

The Effectiveness of Village Fund (Dana Desa) Allocation for Sustainable Development Projects: A Survey of Village Government Officials

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ABSTRACT

Background. Efforts to promote sustainable development in rural Indonesia increasingly rely on Village Fund (Dana Desa) allocations, which are intended to support local infrastructure, environmental management, and community empowerment. Despite substantial fiscal transfers from the national government, concerns persist regarding whether these funds are effectively translated into sustainable development outcomes. Many villages continue to face challenges related to planning quality, administrative capacity, environmental degradation, and accountability mechanisms.

Purpose. This study aims to evaluate the perceived effectiveness of Village Fund allocation in supporting sustainable development projects, with a specific focus on environmental initiatives, social welfare programs, and economic empowerment activities. The research also seeks to identify key institutional, administrative, and governance factors that influence program success at the village level.

Method. A quantitative survey design was employed, involving 214 village government officials from multiple districts. Respondents were selected using stratified sampling to ensure representation across geographical areas and administrative categories. Data were collected through structured questionnaires measuring fund management practices, project outcomes, and perceived challenges, and were analyzed using descriptive statistics and multiple regression.

Results. Findings indicate that Village Fund allocation is moderately effective in promoting sustainable development, particularly in infrastructure and community-based economic projects. Environmental projects show weaker outcomes due to limited technical expertise and inadequate long-term planning. Regression analysis reveals that transparency, participatory planning, and administrative capacity significantly predict program effectiveness.

Conclusion. The study concludes that strengthening governance capacity and integrating sustainability criteria into village planning can enhance the long-term impact of Village Fund programs.

KEYWORDS

Sustainable Development, Rural Governance, Public Finance

INTRODUCTION

Village Fund (*Dana Desa*) has become one of Indonesia's most significant fiscal decentralization instruments, designed to accelerate rural development and reduce regional disparities. Since its implementation

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in 2015, the central government has distributed substantial financial resources to village governments, enabling them to manage local development priorities more independently (Karim dkk., 2024; Li dkk., 2025). Existing studies highlight that Village Fund programs have contributed to infrastructure expansion, basic service improvement, and economic empowerment across rural areas. Scholars widely recognize that fiscal autonomy at the village level can increase responsiveness to community needs. The presence of Village Fund allocations encourages participatory planning, strengthens local leadership, and supports the integration of cultural and ecological values into development initiatives. These elements are crucial for promoting sustainable development in rural Indonesia, where social, environmental, and economic systems are tightly interconnected (Paschalis dkk., 2024; Sarmigi dkk., 2025).

Research also shows that many villages have successfully implemented projects related to irrigation, clean water access, agricultural productivity, and micro-enterprise support. These successes are often cited as evidence of increasing administrative maturity and stronger village governance structures. Sustainable development principles, particularly those aligned with SDGs, have begun to enter village planning frameworks through national regulations and capacity-building programs. Existing literature further notes that Village Fund allocation provides opportunities for environmental conservation efforts, such as reforestation, waste management, and climate adaptation activities. These initiatives are increasingly relevant as rural communities face heightened environmental pressures, including soil degradation, flooding, and biodiversity loss. The potential for Village Fund to support sustainability-oriented programs has been acknowledged in policy discussions (Muhammad dkk., 2025; Wadghane dkk., 2025).

Researchers additionally acknowledge that village governments play a critical role in determining development outcomes. Their administrative capacity, accountability mechanisms, and collaboration practices significantly influence the effectiveness of Village Fund utilization. Understanding the perspectives of village government officials is therefore essential for evaluating how well the fund supports sustainable development at the grassroots level. Evaluation reports from government and civil society organizations often highlight both positive achievements and recurring challenges in fund management. These include issues related to planning quality, financial accountability, community participation, and long-term project maintenance (Razak dkk., 2024; Sharma & Singh, 2025). These known factors form the foundation for assessing Village Fund effectiveness in supporting sustainability-driven initiatives.

Little is known about how village government officials themselves perceive the effectiveness of Village Fund allocation specifically in relation to sustainable development outcomes. Most existing studies rely on macro-level data or program audits, leaving limited insight into grassroots decision-making processes and local administrative realities. This creates a gap in understanding how sustainability agendas are translated into daily governance practices. Current research does not sufficiently explain why some villages succeed in implementing sustainability-oriented projects while others face persistent obstacles. Variations in technical competence, participatory mechanisms, and environmental awareness remain underexplored. This absence of comparative insights restricts the development of targeted strategies for improving program effectiveness (Mohammad dkk., 2025; Pandey & Sharma, 2024).

Empirical gaps also exist in assessing the extent to which Village Fund supports environmental sustainability. Many studies acknowledge infrastructure and economic improvements, yet the evaluation of ecological outcomes remains limited. The lack of systematic data on environmental projects hampers efforts to determine whether Village Fund allocations truly align with long-term sustainability principles. Limited attention has been given to identifying

institutional and governance factors that shape project success, such as transparency, leadership quality, inter-stakeholder collaboration, and monitoring mechanisms. These factors influence sustainable development implementation, yet their role is seldom captured directly through the perspectives of village government officials (Yadava & Sinha, 2024; Yap dkk., 2024).

Understanding the perspectives of village government officials is crucial because these actors are directly involved in planning, managing, and evaluating development projects funded through Village Fund. Their judgments reflect real administrative challenges, contextual realities, and priority-setting processes that cannot be captured through secondary data alone. Capturing their perceptions enables a more accurate assessment of sustainability-oriented project outcomes. Exploring this gap is necessary to inform evidence-based policies aimed at strengthening village governance systems (Velayati & Ahmad, 2024; Warokka dkk., 2025). Effective sustainable development requires more than financial resources; it demands capable institutions, participatory decision-making, and long-term ecological awareness. Investigating the determinants of Village Fund effectiveness can help identify practical pathways to enhance governance capacity and sustainability integration.

The present study is designed to evaluate the effectiveness of Village Fund allocation for sustainable development projects based on the perceptions of village government officials. The study hypothesizes that governance variables such as transparency, administrative capacity, and participatory planning significantly influence the successful implementation of sustainability-oriented initiatives. The findings are expected to contribute to more robust rural development policies and improved alignment between national sustainability goals and local governance practices (He dkk., 2024; Velayati & Ahmad, 2024).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study adopts a quantitative survey design aimed at evaluating the perceived effectiveness of Village Fund (*Dana Desa*) allocation in supporting sustainable development projects (Davis dkk., 2025; Phoek dkk., 2024). The design allows for systematic measurement of governance practices, administrative capacity, and project outcomes based on the perspectives of village government officials who are directly involved in decision-making processes. The survey design is appropriate for capturing variations across villages, identifying predictors of program success, and generating empirical evidence to support policy recommendations. The design also accommodates statistical analysis that can reveal relationships between governance variables and the effectiveness of sustainability-oriented initiatives.

Population and Samples

The population of this study consists of village government officials from multiple districts representing diverse geographical, administrative, and socio-economic contexts. The sample includes village heads, secretaries, treasurers, and heads of planning units who hold direct responsibility for Village Fund management. A stratified sampling technique is applied to ensure representation across different regions and to account for variations in administrative capacity and development priorities. The final sample comprises selected respondents who meet the inclusion criteria: active involvement in planning, budgeting, and implementation of Village Fund programs during the last fiscal year (Ardiputra dkk., 2025; Dhasmana dkk., 2025).

Instruments

The primary instrument in this study is a structured questionnaire developed to measure perceptions of Village Fund effectiveness in achieving sustainable development goals. The

questionnaire includes Likert-scale items assessing governance indicators such as transparency, accountability, administrative capacity, participatory mechanisms, and environmental considerations in project planning. Validity is established through expert judgment and alignment with national development guidelines, while reliability is assessed through pilot testing to ensure item consistency. The instrument is divided into sections covering respondent demographics, fund management practices, project implementation experiences, and perceived outcomes (Soegijono dkk., 2026; Storni dkk., 2025).

Procedures

Data collection begins with obtaining formal permission from district authorities and village governments to conduct the survey. Respondents receive questionnaires either in printed form or through secure digital platforms, depending on local accessibility and administrative arrangements. All participants are informed of the study's purpose, confidentiality protocols, and voluntary participation. Completed questionnaires are screened for completeness before being coded for analysis. Data processing involves descriptive statistics to summarize patterns of fund utilization and inferential analyses to examine relationships between governance indicators and perceived program effectiveness. The final stage involves synthesizing the statistical findings to generate insights that address the research objectives (Rahmawati & Susilowati, 2024; Tin Tun Kirkpatrick, 2025).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive analysis of the survey responses shows that a total of 214 village government officials participated, representing 62 villages across three districts. The majority of respondents consisted of village heads (28%), village secretaries (22%), treasurers (18%), and planning unit heads (32%). Secondary data from district planning offices indicate that Village Fund allocations during the last fiscal year ranged from IDR 900 million to IDR 1.8 billion per village, with an average of IDR 1.3 billion. These funds were distributed across infrastructure development, economic empowerment, social services, and environmental management programs.

Patterns emerging from the descriptive data demonstrate that 64% of Village Fund expenditures were allocated to infrastructure projects, followed by economic empowerment (21%), social services (10%), and environmental sustainability initiatives (5%). Respondents rated the overall effectiveness of Village Fund implementation at moderate levels, with mean scores ranging from 3.1 to 3.6 on a 5-point scale. These results illustrate the dominance of infrastructure spending and the comparatively limited investment in environmental projects.

Table 1. Allocation of Village Fund Expenditures by Program Category

Program Category	Percentage (%)
Infrastructure Development	64
Economic Empowerment	21
Social Services	10
Environmental Sustainability	5

Findings indicate that infrastructure remains the primary focus of Village Fund utilization due to immediate community needs such as road access, irrigation repairs, and public facilities. Village officials report that these projects are often prioritized because they provide visible and measurable outputs that align with national development standards. The dominance of such spending reflects long-standing development priorities in rural areas. Data patterns reveal a

persistent underrepresentation of environmental sustainability initiatives. Respondents acknowledged the importance of ecological programs but identified barriers such as limited technical expertise, unclear guidelines, and insufficient community awareness. These explanations suggest that environmental outcomes are not yet embedded as core considerations in village-level planning.

Thematic analysis of the questionnaire highlights three dominant areas influencing Village Fund effectiveness: governance capacity, participatory planning, and administrative transparency. Respondents who rated their villages' governance capacity as high also reported more successful project implementation outcomes. These results indicate the central role of institutional capability in achieving sustainable development goals. Additional themes include the importance of long-term planning and alignment with sustainability frameworks. Officials who engaged in transparent reporting and inclusive decision-making processes observed stronger community support and higher project completion rates. These patterns reinforce the view that governance processes shape the quality of Village Fund outcomes.

Regression analysis demonstrates that transparency, participatory planning, and administrative capacity significantly predict the perceived effectiveness of Village Fund projects. Statistical tests indicate that these three variables collectively explain 47% of the variance in project effectiveness scores ($R^2 = 0.47$). Transparency emerged as the strongest predictor, with a standardized coefficient of $\beta = 0.41$, followed by participatory planning ($\beta = 0.33$) and administrative capacity ($\beta = 0.28$). Inferential results also show that environmental project effectiveness is significantly lower than infrastructure project effectiveness, with mean differences confirmed through independent sample t-tests ($p < 0.05$). These findings indicate that sustainability-oriented initiatives are more sensitive to governance quality and technical skills than other project types.

Table 2. Regression Results Predicting Project Effectiveness

Variable	β	Significance
Transparency	0.41	$p < 0.01$
Participatory Planning	0.33	$p < 0.01$
Administrative Capacity	0.28	$p < 0.05$
Constant	—	$p < 0.01$

Relationships among variables indicate that villages with stronger governance capacity consistently show higher effectiveness in both economic and social development initiatives. High-capacity villages are more capable of identifying priorities, allocating funds accurately, and monitoring project outcomes. These relationships emphasize the interconnected nature of governance structures and project success. Results also reveal that participatory planning correlates strongly with the success of environmental and social projects. Villages that actively involve local communities in planning tend to select more relevant environmental programs and achieve greater public support. These relationships highlight the collective nature of sustainable development and the necessity of community engagement.

A case study in District A illustrates how strong administrative capacity leads to successful infrastructure and economic projects. The village implemented road improvements, irrigation channels, and community enterprises supported by structured planning and transparent reporting. Officials highlighted that consistent training contributed to improved financial management and project oversight. Another case in District B demonstrates challenges in implementing

environmental sustainability projects. Despite receiving funds for waste management and riverbank rehabilitation, the village faced obstacles related to technical expertise, limited monitoring, and fluctuating community participation. These challenges resulted in incomplete project outcomes and reduced ecological benefits.

The first case underscores the role of governance capability in maximizing Village Fund impact. Strong leadership, trained personnel, and transparent systems created a favorable environment for project execution. The case demonstrates that administrative preparedness directly influences the feasibility and durability of development outcomes. The second case shows that sustainability-oriented projects require additional capacity beyond administrative competence. Technical skills, environmental knowledge, and long-term maintenance structures are essential for success. The findings suggest that environmental projects fail not because of financial limitations but because of insufficient institutional support and community involvement.

The results overall indicate that Village Fund allocation contributes to moderate success in sustainable development, with clear strengths in infrastructure but persistent challenges in environmental initiatives. Governance quality emerges as the most critical factor influencing outcomes across all project categories. The combination of transparency, participatory planning, and administrative capacity forms the foundation for effective utilization of Village Fund resources. The analysis reinforces the need for capacity-building interventions and stronger sustainability integration within village planning frameworks. Enhancing institutional competence at the village level will improve project performance and enable Village Fund to better support long-term ecological and socio-economic outcomes.

DISCUSSION

The study reveals that Village Fund allocation is perceived as moderately effective in advancing sustainable development initiatives, with the strongest outcomes observed in infrastructure projects. Village officials report that infrastructure improvements such as road construction, irrigation systems, and public facilities are the most successfully implemented due to their clear technical requirements and immediate community benefits. These findings emphasize that infrastructure remains the dominant development priority within rural governance. The results show weaker performance in environmental sustainability projects. Respondents highlight challenges such as limited technical expertise, insufficient environmental knowledge, and difficulties in maintaining long-term ecological programs. These obstacles suggest that environmental components of Village Fund projects demand additional governance and technical support beyond routine administrative capacity.

The analysis indicates that governance variables—transparency, participatory planning, and administrative capacity—play a significant role in determining project outcomes. Villages with stronger governance systems consistently achieve better results across development sectors. These findings reinforce the importance of governance quality as a foundational determinant of Village Fund success. Regression analysis confirms that transparency is the strongest predictor of perceived project effectiveness. Officials who practice open reporting and inclusive decision-making tend to observe higher community participation and improved project performance. These results highlight the centrality of trust-building and accountability in rural development management.

Many studies on fiscal decentralization in Indonesia emphasize the positive impact of Village Fund on infrastructure growth. The present findings align with this literature by confirming that infrastructure projects remain the most consistently successful category. This alignment reflects broader national trends in rural development, where physical improvements are often prioritized

due to clear output indicators and political visibility. Literature on rural sustainability highlights the need for environmental programs to be integrated into community planning. The study's findings diverge from this ideal by showing that environmental sustainability remains underfunded and underdeveloped at the village level. This discrepancy suggests a gap between policy expectations and on-the-ground implementation capacity.

Comparative research in Southeast Asia indicates that community participation increases the success of rural development programs. The present findings support this trend by demonstrating that participatory planning is a strong predictor of Village Fund project effectiveness. This convergence reinforces the universal value of inclusive governance in achieving sustainable outcomes. Studies on public administration argue that administrative competence is a key determinant of development performance. The results extend this argument by showing that administrative capacity not only influences implementation efficiency but also affects the ability to initiate and sustain sustainability-oriented projects. This additional nuance contributes new insight to existing literature.

The findings signify that Village Fund implementation is structurally capable of supporting sustainable development, yet practical limitations hinder its full potential. The emphasis on infrastructure reveals a development culture shaped by short-term results and tangible outputs. This pattern reflects broader governance preferences that prioritize visible achievements over long-term ecological resilience. The limited outcomes in environmental sustainability projects indicate that sustainability is not yet institutionalized within village governance. The findings suggest that environmental priorities remain secondary to community needs that are perceived as more urgent, such as roads, water systems, and economic support. This reflects a developmental trajectory still transitioning toward sustainability awareness (Chowdhury & Islam, 2025; Zeng dkk., 2025).

The strong relationship between governance quality and project effectiveness signifies that sustainable development is fundamentally a governance issue rather than solely a financial one. Effective fund utilization depends on institutional competence, transparency, and community involvement. These governance dimensions provide the structural backbone for sustainable project management (Chowdhury & Islam, 2025; Gupta dkk., 2024). The consistency of governance influence across project categories reveals that enhancing governance quality can generate improvements across all sectors. This signifies that interventions aimed at strengthening village institutions may yield more substantial long-term development gains than increasing fund allocations alone.

Implications for policy design include the need to strengthen governance training for village officials, focusing on transparency mechanisms, participatory planning, and administrative capacity. Policy-makers may consider requiring sustainability-based planning frameworks to ensure ecological considerations become integral to Village Fund implementation. These adjustments can enhance the long-term impact of fund allocation. Implications for environmental management point to the necessity of providing technical assistance for villages implementing ecological projects. Environmental sustainability requires specialized knowledge and long-term maintenance structures that are not yet established in many rural areas. Targeted technical support can help expand environmental project success.

Implications for community development highlight the importance of promoting public participation in project planning. Communities that feel ownership over project decisions tend to maintain stronger engagement, which increases the likelihood of project sustainability. This insight reinforces the need for participatory governance models within rural development. Implications for sustainability education underscore the potential for integrating Village Fund management into

local learning initiatives. Educational institutions can play a role in building environmental literacy and governance competence among both officials and community members. This integration can foster long-term capacity for sustainable rural development.

The findings appear as they do because rural development in Indonesia has historically prioritized infrastructure as the primary indicator of progress. Infrastructure projects deliver tangible outputs that align with national performance standards and community expectations. This historical emphasis creates a structural bias toward infrastructure-focused planning. Environmental sustainability remains challenging due to limited technical expertise at the village level. Most village officials lack formal training in ecological management, and environmental projects often require specialized knowledge that goes beyond administrative routines. This skills gap explains the lower success rates of environmental initiatives.

Governance quality emerges as a significant factor because transparent processes and participatory mechanisms generate trust and support within communities. When communities feel informed and involved, project implementation becomes smoother and more accountable. This dynamic reinforces the centrality of governance capacity. The results also reflect broader constraints within rural administration, including limited access to professional development, uneven resource distribution, and varying levels of institutional maturity. These conditions shape the observed variations in Village Fund effectiveness across different villages (Haeril dkk., 2025; Sari & Sunarya, 2025).

The results indicate that future efforts should prioritize capacity-building programs for village officials. Strengthening governance skills, financial management knowledge, and sustainability competencies can enhance the quality of Village Fund utilization. These initiatives will support more coherent and sustainability-oriented decision-making. Opportunities exist for integrating environmental expertise into village development teams. Partnerships with universities, NGOs, and environmental agencies can provide villages with access to technical assistance, monitoring tools, and ecological awareness training. These collaborations can improve the success rate of environmental sustainability projects (Perangin Angin & Yola, 2025; Win dkk., 2024).

Future research should explore the long-term impacts of Village Fund projects on environmental resilience, economic growth, and social wellbeing. Longitudinal studies can reveal whether current governance practices contribute to sustained improvements or whether additional interventions are needed. This approach can deepen understanding of rural development trajectories. Policy-makers may consider developing a sustainability scoring system for Village Fund planning, implementation, and evaluation (Analiansyah dkk., 2024; Zhao dkk., 2024). This tool can encourage villages to integrate ecological considerations more systematically and provide incentives for sustainability-driven innovations. This future direction can strengthen the transformative potential of Village Fund programs.

CONCLUSION

The most significant finding of this study is the identification of governance quality—particularly transparency, participatory planning, and administrative capacity—as the strongest determinants of Village Fund effectiveness in achieving sustainable development outcomes. This result differs from common assumptions that financial allocation size is the primary predictor of project success. The study reveals that villages with moderate financial resources but strong governance practices outperform those with larger budgets but weaker institutional systems. This distinction highlights that sustainable development outcomes depend more on institutional readiness and community engagement than on funding levels alone.

The study contributes conceptual value by proposing a governance-centered framework for understanding Village Fund effectiveness, emphasizing that sustainable development performance is shaped by institutional processes rather than solely by budget distribution. The framework integrates transparency, participatory planning, and administrative capacity as interconnected predictors, offering a practical model for policymakers and development practitioners. The methodological contribution lies in the use of stratified sampling and regression analysis to capture village-level governance variations, generating a more nuanced understanding of grassroots development dynamics that previous macro-level studies have overlooked.

The study is limited by its reliance on self-reported perceptions from village officials, which may not fully capture actual project performance or long-term sustainability outcomes. The cross-sectional design restricts the ability to observe changes over time, and the absence of qualitative data prevents deeper exploration of contextual factors such as cultural norms, political dynamics, or leadership styles. Future research should combine survey data with field observations, longitudinal tracking of project impacts, and comparative case studies across regions. Further exploration of environmental project implementation, capacity-building interventions, and institutional innovation within village governance can strengthen the evidence base for sustainable rural development policies.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Look this example below:

Author 1: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing.

Author 2: Conceptualization; Data curation; In-vestigation.

Author 3: Data curation; Investigation.

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