

RESEARCH PAPER

Authority and Legitimacy of Multi-Actors in Fulfilling Fertilizer Needs in Maros Regency

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the authority and legitimacy of multi-actors in fulfilling fertilizer needs in Maros Regency through the perspective of collaborative governance and public value governance. The problem of subsidized fertilizer governance in Maros Regency is not only related to technical issues of distribution and allocation but also reflects deeper governance problems concerning authority, legitimacy, trust, and public acceptance among actors involved in fertilizer policies. This study employs a qualitative approach using phenomenological methods to explore the experiences, perceptions, and awareness of actors involved in fertilizer governance, including government institutions, private companies, agricultural extension workers, fertilizer agents, farmer groups, and civil society organizations. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, field observations, and documentation involving the Regent of Maros, DPRD members, the Department of Agriculture and Food Security, agricultural extension workers, PT Pupuk Indonesia, PT Lampoko Ternak Indonesia, fertilizer agents, farmers, and HKTJ Youth Farmers. The findings reveal that formal authority possessed by local government institutions has not always been accompanied by strong social legitimacy at the community level. Although the government formally controls fertilizer allocation, data validation, and policy implementation, many farmers continue perceiving fertilizer governance as unfair, inaccurate, and administratively complicated. Business actors such as PT Pupuk Indonesia possess stronger operational legitimacy because they are viewed as technically responsive and consistent in distribution systems. Agricultural extension workers gain high social legitimacy through close relationships with farmers, while nonprofit organizations contribute to participatory legitimacy through advocacy and communication. The study concludes that authority and legitimacy within fertilizer governance in Maros Regency remain fragmented and asymmetrical. Effective fertilizer governance therefore requires the integration of formal legitimacy, social legitimacy, participatory governance, and collaborative trust among actors in order to create sustainable public value.

Keywords: *Performance appraisal, State Civil Apparatus, talent management, performance assessment, merit system authority, legitimacy, multi-actor governance, collaborative governance, public value, subsidized fertilizer, Maros Regency*

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Introduction

The transformation of public administration from government-oriented systems toward governance-oriented systems has fundamentally changed the way public policy is formulated and implemented. Governance is no longer understood as an exclusive activity of state institutions but rather as a collaborative process involving multiple actors from government, private sectors, civil society organizations, and local communities. In contemporary governance, public problems are increasingly complex and cannot be resolved solely through bureaucratic authority. Instead, governance

effectiveness depends on collaboration, legitimacy, trust, and collective participation among actors.

Within agricultural governance, fertilizer policy represents one of the most strategic and politically sensitive policy domains because fertilizer availability directly influences agricultural productivity, food security, and farmers' welfare. In Indonesia, subsidized fertilizer policies are designed to support agricultural production and maintain national food resilience. However, despite extensive government intervention through allocation systems, subsidy mechanisms, and distribution

regulations, fertilizer governance continues to face serious implementation challenges. Maros Regency in South Sulawesi constitutes one of the important agricultural regions highly dependent on subsidized fertilizers. Farmers in this region rely heavily on fertilizer availability for rice cultivation and agricultural production activities. Nevertheless, recurring problems such as fertilizer scarcity, delayed distribution, inaccurate allocation, and unequal access continue to emerge. These governance failures indicate that fertilizer problems are not merely technical distribution issues but also governance problems involving authority conflicts, legitimacy deficits, and weak coordination among actors.

Authority in public governance refers to the formal power and institutional capacity to formulate decisions, allocate resources, and regulate implementation processes. In fertilizer governance, local government institutions formally possess authority over data validation, allocation coordination, and policy implementation. However, formal authority alone does not guarantee governance effectiveness. Legitimacy becomes equally important because governance systems require social acceptance, trust, and recognition from citizens and stakeholders.

The concept of legitimacy occupies a central position in collaborative governance and public value governance theories. Mark H. Moore explains that public value can only be created when public institutions possess legitimacy and support from society. John M. Bryson later expanded this framework within multi-actor governance contexts by emphasizing legitimacy and authority as essential elements within collaborative governance systems. In Bryson's strategic triangle, legitimacy does not solely emerge from formal regulations but also from stakeholder trust, public participation, and collaborative relationships among actors. In fertilizer governance contexts, legitimacy becomes particularly important because implementation processes directly affect farmers' daily lives. Policies perceived as unfair, inaccessible, or inconsistent tend to weaken public trust and governance compliance. Therefore, understanding how authority and legitimacy are constructed, negotiated, and contested among actors becomes essential for explaining fertilizer governance effectiveness.

Previous studies concerning subsidized fertilizer governance in Indonesia generally focus on policy implementation, subsidy effectiveness, and distribution mechanisms. Most studies emphasize administrative and technical dimensions while paying limited attention to governance legitimacy and multi-actor authority relations. Furthermore, studies discussing fertilizer governance through

collaborative governance and public value governance perspectives remain relatively limited.

This study therefore seeks to analyze authority and legitimacy among multi-actors involved in fulfilling fertilizer needs in Maros Regency. Specifically, the study examines how government institutions, private companies, farmers, agricultural extension workers, fertilizer agents, and nonprofit organizations construct authority, gain legitimacy, and interact within fertilizer governance systems. The study also investigates how fragmented legitimacy and authority relations affect public trust and collaborative governance effectiveness. The significance of this research lies in its contribution to public governance literature by emphasizing the relationship between formal authority and social legitimacy within agricultural governance systems. Practically, this study provides insights for strengthening participatory governance, collaborative coordination, and public trust within subsidized fertilizer governance.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative research design using a phenomenological approach to explore the experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of actors involved in fertilizer governance in Maros Regency. The phenomenological approach was selected because the study seeks to understand how actors experience authority, legitimacy, governance coordination, and policy implementation in everyday agricultural governance practices. The research was conducted in Maros Regency, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. The region was selected because it represents an important agricultural area experiencing continuous challenges in subsidized fertilizer distribution and governance implementation. Maros Regency also reflects broader governance dynamics occurring in decentralized agricultural systems in Indonesia.

Data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation analysis. Interviews involved multiple actors directly participating in fertilizer governance, including the Regent of Maros, members of the Regional House of Representatives (DPRD), officials from the Department of Agriculture and Food Security, agricultural extension workers, PT Pupuk Indonesia representatives, PT Lampoko Ternak Indonesia representatives, fertilizer agents, farmer group leaders, farmers, and HKTI Youth Farmers.

The interviews explored several themes related to authority and legitimacy, including governance authority, policy implementation, coordination mechanisms, public trust, social acceptance, participatory governance, and institutional relationships among actors. Semi-structured

interview techniques allowed participants to explain their experiences and perceptions in detail while enabling researchers to explore governance dynamics more deeply.

Field observations were conducted to examine fertilizer distribution processes, interactions among actors, farmer meetings, and administrative procedures within agricultural governance systems. Documentation studies included analysis of policy regulations, allocation documents, eRDKK records, agricultural governance reports, and organizational documents related to fertilizer governance. Data analysis employed phenomenological reduction, thematic coding, categorization, and interpretive synthesis. The analysis process focused on identifying themes concerning formal authority, social legitimacy, governance trust, collaborative relationships, and public value creation. Findings were interpreted through Bryson's strategic triangle framework, particularly the dimensions of legitimacy and authority within collaborative governance.

To ensure credibility and validity, this study applied triangulation through cross-checking interview data, observations, and documentation findings. Member checking was conducted with selected participants to confirm interpretive consistency and research accuracy. Ethical principles including confidentiality, informed consent, and voluntary participation were maintained throughout the research process.

Results and Discussion

Government Authority and Formal Legitimacy

The findings reveal that government institutions in Maros Regency possess strong formal authority within fertilizer governance systems. The local government, Department of Agriculture and Food Security, and DPRD formally hold responsibility for fertilizer allocation, data validation, distribution supervision, and policy implementation. Their authority is supported by national regulations, regional governance structures, and administrative mandates. The Regent of Maros explained that the local government possesses formal responsibility to ensure fertilizer distribution reaches eligible farmers according to allocation systems determined through eRDKK mechanisms. Government institutions also function as coordinators connecting agricultural offices, extension workers, fertilizer distributors, and farmer groups.

However, despite possessing strong formal authority, government legitimacy at the social level remains fragile. Many farmers perceive fertilizer governance systems as administratively complicated and insufficiently responsive to field realities. Complaints regarding fertilizer shortages, inaccurate data, and delayed distribution continue to emerge,

reducing public trust toward government institutions. The findings demonstrate that formal authority does not automatically produce social legitimacy. In several cases, farmers question the fairness of fertilizer allocation because quotas often fail to correspond with actual agricultural needs. Farmers also perceive data verification systems as inconsistent and insufficiently transparent.

The DPRD acknowledged that governance effectiveness remains constrained by weak coordination and uneven implementation capacity. Although regulations and institutional procedures formally exist, operational governance frequently encounters implementation gaps at the local level. Such conditions weaken governance credibility and public confidence. From Bryson's perspective, legitimacy and authority must operate simultaneously within collaborative governance systems. Formal authority without social legitimacy tends to produce governance resistance and declining public trust. Therefore, governance effectiveness depends not only on institutional power but also on public acceptance and participatory engagement.

Social Legitimacy of Agricultural Extension Workers

Agricultural extension workers possess relatively high social legitimacy because they directly interact with farmers and local agricultural communities. Farmers generally perceive extension workers as more accessible, communicative, and responsive compared with bureaucratic institutions. Extension workers frequently function as intermediaries connecting government policies with local agricultural realities.

The close relationship between extension workers and farmers creates relational trust within governance systems. Farmers often rely on extension workers for information regarding fertilizer quotas, registration procedures, planting schedules, and agricultural assistance. Such relational proximity strengthens extension workers' social legitimacy.

However, extension workers simultaneously face institutional limitations that affect governance effectiveness. Limited resources, high workloads, and insufficient technological competence constrain their ability to conduct intensive monitoring and verification processes. Despite possessing strong social legitimacy, extension workers often lack institutional support necessary for maximizing governance performance.

The findings suggest that social legitimacy emerges not solely from formal authority but also from continuous interaction, communication, and relational trust. Extension workers gain legitimacy because they maintain direct engagement with

farmers and understand local agricultural conditions more closely than higher-level bureaucratic institutions. This condition reflects the importance of relational governance within collaborative governance frameworks. Governance legitimacy is strengthened when actors maintain communicative relationships and participatory interactions with communities.

Business Authority and Operational Legitimacy

Business actors such as PT Pupuk Indonesia possess significant operational authority within fertilizer governance because they control production systems, national distribution networks, and logistical infrastructure. PT Pupuk Indonesia functions as the primary supplier responsible for ensuring fertilizer availability across regions. The findings reveal that PT Pupuk Indonesia enjoys relatively strong operational legitimacy because farmers and local actors perceive the company as technically capable and organizationally reliable. The company's distribution systems, logistics management, and production mechanisms are considered more modern and structured compared with local governance institutions.

Nevertheless, the company's effectiveness remains dependent on data provided by local governments. Inaccurate or delayed data submission frequently disrupts fertilizer planning and allocation systems. Consequently, operational legitimacy can also become vulnerable when governance coordination weakens. Fertilizer agents similarly possess practical legitimacy because they directly interact with farmers during fertilizer distribution processes. Agents often become the most visible governance actors at the local level because farmers obtain fertilizers through their distribution systems.

However, fertilizer agents also experience legitimacy challenges because they frequently become targets of farmer complaints regarding fertilizer scarcity, allocation inconsistencies, and price issues. Although many problems originate from broader governance systems, local farmers often associate governance failures with agents because of their direct operational visibility.

The findings demonstrate that legitimacy within fertilizer governance is relational and situational. Operational actors gain legitimacy through responsiveness, consistency, and service delivery, but legitimacy can quickly weaken when governance outcomes fail to satisfy public expectations.

Legitimacy Crisis and Public Distrust

One of the most important findings of this study is the existence of legitimacy gaps within fertilizer governance systems in Maros Regency. Formal governance structures continue operating administratively, yet social trust and public

acceptance remain inconsistent. Many farmers perceive fertilizer governance systems as unfair because distribution frequently fails to correspond with actual agricultural conditions. Delayed fertilizer delivery, inaccurate quotas, and bureaucratic complexity contribute to declining public trust. Such perceptions weaken governance legitimacy and reduce citizen confidence in public institutions.

The findings also indicate that governance legitimacy is strongly influenced by communication transparency and participatory inclusion. Farmers often feel excluded from decision-making processes regarding fertilizer allocation and governance evaluation. Consequently, governance systems appear distant and unresponsive to local agricultural realities.

Habermas explains that legitimacy cannot merely rely on procedural compliance but must also emerge from communicative participation and public acceptance. In the context of Maros Regency, governance legitimacy remains limited because many governance processes continue emphasizing administrative compliance rather than participatory dialogue. The existence of fertilizer brokers within distribution systems further illustrates legitimacy deficits in formal governance structures. Brokers emerge because formal systems fail to fully satisfy fertilizer demand and accessibility needs. Farmers frequently rely on informal actors when official systems become insufficient or inaccessible. Such conditions demonstrate that legitimacy deficits create governance vulnerabilities and weaken collaborative governance effectiveness. Governance systems lacking trust and participation tend to generate informal alternatives, policy resistance, and declining public compliance.

Collaborative Governance and Legitimacy Integration

The findings suggest that effective fertilizer governance requires integration between formal legitimacy and social legitimacy. Government authority alone is insufficient without trust, participation, and collaborative relationships among actors. Collaborative governance frameworks emphasize the importance of stakeholder engagement, participatory communication, and relational trust in creating sustainable governance systems. In Maros Regency, fragmented legitimacy among actors weakens governance coordination and reduces public value creation.

Government institutions continue emphasizing administrative procedures and regulatory authority, while farmers prioritize fairness, accessibility, responsiveness, and practical outcomes. Business actors focus on operational efficiency, whereas nonprofit organizations emphasize participation and

advocacy. These differing governance orientations create legitimacy asymmetries among actors.

Bryson's strategic triangle framework explains that legitimacy and authority must be supported by collaborative relationships and operational capability to produce public value. Governance systems cannot function effectively when actors operate within isolated institutional logics. Therefore, strengthening fertilizer governance requires participatory governance mechanisms capable of integrating government authority, social legitimacy, operational trust, and collaborative coordination. Transparency, inclusive dialogue, data openness, and stakeholder participation become essential foundations for strengthening legitimacy within fertilizer governance systems.

The study also highlights the importance of relational legitimacy within local governance contexts. Public trust is more easily strengthened when governance actors maintain direct communication, responsive interaction, and collaborative engagement with communities. Thus, legitimacy should be understood as a dynamic social process continuously negotiated among governance actors.

Conclusion

This study concludes that authority and legitimacy within fertilizer governance in Maros Regency remain fragmented and asymmetrical among actors. Government institutions possess strong formal authority supported by regulations and administrative mandates, yet social legitimacy among farmers and local communities remains limited because of governance inefficiencies, inaccurate data systems, delayed distribution, and limited participatory communication.

Agricultural extension workers possess strong social legitimacy because of their close relationships with farmers, while business actors such as PT Pupuk Indonesia gain operational legitimacy through technical capability and distribution consistency. Fertilizer agents similarly hold practical legitimacy but remain vulnerable to public dissatisfaction resulting from governance failures.

The findings demonstrate that governance legitimacy cannot solely rely on formal authority or administrative procedures. Effective fertilizer governance requires integration between formal legitimacy, social legitimacy, operational trust, and collaborative participation among actors. Governance systems emphasizing participatory communication, transparency, relational trust, and stakeholder engagement are more likely to strengthen public trust and governance effectiveness.

This study contributes theoretically to collaborative governance and public value governance literature by emphasizing the relationship between authority, legitimacy, and public trust within local agricultural governance systems. Practically, the study recommends strengthening participatory governance mechanisms, improving communication transparency, institutionalizing collaborative coordination forums, and increasing farmer involvement in fertilizer governance processes.

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