
Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Instrumentalization and Neoliberal Hegemony: A Village Perspective

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Abstract

The implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for Villages in Indonesia since 2021 marks a significant change in the paradigm of village development. This policy is claimed to be an effort to accelerate sustainable development, but in practice, it constructs villages as objects of state control within the global development architecture. This research aims to examine how the Village SDGs operate within the power relations of the state, market, and village, and to evaluate their implications for the village's autonomy in determining its development direction. Using the Socio-Institutional Neoliberalism (SIN) approach by Toby Carroll, this research examines how village development policies are reproduced within the framework of global economic-political interests. This research uses qualitative methods with case studies in the Panggunharjo Village and Pandowoharjo Village, Yogyakarta. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and policy document analysis, and then analyzed using Yin's pattern matching technique. The research results indicate that the implementation of the Village SDGs is more oriented towards administration and compliance with global indicators rather than substantial village empowerment. The digitalization of village development not only complicates bureaucracy but also increases the village's dependence on central regulations, widens the technology access gap, and strengthens state and market control over the village. This research recommends a more democratic and participatory village development approach, allowing villages to implement development based on their local conditions. The reformulation of the Village SDGs policy must be oriented towards village independence, not merely administrative compliance with global targets.

Keywords: Instrumentalization; Neoliberalism; SDGs; Village

Introduction

Village development in Indonesia has undergone a significant paradigm shift since the enactment of Law Number 6 of 2014 on Villages. This law grants villages the authority to manage their resources independently, emphasizing local initiatives, community participation, and sustainability in development planning. In the global context, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by the United Nations (UN) serve as the main reference for sustainable development in various sectors, including village development in Indonesia (UNDP 2016). Through the policy of the Ministry of Village, Development of Disadvantaged Regions, and Transmigration, the Village SDGs are implemented to accelerate the achievement of sustainable development goals at the village level by 2030. Referring to data from the Ministry of Village, Development of Disadvantaged Regions, and Transmigration, Minister Abdul Halim Iskandar explained that village development and empowerment require structured and integrated handling based on the needs of the village community, utilizing micro-data collected by the village (Iskandar 2020).

The Village SDGs policy is regulated by the Minister of Villages PDRT Regulation Number 21 of 2020. Village SDGs are defined as village data consisting of one name, one address, and family, territorial data from the smallest level, namely Family, RT, RW, up to village-level development data. According to the Minister of Village Ministry, the data is then input into the Village Information System (SID), which is integrated with information on potential issues in each village, to be processed and turned into development recommendations for the respective village. Meanwhile, the principle of no one left behind means that no village community member should be left behind and not enjoy the benefits of village development. Data and administrative-based development planning is intended to facilitate the village government in the village development process. Through data, village governments can more easily analyze problems and potential within the village, making it easier to establish a priority scale for village development. In addition, SDGs-based data collection makes it easier for the Ministry of Villages, Development of Disadvantaged

Regions, and Transmigration to see the level of development progress in all villages across Indonesia.

However, in practice, the implementation of the Village SDGs does not always align with the social realities and needs of the village. This policy operates within a global framework laden with political and economic interests, which in turn can lead to a new form of neoliberal hegemony. The SDG-based development concept promoted by the Ministry of Villages, Disadvantaged Regions, and Transmigration seems to place villages as objects of development, rather than as subjects with full autonomy in determining their development direction. This creates a contradiction with the spirit of the Village Law, which positions villages as the main actors of development. One of the manifestations of neoliberal hegemony in the Village SDGs is the digitalization of rural development realized through various applications and data-based administrative systems (Sarjito 2023). Village governments are encouraged to input data into various digital platforms such as the Village Information System (SID), Village Financial System (Siskeudes), and Village SDGs. Although theoretically, these systems aim to enhance efficiency and transparency, in practice, digitalization often complicates bureaucracy at the village level. The villages of Panggunharjo and Pandowoharjo in Yogyakarta, for example, experience data fragmentation due to the influx of applications from various ministries and agencies without clear coordination. This situation shows that villages not only face administrative complexity but are also trapped in a development pattern controlled by the power structure at the central level.

Administration in the policy becomes a legitimate instrument as long as it does not eliminate the main objectives. However, simplification is needed regarding the various rules and administrations that enter the village so they do not overlap. This is what is then referred to as power, which is a tool to achieve desires or goals (Siregar 2021). Villages can be oriented towards sustainable development without abandoning local wisdom and given full authority to manage their resources without intervention from any party. However, in practice, that authority is often distorted by the complexity of regulations and the dominance of power structures that do not favor the village. This situation is further exacerbated by the digitalization of village development, which not only creates disparities in access and

utilization of technology but also increases the bureaucratic burden. Uneven digital infrastructure, especially outside Java Island, exacerbates the information gap that further entrenches the marginalization of remote villages. Village SDGs which initially aimed to ensure "no one left behind," actually have the potential to reinforce the structure of inequality if it is not accompanied by the empowerment of village communities' capacity to utilize information and communication technology.

This phenomenon shows that Law Number 6 of 2014 on Villages, which is supposed to strengthen village independence through the principles of recognition and subsidiarity, has not yet been fully realized in the implementation of Village SDGs (Luthfi 2017). Instead of encouraging villages to become the main actors in development, this policy emphasizes administrative compliance with global indicators, which ultimately reproduces power hierarchies and strengthens the dominance of the state and market. As criticized in Ben White's study (2017), the Village Law still leaves disparities in the democratization of villages, where village elites hold more power than the community. Therefore, to align with the spirit of recognition and subsidiarity, the reformulation of the Village SDGs needs to prioritize substantive participation of the village community and provide greater space for villages to adjust policies according to their local needs and potential.

The urgency of this research lies in the effort to critique how the Village SDGs, as a global development instrument, operate within the context of villages in Indonesia. This study highlights how the implementation of the SDGs is inseparable from the dominance of state and market interests in the architecture of village development policies, which ultimately reflects a new form of neoliberal control over local spaces. By understanding how the Village SDGs are implemented, this research contributes to the neoliberal interest in instrumentalizing village development and how villages can articulate their autonomy in the face of a hegemonic global structure. This research has novelty in uncovering the paradox of the Village SDGs, which are claimed to be a strategy for sustainable development, but on the other hand, can become a tool to control and direct villages according to global and national interests. By using a critical approach to the relationship between the SDGs and neoliberal hegemony, this study is expected to provide a new perspective in understanding the

dynamics of village development in Indonesia and to formulate policy recommendations that are more in favor of village independence. The theoretical framework of the Socio-Institutional Neoliberalism (SIN) approach by Toby Carroll becomes an analytical knife to reach the appropriate structural network by outlining the localization of the global agenda of SDGs. Therefore, this study seeks to analyze in depth the narrative of village SDGs derivative policies from the national and local levels.

Methods

The Qualitative research method is a type of research that directly understands and explores a symptom that starts from social problems according to individuals and groups. Qualitative research is a type of research that is descriptive and usually uses analysis. Qualitative research often emphasizes the subject's perspective, process, and meaning of research by using theory as an umbrella or support to match the circumstances in the field (Fiantika, Ambarwati, and Maharani 2022). Qualitative methods are used to analyze in-depth, specifically, narratively, and critically related to the SDGs Village policy that contradicts the heterogeneous lives of rural communities in Indonesia. The research approach uses Robert K. Yin's case study. From several types of case studies described by Yin (2019), this research uses intrinsic case study research, namely case studies that are oriented towards processes, activities, and events in life uniquely. The use of case studies is relevant to explore the case of SDGs localization in two villages in depth. The researcher chose a case study, based on the regularity and specificity that Village SDGs only exist in Indonesia, not for other external reasons.

Data collection techniques in qualitative research aim to obtain data both directly and indirectly. In this research, there are 3 data collection techniques, namely observation, interviews, and documentation.

- a. Observations were conducted to obtain empirical data related to the implementation of the Village SDGs policy which is the focus of the research. The type of observation used was non-participant, where the researcher only

observed the activities carried out by the informants without being involved in them. The choice of non-participant observation was driven by the fact that the researcher did not have the authority to be part of the SDGs Village cadre team or to be part of the village government.

- b. Deep interviews were conducted to obtain detailed or specific information related to the research objectives that had been previously set. The interview uses an interview guide (interview guide) for a certain amount of time. Interviews can be conducted several times to obtain more complete data and can answer the problem formulation. Researchers conducted interviews with the village government, the Village SDGs team/cadre, BUMDesa, and community leaders to obtain information about SDGs practices in the village.
- c. Documentation data can support data from observations and interviews. This research uses documents such as the Village SDGs Book, Presidential Regulation Number 111 of 2022, Permendesa PDTT Number 13 of 2020, and Permendesa PDTT Number 6 of 2023.

- 1) Village SDGs Book

This book was compiled by Abdul Halim Iskandar as the Minister of Village PDTT in President Joko Widodo's Advanced Indonesia Cabinet. The Village SDGs book is a translation of the Village SDGs policy as a derivative of the Global SDGs. This book contains 18 goals that must be achieved by the village towards 2030. SDGs in village development, and the urgency of implementing SDGs based on predetermined indicators.

- 2) Presidential Regulation Number 111 of 2022

This regulation describes the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. This document explains that Indonesia is a member state of the United Nations that contributes to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. Indonesia then translates the term Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with 17 goals that are the same as the SDGs. The source of

funding comes from the State Budget (APBN) and other incentive sources.

- 3) Regulation of the Minister of Village Development of Disadvantaged Regions and Transmigration Number 13 of 2020

This document is the foundation for the country to ground the global SDGs into sustainable development goals. It explains that the Village SDGs contribute 74 percent to the achievement of SDGs. Village SDGs are the total development of villages.

- 4) Regulation of the Minister of Village Development of Disadvantaged Regions and Transmigration Number 6 of 2023

This regulation contains changes to the regulation of the Minister of Villages and Transmigration Number 21 of 2020 concerning general guidelines for village development and village community empowerment. The intended changes refer to the Village SDGs, which originally contained 18 goals, to 17 goals as globally agreed SDGs.

The data analysis technique uses Yin (2019) pattern matching, by preparing and organizing the collected data. Pattern matching uses logic by comparing patterns based on empirical data and predicted patterns. According to Yin, if these two patterns are similar, the results can strengthen the internal validity of the case study being researched. The special type of pattern-matching analysis technique used in this research is explanation generation. The purpose of making explanations is to analyze case study data by making explanations related to the case in question, in this case, the SDGs policy case of Village SDGs.

Theoretical Foundations: Toby Carrol's Socio-Institutional Neoliberalism (SIN)

Socio-Institutional Neoliberalism (SIN) is a political economy approach. The promotion of SIN as an approach to poverty alleviation and development is important largely concerning the World Bank (Carroll 2007). The idea of SIN is at its core a project of market expansion into social life. This has the potential to have major political ramifications for

states and constituencies in underdeveloped countries. The proponents of SIN seek widespread influence. SIN is an ideologically consistent set of guidelines based on the methodological individualism of classical economics, with an emphasis on individual choice. The influence of SIN is combined with the knowledge of New Institutional Economics (NIE), a relatively recent extension of classical economic principles. The influence of NIE is reflected in SIN's focus on the relationship between social and political institutions (particularly the state) and market efficiency. These ideas led to new projects, programs, and approaches by market-oriented development agencies such as the World Bank (Carroll 2007). Taking advantage of the NIE effect, where transaction costs and incomplete information distribution are barriers to market activity, projects and programs now 'build' and 'transform' institutions to reduce the costs borne by market participants.

The prominence of delivery devices and political technologies in SIN is an important aspect of its depoliticized character. Many programs and policies of SIN are couched in technical terms that obscure class relations and conflict (Carroll 2007). This constitutes one of the diagnoses of politics. It is concerned with mapping the interests and conflicts associated with class relations and global capitalism that give rise to specific shades of social structure. In this approach institutions and policies are seen as socially constituted and subject to the influence of social and political forces. Furthermore, markets, from this perspective, are not abstract but politically constructed. Based on the SIN perspective, the products of institutions (such as economic capital, social capital, human capital, or other forms of individual or group interests) can be considered as forms of power. Power, in turn, influences the composition of each institution and the institutional matrix.

SIN is relevant as an analytical knife for the localization of SDGs policy in Indonesia. The SDGs agenda becomes the World Bank's idea for market efficiency with political power to subjugate developing countries, furthermore when juxtaposed with the rural context. Rural institutions are considered objects that must submit to the rules of SDGs Village as the basis of sustainable development instruments. This certainly serves the interests of the political elite in market liberalization, even at the expense of the diversity of villages in Indonesia. SIN becomes an analytical lens in reviewing the critical political economy of the

Village SDGs policy. SIN is aligned with the context of Village SDGs with the power of Kemendesa PDTT which cannot be separated from the neoliberal agenda. Actions, words, and regulations have a major impact in directing and controlling social life ideologically in the discourse of 'Sustainability' over a longer period of time. SIN can explain the forms of power that dominate people's consciousness today. Like the Village SDGs as a product of power that can influence the actions of rural communities.

Localizing Village SDGs as a Development Instrument

The implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the village level through the SDGs Village policy since 2021 marks a change in the mechanism of rural development planning (White 2017). The government of Pandowoharjo Village, for example, only became familiar with this term after the issuance of regulations from the Ministry of Village PDTT, even though this village already had local potential in line with the principles of the SDGs. However, in practice, the Village SDGs operate more within electoral bureaucracy rather than becoming a development paradigm that is fully understood and implemented by the village community. This shows that the implementation of the Village SDGs is technocratic and administrative. The structure of the village-level government does not guarantee that all village officials fully understand the concept of the SDGs. In the context of Pandowoharjo, for example, not all village officials understand the full form of the SDGs, let alone memorize the 17 goals that form the basis of this policy. This limited understanding has implications for how the Village SDGs policy is implemented, merely fulfilling the indicators and targets set by the central government, without truly addressing the real needs of the village community.

One of the fundamental issues in the instrumentalization of Village SDGs is that the narrative of sustainable development promoted by the Ministry of Villages, Development of Disadvantaged Regions, and Transmigration (Kemendesa PDTT) does not fully penetrate grassroots levels. Pandowoharjo Village and Panggungharjo Village, for example, have had a sustainable development direction even before the Village SDGs policy was introduced. Development in both villages has been carried out with a local wisdom approach, which in

some aspects even exceeds the targets set by the global SDGs for 2030. (Bernstein 2017) explains the lack of strong evidence that the SDGs have a transformative impact on the mandates, practices, and resource allocation of organizations or state institutions. However, with the introduction of the SDGs Village policy, the previously community-based development process must now be adjusted to the broader SDGs framework, which is essentially an adaptation of international policies translated into the national Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The Village SDGs concept promoted by the central government uses simplified language and rationalized goals to make it easier to implement at the village level. However, in the field, the implementation of Village SDGs often does not take into account the specific capacities and conditions of rural communities. Village governments are more directed to meet centrally set development targets and indicators, rather than autonomously determining their development priorities. In critical development theory, neoliberalism operates through control over economic and institutional policies, including at the village level. As stated by (Carroll 2007), development agendas that seem inclusive often remain dominated by market and capital interests. Village SDGs is not just a local-based development policy, but also part of a global project that reproduces control mechanisms over villages in Indonesia.

In the village development scheme, the instrumentalization of the SDGs occurs through the mechanism of data collection and the digitalization of village information. Based on Permendesdesa Number 21 of 2020, every village is required to conduct data collection, planning, implementation, and periodic accountability for development. However, the reality on the ground shows that this process functions more as an administrative control instrument rather than as a tool that truly helps villages manage development independently. Ben (White 2017) highlights that the bureaucratization of village governance, which is reinforced by such regulations, prioritizes compliance with standardized indicators rather than empowering villages to formulate their development strategies. This aligns with his broader critique that the Village Law (UU Desa) does not necessarily democratize village governance but instead strengthens administrative

hierarchies, where village governments become more accountable to higher authorities rather than to their communities (Luthfi 2017). Moreover, White argues that while the rhetoric of participation, democracy, and local autonomy is emphasized in the law, the actual implementation maintains the dominant position of the village elite, particularly the village head and local bureaucrats, who often act as intermediaries between state interests and village communities. Consequently, the digitalization of village administration, rather than fostering transparency and efficiency, further entrenches state control over village affairs, reducing the space for genuine community-driven governance (White 2017).

This further suggests that the SDGs framework, as applied in the village context, risks becoming an extension of technocratic governance, where the collection and monitoring of data serve primarily as tools of central oversight rather than mechanisms for fostering meaningful village autonomy. Digitalization of development is a strategy to disseminate development information to the public to improve community welfare. However, technology-based development communication no longer positions the government higher than the village community by merely forming a top-down communication pattern (Badri 2016). The Indonesian state, with its open political system, has the ideal reform aspiration of a government that views society as equals. Amien in (Badri 2016) states that the shift in our perspective towards the universe drives a shift in the meaning of development. Previously, development was a series of comprehensive programs aimed at achieving clear goals and objectives; now, it has shifted to efforts to prepare the order to face increasingly dynamic changes to maintain its existence. In this context, the development concept intended by the government is still progressing slowly and is project-oriented. The consequence of the project-based digitalization system in development creates an information gap that positions rural areas increasingly marginal in accessing information technology. The next problem that arises from the digitalization of rural development is the low capacity of rural communities to control and monitor information regarding the planning and implementation of village development. Internet access in rural areas is still limited and difficult, especially when the quality of access is very low (Indrawati et al. 2024).

Panggunharjo Village has become one of the examples of the central government's application for village development. Each Ministry/Agency has its interests through applications to be operated in the villages. Many applications are suspected to be able to help village governments identify potential, manage finances, and even manage assets. The various applications include Village SDGs, Village Information System (SID), Nusantara Tourism Village, Village Academy, Village Map, BUMDes, BUMDes Accounting Application, Village Financial System (Siskeudes), Sipades (Village Assets), Prosdekkel (Village profile), Electronic Village Development (Epdeskel), Sisk-NG or Social Welfare Information System (DTKS), Population Administration Information System (SIAK), DPJ Online, e-SPPT (PBB Tax), and Omspan. According to Rosada, the Admin of SDGs Village Panggunharjo, the village is increasingly far from the main goal of having integrated Indonesian data and becoming a smart city. This certainly adds to the workload of the village government to adjust between applications and use them according to their functions. The utilization of information and communication technology aims for public services that are efficient, effective, and transparent. Bureaucracy shrouded in political interests under power will ultimately govern those who are powerless. The implication of this central power makes humans function as both subjects and objects of power (Siregar 2021).

According to (Santoso, Hanif, and Gustomy 2004) and (Nugraha 2021) public policy is not only an administrative product and a technocratic product but also a political product. Reviewing the Village SDGs, the development framework is directed towards creating a profile that encompasses various potentials and needs of the village community. Data not only becomes a source of knowledge but can also become a new source or form of power (Nugraha 2021). The use of SDG data can influence interaction patterns in policy-making, while the interaction in the SDG Village policy-making process, on the other hand, affects how the data is used.

One of the impacts of data instrumentalization in village development is that villages increasingly depend on the data they report to the central government. The disparity in access to this information further reinforces the hierarchy of power, where only certain parties can access more detailed data. An SDGs Village administrator in Panggunharjo

revealed that the general public can only access data in the form of aggregates or graphs, while individual data and other details can only be accessed by admins and village facilitators. This situation reflects how information is used as a control tool that substantially limits community participation. This phenomenon also opens up opportunities for the penetration of market interests and capitalism in village governance. With the increasing connectivity of villages in a centralized digital system, the opportunities for investors and corporations to access data and invest capital in villages have become more open. Villages that previously had strong local characteristics are now increasingly encouraged to adapt to market mechanisms based on competition and economic productivity logic, which are the main features of neoliberal hegemony.

The digitalization of rural development aims to facilitate the dissemination of information and technology access from the center to the regions. A total of 76 thousand villages across Indonesia have become easier to photograph through a single Village SDGs system. It should be emphasized that the diverse spread of technology access also poses a challenge in the implementation of development digitalization. In Yogyakarta, particularly in the villages of Pandowoharjo and Panggungharjo, which are classified as urban areas, internet access is attainable. Pandowoharjo Village, in terms of infrastructure and human resources, is already capable of keeping up with technological and informational developments. The influx of tourists and the characteristics of urban society encourage residents to become tech-savvy. Inputting SDGs Village data can be carried out well by the Pandowoharjo data team. The same condition is also accepted by the Panggungharjo Village, which is located near a university. The equitable distribution of technology and information on the island of Java is achievable, but it is different outside Java. The geographical condition of Indonesia, which spans across islands, poses a challenge for the Ministry of Village Development (Kemendesa) if it wants to accelerate village development through digitalization. Digital infrastructure is only concentrated in Java and Sumatra, creating a digital divide (Kusuma et al. 2022). In addition to technological infrastructure, skilled human resources are needed to understand the types of data that will be input. This has the

consequence that the input data is prone to being exaggerated by the village SDGs data team to capture the progress of their village.

This condition shows that the Village SDGs function more as an economic control tool rather than as an instrument for village empowerment. In the context of neoliberal hegemony, this policy ultimately encourages villages to be more open to market mechanisms, both through data digitization and the influx of external capital in various forms of development projects. The instrumentalization of the Village SDGs in rural development policies reflects the hegemony of the neoliberal paradigm, where villages are no longer the main actors in development but rather play a role as administrative units within the global policy system. Although normatively the SDGs for Villages aim to improve the welfare of rural communities, their implementation is more often trapped in bureaucratic mechanisms and technocratic logic that limit village independence.

It should be noted that the emergence of the Village SDGs was in 2021 when Pandowoharjo Village and Panggungharjo Village had already implemented the previous development planning mechanisms. Meanwhile, the SDGs Village policy contains goals that must be achieved by villages with their various local potentials. The SDGs Village policy seems to become a document that can be linked to the achievement plans or aspirations that the village aims to achieve. In development planning itself, it needs to start from discussions at the hamlet level (*Dusun*), up to the village level (*Desa*), which are then included in the Government Work Plan (RKP).

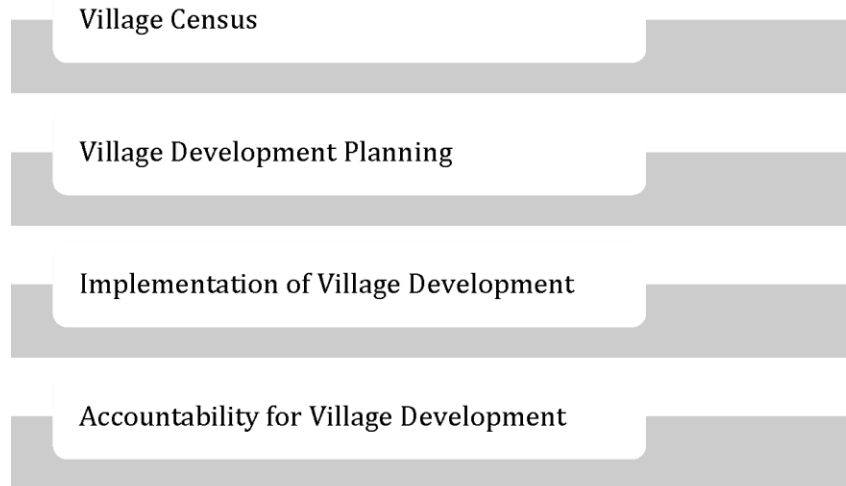
Table 1. Village Development Planning

Development Planning	Type of Forum	Output	
		Document	Legal Format
Five-year Village Development Plan	Musrenbang RPJM Desa	Medium-Term Village Development Plan (RPJM)	Village Regulation
Annual Village Planning	Musrenbang Desa	Village Development Work Plan (RKP)	Village Head Decree

Source: (Ariadi 2019)

One of the main principles of the SDGs is inclusive participation in development, where rural communities are expected to play an active role in determining the direction of their development. However, the reality on the ground shows that community participation in Village SDGs often tends to be formalistic. The village deliberation, which should be the main platform for the community to express their aspirations in village development, still has to contend with the centrally determined SDG parameters. As a result, the freedom of villages to determine their development direction is increasingly limited. In fact, in some cases, villages that are unable to meet the SDG indicators risk losing access to funding from the Village Fund.

Figure 1. Stages of Village Development Implementation according to Minister of Village Regulation Number 21 of 2020



Source: processed by the author

The mechanism for implementing village development based on Regulation of the Minister of Village Development of Disadvantaged Regions and Transmigration Number 21 of 2020 starts from village data collection, village development planning, village development implementation, and village development accountability. According to the interview results, the Village SDGs policy is considered to make villages the object of data collection. The autonomy of villages in development currently depends on the input data. The Village SDGs team is busy with administration for updating data every year. Data updates serve as a means to detect issues and achievements of the village in each SDG goal. Data digitization, if utilized properly, will certainly bring benefits to the lives of the village community. The reality of implementing the Village SDGs shows technical issues such as server downtime, and not all village residents can access the data. This is vulnerable to being misused for the benefit of capitalist groups. The transparency of village development should be accessible so that it is known by all village residents without exception.

"If the data is accessed by the admin and village assistants, others can only see it in the form of diagrams, like the analysis results for families, the aggregate, but individual results cannot be accessed." (Mr. Rosada, SDGs Data Administrator of Panggungharjo Village)

For three years, the implementation of the SDGs Village policy has faced many issues in Panggungharjo. Starting from the SDGs data collection in 2021 to the utilization of that data for village development planning. The SDGs data contains the state's power to have profiles of seventy-four thousand villages in Indonesia. In line with the SIN approach, institutions with political power will dominate the weak (Carroll 2007). SDG data is a manifestation of the state's power relations that compel villages to complete it. On the other hand, the power relations of the village government have the right to determine the cadre team for the village SDGs data collection. The cadre team carries out their duties based on orders and the wage rewards they receive from the allocation of village funds. This shows that sustainable development designed through the funding disbursement system increasingly strengthens power relations in the village. The digitalization of village data operates hierarchically, starting from SDGs Village cadres, village governments, to the central government. This hierarchy is intended so that the Ministry of Villages, Development of Disadvantaged Regions, and Transmigration (Kemendesa PDTT) can provide development input in villages based on their achievements in the SDGs indicators.

In the end, villages must be seen as subjects of development with the right to independence and freedom in determining their future. Without this paradigm shift, the Village SDGs will only become a tool to perpetuate unequal power relations, where villages remain in a position vulnerable to external interest interventions. The SDGs Village policy, although theoretically aimed at promoting sustainable development, in practice functions as an administrative control instrument that reinforces the dominance of the state and market over the village. With a centralized data collection mechanism and the village's dependence on global SDG parameters, villages lose sovereignty in determining their development

direction. Therefore, a more democratic approach based on substantial participation from the village community is needed, so that village development can truly proceed according to the needs and aspirations of the local community.

Standardization of Heterogeneous Villages Through Village SDGs

Since the launch of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for Villages policy by the Ministry of Villages, Disadvantaged Regions Development, and Transmigration (Kemendesa PDTT), the paradigm of rural development in Indonesia has undergone a significant shift. Village SDGs has become the main instrument in standardizing the development of heterogeneous villages in Indonesia, by adopting a structured global development model in the Village Development Index (IDM). IDM, which consists of the Economic Resilience Index, Ecological Resilience Index, and Social Resilience Index, is used as a measuring tool to assess the success of villages in achieving development goals. Every year, villages in Indonesia are ranked based on this index, thus forming a hierarchy of villages based on standardized development success. However, the implementation of this system has faced sharp criticism, especially in the context of the instrumentalization of Village SDGs as a tool for state control and the dominance of neoliberal development logic.

Fundamentally, the Village SDGs operate within a top-down policy framework, where villages are required to follow centrally determined indicators and targets. However, villages in Indonesia have very diverse characteristics, ecologically, socially, economically, and culturally. Thus, this policy has the potential to overlook the heterogeneity of villages and marginalize locally-based development practices that are more suited to the specific conditions of village communities. As (Carroll 2007) stated, neoliberalism in development governance often operates through institutional control mechanisms that standardize development practices to align with global market needs. In the context of Village SDGs, the development standards set by the central government are not merely aimed at improving village welfare, but also opening opportunities for market interests and private investments to enter rural economic sectors.

One of the main indications of the hegemony of neoliberal development in the Village SDGs is the implementation of a village ranking system based on certain indices. Villages that are considered to have successfully met the SDGs indicators receive more incentives and access to development funding, while villages that do not meet these standards risk losing access to resources and other affirmative policies. This creates an imbalanced power relationship between villages and the state, where villages are forced to adapt to a predetermined system without considering the needs and aspirations of the local community.

Standardization of villages through the Village SDGs also implies labeling villages based on certain categories, which ultimately can obscure local identity and village autonomy in determining their development direction. The government designated several villages as SDGs pilot villages, which were then used as models for other villages to follow a uniform development pattern. In 2021, the Ministry of Villages, Development of Disadvantaged Regions, and Transmigration (Kemendesa PDTT) designated four villages as pilot projects for the Village SDGs, namely Tempelsari Village (Temanggung), Kemojing Village (Cilacap), Mlaten Village (Bojonegoro), and Kretek Village (Bondowoso). These four villages have become symbols of the government's efforts to uphold the "truth" of the state's version of sustainable development, which in practice often neglects the socio-economic realities of other village communities.

On the other hand, this labeling also creates exclusion for villages that do not meet the SDGs Village standards, especially those with unique geographical and social conditions. Villages with cultural-based economic potential, such as Pandowoharjo Village and Panggungharjo Village, for example, have a more flexible development approach based on local culture. However, because the SDGs for Villages standards place more emphasis on economic and infrastructure indicators, the cultural potential, which is the main strength of these villages, is not fully accommodated in national development policies.

A village official in Pandowoharjo emphasized the importance of a more flexible and contextual development approach:

"In my opinion, it's more flexible according to the character of each village. It can't be 100% following the Ministry of Villages, but our path should align with our desires. So, stay on track, but in each village's way." (Wakhid, Head of Development Planning Pandowoharjo).

This statement reflects that the standardization of village development cannot be applied uniformly, because each village has different social, cultural, and economic capital. The SDGs Village policy also shows how the state strengthens its control over villages through regulations and administrative assistance. In practice, villages must follow the established procedures, including the obligation to report on development progress periodically. Village facilitators, who are supposed to play a role in empowering villages, often end up functioning more as tools of surveillance to ensure that villages comply with central policies. This is exacerbated by the conditional allocation scheme of village funds, where villages that do not meet SDG indicators risk losing access to development budgets.

In Panggungharjo Village, for example, the SDGs-based village development policies are more often implemented due to regulatory pressure, rather than the village's initiative. The Head of Panggungharjo Village emphasized that village development should be based on local needs, not just to meet targets set by the central government.

"Give full authority to the village to build itself, because the village is capable of building." (Bimo, Head of Development Planning Panggungharjo).

This statement indicates that true village development should be based on the principles of village autonomy and independence, rather than merely being part of a global development project that is only replicated in a local context. The SDGs Village policy, which was initially claimed to be an instrument of locally-based sustainable development, in practice has instead become a mechanism for state control in standardizing heterogeneous villages. With the ranking of villages based on a centralized development index, villages lose the freedom to determine their development direction. Furthermore, this standardization also reflects how neoliberal hegemony operates in village development policies, where

villages are forced to adapt to market logic and international regulations without considering their local characteristics. To create more inclusive village development based on local realities, the Village SDGs policy needs to be reviewed. The state must provide greater space for villages to determine their development direction, emphasizing village sovereignty and community participation as the main pillars of development. Without this paradigm shift, the Village SDGs will only become an administrative control tool that obscures the socio-economic realities of villages in Indonesia.

Critical reflections on the Village SDGs policy emphasize the power of SDGs knowledge as a global product, entering the villages. SDGs Village then becomes a guideline used by the village to determine the direction of sustainable development. At this point, structural problems arise such as the lack of accountability and coherence of data that has been inputted from the field. The bureaucracy between the Ministry of Villages and the Village Government is in the form of superiors and subordinates, unequal power relations, or depoliticization. Sergio's study (2019) shows that the SDGs do not overcome the depoliticization of aid discourse and policies as development is still interpreted as a technical, managerial, and measurable issue. The SDGs seem to be locked into a similar managerial and technical approach to sustainable development. Apart from structural problems, the SDGs agenda has been criticized for reproducing the status quo and not addressing the causes of impoverishment created by the currently dominant capitalist and developmental model (Belda-Miquel, Boni, and Calabuig 2019).

Conclusion

The implementation of the Village SDGs in Indonesia reveals a paradox between the claims of inclusive sustainable development and the technocratic reality that strengthens state control over villages. Although claimed as a data-based empowerment instrument, this policy in practice reproduces power structures that standardize villages within the framework of global development, which does not fully consider local social, economic, and cultural heterogeneity. The digitalization of village administration through various data-based systems, instead of increasing efficiency and transparency, actually burdens the village bureaucracy and turns it into an object of administrative control, rather than an autonomous subject of development. Moreover, the disparity in digital infrastructure and the limited capacity of human resources in various regions further deepen the rural gap, making the Village SDGs policy more beneficial to the economic-political interests of the state and market rather than promoting rural independence. With a hierarchical pattern that limits substantial community participation, this policy risks trapping villages in a mechanism of compliance with global targets without providing adequate space for formulating policies based on local needs and potential. Therefore, a more critical and democratic approach is needed that positions villages as the main actors in development, rather than mere administrative units within a global governance system increasingly dominated by neoliberal interests.

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