



Decentralization and public service performance in traditional village governance of Central Maluku, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: to examine the impact of decentralization policies on public service effectiveness, governance quality, and community participation in Tulehu village, Central Maluku regency.

Method: this study employs a qualitative descriptive approach. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation, and then analyzed using an interactive model of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing to examine the implementation of decentralization and its impact on public service effectiveness in Tulehu village.

Findings: decentralization in Tulehu village has improved governance and community participation, particularly through musrenbang and Saniri institutions. However, public service effectiveness remains limited due to restricted village authority and dependence on higher-level government. Human resource capacity and local institutional support play a key role in enhancing administrative performance and transparency.

Implications: effective decentralization requires not only authority delegation but also strong human resource capacity, institutional strengthening, and active community participation to improve public service delivery and local governance performance.

Originality: focus on the implementation of decentralization in Tulehu village by integrating perspectives of local customary governance (Saniri negeri) and public administration, particularly in analyzing how institutional and social factors jointly influence public service performance in an island-based setting.



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Introduction

Decentralization is a strategic policy within the Indonesian government system, aimed at bringing public services closer to the people and increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of government administration (Setiawan et al., 2022). Through

decentralization, regional governments are granted broader authority to manage government affairs in line with the characteristics, needs, and potential of their respective regions (Madubun, 2024). In the context of modern governance, decentralization is viewed not only as a mechanism for distributing administrative authority but also as an instrument to strengthen public participation, increase government accountability, and accelerate regional development (Chamusca, 2025).

Public service is one of the main indicators of the success of good governance (Dharmika & Subanda, 2023). The Indonesian government has established various regulations to ensure the quality of public services, including Law Number 25 of 2009 concerning Public Services and Decree of the Minister of Administrative and Bureaucratic Reform Number 63/KEP/M.PAN/7/2003 concerning General Guidelines for the Provision of Public Services. These regulations emphasize that the public is the primary focus in the provision of public services. Therefore, the quality of public services is not only determined by the service provider but also measured by the level of satisfaction and ease of access experienced by the public as service recipients. Normatively, public services are a basic right of every citizen. This is emphasized in Article 4 of Law Number 36 of 2009, which states that everyone has the right to receive safe, quality, and affordable government services. In practice, the quality of public services reflects local governments' ability to carry out their functions effectively. The better the quality of services provided, the higher the level of public trust in the government (Stroppe, 2023).

Although the decentralization policy has been in place for more than two decades, its implementation continues to face various challenges, particularly in archipelagic regions (Madubun, 2024). Maluku province is one of the regions with unique geographic characteristics, consisting of a widely dispersed archipelago. This condition often hinders public access to public services due to distance, transportation costs, and limited service infrastructure. In Central Maluku regency, communities still rely heavily on recommendations from the local government (traditional villages) to obtain various district-level administrative services. The centralization of service processes in the district capital requires residents to spend substantial time and money to handle various government administrative needs.

From the perspective of local institutional development, the success of decentralization is largely determined by local governments' ability to empower local institutions. Cheema (1981) explains that local institutions play a crucial role as a medium for community participation, a means of development planning, a provider of public services, a mobilizer of local resources, a two-way communication link, a channel for community aspirations, and a developer of social and political awareness. Similarly, Acharya & Zafarullah (2024) emphasize that decentralization encourages increased community participation and more effective resource allocation and mobilization through strengthening local institutional capacity.

Various previous studies have shown that decentralization can improve the quality of public services, the effectiveness of local government, and community participation if supported by adequate institutional capacity (Acharya & Scott, 2022; Ali, 2022; Din et al., 2023; Ogunnubi, 2022; Setiawan et al., 2022; Zarychta et al., 2024). However, most studies have focused more on the implementation of decentralization at the local government level, while those specifically analyzing the impact of decentralization on the performance of state governments (customary villages) in island regions remain relatively limited. Furthermore, previous research has generally focused on administrative and fiscal aspects, while studies on the relationship between

decentralization, public service effectiveness, human resource capacity, and the role of customary institutions in state governance have been limited.

This situation indicates a research gap that needs to be addressed: limited empirical studies on the implementation of decentralization in local governments in the Maluku Islands region, particularly regarding the effectiveness of public services, strengthening human resource capacity, governance, and community participation. The novelty of this research lies in a comprehensive analysis of the impact of decentralization policies on local government performance in Central Maluku regency, using Tulehu as a case study. This research not only examines aspects of public services but also examines how human resource capacity, customary institutions, and community participation contribute to the successful implementation of decentralization at the local level.

This study aims to analyze the impact of decentralization policies on the effectiveness and efficiency of public services, the quality of human resources, governance, and factors influencing the successful implementation of decentralization in Central Maluku regency. Furthermore, this study aims to formulate strategies for improving local governments' performance in delivering more responsive, effective, and sustainable public services. This research is important because the characteristics of archipelagic regions pose different challenges for the administration of government and public services compared to mainland regions. A deeper understanding of the implementation of decentralization in archipelagic regions is expected to yield policy recommendations that are more context-specific and better aligned with local communities' needs. The expected contribution of this study is to enrich academic studies on decentralization and local governance, particularly in the context of state governance in Maluku. In practice, the results of this study are expected to inform the central, regional, and state governments in formulating policies to improve the quality of public services, strengthen local institutional capacity, and develop more effective, participatory, and accountable governance in the archipelagic region.

Method

This research uses a qualitative, case study approach. The qualitative approach was chosen because this research aims to understand in depth the implementation of decentralization policies and their impacts on the effectiveness of public services, the quality of human resources, governance, and the performance of local governments in Central Maluku regency. The case study was chosen because it allows researchers to gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of decentralization in the context of village governance (traditional villages), which have unique social, cultural, and institutional characteristics. The research location was determined in Tulehu village, Salahutu district, Central Maluku regency, Maluku province. This location was chosen because Tulehu village is one of the largest villages in Central Maluku regency, has a functioning customary government, and serves as a center of economic, social, and public service activities in the Salahutu district.

The research data were obtained through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation studies. Interviews were conducted directly with informants selected using purposive sampling, namely those with knowledge, experience, and involvement in governance and the implementation of decentralization policies. The research informants consisted of the King of Tulehu as the leader of the state government responsible for governance and public services, members of the Saniri as a representative institution of the community that carries out the function of monitoring

and channeling community aspirations, state apparatus involved in government administration and public services, the Salahutu Sub-district Head as the party that coordinates and provides guidance to the state government, officials in the Central Maluku regency government who handle village or state government affairs, traditional leaders and community leaders who understand the dynamics of local institutions, and the community that receives public services from the state government. The selection of informants was carried out to obtain diverse perspectives on the implementation of decentralization and its impact on society.

Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner, using interview guidelines developed in line with the research focus. Interview material covered the implementation of decentralization policies, the effectiveness and efficiency of public services, the human resource capacity of state government officials, governance, community participation in development, factors that support and hinder decentralization, and strategies to improve local government performance. In addition to interviews, direct observations were made of state government activities, the process of administrative services to the community, the implementation of state development planning meetings (*musrenbang negeri*), Saniri n activities, and the condition of public service facilities and infrastructure. Observations were conducted to obtain a factual picture of governance and public services in the field.

Documentation studies were conducted to complement and verify the data from interviews and observations. The documents analyzed included Law Number 25 of 2009 concerning Public Services, Law Number 6 of 2014 concerning Villages, various regional regulations and regent regulations governing state government in Central Maluku, state revenue and expenditure budget documents (*APB negeri*), state medium-term development plans (*RPJM negeri*), state government work plans (*RKP negeri*), accountability reports on village funds and village fund allocations, minutes of the *musrenbang negeri*, population data, profiles of the Tulehu negeri, archives of development activities, and historical documents and traditional institutions of the Tulehu negeri. In addition, various scientific journals, books, and prior research on decentralization, public services, and local government were used as supporting data sources.

The data obtained were analyzed using an interactive analysis model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing and verification. In the data reduction stage, all interviews, observations, and documentation results were selected, categorized, and organized based on research themes. Next, the reduced data were presented in narrative form to facilitate interpretation. The final stage involved concluding by identifying patterns, relationships, and meanings emerging from the research data to explain the impact of decentralization policies on public services, human resource quality, governance, factors influencing successful policy implementation, and strategies for improving local government performance.

To ensure data validity, this study used source, method, and document triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from the Raja negeri (King of the village), Saniri negeri, government officials, community leaders, and the general public. Method triangulation was conducted by comparing interview, observation, and documentation results, while document triangulation was conducted by verifying the consistency of field information with various official documents related to the implementation of government and public services. Through this process, the data obtained is expected to be highly credible and valid, enabling it to

comprehensively describe the implementation of decentralization policies and their impact on local government performance in Central Maluku regency.

Results and discussion

General description of the land of Tulehu

Based on documentation and field observations, Tulehu Village is one of the traditional villages located in the Salahutu district, Central Maluku regency. Historically, the Tulehu community has had a strong social system rooted in a patrilineal kinship structure, traditional institutions, and cultural values passed down from generation to generation. Community life is still influenced by traditional institutions such as the King, Saniri Negeri, Soa, and other social institutions that regulate community life. Geographically, Tulehu Village is approximately 25 kilometers from Ambon city and is strategically located as a center of economic activity and transportation in the eastern part of Ambon Island. In addition to having significant natural resource potential, Tulehu village is also one of the areas with the largest population in Central Maluku regency. This condition makes Tulehu village one of the centers of government services and community activities in the Salahutu district.

Implementation of decentralization policy in public services

Interviews with the Raja negeri (King of the village), village officials, village heads, and sub-district governments indicate that the decentralization policy has provided greater space for the village government to manage government affairs and provide services to the public. The village government has the authority to handle various administrative needs of the community, especially those related to certificates, recommendations, and population administration. However, the research results indicate that the authority granted to the village government remains limited. Most strategic administrative services are still centralized in the district government, so the community still has to process various documents and certain services at the district level. This condition makes public services less than fully effective, especially for the community that must travel considerable distances to the Central Maluku regency government center. Observations also indicate that public services at the village level have been running routinely and in a relatively orderly manner. The village government strives to provide prompt services within its authority. However, limited authority and the lack of technical service units at the sub-district level are among the main obstacles to improving the effectiveness of public services.

Resource management and support for state autonomy

Based on interviews with local government officials, it was found that fiscal decentralization has not fully enabled local governments to manage their resources. Although Tulehu Village possesses significant economic potential and natural resources, its direct contribution to local revenues remains very limited. Documentation obtained indicates that the primary source of funding for village development remains village funds and their allocations. The local government believes that these funds significantly support the implementation of development and community empowerment programs, but are insufficient to address all development needs due to the region's vast area and population. Observations indicate that most development programs implemented by the local government focus on basic infrastructure development, community economic

empowerment, strengthening traditional institutions, and increasing the capacity of local government officials.

The quality of human resources of the state government

Interviews with the Raja negeri, Saniri begeri, and sub-district government officials indicate that the quality of Tulehu's civil servants is relatively good compared to that of several other villages in Central Maluku regency. Civil servants have sufficient education and experience to perform their duties. The study found that civil servants actively encourage increased capacity through participation in various training programs, technical guidance, seminars, and capacity-building activities organized by district and provincial governments. Furthermore, documentation indicates a regular evaluation process for civil servant performance. The civil servants also restructure their organizational structure and assign personnel based on their competencies to improve the effectiveness of government administration.

Public participation in governance

Interviews with village heads, community leaders, and village officials indicate a high level of community participation in governance and development processes. Community involvement is achieved through various deliberation forums, particularly the annual village development planning forum (musrenbang negeri). In these forums, communities can express their needs, aspirations, and proposed development programs. Participation extends beyond community leaders to women's groups, youth, traditional leaders, and other community elements. Observations indicate that the decision-making process in Tulehu continues to prioritize the principles of deliberation and consensus, which are part of the local culture. Community involvement in the development planning process provides strong legitimacy to the programs implemented by the village government.

Transparency and accountability of program management

The research findings indicate that the Tulehu village government implements the principles of transparency and accountability in managing development programs and state finances. Based on interviews, each program to be implemented is first discussed with the community through a deliberation forum. The village government also regularly provides the community with information on budget utilization and progress in program implementation. Village heads play an active role in overseeing budget utilization and the implementation of development activities. Documentation results indicate that accountability reports for activities and finances are prepared periodically in accordance with applicable regulations. Meanwhile, observations indicate that the community's social oversight mechanism is functioning quite well through community involvement in various development evaluation forums.

Monitoring and evaluation of development programs

The study found that the village government and the village Saniri continuously monitored and evaluated development programs. Evaluation activities were conducted through coordination and regular meetings to assess program achievements, budget utilization, and obstacles encountered during implementation. Interview results indicated that the evaluation mechanism was used to increase program effectiveness and ensure that all development activities were carried out in accordance with the established plan. Furthermore, the evaluation also served as a monitoring instrument to

prevent budget misuse and increase village government accountability. Overall, the study results showed that the implementation of decentralization policies in Tulehu village had a positive impact on village governance, particularly by increasing institutional capacity, community participation, and governance quality. However, the effectiveness of public services still faced various obstacles, including limited authority, the centralization of services at the district level, and limited resources available to the village government.

The impact of decentralization policy on the effectiveness and efficiency of public services in Tulehu village

The implementation of decentralization policies aims to bring public services closer to the community by delegating authority from the central government to regional governments, and subsequently from regional governments to village or state governments. In the context of Tulehu, decentralization provides greater scope for state governments to manage government affairs in line with the needs and characteristics of local communities. However, research shows that the implementation of decentralization has not yet fully resulted in effective and efficient public services.

Normatively, decentralization empowers local governments to respond more quickly to community needs by allowing decisions to be made at the level of government closest to the people. However, in practice, the authority held by the Tulehu local government remains limited. Most administrative services consist of issuing cover letters or letters of recommendation, which must then be processed at the district level. This situation indicates that the ongoing decentralization is more administrative than substantive. This finding aligns with Mulyani et al. (2024); Baudner (2026) research, which explains that the success of decentralization depends heavily on the extent to which decision-making authority is actually delegated to local governments. If the authority granted is only formal without an adequate implementing authority, the goal of decentralization to improve the effectiveness of public services is difficult to achieve.

Furthermore, Maluku's archipelagic geography presents unique challenges in the delivery of public services. The Tulehu community must incur relatively high administrative costs in the capital of Central Maluku Regency, located on Seram Island. Transportation costs, long travel times, and uncertainty about service delivery reduce the efficiency of public services. Therefore, the need for Technical Implementation Units (UPTs) at the sub-district level or for delegating greater authority to sub-district heads is highly relevant to improving the accessibility of public services. These findings support Setiawan et al. (2022) research, which states that decentralization will result in better public services if accompanied by strengthening local institutional capacity and proportional distribution of authority. Without adequate institutional support, decentralization will only shift the administrative burden without improving service quality.

Fiscal decentralization and local resource management

One important dimension of decentralization is fiscal decentralization, namely the delegation of authority to regional and village/state governments to manage financial resources and local economic potential to support governance and development. In the context of Tulehu village, research results show a significant gap between the potential of locally owned resources and the economic benefits received by the state government and local communities. Tulehu village has a strategic geographic location and potential economic resources, including clean water sources, ferry ports,

sea transportation terminals, trade activities, and transportation services connecting regions in Central Maluku and its surroundings.

However, the utilization and management of these resources have not yet fully contributed directly to local revenue. Most of the economic benefits from these activities remain concentrated in the district government or certain parties managing the transportation and public services sectors. The Tulehu district government does not yet have a formal scheme that allows for direct revenue sharing from economic activities within its territory. This situation indicates that fiscal decentralization at the local level remains suboptimal, particularly in the equitable distribution of economic benefits.

This imbalance has limited local governments' fiscal capacity to fund development programs and public services independently. Consequently, local governments remain heavily reliant on fiscal transfers from central and regional governments, primarily through village funds and their allocations. This dependence narrows local governments' fiscal space and reduces their flexibility in responding to increasingly complex community needs. In theory, fiscal decentralization should provide greater space for local governments to explore and manage their own revenue sources, thereby improving fiscal independence and the quality of public services.

The effectiveness of fiscal decentralization is largely determined by the extent to which local governments have access to adequate revenue sources and the authority to manage them independently (Bucci et al., 2024; Kharel & Acharya, 2023; Wang et al., 2024). Without strong fiscal support, local governments will struggle to perform basic government functions effectively. In the case of Tulehu, significant economic potential, including the port sector, maritime transportation, inter-island trade, ferry services, and tourism, has not been fully utilized as a source of local revenue.

Therefore, a reformulation of fiscal decentralization policies is needed that is fairer and more adaptive to the characteristics of island regions like Maluku. Such policies include revenue-sharing schemes between district and state governments, strengthened regulations regarding the management of local assets and resources, and granting state government broader authority to manage their regions' economic potential. Thus, fiscal decentralization would not only be administrative but also capable of increasing fiscal independence, strengthening local development, and improving community welfare at the village and state levels (Ardiputra et al., 2025; Sugito & Sartika, 2025).

Effectiveness of implementation of state government programs

Government effectiveness is defined as the degree to which an organization achieves predetermined goals through optimal utilization of available resources. In the context of the Tulehu government, program implementation effectiveness can be analyzed through four main indicators: goal achievement, timeliness, program benefits, and outcomes. These four indicators are used to assess the extent to which development and community empowerment programs have a tangible impact on improving community welfare and the quality of local governance.

In terms of achieving objectives, the research results indicate that most government programs funded by village funds and village fund allocations have been implemented in accordance with the plans agreed upon in the national development planning meeting (*musrenbang negeri*). These programs cover various strategic areas, such as community economic empowerment, skills training for small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), fisheries sector development, strengthening community business

groups, and various social activities. In general, these programs have addressed the community's basic needs and supported improvements in local economic capacity.

However, in terms of timely implementation, the study found that various structural obstacles persist, affecting the effectiveness of program implementation. One key factor is the gradual disbursement of village funds and village allocation funds, which causes delays in the implementation of planned activities. This situation often leads to a backlog of activities during certain periods, resulting in suboptimal program implementation and potentially reducing the quality of the results achieved. Furthermore, the limited implementation time also affects the suboptimal process of mentoring and evaluating activities in the field.

These findings align with Beidas et al. (2022) view, which holds that effectiveness is not measured solely by goal achievement but also by the timeliness of implementation, the efficiency of resource use, and the quality of the results. Therefore, delays in program implementation can be considered a factor that reduces government effectiveness at the village or state level. In terms of program benefits, research results show that the Tulehu community has clearly felt the positive impact of various programs implemented. Community economic empowerment programs, particularly in the fisheries sector, micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), local tourism, culinary businesses, transportation services, and boarding house development, have significantly increased community income and economic independence. Furthermore, training and capacity-building programs for community groups have also helped improve community skills and competitiveness in managing productive businesses.

Meanwhile, in terms of results achieved, the implementation of state government programs has generally shown good results, though it is still constrained by budgetary capacity and authority. The programs implemented have increased community participation in development and strengthened the relationship between the state government and communities (Dushkova & Ivlieva, 2024). However, development outcomes remain short-term and have not yet fully achieved sustainable structural transformation of the village economy. The Tulehu government's program implementation is quite effective, particularly in achieving program objectives and delivering benefits. However, this effectiveness still needs to be improved, particularly in terms of timeliness, strengthening institutional capacity, and optimizing budget management, so that program implementation can be better planned, more sustainable, and have a broader impact on community welfare.

Strengthening human resource capacity in national governance

One key factor determining the success of decentralization implementation at the local level is the quality of the human resources (HR) responsible for carrying out government functions. In the context of the Tulehu village government, research results indicate a strong commitment to strengthening the capacity of village government officials and village Saniri institutions, which are essential elements of the local governance structure. This strengthening is understood not only as improving technical skills but also as an effort to build a more professional, transparent, and responsive government system that better meets community needs.

Since the beginning of his reign, the King of Tulehu has conducted a comprehensive evaluation of the village government apparatus. This evaluation was carried out as a strategic step to ensure that each village/village apparatus possessed the competencies appropriate to its duties and functions. This process was realized through the restructuring of the village government's organizational structure, the

replacement of apparatus deemed incapable of carrying out their duties optimally, and the reassignment of personnel based on their abilities and work experience. This approach reflects the application of the merit system principle in local governance, where professionalism and competence are the primary foundations in the management of apparatus resources.

In addition to organizational restructuring, capacity building is also carried out through ongoing education and training programs. State government officials are actively involved in various training activities organized by district and provincial governments, especially after funding support from village funds. The presence of village funds is a crucial factor in strengthening the fiscal capacity of state governments in developing apparatus capacity, as it allows for the allocation of a special budget for competency-building activities, such as training in government administration, village financial management, development planning, and capacity building in the preparation of accountability reports.

The results of these various efforts are beginning to be seen in the improved quality of governance in Tulehu village. Village government officials have demonstrated improvements in administrative skills, work discipline, budget management, and understanding of the principles of accountability and transparency. Furthermore, coordination between the village government and village Saniri institutions has improved, allowing for a more structured and participatory development planning, implementation, and oversight process. This demonstrates that strengthening human resource capacity impacts not only individual officials but also the overall quality of the institution.

The findings of this study also reinforce Grindle's (1997) theory, which states that the quality of their human resources largely determines the institutional capacity of local governments. Local governments with competent and trained personnel are better able to respond to community needs and manage resources effectively. In this context, improving human resource capacity in Tulehu Village is a crucial factor in fostering more adaptive and service-oriented governance. Furthermore, the results of this study align with Pose & Muštra (2022) view, which asserts that the quality of local government officials greatly influences the success of regional autonomy. Higher human resource capacity increases the likelihood of achieving effective, efficient, transparent, and accountable governance. Strengthening human resource capacity at the national level is not only a technical necessity but also a key foundation for supporting sustainable decentralization and improving the quality of public services in rural and island regions (Fiestiandani et al., 2026).

Community participation as a pillar of good governance

Public participation is a fundamental principle of good governance, as it underpins an inclusive, transparent, and responsive government. In the context of Tulehu, public participation is understood not only as formal involvement in the development process but has become an inherent part of the social and customary governance system, passed down through generations. The values of collectivity, deliberation, and togetherness are the primary foundations of every decision-making process at the village level.

The research findings show that community participation mechanisms in Tulehu village are systematically implemented through various formal and informal forums, such as the village development planning meeting (*musrenbang negeri*) and large-scale meetings held in Baeleo, the center of community social and cultural activities. These

forums serve as the primary venue for the community to express their aspirations, needs, and input on development programs implemented by the village government. The involvement of various community elements, including traditional leaders, religious leaders, women, youth, and other community groups, demonstrates that the development process in Tulehu is inclusive and not dominated by any one group.

This participatory model reflects that local democracy in Tulehu village operates not only within a formal procedural framework but has also become a social practice deeply rooted in everyday community life. Decisions made through deliberation mechanisms have a high degree of social legitimacy because they emerge from collective discussions and take into account the interests of various community groups. This also strengthens the community's sense of ownership of each development program, leading to greater acceptance and support for local government policies.

The findings of this study align with Arnstein's (1969) theory of community participation, which explores the Ladder of Citizen Participation, explaining that levels of community participation range from manipulation and consultation to partnership and citizen control. In the context of Tulehu, community participation has reached the partnership stage, where communities are not merely policy recipients but also actively participate in formulating, monitoring, and evaluating development programs. Thus, communities have a significant influence on local decision-making processes.

Furthermore, high levels of public participation also increase government accountability. Public involvement at every stage of development enables direct social oversight of budget use, program implementation, and the achievement of development outcomes (Ahmad & Islam, 2024). This encourages the government to operate more transparently and responsibly, as every policy and program implementation is subject to open public scrutiny. Thus, public participation in Tulehu serves not only as a mechanism for local democracy but also as a crucial instrument for strengthening good governance. Higher levels of participation contribute to more harmonious government-community relations, improve the effectiveness of development program implementation, and strengthen the legitimacy of local public policies (Syamsiyah et al., 2025).

Transparency, accountability, and oversight in village fund management

Transparency and accountability are two fundamental principles in realizing good governance, particularly in public financial management at the village or state level (Junaidi & Adnan, 2023; Warna et al., 2024). These two principles serve not only as administrative instruments but also as social control mechanisms, ensuring that all use of public funds is openly accounted for to the public. In the context of Tulehu, the implementation of transparency and accountability in village fund management demonstrates a systematic effort to create an open and trustworthy government.

The research results show that the Tulehu village government has developed various oversight mechanisms involving traditional institutions, particularly the village Saniri, and the community directly. The village of Saniri serves as a representative institution for the indigenous community. It plays a crucial role in overseeing the planning, implementation, and evaluation of development programs funded by village funds. Each budget allocation is not only reported administratively but also openly discussed at an evaluation forum involving the village government, the village Saniri, and community members. This forum serves as a space for dialogue, allowing clarification, criticism, and input on the implementation of development programs.

The oversight system implemented in Tulehu reflects the principle of checks and balances in the context of customary-based local governance. The existence of the village Saniri as a customary supervisory institution provides strong social legitimacy to the oversight process, while strengthening the community's position in controlling the administration. With this mechanism, the potential for abuse of authority, budget misappropriation, and non-transparent practices can be minimized because every policy and use of funds is under collective community oversight. Furthermore, transparency of budget information also strengthens public trust in the village government, ultimately enhancing the legitimacy of local governance (Ardiputra et al., 2025; Suhardi et al., 2023). Furthermore, the transparency practices implemented are not limited to financial reporting but also encompass information on program planning, development priorities, and activity outcomes. This demonstrates that transparency in Tulehu has evolved into a more participatory governance culture, where the public is not merely an object of development but also an active participant in overseeing government operations.

The findings of this study align with Hidayat (2025) assertion that transparency and community participation are key factors in improving village government accountability. The higher the level of community involvement in the planning and oversight process, the lower the risk of irregularities in public financial management. In this context, the community-based oversight system implemented in Tulehu village serves not only as a control mechanism but also as a means of social learning, strengthening collective awareness of the importance of clean, responsible financial governance. Thus, the transparency and accountability model implemented in Tulehu village can be categorized as a good practice in customary village governance in the Maluku Islands. This model demonstrates that the combination of formal institutions (village government) and customary institutions (Saniri village), along with active community involvement, can create a more effective, participatory, and sustainable oversight system in the management of village funds.

Overall, this study shows that decentralization policies in Tulehu have increased local government capacity, community participation, and the effectiveness of development programs. However, various structural obstacles remain, particularly limited public service authority, limited access to local revenue sources, and high dependence on government transfers. Therefore, the success of future decentralization requires strengthening local government authority, more equitable fiscal decentralization reforms, sustainable human resource capacity building, and strengthening community participation and oversight systems as the primary foundations of democratic and sustainable governance.

Conclusions

The implementation of decentralization policies in Tulehu village has had a significant impact on village governance, particularly in public services, human resource management, community participation, and government transparency and accountability. The study found that decentralization has created greater space for the Tulehu village government to manage local affairs in line with the community's needs. However, the effectiveness of public services still faces various obstacles, primarily due to the village government's limited authority and its heavy reliance on the district government to resolve administrative matters. On the other hand, the human resource capacity of civil servants continues to improve through various training and empowerment programs, thereby enhancing governance. Community participation,

manifested through deliberative mechanisms, the village musrenbang, and oversight by the village Saniri (Regional Leaders), is also a crucial factor in creating more responsive, transparent, and accountable governance.

Theoretically, this research contributes to enriching the study of the implementation of decentralization in the context of customary village governance in the archipelago, particularly in Maluku. The research findings show that the success of decentralization is not solely determined by the delegation of administrative authority, but is also significantly influenced by human resource capacity, the strength of local institutions, and active community participation in the governance process. In practice, the results of this study serve as a basis for local governments in formulating policies that are better adapted to the archipelago's characteristics. However, this study has limitations because it focuses on only one research location, namely Tulehu village, so the results cannot be generalized to all customary villages or to villages in Central Maluku regency or Maluku province. Furthermore, this study uses a qualitative approach that relies primarily on interviews and observations, and thus cannot quantitatively measure the effectiveness of decentralization and the resulting public services.

Further research is recommended to conduct comparative studies across several customary villages or villages in the Maluku region to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the implementation of decentralization in various social, cultural, and geographic contexts. Future research could also employ a mixed methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods, to more objectively measure the effectiveness of public services, the quality of governance, and the impact of decentralization on community welfare. Furthermore, a more in-depth study of the relationship between fiscal decentralization, local resource management, and the economic independence of customary villages is also needed to generate more concrete policy recommendations to support sustainable island regional development.

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