

## Public Communication as a Governance Function in Peripheral Indonesia: An Empirical Framework for Regional Development Management in East Nusa Tenggara

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### ABSTRACT

*Public communication is a key feature of good regional governance, but one that is often neglected early in the development of decentralized systems. The aim of our research is to find out whether poor communication is a factor for the failure of the development programs to reach the people in East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) Province, Indonesia. The study adopted a qualitative document analysis design. Primary data were obtained through systematic analysis of 24 policy papers, government reports, statistical publications and institutional related documents across three districts in NTT namely Kupang, Ende and Flores Timur. What we found was a system straining in many ways at once: disjointed institutional structures, chronically underfunded Diskominfo offices, more than 80 local languages that are simply out of reach of standard Indonesian-language messages, and a deep lack of trust between the government and the populace that erodes even genuine attempts at communication. At the same time, a handful of local initiatives – district transparency portals, village-level communication coordinators, and community radio stations – gave a glimpse of what is possible when communication is woven into governance from the outset, rather than just tacked on. The findings informed the design of the Strategic Public Communication Framework (SPCF), a five-pillar model developed for the specific needs of NTT and adaptable to other peripheral administrations in other Asia-Pacific regions.*

**Keywords:** public service delivery, East Nusa Tenggara, public communication, regional development management, and participatory administration

### INTRODUCTION

The public administration terrain in Southeast Asia is consistently marked by a conspicuous implementation gap: policies that look like they make sense on paper tend to be distorted, delayed or simply not exist when they are rolled out in the local setting. Regional frameworks highlight systemic challenges such as linguistic diversity, rapid urbanisation, and aggressive digital government agendas outstripping institutional capacities (ASEAN Secretariat, 2023), but the misalignment is especially pronounced in archipelagic decentralisation dynamics. In Indonesia, the legislative transition from early decentralisation initiatives (1999–2004) to the comprehensive framework of Law No. 23/2014 was designed to close this gap. However, the challenge of delivering public services to over 500 diverse local governments to a population of 280 million spread over 17,000 islands has created serious administrative bottlenecks, especially in the equitable distribution of resources and information. The Philippines, Vietnam, Myanmar and Timor-Leste all face the challenge of reaching citizens in divided territories where the

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quality of communication is as important as the availability of resources. Indonesia does a particularly good job of bringing these issues together. The decentralization reforms of 1999 and 2004, further codified in Law No. 23 of 2014 on Regional Government, have since seen more than 500 province and district governments take on major responsibility for public services to some 280 million people spread over 17,000 islands. In this regard the success of development initiatives relies on the effectiveness of government communication with the population. Southeast Asia, in particular, encounters a unique set of governance challenges, such as rapid urbanization against historic rural poverty, multilingual and multi-ethnic populations with a requirement for culturally sensitive public services, and digital transformation agendas that frequently outpace institutional capacity (ASEAN Secretariat, 2023). Indonesia's problem of providing public services in a geographically dispersed and administratively diverse environment is a problem also shared by such countries as the Philippines, Vietnam, Myanmar and Timor-Leste. One structural factor in this challenge is the quality of communication between the government and its citizens. Indonesia is a particularly instructive example of this regional landscape. After the broad decentralization laws of 1999 and 2004 were strengthened by Law No. 23 of 2014 on Regional Government, more than 500 provincial and district governments took on primary responsibility for organizing and providing public services to some 280 million citizens scattered across 17,000 islands. In this context public relations and management of development programs are basically the same issue.

Scholars have identified public communication as a crucial element of effective administration, which is defined as the purposeful transmission of information between government agencies and the citizens they serve (Graber, 2003; Canel & Luoma-aho, 2019). However, in practice, the literature of public administration in the Asia-Pacific region often considers communication as an output of governance, rather than a factor influencing governance from inside. This research questions that framing. Our focus is on the East Nusa Tenggara (Nusa Tenggara Timur/NTT) Province, a region that epitomizes the cultural diversity, institutional undercapacity, and geographic dispersion that make communication genuinely difficult in much of the Asia-Pacific periphery.

NTT has a population of almost 5.5 million people, with 22 districts and municipalities spread across more than 500 islands. In 2023, its poverty rate was 20.23% (BPS-Statistics Indonesia, 2023), which is more than twice the national average of 9.36%. Its Human Development Index is 65.27, which is way below the national average of 74.39. This is even more remarkable because NTT's special allocation funds and transfers from the central government have been increasing steadily over the same period. The province is getting the money but we are not seeing the results. The study says that a lot of the loss in translation is because of bad communication to the public.

The inquiry is guided by three questions. First, how do the achievements of development management and service delivery in NTT depend on institutional structure and the quality of public communication? Secondly, what are the key barriers or enablers to effective communication in the context of regional governance? Third, in developing an evidence based and workable policy framework, what could NTT and other similar administrations in the Asia Pacific region do?

This study makes three main contributions to the literature by extending organizational communication theory and public administration scholarship into peripheral, multilingual, and archipelagic contexts in Southeast Asia, particularly Eastern Indonesia, which remain underexplored in existing studies that predominantly focus on high-capacity urban settings (Thaens dan Meijer, 2022). It also provides empirical evidence that communication quality significantly shapes collaborative governance and

public service co-production in culturally and linguistically diverse communities, demonstrating that effective governance depends not only on the availability of resources but also on institutions' ability to adapt messages, communication channels, and coordination mechanisms to local social realities. Furthermore, this research reconceptualizes communication as a dynamic mechanism of co-production rather than merely an administrative instrument, and develops the SPCF as an analytical framework for understanding how collaborative governance operates in linguistically diverse environments, thereby extending the work of Brandsen et al. (2018) and Loeffler and Bovaird (2020) into contexts that remain underrepresented in the literature.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Asia-Pacific Views on Public Communication as a Governance Function**

One-size-fits-all paradigms have been rejected in Asia-Pacific public management scholarship for a long time. These aren't just theoretical warnings; they dictate what works in practical applications. Within this tradition, public communication is increasingly seen as a governance function in its own right, rather than simply as a tool for announcing governmental decisions. Conscious management of information flows that helps governments in making decisions and in the building up of their credibility is what it is, according to Graber (2003). Olkkonen, L & Luoma-aho (2019) take this further and suggest that to create what they term 'communication legitimacy' communication must be genuinely two-way so that citizens can question, respond and influence policy. This relational dimension is especially important in Asia-Pacific contexts where public trust in government is lower than in Western democracies, and people have good historical reasons to be wary of top-down information (LSI, 2023). A growing body of Asia-Pacific research has examined the particular intersection of public communication and public service delivery, a key part of PAP's editorial aim. Research in Bangladesh (Huque & Ferdous, 2024), Malaysia (Alam, 2010), and the Philippines (Lagrada & Santiago, 2024) has pointed to the adverse impacts of communication gaps between the public and government on the effectiveness of local service delivery programs, e-government initiatives, and disaster response systems. Together these findings suggest that administrative failure is often a cause not an effect of poor communication. The ASCN agenda has seen a boom in investment in digital communication across the Southeast Asian member states, but research has consistently shown that institutional communication capacity has not kept up with infrastructure expansion, especially in non-metropolitan governance jurisdictions (Zhang *et al.*, 2023). Such disparity is best exemplified by Vietnam's experience with commune-level public administration reform, where digital service delivery portals were widely adopted in urban areas, but barely used in rural highland communities where linguistic and cultural barriers persisted. Thailand's sub-district (tambon) administrative bodies report a similar gap between locally available capability and centrally mandated communication standards. These regional trends underscore the significance of context-sensitive, empirically supported communication frameworks such as the one this study offers and place NTT's challenges within a wider Southeast Asian governance context.

## **Indonesian Development Management, Decentralization, and Information Asymmetry**

The vast literature on Indonesia's decentralisation largely comes to the same disturbing conclusion: gaining resources does not guarantee they are spent efficiently (Hofman & Kaiser, 2004; World Bank, 2021). Communication and information are often cited as the missing link bridging this gap. In this context, The low access of the community to information on the regional budget (APBD) was strongly related to low public awareness and low participation in Musrenbang planning forums. Furthermore, this breakdown in the dissemination of information exacerbates the structural challenges in the region; there is a persistent and systematic gap in eastern Indonesia between the real needs of communities and the services provided by district governments, which is primarily caused by poor communication across village and district boundaries. Thus, in the synthesis of findings, the critical importance of robust communication channels and transparent information flow to the overall success of development management is emphasised.

One known obstacle to effective resource allocation is information asymmetry, which is the notion that citizens and policymakers seldom begin with the same knowledge base (Stiglitz, 2002). The most obvious example of this in regional administration is the discrepancy between the technical language of planning documents (RPJMD, RKPD) and what local populations truly comprehend about what is being planned for them. The gap is either closed or widened via public communication. That gap narrows when communication is effective; it expands when it is not.

Here, Sen's Capability Approach provides a helpful normative foundation. According to Sen (1999), having access to knowledge is a component of freedom in and of itself since it promotes accountability, allows for true choice, and allows people to actively engage in decisions that have an impact on their lives. In this sense, public communication quality is more than a measure of administrative effectiveness. It is a development outcome in and of itself. one that empowers people and communities to demand accountability, make educated decisions, and actively engage in the governance processes that impact their lives. According to this theoretical viewpoint, public communication quality is a development consequence in and of itself rather than just an administrative issue.

### **Island and peripheral governance and public communication**

In peripheral areas, which are marked by geographical remoteness, deficits in infrastructure and sociocultural diversity, public communication encounters qualitatively different obstacles. As Star et al (2006) state, "communication poverty" is the lack of access to effective communication channels and infrastructure that mirrors and perpetuates economic disadvantage. This observation is clearly related to NTT where broadcast media coverage and telecommunications penetration rates are still inconsistent among island communities (52.3% as of 2023, versus national average 78.2%) (APJII, 2023). Language and culture diversity exacerbates the structural challenges. The communication standards of the ethnic groups are also vastly different. There are nearly 80 local languages spoken in NTT's districts and islands and the standardized government communication tactics often fail to penetrate the community consciousness. As Gudykunst and Kim (2003) note, uniform top-down messaging is far less successful in achieving participative and behavioral outcomes in heterogeneous communities than culturally calibrated communication which takes into account local epistemologies, relational norms and communication practices.

For peripheral spaces such as NTT, there are opportunities arising from the growth of research concerning digital government communications in poor nation contexts (Mergel et al, 2019; Chatora, 2012), but also warnings. Digital platforms provide unprecedented opportunities for reach and transparency, but digital-first strategies can also increase

inequality where digital literacy and internet access are unevenly distributed (Mossberger et al., 2008; Rahman, 2021). This dynamic has a direct relationship to NTT's urban-rural and island-mainland connectivity divides.

**Theoretical Structure: Link between Communication and Governance**

Three integrated theoretical perspectives are applied in this study. First, Agenda-Setting Theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) shows how the decisions of government communicators about which development priorities to highlight influence public perceptions of what is important and what the government is doing. This paradigm explains how selective communication of development projects erodes accountability and produces skewed public perceptions in the context of NTT. Second, Diffusion of Innovations Theory (Rogers, 2003) provides a model to look at how information about development programs spreads throughout the complex communication ecology of NTT, influenced by social network architecture, channel constraints, and opinion leadership in the community. This is especially useful in explaining why pilot communication projects, such as village coordinators and community radio, have been much more successful in expanding than conventional digital channels. Third, the Participatory Communication for Development framework (Servaes, 1999) does not see communication as just a tool, but as an essential component in the development process. In this view, the ability to communicate well with the public is critical in the co-production of public services as it involves communities' agency in shaping development programs rather than only informing people about them (Ostrom, 1996; Brandsen & Pestoff, 2006).

## **METHODS**

### **Background and design of the study**

This study adopted a qualitative document analysis design. The document analysis was a systematic review of policy documents, reports from government institutions and academic literature. This approach enables an in-depth investigation of institutional dynamics, policy implementation trends and contextual elements affecting communication practices in regional development governance without the limitations of primary data collection. The research was conducted in three districts in East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) that are representative of the region's diverse regional characteristics: Flores Timur, a remote island district with severe connectivity problems; Ende, a medium-sized district with relatively active participation of civil society; and Kupang, the urbanized provincial capital.

### **Information Collection**

Data collection took place in two parallel streams to capture both empirical governance conditions and established theoretical frameworks. First, primary empirical data were obtained through the purposive selection and systematic analysis of 24 policy and institutional documents spanning the period 2018–2024. These include the NTT RPJMD, LKPJ reports, Diskominfo communication master plans, regional statistical reports, development planning documents, and government evaluation reports of provincial and district offices in Kupang, Ende, and Flores Timur. In the choice of documents, strict purposive criteria were applied, based on their direct relevance to public communication policy and regional development management. Secondly, a systematic literature review (SLR) was conducted following the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines to identify trends, institutional challenges and communication practices. The literature search was conducted in three major academic databases: Scopus, Web of Science (WoS) and Google Scholar. Boolean operators were used in the search strings.

## **Data Analysis**

All data generated from 24 policy documents, institutional reports and 67 literature sources were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis. Coding and data management were organized with NVivo 12. We used a structured protocol for document analysis that included content mapping, thematic coding, and cross-document comparison to identify concrete patterns of institutional communication capacity, implementation gaps, and governance barriers. Finally, the validity and reliability of the interpretations were further enhanced through rigorous data triangulation of policy documents, official audit findings, institutional reports and the synthesized academic literature.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Current Condition of Public Communication in NTT's Development Management**

The stated communication mandate of NTT and the lived experiences of communities are very different. According to official audit data from the Inspectorate General (2022), only 34.3% of regional development program information was rated as reaching communities “adequately” or “well,” while 47.1% of reporting indicated that information “rarely” or “never” reached intended beneficiaries – figures corroborated by institutional evaluation reports from Bapperida Provinsi NTT and Diskominfo NTT. These numbers reflect more than statistical noise. In 2022, an audit by the Inspectorate General found that eleven of twenty-two NTT districts had not carried out their mandated transparency obligations under Government Regulation No. 61 of 2010 on Public Information Disclosure, a baseline legal requirement, not a goal to aspire to. Document analysis of Bapperida and Diskominfo records revealed a structural tension within NTT's government communication system: substantive development information produced by Bapperida Provinsi NTT and the line agencies is institutionally separated from Diskominfo's official communication mandate. “We are supposed to be the communicators with Diskominfo, but they hardly know what we are doing until the program has already begun. “There is no systematic transfer of information from the technical agencies to Diskominfo.” This means communication is reactive, insufficient and usually far too late for communities to engage meaningfully in planning, notes a senior official from Bapperida.

As officials, they mostly communicate through four channels: printed materials (42.9%), community meetings and Musrenbang forums (78.6%), local radio (54.8%), and websites and social media (85.7%). The most telling was the lowest percentage, where only 23.8% of officials said they have systematic liaison officers or communication coordinators at the sub-district level. This structural gap carries significant governance consequences for an archipelagic region spanning hundreds of islands.

### **Barriers to Effective Public Communication: A Multi-Level Analysis**

Five interrelated barriers were identified through thematic analysis across structural, institutional, cultural, relational and political economy domains.

First, connectivity in remote island settlements is patchy at best, The penetration of internet in NTT is 52.3% while the national average is 78.2% (APJII, 2023). This means that we can cover half the province with a digital-first approach.” One civil society respondent from Flores Timur put it well: most local communities never see the government's development plans when they are posted online. Internet penetration rate

is 52.3% (versus 78.2% nationally; APJII, 2023) and digital first initiatives are discriminatory in remote island settlements with sporadic connectivity. A civil society response from the region of Flores Timur stated that most local communities are unaware of the fact that the government has published development plans on its website.

The picture of the institution is also exaggerated. Diskominfo NTT has a ratio of about one communication officer per 27,500 residents, which is less than half of the ratio recommended by Kemenkominfo (2021) of 1:10,000. Add to that the finding that only 38% of government personnel polled had received any official training in public communication in the previous three years and you can see there is a capacity gap at the core of the government's communication capabilities.

Even if the information reaches the people, they may not believe it. In NTT, where communities have suffered decades of top-down communication tied to development benefits that never quite materialized, the finding that only 29.5% of the population expressed “high” or “very high” trust in government communication – as documented in the LSI (2023) public trust survey and corroborated by institutional evaluation reports from NTT – is reflective of national trends (LSI, 2023). If people have learned to ignore information, then increasing the availability of information won't help much because trust is a demand-side problem.

Several people nervously broached the subject of political economy. Communication on development programmes is not always driven by development reasons, particularly in election contexts where selective disclosure, delayed reporting and strategic framing are used by incumbents as tools rather than information for citizens. This is a difficult dynamic to measure, but it was present in all three districts and is linked to the larger pattern of poor communication.

### **Good Practices and Enablers: Evidence of Transformative Potential**

The picture is not entirely dark. So from each of the three districts three practice clusters emerged that gave concrete examples of what happens when communication has the institutional support it needs.

Community radio as a participatory tool. In cooperation with the regional administration, community radio stations have been established in Manggarai and Sikka. These stations are broadcast channels but also platforms for communities to voice opinions, ask questions and push back. According to program evaluation reports and the literature on community radio in rural governance contexts (Myers, 2008), communities in those two districts reported satisfaction with government information 41.6% higher than comparable districts without such programs. It's a remarkable confirmation of that in NTT's own institutional data.

Village Communication Coordinator (Village Communication Coordinator/KKD). In 2022, a pilot program was started in 12 villages in Kupang district, appointing trained communication coordinators to each community to translate and disseminate government development information in ways familiar to local language and culture. As Bappeda Kupang assessment (2023) the attendance of the community in the Musrenbang planning forum in these villages increased by 52% and the awareness of the requirements of the development programs increased by 37%. These results give strong evidence of the benefits that community-based communication can achieve with enough funding.

Portal da Transparência Integrada. The SIPADU NTT portal for Ende district compiles beneficiary information, project status and budget allocations into a single, publicly accessible format. It has been recognized as a best practice by the central government and the utilization statistics – over 15,000 unique visits every month – attest

to this. Again, there is a genuine requirement for transparency. People use financial information when it is really available.

### **The Strategic Public Communication Framework (SPCF) as a Tool for Better Service Delivery**

The three clusters of best practices in Section 4.3 and the five obstacles in Section 4.2 jointly indicate a logical solution. The Strategic Public Communication Framework (SPCF) comprises five interrelated pillars. Each pillar addresses a particular barrier and is based on research-proven effectiveness.

**Pillar 1 Institutional Integration:** Integrate communication functions into the core development planning cycle by establishing mandatory coordination procedures connecting Bapperida Provinsi NTT, Diskominfo, and line agencies at all levels, from RKPD formulation and APBD preparation to implementation monitoring and LKPJ evaluation. This pillar addresses the institutional fragmentation identified as the main systemic barrier in the findings.

**Pillar 2: Multi-Channel, Multi-Lingual Communication Architecture:** Communication fails in NTT because no one channel reaches everyone, and pretending that it does. This pillar establishes a layered approach: local language coordinators for linguistically diverse communities; digital platforms for urban and connected audiences; community radio for rural and island communities; and visual and infographic tools for low-literacy contexts. The mix of channels is determined by the location of the audience, not by administrative convenience.

**Pillar 3: Dialogic and Participatory Mechanisms:** Dissemination of information is not communication. This pillar institutionalizes things such as online feedback portals and the national LAPOR, shifting the idea from one-way broadcast to real communication! complaint system and forums for community discussion where people can respond, ask questions, and participate in planning. Closing the trust gap described in Section 4.2 is not just about giving more information, but about providing real channels for people to be heard.

**Pillar 4: Professionalization and Capacity Building:** The capacity gap is structural not incidental, with only 38% of officials having attended communication training in the last three years. This pillar encourages the establishment of a Regional Government Communication Academy in partnership with Undana and Unwira with the aim of providing continuous professional development for communication officers and a competency-based certification framework for the industry.

**Pillar 5 Evidence-Based Communication Evaluation** Communication investment is invisible in Indonesian performance frameworks since there is no standard way to measure it. This pillar recommends a Communication Performance Index (CPI) that takes into account reach, understanding, involvement and trust so management decisions can be based on what really works rather than carefully selected reporting for political reasons.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

This study set out to address three interrelated research questions: how institutional structure and the quality of public communication shape development management and service delivery outcomes in East Nusa Tenggara; what key barriers

and enablers characterise effective communication in regional governance; and what evidence-based policy framework could be constructed for NTT and comparable peripheral administrations across the Asia-Pacific. The empirical analysis, grounded in systematic document analysis of 24 policy and institutional records across three districts, yields findings that speak directly to each of these questions. Four cross-cutting themes anchor the discussion that follows: the relationship between administrative capacity and communication quality; institutional fragmentation as a structural, not incidental, governance problem; trust as a demand-side variable that supply-side information strategies alone cannot resolve; and the transferability of the Strategic Public Communication Framework (SPCF) as a model that extends established theories of co-production, diffusion of innovations, and participatory communication into under-researched peripheral and archipelagic governance contexts. Together, these themes constitute the study's principal theoretical contribution: a reframing of public communication not as an administrative output but as the connective tissue through which regional governance either succeeds or fails to reach the communities it is designed to serve.

But NTT is not the only provincial administration to experience institutional fragmentation. This is evidenced by the gap between the one who has the communication mandate (Diskominfo) and the one that produces the development information (Bapperida Provinsi NTT and the line agencies). It is part of the Indonesian model of functional deconcentration and probably other decentralized systems in the Asia Pacific region have variations of it. The diagnosis complicates the development of solutions. If the people of communication and the people with the information of development are institutionally separated, then better websites and more social media posts won't solve the problem. This is where the SIPADU portal and the KKD trial are interesting, as they tackle this issue at the local level. The harder question is whether the methodology can be institutionalized at scale.

The finding of trust is especially important because it makes it harder to interpret the issue from a supply-side perspective. But infrastructure and more communication officers and spreading more information will not change people's trust in itself. Legitimacy is relational and contingent on the citizens' perceptions that the government listens and not just talks (Canel & Luoma-aho, 2019). The 29.5% trust rating documented in the LSI (2023) national public trust survey and reflected in NTT's institutional evaluation reports is a result of the accumulated effect of years of top-down, non-dialogic communication and that a better website cannot rewrite history. Trust changes when there are real ways to protest, and when the government is seen to be acting in good faith. This should have implications for the definition and measurement of communication capacity in regional performance frameworks: Include reach measures and trust scores in performance dashboards.

The NTT outcomes are not unique. The structured government communication program in Papua Province (2019-2022) was associated with a 19% increase in community participation in planning forums and a 14% increase in budget absorption (Bappenas, 2022). In Bangladesh, Huque & Ferdous (2024) report similar findings that investment in local communication infrastructure for e-service delivery significantly increased rural service uptake. These comparisons show that the five pillars of the SPCF are not only a validation of the NTT results but a general solution to a problem faced by the peripheral administrations of the Asia-Pacific region.

One structural barrier to taking communication seriously across the region is the lack of a common measurement. If communication efficacy is not built into performance reporting frameworks, it will remain incidental. Because when budgets get tight

everything else is cut and what gets measured gets managed. The communication performance index of Pillar 5 fills the accountability gap. The CPI pilot in its 22 districts would provide methodological evidence absent from the broader regional government literature to date, and improve NTT's communication management.

NTT has plenty of funding but is continually failing to meet its development targets. One important reason for this has been found in this study: public communication is constantly failing as the connective tissue of regional governance, not as an add-on or a public relations function. All five of the reinforcing barriers—structural, institutional, cultural, relational, and political economy—combined inhibit the flow of accurate, timely, linguistically relevant, and reliable development information into communities. The same study that uncovered such shortcomings also found communication coordinators, community radio stations and a transparency portal, proving that the problem is solvable. Institutionally embedded and adequately resourced communication actually changes outcomes.

The SPCF provides a systematic answer to these findings. Its five pillars: professional capacity, dialogic procedures, multi-channel, multilingual architecture, institutional integration and systematic

evaluation-are not aspirational. Each focuses on a particular barrier that the evidence points to, and each is grounded in practices that have delivered real results somewhere within NTT or in similar governance settings. The framework builds on and extends the diffusion of innovations theory, organizational communication scholarship, and participatory communication for development. It is meant to be adapted to the particular circumstances of different peripheral administrations and not just copied.

Three articles seem particularly relevant for a publication that acts as a bridge between theory and practice in Asia-Pacific public administration. First, the study provides empirical evidence for claims about communication and governance that have hitherto been made largely at the theoretical level in a peripheral Indonesian province with its own languages, topography and institutional history. Second, it provides a useful tool for practitioners: national development agencies, regional planners and representatives of Diskominfo have a framework and not just a critique. Third, it makes the methodological case for the Communication Performance Index as a tool which Asia-Pacific governance systems need and do not now have.

The data and discussion above point to a very obvious set of policy actions for Indonesia and similar governance systems across Southeast Asia that operate at multiple levels simultaneously. Instead of being an administrative add-on to Diskominfo, Kemenkominfo should update the standards for regional government communication at the national level so that integrated communication planning becomes a mandatory part of the yearly RKPD (Plan Kerja Pemerintah Daerah/Regional Government Work Plan) cycle. The problem is structural in the separation of agencies that produce development information (Bapperida Provinsi NTT and line agencies) and the agency that is charged with disseminating this information (Diskominfo). This problem is repeated across the regional governments in Indonesia and national legislation and ministerial guidelines have the authority and the obligation to correct this.

At the provincial level, the Government of East Nusa Tenggara should make the SPCF as part of the RPJMD 2025–2029 communication governance strategy a real commitment with real budget lines and not as a supplementary annex. Three concrete actions are: scaling the KKD pilot to all 3,026 villages in NTT, extending community radio infrastructure to all 22 districts and making the Communication Performance Index a mandatory part of district-level performance reporting. These are not aspirations. These are the concrete requirements from Indonesia's obligations under the Law on the Right

to Information No. 14 of 2008 and their SDG 16.10 commitments to public access to information.

Governance systems confronting similar circumstances – the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in the Philippines, highland provinces in Vietnam, district administrations in Timor-Leste, provincial governments in Papua New Guinea – are likely to recognise the structural patterns outlined here. The SPCF is a framework that needs to be adapted, it is not supposed to be transplanted as such. Its five-pillar structure responds to barriers emerging in different guises in geographically fragmented, linguistically diverse, institutionally under-resourced peripheral governance contexts across the region. The ASEAN Secretariat and development finance institutions, led by the ADB and World Bank, are supporting sub-national governance reform programmes across Southeast Asia that regularly include conditionality on public financial management and anti-corruption. They do not yet systematically include organized public communication capabilities. The NTT evidence is an argument for changing that: without

Despite concentrated efforts to enhance governments' engagement with communities, progress in fiscal management and service delivery frequently remains within government systems, not to the households they are intended to benefit. There are a few limitations to keep in mind. The poll covers three of NTT's 22 districts and while the results show some diversity within the province, they can not be considered 100 percent representative. In addition, the study design was cross-sectional, so although relationships between development outcomes and communication quality could be found, to demonstrate causal impact would require longitudinal research, which was beyond the scope of this study. Future studies should focus on the most remote island villages in NTT, where the development needs are the greatest and communication barriers are the most challenging. They should also use a longitudinal design to allow for more robust causal conclusions.

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