



REVIVING THE VILLAGE MEDIUM-TERM DEVELOPMENT PLAN (RPJM DESA)



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Villages' obligation to formulate the village medium-term development plan (RPJM Desa) should not be a mere legal formality. RPJM Desa substantially needs to be drafted, as it is

- a manifestation of village independence,
- an acknowledgement of the village's technocratic capacity to determine the development needs in its region, and
- an evaluation tool for the supravillage government at all levels and the village community.

However, almost four years into the implementation of Village Law, this substance has much been neglected. The study in ten villages in five *kabupaten* (districts) shows that RPJM Desa is only drafted as a formality, thus

- it does not provide clear development direction and goals,
- it is not inclusive of the interests of the marginalized, and
- it does not serve as a reference for annual planning.

This policy brief recommends the need for efforts to

- increase the technocratic capacity of village governments and communities to identify the issues, potentials, and needs of their villages as the basis for formulating the development direction;
- supervise the process of formulating RPJM Desa in order to ensure the inclusion of all interests of the village community, especially the marginalized;
- ensure that the capacity to facilitate participatory planning is well mastered by village facilitators in order to be able to achieve the substantial aspects of village planning, especially RPJM Desa; and
- reduce regulations on Village Fund that are inherently to direct and change them with those that list down criteria for activities or compile a negative list.

The Village Law Policy Brief Series is published periodically based on the Village Governance and Community Empowerment Study undertaken in ten villages located in five *kabupaten* in three provinces of Indonesia. This qualitative study was conducted by The SMERU Research Institute with the support of Local Solutions to Poverty between September 2015 and April 2018.

The Importance of RPJM Desa

As the main document for development planning, the village medium-term development plan (RPJM Desa) is not foreign to villages. Since 2008, villages within the coverage of the National Program for Community Empowerment (PNPM) have been requested to draft RPJM Desa. However, villages' capacity to realize such plan is still limited, as they are still dependent on funding from the supravillage government. Additionally, villages have only limited control over resources to support their development priorities.¹ Such limitation exists due to the fact that in the past village-related matters fell under the authority of the supravillage government, where village governments were also positioned at the lowest level of the overall government structure.

In line with the enactment of Law No. 6/2014 on Villages (Village Law), all villages are required to draft development plans, consisting of RPJM Desa and village government work plan (RKP Desa). RPJM Desa contains the elaboration of the vision and mission of the elected village head and the village development planning policy direction for a period of six years. Meanwhile, RKP Desa is the elaboration of RPJM Desa covering a one-year period. With such stipulation, RPJM Desa is the only reference for village development planning.

Aside from being required by Village Law, RPJM Desa is important for villages for three considerations: (i) independence, (ii) technocracy, and (iii) accountability.

Independence. Village Law acknowledges villages' authority to regulate and manage the interests of the community and the governance of their region. Receiving such acknowledgement, villages have the authority to design plans according to their needs. This means that RPJM Desa is a manifestation of village independence in determining development design.

Such independence is supported by the guarantee of authority and access to resources. As they exercise their authority, villages regularly receive certain amounts of funding from the central and regional governments. Village assets, such as village markets, boat moorings, village forests, etc. are acknowledged; this also applies to access to resources such as forests, rivers, and other natural resources. The authority and access should be governed to improve the village. RPJM Desa is important as a means of organizing both of them in a systematic, integrated, and focused development design.

Technocracy. RPJM Desa needs to be made to emphasize the goals and plans of the village development during the elected village head's term. The Implementing Regulation for Village Law states that RPJM Desa should be finalized at the latest three months after the village head is inaugurated.² Undoubtedly, this document is the first task of a village head

after taking office. Even though RPJM Desa is the elaboration of the vision and mission of the village head, its drafting and stipulation should be carried out jointly with the Village Consultative Body (BPD) and the community through the village deliberation meeting (*musdes*).³

Involving the community in the process of drafting the RPJM Desa should not merely be perceived as applying the principle of participatory planning, but also as acknowledging the collective capacity of the community to review the state of their own region. Action plans are also formulated collectively in RPJM Desa based on the community's review in order that development can run effectively and meet its goals. In other words, through their participation in formulating RPJM Desa, village stakeholders are acknowledged as "technocrats", who are the most knowledgeable about their region and its needs.

Accountability. From the regulatory perspective, the existence of RPJM Desa becomes one of the indicators for assessing village development.⁴ Moreover, in many *kabupaten*, RPJM Desa is one of the requisites for withdrawing funds that are transferred from the supravillage government to villages every year. RPJM Desa must also be enclosed when a village submits a development proposal seeking funding from the supravillage government budget. In short, RPJM Desa must exist if villages wish to receive funding and/or a "share" of the supravillage government's development.

For villages, being the only reference document, RPJM Desa is mandatory when the village government develops the annual work plan (RKP Desa). Additionally, RPJM Desa can also serve as a tool for the community to evaluate their government, i.e., when responding to the report on the implementation of development that is presented by the village head each year (Article 82 section 5 of Village Law).

RPJM Desa Issues

In its implementation, the important purpose of RPJM Desa, as outlined above, is neglected. The orientation of village planning tends to be pragmatic; thus RPJM Desa has not been effective to solve fundamental issues in villages. What is worse is that RPJM Desa is only viewed as an administrative formality to meet the requisites that are outlined by the supravillage government.

1. RPJM Desa has not provided direction for and goals of the village development.

In the process of drafting the RPJM Desa document, villages are currently "low on ideas"; they are unable to formulate ideas as to where to lead the villages in the medium term. Subsequently, there has not been a policy design or strategy. However, there is a tendency displayed by village heads to take a populist stand in order to please everyone by

¹ Wetterberg, Anna, Leni Dharmawan, and Jon Jellema (2013) 'Studi Kelembagaan Tingkat Lokal Ke-3' [Local-Level Institution Study 3]. Final report. Coordinating Ministry of People's Welfare in cooperation with TNP2K and PNPM Support Facility [online] <<http://microdata.worldbank.org/index.php/catalog/1799/download/39349>> [24 September 2018].

² Article 117 section 4 of Government Regulation No. 43/2014 on the Implementing Regulation for Village Law.

³ In Government Regulation No. 43/2014 that was amended with Government Regulation No. 47/2015, "the community" refers to public figures and representatives of community groups (Article 80).

⁴ See Regulation of the Minister for Home Affairs No. 81/2015 on Evaluation of Village and *Kelurahan* (village administrative area located in an urban center) Development.

accommodating all incoming suggestions. Therefore, the planned activities are predominantly the same infrastructure development year after year and are dispersed into small-time activities, hence their economic support lacking.⁵

2. RPJM Desa is not yet inclusive of the interests of the marginalized.

There is a general assumption in the village that the benefits of development should be enjoyed by many people. The application of this criterion has resulted in the interests of marginalized village residents being deprioritized, as they fail to gain much support from the elite-dominated deliberation meeting participants.

3. RPJM Desa has not been the main reference for annual planning and performance evaluation for village heads.

Rather than used as the principal plan, RPJM Desa is often amended to match RKP Desa; during the annual planning, new suggestions that are not yet accommodated in RPJM Desa often arise. Amendments to RPJM Desa are often made to abide by the Regulation of the Minister for Villages, Disadvantaged Regions, and Transmigration on the Priority Usage of Village Funds, which is annually issued. The regulation, which contains priority programs and a list of activities eligible for Village Fund financing, is considered as a policy change that can be used as a basis for amending RPJM Desa.⁶

As it is not consistently used as a planning reference, RPJM Desa does not become a guideline for assessing the performance of village heads, both at the internal level through village deliberation meetings and at the external level by the supravillage government.

Recommendations

1. RPJM Desa should return to its function as a means of developing village technocracy by providing directions for village development policies, thus serving as a reference for the annual planning.

The lack of RPJM Desa's substance as a guideline for policy direction shows that village technocratic capacity is still low. The discussion for drafting RPJM Desa, whether at the village or subvillage level, has not yet been an effective deliberation process.⁷ Consequently, there needs to be supervision for the process of determining the goals and direction of village development. In practice, the deliberation meetings often

skip this process and go straight to collecting suggestions for activities.

Furthermore, the first step in the process that should not be overlooked is the review of the village condition to identify issues, potentials, and needs of the village. By jointly identifying those aspects, all stakeholders are encouraged to focus on drafting the main ideas, which will become the goals and future direction of the village.

For the process to be carried out well, the technocratic capacity of village governments needs to be improved. There needs to be continuous training held by the authorized local government organizations (OPD). Not only training, there should also be effective post-training guidance and supervision. The foremost technocratic capacity that needs to be improved is village governments' capacity to formulate development goals and break them down into measurable plans.

2. The drafting process of RPJM Desa must be supervised so that it can cover the interests of all community members, especially the marginalized ones.

The act of identifying issues needs to be supervised in order to also accommodate the interests of marginalized village residents, such as the poor, considering that one of the purposes of Village Law is to reduce poverty.⁸ Therefore, it is important to carry out effective awareness-raising efforts intended for village governments for the said purpose so that they are willing and able to accommodate the interests of the poor despite the community's perception that development priorities should benefit the many.

The domination of village elites in decision-making seems unavoidable due to the principle of representation in deliberation meetings. Rather than enforcing physical attendance of poor village residents, it is far more important to ensure that their interests are promoted and are included in the list of priorities during the decision-making. The elites who are invited to and are present in the forum should actually receive the mandate from the residents they represent, including the marginalized ones. In order for this to work, village facilitators should be able to oversee meetings at the subvillage level, namely the *dusun* (hamlets), RT (neighborhood units)/RW (units of local administration consisting of several RT), and village community institutions (LKD), in such a way that they become channels for assigning mandates.

⁵ For further reference, read 'Report on Village Law Case Study: Tracing the Benefits of Village Spending' (The SMERU Research Institute, forthcoming).

⁶ According to Article 120 section 1 (b) of Government Regulation No. 43/2014, RPJM Desa may be amended if, among others, "there is a fundamental change to the central, provincial, and/or *kabupaten/kota* [city] governments' policy."

⁷ Mansbridge (2015) stated that at least there are two prerequisites for deliberation to effectively reach a consensus. The first prerequisite is to respect one another. This means that each person is obligated to listen to the argument of another and respond to it with an argument that is acceptable to the other party. The second prerequisite is to be free from the influences of power. Power in this case is in the form of threats and coercion, whereas power in the form of good or persuasive arguments is allowed to be used in the process of deliberation. For more details, see Mansbridge, Jane (2015) 'A Minimalist Definition of Deliberation'. In *Deliberation and Development: Rethinking the Role of Voice and Collective Action in Unequal Societies*. Patrick Heller and Vijayendra Rao (eds.) Washington, DC: World Bank: 35–36 [online] <<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/22167/9781464805011.pdf>> [26 September 2018].

⁸ Each village may formulate specific development goals. However, in general, Article 78 of Village Law states that village development carries the purposes of improving the welfare and quality of life of the village community and reducing poverty through the fulfillment of basic needs, village infrastructure development, the development of the village's local economic potential, and the use of natural and environmental resources in a sustainable manner.



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3. Village facilitators must have the capacity to facilitate a participatory planning process so that the substantive aspects of the village planning, particularly RPJM Desa, can be achieved.

To be able to facilitate the formulation of RPJM Desa well, the facilitators should have the ability to facilitate planning that is based on an effective deliberation process. They have to facilitate meetings down to the subvillage level (*dusun*, RT/RW, LKD) to ensure that the community's interests are not overlooked. The overall process should involve the village government and/or BPD so that the transfer of knowledge and skills of gathering community aspirations can take place.

In regard to this, the supravillage government should set the minimum standards for skills that must be possessed by village facilitators, namely the ability to use necessary tools to facilitate a participatory planning process. Moreover, evaluation on the facilitators' performances needs to be carried out regularly to ensure that they master this skill.

4. The supravillage government at all levels needs to reduce regulations that are directive in nature by changing them with those that list down things not to do so that the content of the RPJM Desa is not "compromised".

The supravillage government at all levels is responsible for maintaining the position of RPJM Desa as a form of village independence. Rather than directing villages to perform a proposed list of activities, the supravillage government should just make a guide as to what should not be implemented (a negative list) and/or describe the criteria for activities that are suitable for developing villages' potentials and meeting their needs.

Still related to this responsibility, the *kabupaten/kota* government needs to intensify its mentoring role. It needs to make the role of village government technical facilitators (PTPD) at the *kecamatan* (subdistrict) level effective in assisting village governments to find programs/ ideas that match the criteria set forth.

To produce new programs/ideas that are suitable for implementation in a village, information on opportunities and challenges available outside the village needs to be presented to the village. This can be done through, among others, the exchange of knowledge among villages, the use of social media to gain inspiration, and the use of available marketing opportunities from e-commerce platforms. Inspiring ideas from the outside need to be adjusted to the village's potentials and needs. ■



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