



Empowering territorial officers for total people's defense: Policy implementation and collaborative governance in Indonesia's border region

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.66856/ijsp.2026.8.3.8084>

Abstract

The empowerment of territorial officers plays a crucial role in supporting the Total People's Defense System, particularly in border regions characterized by geographical, social, and institutional complexities. This study aims to analyze the empowerment of territorial officers, the interactions among territorial officers, local governments, and the community, as well as the factors that support and hinder its implementation in Merauke Regency. The study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical case study design. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation, involving ten informants purposively selected from territorial officials, local government representatives, district and village officials, and community leaders. Data were analyzed through data condensation, data presentation, and the derivation and verification of conclusions. The results of the study indicate that the empowerment of territorial officials is supported by tiered policy communication, a clear organizational structure, the commitment of officials, coordination among various actors, and social legitimacy from the community. However, its implementation remains constrained by limitations in personnel, budget, operational resources, regional accessibility, infrastructure, and suboptimal cross-sectoral integration. Formal and informal interactions with local governments, local leaders, and the community strengthen officials' ability to adapt policy implementation to the characteristics of border regions. This study expands the understanding of policy implementation by conceptualizing the empowerment of territorial officials as a relational and contextual implementation capacity, which emphasizes the interrelationship between organizational capacity, adaptive capabilities, cross-actor collaboration, public legitimacy, and the local context.

Keywords: Empowerment of territorial officials, policy implementation, collaborative governance, Universal People's Defense System, border areas

Introduction

Changes in the global security environment have broadened the defense paradigm from an approach focused on military strength to one that involves the state and society as a whole. Contemporary threats take the form not only of military conflicts but also include social conflicts, disasters, vulnerabilities along border regions, and disruptions to societal stability. In this context, total defense has evolved through a whole-of-society approach that positions various elements of society as integral to the development of national resilience. Wrangle *et al.* (2024)^[18] demonstrate that total defense is related to strengthening societal resilience through the involvement of various actors, while Ruggiero *et al.* (2024)^[15] emphasize the importance of interaction between the government, civil society, the private sector, and security actors in building preparedness to face crises.

In the Indonesian context, this approach is reflected in the Comprehensive People's Defense System (Sishankamrata), which involves all national resources and the public in supporting national defense. Its implementation has become increasingly important in border regions such as Merauke Regency, which shares a direct border with Papua New Guinea. The vastness of the territory, limited access and infrastructure, the scattered nature of settlements, and socio-cultural diversity present unique challenges for the implementation of defense policies. Under these conditions, territorial authorities particularly the Kodim, Koramil, and Babinsa, hold a strategic position because they interact directly with local governments and the community. These

geographical and social complexities require territorial officials not only to carry out their formal duties but also to possess the ability to adapt, establish communication, and build relationships with the local community.

The success of territorial officials' roles can be understood from the perspective of policy implementation. Edwards III (1980)^[6] identified communication, resources, disposition, and bureaucratic structure as the main factors influencing policy implementation. However, developments in the literature indicate that implementation also depends heavily on an organization's capacity to manage resources, policy burdens, and environmental complexity (Hill & Hupe, 2021^[12]; Peters, 2022)^[13]. Fernández-i-Marín *et al.* (2024)^[8] demonstrate that the gap between policy demands and implementation capacity can undermine policy performance, while Yang *et al.* (2024)^[19] emphasize that actor capacity, resources, the implementation environment, and implementation methods are critical elements in achieving policy objectives. In the context of territorial development, this capacity relates to the competencies, commitment, adaptability, and organizational support that enable officials to carry out their roles effectively.

The implementation of community-based defense also requires collaboration among territorial authorities, local governments, and the community. Collaborative governance emphasizes that complex public issues require the involvement of various actors and cannot be effectively resolved by a single institution alone (Bryson *et al.*, 2020^[4]; Emerson & Nabatchi, 2022)^[7]. Research shows that the

sustainability of collaboration is influenced by stakeholder engagement, trust, coordination, and alignment of objectives (Ambrose & Siddiki, 2024; Qi & Ran, 2024) ^[2, 14]. In the context of defense, Alvinus and Hedlund (2024) ^[1, 10] note that civil-military collaboration may face institutional barriers, while Hedlund and Alvinus (2024, 2025) ^[1, 10, 11] emphasize the importance of developing collaborative capacity. In Indonesia, Fitrianang and Soeling (2024) ^[9] have discussed the implementation of territorial development in the prevention of social conflict, while Sungudi *et al.* (2024) ^[16] highlight the importance of synergy between territorial authorities and local governments in the empowerment of defense areas.

Nevertheless, gaps in the literature remain. Recent studies on total defense and societal resilience have largely developed in the context of the Nordic and Baltic countries, whereas empirical evidence from developing countries with extensive and heterogeneous border regions remains relatively limited (Wrange *et al.*, 2024 ^[18]; Ruggiero *et al.*, 2024) ^[15]. In Indonesia, research on territorial development has addressed policy implementation and institutional synergy, but few studies have comprehensively linked policy implementation capacity, the empowerment of territorial officials, and collaborative interactions among officials, local governments, and communities in the implementation of Sishankamrata. This study addresses this gap by positioning territorial officials not merely as hierarchical policy implementers but as implementation actors whose effectiveness is determined by both their internal capacity and the quality of their collaborative relationships with local actors. The integration of these three perspectives constitutes the novelty of this research and expands the discussion of total defense from a context dominated by developed nations to that of Indonesia's border regions.

Based on these gaps, this study aims to analyze the empowerment of territorial officials in supporting the Total People's Defense System in Merauke Regency, analyze the interactions between territorial officials, local government, and the community, and identify the factors that support and hinder the empowerment of territorial officials. By integrating the perspectives of policy implementation, empowerment, and collaborative governance, this study is expected to make a theoretical contribution to the study of policy implementation and total defense, while also providing empirical evidence on how collaboration between officials, local governments, and the community can strengthen the implementation of the Total Defense System in Indonesia's border regions.

Literature Review

1. Policy Implementation and Territorial Officer Empowerment

Policy implementation explains how formal decisions are translated into actions to achieve policy objectives. Edwards III (1980) ^[6] identified four key dimensions that determine implementation: communication, resources, disposition, and bureaucratic structure. Communication relates to the clarity and consistency of policy delivery; resources include personnel, competencies, information, authority, budget, and facilities; disposition reflects the commitment and attitudes of implementers; while bureaucratic structure determines the division of tasks, procedures, coordination, and working mechanisms. Contemporary literature expands

on this perspective by emphasizing the importance of organizational and implementer capacity in addressing the complexity of the implementation environment (Hill & Hupe, 2021 ^[12]; Peters, 2022) ^[13]. Fernández-i-Marín *et al.* (2024) ^[8] demonstrate that an imbalance between policy demands and implementation capacity can undermine policy performance, while Yang *et al.* (2024) ^[19] emphasize the importance of actor capacity, resources, and coordination in the implementation process.

In the context of territorial development, policy implementation is closely linked to the empowerment of officials as implementers at the local level. Empowerment does not merely mean the granting of formal authority but also the strengthening of competencies, access to resources, commitment, adaptability, and the capacity to act in accordance with local conditions. Zimmerman (2000) ^[20] views empowerment as a process that occurs at the individual, organizational, and community levels. From this perspective, effective communication can strengthen officials' understanding of their roles; resources provide the capacity to act; dispositions reflect commitment to carrying out duties; and bureaucratic structures provide institutional support for task execution. The relevance of these relationships is also evident in the Indonesian context, where territorial development plays a role in preventing social conflict (Fitrianang & Soeling, 2024) ^[9], while synergy between territorial officials and local governments contributes to the empowerment of defense regions (Sungudi *et al.*, 2024) ^[16]. Thus, this study views the empowerment of territorial officials as an implementational capacity shaped by individual, organizational, and policy environment factors.

2. Collaborative Governance in Territorial Defense

The implementation of defense policies at the local level depends not only on the internal capacity of the apparatus but also on the ability to build relationships with local governments and the community. The collaborative governance perspective is relevant because complex public issues generally involve resources and authority that are dispersed among various actors (Bryson *et al.*, 2020) ^[4]. Emerson and Nabatchi (2022) ^[7] emphasize that collaboration involves interactions among stakeholders to build shared capacity in achieving public goals. In this context, clarity of roles, communication, trust, alignment of objectives, and participation are key elements in sustaining collaborative processes (Ambrose & Siddiki, 2024) ^[2]. However, collaboration can also face tensions between structures, interests, and practices across institutions, meaning it does not always yield the expected results (Qi & Ran, 2024) ^[14].

These challenges become more complex in civil-military relations because they bring together the hierarchical structure of the military with local governments and communities that have different institutional frameworks. Alvinus and Hedlund (2024) ^[1, 10] note that civil-military collaboration can face institutional inertia that limits the effectiveness of cooperation. Conversely, joint capacity building, coordination, learning, and alignment of objectives can strengthen collaborative capabilities (Hedlund & Alvinus, 2024, 2025) ^[1, 10, 11]. Based on this perspective, this study examines the interactions among territorial officials, local governments, and the community through three main aspects: institutional design, which encompasses

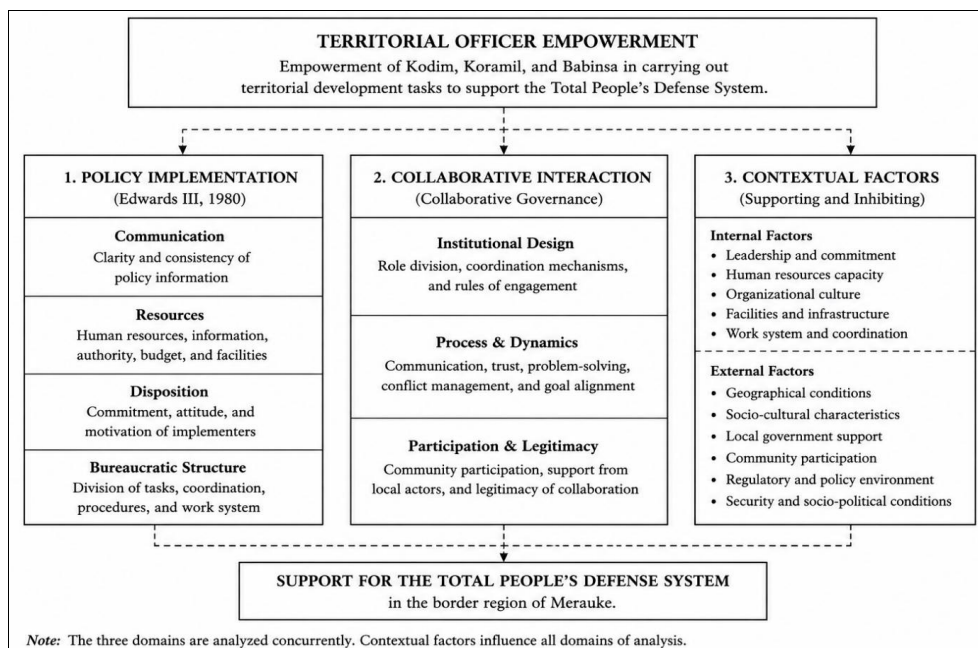
the division of roles and coordination mechanisms; the processes and dynamics of interaction, which include communication, trust, problem-solving, and alignment of objectives; and participation and legitimacy, which relate to community engagement and support as well as the involvement of local leaders. These three aspects align with the analytical focus employed in this study.

3. Total Defense and Integrated Analytical Framework

The concept of total defense views defense as an effort that integrates military and nonmilitary capabilities. In contemporary literature, this approach is increasingly linked to the whole-of-society approach, which emphasizes the involvement of the government, the public, and various actors in building readiness to face threats. Wrangé *et al.* (2024)^[18] demonstrate that the development of total defense in the Nordic and Baltic countries is linked to public engagement and the strengthening of societal resilience. Ruggiero *et al.* (2024)^[15] also emphasize that the whole-of-society approach requires interaction among stakeholders in building preparedness to face crises. Meanwhile, Bouckaert (2024)^[3] underscores the importance of governance capacity to prepare for, respond to, and adapt to complex disruptions. In this study, societal resilience is not treated as an empirical variable but is used as a perspective to understand the relevance of public engagement and cross-actor collaboration within the total defense system. In the Indonesian context, this principle is linked to the Universal People's Defense System, which positions the

public and national resources as integral parts of national defense. This study employs three interrelated domains of analysis. First, policy implementation, analyzed through communication, resources, dispositions, and bureaucratic structures (Edwards III, 1980)^[6]. Second, collaborative interactions, analyzed through institutional design, interaction processes and dynamics, as well as participation and legitimacy. Third, contextual factors, which include internal and external factors that can either support or hinder the empowerment of territorial officials. These three domains are analyzed simultaneously to understand how the empowerment of territorial officials is carried out in support of the Universal People's Defense System within the specific characteristics of the Merauke border region. This framework aligns with the research focus, which distinguishes between the dimensions of implementation, interactions among stakeholders, and supporting and hindering factors.

Based on the integration of these perspectives, this study does not treat the three domains as causal relationships to be tested, but rather as an analytical framework for interpreting the process of empowering territorial officers. This approach allows for an analysis of the internal capacities of the implementers, as well as the relationships between territorial officers and local governments and communities, and the contextual conditions that influence implementation. The analytical framework of the study is presented in Figure 1.



Source: Developed by the authors based on Edwards III (1980)^[6] and the collaborative governance perspective.

Fig 1: Analytical Framework of Territorial Officer Empowerment in Supporting the Total People's Defense System

Research Methods

1. Research Design and Study Context

This study employs a qualitative approach based on a post-positivist paradigm and a descriptive-analytical case study design. This approach is used to understand the implementation of territorial development policies, the empowerment of territorial officers, and the interactions among territorial officers, local governments, and the community in supporting the Total People's Defense System (Sishankamrata). Merauke Regency was selected as

the research location due to its characteristics as a border region with a vast geographic scope and high sociocultural complexity. The case study design allows for an in-depth analysis of policy implementation phenomena within a real-life context (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018)^[5].

2. Informants and Sampling

Informants were selected through purposive sampling based on their direct involvement, knowledge of the subject matter, experience in territorial development, and

understanding of Merauke's social and institutional conditions. The selection of informants took, into account information richness and data saturation (Creswell & Poth, 2018 ^[5]; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The study involved 10

informants representing territorial officials, the regional government, district and village governments, and members of the community.

Table 1: Research Informants

0	Informant Group	Position/Role	Code
1	Territorial Unit	Commander of Kodim 1707/Merauke	KD-01
2	Territorial Unit	Territorial Staff of Kodim 1707/Merauke	ST-01
3	Territorial Unit	Military District Commander (Danramil)	DR-01
4	Territorial Unit	Village Supervisory NCO (Babinsa)	BB-01
5	Local Government	Agency for National Unity and Politics, Merauke Regency	KB-01
6	District Government	District Head (Camat)	CM-01
7	Village Government	Village Head/Village Official	PK-01
8	Community	Customary Leader	TA-01
9	Community	Religious Leader	TG-01
10	Community	Community Leader	TM-01

Source: Research data.

The composition of these informants provides perspectives from policy implementers, local governments, and the community, thereby enabling a comparison of information regarding the implementation of territorial development and interactions among various actors.

3. Data Collection

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, documentation, and observation. Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured approach based on guidelines aligned with the research focus and were recorded with the informants' consent. Documentation included Law No. 3 of 2002, territorial development policy documents, planning documents and activity reports, coordination minutes, and local government documents related to regional resilience. Non-participatory observation was used to understand territorial development practices and the dynamics of interactions among stakeholders in the field.

4. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles *et al.* (2014) through the stages of data collection, data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. The analysis focused on three main domains: (1) policy implementation through communication, resources, disposition, and bureaucratic structure; (2) collaborative interactions through institutional design, interaction processes and dynamics, as well as participation and legitimacy; and (3) internal and external factors that support or hinder the empowerment of territorial officials. Findings from various groups of informants were compared and interpreted based on the frameworks of policy implementation and collaborative governance.

5. Trustworthiness

Data validity refers to credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility is strengthened through triangulation of sources and methods as well as member checking with specific informants. Transferability is supported through a thick description of the research context, while dependability and confirmability are maintained through systematic documentation of the research process, the storage of data

and field documents, the use of direct quotes from informants, and the researcher's reflexivity.

Results

The research findings are grouped into three domains of analysis, namely: (1) policy implementation and the empowerment of territorial officials, (2) collaborative interactions among territorial officials, local governments, and the community, and (3) contextual factors that support and hinder the empowerment of territorial officials. In general, the research findings indicate that the empowerment of territorial officers in Merauke Regency has been supported by a relatively clear institutional structure, strong commitment from the officers, and social acceptance by the community. However, its implementation has not yet been fully optimal due to resource constraints, the geographical conditions of the border region, and the uneven integration across sectors.

1. Policy Implementation and Territorial Officer Empowerment

1.1 Policy Communication

Communication regarding territorial development policies occurs hierarchically and in stages, from higher command down to the Kodim, Koramil, and Babinsa. Technical guidelines and implementation instructions are translated into operational plans and conveyed through unit roll calls, weekly meetings, periodic evaluations, and digital communication channels. This mechanism also allows territorial units to adapt policy implementation to the geographical, demographic, and social conditions of the Merauke community. Informant KD-01 explained:

"In principle, these policies are general in nature, so Kodim is granted the authority to adapt their implementation to the geographical, demographic, and social conditions of the Merauke community." (KD-01, Interview, June 6, 2026)

Nevertheless, the effectiveness of communication is not yet consistent across the entire region. Limitations in the telecommunications network and the difficulty of accessing certain districts have caused delays in the dissemination of information and reporting. Under these conditions, informal communication and digital media have become alternatives used by officials. Informant BB-01 stated:

“Coordination also takes place through the Koramil WhatsApp group, although in some areas the signal frequently drops, so information is sometimes received late.” (BB-01, Interview, June 11, 2026)

Thus, policy communication already has a structured mechanism, but its effectiveness is still influenced by geographical conditions and limitations in communication infrastructure in border areas.

1.2 Availability and Quality of Resources

Limited resources are one of the key findings in the implementation of territorial development. Kodim 1707/Merauke has 179 Babinsa personnel for its area of responsibility, which covers 168 villages across 20 districts. This situation means that some Babinsa are still responsible for two to three villages at the same time. Informant KD-01 explained:

“Currently, there are still Babinsa who are responsible for two to three villages at the same time, especially in vast and hard-to-reach areas.” (KD-01, Interview, June 6, 2026)

Limitations were also found in transportation. To reach remote areas, some officials use private vehicles, boats, or even walk, especially under certain conditions and during the rainy season. Budget allocations are also primarily directed toward routine activities, so some programs require support from local governments and community participation.

“There is a budget for territorial development, but most of it is used for routine activities. Many activities continue to run thanks to community support and the spirit of mutual cooperation among the residents under our care.” (KD-01, Interview, June 6, 2026)

These findings indicate that although officials possess the basic competencies required for territorial development, limitations in personnel, transportation, and funding as well as the vast size of the areas under their jurisdiction continue to restrict the intensity and scope of territorial development activities.

1.3 Attitude and Commitment of Officials

In contrast to resource constraints, the aspect of disposition is one of the key strengths in empowering territorial officials. Officials demonstrate a high level of commitment, motivation, and responsibility in carrying out their duties despite facing limitations in facilities, personnel, and geographical conditions. Informant BB-01 stated:

“Our main motivation is to serve the people. There is a special sense of pride when the community trusts the Babinsa and feels helped by our presence in the village.” (BB-01, Interview, June 11, 2026)

This commitment is reinforced by the close social ties between the officers and the community. Traditional leaders stated that Babinsa have been accepted as part of the community due to their involvement in traditional activities and daily community life. Thus, commitment and the ability to build social relationships are crucial assets in the empowerment of territorial officers.

1.4 Bureaucratic Structure and Work System

The bureaucratic structure of territorial development is formally organized and hierarchical, ranging from the

Kodim Commander, Territorial Staff, Danramil, to the Babinsa. This division of duties is reinforced by a system of reporting, monitoring, and evaluation, as well as various coordination forums at the regency, district, and village levels. Informant ST-01 explained:

“Babinsa are required to submit daily activity reports to the Danramil. These reports are then compiled into a monthly Koramil report and submitted to the Kodim to be forwarded to the Korem.” (ST-01, Interview, June 8, 2026)

Although the organizational structure is clear, the implementation of territorial development requires flexibility. The characteristics of indigenous communities, geographical conditions, and infrastructure limitations necessitate that officials adapt the methods of program implementation without altering the substance of the policy.

2. Collaborative Interaction among Territorial Officers, Local Government, and Communities

2.1 Institutional Design

Cross-sectoral interaction has taken place through both formal and informal coordination mechanisms. Formally, coordination is carried out through the Regional Leadership Coordination Forum (Forkopimda), regional security coordination meetings, the Regional Development Planning Forum (Musrenbang), forums for addressing social conflicts, and regional development activities involving various local government agencies. Informant KB-01 explained:

“The Kodim is one of the local government’s key partners in maintaining regional stability. Coordination takes place through both formal forums and informal communication.” (KB-01, Interview, June 17, 2026)

At the district and village levels, institutional relationships involve the Koramil, district governments, village governments, traditional leaders, religious leaders, and community leaders. In practice, Babinsa also serve as liaisons between the community and the local government.

These findings indicate that a space for cross-sectoral coordination already exists. However, its effectiveness is still influenced by differences in program priorities, the capacity of each institution, and resource constraints.

2.2 Processes and Dynamics of Interaction

Interactions between territorial officials, local governments, and the community take place quite intensively through both formal and informal channels. Coordination covers issues ranging from security, village development, community activities, and social issues to conflict prevention. Informant DR-01 explained:

“We coordinate with the district government almost every week. Sometimes we discuss security issues, community activities, village development, or social issues arising in the area.” (DR-01, Interview, June 9, 2026)

At the community level, a personal and family-oriented approach serves as a key strategy. Babinsa are not only present at formal events but also participate in traditional ceremonies and help resolve community issues.

“We rely more on a family-oriented approach. If there are traditional ceremonies, we attend. If there are community issues, we come and help find solutions.” (BB-01, Interview, June 11, 2026)

These interactions foster relatively strong social bonds and trust. However, differences in institutional orientation were also identified. Local governments are more focused on development and public services, while territorial officials place greater emphasis on regional resilience and social stability. These differences can generally be managed through interagency coordination.

2.3 Community Participation and Legitimacy

The research findings indicate a relatively high level of community acceptance of the territorial officers' presence. Community participation is evident in social communication activities, TNI community service, community work projects, food security programs, religious activities, and various other social initiatives. Informant TA-01 explained: "Babinsa understand local customs and traditions. They often attend traditional ceremonies, assist with community activities, and even help resolve issues that arise in the village." (TA-01, Interview, June 14, 2026)

This statement is reinforced by religious leaders and village officials, who affirm that territorial officers are active in social and religious activities and assist in resolving various community issues.

The social legitimacy of these officers is primarily built through the intensity of their interactions, emotional closeness, understanding of local culture, and consistency in assisting the community. However, the level of participation is not yet entirely uniform, particularly in areas with limited accessibility and information.

3 Supporting and Inhibiting Contextual Factors

The research findings identified internal and external factors that collectively influence the empowerment of territorial officials. Internal supporting factors primarily include personnel commitment, field experience, the ability to adapt to local communities, and the existence of a relatively structured command and reporting system. Informant BB-01 emphasized the importance of adaptability:

"The approach taken cannot be merely formal; it must incorporate a family-oriented approach and respect local culture." (BB-01, Interview, June 11, 2026)

Meanwhile, external supporting factors include community acceptance, local government support, the involvement of local leaders, a culture of mutual cooperation, and established social relationships between officials and the community. The relationship between the Kodim and the local government is also seen as supporting regional stability, the prevention of social conflict, and community development activities.

On the other hand, internal constraints primarily include limited personnel, operational resources, and budget, as well as the need to improve competencies in information and technology, social conflict management, and cross-cultural communication. These factors interact with external constraints such as the vastness of the region, distances between villages, terrain conditions, limited transportation and telecommunications, and seasonal conditions that affect regional accessibility. Informant DR-01 described these conditions:

"The Merauke region is very vast. There are villages that require hours of travel by boat or special vehicles. During the rainy season, some areas are even difficult to reach." (DR-01, Interview, June 9, 2026)

Overall, the research findings indicate that the empowerment of territorial officials is shaped by the interplay between policy implementation capacity, collaborative relationships among various actors, and internal and external factors that either support or constrain its implementation. Personnel commitment, social legitimacy, proximity to the community, and institutional relationships serve as key strengths, whereas limitations in personnel, budget, operational resources, geographical conditions, and suboptimal cross-sectoral integration remain obstacles to supporting the implementation of the Universal People's Defense System in the Merauke border region. These findings highlight a contrast between the strong social capacity of officials and the limited structural capacity for implementation. A summary of the study's main findings is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Summary of Key Research Findings

Analysis Domain	Dimension	Key Findings
Policy Implementation and Empowerment of Territorial Officials	Communication	Policy communication takes place in a tiered manner through the Kodim–Koramil–Babinsa, but its effectiveness is still affected by geographical conditions and limitations in the communication network.
	Resources	The availability of personnel, transportation, and funding is not yet fully commensurate with the size and complexity of the areas under their jurisdiction.
	Disposition	Officials demonstrate a high level of commitment, motivation, and responsibility despite facing resource constraints.
	Bureaucratic Structure	The division of tasks, coordination, and reporting systems are well-structured, but their implementation requires flexibility to accommodate local conditions.
Collaborative Interaction	Institutional Design	Formal and informal coordination has been established between territorial officials, local governments, and community members, but program integration still needs to be strengthened.
	Interaction Processes and Dynamics	Interactions take place through institutional coordination and social approaches that build trust among actors.
	Participation and Legitimacy	Community acceptance and participation are relatively good and are reinforced by social ties and the officials' understanding of local culture.
Contextual Factors	Supporting Factors	The commitment of officials, field experience, support from local governments, community acceptance, the role of local leaders, and mutual cooperation support the implementation of territorial development.
	Constraints	Limitations in personnel, budget, operational resources, the size of the territory, accessibility, infrastructure, and differing institutional priorities hinder the optimization of territorial development.

Source: Research findings.

Discussion

1. Empowering Territorial Officials as an Adaptive Policy Implementation

Research findings indicate that the empowerment of territorial officials in border areas depends not only on communication, resources, disposition, and bureaucratic structure as argued by Edwards III (1980)^[6] but also on the implementers' ability to adapt policies to local geographic and sociocultural conditions. Limitations in personnel, facilities, budget, and accessibility indicate a gap between policy demands and implementation capacity, while the commitment and adaptability of officials help sustain the implementation of territorial development. This is evident in the strong commitment of officials despite facing resource constraints and challenging geographical conditions.

These findings support Peters (2022)^[13] regarding the importance of administrative capacity in policy implementation, as well as Fernández-i-Marín *et al.* (2024)^[8], who show that the gap between policy demands and implementation capacity can reduce policy performance. Yang *et al.* (2024)^[19] also emphasize that implementation capacity is influenced by actors, resources, and coordination. In the context of Merauke, this capacity has an adaptive dimension because officials must adapt policies to local conditions. This is also consistent with Zimmerman (2000)^[20], who identifies competence and the capacity to act as key components of empowerment. Thus, the empowerment of territorial officials is a combination of institutional capacity and their adaptive capacity.

1.2 Cross-Actor Collaboration and Social Legitimacy

Research findings indicate that the capacity of territorial officials is also shaped through their relationships with local governments and the community. Formal coordination forums provide a space for information exchange and the resolution of cross-sectoral issues, while informal relationships through familial approaches, customary, religious, and social activities strengthen public trust. These findings support Bryson *et al.* (2020)^[4] regarding the importance of cross-sectoral collaboration in addressing complex public issues, as well as Emerson and Nabatchi (2022)^[7], who emphasize interaction, trust, shared understanding, and the capacity for collective action in collaborative governance. Ambrose and Siddiki (2024)^[2] also demonstrate that the sustained involvement of actors is a key element in maintaining collaboration.

However, collaboration is not entirely free from conflicting interests. Local governments' focus on development and public services does not always align with territorial officials' focus on regional stability and resilience, although these differences can generally be managed through coordination. This finding is consistent with Qi and Ran (2024)^[14] regarding the existence of a paradox in collaborative governance and with Alvinus and Hedlund (2024)^[1, 10] regarding potential institutional barriers in civil-military collaboration. The findings from Merauke indicate that formal mechanisms need to be complemented by social closeness and local legitimacy. Community acceptance—forged through interaction, cultural understanding, and the involvement of officials in community life—is a crucial asset for the effectiveness of territorial development.

1.3 Community Participation from a Total Defense Perspective

Community participation in social activities, mutual aid, food security, religious activities, and regional development

demonstrates that communities are not merely recipients of policies but are also actively involved in supporting regional resilience. However, this participation is not yet fully equitable, as it is influenced by accessibility, the availability of information, and the sociogeographic characteristics of each region. 's findings are consistent with those of Wrange *et al.* (2024)^[18], who show that total defense increasingly emphasizes community involvement and the fostering of a shared security culture, as well as Ruggiero *et al.* (2024)^[15], who identify the involvement of various actors as a key element in the whole-of-society approach.

Unlike the Nordic–Baltic context frequently discussed in the total defense literature, the case of Merauke demonstrates that community engagement in border regions is significantly influenced by geographical conditions, infrastructure, local culture, and the ability of authorities to build trust. Thus, a whole-of-society approach in the context of border regions requires a combination of top-down institutional mechanisms and bottom-up legitimization through social interaction and respect for local culture. These findings are also relevant to Bouckaert (2024)^[3] regarding the importance of adaptive governance in building readiness to face complex conditions. In this study, societal resilience is not positioned as an empirical outcome but as a perspective for understanding the importance of community engagement and cross-actor relationships in supporting a holistic defense system.

1.4 Theoretical Contribution: Relational and Contextual Implementation Capacity

The main contribution of this study is to demonstrate that the empowerment of territorial officials cannot be adequately explained solely through an organization's internal capacity. Edwards III's (1980)^[6] perspective highlights the importance of communication, resources, dispositions, and bureaucratic structures, while collaborative governance explains how implementation is strengthened through coordination, trust, participation, and cross-actor legitimacy. The research findings indicate that these two capacities operate simultaneously and are influenced by the characteristics of border regions. Internal factors such as commitment, experience, leadership, resources, and organizational systems interact with external factors such as local government support, community acceptance, the role of local leaders, geographical conditions, infrastructure, and sociocultural dynamics.

Based on these findings, this study proposes relational and contextual implementation capacity as a perspective for understanding the empowerment of territorial officials. Implementation capacity is relational because the effectiveness of officials depends on coordination, trust, participation, and legitimacy built jointly with actors outside the organization. This capacity is contextual because its implementation is influenced by geographic conditions, infrastructure, sociocultural factors, and the characteristics of the local community. Thus, the contribution of this study is not to propose a new theory, but to expand the understanding of policy implementation by integrating organizational capacity, collaborative governance, public legitimacy, and contextual adaptation in the implementation of defense policies in border regions. Based on the integration of empirical findings and the theoretical perspectives employed, the contributions of this study can be summarized as presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Theoretical Integration and Research Contributions

Theoretical Perspectives	Key Explanation	Empirical Findings of the Research	Theoretical Contributions
Policy Implementation (Edwards III, 1980)	Implementation is influenced by communication, resources, dispositions, and bureaucratic structure.	Structured communication, strong commitment, and clear coordination support implementation, whereas limitations in personnel, budget, facilities, and accessibility constrain implementation capacity.	Expanding the analysis of policy implementation by emphasizing the importance of adaptive capacity in addressing the geographic characteristics of border regions.
Collaborative Governance (Bryson <i>et al.</i> , 2020 ^[4] ; Emerson & Nabatchi, 2022) ^[7]	Cross-sectoral coordination, trust, participation, and collective action strengthen policy implementation.	Formal coordination is complemented by informal relationships among territorial officials, local governments, community leaders, and local residents.	This demonstrates that implementation capacity is also shaped by cross-actor relationships and local social legitimacy.
Whole-of-Society Defense (Wrange <i>et al.</i> , 2024; Ruggiero <i>et al.</i> , 2024) ^[15, 18]	Defense and preparedness involve the participation of the government and all segments of society.	Community participation is supported by social cohesion, cultural understanding, the role of local leaders, and the community's acceptance of territorial authorities.	Expanding the whole-of-society perspective in the context of developing countries' border regions, which present geographical and sociocultural complexities.
An Integrated Perspective	Organizational capacity, collaborative relationships, and contextual adaptation collectively shape implementation.	The empowerment of territorial authorities reflects the interaction between internal capacity, cross-actor collaboration, community legitimacy, and local conditions.	Conceptualizing the empowerment of territorial officials as a relational and contextual implementation capacity that integrates organizational, collaborative, and contextual dimensions.

Source: Developed by the authors based on research findings and theoretical synthesis.

Conclusion

This study shows that the empowerment of territorial officials in supporting the Universal People's Defense System in the Merauke border region is underpinned by tiered policy communication, a clear organizational structure, and strong commitment and accountability on the part of officials. However, its implementation has not yet been fully optimized due to ongoing constraints in personnel, budget, operational resources, communication networks, and regional accessibility. These conditions indicate that policy implementation in border regions requires not only institutional capacity but also the ability of officials to adapt policy execution to local geographic and sociocultural characteristics.

Interaction between territorial officials, local governments, and the community takes place through both formal coordination mechanisms and informal relationships based on social ties. Support from local governments, the involvement of local leaders, community participation, and socio-cultural approaches are key factors that support the empowerment of territorial officials. Conversely, resource constraints, the vastness and inaccessibility of the region, limited infrastructure, and suboptimal cross-sectoral integration are factors that limit its implementation. These findings indicate that support for the Universal People's Defense System in border regions requires a synergy between organizational capacity, cross-actor collaboration, and public legitimacy.

Theoretically, this study expands the understanding of policy implementation by demonstrating that the empowerment of territorial officials can be understood as a relational and contextual implementation capacity. This capacity is reflected in the interrelationship between an organization's internal capacity, the adaptive abilities of officials, collaborative relationships among various actors, public legitimacy, and local characteristics. Thus, the implementation of community-based defense policies in border regions requires a balance between strengthening resources and institutions, cross-sectoral coordination, and

socio-cultural approaches that are appropriate to the local community context.

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