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Polycentric Governance in Collective Action in the Implementation of Affirmative Policy to Improve the Economy of OAP in Sorong City

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Abstract. *The implementation of economic affirmative action policies for Indigenous Papuans (OAP) in Sorong City operates within a polycentric governance landscape involving multiple centers of authority with different levels of legitimacy and capacity. This study examines how polycentric governance dynamics influence the effectiveness of affirmative action policies by applying a Polycentric Governance framework consisting of eight analytical dimensions: diversity of authority centers, institutional autonomy, cross-scale coordination, legitimacy of customary governance, institutional adaptability, democratic participation, integration of local knowledge, and sustainability outcomes. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed involving 45 policy actors and 158 Indigenous Papuan business actors through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. The findings reveal that although 12 centers of authority are involved in policy implementation, cross-scale coordination reaches only 23.4% effectiveness due to the absence of institutional mechanisms integrating formal government authority with the customary Moi governance system. Customary institutions possess strong social legitimacy, with 87% of Indigenous Papuans recognizing their authority, yet their participation in policy formulation remains limited at only 12%. This disconnect contributes to overlapping authority in 34% of programs and unmet economic empowerment needs in 41% of cases. The study concludes that polycentricity without coordination mechanisms and recognition of plural legitimacy leads to institutional fragmentation rather than adaptive governance. It proposes prerequisites for productive polycentric governance, including clear authority boundaries, mutual recognition, and bridging institutional forums.*

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INTRODUCTION

Implementing affirmative action policies in the context of a pluralistic society with a pluralistic governance system requires an approach that transcends the monocentric assumption of state authority as the sole source of policy legitimacy (Greve, 2025; Jacobson, 2025; Divetia & Chaudhary, 2023; Widłak, 2019). In the case of Papua, the complexity of implementing Special Autonomy policies stems not only from limited fiscal capacity or program design, but also from the coexistence of multiple centers of authority operating with differing logics, legitimacy, and resources (Aligica & Murtazashvili, 2025; Thiel et al., 2025; Thunder, 2025). The formal government, with its constitutional mandate, confronts customary governance structures with deep socio-cultural legitimacy, while the private sector and civil society organizations present agendas and capacities that do not always align with the priorities of these two governance

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systems. This creates an inherently polycentric policy landscape, where no single authority can claim a monopoly over the decision-making process and implementation of economic empowerment programs for Indigenous Papuans (Merina et al., 2023; Yance Baho et al., 2025; Situmorang, 2025).

The Polycentric Governance theory developed by Elinor Ostrom offers a framework for understanding how multiple centers of authority can produce adaptive and responsive governance to diverse local needs (Megens & Warner, 2025; Risnawati, 2025; Ostrom, 2010; Nagendra & Ostrom, 2012; Andersson & Ostrom, 2008). Unlike the hierarchical perspective, which views fragmentation of authority as a pathology of governance, polycentricity theory argues that the existence of multiple, overlapping centers of decision-making can enhance policy innovation, horizontal accountability, and responsiveness to diverse local contexts (Fontaine & Gurza-Lavalle, 2019; Boschken, 2017; Masini & Nania, 2025). However, the success of polycentric governance depends on several prerequisites: clear boundary rules regarding the authority of each authority, effective cross-scale coordination mechanisms, mutual recognition of the legitimacy of various governance systems, and institutional capacity to adapt to changing contexts (Morrison et al., 2023; Allen et al., 2023; Tai, 2015; Leck & Simon, 2013; Wyborn, 2015; Schoon & Cox, 2018).

Empirical studies of polycentric governance in public policy implementation have yielded mixed results (Baldwin et al., 2024; Heinen et al., 2022; Homsy & Warner, 2015). On the one hand, research in the natural resource management sector shows that recognizing customary governance systems can improve conservation effectiveness and distributive justice (Andhika et al., 2018; Filgueiras & Queiroz, 2021). On the other hand, studies on the implementation of development policies in regions with high institutional pluralism reveal that fragmentation of authority without clear coordination mechanisms actually results in conflicting authority, program duplication, and accountability gaps where no single party is held accountable for policy failures (Leong & Howlett, 2022; Sokołowski & Heffron, 2022). In the Papuan context, previous research tends to identify the multiplicity of actors as a barrier to implementation without deeply exploring how the dynamics of inter-authority relations influence policy outcomes (Williams, 2020).

This gap in the literature is important because normative assumptions about the superiority of polycentric governance need to be tested in the context of ethnic identity-based affirmative action policies, where unequal power relations between authorities and a history of marginalization create a trust deficit between indigenous communities and state institutions (Hiriart-Bertrand et al., 2020; Sokołowski & Heffron, 2022). In Sorong City, the implementation of the OAP economic affirmative action policy involves complex interactions between the city government and various Regional Apparatus Organizations (APBD), the provincial government of Southwest Papua, the Moi Indigenous Community Institution, which has a traditional governance system of egek and sasi, the private sector, such as Freeport Indonesia and Bank Papua, which implement Corporate Social Responsibility programs, and civil society organizations that play a role in advocacy and mentoring. However, no systematic research has analyzed how this multiplicity of authority centers interacts in shaping the outcomes of policy implementation, whether it results in adaptive governance or institutional chaos (Chaffin & Gunderson, 2016; Jalonen, 2025; Aligica & Tarko, 2013; Klinke, 2017).

A fundamental unanswered question is: under what conditions does polycentricity produce productive versus destructive governance in the implementation of affirmative action policies? Studies on hybrid governance show that the integration of formal and informal systems requires bridging institutions capable of translating differing logics between authorities and facilitating mutual recognition (Doorudinia et al., 2025; Indrayati et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2025). In the According to Suprasetya et al. (2024) and Rumanasen & Rifai (2025) Papuan context, the Papuan People's Assembly (MRP) and customary forums are supposed to function as bridging institutions, but their effectiveness in influencing policy at the city level remains questionable.

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Theoretically, this study explores the limitations of polycentric governance theory, which assumes that self-organization will naturally occur when multiple authorities are present (Carlisle & Gruby, 2019; Thiel, 2017; Aligica & Tarko, 2012). However, in the Papuan context, with its history of conflict and capacity imbalances, self-organization requires deliberate institutional design and political will to recognize plural legitimacy.

This research is important for several reasons. First, theoretically, this study tests the applicability of Polycentric Governance theory in an affirmative policy setting where power relations between authorities are highly asymmetric and legitimacy is contested. Second, empirically, this study fills a gap in the literature on cross-authority coordination mechanisms in the implementation of Papua's Special Autonomy, which has been dominated by legal-formal analysis without considering the complexity of plural governance. Third, practically, the research findings can provide input for the design of bridging institutions that are more effective in bridging state and customary logics. This study aims to systematically analyze the eight dimensions of Polycentric Governance in the context of Sorong City to identify conditions that facilitate or hinder adaptive governance, as well as formulate prerequisites for productive polycentricity that can serve as a model for the implementation of affirmative policies in other regions with similar characteristics.

METHODS

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study in Sorong City, conducted over six months (April-October 2025). Informants were selected purposively, involving 45 policy actors from various authority centers: the city government (Bappeda, technical agencies), the Moi Indigenous Peoples Institution, district traditional leaders, the Special Autonomy PROSPPEK Secretariat, Bank Papua, Freeport and Pertamina CSR coordinators, and supporting NGOs, plus 158 Indigenous Peoples (OAP) business actors from 15 sub-districts. Data collection through in-depth semi-structured interviews guided by the eight dimensions of Polycentric Governance resulted in 512 pages of transcripts, participatory observations at multi-stakeholder coordination forums and customary meetings, and documentation studies of 31 policy documents, the Perdasus on the recognition of customary rights, and minutes of cross-authority forums. Data analysis used a three-stage thematic technique: open coding generated 94 initial themes, axial coding grouped them based on eight dimensions of Polycentric Governance, and selective coding identified patterns of interaction between authorities and conditions that facilitate or hinder productive coordination. Data validity was maintained through source triangulation by comparing the perspectives of various authorities, method triangulation, and member checking with 15 key informants representing various centers of authority.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Thematic Analysis Results

The thematic analysis of 512 pages of interview transcripts and field notes identified 94 initial themes, which were grouped into eight dimensions of Polycentric Governance. Table 1 presents the distribution of themes across these analytical dimensions.

Table 1. Distribution of Themes from the Thematic Analysis

Polycentric Governance Dimension	Number of Themes	Main Theme Categories
Number and Diversity of Centers of Authority	11	Actor multiplicity (4), authority overlap (3), boundary clarity (4)
Autonomy of Local Institutions	13	Customary decision-making space (5), subordination of local institutions (4), formal vs customary authority (4)
Cross-Scale Coordination	15	Vertical central–local (6), horizontal inter-OPD (5), formal–customary integration (4)

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Legitimacy of Customary Governance	12	Social recognition (4), formal neglect (4), authority contestation (4)
Institutional Adaptability	10	Bureaucratic rigidity (4), customary flexibility (3), innovation capacity (3)
Democratic Participation	14	Forum inclusiveness (5), tokenism (4), effective representation (5)
Integration of Local Knowledge	11	Exclusion of indigenous knowledge (5), technical bias (3), wisdom disconnect (3)
Sustainability Outcomes	8	Long-term impacts (4), community resilience (4)
Total	**94**	–

The analysis shows that although the City of Sorong involves 12 centers of authority in implementing economic affirmative policies for Indigenous Papuans (OAP), the effectiveness of polycentric governance is very low, with an average score of only 24.8 percent of the ideal condition. Fragmented authority without productive coordination mechanisms has resulted in overlapping mandates, accountability gaps, and a clear disconnect between program design and the real needs of customary communities. Table 2 summarizes the achievement scores for each Polycentric Governance dimension.

Table 2. Achievement Scores by Polycentric Governance Dimension

Dimension	Score (%)	Category	Key Findings
Number and Diversity of Centers of Authority	45.0	Moderate	12 centers identified; 34% overlap of authority
Autonomy of Local Institutions	18.5	Very Low	Customary institutions subordinated; customary decisions not accommodated
Cross-Scale Coordination	23.4	Very Low	Weak vertical coordination (28%); very weak horizontal coordination (19%)
Legitimacy of Customary Governance	52.3	Moderate	High social legitimacy (87%) but low formal recognition (17%)
Institutional Adaptability	21.7	Very Low	Rigid bureaucracy; minimal innovation capacity
Democratic Participation	15.2	Very Low	Non-inclusive forums; only 12% customary participation
Integration of Local Knowledge	19.8	Very Low	Indigenous knowledge ignored in 89% of programs
Sustainability Outcomes	22.4	Very Low	Unsustainable impacts; weak community resilience
Average	**24.8**	**Very Low**	–

Number and Diversity of Centers of Authority: Multiplicity without Boundary Clarity

Actor mapping reveals the presence of 12 centers of authority involved in the implementation of economic affirmative policies for OAP in the City of Sorong, each with varying levels of involvement and legitimacy. Table 3 presents the mapping of these centers of authority, their sources of legitimacy, scopes of authority, and levels of engagement.

Table 3. Mapping of Centers of Authority in the Implementation of Affirmative Policies

Category	Center of Authority	Source of Legitimacy	Scope of Authority	Level of Involvement
Formal Government	City Development Planning Agency (Bappeda)	Legal–formal (local regulation)	Planning and coordination	Very high (95%)

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	Office of MSMEs	Legal–formal	Business facilitation and licensing	High (87%)
	Social Affairs Office	Legal–formal	Capital assistance and social welfare	High (82%)
	Industry and Trade Office	Legal–formal	Market access and promotion	Moderate (68%)
	Cooperative Office	Legal–formal	Institutional strengthening	Moderate (61%)
Customary Governance	Moi Customary Council (LMAM)	Socio-cultural (customary)	OAP representation and mobilization	Moderate (58%)
	District Customary Leaders	Socio-cultural	Local legitimacy and mediation	Moderate (52%)
Private Sector	Bank Papua	Commercial–regulatory	Financing (special OAP credit schemes)	Moderate (64%)
	Freeport CSR	Voluntary–reputational	Training and internships	Moderate (47%)
	Pertamina CSR	Voluntary–reputational	MSME empowerment	Low (38%)
Civil Society	Partner NGOs	Moral–advocacy	Assistance and monitoring	Moderate (55%)
Coordination	PROSPPEK Otsus	Legal–formal (coordinative)	Cross-sector synchronization	Low (31%)

In principle, this diversity of centers of authority should generate complementarity, with each actor contributing according to its comparative advantage. However, analysis of inter-authority interactions shows that 34 percent of programs experience overlapping mandates, where two or more authorities claim jurisdiction over the same activities without clear role delineation. The most prominent overlap occurs in entrepreneurship training programs coordinated by Bappeda, implemented by the MSME Office, and simultaneously delivered by Freeport's CSR initiatives. These programs often recruit the same beneficiaries without any synchronization mechanism. Conversely, 41 percent of critical needs remain unaddressed, such as post-training mentoring, facilitation of access to modern retail distributors, and mediation of land conflicts for business activities. These unmet needs fall outside the clear responsibility of any authority, creating significant accountability gaps.

Table 4. Patterns of Overlapping Authority and Accountability Gaps

Aspect	Indicator	Findings
Overlapping Authority	Programs with dual jurisdiction	34% (19 of 56 programs)
	Overlap in training programs	Bappeda + MSME Office + Freeport CSR targeting the same beneficiaries
	Overlap in capital assistance	Social Affairs Office + Bank Papua (credit schemes); 18 OAP received double benefits
Accountability Gaps	Needs without a clear responsible authority	41% (23 of 56 identified needs)
	Post-training mentoring	No authority assigned
	Access to modern retail distributors	Industry and Trade Office does not facilitate; MSME Office lacks mandate

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	Mediation of land conflicts for businesses	Unclear boundary between municipal government and customary authorities
	Competency certification beyond basic licensing	No institution responsible

This fragmentation is exacerbated by the absence of clear boundary rules defining the authority of each actor. Local Regulation No. 8 of 2022 on OAP Economic Empowerment only stipulates general mandates for local government agencies without specifying detailed task allocation within integrated programs. Meanwhile, special regulations on the recognition of customary rights, which should clarify the decision-making authority of customary institutions in development processes, have not been operationalized at the city level. This regulatory vacuum creates ambiguity regarding the binding nature of customary decisions in government program implementation. As a result, competition emerges among authorities to claim visible and high-profile programs, while responsibility for complex or high-risk areas is systematically avoided.

Autonomy of Local Institutions: Subordination of Customary Institutions within the Formal Hierarchy

Although Polycentric Governance theory emphasizes the importance of local institutional autonomy in making context-specific decisions, the findings show that Moi customary institutions experience systematic subordination in their relationship with formal government authorities. The Moi Customary Council operates a traditional governance system that regulates resource allocation and conflict resolution through *egek* (extended family deliberation) and *sasi* (customary conservation rules). However, decisions produced through these customary mechanisms have no legal-formal standing within the municipal governance system. An analysis of 23 cases in which customary institutions issued decisions related to economic empowerment programs shows that only 17 percent (4 cases) of these decisions were accommodated in formal policy, while 83 percent were ignored or rejected on the grounds of non-compliance with administrative procedures.

Table 5. Level of Accommodation of Customary Decisions in Formal Policy

Type of Customary Decision	Number of Cases	Accommodated	Ignored	Explicitly Rejected	Dominant Reason for Rejection
Determination of priority beneficiaries	8	2 (25%)	5 (62.5%)	1 (12.5%)	Not aligned with technical criteria
Proposed program types	6	1 (16.7%)	4 (66.7%)	1 (16.7%)	Outside the approved local budget (APBD)
Determination of business locations	5	1 (20%)	2 (40%)	2 (40%)	Not consistent with spatial planning (RTRW)
Aid distribution mechanisms	4	0 (0%)	3 (75%)	1 (25%)	Contradicts procurement procedures
Total	23	4 (17%)	14 (61%)	5 (22%)	–

This subordination manifests in three main patterns. First, the involvement of customary institutions is largely consultative rather than decisive. They are invited to program socialization forums after policy designs have already been finalized, with no real opportunity to influence substance. A survey of 45 policy actors indicates that 73 percent view customary institutions primarily as "legitimizing agents" to mobilize community participation, rather than as equal co-

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decision makers. Second, knowledge and preferences articulated by customary institutions through *egek* deliberations are often discredited as "unscientific" or "not feasible" by technical bureaucrats who rely exclusively on formal administrative standards as the sole criterion of validity. Third, the limited institutional capacity of customary bodies in formal documentation and bureaucratic communication is used as a justification for excluding them from substantive decision-making processes.

This situation produces a legitimacy paradox. Customary institutions enjoy very high social legitimacy among Indigenous Papuans, with 87 percent of OAP respondents recognizing their authority in regulating community life, yet they possess extremely low formal legitimacy within the government system, as reflected in the mere 17 percent accommodation rate of customary decisions. As a result, government-designed programs that lack substantive customary input often encounter silent resistance or apathy from communities who do not perceive these programs as legitimate because they bypass recognized customary processes. The score for the local institutional autonomy dimension stands at only 18.5 percent, confirming that governance in the City of Sorong remains highly monocentric in practice, despite normative recognition of institutional pluralism**.**

Cross-Scale Coordination: Weak Vertical and Horizontal Integration

The effectiveness of polycentric governance depends on the ability to coordinate decisions and actions across scales and sectors. The analysis reveals that cross-scale coordination in the City of Sorong is very weak, both vertically (between central, provincial, municipal, district, and sub-district levels) and horizontally (among agencies at the same level and between formal and customary authorities).

Table 6. Effectiveness of Cross-Scale Coordination

Coordination Dimension	Existing Mechanism	Actual Frequency	Effectiveness (%)	Main Problem
Vertical: Central–Province–City	Otsus coordination meetings	Twice per year	28%	One-way reporting; no strategic alignment
Vertical: City–District–Sub-district	Tiered *Musrenbang*	Once per year	31%	Bottom-up inputs not followed up
Horizontal: Inter-agency (OPD)	PROSPPEK coordination meetings	3–4 times per year	19%	Ceremonial; no sanctions for non-compliance
Integrative: Formal–Customary	City–customary dialogue forums	Ad hoc, irregular	12%	Tokenistic; no power sharing
Average Cross-Scale Coordination	–	–	23.4%	Systemic fragmentation

Vertical coordination between central, provincial, and municipal levels is constrained by time lags and misaligned priorities. Central government policies and technical guidelines on the use of Special Autonomy (Otsus) funds are often issued late to the provincial level, and by the time they reach the city, implementation windows are already limited to the second half of the fiscal year. More fundamentally, centrally defined priorities do not always reflect the specific needs of the City of Sorong, whose Indigenous Papuan communities differ significantly from those in other parts of Papua. Coordination meetings that should serve as platforms for strategic alignment are instead dominated by one-way progress reporting, with little space for negotiation or policy adjustment based on lessons from local implementation.

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Horizontal coordination among local government agencies is even weaker, with an effectiveness score of only 19 percent. Although PROSPPEK Otsus is formally mandated to coordinate cross-sectoral affirmative programs, coordination meetings held three to four times a year remain largely ceremonial and fail to produce binding operational decisions. There are no sanctions for agencies that fail to attend coordination meetings or do not implement agreed actions. Consequently, each agency continues to operate within its own sectoral silo, with limited awareness of the activities undertaken by others, leading to duplication of efforts as previously identified.

The most problematic dimension is integrative coordination between formal authorities and customary institutions, which achieves an effectiveness score of only 12 percent. Dialogue forums between the municipal government and customary institutions are convened on an ad hoc basis, typically in response to specific issues such as land conflicts, rather than as routine mechanisms for co-designing programs. When such forums do occur, customary participation is largely tokenistic: their views are heard but rarely translated into substantive policy change. There are no power-sharing arrangements that grant customary institutions veto rights or co-decision authority over programs that directly affect their communities. This reflects that integrative coordination has yet to evolve into a genuine partnership and remains largely a consultative gesture.

Legitimacy of Customary Governance: Socially High, Formally Low

The most striking paradox in polycentric governance in the City of Sorong is the sharp disconnect between the very high social legitimacy of customary institutions and their very low level of formal recognition. A survey of 158 Indigenous Papuan (OAP) business actors shows that 87 percent recognize the authority of customary institutions in regulating community life and would comply with decisions made through *egek* mechanisms even when these decisions contradict government policies. Customary leaders are perceived as authentic representatives of community interests because they possess a deep understanding of local contexts, are embedded in genealogical ties and customary land relations, and do not hold vested interests in formal politics.

Table 7. Social Legitimacy vs Formal Recognition of Customary Governance

Legitimacy Dimension	Indicator	Findings
Social Legitimacy	OAP recognizing the authority of customary institutions	87% (137 of 158)
	OAP willing to comply with *egek* decisions	82% (129 of 158)
	OAP who trust customary leaders to represent their interests	79% (125 of 158)
Formal Recognition	Customary decisions accommodated in formal policy	17% (4 of 23)
	Participation of customary institutions in policy formulation forums	12% of total forums
	Formal authority of customary institutions in local regulations	No specific provisions
	Budget allocation for strengthening customary institutional capacity	0.3% of Otsus funds

However, this high level of social legitimacy is not translated into formal recognition within the city's governance structure. Local Regulation (Perda) of the City of Sorong No. 8 of 2022 contains no specific provisions granting formal decision-making authority to customary institutions in the implementation of affirmative programs. The special regulation on the recognition of customary law communities mandated by the Special Autonomy Law has not been operationalized at the municipal level, leaving the legal status of customary institutions ambiguous. In practice, customary institutions are invited to only 12 percent of policy formulation forums, and even when present, their participation carries little weight in final

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decisions. Budgetary support for strengthening customary institutional capacity is also minimal, with only 0.3 percent of Otsus funds allocated to economic empowerment, indicating that customary institutions are not regarded as strategic partners in policy implementation.

This disconnect generates two major implications. First, government programs that do not receive endorsement from customary institutions suffer from a legitimacy deficit in the eyes of the community, resulting in apathy or passive resistance. Of the 56 economic affirmative programs implemented during the 2021–2024 period, only 23 programs (41 percent) involved customary institutions at the design or implementation stages. These programs recorded average community participation rates that were 67 percent higher than programs without customary involvement. Second, customary institutions that feel marginalized within formal governance structures tend to make decisions in parallel without coordination with government actors, creating a dual and poorly integrated governance system that is potentially conflictual, particularly in matters of land allocation and natural resource management.

Institutional Adaptability: Bureaucratic Rigidity versus Customary Flexibility

One of the theoretical strengths of polycentric governance lies in its capacity to adapt to changing contexts through learning and institutional innovation. The analysis, however, indicates that formal bureaucratic rigidity dominates the governance landscape in the City of Sorong, resulting in very limited adaptive capacity. Of the 56 economic affirmative programs examined, only 8 programs (14 percent) were adjusted based on beneficiary feedback or lessons learned from previous implementation failures. Most programs are implemented year after year with the same design, despite changes in economic conditions, community preferences, or external shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic that clearly require adaptive responses**.**

Table 8. Comparison of Adaptability between Formal Bureaucracy and Customary Governance

Aspect	Formal Bureaucracy	Customary Governance
Responsiveness to feedback	Low: only 14% of programs adjusted	High: *egek* decisions can be revised in real time
Speed of decision-making	Slow: 4–6 months on average to change programs	Fast: *egek* can be convened within 1–2 weeks
Innovation capacity	Limited: replication of existing programs	Creative: case-specific, customized solutions
Tolerance for experimentation	Low: risk-averse due to audit accountability	High: trial-and-error is accepted
Learning mechanisms	Weak: no systematic lessons-learned process	Strong: oral traditions preserve institutional memory
Main constraints	Rigid administrative procedures; locked-in budgets	Limited resources; lack of formal documentation

Bureaucratic rigidity is rooted in two main factors. First, the planning and budgeting system is inflexible, as the local budget (APBD) is effectively locked in one year in advance through the *Musrenbang* process. When new needs emerge during the fiscal year or when feedback indicates that programs are ineffective, there is little flexibility for budget reallocation without going through a complex and time-consuming budget revision process. Second, a risk-averse bureaucratic culture discourages innovation or experimentation, as officials fear audits and potential sanctions for deviating from standard procedures, even when those standards are ill-suited to the Papuan context.

In contrast, customary governance demonstrates a high degree of flexibility in decision-making. The *egek* mechanism enables communities to convene meetings within one to two weeks when urgent issues arise, deliberate in a participatory manner, and reach decisions that are immediately applicable without navigating bureaucratic hierarchies. Such decisions are not rigid but can be revised in real time as conditions change or new concerns emerge. Customary systems

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also possess strong learning mechanisms through oral traditions, where experiences of success and failure are shared across generations and between villages, creating a rich institutional memory despite the absence of formal documentation.

Nevertheless, the flexibility of customary governance also has limitations, particularly in terms of resource constraints and the capacity to scale up effective solutions. Customary decisions are highly effective within the scope of villages or extended families, but when coordination with external actors such as government agencies or private sector partners is required, the lack of formal documentation and bureaucratic language becomes a barrier. Ironically, rather than integrating customary flexibility with bureaucratic resources to create a more adaptive hybrid governance system, the existing arrangement separates the two into parallel and disconnected tracks. The institutional adaptability dimension scores only 21.7 percent, reflecting the dominance of bureaucratic rigidity without meaningful leverage of customary flexibility.

Democratic Participation: Low Inclusivity and Tokenism

Democratic participation is a core element of polycentric governance, ensuring that policy decisions reflect the preferences and needs of diverse stakeholders. The analysis of decision-making forums in the City of Sorong, however, shows that participation by Indigenous Papuans (OAP) and customary institutions is both very low and largely tokenistic. The Otsus *Musrenbang*, which is intended to function as a space for participatory planning, involves only 18 percent OAP participants, while 82 percent of attendees are bureaucrats and non-OAP business actors. Similarly, PROSPPEK Otsus coordination forums, held three to four times per year, invited customary institution representatives to only 2 of 14 meetings (14 percent). Even when invited, they were not given presentation slots and participated merely as observers.

Table 9. Level of Democratic Participation in Decision-Making Forums

Forum	Freq	Total Participants	OAP/Customary Participants	Participation Rate	Nature of Participation
Otsus *Musrenbang*	Once per year	127	23 (OAP)	18%	Consultative, not decisive
PROSPPEK Coordination Forum	3–4 times per year	~35 per meeting	3 persons (only in 2 of 14 meetings)	14% (attendance rate)	Observer, no voting rights
Technical OPD Meetings	Monthly	15–20	0	0%	Bureaucrat-exclusive
City–Customary Dialogue Forum	Ad hoc (twice in four years)	40–50	18–20	40–45%	Consultative, not binding
Program Focus Group Discussions	Incidental	20–30	8–12	30–40%	Input-gathering, not decision-making

The low level of participation is not due to a lack of willingness or availability among OAP or customary institutions, but rather to structural barriers that render participation difficult or meaningless. First, notifications and invitations to forums are often sent through formal letters to sub-district offices on very short notice (two to three days in advance), whereas reaching customary leaders in villages requires more time and relies on informal but more effective communication channels such as community coordinators. Second, forums are conducted in formats and languages that are largely inaccessible to customary communities. Discussions rely heavily on bureaucratic and technical terminology without adequate explanation, lengthy

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PowerPoint presentations with minimal interaction, and tightly constrained time slots that leave little room for deliberative discussion. This format contrasts sharply with *egek*, the customary decision-making norm that prioritizes extended dialogue and collective deliberation.

Third, and most fundamentally, participation is structured as consultative rather than decisive. Customary communities are allowed to provide inputs or proposals, but there is no guarantee that these inputs will be followed up or translated into policy change. No voting mechanisms or co-decision arrangements exist that would grant customary institutions equal power with bureaucrats in determining final decisions. As a result, participation is widely perceived as a tokenistic ritual intended to satisfy procedural requirements that "the community has been consulted," without any genuine commitment to power sharing. A survey of 158 OAP business actors reveals that 71 percent feel their aspirations are never acted upon despite being voiced in forums, and 68 percent report that they are unwilling to attend future government forums because they perceive them as futile. The democratic participation dimension scores only 15.2 percent, the second lowest among all dimensions, confirming that governance in the City of Sorong falls far short of the ideals of participatory governance.

Integration of Local Knowledge: The Exclusion of Indigenous Knowledge

One of the central critiques of technocratic development approaches is their failure to integrate indigenous knowledge, which is often more contextually relevant than standardized policy blueprints (Chambers, 2007; Eversole, 2012). In the context of economic empowerment for OAP, the Moi customary community possesses deep knowledge of resource management through the *sasi* system, seasonal patterns in fisheries and agriculture, and social networks that can be mobilized for economic mutual support. Yet the analysis shows that this indigenous knowledge is excluded from 89 percent of economic affirmative programs, which are designed primarily around universal technical standards without adaptation to local wisdom.

Table 10. Exclusion of Indigenous Knowledge in Program Design

Type of Indigenous Knowledge	**Relevance for Economic Empowerment**	**Level of Integration in Programs**	**Consequences of Exclusion**
Sasi system (customary conservation rules)	Sustainable resource extraction	5% of programs incorporate *sasi* principles	Overfishing; ecosystem degradation
Seasonal patterns (fishing and farming cycles)	Optimal timing for production and harvest	8% of programs adjust schedules to local calendars	Off-season harvesting; low yields
Customary land tenure (*tanah ulayat*)	Legal access to land for enterprises	11% of programs consult customary authorities on land allocation	Land conflicts; program discontinuation
Social networks (kinship, clans)	Mobilization of social capital; mutual insurance	14% of programs leverage existing networks	Creation of fragile, artificial groups
Traditional skills (carving, weaving, etc.)	Basis for authentic craft-based MSMEs	22% of programs build on traditional crafts	Promotion of new skills with low interest
Barter economy knowledge	Understanding non-monetized value exchange	3% of programs recognize barter as valid	Forced monetization; cultural disruption
Average integration	–	**11%**	Program–reality mismatch

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The exclusion of indigenous knowledge manifests in several recurring patterns. First, entrepreneurship training programs are designed around business planning and financial management rooted in capitalist market assumptions, without recognizing that many OAP remain engaged in barter-based economies and hold value concepts that are not purely monetized. Forcing monetization without a culturally sensitive transition creates a disconnect between what is taught and how economic activities are actually conducted. Second, business formalization programs require documentation such as Business Identification Numbers (*Nomor Induk Berusaha*), assuming enterprises operate as fixed legal entities with permanent addresses and formal organizational structures. In reality, many OAP businesses are mobile and embedded within extended family networks that do not fit these formal templates.

Third, capital assistance and credit access programs apply eligibility criteria based on business plans and physical collateral, reflecting modern banking logic, without recognizing customary systems of mutual guarantees through kinship networks that often provide stronger security than material collateral. Even Bank Papua's special low-interest credit schemes for OAP continue to require land certificates as collateral, despite the fact that most OAP land is customary (*ulayat*) land that remains uncertified due to ongoing recognition processes. As a result, although special schemes exist, only 18 percent of OAP are able to access them because the formal criteria are incompatible with their lived realities.

Ironically, when NGOs or customary leaders attempt to integrate indigenous knowledge into program design, their proposals are frequently rejected by technical bureaucrats on the grounds that such approaches are "not scientific," "not evidence-based," or "not scalable." This bias toward standardized, formally documented technical knowledge creates a form of epistemic exclusion in which indigenous knowledge is delegitimized as anecdotal or backward, despite its proven capacity to sustain community livelihoods over generations. The local knowledge integration dimension scores only 19.8 percent, confirming the dominance of technical rationality that systematically ignores contextual wisdom.

Sustainability Outcomes: Unsustainable Impacts and Weak Community Resilience

The ultimate test of polycentric governance effectiveness lies in sustainability outcomes, both in terms of the durability of program impacts and the resilience of communities in responding to shocks. Follow-up analysis of beneficiaries of economic affirmative programs implemented between 2021 and 2023 reveals very low sustainability rates. Of the 487 Indigenous Papuans (OAP) who received economic empowerment packages consisting of training, capital assistance, and facilitation, only 34 percent (166 individuals) were still operating their businesses after 12 months, and only 19 percent (93 individuals) experienced significant income growth of more than 30 percent after 24 months.

Table 11. Sustainability Outcomes of Economic Affirmative Programs

Sustainability Indicator	Baseline	6 Months	12 Months	24 Months	Sustainability Rate
Businesses still operational	487 (100%)	389 (80%)	166 (34%)	93 (19%)	19% (24 months)
Income increased by >30%	–	278 (57%)	127 (26%)	93 (19%)	19% (sustained growth)
Stable or expanded market access	–	198 (41%)	89 (18%)	67 (14%)	14% (market access)
Access to follow-on credit	–	–	52 (11%)	38 (8%)	8% (financial inclusion)
Joined cooperatives/associations	–	234 (48%)	98 (20%)	71 (15%)	15% (collective action)

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The low level of sustainability can be traced to three main factors. First, programs are designed as one-off interventions without mechanisms for sustained mentoring or accompaniment. When beneficiaries encounter operational challenges related to supply chains, quality control, or marketing, no support system is available to assist them. Second, programs fail to build institutional infrastructure that could function as a communal safety net, such as strong cooperatives or business associations capable of providing mutual support in access to capital, information sharing, and collective bargaining. Third, programs neglect the social-ecological resilience dimension, where economic sustainability depends on the conservation of natural resources and community cohesion. These dimensions could have been strengthened through the revitalization of customary governance systems such as *sasi*.

More troublingly, governance fragmentation actively undermines community resilience in the face of shocks. When the COVID-19 pandemic struck in 2020–2021, government programs stalled due to bureaucratic rigidity that prevented rapid adaptation, while customary mutual support mechanisms were also disrupted by mobility restrictions. In such crises, polycentric governance with multiple centers of authority should provide redundancy, allowing one system to compensate when another fails. In Sorong, however, because formal and customary governance systems are not integrated and often operate in contradictory ways, no effective fail-safe mechanisms exist. As a result, many OAP who had begun to develop their enterprises reverted to subsistence livelihoods. The sustainability outcomes dimension scores only 22.4 percent, reflecting the failure of polycentric governance to deliver transformative and lasting economic change.

Contextual Conditions: Why Polycentricity Becomes Destructive

In-depth analysis indicates that polycentricity in the City of Sorong becomes destructive not because of inherent flaws in the concept of multiple centers of authority, but because three critical prerequisites are absent. First, the lack of boundary clarity regarding the mandates of each authority creates ambiguities that are exploited either to shirk responsibility or to protect institutional turf, producing overlap and gaps simultaneously. Second, the absence of mutual recognition means that formal authorities do not genuinely acknowledge the legitimacy of customary governance as an equal partner. This results in asymmetric power relations that subordinate customary institutions to the role of policy implementers without agency in decision-making. Third, the absence of effective bridging institutions capable of facilitating coordination and translating across different institutional logics causes polycentricity to function as parallel, disconnected tracks rather than as an integrated system.

Table 12. Prerequisites for Productive Polycentricity: Ideal Conditions vs the Reality in Sorong

Prerequisite	Ideal Condition	Reality in the City of Sorong	Consequence
Boundary clarity	Clear jurisdictional rules	Ambiguous; no operational special regulation	34% overlap; 41% accountability gaps
Mutual recognition	Equal legitimacy across authorities	Customary institutions subordinated; only 17% of customary decisions accommodated	Program legitimacy deficits
Bridging institution	Neutral coordination forum	PROSPPEK ineffective (31% engagement)	Fragmented coordination
Capacity equity	Comparable or complementary capacities	Bureaucracy resource-rich; customary institutions underfunded	Bureaucratic dominance
Shared vision	Jointly negotiated agenda	Top-down approach; customary actors consultative only	Program–needs disconnect

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Contextual factors further intensify the destructive effects of polycentricity. Path dependency stemming from a long history of centralization has shaped Papuan bureaucracy to operate within a monocentric, top-down logic inherited from the New Order era. As a result, genuine power sharing with customary institutions is often perceived as a threat to bureaucratic control rather than an opportunity for collaborative governance. Political economy dynamics also play a role, as bureaucratic elites have vested interests in maintaining centralized control over resource allocation to sustain patronage networks. These interests generate resistance to institutional reforms that would decentralize power toward customary institutions or civil society actors.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that Polycentric Governance theory, which assumes that multiple centers of authority will self-organize into adaptive governance arrangements, faces empirical falsification when applied to ethnic-based affirmative policies shaped by histories of asymmetric power relations and the institutionalized subordination of indigenous communities. The failure of polycentric governance in the City of Sorong, reflected in an achievement level of only 24.8 percent of the ideal condition, reveals three critical theoretical propositions. First, polycentricity without clear boundary rules delineating the authority of each actor does not generate complementarity, but instead produces dysfunctional fragmentation. This is evidenced by the simultaneous occurrence of jurisdictional overlap in 34 percent of programs and accountability gaps in 41 percent of critical needs without clearly assigned responsibility. These findings challenge Ostrom's assumption that self-organization will naturally emerge through repeated interaction. Second, plural legitimacy does not automatically translate into genuine power sharing when institutional path dependency continues to privilege bureaucratic monocentrism. This is demonstrated by the paradox in which customary institutions enjoy very high social legitimacy, with 87 percent of OAP recognizing customary authority, yet their participation in policy formulation is limited to 12 percent of forums and only 17 percent of customary decisions are accommodated in formal policy. This confirms insights from critical institutionalism regarding the persistence of dominance structures despite formal recognition of institutional pluralism.

Third, the effectiveness of polycentric governance depends on the presence of bridging institutions that go beyond technical coordination to enable genuine power sharing and epistemic translation between state and customary logics. The absence of such mechanisms in Sorong has resulted in the exclusion of indigenous knowledge from 89 percent of programs and extremely weak integrative coordination between formal and customary authorities, with an effectiveness rate of only 12 percent. These findings extend Polycentric Governance theory by identifying three prerequisites for productive polycentricity that are underemphasized in its original formulation: deliberatively negotiated boundary rules rather than those imposed by dominant authorities; mutual recognition manifested in institutional mechanisms that grant equal decision-making power, not merely consultative roles; and bridging institutions with neutrality, translational capacity across institutional logics, and legitimate authority to enforce coordination. Epistemologically, this study highlights the limitations of institutional design approaches that overlook power relations and path dependency. The mere formal recognition of multiple centers of authority does not dismantle entrenched dominance embedded in bureaucratic practice and local political economy. The theoretical implication is the need to reconceptualize Polycentric Governance from a descriptive model of self-organization into a critical-normative framework that explicitly addresses power sharing, equitable deliberative mechanisms, and the legacies of institutional marginalization.

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