



Bridging Formal and Customary Institutions: How District Mentoring Shapes Good Governance in Village Fund Management in Agam Regency

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Abstract. This study examines how district-level mentoring translates good-governance principles into village fund management within the dual formal-customary institutional setting of Agam Regency, West Sumatra. A qualitative embedded case-study design was used in three nagari representing different mentoring intensities. Data were obtained from 14 purposively selected informants through semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and limited non-participant observation, and were analyzed using an interactive process of data condensation, display, and verification. The findings show that mentoring generated the clearest improvements in transparency and formal accountability, particularly through more regular disclosure, timely financial reporting, and consistent use of Siskeudes. Participation remained uneven and often procedural, while regulatory compliance depended strongly on administrative capacity. Cross-case comparison further indicates that mentoring quality and continuity, rather than visit frequency alone, explain differences in governance outcomes. Facilitators who maintained sustained contact and understood local customary relations were more effective in encouraging inclusive deliberation. The study positions district mentoring as an institutional bridge that connects formal regulatory demands with local governance practices. Strengthening facilitator capacity, inter-institutional coordination, and context-sensitive assistance is therefore essential for more substantive and sustainable village fund governance.

Keywords: Customary Institutions; District Mentoring; Good Governance; Nagari; Village Fund Management.

1. INTRODUCTION

Village funds are a major instrument of decentralized rural development in Indonesia, but their effectiveness depends on governance capacity rather than fiscal transfer alone. Recent studies identify persistent weaknesses in accountability, community participation, administrative capacity, and coordination, even where formal reporting requirements are fulfilled (Anam et al., 2023; Alvin, 2025; Wardhani et al., 2025). These problems are especially relevant in West Sumatra because nagari government operates alongside customary institutions that shape local authority, deliberation, and social legitimacy. Informal relations can therefore support or constrain the implementation of formal village-fund rules (Viona et al., 2020).

Good governance in village financial management is reflected in transparency, accountability, participation, and rule-of-law compliance. Transparency concerns timely public access to budget and expenditure information; accountability includes responsibility to supervisory institutions and citizens; participation requires meaningful influence in decision making; and the rule of law requires consistent compliance with financial procedures. Digital tools such as Siskeudes can strengthen reporting, but standardized systems cannot fully address unequal competence, weak public access, or local power asymmetries (Maharani & Widodo, 2024). District mentoring is therefore important because it can combine technical assistance, capacity development, monitoring, and interpretation of regulatory requirements. This study

examines mentoring by the Community and Nagari Empowerment Office of Agam Regency as an institutional bridge between formal regulation and customary local governance. Its novelty lies in comparing three nagari with different mentoring intensities and linking mentoring quality to four governance outcomes. The analysis asks how good-governance principles are implemented, how district mentoring shapes their implementation, and which conditions enable or constrain effective mentoring. The study argues that mentoring outcomes depend not merely on the number of visits but on continuity, facilitator competence, and the ability to work within the formal-customary institutional setting.

2. THEORETICAL REVIEW

Good governance offers a framework for evaluating how public resources are planned, implemented, reported, and supervised. Village-fund research shows that administrative accountability can improve more rapidly than public participation because reporting procedures are easier to standardize than local power relations (Putri et al., 2024; Wardhani et al., 2025). This distinction is central to the present study: procedural compliance is treated as necessary but insufficient evidence of substantive governance quality.

Collaborative-governance theory emphasizes sustained interaction, facilitative leadership, trust, and coordination among public institutions and community actors (Ansell & Gash, 2008). In the nagari setting, district mentoring can connect the district office, nagari government, consultative bodies, customary institutions, and citizens. Mentoring is therefore conceptualized as an institutional bridge that translates regulation into local administrative practice while accommodating the social relations that influence deliberation. The expected effect is strongest on observable procedures such as disclosure and reporting, while participation is expected to change more slowly.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

A qualitative embedded case-study design was used in Agam Regency, West Sumatra. Three nagari were selected purposively to represent differences in mentoring intensity and regularity, administrative capacity and geographic accessibility, and the presence of active customary institutions. Fourteen key informants were involved: four officials of the Community and Nagari Empowerment Office, five representatives of nagari government, three members of consultative or customary bodies, and two community figures. Their experience in village-fund management or mentoring ranged from three to twelve years. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews of approximately 45-90 minutes, analysis of

financial reports, mentoring records, musyawarah minutes and accountability documents, and limited non-participant observation. Data were analyzed through iterative data condensation, display, and conclusion drawing and verification (Miles et al., 2014), with cross-case themes organized around transparency, accountability, participation, rule-of-law compliance, and mentoring conditions. Trustworthiness was strengthened through triangulation of interviews, documents, and observations, member verification with selected informants, and reflexive notes. The study seeks analytical rather than statistical generalization, consistent with case-study research (Yin, 2018).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Implementation of Good-Governance Principles

Transparency showed the clearest improvement. Nagari receiving more intensive mentoring disclosed budget information more regularly through information boards, musyawarah forums, and digital communication channels. Formal accountability also strengthened through timely realization reports, document verification, and consistent use of Siskeudes. However, downward accountability remained limited because detailed expenditure information was still concentrated in formal forums. Participation was more uneven: all cases conducted musyawarah, yet influence over priorities was broader in the intensively mentored nagari and more procedural in the other cases. Rule-of-law compliance depended heavily on administrative competence, especially when regulations changed or supporting documents required correction. These patterns confirm that formal systems can strengthen reporting while deeper governance dimensions remain capacity- and context-dependent (Alvin, 2025; Putri et al., 2024).

Table 1. Cross-Case Pattern of Good-Governance Implementation.

Principle	Nagari A Intensive	Nagari B Moderate	Nagari C Limited
Transparency	Strong; multi-channel disclosure	Moderate; basic disclosure	Weak-moderate; less consistent
Accountability	Strong formal; moderate downward	Strong formal; weak downward	Moderate formal; weak downward
Participation	More inclusive and deliberative	Mostly procedural	Procedural; elite-centered
Rule of law	High formal compliance	Moderate compliance	Capacity-constrained

Mentoring as an Institutional Mechanism

Cross-case comparison indicates that mentoring quality and continuity matter more than the mere existence of a mentoring program. Intensive mentoring involved repeated contact, review of draft reports, technical consultation, and follow-up when problems emerged. Under these conditions, errors were corrected earlier and officials were more likely to seek

clarification before making financial decisions. Episodic or mainly administrative mentoring produced more fragmented improvement. This supports evidence that institutional capacity is strengthened more effectively through sustained assistance than through isolated training (Magfiroh, 2025). The mechanism is relational as well as technical: facilitators who remained accessible could coordinate across district and nagari institutions and prevent small administrative problems from becoming compliance failures.

Formal-Customary Institutional Dynamics

The findings also show why technical guidance alone does not produce substantive participation. Formal rules determine procedures and reporting, whereas customary relations influence who speaks, whose proposals are prioritized, and how disagreement is expressed. In the intensively mentored case, facilitators who understood local customary relations were better able to encourage broader discussion without positioning regulatory requirements against adat authority. Where mentoring concentrated on documents and deadlines, musyawarah could satisfy formal requirements while remaining dominated by familiar actors. This supports Viona et al. (2020) and extends collaborative-governance theory by showing that mentoring becomes an institutional bridge only when facilitators can operate in both administrative and social domains.

Enabling and Constraining Factors

Effective mentoring was supported by facilitator commitment, cooperative nagari leadership, Siskeudes and routine digital communication, and continuing access to consultation. The principal constraints were limited district staffing, uneven administrative literacy, geographic distance, and customary hierarchies that restricted broader participation. These interacting conditions explain why identical formal mandates produced different outcomes across cases (Wardhani et al., 2025). Mentoring should therefore be differentiated: lower-capacity nagari require more frequent technical review, while better-established administrations can receive greater support for downward accountability and substantive participation. Coordination between the empowerment office, supervisory institutions, and nagari governments is also needed to ensure consistent guidance.

Implications

Theoretically, the study distinguishes between procedural governance gains and changes in local power relations. Transparency and formal accountability respond relatively quickly because they can be converted into documents, information channels, and reporting routines; meaningful participation changes more slowly because it requires broader voice and agenda influence. Practically, district governments should evaluate mentoring not only by visit

frequency or completed reports but also by disclosure quality, citizen access to information, inclusiveness of deliberation, and local problem-solving capacity. Facilitators therefore need both financial-regulatory competence and skills in communication and customary-institution engagement.

Research Limitations and Future Directions

The study is limited to three nagari in one regency and therefore does not represent the full institutional diversity of village governance in West Sumatra or Indonesia. Data were derived primarily from interviews and documents with limited observation, so longer ethnographic engagement could reveal informal negotiation processes that are less visible in formal forums. The analysis also focused on four core governance principles and did not examine responsiveness, equity, or service outcomes in equal depth. These boundaries are important because studies in other Indonesian settings report different relationships among transparency, accountability, participation, and public trust (Suhardi et al., 2023; Yudastio & Azriya, 2023).

Future research should extend the comparison across regencies with different customary and administrative arrangements, follow mentoring relationships longitudinally, and combine qualitative process evidence with measures of financial performance, citizen satisfaction, and participation quality. A wider comparative design would help test whether the institutional-bridge role of district mentoring remains robust when local capacity, digital infrastructure, and political relations differ. Systematic evidence on village-fund governance also suggests that institutional strengthening must be evaluated in relation to sustainable development outcomes, providing an additional direction for future research (Kurniawati et al., 2024).

5. CONCLUSION

District mentoring contributes to better village-fund governance in Agam Regency, particularly by improving transparency, formal accountability, reporting discipline, and use of Siskeudes. Its effect on substantive participation and regulatory compliance is less uniform because these dimensions depend on administrative capacity and local institutional relations. The main conclusion is that mentoring quality, continuity, and contextual sensitivity are more decisive than visit frequency alone. District agencies should adopt continuous and differentiated mentoring, strengthen facilitator competence, and improve coordination with nagari and supervisory institutions. Future research should compare more regencies and use

longitudinal or mixed-method designs to test whether the institutional-bridge mechanism persists across different village-governance settings.

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