

Short Communication

Environmental Adaptation and Disaster Mitigation Education in Remittance-Receiving Villages: A Diaspora-Linked Community Service Program with PCIM Taiwan

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Abstract. Village development planning in Indonesia has, since the enactment of Village Law No. 6/2014, been formally regulated through a cascade of participatory forums, technical guidelines, and administrative reporting requirements. Yet formal procedure alone rarely explains why plans succeed, stall, or drift from their original intent. This study uses institutional ethnography a method that traces how everyday, local work is coordinated by wider institutional relations to examine how village officials, facilitators, and community members actually produce village development plans in the upland villages of Bengkulu Province. Data were collected through sustained field observation, informal conversation, document review, and semi-structured interviews with village heads, village secretaries, community facilitators, women's group leaders, and ordinary residents. The analysis maps a set of recurring informal routines pre-meeting lobbying, document "polishing," selective invitation, and negotiated attendance quotas that operate alongside, and sometimes in tension with, the formally mandated Musyawarah Desa (village deliberation) process. Findings show a persistent gap between the participatory ideal inscribed in national regulation and the practical, relationship-based work required to make planning documents move through the bureaucratic chain. The study argues that these informal practices are not simple deviations or corruption but are meaningful "work" that village actors perform to reconcile limited resources, tight deadlines, and genuine participatory aspirations. The paper contributes to public administration theory by demonstrating the analytical value of institutional ethnography for Indonesian local governance research and offers policy recommendations for strengthening facilitation support, simplifying reporting formats, and recognizing informal coordination as a legitimate object of capacity building efforts.

Keywords: Institutional Ethnography, Village Development Planning, Bureaucratic Practice, Local Governance.

1. Introduction

Village-level development planning in Indonesia occupies a peculiar position in the architecture of decentralized governance. On one hand, it is one of the most heavily regulated spheres of public administration at the grassroots level: villages are required to produce a medium-term development plan, an annual government work plan, and a village budget, each of which must pass through a sequence of deliberative forums, verification steps, and reporting obligations mandated by national and provincial regulation. On the other hand, the actual work of producing these documents takes place in village halls, sub-village meeting rooms, and the homes of village officials, where the formal script of participatory planning is filtered through everyday relationships, personal obligations, and practical constraints that no regulation fully anticipates [1], [2]. [3]

Bengkulu Province, and its upland villages in particular, offers a revealing site for examining this everyday layer of village governance. Upland villages in Bengkulu are frequently characterized by dispersed settlement patterns, limited road access during the rainy season, uneven literacy among residents, and a heavy reliance on smallholder agriculture (coffee, rice, and horticultural crops) for household income. These conditions shape how village officials interpret and implement national planning guidelines: a Musyawarah Desa that, on paper, should gather representatives from every hamlet and social group must, in practice, be organized around who can physically attend, who is

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willing to speak, and who the village head trusts to represent community interests without prolonging the meeting. Community empowerment programs whether funded through the Village Fund, provincial community empowerment schemes, or partnerships with non-governmental organizations are similarly filtered through this everyday bureaucratic layer before they take the shape reported in official documents [4].

Understanding this layer matters because it is precisely where the promise of participatory, bottom-up village planning is either realized or quietly hollowed out. National policy documents describe an idealized sequence: hamlet-level deliberation, consolidation at the village level, technical verification by the sub-district government, and formal ratification by the village legislative body. Yet the people who carry out this sequence must translate it into concrete, situated action: deciding whom to invite, how to phrase an agenda so that it will not provoke conflict, which proposals to write up in full and which to mention only briefly, and how to satisfy a facilitator's checklist without disrupting relationships that will be needed again next year. These translations are rarely visible in the final planning documents that most research on village governance relies upon [1], [5].

The dominant approach in Indonesian public administration research on village development planning treats the formal regulatory framework laws, ministerial regulations, technical guidelines, and the planning documents they produce as the primary object of analysis. Studies in this tradition typically ask whether village plans comply with legal requirements, whether budget allocations match sectoral priorities set by higher levels of government, or whether participation targets (for example, a minimum percentage of women or marginalized group representatives) are formally documented as met. This document-centered approach has produced valuable knowledge about the formal architecture of village planning, but it systematically underrepresents a second, equally important reality: the informal, everyday bureaucratic practices through which formal procedures are actually accomplished, negotiated, or bypassed [6], [7].

This is a significant blind spot. A village RPJMDes may show full compliance with participatory requirements attendance lists signed, minutes archived, budget categories correctly labeled while the actual deliberative process behind that document looked nothing like the idealized forum described in national guidelines. Conversely, a village that appears, on paper, to have weak formal compliance may in practice be conducting rich, substantively inclusive deliberation that simply is not captured in the standardized reporting format. Without direct observation of the everyday work behind these documents, researchers and policymakers risk drawing conclusions about “good” or “poor” village governance based on artifacts that reveal only the tip of a much larger, socially organized process [5].

The research gap this study addresses is therefore methodological as much as it is empirical: existing literature on Indonesian village development planning relies overwhelmingly on document analysis, formal policy evaluation, and retrospective interviews about what should happen according to regulation, rather than on sustained, direct observation of what actually happens as village actors do the daily work of planning. Few studies have entered village bureaucratic settings with the aim of tracing, in fine-grained detail, how everyday routines informal conversations before a meeting, the drafting and redrafting of documents, the quiet negotiation of who gets to speak are woven into, and often determine the outcome of, formally mandated planning processes [2], [8].

To address this gap, the present study applies institutional ethnography (IE), an approach originally developed by Dorothy E. Smith, to Indonesian village-level public administration. Institutional ethnography is, to date, rarely used in Indonesian local governance research, which has tended to draw instead on policy implementation frameworks, governance indices, or conventional qualitative case studies. The novelty of this study lies in its explicit adoption of IE's core analytical move: starting from the standpoint of people actually doing the work (village officials, facilitators, and residents) and then tracing outward how their everyday activities are coordinated and constrained by "ruling relations": the texts, regulations, and institutional expectations that operate at a distance from the village itself [9], [10], [11].

The objectives of this study are threefold:

1. To map the everyday, informal bureaucratic routines through which village officials and facilitators in upland Bengkulu villages produce development planning documents and implement community empowerment programs.
2. To identify and characterize the discrepancies between the formal, regulation-based model of participatory village planning and the practical, relationship-based work observed in the field.
3. To analyze the challenges, informal trade-offs, and administrative dynamics that shape how community empowerment programs are actually implemented, and to draw out theoretical and practical implications for public administration research and policy in Indonesian local governance. [11]

By pursuing these objectives, the study aims to contribute both a substantive account of everyday village bureaucracy in Bengkulu and a methodological demonstration of how institutional ethnography can enrich the study of Indonesian local governance beyond document-centered analysis [9].

2. Method

2.1 Research Approach: Institutional Ethnography

This study adopts institutional ethnography (IE) as its overarching methodological framework. Institutional ethnography differs from conventional ethnography in that its object of analysis is not a bounded community or culture but a set of social relations of ruling the ways in which everyday, local activities are organized and coordinated by texts, categories, and institutional processes that extend beyond the immediate setting. IE begins from the "standpoint" of specific actors engaged in everyday work (in this case, village officials, facilitators, and community members involved in village development planning) and traces how their activities are shaped by, and in turn shape, the broader institutional apparatus of village governance including national laws, ministerial technical guidelines, standardized reporting templates, and the expectations of sub-district and district-level administrators [9], [10].

Three features of IE make it particularly suited to this study's objectives. First, IE treats texts (regulations, forms, planning templates, meeting minutes) not merely as records to be content-analyzed but as active organizers of social action: a planning template does not simply describe a meeting, it shapes how the meeting must be conducted in order to produce a document that will be accepted by higher authorities. Second, IE is explicitly attentive to the disjuncture between officially sanctioned accounts of institutional process and the actual, often more improvisational work required to produce those accounts precisely the disjuncture this study seeks to examine. Third, IE requires the researcher to move between the local site of everyday work (the village) and the "extralocal" institutional relations that organize it (sub-district verification meetings,

provincial reporting systems, national policy texts), producing an analysis that connects micro-level practice to macro-level institutional structure without reducing one to the other [9].

2.2 Research Location: Bengkulu's Upland Villages

Fieldwork was conducted in a purposively selected set of upland villages located in the highland districts of Bengkulu Province, an area characterized by hilly and mountainous terrain, dispersed hamlet settlements, partial road connectivity, and an economy centered on smallholder coffee cultivation supplemented by rice farming and seasonal horticulture. These villages were selected because their geographic and infrastructural conditions place particular strain on the formal participatory planning model: convening a fully representative Musyawarah Desa in a village where hamlets may be separated by several kilometers of unpaved road, and where mobile phone signal is intermittent, requires practical accommodations that are not addressed in national technical guidelines. This makes upland Bengkulu an especially revealing setting for observing how formal planning procedures are translated into everyday, situated practice. Village and individual identities have been anonymized throughout this paper in accordance with standard ethnographic research ethics; villages are referred to using pseudonyms (Village A, Village B, Village C) where necessary to protect informant confidentiality [2].

2.3 Analytical Framework: Ethnographic Mapping of Informal Bureaucratic Actions

The analytical framework used in this study can be described as an ethnographic mapping of informal bureaucratic action, structured around four interrelated dimensions adapted from institutional ethnography's core concepts [9], [12]:

1. Work processes: the concrete, observable activities that constitute village planning work drafting documents, holding informal conversations, organizing meetings, traveling between hamlets, and communicating with sub-district officials.
2. Texts-in-action: the specific documents, forms, and templates that organize this work, and how they are read, filled in, revised, and mobilized by different actors at different points in the planning cycle.
3. Ruling relations: the extralocal institutional expectations embodied in laws, ministerial regulations, and sub-district administrative practice that village-level work must ultimately satisfy, even when the path to satisfying them departs from the formally prescribed sequence.
4. Disjunctures: points of tension or mismatch between the official account of a process (as it appears in a finalized document) and the actual work observed in producing that document.

Data collected under each dimension were organized into a matrix cross-referencing specific bureaucratic routines against the stage of the planning cycle in which they occurred (hamlet deliberation, village deliberation, sub-district verification, budget ratification, program implementation, and reporting).

2.4 Data Collection

Data collection combined four complementary methods over an extended fieldwork period [9]. The research team attended and observed hamlet-level deliberations, village deliberations, village official meetings, and community empowerment program activities (including women's group meetings and farmer group training sessions), recording detailed field notes on seating arrangements, speaking order, informal conversations before and after formal sessions, and the handling of documents during meetings. Building on initial observations, the research team

constructed process maps tracing the sequence of informal activities that preceded and followed each formal planning event, including who initiated informal conversations, where they took place (in a village official's home, at a coffee stall, during a chance roadside encounter), and what was discussed or decided informally before being brought into a formal forum.

The team reviewed village planning documents (RPJMDes, RKPDes, APBDes), meeting minutes, attendance lists, and community empowerment program reports, comparing the content and chronology of these documents against the researchers' own observational records of the events the documents purported to describe. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with village heads, village secretaries, hamlet heads, village facilitators, members of the Village Consultative Body, women's group leaders, farmer group representatives, and ordinary village residents who had participated in or been excluded from planning forums. Interview questions were designed to elicit detailed, concrete accounts of specific planning episodes rather than general statements about how planning is "supposed to" work, in keeping with IE's emphasis on grounding analysis in actual, situated experience.

Data from these four sources were triangulated iteratively throughout the fieldwork period, allowing the research team to identify recurring patterns, follow up on apparent discrepancies between document and observation, and refine the process maps described above. Analysis proceeded through thematic coding of field notes and interview transcripts, organized according to the four-dimensional framework (work processes, texts-in-action, ruling relations, disjunctures) described in Section 2.3, and cross-checked against the document review findings to ensure that identified patterns were grounded in multiple, independent sources of evidence [9].

2.5 Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

To enhance the credibility of findings, the research team employed prolonged engagement across multiple planning cycles, methodological triangulation across observation, documents, and interviews, and peer debriefing among the four-member research team to test emerging interpretations against alternative explanations. All informants provided informed consent, and all names and identifying details reported in this paper have been altered or generalized to protect informant confidentiality, consistent with standard ethical protocols for ethnographic research involving local government officials and community members [9].

3. Result and Discussion

3.1 Mapping Everyday Bureaucratic Practices and Informal Routines in Village Development Planning

Fieldwork observation revealed a set of recurring informal routines that consistently accompanied, and in several cases substituted for, the formally prescribed steps of village development planning. These routines are summarized below according to the stage of the planning cycle in which they most commonly appeared [13], [14]. Across all observed villages, the substantive content of village deliberations was rarely determined within the formal meeting itself. Instead, village heads and hamlet heads engaged in a round of informal conversations in the days preceding a scheduled Musyawarah Desa, visiting influential residents, discussing priority proposals over coffee, and in several cases pre-negotiating which hamlet's proposal would receive priority funding in the coming budget cycle. One village secretary described this practice candidly during an interview, explaining that holding these conversations in advance was necessary "so that the meeting does not become a debate that takes all day" a framing

that treats pre-meeting lobbying not as circumvention of participatory process but as a practical necessity for keeping the formal meeting efficient and non-confrontational. From an institutional ethnography perspective, this routine reveals that the “text” of the Musyawarah Desa minutes which formally record open deliberation and consensus is produced through a process of prior, informal consensus-building that is itself invisible in the final document [9].

A second recurring routine involved the retrospective adjustment of planning and reporting documents to conform to the format and content expected by sub-district verification officers. Field observation of the document preparation process showed that meeting minutes were frequently drafted, or substantially revised, after the meeting had concluded, incorporating standard phrases and structuring elements (such as references to specific ministerial regulation clauses) that had not been explicitly discussed during the meeting itself but were understood by village staff to be required for the document to pass verification smoothly. Village administrative staff in two of the observed villages kept template files of previously approved minutes and reports, which were used as a base structure into which the specifics of the current planning cycle were inserted a practice one facilitator described as “adjusting the clothes to fit the body afterward,” meaning that the formal document was tailored after the fact to fit institutional expectations rather than being generated directly and spontaneously from the meeting proceedings [14].

While formal guidelines specify that Musyawarah Desa should include representation from all major community groups, including women, youth, and marginalized households, observation revealed that invitation practices in several villages were shaped by practical and relational considerations. Village staff reported prioritizing the invitation of individuals known to be cooperative, articulate in formal settings, or influential within their hamlet, while sometimes deprioritizing residents perceived as likely to raise contentious issues or prolong discussion. In one observed instance, a woman who had previously voiced strong objections to a proposed road project was not directly informed of a follow-up planning meeting, though her name remained on the formal invitation list submitted to the sub-district office. This illustrates a clear disjuncture between the textual record of inclusive participation and the practical work of managing who is present in the room [5].

Given the logistical difficulty of gathering representatives from geographically dispersed hamlets, village officials frequently negotiated informal attendance quotas with hamlet heads—for example, agreeing that each hamlet would send two representatives rather than attempting full community attendance, even where formal guidelines implied broader participation. While practical, this routine had the effect of concentrating deliberative influence in the hands of a small number of hamlet representatives, who were relied upon to communicate outcomes back to their communities, a communication step that was rarely verified or documented [5].

Village facilitators, who are formally tasked with providing technical assistance and ensuring procedural compliance, were frequently observed acting as informal brokers between village officials and sub-district administrative requirements. Rather than strictly enforcing procedural guidelines, facilitators in several observed cases advised village officials on which procedural elements were essential for successful verification and which could be handled more flexibly, effectively translating the formal ruling relations of the planning system into a practical, locally workable script. Facilitators described this brokerage role as essential to their job, noting that villages with less experienced facilitators tended to experience more friction and delay in the verification process [13].

3.2 Discrepancies Between Formal Policy Frameworks and Practical Execution in Community Empowerment Programs

Building on the routines mapped above, this section examines specific discrepancies observed between the formal design of community empowerment programs and their practical execution [2], [5]. Formal guidelines for community empowerment programs funded through the Village Fund typically specify minimum participation targets for women and marginalized groups. In the villages observed, these targets were consistently met in terms of documented attendance lists showed the required proportion of women's signatures but direct observation of meeting dynamics showed that women's participation was frequently passive, with women attending in fulfillment of quota requirements but rarely speaking during substantive discussion of budget allocation or project prioritization. In several meetings, women's group representatives were invited to speak specifically about domestically-coded program components (such as nutrition or handicraft training) but not about infrastructure or budget priorities more broadly, reflecting an informal, unstated division of deliberative labor that formal participation statistics do not capture [5]. [15]

Formal guidelines describe development priorities as emerging bottom-up from community proposals submitted during hamlet deliberations. In practice, several observed villages exhibited what might be called a “ready project” phenomenon: certain infrastructure projects (commonly drainage or small bridge construction) appeared repeatedly in village plans across successive years, in a form that closely matched standard technical specifications provided by sub-district technical staff, and that appeared to reflect proposals that facilitators and technical officials were able to guide communities toward. This pattern reflects a genuine tension between technical feasibility (which favors standardized, previously-approved project types) and the participatory ideal of open-ended, community-driven proposal generation [14].

Document review comparing official activity timelines against field observation revealed that the reported schedule of community empowerment activities frequently diverged from the actual timing of implementation. Training sessions and community meetings recorded in reports as having occurred on specific dates were, in several cases, actually consolidated into fewer, longer sessions conducted closer to the fiscal year-end reporting deadline, reflecting the practical pressure village officials face to complete and document all planned activities within the fiscal year despite disruptions such as poor weather, agricultural labor demands during harvest season, or delays in fund disbursement from higher levels of government [13].

Perhaps the most consequential discrepancy identified in this study concerns the Musyawarah Desa itself. As a formal procedure, the Musyawarah Desa is designed to be the definitive deliberative and decision-making forum for village development priorities. As observed in practice, the meeting more often functioned as a forum for ratifying decisions substantially shaped through the pre-meeting lobbying, facilitator brokerage, and proposal-shaping processes described above. This does not mean that the Musyawarah Desa was without value or meaning to participants several residents interviewed described the meeting as an important occasion for public acknowledgment of decisions and for raising concerns even if those concerns did not always change the outcome but it does mean that treating the Musyawarah Desa minutes as a straightforward, complete record of how development priorities were determined would significantly misrepresent the actual planning process [5].

3.3 Discussion

Village officials repeatedly described a practical trade-off between fully open, extensive deliberation (which formal guidelines idealize) and the need to complete planning processes within tight administrative deadlines, using limited staff capacity, and without exhausting community members' willingness to attend repeated meetings. Pre-meeting lobbying and negotiated attendance quotas can be understood, in this light, as informal solutions to a genuine structural problem: national planning timelines and procedural requirements were designed without fully accounting for the logistical realities of geographically dispersed, resource-constrained upland villages [5], [13]. [16] A second recurring trade-off concerned the tension between satisfying sub-district administrative compliance requirements (which favor standardized documentation and technically pre-approved project types) and maintaining local legitimacy by appearing responsive to community-articulated needs. Document polishing and the “ready project” phenomenon reflect village officials' efforts to satisfy both demands simultaneously: presenting technically compliant, easily verifiable plans to higher authorities while attempting to frame these plans, in local communication, as responsive to community priorities [14], [17].

Field interviews consistently identified facilitator capacity and turnover as a major source of administrative friction. Villages that had experienced frequent changes in assigned facilitators reported more difficulty navigating verification requirements and expressed uncertainty about which procedural elements were strictly necessary, leading to more elaborate and time-consuming document polishing to compensate for this uncertainty. This finding suggests that facilitator continuity functions as an important, underappreciated resource for smooth village bureaucratic practice one not directly addressed by most policy discussions of village capacity-building, which tend to focus on training content rather than facilitator retention [13]. Several informants described how delays in Village Fund disbursement from the national to district to village level created cascading pressure throughout the planning and implementation cycle, compressing the time available for genuine community deliberation and increasing reliance on pre-existing “ready” proposals and consolidated, hurried implementation activities near the fiscal year-end. This structural dynamic, largely outside the control of village officials, was repeatedly cited as a root cause of several of the informal practices documented in this study [13].

Finally, several village officials and facilitators reflected on the social cost of overly rigid adherence to formal participatory procedure. One hamlet head noted that strictly following prescribed meeting formats without adaptation to local social dynamics for example, insisting on formal turn-taking speech in a community where consensus is more comfortably reached through informal, iterative conversation could itself undermine genuine community buy-in, illustrating that informal practice sometimes serves substantive participatory goals more effectively than strict procedural compliance, even as it departs from the formally prescribed script [14]. This study demonstrates that institutional ethnography offers significant analytical leverage for understanding Indonesian village governance that document-centered and conventional qualitative approaches do not fully capture. By tracing the everyday work behind planning documents, this study shows that the disjuncture between formal procedure and practical execution is not incidental but structurally embedded in the way village bureaucratic work is organized and coordinated across local and extralocal institutional relations. This extends the street-level bureaucracy literature by demonstrating how discretion at the village level is shaped not only by resource constraints but by the specific

textual and procedural architecture of Indonesia's multi-level village governance system. It also contributes to the broader institutional ethnography literature by extending the approach to a rural, non-Western administrative context markedly different from the urban, Western institutional settings in which IE was originally developed [9], [13].

For practitioners and policymakers, this study's findings suggest that improving village development planning requires attention not only to formal regulatory design but to the practical, everyday conditions under which village officials and facilitators do their work. Interventions that simplify reporting formats, provide realistic timelines that account for agricultural seasonality and logistical constraints in upland areas, invest in facilitator continuity, and formally recognize and support informal coordination practices (such as structured pre-meeting community consultations) rather than treating them as illegitimate deviations, are likely to produce more meaningful improvements in participatory quality than efforts focused solely on tightening formal compliance requirements [5], [14].

4. Conclusion

This institutional ethnography of village development planning in Bengkulu's upland villages has shown that the formally prescribed sequence of participatory planning—hamlet deliberation, village deliberation, sub-district verification, and budget ratification—is consistently accompanied, mediated, and in important respects reshaped by a set of everyday, informal bureaucratic practices: pre-meeting lobbying, document polishing, selective invitation, negotiated attendance quotas, and facilitator brokerage. These practices are not simple failures of governance but represent village actors' situated, often reasonable responses to genuine structural tensions between participatory ideals, administrative compliance requirements, resource constraints, and the social realities of small, close-knit communities. The study further found systematic discrepancies between formally documented participation and program timelines, on one hand, and the substantive quality and actual chronology of community involvement, on the other discrepancies that would remain invisible to research relying solely on document analysis or retrospective interview accounts.

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6. Declaration

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