Implementation of Policy Regarding the Program Desa Sarjana in Malinau District

Ezham Ahmal Alpansyaf'ri, Sukardi, and Dodot Sapto Adi

University of Merdeka Malang

Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Higher education is a strategic pillar in human resource development, especially in rural areas with limited access to education, such as Malinau Regency, North Kalimantan Province. To overcome educational disparities and expand access to higher education for rural youth, the Malinau Regency Government established the Program Desa Sarjana policy through Regional Regulation Number 7 of 2022. This study aims to examine the implementation of this policy and identify the supporting and inhibiting factors. This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive research type. The policy implementation theory used is the Van Meter and Van Horn model, which includes six main variables: policy standards and objectives, resources, characteristics of the implementing organization, attitudes of implementers, inter-organizational communication, and the external environment. Data were obtained through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation of informants from the Community and Village Empowerment Agency (DPMD), program implementation staff, and Program Desa Sarjana (PDS) participants. The results show that the Program Desa Sarjana has been implemented per the established regulations, but still faces various challenges in the field. Supporting factors in implementing this program include political commitment from the local government, regulatory and budgetary support, and high enthusiasm among village communities for higher education. On the other hand, the dominant inhibiting factors include limited scholarship quotas, a lack of higher education infrastructure, and low awareness among some communities of the importance of continuing their education to the undergraduate level. This study concludes that the Sarjana Village Program is a progressive and relevant affirmative action in the context of development in remote areas such as Malinau. However, for its implementation to be more optimal, continuous evaluation, expansion of targets, strengthening of implementing institutions, and improvement of educational literacy among the village community are needed.

Keywords: Desa Sarjana, Malinau Regency, Policy, Program Higher Education.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Education is the primary foundation for the development of a nation. In the midst of globalization and the rapid development of information technology, higher education has become an important component in improving the quality of human resources (HR) that are superior and competitive. Not only as a tool for increasing individual capacity, higher education has also become a significant strategy in promoting economic, social, and cultural progress in society. In the context of regional development, equitable and quality education is an important foundation for driving comprehensive regional progress. In Indonesia, although the government has made efforts to expand access to education, there are still disparities between regions, and disparities in access to and quality of education remain a serious problem, especially in remote, border, and inland areas, particularly between urban and rural areas. One of the regions facing serious challenges in the development of the education sector is Malinau Regency, North Kalimantan Province.

This regency has a large geographical area, mostly consisting of forests, rivers, and mountains, with many remote villages that are difficult to reach. It is an area that faces significant challenges in human resource development due to

its remote geographical location, limited infrastructure, and the developing socio-economic conditions of the community. As a result, people in these villages have limited access to educational services, especially higher education. Based on data from the Malinau Regency Central Statistics Agency and the Malinau Regency Education Office, the following facts have been obtained that describe the condition of secondary and higher education in the last five years:

Table 1. High School/Vocational School Dropout Rates in Malinau Regency

Year	Number of High School/Vocational School Students	Dropout Students	Dropout Rate (%)
2019	1,490	38	2.55
2020	1,520	41	2.70%
2021	1,560	43	2.75%
2022	1,610	39	2.41%
2023	1,580	36	2.28%

Source: Malinau Regency Education Office (2020–2023), Malinau Regency BPS (2023)

Although the dropout rate trend in Malinau Regency at the senior high school level (SMA/SMK) has shown a gradual decline over the last three years, from 2.75% in 2021 to 2.28% in 2023, this figure remains an important indicator that challenges in completing education at this level are still real and have not been fully overcome. This percentage decrease does indicate efforts to improve education policies and services, such as increasing the role of schools, providing educational assistance, and raising awareness among parents and students about the importance of completing secondary education. However, a dropout rate above 2% is still considered high, especially compared to the national target of reducing the dropout rate as low as possible, approaching 0% at all levels. The level of participation of rural communities in Malinau Regency in continuing their education to the tertiary level is relatively low. Many rural youth cannot access higher education due to limited information, financial constraints, lack of transportation, and the minimal role of families and communities as supporters and motivational role models who have successfully pursued higher education. In fact, higher education plays a crucial role in developing excellent human resources capable of driving development based on local potential. The Malinau Regency Government formulated and enacted Regional Regulation No. 7 of 2022 on the Program Desa Sarjana in response to these issues. This policy is a form of affirmation oriented towards social justice and educational equity. Its purpose is to provide full scholarships for young people from villages who excel academically but are economically unable to pursue higher education, both within and outside the North Kalimantan region. The Program Desa Sarjana is intended to expand access to higher education and is a long-term development strategy oriented towards strengthening village human resources. The hope is that graduates of this program will return to their respective villages and actively contribute to village development, whether as educators, economic actors, government officials, or agents of social change.

The Program Desa Sarjana is a form of locally based policy innovation that attempts to address structural gaps in educational development. The uniqueness of this program lies in its decentralized approach and focus on rural communities as the subjects of development. This program reflects the awareness that development cannot rely solely on central government intervention, but requires contextual policies tailored to the needs and characteristics of each region. The Sarjana Village Program is also a form of affirmative policy demonstrating the local government's concern for human resource development in rural areas. This program is also a concrete effort to reduce the gap in access to education between cities and villages. However, as is common in the implementation of public policy, the success of this program is highly dependent on its implementation in the field. However, even though this program has been running for over two years, critical questions still arise regarding its implementation in the field. Some of the issues reported include the inequality in the distribution of scholarship recipients between villages, the selection mechanism, and the lack of evaluation of the academic success of scholarship recipients.

This study aims to examine the implementation of the Desa Sarjana concept in Malinau Regency, with the following focus: to describe and analyze the implementation of the Scholar Village Program policy in Malinau Regency. Describe and analyze the factors that support and hinder the implementation of the Scholar Village Program Policy in Malinau Regency. Thus, this research is expected to positively contribute to efforts to advance local development in Malinau Regency through Desa Sarjana's innovative approach. Research Benefits on the Implementation of Malinau Regent Regulation No. 7 of 2024 on the Scholar Village has several important uses, both theoretically and practically: Theoretical Use: Development of Science: This research will add to academic references related to the implementation of local policies, particularly in the context of regional government. It will also enrich the literature on education policy and community empowerment in rural areas. Contribution to Public Policy Theory: This study can serve as a case study that enriches the theory of public policy implementation, including how policies are implemented in regions with unique geographical and social characteristics, such as Malinau.

Practical Use: Policy Evaluation: This research can serve as an important evaluation for the Malinau Regency Government to assess the effectiveness of Regent Regulation No. 7 of 2024. It can determine whether the policy is running according to its objectives and impact on the village community. Program Improvement: Based on the research findings, the recommendations can help the local government improve or adjust the *Desa Sarjana* program to make it more relevant to the local community's needs. Strengthening Community Capacity: This research can also help understand how this policy impacts the improvement of human resource capacity in villages, particularly in increasing the number of graduates and the quality of education in the region. Reference for Other Regions**:** The results of this study can serve as a model or inspiration for other regions that wish to implement similar policies to improve the quality of education and community development through the *Desa Sarjana* policy. Overall, this research will provide an in-depth picture of how local policies can be implemented and optimized for community empowerment, particularly in education.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Public policy is a series of decisions issued by government agencies and/or officials (Anggara, 2014). Public policy is a decision by public authorities that is binding on the general public.

William N. Dunn argues that public policy is a series of interrelated choices made by government agencies or officials in areas related to government duties such as land, security, energy, health, education, public welfare, crime, urban affairs, and others (2003:22). Knowledge about public policy is Knowledge about the causes, consequences, and performance of public policies and programs. In contrast, public policy knowledge provides information and Knowledge to executives, legislators, judicial institutions, and the general public that is useful in policy formulation and can improve policy performance (Effendi in Syafiie 2006:106). Policy Implementation, Van Meter and Van Horn (in Wahab, 2006:65) say that implementation is actions taken by individuals/officials or government or private groups to achieve the objectives outlined in policy decisions. The Big Indonesian Dictionary (KBBI) defines implementation as execution or application. This means every activity will be carried out as a genuine implementation to achieve the objectives. Leo Agustino, in his book Dasar-Dasar Kebijakan Publik (Fundamentals of Public Policy) (2008:139), states that implementation is a dynamic process, whereby the execution of policy involves certain activities or actions, which will ultimately produce results in line with the objectives or targets of the policy itself. Daniel Mazmanian and Paul Sabatier state that the main essence of policy implementation is understanding what should happen after a program is declared valid or formulated. This understanding includes efforts to administer it and create a real impact on society or events (Mazmanian and Sabatier in Widodo, 2010:87). Public policy implementation is a complex process influenced by various factors. This theoretical study shows that the success of policy implementation is highly dependent on the clarity and consistency of the policy, the availability of resources, the effectiveness of communication, the capabilities of the implementing agency, the external environment, and the disposition of the implementers. A deep understanding of these factors is essential to ensure the success of policy implementation. In general, policy implementation not only includes the execution of what is written in policy documents, but also includes dynamics in the field, including interactions between policy implementers and the social, economic, and political conditions that influence the process. Malinau Regency Regulation Number 7 of 2022 concerning the DESA SARJANA Program, the Desa Sarjana Program is one of the regional innovation programs that encourages and motivates every community to play an active role in empowering the potential of community resources, as an effort to

improve the intellectual quality of the community, based on Malinau Regency Regulation No. 7 of 2022. The Program Desa Sarjana aims to provide basic skills to Program Desa Sarjana participants to develop their potential and become superior human resources to create a skilled community with expertise in their fields who can be empowered in the village. This program is an initiative that emerged in response to the challenges of education and community empowerment in remote areas. In the context of globalization and technological advancements, these challenges have become increasingly complex, requiring communities to adapt and compete at a higher level.

Desa Sarjana's development is focused on improving access to education and aims to empower communities holistically. The Desa Sarjana program is intended to strive for the expansion and equal distribution of opportunities to obtain quality education for the community.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

3.1 Approach and Type of Research

This research uses a qualitative descriptive research approach. Descriptive research aims to systematically describe the facts and characteristics of the object or subject being studied factually and accurately. According to Nazir (2011) in his book "Research Methods," descriptive research is research used to describe a particular phenomenon or event, whether natural or social. In the context of this research, a descriptive qualitative approach was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of how Regional Regulation No. 7 of 2024 concerning the Program Desa Sarjana in Malinau Regency is implemented, the factors that influence its implementation, and its impact on the community in Malinau Regency.

3.2 Research Location

This study aims to analyze the implementation of Regional Regulation No. 7 of 2022 concerning the Program Desa Sarjana in Malinau Regency. This program is designed to improve access to and quality of education at the village level and empower the community in human resource development. The selected research location is the Malinau Regency Village Community Empowerment Office, the leading sector in implementing this program.

3.3 Data Presentation

Data presentation is an important stage in the qualitative data analysis process, where researchers compile and convey the results of their analysis in a clear and easy-to-understand manner. This process involves presenting information and interpreting the meaning of the analyzed data, thereby providing a comprehensive overview of the research findings. Effective data presentation helps readers or audiences understand the context, themes, and insights generated from the research.
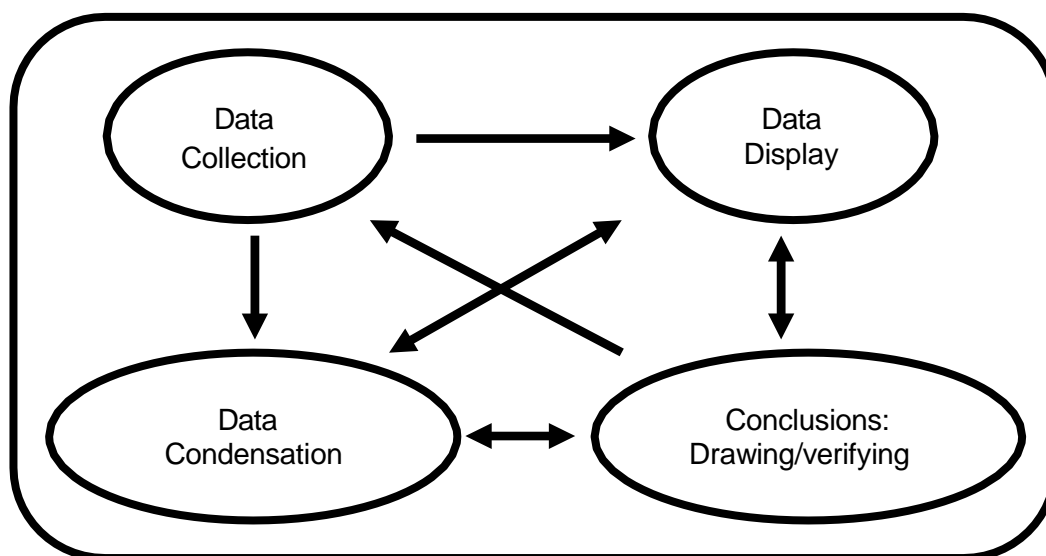

Figure 1: Huberman's Schema

Source: Miles, Huberman, & Saldana (2014) in the book *Qualitative Data Analysis, A Methods Sourcebook, Edition 3*

4. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Research Results

The Secretariat of the Sarjana Village Program is under the coordination of the Community and Village Empowerment Agency (DPMD) of Malinau Regency, North Kalimantan Province. The DPMD of Malinau Regency is a regional agency whose main task is to carry out government affairs in community and village empowerment, including managing and implementing the Sarjana Village Program. The Malinau Regency Community and Village Empowerment Agency office is at the Office of the Regent of Malinau, Building B, 1st Floor, Malinau Regency, North Kalimantan, Indonesia. The Program Desa Sarjana was established as one of Malinau's flagship programs for 2021-2024 and will continue for 2025-2029 to improve village human resources. The legal basis for this program is Malinau Regency Regulation Number 7 of 2022 concerning the Program Desa Sarjana. As a follow-up, the local government issued Malinau Regent Regulation Number 7 of 2024, which contains *the Guidelines for Implementing and Requirements* of the Program Desa Sarjana. The regent regulation explicitly states that the purpose of its issuance is "to implement the provisions of Article 6 paragraph (2) and Article 8 paragraph (3) of Regional Regulation Number 7 of 2022 concerning the Program Desa Sarjana. In other words, Local Regulation 7/2022 is the central legal umbrella, while Regent Regulation 7/2024 regulates the technical details (funding schemes, participant requirements, selection process, etc.). Implementing Malinau Regency Local Regulation Number 7 of 2022 on the Desa Sarjana Program in Malinau Regency. Implementation is usually associated with an activity to achieve specific objectives or targets. Implementation is broadly viewed as the execution of laws involving various actors, organizations, procedures, and techniques working together to carry out policies to achieve policy objectives or programs (Winarno, Budi, 2007: 144). The objectives of the Program Desa Sarjana are in accordance with Regional Regulation No. 7 of 2022 concerning the Program Desa Sarjana in Mlainau Regency in Article 3, which states that (1) the Program Desa Sarjana is intended to strive for the expansion and equal distribution of opportunities to obtain quality education for the community, (2) The Program Desa Sarjana aims to provide basic skills to participants of the Program Desa Sarjana to develop their potential and become superior human resources in order to create a skilled community with expertise in their fields who can be empowered in the village. To achieve these objectives, Article 1 (12) of Malinau Regent Regulation Number 7 of 2024 concerning Guidelines for the Implementation and Requirements of the Program Desa Sarjana states that the Selection and Screening Committee is a committee formed to carry out the selection process for prospective participants of the Program Desa Sarjana from the Community and Village Empowerment Office. In connection with this policy, the Head of the Malinau Regency Village Community Empowerment Office, Dr. Muhammad Fiteriyadi, S.STP., M.Si, stated

"That's right, in accordance with the existing Regency Regulation, the Secretariat for the Program Desa Sarjana is the Village Community Empowerment Agency. This is in line with the main duties and functions of the DPMD itself. In this case, every year, a decree on the Selection Committee and Secretariat of the Program Desa Sarjana will be issued and signed by the Regent."

The Program Desa Sarjana has determined the objectives and standards to be achieved in Malinau Regency Regulation No. 7 of 2022 concerning the Program Desa Sarjana, which is also in line with the mission of Malinau Regency for 2021-2026, namely to create superior human resources, and the first mission of Malinau Regency for 2025-2030, namely Human Resource Development, and the sixth mission, namely Village Empowerment. Establishing policy standards in the Malinau Regency Scholar Village Program is a strategic response to the urgency of human resource development in rural areas, which have experienced limited access to higher education, low quality of public services, and weak village institutional capacity. Through Regional Regulation (Perda) No. 7 of 2022, the Malinau Regency Government seeks to develop a holistic and visionary legal framework that not only targets an increase in the number of graduates in villages but also positions college graduates as agents of social, economic, and village governance transformation. These policy standards were not only born out of administrative needs, but also through a formulation process that took into account the socio-cultural and geographical variables, as well as the local potential of each village. This is reflected in the philosophical basis of the Perda, which emphasizes the principles of equitable development, spatial justice, and local empowerment based on community participation. Thus, determining

policy standards in this context requires a *multi-level governance* approach*,* in which the district government acts as a strategic director and the village acts as an autonomous but integrated policy implementer. Based on interviews conducted with the head of the Institutional and Socio-Cultural Development Division of the Malinau District DPMD, he stated:

"So, the standards and objectives are already in accordance with local regulations, and we are further strengthening them with the regent regulation that has been issued so that this program runs on a legal basis and is focused on the future. Of course, this does not rule out the possibility that there will be adjustments as the program progresses."

Thus, establishing policy standards in the Malinau Regency Graduate Village Program is not merely a technocratic process, but part of a transformative policy design that aims to *decentralize expertise* at the village level. It represents a synthesis between the vision of regional human resource development and the approach of strengthening local institutions. These standards are an important instrument to ensure that the presence of graduates in villages is not merely symbolic, but has a real impact in realizing independent, inclusive, and competitive villages.

Supporting and Hindering Factors in Implementing Malinau Regency Regulation Number 7 of 2022 concerning the DESA SARJANA Program in Malinau Regency. Supporting Factors. The successful implementation of the Sarjana Village Program (PDS) in Malinau Regency cannot be separated from several mutually reinforcing supporting factors. Based on Van Meter and Van Horn's policy implementation theory, supporting factors include resources, the attitudes of implementers, and socio-political support that strengthen effective policy implementation. One of the main factors supporting this program is strong political support from regional heads and legislators. This program has a clear legal basis through Malinau Regency Regulation Number 7 of 2022 and Regent Regulation Number 7 of 2024, which regulate technical implementation and provide legal certainty and budget guarantees. In addition, this program is designated as part of the human resource development priorities in the regional strategic planning document.

The enthusiasm of the village community is also an important driver in the program's implementation. The high interest in participating in the program shows that the village community is beginning to see higher education as a way to improve their quality of life and open access to more decent jobs. Some villages even actively recruit potential participants, prepare the administration, and assist with registration. The availability of a budget and comprehensive regulations are the following supporting factors. With adequate funding allocated through the regional budget, program implementers can carry out the selection, guidance, and monitoring stages more systematically. This support provides a sense of security for the beneficiary students because the local government covers all their basic needs during their studies. Equally important is the commitment of program implementers, both at the district and village levels. The Head of the Malinau District Community and Village Empowerment Office explained:

"*We do have a heavy burden, but this is also a new spirit for us. Since this program was mandated by the regional leadership from the beginning, we are committed to managing it professionally. We see this program not only as a scholarship, but as the future of the village*."

Meanwhile, the Head of Institutional and Socio-Cultural Development, who also serves as the program secretariat coordinator, said:

"In the field, we have received a lot of support from village heads and their officials. They are very supportive, and many even help with the selection process. This shows that at the village level, this program is accepted and considered important."

The cross-sectoral cooperation between the local government, village officials, and the community has created a conducive climate for implementation. This strengthens the position of the Program Desa Sarjana not only as an educational assistance program but also as part of a collective movement to build the future of the village's young generation. With strong synergy among implementers, budget availability, regulatory support, and positive community acceptance, the Program Desa Sarjana has a solid foundation for implementation and the potential to continue developing into a leading regional policy in village-based human resource development.

4.2 Discussion

The *Program Desa Sarjana*, launched by the Malinau Regency Government, is one of the breakthroughs in improving the quality of rural human resources. Conceptually, this program addresses the challenges of low higher education rates and unemployment in rural areas, especially in remote and border areas such as those commonly found in Malinau. Through an affirmative approach based on scholarships and the facilitation of graduate placement in their home villages, this program seeks to create a village development ecosystem supported by local intellectual capacity. Based on the research results, the implementation *of Desa Sarjana* has shown several positive developments. One of them is the increase in the number of rural youth who continue their education to the university level, thanks to scholarship support from the local government. In addition, graduates who are beneficiaries of the program return to their villages and contribute to community empowerment activities to advance their villages. The presence of graduates in villages is expected to assist in the development and encourage the independence of villages. These findings indicate that the role of graduates is not limited to being educators or facilitators, but also as catalysts for social change that bring the values of professionalism and innovation to the village context. However, the study's results also revealed several program implementation challenges. Eight villages did not participate in sending participants from their villages due to the low level of awareness among the community regarding the importance of continuing higher education.

From an institutional perspective, this program is implemented with a strong legal basis, referring to Law Number 6 of 2014 concerning Villages, and mandated in the regional strategic planning document, namely the Malinau Regency RPJMD for 2021-2026. In addition, its technical implementation is regulated through Malinau Regency Regulation Number 7 of 2022 concerning the Program Desa Sarjana, as well as Malinau Regent Regulation No. 7 of 2024 concerning Guidelines for the Implementation and Requirements of the Program Desa Sarjana, which regulates the selection mechanism, funding, and performance reporting of scholars in villages. Overall, *the Scholar Village* is a regional policy innovation that simultaneously integrates education and village development dimensions. The research findings confirm that this program can become a national replication model for building villages based on science, participation, and local independence with regulatory strengthening, institutional capacity building, and a sustainable support ecosystem.

Policy standards and objectives are important elements in Van Meter and Van Horn's implementation theory, which emphasizes the importance of clarity of direction and consistency of implementation. In the Malinau Regency Bachelor Village Program (PDS), standards and objectives have been clearly formulated through Local Regulation No. 7 of 2022 and Regency Regulation No. 7 of 2024. These two regulations strengthen the program's position as a strategic instrument for rural human resource development. This policy aims to improve the quality of village human resources and establish independent villages capable of managing local potential. To support this, the government has set operational targets such as at least one graduate in each village, selection based on local needs, and a performance evaluation system. These objectives are designed to be measured, monitored, and evaluated systematically.

In addition to administrative aspects, the policy standards are substantive and adaptive. The selection process considers academic grades and the relevance of participants' competencies to the village's potential. This approach demonstrates the alignment between policy design and the local socio-cultural context, which is the main strength of this program. On the other hand, the flexibility of the standards also allows the program to adapt to dynamics in the field. The local government provides space for periodic policy evaluation and improvement through a monitoring mechanism by the DPMD. Thus, this policy is a technical guide and a tool for evidence-based learning and decision-making.

In implementing the Program Desa Sarjana in Malinau Regency, the availability of resources has proven to be one of the important foundations supporting the program's sustainability. Based on Van Meter and Van Horn's theory, resources are not limited only to financial aspects but also include human, regulatory, technical, informational, and institutional resources. Research shows that most of these elements are available, although some areas still have technical challenges.

Human resources are a significant strength of this program. The local government has formed an implementation team consisting of members of the DPMD, a selection team, and program alums involved in the orientation process. This shows that the implementers do not only rely on the bureaucratic structure but also empower individuals who have been directly involved as participants. This strategy creates continuity of experience and strengthens the capacity of implementers at the field level. From a financial perspective, the significant budget allocation in the Regional Budget (APBD) demonstrates the government's commitment to the program's sustainability. The allocated funds are used for education, operational, training, and participant incentive costs. In addition, regulatory support through local and regional regulations provides legal clarity and technical guidance that strengthens the stability of program implementation. This aligns with Van Meter and Van Horn's view that clear regulations are a prerequisite for preventing conflict and supporting consistent policy implementation. However, there are still obstacles in terms of digital infrastructure, especially in remote villages. Limited access to the internet and communication devices impacts the effectiveness of reporting and coordination. Although the government has prepared an information system and online communication groups, not all regions can utilize them optimally. Therefore, in the future, it is necessary to strengthen technological infrastructure and equalize the distribution of resources so that policy implementation runs more efficiently and evenly across all program target areas.

The characteristics of the implementing organization are one of the key factors in the successful implementation of policies, according to Van Meter and Van Horn. In the context of the Program Desa Sarjana in Malinau Regency, the Community and Village Empowerment Agency (DPMD) is the leading actor in coordinating, facilitating, and playing a technical role in implementing the program. Research shows that the DPMD has a well-organized structure with clear roles and responsibilities and a strong institutional commitment to supporting this policy as part of the regional development strategy. However, the commitment and collaborative spirit shown by the DPMD and other regional apparatus are the main strengths in maintaining the program's sustainability. Values such as cross-sector collaboration, village participation, and orientation towards social change have begun to be embedded in the character of the implementing organizations. By strengthening internal coordination and improving human resource capacity, the implementing organizations are expected to become the main drivers of institutional transformation in villages through the presence of graduates as change agents.

The attitude and commitment of the implementers are one of the determining factors in policy implementation's effectiveness, as Van Meter and Van Horn explained. In implementing the Program Desa Sarjana in Malinau Regency, the Community and Village Empowerment Agency (DPMD) has shown high institutional commitment. This is reflected in the active role of the DPMD in drafting technical regulations, conducting comprehensive socialization to villages, and ensuring the allocation of an annual budget through the APBD. The involvement of all elements in the organizational structure, from officials to technical staff, shows that implementing the program is not just an administrative routine but has been internalized as a collective responsibility.

In the field, implementers have shown a responsive and proactive attitude in handling the implementation dynamics. Despite facing challenges such as limited communication infrastructure in remote areas and quota distribution issues, the DPMD continues to run the program with a participatory and flexible approach. Intensive coordination with village governments and partner universities reflects the implementers' readiness to maintain program continuity and ensure maximum achievement of policy objectives. This solution-oriented attitude proves the implementers are sensitive to their assigned areas' social and geographical realities. According to Van Meter and Van Horn, inter-organizational communication is one of the important variables in the successful implementation of policies. In the context of the Program Desa Sarjana in Malinau Regency, the study results show that communication between policy implementers has been established quite well. As the leading implementer, the Community and Village Empowerment Agency (DPMD) has established intensive coordination with BAPPEDA, the sub-district government, and the village government. This synergy is reflected in every implementation stage, from planning, participant selection, monitoring, to program evaluation.

Holding coordination meetings and technical forums, as well as using various communication channels—both formal and informal—helps facilitate the exchange of information and the resolution of problems in the field. The

communication established is not one-way, but participatory, where each stakeholder can convey input and obstacles. This approach shows that communication is a tool for directing technical implementation and a forum for mutual learning for implementers at various levels. In addition to communication between implementing agencies, program implementers, and beneficiaries, namely students, are responsive and open. Students not only act as recipients of information, but also actively provide feedback, which the DPMD then follows up with a solution-oriented approach. This indicates that communication has been used as an instrument of empowerment, not merely for delivering administrative instructions. However, challenges are still found in villages with limited digital communication infrastructure. This impacts the smooth reporting and coordination from the field to the implementing center. Therefore, efforts are needed to increase the use of information technology and develop a more systematic and inclusive communication system. Overall, inter-organizational communication in the implementation of the Program Desa Sarjana has been a significant force supporting the smooth and effective implementation, while strengthening the legitimacy of the program in the eyes of stakeholders and the village community.

The external environment is an important factor in the policy implementation framework, according to Van Meter and Van Horn, as it includes variables beyond the direct control of the implementers, but significantly affects the effectiveness of program implementation. In the context of the Sarjana Village Program in Malinau Regency, the geographical conditions of hilly areas, forests, and remote villages on the border pose a significant challenge. Limited transportation access, lack of electricity, and uneven digital infrastructure cause obstacles in communication, supervision, and reporting of program activities in the field. In addition to geographical aspects, social and cultural factors also significantly influence the success of implementation. The fact that there are still villages that have never proposed participants for the Program Desa Sarjana shows a low level of awareness of the importance of higher education. The community's habit of working after graduating from junior high school or high school and the lack of inspirational figures from educated circles reinforce the view that education is not a primary need. This indicates that the policy's success depends not only on institutional readiness but also on the suitability of the approach to local social values. Policy implementation strategies need to adapt to the socio-cultural conditions of rural communities. Program communication must be persuasive and culturally based, for example, through the role of traditional leaders, village heads, or successful alums of the Desa Sarjana Program as agents of change. With this approach, a collective awareness will be created regarding the importance of higher education in improving the quality of life of the village community. This adaptation is key to addressing social challenges that cannot be solved by a bureaucratic approach alone. The political commitment of regional heads is one of the most crucial factors in supporting the implementation of the Program Desa Sarjana in Malinau Regency. This program was born directly from the strategic vision of regional heads who prioritize improving the quality of human resources as the primary focus of regional development, especially in rural areas with limited access to higher education. This commitment is reflected in support for policies, the allocation of regional budgets, and the strengthening of coordination across regional agencies to implement the program sustainably. Within the framework of policy implementation, according to Van Meter and Van Horn, the political commitment of local leaders can be understood as part of a supportive external environment that can influence the attitudes and performance of implementers in the field. When regional heads pay serious attention to a program, the policy orientation will become the shared focus of the entire bureaucracy, at the regency, sub-district, and village levels. This directly impacts the direction of related OPD policies, the acceleration of decision-making, and the readiness of resources to support the program's success.

Furthermore, political commitment is a major driver for maintaining program continuity despite technical, geographical, or socio-cultural challenges. In the context of Malinau District, which has a large and diverse geographical area, the commitment of the regional head determines the strategic direction so that human resource development is not only focused on the central area, but is evenly distributed to the most remote villages. Therefore, the regional head's political commitment can be considered a policy driver that ensures the continuity and consistency of the implementation of the Program Desa Sarjana amid the dynamics of regional government.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research, data analysis, and discussion that have been carried out, it can be concluded that the implementation of the Program Desa Sarjana in Malinau Regency, which is based on Malinau Regency Regulation

Number 7 of 2022, has shown significant progress in efforts to equalize access to higher education for rural communities. This program is a concrete form of the local government's commitment to realizing a vision of development based on improving local human resources (HR). Policy Standards and Objectives have been clearly formulated in the Regional Regulation and Regency Regulation. The objective is to increase the number of college graduates from villages and present them as agents of change who can accelerate village development in an inclusive, independent, and locally-based manner.

Available resources include human resources, the regional budget, regulatory instruments, and reporting systems. Budgetary support reflects the government's political commitment to human resource development. However, the distribution of resources and the accessibility of technical infrastructure are not yet evenly spread across all rural areas. The characteristics of the implementing organization, DPMD Kab Malinau, show an active, open, and comprehensive institutional structure in coordinating the program. Although there are challenges regarding limited technical human resources, the bureaucratic structure has worked synergistically through forming an implementing committee and a dynamic village graduate secretariat. The attitude and commitment of the implementers show high dedication, from the head of the agency, technical staff, to sub-district and village officials. The implementers organize socialization, assist participants, and maintain program sustainability amid rugged geographical terrain. Inter-organizational communication has been established in a participatory and effective manner, both vertically and horizontally. Coordination forums, online communication groups, and informal communication patterns are the main instruments that maintain connectivity between implementers, village governments, and program participants.

The external environment poses a significant challenge to the implementation of this program. Among these challenges are the difficult geographical conditions of Malinau Regency, which is difficult to reach, uneven basic infrastructure, and the culture of the village community, which still prioritizes work over higher education. The political commitment of regional heads is the primary foundation supporting the implementation of the Village Scholars Program. From planning to execution in the field, regional heads have strongly supported this policy. This is reflected in drafting regulations, budget allocation, and the direction of village human resource development policies, which are prioritized in the RPJMD. The consistency of this political support has created a collective spirit at the OPD, sub-district, and village levels, as well as strong legitimacy among the community. However, the program's success, which is highly dependent on the local government leader, also risks its sustainability if not institutionalized systematically.

Malinau Regency Regulation Number 7 of 2022 and Regent Regulation Number 7 of 2024 are the leading legal forces supporting the program's sustainable implementation. These regulations guide all implementing parties, including village officials, technical OPDs, and prospective program participants. With a strong legal basis, the program's implementation has a clear direction and is administratively accountable. However, the existence of these regulations still requires strengthening in terms of technical implementation in the field so that the implementation is in accordance with the principles of effectiveness and accountability. One of the most significant supporting factors for this program is the relatively large regional budget allocation prioritized to finance all stages of the program. The Malinau Regency Budget provides fiscal space that allows for the financing of scholarships, operational costs, and village human resource development. In addition, implementing organizations such as the DPMD and villages are vital in selecting, socializing, coaching, and monitoring program participants. However, the available quota is still limited and has not been able to reach all villages evenly every fiscal year, resulting in disparities in access between regions.

In several villages, there has been growing awareness of the importance of higher education as a path to improving the quality of life and village development. The community's enthusiasm, which has been exposed to the success of program alums, has encouraged active participation in this program. However, in general, many villagers still do not consider higher education necessary. The culture of working from a young age, limited Knowledge about the academic world, and perceptions of costs and risks mean that higher education is not prioritized. This is a significant obstacle to achieving the "one graduate per village." The geographical location of Malinau Regency, which consists of remote and hard-to-reach villages, poses a unique challenge to implementing the program. Limited road access,

minimal internet coverage, and the absence of electricity in some areas make regular program socialization, monitoring, and reporting difficult. In addition, the suboptimal monitoring and evaluation system poses the risk of information delays, data manipulation, and weak program accountability. This condition calls for technological innovation and strengthening digital reporting systems to make program implementation more transparent and measurable.

Based on these conclusions, the researchers offer the following suggestions for evaluation and improvement of the Village Program for Bachelor's Degree Holders ( ) in the future, including: Strengthening the evaluation and periodic review mechanisms so that policies remain relevant to the needs of the village and developments in higher education. Involving community leaders, academics, and local stakeholders in the evaluation process to ensure that policies align with the socio-cultural context of Malinau. Improving the distribution of digital infrastructure in remote villages, including internet access and the availability of communication devices, and organizing ongoing training for the implementation team, village officials, and program participants to strengthen human resource capacity. Establish special monitoring and evaluation units at the sub-district level to accelerate coordination and follow-up in the field. Hold regular forums and alums meetings to share experiences and build a network to support the program. Expand outreach methods by utilizing local media (village radio, cultural performances, traditional gatherings) to reach communities that do not have access to digital media. Develop a simple application-based information system that can still be accessed in areas with limited internet connectivity. Overcome cultural resistance to higher education through approaches involving traditional leaders, religious leaders, and local wisdom-based education programs. Optimize logistical support in challenging areas through cross-sector cooperation, including the private sector and security forces. Make the Program Desa Sarjana a model for evidence-based policy by documenting *best practices* as references and expanding strategic cooperation with universities, NGOs, and the private sector to support program sustainability and utilizing digital technology to monitor program achievements and challenges in *real time,* so that the decision-making process is more data-driven.

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