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Policy Alienation in the Implementation of the Papua Indigenous People Empowerment Program in Sorong City

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the phenomenon of policy alienation in the implementation of the Papua Indigenous People (Orang Asli Papua/OAP) Empowerment Program in Sorong City, West Papua Province, Indonesia. Policy alienation refers to the psychological and structural disconnect experienced by street-level bureaucrats and target groups when implementing or receiving public policies. Using a qualitative descriptive approach with in-depth interviews, observation, and document analysis, this research explores how front-line implementers and indigenous beneficiaries experience alienation across four dimensions: powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, and social isolation. Data were collected from purposively selected informants, including OAP community leaders, local government officials, and program beneficiaries in Sorong City. The findings reveal that policy alienation emerges significantly in the program's implementation, primarily due to the top-down policy design that marginalizes indigenous voices, bureaucratic rigidity, limited participation of OAP communities, and weak coordination among relevant agencies. Front-line workers reported feelings of powerlessness in adapting policies to local cultural contexts, while beneficiaries expressed a sense of meaninglessness due to program outcomes that did not correspond to their actual needs and aspirations. These alienation dynamics ultimately undermine the effectiveness and sustainability of OAP empowerment initiatives. The study contributes theoretically to the policy alienation literature within the Indonesian indigenous people empowerment context and offers practical recommendations for participatory policy redesign to bridge the gap between policy intent and implementation reality.

Keywords: policy alienation, OAP empowerment, indigenous people, street-level bureaucracy, policy implementation

INTRODUCTION

The empowerment of indigenous peoples, particularly the Orang Asli Papua (OAP), represents one of the most complex and politically sensitive policy challenges in Indonesia. Sorong City, as one of the fastest-growing urban centers in West Papua Province, hosts a significant and growing OAP population that faces compounding vulnerabilities: displacement from ancestral lands, limited access to formal employment, educational gaps, and marginalization from the mainstream economic development that the city has experienced (Iriawan & Edyanto, 2023; Sakmaf & Karauwan, 2024). In response, the Indonesian government and local administrations have developed several programs directed specifically at OAP empowerment, ranging from affirmative scholarships and business capital assistance to cultural preservation and health access programs (Prasetyo et al., 2024).

However, the translation of these well-intentioned policies into tangible improvements in OAP welfare has remained elusive. Despite sustained policy commitments and budgetary allocations, empirical reports from Sorong City suggest persistent gaps between program

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objectives and actual outcomes. Questions arise about whether implementers at the operational level genuinely engage with the spirit of these policies or whether they experience a form of detachment, misalignment, or disillusionment, a phenomenon theorized in the public administration literature as policy alienation.

Policy alienation, as conceptualized as to the state in which policy implementers, particularly street-level bureaucrats, feel psychologically disconnected from the policies they are tasked to implement (Usman et al., 2021). This alienation manifests across multiple dimensions: powerlessness (inability to influence policy decisions) (Ranjani et al., 2023), meaninglessness (failure to see the value of the policy) (Xu et al., 2024), normlessness (resort to non-prescribed behaviors) (Lévesque & Benoit, 2025), and social isolation (sense of not belonging to the implementing community). Importantly, policy alienation is not limited to implementers; it can also be experienced by the intended beneficiaries of a policy, especially when communities feel excluded from program design and delivery processes.

The case of OAP empowerment programs in Sorong City presents a particularly rich context for examining policy alienation due to the cultural, historical, and structural complexities involved. OAP communities carry unique cultural identities and cosmologies that are often at odds with standardized bureaucratic program designs. The imposition of uniform service delivery mechanisms on diverse indigenous communities can generate alienation among both the community members who receive services and the frontline workers who deliver them, especially those who are themselves OAP members or who live in close proximity to these communities (Joosse & van Buuren, 2024).

This research is motivated by the need to understand the micro-level dynamics of policy implementation in indigenous contexts, particularly from a perspective that takes seriously the subjective experiences of those closest to the point of service delivery. The study asks: To what extent does policy alienation occur in the implementation of OAP empowerment programs in Sorong City? What are the dominant forms of alienation experienced by implementers and beneficiaries? And what structural and cultural factors drive this alienation? By addressing these questions, the study seeks to contribute both theoretical insights into policy alienation in non-Western contexts and practical recommendations for improving the effectiveness and cultural sensitivity of OAP empowerment programs.

The urgency of this research is also informed by broader debates about the right to self-determination of indigenous peoples in Indonesia, the reform of the special autonomy framework in Papua, and the imperatives set out in international frameworks such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). Understanding where and why policy alienation occurs in OAP empowerment programs is thus not only an academic exercise, but a contribution to the practical work of improving governance for indigenous communities in Sorong City and across Papua more broadly.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design, which is considered most appropriate for exploring the complex, context-dependent, and subjective dimensions of policy alienation in OAP empowerment programs. Qualitative approaches allow the researcher to capture the richness and depth of human experience, interpretations, and social meanings that quantitative methods may overlook. The descriptive orientation of this study ensures that the findings are grounded in the empirical realities of program implementation in Sorong City without imposing predetermined categories on the data.

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The research was conducted in Sorong City, West Papua Province, Indonesia, specifically focusing on institutions and communities directly involved in the implementation of OAP empowerment programs. Key research sites included the Sorong City Department of Social Affairs (Dinas Sosial), the Regional Development Planning Agency (Bappeda), the OAP Affairs Bureau (Biro Orang Asli Papua), as well as selected OAP community settlements in the Klawasi, Maladum Mes, and Malawili districts of Sorong City. These locations were selected because they concentrate the highest density of OAP residents and active program implementation activities.

Informants were selected through purposive sampling, a technique appropriate for qualitative research where the goal is to capture diverse and information-rich perspectives rather than statistical representativeness. A total of 24 informants participated in the study, comprising: eight street-level bureaucrats directly responsible for implementing OAP empowerment programs at the sub-district (kelurahan) level; six mid-level policy officials from relevant agencies; five OAP community leaders (kepala suku and tokoh adat); and five OAP community members who were direct beneficiaries or intended beneficiaries of the programs. Snowball sampling was applied to identify additional informants within the OAP community who had not been initially identified through official channels.

To enhance transparency regarding informant characteristics, a more detailed profile of participants is warranted. Among the eight street-level bureaucrats, all held operational positions at the kelurahan level with a minimum of three years of direct program implementation experience, ensuring that their accounts reflected substantive familiarity with day-to-day program realities rather than institutional narratives alone. The six mid-level policy officials were drawn from three distinct agencies — Dinas Sosial, Bappeda, and Biro Orang Asli Papua — thereby capturing inter-agency variation in policy interpretation and implementation priorities. The five OAP community leaders included both formally recognized kepala suku and informal tokoh adat whose authority derived from customary rather than state recognition, a distinction that proved analytically significant given the study's focus on cultural alienation. The five OAP community members comprised both active program beneficiaries and individuals who had disengaged from programs, a deliberate sampling decision intended to capture the full spectrum of program experience, including those whose exclusion might otherwise remain invisible in beneficiary-focused assessments. Gender composition across OAP informants was approximately balanced, with three women included among community leaders and members, reflecting the study's commitment to avoiding male-dominated representation of indigenous community perspectives. Table 1 provides a summary profile of all informants, including pseudonyms, institutional affiliation or community district, gender, and years of program involvement, in accordance with ethical confidentiality requirements.

Data collection was carried out through three complementary techniques. First, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with all 24 informants, with each interview lasting between 45 and 90 minutes. Interview guides were developed based on the four dimensions of policy alienation: powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, and social isolation, as conceptualized by Tummers et al. (2012). Second, non-participant observation was conducted at three program implementation sites over a period of four weeks to observe how programs were delivered in practice and how bureaucrats and beneficiaries interacted. Third, document analysis was performed on relevant policy documents, program reports, implementation guidelines, and budget documents obtained from local government offices.

To further enhance methodological transparency, the thematic analysis process warrants more granular description. Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework, the familiarization phase involved repeated reading of all 24 interview transcripts alongside

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observation field notes and documentary materials, with initial reflective memos recorded to document early interpretive impressions. In the coding phase, a total of 312 initial codes were generated across the full dataset using NVivo 14 software to facilitate systematic code management and audit trails. Codes were generated through a hybrid approach: deductive codes were anchored in the four alienation dimensions of Tummers et al. (2012) — powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, and social isolation — while inductive codes emerged from recurring patterns in the data that were not fully anticipated by the theoretical framework, most notably themes relating to linguistic exclusion and ceremonial non-recognition. These inductive codes were subsequently theorized in relation to existing literature on indigenous policy alienation. In the theme construction phase, initial codes were clustered into 18 candidate themes, which through iterative review were consolidated into eight refined themes organized under the four alienation dimensions. To strengthen credibility, reflexivity memos were maintained throughout analysis to document the researcher's positionality as a non-OAP researcher working within indigenous community contexts, and peer debriefing was conducted with two colleagues external to the study to interrogate emerging interpretations. Member checking sessions, conducted with four informants representing each informant category, resulted in minor clarifications of terminology but confirmed the overall analytical narrative, lending confidence to the validity of the final thematic structure

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Powerlessness Among Street-Level Bureaucrats in OAP Program Implementation

The most prominently reported dimension of policy alienation among frontline implementers was powerlessness, conceptualized as the perceived inability of street-level actors to exert meaningful influence over the policies they are formally tasked with delivering. This dimension did not merely emerge as a marginal concern but rather as a dominant experiential reality shaping how implementers understood their roles within the policy process. Across all eight street-level bureaucrats interviewed, there was a consistent pattern of expressed disempowerment, albeit articulated with varying degrees of intensity. Informants repeatedly emphasized that their professional judgment, experiential knowledge, and familiarity with local socio-cultural dynamics were not adequately recognized within the formal structures of policy design and implementation. Instead, these forms of situated knowledge were often subordinated to standardized administrative procedures that prioritize uniformity over contextual responsiveness.

This perceived marginalization was further reinforced by the structural characteristics of the program itself, which were described as highly rigid, top-down, and procedurally deterministic. The institutional framework governing the program left little room for discretion, adaptation, or innovation at the local level, thereby constraining the ability of implementers to respond effectively to the diverse and often complex needs of the communities they serve. In particular, the absence of flexible mechanisms for contextual adjustment meant that policies designed at the central level were frequently misaligned with local realities, especially in culturally distinct settings such as OAP (Orang Asli Papua) communities.

One sub-district welfare officer in Klawasi District provided a compelling illustration of this dynamic, stating that "the program forms require us to fill in exactly what the central guidelines prescribe, but many OAP families do not fit into those categories. We know what they need, but we cannot change the criteria." This statement vividly encapsulates the essence

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of powerlessness in practice: a condition in which frontline implementers possess relevant and actionable knowledge about community needs but are institutionally constrained from acting upon it. The tension between formal procedural compliance and substantive responsiveness becomes particularly evident in such cases, where bureaucratic requirements effectively override local expertise and ethical considerations.

From a theoretical standpoint, this finding resonates strongly with the broader literature on policy alienation, particularly the work of Lars Tummers et al. (2012), who identify powerlessness as the most pervasive and structurally embedded dimension of policy alienation in public sector contexts. Tummers and colleagues argue that when implementers perceive a lack of influence over policy content and processes, their sense of ownership and commitment to policy goals diminishes significantly. In the context of OAP-targeted programs in Sorong City, this condition is further intensified by asymmetric power relations between different levels of government. Central authorities retain dominant control over key aspects such as budget allocation, program design, and performance evaluation metrics, while local governments and frontline workers are relegated to execution roles with limited input into strategic decision-making. This vertical imbalance creates a structural disconnect between policy formulation and policy implementation, particularly in regions with distinct socio-cultural characteristics.

Moreover, observational data collected during the study revealed that frontline implementers frequently resorted to a range of informal coping strategies as a means of navigating their constrained environment. These strategies included simplifying administrative procedures, combining multiple program requirements, selectively interpreting guidelines, and, in some cases, informally adjusting eligibility criteria to better align with local needs. While such practices may be viewed as deviations from formal rules, they can also be understood as pragmatic responses to the inherent limitations of rigid policy frameworks. In this regard, the findings are consistent with the seminal insights of Michael Lipsky (1980), who conceptualizes street-level bureaucrats as policy actors who exercise discretion not in spite of constraints, but because of them. Lipsky argues that the gap between policy ideals and implementation realities is often too wide to be bridged through formal mechanisms alone, thereby necessitating discretionary practices at the frontline level.

Importantly, the prevalence of such coping mechanisms also signals a deeper systemic issue, namely the lack of institutionalized channels through which frontline feedback can be incorporated into policy revision and improvement. In the absence of participatory or deliberative mechanisms that meaningfully engage implementers in the policy cycle, informal adaptation becomes the de facto mode of reconciling policy intent with ground-level realities. However, this reliance on informal practices carries its own risks, including inconsistencies in service delivery, potential deviations from policy objectives, and challenges in accountability and evaluation.

Taken together, these findings suggest that powerlessness among frontline implementers is not merely an individual perception but a structurally produced condition embedded within hierarchical governance arrangements and centralized policy systems. Addressing this issue requires more than incremental adjustments; it necessitates a reconfiguration of the relationship between policy design and implementation, including greater decentralization of decision-making authority, the incorporation of local knowledge into policy frameworks, and the creation of feedback mechanisms that allow frontline actors to contribute meaningfully to policy development. Without such reforms, the persistence of powerlessness is likely to undermine not only the effectiveness of policy implementation but also the broader goals of equity and responsiveness in public service delivery, particularly in culturally diverse and administratively complex contexts such as those found in OAP communities.

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Meaninglessness: The Disconnect Between Policy Goals and Community Needs

The second dominant form of policy alienation identified in this study was meaninglessness, which refers to the perception that the policy being implemented lacks a valuable, coherent, or socially meaningful purpose. Unlike powerlessness, which primarily concerns the inability to influence policy processes, meaninglessness relates to doubts regarding the intrinsic value and relevance of policy objectives themselves. The findings indicate that this dimension was experienced by both frontline implementers and OAP beneficiaries, although the nature and sources of meaninglessness differed significantly between the two groups. Despite these differences, both perspectives ultimately pointed toward a shared concern that the empowerment programs were failing to address the realities and aspirations of the communities they were intended to serve.

Among frontline implementers, meaninglessness emerged from their repeated exposure to policy interventions that appeared unable to generate sustainable improvements in the socioeconomic conditions of OAP communities. Many implementers reported that although program activities were regularly conducted and administrative targets were formally achieved, the broader welfare outcomes envisioned by policymakers remained largely unattained. This disconnect between procedural accomplishment and substantive impact generated frustration and skepticism among street-level bureaucrats. Several participants described a growing sense of cynicism regarding the true purpose of the programs, questioning whether they were genuinely intended to empower indigenous communities or merely designed to satisfy bureaucratic reporting requirements and political expectations. As one field officer noted during the interview process, success was often measured by the number of beneficiaries reached or activities completed rather than by meaningful changes in community well-being. Consequently, implementers increasingly perceived their work as focused on compliance rather than transformation (Nepal et al., 2025).

The persistence of this perception had important implications for implementation behavior. When frontline workers no longer perceive a clear relationship between their efforts and desired social outcomes, their motivation to actively support policy objectives may gradually diminish. In such circumstances, implementation risks becoming a routine administrative exercise characterized by procedural adherence rather than genuine commitment to policy goals. This finding supports the argument advanced by policy alienation scholars that meaninglessness can significantly weaken implementers' identification with policy objectives and reduce the effectiveness of public service delivery.

Among OAP beneficiaries and community leaders, however, meaninglessness was articulated in a deeper and more fundamental manner. Rather than focusing on implementation outcomes, beneficiaries questioned the underlying assumptions embedded within the policy itself. Many respondents argued that the categories, indicators, and objectives used by government programs reflected external understandings of empowerment that were not aligned with indigenous perspectives and priorities. In their view, empowerment could not be reduced solely to economic assistance, entrepreneurship training, or small-scale income-generating activities. Instead, empowerment was closely connected to cultural continuity, collective autonomy, land rights, social identity, and the preservation of indigenous knowledge systems (Mashuri et al., 2024).

A tribal elder in Maladum Mes expressed this perspective clearly when he stated that "empowerment to us means being able to sustain our cultural practices, manage our own lands, and teach our children our language. The government program gives us a little money for a small business, but what we truly need is something different." This statement reveals a profound conceptual gap between the technocratic understanding of empowerment embedded in government policy and the culturally grounded aspirations of OAP

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communities. While policymakers tend to define empowerment through measurable economic indicators such as income generation, business creation, or workforce participation, many indigenous communities interpret empowerment through the lens of cultural survival, self-determination, and collective well-being. As a result, even when programs are implemented successfully according to official standards, they may still be perceived as lacking relevance and meaning by the intended beneficiaries (Anafinova, 2020).

The findings therefore suggest that meaninglessness in the OAP empowerment context operates at both operational and normative levels. At the operational level, implementers experience meaninglessness because policy interventions fail to produce visible and lasting outcomes. At the normative level, beneficiaries experience meaninglessness because the policy objectives themselves do not adequately reflect their values, priorities, and lived experiences. This dual manifestation of meaninglessness creates a particularly challenging implementation environment, as both those delivering the policy and those receiving it question its underlying significance.

These findings resonate strongly with longstanding critiques of top-down development paradigms in indigenous and marginalized communities. Development initiatives designed through centralized planning mechanisms often rely on standardized categories of need, progress, and success that fail to capture the diversity of local social realities. Such approaches frequently prioritize administrative efficiency and quantifiable outputs over contextual understanding and cultural sensitivity. In the case of OAP empowerment programs, this tendency appears to have resulted in policies that are administratively coherent but socially disconnected from the communities they target.

The results also align with the arguments of (Bowler & Donovan, 2002), who critiques high-modernist development schemes for their tendency to simplify complex social realities into categories that can be more easily managed by state institutions. According to Scott, these schemes often fail because they disregard local knowledge, cultural practices, and informal social structures that are essential for sustainable development. The experiences reported by OAP beneficiaries provide empirical support for this argument, illustrating how centrally designed empowerment initiatives can become disconnected from the lived realities of indigenous populations when local perspectives are excluded from policy formulation.

Furthermore, the data indicate that meaninglessness was reinforced by the absence of effective feedback mechanisms capable of facilitating policy learning and adaptation. Both implementers and beneficiaries reported limited opportunities to communicate their experiences, concerns, and recommendations to higher levels of government. Although monitoring and evaluation activities were formally conducted, these processes were largely oriented toward measuring compliance with predetermined indicators rather than gathering substantive insights from local actors. Consequently, valuable information regarding policy shortcomings and community needs rarely translated into meaningful program revisions.

The lack of institutionalized feedback channels suggests that the OAP empowerment programs functioned within what may be characterized as a closed policy loop. Decision-making authority remained concentrated at higher administrative levels, while information flowing upward from frontline implementers and community members had minimal influence on subsequent policy adjustments. This institutional arrangement not only perpetuated existing policy deficiencies but also deepened perceptions of alienation among stakeholders. When beneficiaries and implementers repeatedly observe that their experiences and perspectives do not influence policy evolution, the policy itself increasingly appears detached from local realities and devoid of meaningful purpose.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that meaninglessness represents a significant dimension of policy alienation within OAP empowerment programs in Sorong City. The

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problem extends beyond implementation challenges and reflects a deeper disconnect between policy objectives, implementation practices, and indigenous understandings of empowerment. Unless future policy initiatives incorporate meaningful participation, culturally grounded definitions of development, and adaptive feedback mechanisms, the risk of persistent meaninglessness will remain high, undermining both policy legitimacy and long-term program effectiveness (Purna, 2025).

Normlessness, Social Isolation, and Systemic Factors Driving Policy Alienation

Normlessness, characterized by the tendency to deviate from prescribed behaviors as a response to institutional incoherence, was observed primarily at the operational implementation level. Several frontline workers described situations in which the official program procedures were either impractical, culturally inappropriate, or contradicted by the informal norms of the communities they served. In response, they developed unofficial workarounds, such as modifying eligibility criteria, skipping certain procedural steps, or coordinating informally with community leaders outside official channels. While these adaptations often improved immediate service delivery outcomes, they also created ambiguity about accountability, transparency, and program integrity.

Social isolation as a dimension of policy alienation was particularly evident among OAP community members who felt excluded from the networks of information, decision-making, and social recognition that structured the program's operation. Many OAP beneficiaries reported that they learned about program availability through informal channels, neighbors, or clan relatives, rather than through official outreach. Several reported never having been formally informed of their eligibility or of the procedures for accessing program benefits. This structural exclusion from the information environment of program implementation constitutes a form of social isolation that compounds the other alienation dimensions already described (Ade Saputra & Purna, 2024).

Several systemic factors were identified as underlying drivers of policy alienation across all four dimensions. First, the centralized and standardized character of the OAP empowerment programs limited the flexibility needed for culturally responsive implementation. Second, the absence of OAP representation in key decision-making forums, including inter-agency coordination meetings and annual planning sessions, meant that indigenous perspectives were systematically absent from the governance of programs ostensibly designed for their benefit. Third, weak inter-agency coordination produced overlapping, contradictory, and duplicative program activities, contributing to frustration and confusion among both implementers and beneficiaries. Fourth, the shortage of qualified OAP civil servants in implementing agencies reinforced cultural and communicative distance between the bureaucracy and the communities it serves (Grugulis, 2024).

These findings collectively paint a picture of OAP empowerment programs in Sorong City that are structurally disposed to generating policy alienation. The institutional architecture of the programs, from design through delivery and evaluation, prioritizes administrative conformity over substantive empowerment, thereby creating conditions in which both implementers and beneficiaries are alienated from the policies that are meant to serve them. Table 1 below summarizes the key manifestations of each policy alienation dimension identified in this study.

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Table 1: Dimensions of Policy Alienation in OAP Empowerment Program Implementation in Sorong City

Dimension	Manifestation Among Implementers	Manifestation Among Beneficiaries
Powerlessness	Inability to adapt program criteria to local cultural contexts; discretion overridden by central guidelines	Exclusion from program design; no channel for expressing needs or influencing program structure
Meaninglessness	Cynicism about program impact; repeated failure of interventions to produce visible community improvement	Programs do not address culturally defined empowerment needs; perceived irrelevance of program objectives
Normlessness	Development of unofficial workarounds; informal coordination with community leaders outside protocol	Reliance on informal information channels; distrust of official program communication
Social Isolation	Sense of professional detachment from OAP communities; limited cultural and linguistic connection	Exclusion from program information networks; non-recognition of traditional leadership structures

Source: Primary Data, 2026

The four-dimensional pattern of policy alienation documented in Table 1 resonates strongly with findings from comparable indigenous community empowerment program studies in other national contexts, while also revealing features that are distinctive to the Papuan socio-political setting. The manifestation of powerlessness among street-level bureaucrats — specifically the override of local discretion by centralized program guidelines — mirrors foundational work on street-level bureaucracy, in which frontline implementers routinely experience structural disempowerment when institutional rules preclude context-sensitive judgment. However, what distinguishes the Sorong City case is that this bureaucratic powerlessness intersects with a culturally specific form of beneficiary exclusion: OAP communities are not merely administratively marginalized but are excluded from program design processes in ways that systematically negate indigenous decision-making protocols and customary governance structures. This layered powerlessness — simultaneously experienced by implementers and beneficiaries but through fundamentally different mechanisms — has been documented in indigenous program implementation contexts in Australia's Northern Territory, where observed that top-down federal intervention programs produced parallel alienation effects among both Aboriginal community members and local service providers who recognized but could not remedy the cultural inappropriateness of mandated program models. Similarly, the normlessness dimension, expressed in Sorong City through bureaucratic workarounds and beneficiary reliance on informal information channels, comparative study of indigenous citizenship regimes in Latin America, where the erosion of formal program legitimacy routinely produced what she termed "associational autonomy" — informal parallel structures through which indigenous communities negotiated program access outside official channels. That OAP communities in Sorong City have developed analogous informal networks suggests that normlessness in indigenous program contexts is not merely a symptom of implementation dysfunction but may represent a rational adaptive

response to the structural misalignment between state program logics and indigenous social organization.

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that policy alienation is a significant and pervasive phenomenon in the implementation of OAP empowerment programs in Sorong City. All four dimensions of policy alienation, powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, and social isolation, were identified in the experiences of both street-level bureaucrats and OAP community beneficiaries. The findings reveal that alienation is not merely a product of individual attitudes or capacities but is structurally embedded in the design and governance architecture of the programs themselves.

The powerlessness of frontline implementers stems from centralized program designs that leave little room for cultural adaptation, while the meaninglessness experienced by both implementers and OAP communities reflects a fundamental mismatch between the technocratic definition of empowerment used in program design and the culturally grounded aspirations of indigenous communities. Normlessness arises as a practical response to institutional incoherence, while social isolation reflects the structural exclusion of OAP communities from the information and decision-making networks that govern the programs designed for them.

These findings carry important theoretical implications. They extend the policy alienation framework, developed primarily in the context of Western welfare state institutions, to the distinct setting of indigenous people empowerment programs in an Indonesian urban context. The study demonstrates that the alienation phenomenon is not culturally bound to Western administrative systems but is relevant and operational in diverse institutional and cultural settings, with its manifestations shaped by the specific historical, political, and social context of each case.

Practically, the findings call for a fundamental redesign of OAP empowerment programs in Sorong City toward more participatory, flexible, and culturally responsive approaches. Specific recommendations include: (1) establishing formal mechanisms for OAP community participation in program planning, monitoring, and evaluation cycles; (2) decentralizing decision-making authority to allow frontline implementers to adapt program criteria and delivery modalities to local cultural contexts; (3) strengthening the representation of OAP members in implementing agencies through affirmative recruitment policies; (4) investing in cultural competency training for non-OAP program staff; and (5) developing feedback loops that systematically channel community experiences and assessments back into program revision processes. These changes are essential if OAP empowerment programs are to move beyond administrative compliance toward genuine and sustainable community development outcomes.

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