

Aligning policy through inclusive multi-level governance in local development planning

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Abstract

Development disparities in Indonesia, particularly in Gorontalo Province, continue to be influenced by weak coordination between the central and local governments. Although decentralization and participatory planning have been widely discussed, attention to how intergovernmental coordination functions in regional development planning and how community participation is effectively integrated into these processes remains limited. This study examines multi-level governance in regional development planning in Gorontalo Province. Using a qualitative case study design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with ten key informants, field observations, and document analysis conducted between January and March 2024. Data were analyzed thematically to identify patterns of vertical coordination, institutional capacity, community participation, and oversight mechanisms. Results show that overlapping jurisdictions, limited local institutional capacity, and unequal access to participatory forums such as Development Planning Consultation reduce policy responsiveness and implementation effectiveness. This study suggests that strengthening coordination mechanisms, enhancing local administrative capacity, and expanding access to participatory forums can support more inclusive local development planning. This article contributes empirical insights into how cross-level governance challenges are experienced within a decentralized regional context

Keywords: trans-level governance, policy coordination, community participation, inclusive development, local governance

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Introduction

Development In the Indonesian context, particularly in Gorontalo Province, there remains a lack of empirical explanation regarding how national development priorities are translated into local planning practices and how local actors negotiate these priorities through participatory forums. Existing studies on development governance within decentralized systems have examined policy coordination and governance structures (Sambodo et al., 2023), as well as participatory planning and accountability mechanisms (Sebunya & Gichuki, 2024). However, these dimensions are often analyzed in isolation, resulting in a limited understanding of how vertical coordination across levels of government interacts with community participation and local institutional capacity in concrete planning processes (Lah, 2025). This study addresses this gap by examining trans-level governance as an interactive process involving actors from the central, provincial, and district/city governments, as well as the community, within local development planning.

Regional development in Indonesia, especially in Gorontalo Province, faces serious challenges related to persistent disparities between regions (Baruwadi et al., 2024). These disparities are reflected in unequal access to basic facilities such as

education, health services, and infrastructure, as well as socio-economic gaps that weaken community welfare (Nalin et al., 2022). Fiscal asymmetry and regional transfer imbalances further constrain local government capacity to deliver equitable public services (Gałęcka et al., 2022). Evaluations of regional long-term development planning demonstrate that translating national development priorities into locally adaptive policies remains a significant challenge (Djafar et al., 2025).

This inequality underscores the need for a more inclusive development approach to ensure that all layers of society benefit from public policy (Khamdamov & Usmanov, 2024). In Gorontalo, abundant natural resources have not been fully transformed into inclusive growth due to institutional and governance constraints (Fitrianasari et al., 2024). Policies designed at the central level frequently overlook geographical characteristics and contextual socio-economic realities at the regional level (Liang, 2024). Studies on institutionalization and policy adaptation indicate that effective development requires strengthened local organizational capacity and improved coordination across governance tiers (Cid & Lerner, 2023).

Gorontalo Province, with its diverse resources and multicultural society, should possess significant developmental potential (Izudin et al., 2022). However, reliance on centralized policy frameworks limits local discretion in designing context-sensitive strategies (Song & Zhao, 2024). Centralized policy orientation often produces coordination gaps and weak interagency alignment, reducing responsiveness to community aspirations (Roberts & Milman, 2024). Such misalignment can generate inequitable development outcomes and reinforce structural inequality (Bircan & Özbilgin, 2025). Comparative analyses of centralized and decentralized systems further emphasize that balanced authority distribution and adaptive governance structures are crucial for effective policy implementation (Kharel & Acharya, 2023).

One strategic approach to addressing development disparities is the application of trans-level governance principles (Goodkind et al., 2024). Multi-level coordination frameworks have demonstrated that institutional transformation and collaborative governance can enhance adaptive capacity and policy coherence (Goodkind et al., 2024). Trans-level governance emphasizes structured interaction between central, provincial, and local actors to bridge policy design and implementation gaps (Salman & Salman, 2023). In the context of infrastructure development, the absence of synchronized planning frequently results in delayed execution and inefficiency. Research on governance complexity confirms that weak vertical coordination undermines effective policy delivery (Pahl-Wostl & Knieper, 2023).

Inclusive governance also requires meaningful community participation. Participatory mechanisms strengthen democratic anchorage, accountability, and policy legitimacy (Özden, 2025). Empirical findings indicate that local capacity development and participatory planning improve responsiveness and policy sustainability (Abas et al., 2023). Moreover, policy oversight institutions play a vital role in ensuring that development programs translate into measurable public outcomes (Ghimire, 2024). Without adequate institutional capacity, overlapping authority structures and regulatory fragmentation can further hinder development effectiveness (Xiaoyu et al., 2026).

Strengthening institutional capacity and community empowerment has therefore become central to reducing development disparities. Integrative governance models that combine vertical coordination and horizontal participation demonstrate greater effectiveness in promoting inclusive development (Ahmad & Islam, 2024). Governance research also highlights that institutional complexity requires coherent

regulatory frameworks and adaptive intergovernmental collaboration (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni & Westerwinter, 2022).

The main objective of this research is to examine the role of trans-level governance in reducing development policy disparities in Gorontalo through an inclusive and participatory approach. By analyzing coordination mechanisms between central and local governments, this study seeks to explain how institutional strengthening and collaborative governance can enhance policy effectiveness and reduce regional inequalities. Unlike centralized approaches that often overlook local dynamics, trans-level governance promotes balanced interaction between top-down direction and bottom-up participation, encouraging context-sensitive and sustainable policy design within differentiated governance arrangements (Lyons, 2024).

This study offers an empirical examination of how intergovernmental coordination, institutional capacity, and community participation shape local development planning in Gorontalo. Rather than treating policy alignment and public participation as separate issues, this article analyzes their interaction through a trans-level governance perspective. The findings are expected to provide contextual insights into governance conditions that enable or constrain inclusive local development planning.

Based on these objectives, the study addresses the following research questions: (1) How do actors at the central, provincial, and district/city levels coordinate development planning in Gorontalo Province? (2) How is community participation institutionalized within local development planning processes, particularly through Development Planning Consultation? (3) What institutional, administrative, and oversight challenges constrain the effectiveness of trans-level governance in reducing development disparities? and (4) What governance improvements can be derived from the empirical findings to strengthen inclusive local development planning?

The strength of this research lies in proposing a holistic and integrated governance approach to address structural disparities in regional development. By reinforcing coordination across governance levels and institutionalizing community participation, this study offers a more balanced model of development governance compared to approaches that prioritize either administrative control or grassroots participation alone (Awoonor, 2025). Such an integrative approach aligns with the principles of transformative governance, which emphasize systemic coordination, inclusivity, and long-term sustainability in addressing complex development challenges (Sirisawat & Chaiya, 2025). Ultimately, this research aims to contribute to the formulation of more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable development strategies applicable not only in Gorontalo but also in other decentralized regions facing similar governance challenges.

Research Methods

The unit of analysis in this study is the interaction between government actors and the community within the local development planning process, particularly the coordination among central, provincial, and district/city institutions, as well as the participation of societal actors through formal planning forums. Gorontalo Province was purposively selected as it represents a decentralized regional context where development disparities, fiscal constraints, and coordination challenges persist despite the institutionalization of participatory planning mechanisms, reflecting broader governance challenges in translating policy vision into local implementation (Ibrahim et al., 2024). As a single qualitative case study, this research is analytically bounded to

explaining governance dynamics within the Gorontalo context. Therefore, the findings are not intended for statistical generalization but rather for analytical transferability to other decentralized regions facing similar institutional and planning challenges.

The selection of Gorontalo Province was conducted purposively, considering its representation of structural inequality within Indonesia’s decentralized governance framework. The research analyzes vertical and horizontal governance interactions while also examining the role of community actors in influencing development planning and implementation. From a governance perspective, democratic anchorage and stakeholder engagement are essential for strengthening legitimacy and accountability within multi-level governance systems (Caponio, 2023). Accordingly, the inclusion of governmental institutions and community representatives was methodologically necessary to capture the full spectrum of governance dynamics.

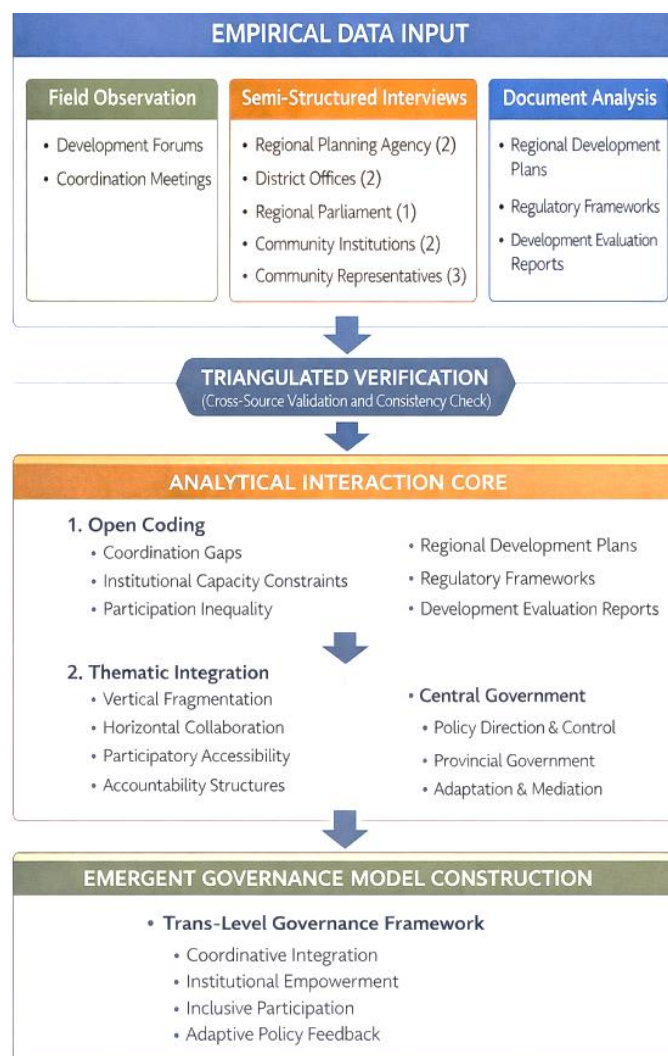


Figure 1. Integrated Data Analysis Interaction Model of Trans-Level Governance.

Source: Authors elaboration based on interviews, observations, and document analysis (2024)

Data were generated through a triangulated research design integrating field observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Field observations were conducted through direct participation in development planning forums and intergovernmental coordination meetings, enabling contextual examination of institutional interaction and procedural negotiation processes (Mityushina & Hehenberger, 2026). Semi-structured interviews constituted the primary interpretive instrument. Ten key informants were selected using purposive sampling based on their

direct involvement in regional development planning and policy implementation. These consisted of two officials from the Regional Development Planning Agency, two representatives from district-level development offices, one member of the Regional People’s Representative Council responsible for development oversight, two leaders of community empowerment institutions, and three community representatives actively participating in development planning consultations. Interviews were conducted and data saturation was achieved when no new substantive themes emerged. Documentary analysis further included regional development plans, regulatory frameworks, and official evaluation reports to ensure cross-source validation.

To enhance methodological transparency and demonstrate the integration between empirical data and analytical procedures, the study conceptualizes data sources and analytical stages as an interconnected process. This integrative structure is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1 illustrates the integration between empirical data sources and the staged analytical process culminating in the construction of the trans-level governance framework. As depicted in Figure 1, empirical data from observation, interviews, and documentary analysis were subjected to triangulated verification before entering the analytical core. The analytical procedure unfolded through four interconnected stages. First, open coding was conducted to identify recurring empirical patterns, including coordination gaps, institutional capacity constraints, participation inequality, and oversight limitations. Second, thematic integration organized these codes into higher-order governance categories such as vertical fragmentation, horizontal collaboration, participatory accessibility, and accountability structures. Third, cross-level interaction analysis examined policy flows and feedback mechanisms among central, provincial, and district governments to detect structural asymmetries and coordination dynamics. Finally, interpretive synthesis generated an emergent trans-level governance framework grounded in empirically traceable interaction patterns.

Table 1. Trustworthiness Criteria and Operational Procedures in the Study

Trustworthiness Criteria	Operational Procedures in This Study
Credibility	Triangulation of interview data with field observations and planning documents; comparison of perspectives from government officials, community representatives, and oversight actors.
Dependability	Use of consistent semi-structured interview guidelines and systematic documentation of coding procedures from open coding to thematic integration.
Confirmability	Maintenance of an audit trail, including interview summaries, document excerpts, coding notes, and records of theme development.
Transferability	Provision of thick contextual descriptions of the decentralized planning setting in Gorontalo, informant categories, and institutional planning processes to enable readers to assess applicability to similar contexts.

Source: Author’s elaboration, 2024

To ensure the rigor and validity of qualitative findings, this study applies the trustworthiness criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba, encompassing credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Each criterion is operationalized through specific procedures implemented throughout the research process, as summarized in Table 1.

Results and Discussion

The results and discussion of this study highlight important findings regarding the application of the trans-level governance concept in development planning in Gorontalo. The study reveals how interactions between central, provincial, and district governments influence the effectiveness of policy implementation at the regional level. Multi-level governance literature emphasizes that policy outcomes are strongly shaped by the quality of vertical coordination and institutional coherence across different levels of government (Dosunmu, 2023). It was found that although development policies often originate from the central government, their implementation does not always align with local conditions and community needs in Gorontalo. This misalignment reflects broader challenges within decentralized governance systems, where weak intergovernmental synchronization and fragmented authority structures reduce policy responsiveness (Sirod et al., 2026). Limited institutional capacity at the local level further constrains the translation of national policies into adaptive and context-sensitive strategies. In this context, trans-level governance provides a strategic framework to strengthen coordination and collaboration across government tiers. Enhancing institutional integration and structured coordination mechanisms can bridge the gap between policy formulation and implementation, thereby making development policies more responsive and more effective in reducing regional disparities (Nguyen, 2024).

Patterns of Interaction Between Policy Levels in Trans-Level Governance

Interviews reveal that coordination problems primarily arise at the stage where centrally formulated programs are translated into implementation plans at the district and municipal levels. A Regional Development Planning Agency official noted, "Local governments are often asked to implement programs after the main priorities have already been determined at the central level." This statement indicates limited involvement of local governments in shaping policy directions during the early stages of formulation, thereby constraining their capacity to adapt policies to local contexts.

This finding is further supported by the Annual Development Report (2023), which documents delays in several infrastructure programs due to weak synchronization between national and regional planning schedules. Such conditions reflect a persistent gap between policy formulation and implementation, where coordination across levels of government does not occur simultaneously or in an integrated manner. In public policy literature, this misalignment is often attributed to the limited inclusion of local actors during the early stages of policy formulation, resulting in policies that are less adaptive to local needs and conditions.

Moreover, institutional fragmentation and overlapping authorities within governance systems contribute to weak cross-level coordination, particularly in sectors involving multiple actors and competing interests. In this context, the findings suggest that coordination problems are not merely administrative but also procedural in nature, as local actors tend to be engaged only after key policy decisions have been finalized. This procedural limitation reduces policy responsiveness and undermines the effectiveness of implementation at the local level.

The head of Regional Development Planning Agency Gorontalo emphasized that "The differences in policies and regulations set by the central government often complicate implementation at the local level. Local governments need to be more involved in the planning stages from the beginning to reduce these disparities." This

indicates a gap between the policies coming from the center and the actual needs in the region. To visualize this gap, Figure 2 presents the Policy Synchronization Index derived from comparative analysis of central, provincial, and district development programs (2021–2024). The data show that alignment improved slightly from 52% in 2021 to 65% in 2024, but implementation at the district level remains below 50%, indicating persistent vertical fragmentation in policy execution.

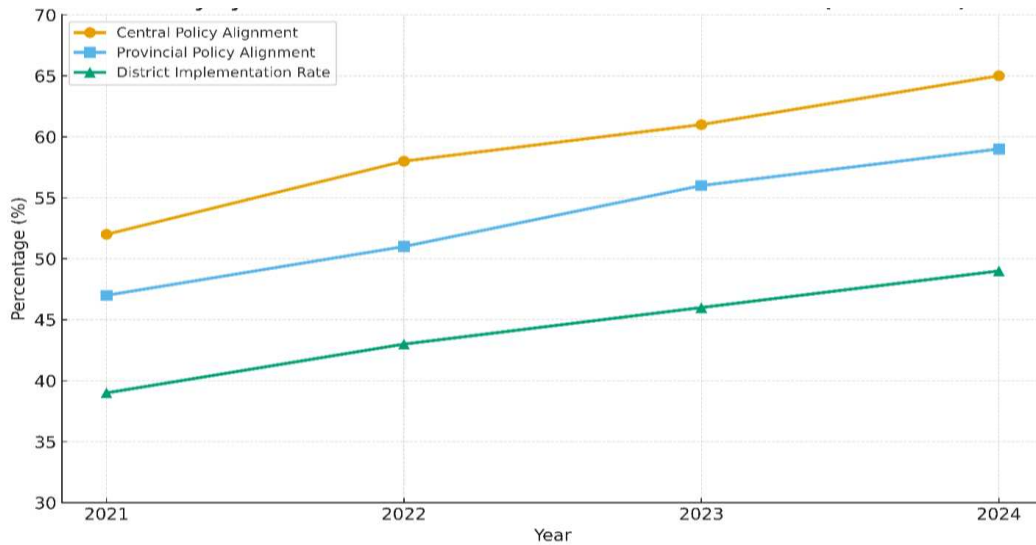


Figure 2. Policy Synchronization Index between Government Levels (2021–2024)

Source: Processed by author, 2024

Document analysis supports this finding, indicating that several centrally funded infrastructure projects, including national road construction, experienced delays due to coordination gaps between central and regional authorities. The 2023 Annual Development Report from Regional Development Planning Agency highlights that a number of strategic projects failed to meet their targeted timelines because of weak synchronization across governance levels. These cases demonstrate how misalignment between centrally formulated policies and local contextual conditions can hinder effective policy implementation.

The visualization in Figure 1 reinforces this argument, showing that while central-level policy alignment appears statistically adequate, district-level translation remains inconsistent and time-inefficient, particularly in infrastructure and public service programs. This pattern reflects broader challenges in multi-level governance, where insufficient coherence and coordination across administrative tiers undermine policy integration and implementation performance.

To further illustrate this dynamic, the Policy Synchronization Index was constructed as a descriptive analytical tool to assess the degree of alignment between central, provincial, and district/city development priorities. The index is based on three key indicators: alignment of program priorities, consistency of implementation timelines, and congruence of budget allocation. Each indicator was scored on a scale of 0–100 based on document analysis of development planning frameworks and evaluation reports, and subsequently validated through interviews with planning officials. The final index score represents the average of these three indicators. Given that the index is derived from qualitative document interpretation and stakeholder validation, it should be understood as an illustrative analytical measure rather than a standardized statistical index.

Therefore, the application of trans-level governance principles becomes highly relevant in strengthening collaboration between central, provincial, and district governments. Through clearer institutional alignment and structured coordination, development policies can be better adapted to local needs and implemented more effectively.

The Role of the Community in the Planning Process

One of the main findings of this research is the role of the community in the regional development planning process, which is a crucial aspect in achieving inclusive and equitable development. Participatory governance literature emphasizes that democratic anchorage and meaningful public involvement strengthen policy legitimacy and accountability within governance networks. Interviews with community leaders in Gorontalo revealed that people in several areas feel they are not actively involved in decision-making related to development. One community leader stated, "Policies often come without direct consultation with us, even though we know the conditions on the ground." This statement highlights a gap in participation, where policies developed by the central or provincial government often do not adequately incorporate input from local communities who are more familiar with real needs and contextual conditions.

However, despite this participation gap, the research also found positive initiatives aimed at addressing this disparity. One example is the Development Planning Consultation (Development Planning Consultation), a forum that involves the community in planning budgets and development policies. Participatory planning mechanisms such as Development Planning Consultation reflect efforts toward open and collaborative governance in regional development processes. Interviews with officials from the Regional Development Planning Agency of Gorontalo revealed that, although Development Planning Consultation has shown productive results, there are still challenges in terms of accessibility for communities living in remote areas. One Regional Development Planning Agency official stated, "People living in remote areas often lack the proper access to participate in these forums."

To illustrate this disparity, Table 2 presents the *Community Participation Index (CPI)*, which measures participation rate, accessibility, and integration of public input into planning documents.

Table 2. Community Participation Index (CPI) in Development Planning Consultation Forums, Gorontalo Province (2024)

Category	Participation Rate (%)	Accessibility Score (%)	Integration into Planning Documents (%)
Area 1	82	88	74
Area 2	69	71	58
Area 3	65	68	55
Area 4	59	63	49
Area 5	54	57	44

Source: Processed from Development Planning Consultation 2023 Report and Regional Development Planning Agency Gorontalo Interviews (2024)

The table 2 shows that the highest participation rate reaches 82%, indicating stronger inclusivity and better infrastructure support, while the lowest participation is only 54%, revealing persistent accessibility gaps. These variations highlight the unequal distribution of opportunities for communities to engage in planning forums. The documentary review of the Development Planning Consultation 2023 Report reinforces this pattern, noting that although participatory mechanisms have been formally

institutionalized, communication and transportation limitations continue to hinder full inclusion. Such disparities reflect the need to strengthen local institutional capacity to ensure that participatory spaces function effectively and inclusively.

This study emphasizes that community empowerment and equitable access to participatory spaces are essential for building inclusive and emancipatory development policies. Strengthening local governance institutions as facilitators and mediators of participation can institutionalize collaborative planning mechanisms more effectively. When communities are positioned not merely as policy beneficiaries but as active contributors in planning and oversight, governance becomes more transparent and accountable. Despite positive initiatives through Development Planning Consultation, significant structural and accessibility challenges remain, particularly for communities in remote areas, limiting the realization of fully inclusive development planning.

Challenges in Policy Implementation and Local Government Capacity

One of the critical challenges identified in this study is the limited capacity of local governments in translating policy objectives into effective implementation. Although national and provincial governments have introduced various development programs, the actual performance at the district and municipal levels remains inconsistent. Interviews with several officials at the district level revealed that differences in administrative procedures, overlapping regulations, and limited technical competencies often hinder timely and coordinated execution of programs.

A senior official from the Gorontalo District Development Office noted that *“Many programs are designed at the national level without fully considering the readiness of local institutions. Sometimes, we receive directives that are beyond our resource capacity to implement effectively.”* This statement underscores a recurring issue of institutional misalignment, where the gap between policy formulation and execution widens due to uneven administrative capacity and insufficient intergovernmental synchronization. Documentary analysis from the 2023 Annual Development Evaluation Report further reinforces these findings. The report indicates that delays in project completion particularly in infrastructure and public service programs, are primarily due to weak inter-agency coordination and limited resource management. Similar patterns of regulatory fragmentation and jurisdictional ambiguity have been observed in other multi-level governance contexts, where overlapping administrative mandates and unresolved boundary conflicts generate hyperregulation and institutional inefficiency (Horn, 2021). In Gorontalo, although territorial disputes are not as explicit, functional overlaps between central and district authorities produce comparable coordination frictions that slow implementation and blur accountability lines. As shown in Figure 3, *the Institutional Coordination Efficiency Index reveals* the extent of this disparity across levels of governance.

As illustrated in Figure 3, coordination efficiency decreases as the level of government becomes more localized, with the lowest performance (47%) occurring at the inter-district level. This trend reflects fragmented governance, where local institutions operate with limited technical capacity and weak horizontal collaboration. Such patterns are consistent with findings in policy capacity research, which emphasize that insufficient analytical and managerial capacity at subnational levels weakens implementation performance. In complex governance environments, the absence of structured policy integration mechanisms further exacerbates fragmentation and regulatory inconsistency across levels of government.

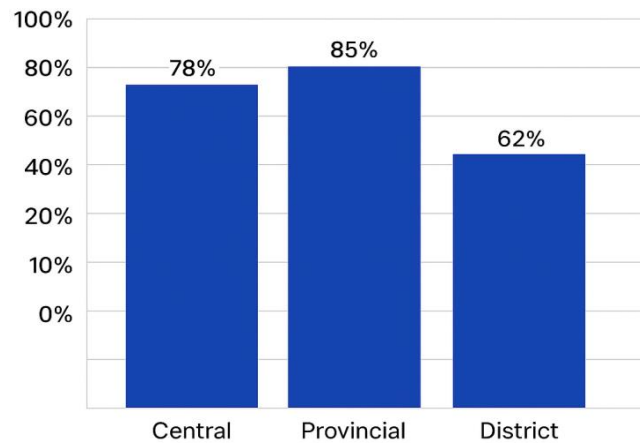


Figure 3. Institutional Coordination Efficiency between Government Levels (2024)

Source: processed by author, 2024

To support this analysis, the Institutional Coordination Efficiency Index was developed as a descriptive analytical tool to capture perceived effectiveness of coordination across governance levels. The index is based on four indicators: frequency of coordination meetings, clarity of institutional roles, timeliness of information exchange, and consistency of follow-up actions after coordination meetings. Each indicator was scored on a scale of 0–100 based on interview data and analysis of coordination-related documents. The final score represents the average of these four indicators. As the index is derived from qualitative interpretation and stakeholder-based validation, it should be understood as an illustrative analytical measure rather than a statistically validated instrument.

Furthermore, the study found that local bureaucracies in Gorontalo still depend heavily on hierarchical decision-making, limiting innovation and adaptive responses to local challenges. This top-down administrative orientation reflects broader challenges in multi-level governance systems, where institutional inertia constrains contextual experimentation and adaptive policy learning.

To address these constraints, this research proposes a comprehensive three-pronged strategy that strengthens both institutional capacity and intergovernmental collaboration. First, Institutional Strengthening focuses on enhancing technical competence through continuous professional training, data-driven management practices, and adaptive leadership at the local level. Second, Collaborative Governance emphasizes the creation of stronger communication frameworks between central, provincial, and district governments to synchronize policies, reduce redundancy, and promote shared accountability in decision-making. Third, Performance-Based Evaluation introduces an incentive mechanism that rewards districts demonstrating innovation, efficiency, and measurable improvements in policy execution. Collectively, this integrative approach ensures that development policies are not merely administrative formalities but are contextually responsive, effectively implemented, and aligned with the actual needs and capacities of local communities thereby bridging the persistent gap between policy design and delivery within Indonesia’s regional governance system.

Policy Evaluation and Oversight

In addition to challenges in institutional capacity, policy evaluation and oversight play a critical role in determining the success of implementing emancipatory development policies. Interviews with members of the Gorontalo Regional People's Representative Council revealed that despite efforts to enhance transparency and accountability in governance, some policies remain inadequately monitored. This can potentially lead to budget mismanagement and a decline in public trust in the government. One Regional People's Representative Council member stated, *"Although efforts have been made to improve transparency, weak oversight still opens opportunities for budget deviations that ultimately harm the public."*

The policy evaluation report from the Regional People's Representative Council Gorontalo (2024) shows that oversight of development projects in the region is often ineffective, particularly in monitoring budgets and evaluating the outcomes of completed projects. The document notes, *"Although there is oversight from the Regional People's Representative Council, not all development projects can be properly monitored, especially those that are multisectoral or involve multiple agencies."* This indicates that while formal oversight mechanisms exist, the main challenge lies in coordination among multiple stakeholders, resulting in fragmented supervision and suboptimal policy outcomes. To visualize these findings, Figure 3 presents the *Oversight and Evaluation Effectiveness Index (OEEI)* derived from Regional People's Representative Council monitoring reports and stakeholder interviews. The index highlights variations in effectiveness across three dimensions: budget control, project performance monitoring, and policy outcome evaluation.

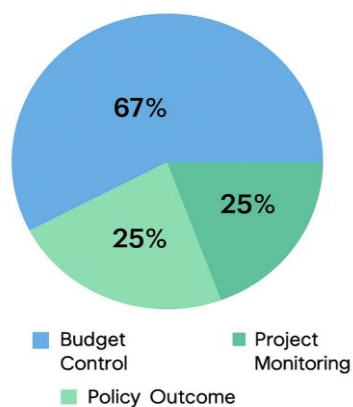


Figure 4. Oversight and Evaluation Effectiveness Index (OEEI) in Gorontalo Province (2024)

Source: processed from Regional People's Representative Council Gorontalo oversight report and field interviews (2024)

As shown in Figure 3, budget control demonstrates relatively higher oversight performance (67%), while monitoring and policy outcome evaluations remain weak, scoring below 60%. This imbalance indicates that policy evaluation practices in Gorontalo are still predominantly compliance-oriented, with stronger emphasis on financial verification than on assessing the long-term social and developmental impact of programs. Field interviews with Regional People's Representative Council members and development officials confirm that oversight activities are often concentrated on budget absorption and procedural reporting, while systematic evaluation of program effectiveness remains limited.

This pattern reflects a broader tendency within intergovernmental management systems in Indonesia, where financial accountability mechanisms tend to receive greater institutional attention than substantive policy outcome evaluations, particularly under

conditions of administrative pressure and fiscal constraint. In Gorontalo, this tendency manifests in fragmented supervision across agencies and limited integration between financial auditing and performance assessment. As a result, while compliance-based oversight functions procedurally, integrative accountability linking fiscal management to measurable developmental impact remains insufficiently institutionalized.

Strengthening continuous evaluation systems, enhancing inter-agency coordination in oversight, and incorporating outcome-based performance indicators are therefore essential to transform evaluation from a formal compliance exercise into a learning-oriented governance mechanism. Comparative policy analysis literature underscores that systematic feedback loops are crucial for identifying implementation gaps and enabling adaptive policy adjustment within decentralized governance systems.

Moreover, governance studies underline that effective oversight requires not only formal monitoring structures but also integrative governing capacities capable of linking financial accountability with substantive policy outcomes. This is particularly relevant in Gorontalo, where stronger oversight and iterative evaluation processes can reduce disparities in budget allocation and reinforce accountability mechanisms. An integrated oversight framework supported by data-driven monitoring tools and participatory evaluation can improve government responsiveness and restore public trust. As oversight effectiveness increases, governance integrity will be strengthened, and regional development management will become more efficient, transparent, and oriented toward measurable public welfare outcomes.

Empirical Findings: Driving and Inhibiting Factors

The findings of this study reveal a set of interrelated driving and inhibiting factors that shape the effectiveness of trans-level governance in local development planning in Gorontalo.

Driving Factors

The empirical findings identify several key factors that support the effectiveness of trans-level governance. First, the formal institutionalization of participatory forums such as Development Planning Consultation provides a structured mechanism for incorporating community input into development planning processes, which is widely recognized in participatory governance literature as enhancing policy legitimacy and accountability. Second, the presence of planning institutions at the provincial and district/city levels facilitates administrative coordination and the translation of policies into operational programs, which is a critical component of effective multi-level governance. Third, the growing awareness among stakeholders regarding coordination challenges provides a foundation for improving intergovernmental collaboration. Fourth, the emergence of local innovations and institutional adaptations demonstrates the capacity of local actors to respond to governance constraints in context-sensitive ways.

Inhibiting Factors

However, the findings also reveal several structural and institutional constraints that hinder governance effectiveness. One of the most prominent challenges is the misalignment between centrally formulated policies and local conditions in Gorontalo. This misalignment reflects weak integration between policy formulation and implementation processes, resulting in policies that are insufficiently adaptive to local

needs. Field evidence indicates that nationally designed development programs often overlook variations in institutional readiness, fiscal capacity, and socio-economic conditions at the district level, leading to implementation delays, administrative rigidity, and limited policy responsiveness.

Furthermore, institutional fragmentation and overlapping authorities contribute to weak cross-level coordination, particularly in governance contexts involving multiple actors and competing interests. This vertical asymmetry also reflects broader coordination imbalances in multi-level governance systems, where uneven leadership capacity and insufficient cross-level alignment hinder coherent policy. Additional inhibiting factors include limited technical capacity at the district level, budget constraints, restricted access to participatory forums for communities in remote areas, and fragmented oversight mechanisms. These conditions reduce planning efficiency and weaken intergovernmental trust.

Policy Implications Derived from the Findings

Based on these empirical findings, several policy implications can be derived to strengthen trans-level governance and enhance the effectiveness of local development planning. First, strengthening coordination mechanisms across governance levels is essential through clearer institutional role definition, synchronized planning cycles, and structured communication channels between central, provincial, and district governments. This aligns with governance literature emphasizing the importance of policy integration across levels to improve implementation performance. Second, enhancing local institutional capacity is necessary through continuous professional development, technical training, and data-driven administrative practices that support adaptive policy implementation. Third, the development of outcome-based monitoring and evaluation systems is required to shift governance practices from compliance-oriented oversight toward performance- and impact-based assessment. Fourth, improving access to participatory forums such as Development Planning Consultation, particularly for communities in remote areas, is crucial to ensure more equitable inclusion in development planning processes.

Overall, these policy directions highlight the importance of integrating vertical coordination with horizontal participation within a coherent governance framework. Without structured multi-level collaboration, strengthened institutional capacity, and inclusive participatory mechanisms, development disparities are likely to persist despite the formal implementation of decentralized governance systems.

Conclusion

This study highlights the importance of trans-level governance as a strategic framework for addressing development disparities in Gorontalo Province. The findings indicate that although national policies provide a structural foundation, weak coordination and limited institutional capacity at the local level continue to hinder effective and context-sensitive implementation. Community participation through forums *such as Development Planning Consultation* also remains uneven due to access constraints and structural limitations. Therefore, strengthening intergovernmental coordination and empowering communities are essential to improving policy responsiveness, accountability, and inclusiveness.

The study further demonstrates that the integration of collaborative governance, institutional capacity strengthening, and performance-based evaluation can enhance policy alignment and implementation effectiveness. These efforts are crucial to ensure

that development policies are not only vertically aligned but also adaptive to local conditions. Without structured multi-level coordination and adequate institutional capacity, development disparities are likely to persist despite the formal adoption of decentralization frameworks.

However, this study has several limitations. It employs a single case study design and focuses on specific actors involved in development planning in Gorontalo Province. Therefore, the findings are not intended for statistical generalization across all decentralized regions in Indonesia, but rather offer analytical insights into how coordination gaps, uneven institutional capacity, and unequal participation shape local development planning in similar governance contexts. Future research may adopt comparative approaches across provinces, involve a broader range of societal actors, or integrate qualitative analysis with quantitative indicators of policy alignment and development outcomes. .

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