatory understanding, administrative data management, and conflict resolution, while cultural capacity is relatively stronger but remains individualized rather than institutionalized. These limitations hinder the effective integration of formal and customary governance systems. Additionally, weak data systems, limited coordination, and reliance on informal practices further constrain governance effectiveness. This study highlights that capacity should be understood as a multidimensional and adaptive concept. Therefore, strengthening capacity requires an integrative, contextual, and sustainable approach, combining individual competency development, institutional reform, and governance system improvement. Enhancing village capacity is essential to achieving inclusive and sustainable customary territory governance.*

**Keywords:** Village Governance, Capacity Building, Customary Territories, Indigenous Communities, Riau Province

## **1. Introduction**

The management of customary (indigenous) territories in Indonesia constitutes a strategic issue closely related to the recognition of indigenous peoples' rights, the sustainability of natural resources, and local governance practices. Normatively, the state has acknowledged the existence of customary law communities and their traditional rights through various regulations, including Law Number 6 of 2014 on Villages [14], [15]. This regulation positions villages as key entities in promoting community-based development and strengthening local wisdom [1], [2]. However, such normative recognition has not been fully accompanied by the readiness and capacity of village administrative apparatuses to effectively manage customary territories.

At the implementation level, village administrative officials occupy a strategic yet complex position as frontline actors in governing customary territories. They are required to perform formal governmental functions in accordance with state regulations while simultaneously engaging with existing social structures and customary leadership that continue to operate within the community. This situation creates

a dual governance system that demands not only administrative competence but also cultural sensitivity and the ability to establish legitimacy across two distinct systems [3], [4].

The situation in Riau Province illustrates a gap between the normative recognition of indigenous rights and the actual capacity of village apparatuses to support the management of customary territories. As a region rich in natural resources and characterized by diverse indigenous communities, Riau faces complex dynamics, particularly concerning overlapping interests among indigenous groups, industrial sectors, and government policies [5]. In this context, village officials function not only as policy implementers but also as mediators who bridge emerging conflicts of interest.

The capacity of village administrative apparatuses in managing customary territories should not be narrowly understood as merely administrative ability; rather, it encompasses multiple interrelated dimensions. These include regulatory capacity (understanding and applying rules), administrative capacity (data and document management), managerial capacity (planning and coordination), cultural capacity (understanding customary values

and norms), and conflict resolution capacity (mediation and negotiation skills) [16], [17]. Limitations in any of these dimensions may hinder the overall effectiveness of customary territory governance [6], [7], [8].

Furthermore, within the academic literature, there remains a lack of specific instruments designed to measure the capacity of village administrative apparatuses in the context of customary territories. Most previous studies have focused primarily on policy aspects or legal recognition, with limited attention given to the capacity of implementers at the local level [22], [23], [24]. This indicates both a conceptual and practical gap that necessitates more comprehensive research.

Based on these considerations, this study focuses on analyzing the existing capacity of village administrative apparatuses operating within customary territories in Riau Province, particularly in performing five key functions: regulatory, administrative, managerial, cultural, and conflict resolution. This analysis is expected to provide a clearer understanding of the capacity challenges faced and to serve as a foundation for developing a more integrative and context-sensitive capacity-building model.

## **2. Method**

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical design to comprehensively examine the capacity of village administrative apparatuses in managing customary territories in Riau Province. The research sites were selected purposively, focusing on villages where customary law communities remain active, where there is interaction between village governance and customary institutions, and where potential conflicts in customary land management are present. The research subjects include village officials, customary leaders, indigenous community members, and other relevant stakeholders.

This study utilizes both primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews and participant observation, while secondary data were collected from official documents, regulations, government reports, and relevant academic literature. The research process began with problem identification and a preliminary study to understand the empirical context and identify research gaps. This was followed by the formulation of research focus, the purposive selection of research locations and informants [18], [19], and the development of research instruments in the form of interview guidelines based on five dimensions of capacity: regulatory, administrative, managerial, cultural, and conflict resolution [20], [21].

The next stage involved field data collection through semi-structured interviews, observation of governance practices and social interactions, and documentation studies to strengthen contextual validity. The collected data were then analyzed through a systematic process consisting of data reduction to select and focus relevant information, data display in the form of analytical narratives and thematic matrices, and conclusion drawing and verification conducted continuously throughout the research process [9]–[11].

In the analytical stage, this study also applies thematic analysis techniques, including open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, to identify patterns and relationships among the dimensions of village apparatus capacity within the context of dual governance systems [12], [13]. The research process follows an iterative and cyclical approach, in which data collection and analysis are conducted simultaneously to ensure depth of interpretation and accuracy of findings.

To ensure data validity and reliability, this study employs triangulation of sources and methods, as well as member checking with key informants. These strategies enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings in explaining the existing capacity of village administrative apparatuses in supporting the management of customary territories in Riau Province.

## **3. Results and Discussion**

### **Results**

The findings indicate that the capacity of village administrative apparatuses in managing customary territories in Riau Province remains suboptimal and unevenly distributed across villages. This variation in capacity is influenced by several factors, including officials' experience, educational background, institutional support, and the intensity of interaction with indigenous communities. In general, village apparatuses have performed basic governmental functions; however, they have not yet been able to systematically integrate customary aspects into governance practices.

In the regulatory capacity dimension, most village officials demonstrate a basic understanding of general regulations, such as the Village Law, but lack a deeper comprehension of policies related to the recognition of customary territories [25], [26]. This limitation affects their ability to translate policies into context-sensitive practices at the local level. In terms of administrative capacity, the management of customary territory data remains partial, poorly documented, and not supported by integrated digital systems. Many villages lack valid

maps of customary territories as well as formal archives related to customary institutions.

Regarding managerial capacity, planning and coordination capabilities are still limited. Although there have been efforts to involve customary leaders in village deliberation forums, such involvement remains informal and unsustainable. Cross-actor coordination is also weak, particularly among village governments, local authorities, and customary institutions. In the cultural capacity dimension, it is found that village officials originating from local communities possess a better understanding of customary values, whereas those from outside the community tend to face challenges in establishing effective communication. Meanwhile, in the conflict resolution capacity dimension, village officials often act as mediators; however, the approaches employed remain informal and are not yet based on systematic conflict resolution techniques.

To provide a clearer overview of the findings, the following table summarizes the condition of village apparatus capacity:

Table 1. Summary of Village Apparatus Capacity Conditions

Capacity Dimension	Existing Condition	Main Issues
Regulatory	Basic understanding	Limited knowledge of customary territory regulations
Administrative	Not integrated	Incomplete and manual data management
Managerial	Varies	Weak and unsystematic coordination
Cultural	Uneven	Limited cultural sensitivity
Conflict Resolution	Informal	Lack of formal mediation techniques

Furthermore, from a conceptual perspective, the levels of capacity can be categorized as follows:

- a) High: Cultural capacity (particularly among locally rooted village officials)
- b) Moderate: Managerial capacity
- c) Low: Regulatory, administrative, and conflict resolution capacities

This categorization indicates that technocratic aspects remain the primary weakness in the overall capacity of village administrative apparatuses. The limited strength in these dimensions suggests that, while cultural understanding may exist at the individual level, the institutional and technical capabilities required for effective governance of customary territories are still insufficiently developed.

## Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the capacity of village administrative apparatuses in managing customary territories has not yet been sufficient to address the complexity of dual governance between

formal state systems and customary institutions. The identified gaps reflect that existing capacity-building approaches have largely focused on formal administrative aspects, without adequately integrating the living customary systems within local communities.

In the regulatory dimension, the limited understanding of policies related to customary territories suggests that the decentralization process has not been accompanied by adequate strengthening of the interpretative capacity of village officials. As a result, village apparatuses tend to implement regulations in a procedural manner, lacking the ability to adapt them to local contexts. This condition weakens policy implementation, which should ideally be inclusive of indigenous communities.

Within the administrative dimension, weak data systems constitute a structural barrier to effective customary territory management. Without a valid and reliable database, villages lack a strong bargaining position in the recognition process of customary territories and in addressing land-related conflicts. This finding underscores the importance of digital transformation in village governance as a critical component of institutional capacity building.

In the managerial dimension, the absence of formalized collaborative mechanisms indicates that village governance remains largely sectoral. The limited institutionalization of customary institutions within governance structures creates potential for conflict and policy inconsistency. Therefore, a collaborative governance model is needed to integrate both formal and informal actors into a unified system.

The cultural dimension presents an important finding, as this capacity tends to be relatively stronger among locally rooted village officials. However, it has not yet been institutionalized within the formal governance system. This suggests that cultural capacity remains individual rather than organizational. In the context of customary territories, cultural sensitivity is a critical determinant of governance effectiveness.

Meanwhile, in the conflict resolution dimension, the predominance of informal approaches indicates that village apparatuses lack professional capacity in conflict mediation. In a region such as Riau, where land conflicts are prevalent, this condition may prolong disputes and reduce public trust in village governance.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the five dimensions of capacity are interconnected and form a complex system. Weakness in one dimension can adversely affect the others. Therefore, a

comprehensive capacity-building model is required, characterized by:

- a) Integrative (combining formal and customary governance systems)
- b) Contextual (aligned with local conditions)
- c) Sustainable (beyond short-term training interventions)

Such a model should encompass the strengthening of individual competencies, institutional reform, and the development of collaborative mechanisms among stakeholders. In this way, village administrative apparatuses can move beyond their role as mere administrative implementers and function as strategic actors in bridging the interests of the state and indigenous communities.

#### 4. Conclusion

This study concludes that the capacity of village administrative apparatuses in managing customary territories in Riau Province remains insufficient to effectively address the complexities of dual governance between formal state systems and customary institutions. The findings reveal that capacity limitations are multidimensional, encompassing regulatory, administrative, managerial, cultural, and conflict resolution aspects, which are interrelated and collectively shape the effectiveness of governance practices.

The study demonstrates that the primary weaknesses lie in the technocratic dimensions—particularly regulatory understanding, administrative data management, and conflict resolution capacity. These limitations hinder the ability of village apparatuses to translate policies into context-sensitive practices, to establish strong administrative legitimacy, and to manage conflicts in a structured and sustainable manner. While cultural capacity appears relatively stronger, especially among locally rooted officials, it remains largely individual and has not yet been institutionalized within formal governance systems. This imbalance highlights a critical gap between technical competencies and contextual-cultural understanding in village governance.

Furthermore, the persistence of fragmented and sectoral governance approaches indicates that the integration between formal and customary systems has not been effectively achieved. The absence of institutionalized collaboration mechanisms reduces the potential for inclusive decision-making and weakens coordination among stakeholders. As a result, village apparatuses are not yet fully equipped to function as effective intermediaries in bridging the interests of the state and indigenous communities.

Based on these findings, this study emphasizes that capacity building should not be approached as a purely technical or short-term intervention. Instead,

it requires a comprehensive and systemic strategy that integrates three key dimensions: (1) strengthening individual competencies through continuous learning and skill development; (2) reforming institutional structures to embed customary values and collaborative mechanisms within formal governance; and (3) enhancing governance systems through digital transformation, data integration, and participatory frameworks.

In this regard, an integrative, contextual, and sustainable capacity-building model is essential. Such a model should facilitate the alignment between formal regulations and customary practices, adapt to local socio-cultural conditions, and promote long-term institutional learning. By doing so, village administrative apparatuses can evolve from being mere administrative executors into strategic boundary actors who are capable of mediating complex governance dynamics and fostering inclusive development.

Finally, this study contributes to the broader discourse on local governance and indigenous territory management by highlighting the importance of viewing capacity as a dynamic and relational concept. Future research is encouraged to develop more specific measurement instruments and to explore comparative studies across regions to further refine capacity-building models. Without systematic and sustained interventions, the gap between normative recognition and practical implementation will continue to persist, potentially exacerbating governance inefficiencies, social conflicts, and inequalities in the management of customary territories.

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