

Participatory Village Governance and the Revitalization of *Gotong Royong* in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Gotong royong (mutual cooperation) serves as the social capital underpinning rural community development in Indonesia. However, modernization, urbanization, and a growing individualistic orientation have led to a decline in gotong royong practices in many villages. This study aims to analyze the role of participatory governance in revitalizing gotong royong within village administration. Employing a qualitative approach with a multiple-case study design in Bungbulang District, Garut, the research explores the interplay between institutional capacity, facilitative leadership, inclusion dynamics (gender and youth), and external actor interventions. Informants included village government officials, the Village Consultative Body (BPD), community leaders, and representatives of women, youth, and NGOs. The findings indicate that the revitalization of gotong royong is driven by facilitative leadership, transparency, and inclusive deliberative spaces. However, the study also identifies the risk of state co-optation, where the formalization of gotong royong potentially erodes organic cooperation. The research produces a Social Capital Based Participatory Governance Model complete with a matrix of operational indicators and recommends a mixed-methods approach for future research across broader geographical areas.

Keywords: participatory governance, mutual cooperation, village governance, social capital, collective action.

INTRODUCTION

Village development constitutes a strategic agenda within national development. The enactment of Law No. 6 of 2014 as amended by Law No. 3 of 2024 concerning Villages has shifted the paradigm from a centralized approach to one of participatory governance. Villages are now positioned as subjects possessing autonomous authority. However, the implementation of this autonomy often gives rise to structural tension between village independence and a reliance on interventions and capacity-building assistance from higher levels of government or external actors (such as NGOs and development agencies).

On the other hand, the implementation of participatory governance often gets bogged down in procedural formalities. Decision-making remains dominated by local elites. Furthermore, the involvement of women and youth frequently amounts to little more than meeting administrative requirements serving as a mere "technical flourish" rather than representing substantive, deliberative participation. At the same time, the erosion of social capital and a shift toward transactional relationships continue to undermine the culture of gotong royong (mutual cooperation).

It is important to note that the institutionalization of gotong royong (mutual cooperation) by village governments does not always yield positive results. When gotong royong is rigidly codified into formal village programs, there is a risk of state co-optation that can actually stifle organic initiative and citizen voluntarism. Furthermore, the advent of the digital transformation era presents both challenges and opportunities: to what extent can digital media and village e-governance complement or perhaps displace the tradition of face-to-face deliberation?

Most previous studies have examined governance, social capital, and participation in isolation. This research addresses that gap in the literature by critically analyzing how participatory governance revitalizes gotong royong taking into account gender dynamics, the role of youth, the functions of external actors, the challenges of digitalization, and the potential negative impacts of formal institutionalization.

From the perspectives of collective action and social capital, gotong royong is built upon trust, norms of reciprocity, local leadership, and social networks. Therefore, its revitalization requires participatory governance capable of creating spaces for participation, strengthening trust, and fostering collaboration between the village government and the community.

Most previous studies have examined village governance capacity, local leadership, or community participation in isolation; meanwhile, research explaining how participatory governance revitalizes gotong royong remains limited, particularly studies that integrate perspectives on participatory governance, collective action, and social capital within the context of village governance in Indonesia.

Against this backdrop, this study aims to analyze how participatory governance reshapes gotong royong practices through the interplay of village government institutional capacity, local leadership, community participation, and social capital. The study proposes a conceptual model illustrating that the revitalization of gotong royong is an outcome of participatory governance, one that builds trust, expands spaces for deliberation, strengthens collaboration, and integrates social capital into village governance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Participatory Governance in Village Government

The evolution of public administration reflects a paradigm shift from "government" to "governance," viewing the conduct of government as the result of collaboration among the government, civil society, the private sector, and other stakeholders. In this paradigm, development success depends not only on government capacity but also on the ability to foster participation, coordination, and collaboration. One emerging approach is participatory governance, which positions the public as a key factor in the planning, implementation, oversight, and evaluation of public policy. According to Fung (2006), participatory governance creates deliberative spaces that enable the public to contribute to decision-making, thereby enhancing policy legitimacy and government accountability.

In the context of village governance, this approach has become increasingly relevant since decentralization policies granted villages broader authority. Village deliberations, participatory development planning, village fund management, and development oversight serve as key instruments for community engagement. However, the effectiveness of these mechanisms is heavily influenced by the institutional capacity of the village government, the quality of local leadership, and the level of community participation. Various studies indicate that participatory forums often remain merely procedural and dominated by local elites, failing to foster truly inclusive participation. Therefore, participatory governance must be understood as an institutional process that builds transparency, accountability, collaboration, and trust between the village government and the community.

2. Revitalizing gotong royong as a Form of Collective Action

Gotong royong represents a form of social capital that has long characterized Indonesian society, as well as a form of collective action enabling communities to voluntarily resolve shared issues. From a public administration perspective, the sustainability of gotong royong is influenced by the interplay among local institutions, social norms, leadership, and mutual trust.

Ostrom (1990) explains that the success of collective action depends on the ability of institutions to establish shared rules, coordination mechanisms, and oversight systems that are accepted by all community members. Thus, community cooperation is determined not only by individual motivation but also by the quality of governance regulating the relationships among the actors involved.

Social changes driven by modernization, urbanization, economic transformation, the advancement of information technology, and a growing individualistic orientation have diminished the intensity of gotong royong in many villages. Social relationships that were once voluntary have increasingly shifted toward transactional interactions. This situation reflects an erosion of social capital and a weakening of the community's capacity to engage in collective action. Consequently, revitalizing gotong royong should not be viewed merely as the preservation of tradition, but rather as a process of rebuilding the community's ability to collaborate, fostered through the strengthening of local institutions, inclusive leadership, citizen participation, and governance that bolsters public trust.

3. Social Capital and Trust in Governance

Social capital is a crucial concept for explaining the success of community-based development. Coleman (1988) defines social capital as a resource formed through social relationships, shared norms, and trust that facilitates cooperation. Putnam (2000) adds that communities with high levels of trust possess a greater collective capacity to resolve public issues.

In village governance, social capital strengthens the relationship between the village government and the community. Trust in the government encourages citizen participation in development, while trust among residents fosters voluntary cooperation. Conversely, low levels of trust hinder collaboration, even when participatory mechanisms are in place. Thus, social capital is not merely a characteristic of the community; it is a decisive factor in the effectiveness of participatory governance in generating collective action. The higher the level of trust that develops, the greater the likelihood that the revitalization of gotong royong will be sustained.

4. Synthesis of Previous Research

Studies on participatory governance, local leadership, social capital, and village development have expanded significantly within the field of public administration. Ansell and Gash (2008) demonstrate that the success of collaborative governance is influenced by facilitative leadership, trust-building, and stakeholder dialogue. Fung (2006) asserts that public participation through deliberative processes enhances the quality of public decisions, while Bovaird (2007) emphasizes the importance of co-production between government and the public in improving the quality of public services. In the Indonesian context, Antlöv et al. (2016) explain that the implementation of the Village Law opens up opportunities for the development of more participatory village governance. However, the study focuses more on institutional changes than on the mechanisms by which participatory governance rebuilds collective action in the form of gotong royong.

On the other hand, Coleman (1988), Putnam (2000), and Ostrom (1990) emphasize the importance of social capital, trust, and local institutions in fostering community cooperation. However, these studies have not specifically integrated the concepts of participatory governance, collective action, and social capital to explain the revitalization of gotong royong within the context of village governance in Indonesia. Furthermore, most research employs a quantitative approach that prioritizes relationships between variables, thereby failing to reveal the institutional dynamics, power relations, deliberative processes, and trust-building mechanisms that underpin the success or failure of participatory governance.

5. Research Gap and Research Contribution

A synthesis of the literature reveals three key gaps. First, prior research has largely focused on participatory governance in the context of improving public services, transparency, and accountability, whereas studies regarding its role in revitalizing gotong royong as a form of collective action remain limited. Second, village government capacity, local leadership, community participation, and social capital have generally been examined as isolated factors, failing to elucidate the mechanisms of interaction among them in rebuilding gotong royong. Third, the dominance of quantitative approaches has resulted in a lack of in-depth insight into social dynamics, power relations, deliberative processes, and the formation of trust.

Addressing this gap, this study proposes a Social Capital-Based Participatory Governance Model. The model posits that the revitalization of gotong royong emerges from the interaction between village government

institutional capacity, facilitative leadership, inclusive community participation, and the strengthening of social capital through participatory governance processes. Unlike previous studies that view gotong royong primarily as a cultural heritage, this research positions it as an outcome of governance capable of building trust, strengthening collaboration, and generating sustainable collective action.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach with a multiple-case study design across several villages in Bungbulang District, Garut Regency. The research sites were selected purposively to illustrate variations in institutional capacity and levels of citizen participation.

The research was conducted in several villages within Bungbulang District, Garut Regency, West Java Province. These locations were selected purposively because they retain values of gotong royong while facing challenges related to modernization, social change, and economic transformation. Furthermore, the villages exhibit variations in governance capacity, the quality of local leadership, levels of community participation, and development outcomes, thereby providing a suitable context for comparative analysis.

Informants were selected using an expanded purposive sampling method, comprising: the village head, village officials, the Village Consultative Body (BPD), community and religious leaders, representatives from women's organizations (PKK/women's farmer groups) and youth organizations (Karang Taruna), as well as representatives from NGOs and external development facilitators. Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews, participant observation at village deliberation forums, and a review of documents (Village Medium-Term Development Plan/RPJM Desa, Village Budget/APBDes, and village digital media platforms).

Data analysis employed the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), involving data reduction, open coding, the formation of thematic categories, and triangulation. To inform future methodological strengthening (future research design), this study also devised an operationalization of qualitative indicators that can be adapted into quantitative survey instruments (mixed-methods approach) to measure levels of trust, network density, and norms of reciprocity.

Data validity is ensured through source and method triangulation, member checking, peer debriefing, and the creation of an audit trail documenting the entire research process. The study also adheres to social research ethics by obtaining informed consent, respecting informants' rights to withdraw at any time, using pseudonyms to protect identity confidentiality, and securely storing data solely for academic purposes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data analysis yielded five key themes explaining the mechanisms by which participatory governance revitalizes gotong royong in village administration. These five themes are interconnected, forming an institutional mechanism that links village government capacity, local leadership, community participation, and social capital to rebuild collective community action.

1. Village Government Institutional Capacity as the Foundation for Participatory Governance.

Research findings indicate that the institutional capacity of village governments serves as the primary foundation for establishing participatory governance. This capacity is reflected not only in the administrative competence of village officials but also in their ability to facilitate communication, coordination, transparency, and public service delivery. Villages with strong institutional capacity are able to conduct open deliberations, provide regular updates on development activities, and create opportunities for community members to voice their aspirations. These conditions foster public trust while simultaneously broadening citizen engagement in the implementation of development initiatives.

Conversely, villages with low institutional capacity exhibit poor inter-institutional coordination, limited capacity among officials to facilitate deliberations, and a lack of transparency in managing development activities. Consequently, some community members view the deliberation process as merely a formality, believing that

decisions have already been predetermined. Several informants noted that community proposals are often not acted upon, leading to a steady decline in interest in attending village deliberations. This situation not only diminishes the effectiveness of governance but also undermines the legitimacy of the village government.

These findings indicate that institutional capacity is a prerequisite for the development of participatory governance. The greater the capabilities of village government organizations, the higher the likelihood of establishing open and collaborative relationships with the community. The study's results support Grindle's (1997) perspective on the importance of institutional capacity for effective governance, while extending it by demonstrating that such capacity also fosters the social trust that underpins collective action. Consequently, efforts to strengthen the capacity of village officials should focus not only on enhancing administrative competence but also on developing skills in public communication, the facilitation of participation, and conflict resolution.

2. Facilitative Leadership as a Driver of Collaboration

The second theme indicates that village head leadership is a decisive factor in developing participatory governance. Village heads who employ a facilitative leadership style tend to foster open communication, actively participate in community activities, and resolve conflicts through deliberation. Such leadership by example cultivates a sense of ownership regarding village development, thereby making the community more willing to participate in gotong royong activities.

Most informants believe that the village head's direct involvement in social activities sets an example showing that development is a shared responsibility. Conversely, in villages where leadership is primarily administrative and distant from the community, resident participation tends to decline. Gotong royong generally occurs only in the context of government programs or external aid, rather than arising from community initiative.

Facilitative leadership also serves a mediating role in resolving conflicts of interest, whether among residents or between the community and the village government. The ability to foster dialogue and reach consensus boosts public trust in the village government, thereby strengthening collaboration in the implementation of development initiatives.

These findings align with the collaborative governance theory proposed by Ansell and Gash (2008), which identifies facilitative leadership as a crucial factor in fostering collaboration among stakeholders. The study extends this theory by demonstrating that facilitative leadership not only generates institutional collaboration but also strengthens the culture of gotong royong (as a form of community collective action). In the context of village governance, local leadership serves as a bridge between formal policies and the social values embedded within the community.

3. Public Participation: From Formal Involvement to Inclusive Deliberation

The third theme reveals that the quality of community participation is more decisive than the mere existence of participatory forums. While village deliberations were indeed held regularly across all research sites, the level of community engagement showed significant variation.

In villages that implement inclusive deliberation, community members have equal opportunities to voice their aspirations, regardless of social standing. Women, youth, farmer groups, and community leaders are involved in establishing development priorities. This process fosters a sense of ownership over collective decisions, leading the community to demonstrate a stronger commitment to implementing development programs through gotong royong.

Conversely, in some villages, local elites dominate the decision-making process. Figures with greater political or economic influence tend to control discussions, while other groups serve merely as formal participants. Consequently, some residents feel their aspirations are disregarded and choose to reduce their involvement in deliberative forums and development activities.

These findings indicate that procedural participation does not necessarily result in effective participatory governance. The success of governance is determined more by the quality of deliberation, the openness of the space for dialogue, and the equitable distribution of opportunities among all societal groups. These results align with Arnstein's (1969) "Ladder of Citizen Participation" concept, which distinguishes between symbolic participation and participation that exerts real influence on decision-making.

This study contributes by demonstrating that inclusive deliberation is a mechanism that transforms formal participation into collective action. When community members feel heard, valued, and capable of influencing public decisions, they are more willing to contribute voluntarily to village development. Thus, the quality of the participatory process emerges as a key factor in revitalizing the practice of gotong royong (mutual cooperation) as a form of social capital that supports sustainable village development.

4. Social Capital as a Driver of Gotong Royong Revitalization

A cross-case analysis indicates that the success of participatory governance is heavily influenced by the quality of social capital within the village community. Social capital is reflected not only in interpersonal relationships among residents but also in the level of trust in the village government, norms of reciprocity, social networks, and collective values that foster cooperation. Villages with strong social capital demonstrate higher levels of community participation in development activities, including infrastructure improvements, environmental sanitation, religious events, and disaster management. Such engagement is generally rooted in the collective awareness that development is a shared responsibility, rather than solely an obligation of the village government.

Conversely, in villages experiencing a decline in social trust, the practice of gotong royong to weaken. Informants revealed that some community members have begun weighing economic benefits before participating in joint activities. This shift from voluntary relationships to more transactional ones has caused various social activities to become increasingly dependent on incentives or support from government programs. These findings indicate that the weakening of gotong royong is not merely a result of cultural change but also reflects a depletion of the social capital that underpins collective action.

This study also finds that trust in the village government plays a role just as important as trust among residents. Village governments perceived as transparent in budget management, open to criticism, and consistent in involving the community achieve higher levels of participation compared to villages with low public trust. Such trust facilitates development coordination, eases conflict resolution through deliberation, and increases the community's willingness to contribute labor, time, and resources to gotong royong activities.

These findings support the social capital theories of Coleman (1988) and Putnam (2000), which position trust, shared norms, and social networks as the foundations of community cooperation. However, this study extends that perspective by demonstrating that social capital is not merely a precondition for development but also an outcome continuously shaped through participatory governance practices. Transparency, inclusive leadership, and open spaces for deliberation are shown to strengthen public trust, thereby generating a virtuous cycle between governance and social capital. Thus, participatory governance does not simply leverage existing social capital; it also actively builds and reproduces it.

5. Social Capital-Based Participatory Governance Model

Based on a cross-case analysis, this study develops a Social Capital-Based Participatory Governance Model. The model explains that the revitalization of gotong royong results from the dynamic interaction among village government institutional capacity, facilitative leadership, inclusive community participation, and the strengthening of social capital.

Institutional capacity serves as the foundation that enables village governments to administer in a transparent, accountable, and responsive manner. This foundation is reinforced by facilitative leadership that fosters communication, mediates conflicts, and establishes equitable relationships between the village government and the community. The interplay of these factors creates an inclusive space for deliberation, ensuring that community members have equal opportunities to voice their aspirations and participate in decision-making.

A high-quality deliberation process further strengthens social capital by fostering greater trust in village government, cultivating norms of cooperation, and establishing tighter social networks. It is this social capital that subsequently drives the community to engage in voluntary collective action through gotong royong. Thus, gotong royong is understood not as an automatic consequence of local culture, but as the outcome of a governance system capable of building trust, collaboration, and shared commitment.

This model also demonstrates a reciprocal relationship between participatory governance and social capital. Quality governance strengthens social capital, while strong social capital enhances governance effectiveness by fostering trust and community participation. This relationship creates a mutually reinforcing cycle, thereby making village development more sustainable.

These findings extend the collaborative governance theory developed by Ansell and Gash (2008) by demonstrating that, within the context of village governance in Indonesia, collaboration not only yields better decisions but also shapes a distinctive form of collective action known as gotong royong. The study also enriches Ostrom's (1990) collective action theory by emphasizing that the effectiveness of local institutions depends not merely on the existence of formal rules, but also on the quality of participatory governance capable of fostering trust and strengthening community social capital.

Conceptually, this study integrates three key perspectives, participatory governance, social capital, and collective action, into a single analytical framework that explains the mechanisms behind the revitalization of gotong royong in village governance. This integration demonstrates that institutional capacity, leadership, participation, and social capital are not isolated factors but rather elements that mutually influence one another in generating collective action.

The practical implications of this research indicate that efforts to strengthen village development cannot rely solely on enhancing the administrative capacity of village officials. Local and village governments need to develop strategies to foster collaborative leadership, expand spaces for inclusive deliberation, enhance governance transparency, and strengthen the participation of women, youth, and vulnerable groups in decision-making processes. Such policies will bolster public trust while creating conditions conducive to the flourishing of gotong royong as a form of social capital for development.

This study makes three key theoretical contributions. First, it expands the study of participatory governance by demonstrating that such governance not only enhances the quality of public decisions but also rebuilds the social capital that underpins collective action. Second, it integrates theories of participatory governance, social capital, and collective action into a single conceptual model explaining the mechanisms behind the revitalization of gotong royong in village governance. Third, it proposes a Social Capital-Based Participatory Governance Model as a conceptual framework suitable for future research and as a reference for formulating village development policies grounded in participation, collaboration, and the strengthening of social capital.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to analyze the role of participatory governance in revitalizing gotong royong (within village governance in Indonesia). The findings indicate that the revitalization of gotong royong is not determined solely by the presence of local cultural values but is the result of a governance system capable of fostering collaborative relationships between the village government and the community. The institutional capacity of the village government serves as the primary foundation for achieving transparent, responsive, and accountable governance, thereby enhancing public trust. Furthermore, facilitative leadership plays a role in strengthening communication, mediating conflicts, and building shared commitment regarding development implementation.

This study also demonstrates that the quality of community participation is more important than the quantitative level of participation. Inclusive and deliberative village deliberations foster a sense of ownership regarding development decisions and encourage community involvement in gotong royong. Conversely, the dominance of local elites results in merely symbolic participation and weakens collective commitment. Other findings indicate that social capital, specifically trust, norms of reciprocity, and social networks, serve as the mechanism linking participatory governance to the emergence of collective action. Based on these findings, the study develops a

Social Capital-Based Participatory Governance Model, which explains that the revitalization of gotong royong results from the interaction among institutional capacity, facilitative leadership, inclusive community participation, and the strengthening of social capital.

Theoretically, this study extends the study of participatory governance by demonstrating that participatory governance not only enhances the quality of decision-making but also builds social capital as a foundation for collective action. It also integrates perspectives on participatory governance, social capital, and collective action into a single conceptual framework that explains the mechanisms behind the revitalization of gotong royong within village governance.

In practical terms, the research findings underscore the importance of strengthening the capacity of village officials, fostering collaborative leadership, expanding spaces for inclusive deliberation, and enhancing transparency and accountability to bolster public trust and encourage sustained participation. As this study was limited to select villages in Bungbulang District, Garut Regency, and employed a qualitative approach, the findings are context-specific. Consequently, future research is encouraged to test this conceptual model using quantitative or mixed-methods approaches across a broader geographical area, as well as to explore the impact of digital transformation and technology-enabled village governance on public participation, social capital, and the revitalization of gotong royong.

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