

Governing Transformation from the Periphery: The Role of Sustainable Governance in Shaping Local Economies under National Strategic Projects

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Abstract

This study examines the role of sustainable governance in driving local economic transformation in Merauke Regency, Indonesia, within the context of National Strategic Projects (PSN). Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, document analysis of regional policies, and field observations. The findings reveal that regional development is significantly influenced by the alignment between national policies and local governance practices. Policy harmonization with PSN has strengthened development direction, particularly in agriculture and food security sectors; however, challenges remain in institutional capacity, coordination, and equitable distribution of economic benefits. The study further shows that while PSN contributes to structural economic changes through the development of leading sectors, the transformation remains partial and uneven across regions and communities.

The integration of Governance Theory, Regional Development Theory, and Local Economic Development (LED) highlights that sustainable governance functions as a key mechanism for aligning national agendas with local needs within a multi-level governance framework. The findings emphasize the importance of adaptive policy strategies, institutional capacity, and cross-sectoral coordination in achieving inclusive and sustainable economic outcomes. Nevertheless, limitations related to the qualitative scope and localized context suggest the need for future research employing broader methodologies and incorporating social and environmental dimensions.

Keywords: Sustainable Governance; Local Economic Transformation; National Strategic Projects (PSN); Regional Development; Multi-level Governance

Introduction

Regional development in border and peripheral areas, such as Merauke Regency, faces complex structural challenges, particularly related to limited institutional capacity, infrastructure disparities, and weak integration of long-term policies. Globally, the development paradigm has shifted from a growth-based approach to sustainable development, which emphasizes the integration of economic, social, and environmental dimensions as a single, systemic whole. (Andersson et al., 2022).

In its implementation, as a peripheral region, including in Indonesia, this paradigm shift has not been fully accompanied by adequate governance capacity. Decentralization policies, which are expected to accelerate regional development, often face obstacles in terms of inter-institutional coordination and consistent policy implementation. (Pambudi, 2025) This shows that regional development depends not only on the availability of resources, but also on the quality of governance that is able to effectively manage the interaction between national policies and local dynamics.

While the study results have emphasized the importance of sustainable development and strengthening local economies, there is still a significant gap between policy design and implementation at the regional

level, especially in the context of peripheral areas. (Ekasari & Judijanto, 2025) Many development programs, including those within the National Strategic Project (PSN) framework, are still sectoral in nature and have not yet fully achieved inclusive and sustainable economic transformation. (Kurniawan Ariadi & Dadang Solihin, 2026) On the one hand, the National Strategic Project (PSN) provides strategic benefits in the form of accelerated infrastructure development, increased regional connectivity, and strengthening leading economic sectors such as agriculture and food security.

Various challenges, such as limited regional institutional capacity, unequal distribution of development benefits, and the dominance of top-down approaches that fail to consider local contexts, often result in uneven development impacts and inability to fully drive sustainable economic transformation. This leads to weak coordination between actors and a lack of policy harmonization between the central and regional governments, which often hinders the effective implementation of the National Strategic Projects (PSN). (Taqwim, 2026).

Regulatoryly, the implementation of PSN in Indonesia is supported by Presidential Regulation Number 3 of 2016 which is then updated through Presidential Regulation Number 109 of 2020, which emphasizes the importance of accelerating development through cross-sector and cross-regional integration, the implementation of these regulations still faces challenges in policy synchronization, division of authority, and multi-level governance coordination capacity. In this context, crucial questions arise regarding how development governance can function not only as an administrative mechanism, but also as a strategic instrument capable of effectively bridging the national agenda and local needs, particularly in driving regional economic transformation in peripheral areas.

Conceptually, the integration of Governance Theory, Regional Development Theory, Sustainable Development Theory, and Local Economic Development (LED) Theory. Governance Theory emphasizes that policy effectiveness is determined by the quality of institutions and interactions between actors in a multi-level governance system. (Abas, 2023) Regional Development Theory highlights the importance of spatial and institutional linkages in driving regional economic growth. (Medeiros, 2022) The LED approach emphasizes strengthening local potential-based sectors as the driving force of economic transformation. (Kurikka et al., 2023) The integration of these theories provides a foundation for understanding that sustainable governance functions not only as a normative framework, but also as an operational mechanism that determines how national policies, such as the National Strategic Plan, are adapted and implemented at the local level to produce effective economic transformation.

Based on this framework, this study aims to analyze the role of sustainable governance in shaping the dynamics of regional development in peripheral areas, and how this influences local economic transformation in the context of the National Strategic Projects (PSN) implementation in Merauke Regency. Specifically, this study answers the following questions: (1) what is the quality of sustainable governance in the implementation of regional development programs; (2) how local economic transformation is formed as a result of policy interventions; and (3) how the interaction between national policies and local capacity influences economic development outcomes.

The main contribution of this research lies in its attempt to reposition the concept of sustainable governance in the context of peripheral regions as a mechanism to bridge the tension between the national development agenda and local realities. Unlike previous studies that tend to view the relationship between governance and economic development in a linear manner, this research shows that local economic transformation is non-linear and is strongly influenced by the interaction between national policies, regional institutional capacity, and local socio-economic conditions. This study provides a new perspective in the regional development literature by emphasizing the importance of a more adaptive, contextual, and governance-based approach in understanding development dynamics in peripheral regions.

Literature review

Sustainable Governance

Sustainable governance refers to the capacity of institutions and policy mechanisms to maintain consistency, sustainability, and mitigate the impacts of development in the long term. (Haghighi & Takian, 2024) This concept positions governance as a key factor in ensuring that public policies are not only administratively effective but also oriented towards sustainability across sectors and time. Development success is measured not only by short-term output but also by the governance system's ability to maintain policy stability and adaptability.

In the context of regional development, the quality of sustainable governance significantly determines the effectiveness of coordination between actors and the ability of institutions to integrate national and local policies. Strong governance enables synergy between the central and regional governments, while ensuring that implemented policies remain responsive to local needs. This close relationship also plays a role in minimizing conflicts of interest and increasing accountability, enabling development to proceed in an inclusive and sustainable manner.

Regional Development Theory.

Regional development theory emphasizes the importance of spatial interaction, institutional capacity, and sector integration in promoting inclusive and sustainable economic growth. This approach views development as a dynamic process influenced by regional structure, inter-regional connectivity, and policies that effectively optimize local potential. (Lu, 2024). The success of development depends not only on the available resources, but also on how the region is connected and managed strategically.

This theory highlights the importance of policy interventions that can reduce development disparities and accelerate economic transformation. Outlying regions often face limitations in access, infrastructure, and institutional capacity, requiring more targeted and adaptive policy support. Regional development must be designed in an integrated manner to create equitable growth and increase regional economic competitiveness in a sustainable manner.

Local Economic Development (LED) Theory

The LED approach emphasizes that local economic transformation occurs through strengthening leading sectors based on local resources. The theory's primary focus is on increasing productivity, creating added value, and increasing community income through community-based economic development. (Jahid, 2022) In the context of regional development, LED is an important instrument in ensuring that economic growth is inclusive and sustainable.

Several previous studies have shown that the quality of governance has a significant impact on the success of local economic development. Policy effectiveness is largely determined by inter-agency coordination and the implementation capacity of local governments. (Widjaja & Dhanudibroto, 2025), as well as the integration of public policy and the participation of local actors. A region-based approach has also proven effective in optimizing local potential as a driver of economic growth. In the context of developing countries, institutional weaknesses remain a major obstacle to driving inclusive economic transformation. (Suhardi & Panjaitan, 2025).

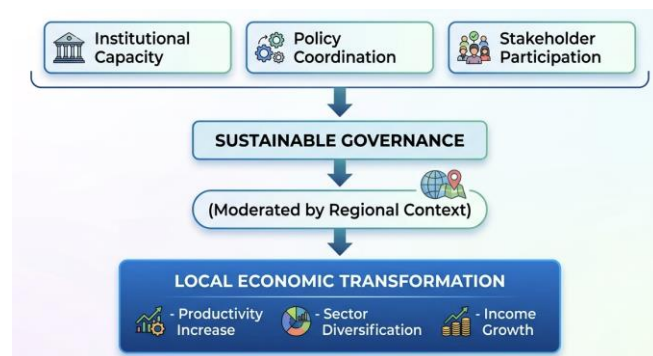
The research gap lies in the relationship between sustainable governance and integrated local economic transformation, which generally tends to separate the analysis of governance and economic development

without looking at the causal relationship between the two. The limitations of studies in peripheral areas of Indonesia have led to a lack of contextual understanding of the dynamics of regional development. (Enala et al., 2025), by integrating sustainable governance and local economic transformation within a comprehensive analytical framework, distinguishing it from previous studies by positioning governance as a determinant factor that directly influences changes in local economic structure. This approach aligns with research that emphasizes the link between public policy and economic outcomes in regional development. (Wang & Yang, 2025).

Conceptual Framework of the Research

Based on theoretical synthesis, this study builds a conceptual framework that positions sustainable governance as a key factor in driving local economic transformation. Effective governance is expected to improve coordination, strengthen policy implementation, and create conditions that support the development of local economic sectors, and serve as a basis for analysis in explaining the relationship between policies, institutions, and local economic dynamics in the context of regional development.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Sustainable Governance and Local Economic Transformation



The conceptual framework positions sustainable governance as a central mechanism linking national policy agendas with local economic outcomes through policy harmonization, institutional capacity, and multi-level coordination. It highlights that effective governance enhances policy implementation, strengthens actor coordination, and supports local economic development. However, uneven impacts may arise due to differences in local capacity, resource access, and implementation dynamics. Local economic transformation is reflected in structural changes, including increased productivity, sectoral diversification, and income growth, forming the basis for analyzing the relationship between governance and development outcomes.

Research methods

This research uses a qualitative case study approach to deeply understand the dynamics of regional development policy implementation in the real context of Merauke Regency. The case study approach was chosen because it can explore complex phenomena involving interactions between institutions, actors, and

policies within a specific regional context. This method allows researchers to capture the processes, meanings, and interpretations of actors regarding sustainable governance practices and their impact on local economic transformation in a contextual and holistic manner.(Muiderman et al., 2022).

The data sources for this research consist of primary data obtained through in-depth interviews with key informants, including local government officials (Bappeda and related agencies), the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRP), and stakeholders directly involved in the development and implementation of the National Strategic Project (PSN), with 10 key informants. Secondary data comes from policy documents, government reports, and academic literature. This combination of data is used to increase the depth of analysis and validity through source triangulation, as well as to understand the policy framework and implementation comprehensively.

Data collection techniques were conducted through three main methods: in-depth interviews, documentation, and limited observation. Interviews were conducted semi-structured to provide flexibility in gathering information while maintaining focus on the research issue. The interview instrument was developed based on predetermined indicators of sustainable governance and local economic transformation concepts. Documentation was used to review the content of policies, programs, and reports on regional development implementation, while observations were conducted to understand empirical conditions in the field, particularly related to local economic activities. This multi-method approach aims to increase data credibility and provide a comprehensive picture of the phenomena studied.(Ependi et al., 2023).

The unit of analysis of this research is implementation.sustainable governance and its impact on local economic transformation in Merauke Regency. The research subjects included local government officials, local economic actors (farmers and MSMEs), and stakeholders such as academics, community leaders, and the private sector, selected through purposive sampling. Data analysis usedthematic analysiswith an interactive model including data reduction, presentation, and drawing conclusions(Braun & Clarke, 2023)The process begins with transcription, followed by coding to identify key themes, and then presented in narrative or matrix form. Validity is maintained through triangulation and*member checking*, thus producing an in-depth analysis of the dynamics and relationships between phenomena.

Finding and Discussion

Policy Consistency and Harmonization with National Strategic Projects (PSN).

The research results show that regional development in Merauke Regency has undergone significant adjustments in response to the implementation of the National Strategic Projects (PSN), particularly in the agriculture and food security sectors. Analysis of regional policy documents and interviews with informants indicate that the local government is actively harmonizing policies to avoid conflicts with national programs. This adjustment is evident in the integration of PSN priorities into the Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMD) and the work programs of regional apparatus organizations (OPD). This condition indicates that the direction of regional policy is no longer solely based on local needs, but is also influenced by the strategic national development agenda.

Institutional Capacity and Multi-Level Governance Coordination in the Implementation of National Strategic Projects (PSN).

The implementation of the National Strategic Project (PSN) has encouraged the formation of new coordination patterns between the central and regional governments, characterized by multi-level governance. The central government's involvement in strategic projects has increased the intensity of coordination between institutions, but also presents challenges in policy synchronization and the division of authority. Informants from regional governments stated that regional policies must be adjusted to avoid

conflicts with central policies. Consequently, in practice, there is a tendency to adjust local policy direction to follow national priorities. This demonstrates that the PSN has a direct influence on the capacity and work patterns of regional institutions.

Implementation of Leading Sector-Based Programs within the National Strategic Project Framework and Their Impact on the Regional Economy.

The impacts demonstrate that the National Strategic Project (PSN) contributes to focusing regional economic development on leading sectors, particularly agriculture and food commodities. Integrated programs within the PSN provide support in the form of infrastructure development, provision of production facilities, and increased market access (Ririhena et al., 2024). The initial visible impact is increased economic activity in nationally prioritized sectors. Program implementation still faces challenges in terms of benefit distribution and local capacity readiness, resulting in less than optimal and equitable economic impact.

Changes in Local Economic Structure as an Impact of PSN Intervention.

The National Strategic Projects (PSN) interventions demonstrate changes in local economic structures, which are beginning to shift in line with the direction of the PSN interventions. Previously traditional economic activities are evolving toward more structured production patterns integrated with national programs. However, these changes remain partial and concentrated in specific regions or groups directly involved in the PSN program. Other regions not focused on the program continue to rely on the primary sector with relatively low productivity levels.

The Impact of National Strategic Projects on Community Income and Economic Inequality.

In general, National Strategic Projects (PSN) have had an impact on increasing community incomes, particularly for groups directly involved in development programs. This increase is evident in the agricultural sector and leading commodities, which receive support in the form of infrastructure, production access, and market opportunities from national programs. The distribution of these economic benefits is not yet equitable, resulting in persistent disparities between community groups. Several informants stated that the sustainability of income increases depends heavily on program consistency and the ability of local governments to adapt local policies to the needs and characteristics of local communities.

On the other hand, interview results also revealed concerns among local communities that they could be left behind in the development process. This is due to limited capacity, skills, and readiness to access opportunities generated by the National Strategic Projects (PSN). Several informants revealed that job opportunities and economic benefits are enjoyed more by workers from outside the region, who are considered more competently prepared. This situation highlights challenges to development inclusivity, where without appropriate policy intervention, the PSN has the potential to widen the gap between local communities and migrants.

Integration of Regional Policy and Direction of Economic Development within the National Strategic Project Framework.

The research findings indicate that the existence of National Strategic Projects (PSN) has driven a shift in the direction of local government policy toward a development model more integrated with the national agenda. Local governments are required to ensure that their policies do not conflict with national programs, but rather support and strengthen the implementation of National Strategic Projects (PSN) at the local level. This is reflected in the adjustment of development priorities, the alignment of sectoral programs, and

increased coordination between development actors. National Strategic Projects (PSN) serve not only as development programs but also as instruments that shape the direction of regional policy and influence the dynamics of local economic development.

Interviews revealed that local communities expect greater commitment to program implementation, particularly in prioritizing employment opportunities for local residents. Informants emphasized that the policy needs to be supported by clear regulations and concrete actions on the ground, not just normative commitments. Communities also highlighted the importance of transparent information regarding the promises and benefits of the National Strategic Projects (PSN) program, which must be communicated clearly, openly, and understandably to avoid misunderstandings or feelings of disadvantage during the development process.

The following table presents a synthesis of research results that integrates empirical findings regarding the implementation of the National Strategic Project (PSN) in Merauke Regency with the dynamics of regional governance and local economic transformation. This presentation groups the research results into several key variables that reflect key aspects of sustainable governance and local economic transformation, while also identifying implementation challenges and relevant policy implications. Through this approach, the table serves not only as a summary of findings but also as an analytical tool that demonstrates the relationship between national policies, regional institutional capacity, and their impact on local economic development.

Table of Research Findings, Challenges, and Policy Implications

Variables	Research Findings	Implementation Challenges	Policy Implications
Policy Consistency and Harmonization with National Strategic Projects	Regional policies are aligned with the National Strategic Projects (PSN), particularly in the agriculture and food security sectors, and are integrated into the RPJMD and OPD programs.	Dependence on central policies, potential neglect of local needs, and inconsistencies between regional planning documents.	Regional governments need to strengthen adaptive policy synchronization to remain aligned with the national agenda without ignoring local characteristics.
Institutional Capacity and Coordination of Multi-Level Governance	PSN encourages coordination across levels of government, but has not been fully effective in implementation on the ground.	Limited human resource capacity, weak coordination between OPDs, and overlapping authority between central and regional governments.	Strengthening institutional capacity, improving human resource competency, and creating a more integrated cross-sector coordination system are required.

Implementation of Leading Sector-Based Programs	The focus of development on leading sectors has increased with the support of infrastructure and market access, but the benefits have not been evenly distributed.	Limited market access, uneven distribution of aid, and low readiness of local actors in managing the program.	Policies need to encourage downstreaming, equal access to programs, and increased capacity of local economic actors.
Changes in Local Economic Structure	There has been a shift towards the priority sectors of the National Strategic Projects (PSN), but the transformation is still partial and concentrated in certain areas.	Regional disparities, limited economic diversification, and the continued high dominance of the primary sector.	Local governments need to encourage economic diversification and expand development interventions to underserved areas.
Impact on Income and Economic Inequality	Income increased for certain groups involved in PSN, but the distribution was not yet even.	Disparities between community groups, limited access to programs, and dependence on policy sustainability.	Inclusive policies are needed to distribute benefits equitably, empower vulnerable groups, and strengthen community-based economies.
Integration of Regional Policy with National Development Direction	PSN encourages changes in the direction of regional policies to align with national programs.	The risk of top-down policy dominance, reduced regional flexibility, and potential incompatibility with local needs.	Local governments need to develop adaptive planning that is able to integrate national priorities and local needs in a balanced manner.

The results of this study confirm that the implementation of sustainable governance in Merauke Regency has a strong relationship with the direction of local economic development, particularly in the context of National Strategic Project (PSN) interventions. The findings indicate that the quality of governance characterized by policy consistency, institutional capacity, and coordination between actors is a key factor in determining the effectiveness of development programs and their impact on local economic transformation. This directly answers the research problem formulation that the relationship between sustainable governance and local economic transformation is interdependent, where governance that is adaptive to national policies can accelerate changes in regional economic structures. In line with research stating that the success of regional development is greatly influenced by the ability of institutions to manage policies sustainably and responsive to external dynamics.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings reinforce the relevance of integrating Governance Theory, Regional Development Theory, and Local Economic Development (LED) in explaining the dynamics of regional development. Sustainable governance, reflected in the harmonization of regional policies with National Strategic Plans (PSN), demonstrates that institutional quality plays a role not only in implementing policies but also as a mediator between the national agenda and local needs. From a governance perspective, this reflects multi-level governance practices, where interactions between the

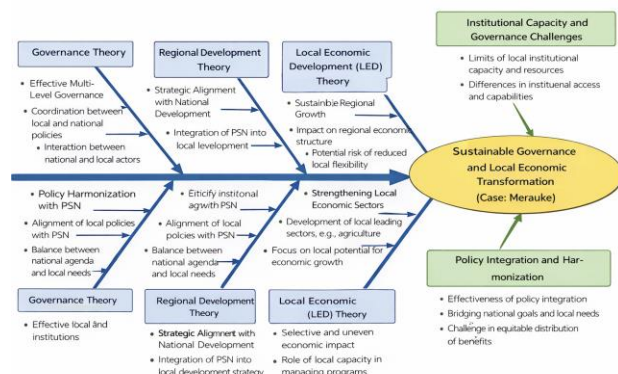
central and regional governments are a determining factor in policy success. From a regional development perspective, the integration of PSN into regional policies demonstrates a shift from locally driven development to more nationally coordinated development, which can accelerate economic growth but potentially reduce regional flexibility in determining priorities.

In terms of local economic transformation, research findings indicate that National Strategic Projects (PSN) interventions can drive structural economic change by strengthening leading sectors, particularly agriculture and food commodities. This aligns with the Local Economic Development approach, which emphasizes the importance of developing sectors based on local potential as a driver of economic growth. (Suhardi & Panjaitan, 2025) Transformation remains partial and uneven, demonstrating that the success of economic development is determined not only by the existence of programs but also by local capacity to manage and optimize them. This situation reinforces the argument that regional development requires an approach that is not simply top-down but also takes into account the local context more deeply.

When compared with previous studies, these findings are in line with research that emphasizes the importance of integration between national and local policies in promoting regional development (OECD, 2020; <https://doi.org/10.1787/97f39a3-en>), differing from several studies that assume that national interventions will automatically produce equitable economic impacts. In the Merauke context, findings indicate that the impact of the National Strategic Project (PSN) remains selective and dependent on the level of involvement of local actors and the readiness of regional institutions. This aligns with recent research showing that inequality in the distribution of development benefits often arises from differences in institutional capacity and access to resources. (Malla & Pathranarakul, 2022).

The scientific contribution of this research lies in strengthening the concept that sustainable governance functions not only as a normative framework for development but also as an operational mechanism that determines the effectiveness of policy implementation in the context of multi-level governance. The relationship between governance and local economic transformation is not linear, but is influenced by the interaction between national policies, regional institutional capacity, and local socio-economic conditions. This new perspective in the study of regional development, particularly in the context of border regions, which often receive less attention in the academic literature.

The results of the synthesis of research findings that link the implementation of the National Strategic Project (PSN), the challenges faced, and the policy implications for regional economic development in Merauke Regency, can be seen in the following figure:



The figure shows that the success of sustainable governance and local economic transformation in Merauke Regency is the result of a complex interaction between the quality of governance, the integration of national policies through National Strategic Projects (PSN), the capacity of regional institutions, and local economic dynamics. Imbalances in any one element, such as weak coordination, limited local capacity, or a lack of

policy harmonization, can impact overall development effectiveness. Regional development needs to be designed in an integrative and adaptive manner to sustainably bridge national interests and local needs.

This study has limitations, particularly the qualitative approach, which limits the generalizability of the findings; the limited data and informants that affect the depth of analysis; and the dominant focus on governance and economic aspects, which therefore does not fully encompass the social and environmental dimensions. The implications of this study emphasize the importance of strengthening institutional capacity, improving cross-actor coordination, and developing effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to support more adaptive policy implementation. This also opens up space for further research to examine the long-term impacts of National Strategic Projects (PSN) and the integration of socio-environmental aspects into sustainable regional development (Sachs et al., 2021;<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-021-00963-9>).

Conclusion

The research results show that the success of regional development is largely determined by the ability of local governments to adaptively integrate national policies with local needs. The main findings indicate that (1) harmonization of regional policies with National Strategic Projects (PSN) is an important factor in maintaining development consistency, (2) institutional capacity and multi-level governance coordination determine the effectiveness of program implementation, (3) PSN interventions are able to encourage economic transformation based on leading sectors, although still partial, and (4) the resulting economic impacts are not evenly distributed, so there are still gaps between community groups. Thus, the relationship between sustainable governance and local economic transformation is dynamic and influenced by the interaction between national policies, local capacity, and regional socio-economic conditions.

Theoretically, this study strengthens the integration between Governance Theory, Regional Development Theory, and Local Economic Development (LED) by showing that sustainable governance not only functions as a normative framework, but also as an operational mechanism in bridging national and local interests in the context of multi-level governance which emphasizes that local economic transformation does not occur linearly, but is influenced by the quality of governance and the readiness of regional institutions in managing national policy interventions. Practically, this finding provides implications that local governments need to develop more adaptive policy strategies, strengthen institutional capacity, improve cross-sector coordination, and ensure equitable distribution of development benefits so that national programs such as the National Strategic Program (PSN) can provide sustainable and inclusive economic impacts.

The limitations of this study include a qualitative approach that limits the generalizability of the findings, limited data and the number of informants, and a focus that is still limited to governance and economic aspects. Further research is recommended to develop a mixed methods approach, expand the scope of the research area, and integrate social and environmental variables to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the long-term impact of PSN on regional development.

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