Resolution of the Long Conflict in Papua for Equitable National Development

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Article Info:	Abstract

Purpose: This study aims to analyse efforts to resolve the Papua conflict to achieve equitable national development, focusing on the role of Special Autonomy (OTSUS) policies, local leaders' involvement, and community-based security strategies.

Study Design/Methodology/Approach: Using a qualitative approach through a comprehensive literature review, this study adopts the theoretical frameworks of Social Resilience and Sustainable Development, identifying factors that influence social stability in Papua. Data was drawn from previous studies, policy document analysis, and relevant theories to explore bureaucratic challenges, unequal access to public services, and the significant role of local customary and religious leaders in strengthening social cohesion.

Findings: The findings indicate that the OTSUS policy has yet to succeed in improving the quality of life for the people of Papua, particularly in remote areas. Bureaucratic factors, weak law enforcement, and overlapping regulations hinder social integration and increase the community's dependence on external aid. Integrating local customary and religious leaders in development project planning and oversight has proven to increase community acceptance, reduce conflict, and strengthen local resilience. Additionally, community intelligence-based security strategies and effective use of social media are essential to counter separatist propaganda.

Originality/Value: This study highlights the importance of a culturally grounded, collaborative approach to building social and economic resilience in Papua, offering a new perspective on sustainable development strategies relevant to regions with similar conflict dynamics.

INTRODUCTION

Achieving National Development in Indonesia requires continuous effort and dedicated commitment. Moreover, the principles of national development, as mandated in the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, necessitate the advancement of public welfare and the enlightenment of the nation. However, this vision, as outlined in the Preamble of the 1945 Constitution, faces significant challenges, particularly in Papua, where social-political instability and prolonged conflict have created substantial barriers to development and regional stability (Ayuni et al., 2024; Hadi, 2021). The Indonesian Government has introduced approaches and initiatives such as Special Autonomy (OTSUS) policies and various socio-economic development programmes (OTSUS Bagi Provinsi Papua, 2001; UU RI No.35, 2008). Nonetheless, Papua continues to experience high poverty rates, limited access to education and healthcare, and systemic distrust of the government (Laia, 2022). This situation exacerbates socio-economic inequality and impedes the formation of a resilient and self-sufficient society.

Furthermore, the complex socio-political dynamics in Papua have given rise to separatist movements, such as the Free Papua Movement (OPM), fuelling distrust and demands for independence from Indonesia (Karseno, 2011). This situation has been worsened by repeated incidents of violence, such as shootings and killings, which have claimed lives on both sides and strengthened the OPM's stance, leading to deep-seated distrust in the government and escalating the OPM's demands for separation from the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (Mukhtadi, 2021). Additionally, foreign support in the form of military and financial aid further bolsters the OPM. The internationalisation of the Papua issue by certain U.S. senators and members of parliament from the UK and Germany also compounds the situation, inciting concerns over human rights and allegations of government neglect. External actors and foreign support for separatist agendas add pressure on Indonesia to address this issue comprehensively (Ryan, 2021).

In confronting these challenges, sociological and developmental theories, such as Social Resilience Theory (Keck & Sakdapolrak, 2013; Seda et al., 2018) and Sustainable Development Theory (Bossel, 1999; Dasgupta, 2007), provide relevant frameworks for analysing factors that impact long-term stability and the socio-economic resilience of the Papuan people. On one hand, Social Resilience Theory emphasises society's ability to endure and adapt to external pressures by stressing the importance of fulfilling basic needs and economic empowerment as pillars of societal resilience. On the other hand, sustainable development theory underscores the need for inclusive, long-term solutions that promote social equity and economic opportunity without fostering dependency. This theoretical framework underlines the urgency of community-focused development that aligns with local needs, promotes sustainable socio-economic empowerment, and strengthens national identity.

A significant research gap exists because current studies frequently overlook the direct and sustained involvement of local leaders—community figures, customary leaders, and religious leaders—in conflict resolution and development initiatives. Without adequate integration of these figures, government programmes at both national and regional levels risk failing to meet their objectives. Although previous studies have highlighted infrastructure and accessibility challenges in Papua's remote areas, they often neglect culturally and socially tailored interventions that resonate with Papuan values and traditions. This shortcoming contributes to the transient and sometimes ineffective nature

of government programmes, as well as a continuous cycle of distrust and social fragmentation in Papua.

Adopting a comprehensive approach that incorporates sociological insights and practical policy implementation considerations, this study aims to provide a holistic perspective on how the integration of local leadership and community-centered development initiatives can strengthen resilience and support national development objectives. This research focuses on two aspects: first, examining the socio-economic factors that hinder resilience and community participation in Papua, particularly in relation to government initiatives and security efforts; and second, exploring strategies that empower local leaders and ensure sustainable community engagement. The research questions aim to address: first, why existing policies, such as OTSUS and other development programmes, have not been effective in building socio-economic resilience in Papua; second, how the role of local leaders—customary leaders, religious leaders, and youth—can be optimised to support stability and community resilience in Papua; and third, what community-centered development strategies can reduce dependency on temporary aid and promote long-term socio-economic empowerment.

Literature Review

The prolonged conflict in Papua, compounded by socio-economic disparities, presents a significant challenge to achieving equitable development in Indonesia (Mollet, 2011). Consequently, emphasise the importance of stability, resilience, and sustainable community empowerment as critical aspects in addressing the issues in Papua. This literature review examines three key areas related to the research questions: the effectiveness of Special Autonomy (OTSUS) policies and development initiatives, the role of local leaders in conflict resolution and social resilience, and community-based strategies for sustainable socio-economic empowerment. Although previous studies provide insights into development and governance challenges in Papua, a significant gap exists in examining the long-term impact of community-based strategies and the direct involvement of local leaders in policy-making (Chauvel & Bhakti, 2004). While some research highlights socio-economic conditions in Papua, it often neglects the unique historical, cultural, and political factors (Seda et al., 2018). This underscores the need for sustainable policies that balance government initiatives and community aspirations, as outlined below:

Effectiveness of Special Autonomy (OTSUS) Policies and Development Initiatives

The OTSUS policy was introduced to grant Papua greater control over its governance, with the aim of addressing grievances and fostering development. However, various studies reveal mixed results in improving socio-economic conditions and building trust between Papuan society and the Indonesian government (Kaisupy & Maing, 2021; Rohim, 2014; Safril et al., 2016). The OTSUS policy has been criticised for its limited integration with local needs, particularly due to the lack of involvement of customary leaders in decision-making processes. While financial and administrative measures exist, the top-down approach often fails to resonate with local cultural contexts, undermining its impact on sustainable development. Hence, the effectiveness of short-term financial

support, rather than fostering dependency, should ideally aim at genuine empowerment, particularly by integrating local knowledge and addressing specific community challenges in Papua (Ambadar, 2013; Marnelly, 2012). Consistent with these insights, the evaluation of development programmes in Papua highlights the need for a participatory approach aligned with the socio-cultural dynamics of the region.

Role of Local Leaders in Supporting Stability and Resilience

The involvement of local leaders, including customary leaders, religious figures, and youth representatives, has been identified as a crucial factor in promoting resilience and stability within complex socio-political contexts. These local figures not only serve as influential community anchors but also as intermediaries who bridge the trust gap between the government and Papuan society. Studies by Pellokila, (2021); Tanati & Palenewen, (2024) indicate that community-led initiatives foster a sense of ownership that is essential for long-term peace and resilience. Integrating local leaders into governance structures has been shown to yield positive outcomes in creating inclusivity and trust. Additionally, empowering these leaders can lead to culturally appropriate solutions, as customary leaders and community representatives possess deep knowledge of the community's needs and values. Local leaders play a significant role in community security and local justice, further strengthening the effectiveness of national policies.

Community-Based Development Strategies for Sustainable Empowerment

Community-based development strategies should prioritise empowering local populations through socio-economic programmes, reducing dependency on temporary aid and fostering long-term capacity and independence, especially in marginalised communities. This approach is particularly relevant given the historically underdeveloped infrastructure and limited access to essential services such as education and healthcare. Sustainable Development and Social Resilience theories advocate the adoption of inclusive, community-driven initiatives that address immediate needs while supporting broader socio-economic goals. Several studies highlight the success of community-based development models in indigenous regions, which have shown potential in fostering self-sufficiency and resilience among local communities. By implementing culturally appropriate, socially embedded programmes, these initiatives promote higher levels of community acceptance and meaningful engagement, ultimately leading to the creation of more resilient and self-sustaining societies.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach based on the framework proposed by Creswell and Poth (2024). A comprehensive literature review is conducted to examine conflict resolution strategies in Papua and assess their impact on equitable national development. This approach prioritizes national interest and contextualizes findings within the socio-political and economic landscape of Papua. Data is collected from

various sources, including peer-reviewed articles, policy documents, and government reports, with selection criteria emphasizing relevance, credibility, and publications from the past decade to ensure up-to-date analysis. The literature review process includes thematic analysis aimed at identifying key patterns related to the effectiveness of the Special Autonomy (OTSUS) policy, the role of local leadership, and community-based strategies in building resilience.

To enhance focus and depth of analysis, a structured keyword extraction procedure is applied. Initial keywords are derived from research questions and theoretical frameworks, encompassing terms such as "Special Autonomy (OTSUS)," "local leadership," "social resilience," "conflict resolution," and "sustainable development." Searches are conducted in academic databases like Scopus and Google Scholar, where keyword variations and related terms are explored using Boolean operators (AND, OR, NOT) to combine keywords and expand search results. This process is iterative, with search results analyzed to identify additional relevant keywords from abstracts and appropriate article sections, thereby refining and broadening the search scope. The final list of keywords is validated by cross-referencing frequently occurring terms in high-relevance articles to ensure comprehensive coverage. This methodology enables a thorough assessment of how current policies relate to the needs of the Papuan community and highlights areas requiring culturally adapted, participatory approaches. Data limitations and potential biases in existing literature are acknowledged and considered in the interpretation of results, making this methodology a solid foundation for exploring conflict resolution dynamics and enhancing socio-economic resilience in Papua.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that Papuan society does not fully support integration with security forces, such as TNI and POLRI, primarily due to high levels of hardship, limited educational access, and inadequate healthcare services. These conditions highlight that social resilience in Papua hinges on fulfilling basic needs, a challenge compounded by the ineffectiveness of the OTSUS policy in significantly improving community welfare. The bureaucratic inefficiencies, overlapping regulations between central and regional governments, and weak law enforcement exacerbate public distrust in the central government. These observations align with previous research emphasizing that unresponsive bureaucracy and governance issues hinder development in remote areas like Papua.

Addressing these issues necessitates a comprehensive, community-based development approach, particularly in historically marginalized rural areas. The study underscores that within the framework of Social Resilience and Sustainable Development theories, culturally tailored interventions focused on long-term economic independence are essential for Papuan communities. Findings reinforce the idea that empowering local leaders, including traditional and religious figures, enhances public acceptance of government policies, bridges trust deficits, and reduces dependency on external aid. By leveraging local wisdom and integrating community perspectives, these strategies foster social cohesion, deepen communal ties, and strengthen collective responsibility—all of which are pivotal for achieving sustainable resilience.

An in-depth analysis of Human Development Index (HDI) data reveals that the quality of life in Papua remains significantly below the national average, highlighting

severe deficits in educational infrastructure and connectivity that limit public service access. The entrenched normative approach to policy implementation often fails to account for local aspirations and unique sociocultural dynamics, emphasizing the pressing need for policies informed by sociological and anthropological insights. The study suggests that community-driven economic initiatives, designed in partnership with local stakeholders, have a more enduring impact on building sustainable social resilience compared to temporary, top-down aid programs.

The role of religious and traditional leaders in strengthening social structures in Papua is particularly significant. These leaders act as crucial intermediaries who facilitate communication between the government and local communities, ensuring that grassroots needs and aspirations are integrated into development plans. This finding aligns with social development theory, which posits that including local leadership can alleviate public dissatisfaction, enhance resource management efficacy, and mitigate the risk of conflicts. The trust and moral authority vested in these leaders enable them to promote values rooted in local traditions, contributing to social integration and national unity. Empowering such figures to participate actively in policymaking not only solidifies community trust but also infuses culturally relevant solutions into broader national strategies.

The influence of social media as a tool for propaganda, particularly by OPM groups, poses a formidable challenge that underscores the importance of a strategic and multifaceted communication plan. Effective use of social media by the government is critical to counter misinformation, foster transparency, and build trust with the Papuan community. Enhancing digital literacy and deploying media-based educational programs are key components within the social resilience framework that can help elevate HDI scores and reinforce national identity, especially in remote regions where traditional communication channels are limited.

To sustain stability and mitigate conflict in Papua, it is imperative to enhance intelligence coordination and develop culturally informed security strategies. Implementing comprehensive operational strategies, such as forming specialized task forces for targeted interventions, can improve regional security by facilitating collaboration between intelligence units and local communities. This partnership ensures a nuanced understanding of separatist activities and strengthens the operational effectiveness of TNI and POLRI. The findings affirm that a community-integrated intelligence model, which prioritizes local input and cooperation, is vital for maintaining regional security. Policies that are culturally adaptive, supported by rigorous oversight and community engagement, have a transformative effect on public welfare and resilience. This research highlights the critical integration of local leadership and digital platforms as fundamental pillars of sustainable development strategies in Papua, fostering a balanced approach that aligns national objectives with the unique needs and cultural context of local communities.

CONCLUSION

The resolution of the Papua conflict requires a comprehensive approach that involves various elements of local society, including customary and religious leaders, to strengthen national awareness and promote self-reliance in fulfilling basic needs. This study identifies that the Special Autonomy (OTSUS) policy has yet to optimize social and

economic welfare and strengthen community resilience in Papua. The direct involvement of local leaders in the development process can increase community acceptance of government programmes and foster sustainable resilience. Consequently, resilience built on welfare and a sense of justice will assist in countering the Armed Separatist Groups (KSB), disrupting their logistical networks, and addressing the geographical and personnel challenges faced by security forces on the ground.

For the success of long-term development programmes and stability in Papua, it is recommended that the government adopts a culturally relevant, community-based approach by involving customary leaders, religious figures, and youth in project planning and oversight. Strengthening international diplomacy is also essential to curb foreign support for the Free Papua Movement (OPM), through an offensive and consistent diplomatic approach across various international forums. The government should enhance intelligence capacity with accurate data and skilled personnel and improve coordination between the TNI and Polri to more effectively suppress KSB activities. A strong diplomatic strategy will help safeguard Papua's integrity as part of the Republic of Indonesia, ensuring that all elements of development and security proceed in harmony and continuity.

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