

Contextual Public Service Planning: Bridging Administrative Planning and Local Realities in Papua's Special Autonomy

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ABSTRAK

Perencanaan pelayanan publik berperan penting dalam menentukan kualitas layanan pemerintah. Namun, pendekatan perencanaan yang bersifat seragam sering kali kurang mampu mengakomodasi keragaman sosial, budaya, kelembagaan, dan geografis di wilayah otonomi khusus seperti Papua. Penelitian ini menganalisis praktik perencanaan pelayanan publik dalam konteks desentralisasi asimetris serta mengidentifikasi faktor-faktor yang memengaruhi relevansi dan efektivitas layanan. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus melalui wawancara mendalam, diskusi kelompok terarah, observasi lapangan, dan analisis dokumen. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa berbagai persoalan pelayanan publik berakar pada proses perencanaan yang masih berorientasi pada prosedur administratif dan indikator yang terstandarisasi, sehingga belum sepenuhnya mengakomodasi kebutuhan lokal. Temuan lapangan juga memperlihatkan bahwa struktur sosial, sistem penguasaan tanah, nilai budaya, kondisi ekologis, serta hubungan kelembagaan lokal berperan penting dalam menentukan prioritas pembangunan dan efektivitas pelayanan. Berdasarkan temuan tersebut, penelitian ini mengembangkan Contextual Public Service Planning (CPSP), yang menempatkan konteks lokal sebagai bagian integral dari proses perencanaan. Kerangka ini menunjukkan bahwa efektivitas pelayanan publik ditentukan tidak hanya oleh kepatuhan terhadap prosedur administratif, tetapi juga oleh kemampuan perencanaan untuk merespons realitas sosial, budaya, dan kelembagaan masyarakat.

ABSTRACT

Public service planning plays a central role in determining the quality of government services. Yet standardised planning approaches often fail to accommodate the institutional, social, cultural, and geographical diversity found in regions with special autonomy, such as Papua. This study examines public service planning within Papua's Special Autonomy and explores the factors influencing service effectiveness in an asymmetrically decentralised setting. A qualitative case study was conducted using in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, field observations, and document analysis. The findings reveal that many public service challenges originate during the planning stage, where administrative procedures and standardised performance indicators often fail to reflect local realities. Field evidence further shows that social structures, customary land tenure, cultural values, ecological conditions, and local institutional relationships shape planning priorities and service outcomes. Building on these findings, this study proposes the Contextual Public Service Planning (CPSP) framework, which conceptualises local context as an integral component of the planning process rather than merely a factor affecting implementation. The study demonstrates that planning effectiveness depends not only on administrative compliance but also on the capacity of planning systems to respond to local social, cultural, and institutional realities.

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INTRODUCTION

Public service planning shapes the quality of government services long before programmes are implemented. Decisions made during the planning stage determine how public problems are defined, which priorities receive attention, and how public resources are allocated. When planning fails to reflect local realities, programmes may satisfy administrative requirements while delivering only limited benefits to the communities they are intended to serve. This challenge is particularly evident in regions characterised by substantial geographical, social, and institutional diversity.

Although standardised planning procedures have strengthened accountability and coordination across different levels of government, they often leave limited room for accommodating local diversity (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017; Osborne, 2010). Planning frameworks built around uniform administrative standards may therefore reduce the capacity of local governments to respond to the distinctive social, cultural, and institutional conditions that shape public service needs (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2015; Bovaird & Löffler, 2016). As a consequence, administrative success does not necessarily translate into services that are relevant or meaningful within different local contexts.

These tensions become more pronounced in decentralised governance systems. Decentralisation is intended to provide local governments with greater authority to formulate policies that reflect local priorities and circumstances (Faguet, 2014; Smoke, 2015). In practice, however, planning processes frequently remain constrained by nationally prescribed planning frameworks, performance indicators, and evaluation systems. Consequently, planning often becomes an exercise in administrative compliance rather than an opportunity to formulate policies that genuinely respond to locally defined needs (Eaton, Kaiser, & Smoke, 2011).

Papua provides a particularly relevant setting for examining these issues. As a region with Special Autonomy status, Papua is characterised by considerable geographical diversity, strong customary institutions, and distinctive social and cultural traditions. Mountainous and coastal communities face different development challenges, while customary institutions continue to influence how collective decisions are made and how government programmes are received. These geographical and institutional characteristics shape how communities perceive public services, participate in planning, and engage with government institutions. Consequently, planning approaches designed around uniform administrative assumptions do not always correspond to the realities encountered across districts and communities.

Previous studies have highlighted the importance of decentralisation, citizen participation, and governance arrangements in improving public service delivery (Arnstein, 1969; Fung, 2015; Cleaver, 2012). Nevertheless, relatively little attention has been given to understanding how local context shapes planning rationality itself. Most existing studies continue to treat context primarily as a factor influencing implementation rather than as an element embedded within the planning process. This distinction matters because the way public problems are framed during planning ultimately shapes the range of policy options and implementation strategies that governments pursue (Howlett & Ramesh, 2020).

Addressing this gap, the present study examines how public service planning unfolds within Papua's Special Autonomy, where institutional diversity and local governance arrangements interact with nationally standardised planning systems. Rather than concentrating solely on planning outputs, the analysis explores how planning priorities are defined, how local needs are interpreted, and how planning decisions are negotiated among government institutions, customary authorities, and local communities. Accordingly, the study seeks to explain how these

interactions shape planning practices and provide the empirical basis for developing the Contextual Public Service Planning (CPSP) framework.

Drawing on empirical evidence from Papua, this study develops the Contextual Public Service Planning (CPSP) framework. Rather than treating local context as an external condition that influences implementation after planning has been completed, the framework conceptualises context as an integral component of the planning process itself. Planning is therefore understood as an adaptive process that evolves through continuous interaction between administrative institutions, local governance arrangements, community values, and social practices. By positioning local context at the centre of planning, the study offers an alternative perspective for understanding public service planning in institutionally diverse and asymmetrically decentralised settings.

Taken together, these arguments suggest that the effectiveness of public service planning cannot be assessed solely through procedural compliance or administrative performance indicators. Planning should also be evaluated by its capacity to accommodate local realities and to produce services that are socially legitimate, contextually appropriate, and responsive to the communities they are intended to serve.

Literature Review

1. Public Service Planning and the Limits of Standardisation

Planning has long been regarded as a core function of public administration because it provides the basis for defining policy priorities, allocating resources, and organising service delivery. Contemporary planning systems are also closely associated with accountability, performance management, and the use of measurable indicators to assess organisational outcomes (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017; Osborne, 2010).

Evidence from Indonesia also points to similar concerns. Evaluating the technology-based civil servant performance appraisal system (SASIKAP) in Bandung Regency, Marlian et al (2021) found that performance assessment remained closely tied to standardised administrative indicators, limiting its ability to capture the substantive quality of organisational performance. Their findings suggest that an emphasis on procedural compliance may obscure important differences in organisational performance across local contexts.

The increasing emphasis on standardisation has undoubtedly strengthened administrative coordination across government organisations. Common planning formats and performance indicators make programmes easier to monitor and compare, while also reinforcing transparency and accountability. Nevertheless, a growing body of research suggests that standardised planning frameworks are less effective when they are applied to contexts characterised by significant institutional and socio-cultural diversity (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2015; Bovaird & Löffler, 2016).

This concern has become increasingly relevant in public service delivery, where similar administrative targets may produce markedly different outcomes across local settings. Achieving formal performance indicators does not necessarily imply that public services reflect local priorities or respond to the everyday realities experienced by communities.

2. Decentralisation and Planning Flexibility

Decentralisation has frequently been promoted as a mechanism for improving the responsiveness of public services by bringing decision-making closer to citizens (Faguet, 2014; Smoke, 2015). From this perspective, local governments are expected to possess greater discretion in determining development priorities and tailoring policies to local needs.

Experience from many decentralised systems, however, presents a more complex picture. Although authority may be transferred formally to subnational governments, planning practices often continue to operate within centrally prescribed administrative arrangements. Performance indicators, reporting systems, and evaluation criteria frequently remain standardised, leaving limited opportunities for local adaptation (Eaton, Kaiser, & Smoke, 2011).

Evidence from Indonesia further illustrates that decentralisation does not automatically produce greater planning flexibility. Examining the implementation of the zero-percent land and building title acquisition fee (BPHTB) exemption in Jakarta, Yogyakarta and Mayasari (2020) found that a policy designed under local authority remained constrained by a fixed valuation threshold that did not adequately reflect actual property-market conditions. Although implemented within a decentralised governance setting, the policy's standardised design limited its responsiveness to local realities and reduced its effectiveness in reaching the intended beneficiaries. This example suggests that formal decentralisation alone is insufficient when planning instruments continue to rely on uniform administrative assumptions rather than context-specific considerations.

These tensions are particularly evident in asymmetric decentralisation, where regions are granted special institutional arrangements while remaining embedded within national planning systems. Papua illustrates this complexity. Although Special Autonomy provides additional authority, planning continues to be influenced by nationally standardised procedures. The result is a planning process that balances local aspirations with administrative obligations rather than allowing either to operate independently.

3. Local Context, Participation, and Contextual Planning

Citizen participation has become one of the defining principles of democratic public administration. Classical studies argue that involving communities in planning strengthens both policy quality and democratic legitimacy (Arnstein, 1969; Fung, 2015). Participation is therefore expected to improve the alignment between public programmes and citizens' needs.

Yet participation rarely produces identical outcomes across institutional settings. Its effectiveness depends not only on the availability of formal participatory mechanisms but also on the broader social environment within which those mechanisms operate (Cleaver, 2012). In societies where customary institutions, community leadership, and collective norms continue to shape public decision-making, participation extends beyond attendance at formal meetings or consultation forums.

Under such circumstances, planning legitimacy cannot be understood solely as compliance with procedural requirements. Instead, legitimacy also derives from whether planning processes acknowledge existing social relationships, local authority structures, and culturally embedded decision-making practices.

4. Planning across Formal and Informal Institutional Arrangements

Public service delivery increasingly takes place within governance systems where formal governmental institutions coexist with informal local arrangements. Rather than operating independently, these institutional settings interact continuously, producing planning practices that cannot be fully understood through formal policy documents alone (Helmke & Levitsky, 2004; Cleaver, 2012).

Planning in these environments is rarely linear. Priorities evolve through negotiation, adaptation, and continuous interaction among government agencies, community leaders, and local institutions. Scott (1998) argues that institutional effectiveness frequently depends on the capacity to accommodate local practices instead of relying exclusively on formal administrative rules. Similar observations have emerged in studies of collaborative and adaptive governance, which emphasise flexibility rather than procedural uniformity as a condition for effective public management (Ansell & Gash, 2008).

These perspectives suggest that planning should be viewed as an evolving institutional process rather than as the mechanical application of administrative procedures.

5. Contextual Public Service Planning (CPSP) Framework

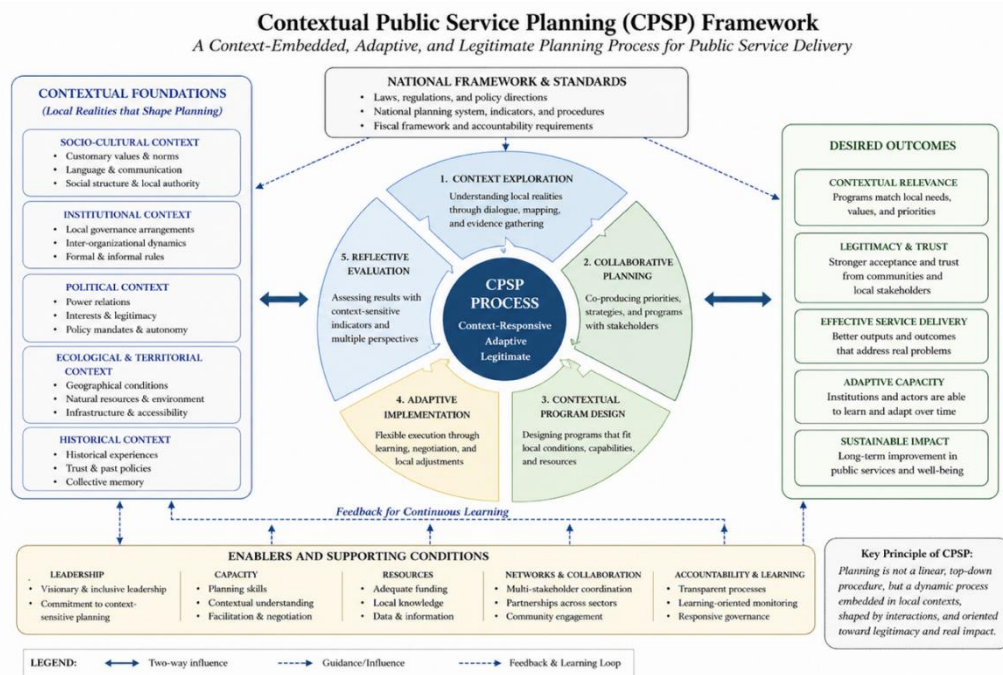
The literature reviewed above provides valuable insights into planning, decentralisation, participation, and governance. Nevertheless, relatively limited attention has been devoted to explaining how local context shapes planning rationality itself. Most existing studies continue to treat context primarily as an external factor influencing implementation rather than as a component embedded within the planning process.

This study addresses that gap by proposing the Contextual Public Service Planning (CPSP) framework. Rather than positioning local context as an external condition, the framework conceptualises it as an integral element influencing how planning problems are defined, how priorities are negotiated, and how public service strategies are formulated.

Drawing on empirical evidence from Papua, the study further demonstrates that shortcomings in public service delivery cannot be explained solely by institutional capacity or administrative coordination. They also emerge when planning frameworks are insufficiently aligned with the social, cultural, and institutional realities in which services are expected to operate.

Accordingly, the principal contribution of this research lies in shifting analytical attention from administrative compliance towards contextual legitimacy. From the perspective of CPSP, effective planning is achieved not simply by following established procedures, but by ensuring that planning processes remain responsive to the institutional diversity and lived realities of the communities they are intended to serve.

Figure 1.
Conceptual Framework of Contextual Public Service Planning (CPSP).



Source: Developed by the authors based on empirical findings.

RESEARCH METHODS

1. Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative case study design to examine how public service planning is practiced within the institutional and socio-cultural context of Papua's Special Autonomy. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the research sought to understand planning as a social and institutional process rather than to measure predefined variables. Instead of concentrating solely on planning outputs, the study explored how planning priorities were formulated, how different actors interpreted local needs, and how planning decisions evolved through interactions among government institutions and local stakeholders (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2018).

2. Research Setting

The research was conducted in Papua, Indonesia, where public service planning takes place within a distinctive governance setting shaped by Special Autonomy. At the time of the study, Papua consisted of twenty-nine regencies and municipalities characterised by considerable geographical variation, ranging from coastal communities to remote mountainous areas. These differences create diverse administrative, social, and cultural conditions that directly influence how public services are planned and delivered. The province therefore provides an appropriate setting for examining the extent to which planning can accommodate complex local realities.

3. Data Sources and Informants

The analysis drew upon both primary and secondary sources of evidence. Primary data were generated through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, while secondary

data consisted of planning documents, policy reports, government regulations, and other official records relevant to public service planning (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

Informants were selected purposively following the criteria proposed by Moustakas (1994), focusing on individuals directly involved in planning, supervising, or implementing regional development programmes. During fieldwork, purposive sampling was complemented by snowball sampling, whereby initial participants recommended other individuals with relevant experience and institutional knowledge (Creswell, 2007; Bungin, 2011). This process enabled the researcher to identify participants who were well positioned to explain planning practices from different organisational perspectives.

In total, seven key informants participated in the study. They represented institutions responsible for planning, oversight, and programme implementation, including the Secretary of the Papua Provincial Development Planning Agency (Bappeda), the Assistant Regional Inspector for Papua Province, the Secretaries of Paniai, Asmat, and Keerom Regencies, the Head of Infrastructure and Regional Development Division in Asmat Regency, and the Head of the Programme Subdivision in Biak Regency. To preserve confidentiality, informants are identified by institutional roles rather than personal names.

4. Data Collection

Data collection combined several complementary techniques to obtain a comprehensive understanding of planning practices. Semi-structured interviews constituted the primary source of empirical evidence, allowing participants to describe their experiences while providing sufficient flexibility to pursue issues that emerged during the conversations (Fontana & Frey, 2009). Focus group discussions were subsequently conducted to explore collective perspectives and to capture interactions among actors involved in planning processes (Kitzinger, 1996; Lehoux et al., 2006).

These data were complemented by field observations undertaken during research activities. Observational notes helped document institutional interactions, planning practices, and contextual conditions that could not always be captured through interviews alone. Interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent, and detailed field notes were maintained throughout the research to support data accuracy and interpretation.

5. Document Analysis

Document analysis formed an integral component of the research by providing insight into how planning priorities were formally articulated within government institutions. Documents examined included regional development plans, strategic planning documents, annual work plans, performance reports, and regulations related to public service planning.

Rather than treating documents simply as administrative records, the analysis focused on how planning problems were framed, how priorities were justified, and how performance indicators reflected underlying assumptions about public service delivery. This approach follows Cooper (1998), who argues that policy documents should be understood as expressions of institutional reasoning as well as administrative practice.

6. Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted iteratively using the interactive model developed by Miles and Huberman (1994), consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Analysis began during data collection and continued throughout the research as new evidence emerged.

Interview transcripts, focus group discussions, observational records, and documentary evidence were analysed simultaneously to identify recurring themes and patterns. Attention was directed not only to formal planning procedures but also to the ways in which local context influenced planning decisions, institutional interactions, and programme implementation. Through repeated comparison across different sources of evidence, broader conceptual patterns gradually emerged, forming the empirical basis for the development of the Contextual Public Service Planning (CPSP) framework.

7. Trustworthiness and Research Ethics

The credibility of the findings was strengthened through methodological triangulation, combining interviews, focus group discussions, observations, and documentary evidence to examine the same phenomenon from multiple perspectives (Denzin & Lincoln, 2009; Patton, 1987). Emerging interpretations were discussed with selected participants to ensure that the analysis accurately reflected their experiences and institutional contexts.

Ethical considerations were observed throughout the study. All participants received information about the objectives of the research before data collection commenced and agreed voluntarily to participate. To protect confidentiality, personal identities were anonymised and informants are referred to by their institutional positions. Particular attention was also given to the social and cultural sensitivities associated with conducting field research in Papua, ensuring that the research process respected local norms and institutional relationships.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

1. Public Service Planning Remains Distant from Local Realities

The empirical evidence indicates that public service planning in Papua continues to be shaped predominantly by administratively prescribed planning frameworks. Although these frameworks provide procedural consistency, they do not always reflect the diversity of needs emerging across local communities.

This concern was clearly expressed by the Secretary of the Papua Provincial Development Planning Agency (Bappeda):

"The planning process has to follow the prescribed performance indicators. However, in many cases those indicators do not fully correspond to the realities we encounter in the field."
(Interview with the Secretary of Papua Provincial Bappeda)

The statement illustrates a recurring tension between administrative planning requirements and the conditions experienced during implementation. Planning documents may satisfy formal administrative standards, yet this does not necessarily mean that programmes respond effectively to local priorities or generate tangible benefits for communities. In other words, procedural compliance does not automatically translate into contextual relevance.

These observations reinforce broader concerns within the public administration literature that planning systems centred primarily on technical procedures and performance indicators often struggle to accommodate local diversity (Osborne, 2010; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017). The findings from Papua nevertheless extend this discussion by showing that the issue is not simply one of implementation. Rather, the disconnect emerges earlier, during the planning stage itself, when local realities are only partially incorporated into the formulation of programmes and priorities.

From this perspective, public service planning is better understood as a socially embedded process rather than a purely technical exercise. Planning continuously interacts with evolving

institutional arrangements, community expectations, and contextual conditions, making adaptation an integral part of effective public service delivery.

2. Local Context as a Determining Factor in Public Service Planning

Field evidence consistently demonstrates that local context cannot be separated from the planning process itself. Rather than functioning merely as a setting for implementation, local conditions shape how planning priorities are identified and how programmes are formulated.

This point was clearly articulated by the Secretary of Paniai Regency, who remarked:

"Each region has its own characteristics. Because of that, planning approaches cannot simply be standardised."(Interview with the Secretary of Paniai Regency)

This observation reflects a broader pattern emerging from the fieldwork. Differences in language, social structures, customary land tenure, cultural values, and ecological conditions do not merely provide the background against which planning takes place. Instead, they actively influence how public problems are understood, how priorities are negotiated, and how development programmes are designed.

These findings provide the empirical foundation for the Contextual Public Service Planning (CPSP) framework proposed in this study. Within this framework, local context is not treated as an external variable that affects implementation after planning has been completed. Rather, context is recognised as an integral component of planning itself, shaping decision-making from problem identification through programme design and implementation.

This perspective is consistent with previous studies emphasising the importance of institutional context in public governance (Scott, 1998; Cleaver, 2012). The present study extends this discussion by demonstrating that contextual factors influence planning long before implementation begins, making them central rather than peripheral to effective public service planning.

3. The Limits of Autonomy in Planning Practice

Although Papua enjoys Special Autonomy status, the field evidence suggests that opportunities for adapting planning processes to local conditions remain relatively limited. While regional governments formally possess greater authority, planning practices continue to be shaped by nationally prescribed systems and performance requirements.

This tension was clearly reflected in the views of the Assistant Regional Inspector I of Papua Province, who observed:

"Although the region has been granted greater authority, in practice we are still required to follow planning systems and performance indicators established by the central government."

(Interview with the Assistant Regional Inspector I of Papua Province)

This statement illustrates a recurring dilemma within Papua's planning system. Formal decentralisation provides regional governments with broader responsibilities, yet the scope for exercising that authority is constrained by planning procedures that remain highly standardised. As a consequence, local governments often have limited flexibility to formulate programmes that fully reflect the distinctive social, cultural, and geographical characteristics of their communities.

The findings suggest that the challenge is not the absence of formal authority, but the limited discretion available in translating that authority into locally responsive planning practices. In this respect, autonomy operates within administrative boundaries that continue to privilege uniformity over contextual adaptation.

These observations are consistent with decentralisation scholarship arguing that the transfer of governmental authority does not necessarily lead to greater discretion in policy formulation or decision-making (Faguet, 2014; Smoke, 2015). The present study extends this discussion by demonstrating that the constraints of standardisation are evident not only during implementation but also throughout the planning process itself. Consequently, the effectiveness of Special Autonomy depends not only on the legal distribution of authority but also on the extent to which planning systems allow local governments to incorporate contextual knowledge into policy design.

4. Participation Beyond Procedural Compliance

The findings indicate that public participation in development planning, particularly through the Musyawarah Perencanaan Pembangunan (Musrenbang), has largely fulfilled procedural requirements. However, its influence on final planning decisions remains limited. While community members are invited to express their priorities, these proposals are often revised or filtered during subsequent stages of the planning process.

This concern was expressed by the Secretary of Asmat Regency, who stated:

"Community members certainly put forward their proposals during the planning meetings. However, many of those proposals are adjusted again as the planning process moves to the next stages."(Interview with the Secretary of Asmat Regency)

This statement suggests that participation often functions as a procedural requirement rather than as a mechanism through which communities can meaningfully influence planning outcomes. Although participatory forums provide opportunities for consultation, final decisions continue to be shaped largely by administrative priorities and technocratic considerations.

The findings also reveal that participation in Papua cannot be understood independently of existing social structures. In many communities, customary institutions and local leadership remain important sources of legitimacy. When formal participatory mechanisms operate without recognising these locally embedded forms of authority, community engagement risks becoming symbolic rather than substantive.

These observations are consistent with Arnstein's (1969) argument that the quality of participation depends on the extent to which citizens are able to influence decision-making, rather than simply being involved in consultation processes. They also support Fung's (2015) view that meaningful participation requires institutional arrangements capable of accommodating local forms of representation and deliberation. The present study extends these perspectives by demonstrating that, within Papua's Special Autonomy, the effectiveness of participation depends not only on the existence of participatory forums but also on their ability to engage with the social and institutional realities that shape local governance.

5. Planning as an Adaptive and Negotiated Process

One of the most significant findings of this study is that public service planning rarely unfolds as a linear process, despite the orderly sequence presented in official planning documents. Across the cases examined, successful programme implementation depended less on strict adherence to predetermined plans than on the ability of local actors to interpret changing circumstances,

build relationships with communities, and adjust their approaches as new challenges emerged.

This perspective was clearly expressed by the Secretary of Keerom Regency, who explained:

“The success of a programme often depends on how well we communicate with the community and how effectively we adapt to local conditions.” (Interview with the Secretary of Keerom Regency)

A similar view was shared by the Head of the Infrastructure and Regional Development Division of Asmat Regency, who emphasised that maintaining close engagement with customary and community leaders was often essential for ensuring that planned activities could be implemented successfully.

“Technical planning alone is not sufficient. We need to approach community leaders because they play an important role in gaining local acceptance of development programmes.”

(Interview with the Head of Infrastructure and Regional Development Division, Asmat Regency)

Taken together, these accounts suggest that planning is inherently adaptive and negotiated rather than purely procedural. Many of the practices that ultimately determine programme success are absent from formal planning documents. Instead, they emerge through continuous interaction, dialogue, and negotiation among government officials, customary authorities, and local communities as implementation progresses.

These findings reinforce arguments that public governance frequently operates through informal institutional arrangements embedded within local social contexts (Helmke & Levitsky, 2004; Cleaver, 2012). The present study, however, extends this perspective by demonstrating that adaptation is not simply a feature of programme implementation. It is an integral component of the planning process itself. In Papua's Special Autonomy, planning evolves through ongoing adjustments to institutional relationships, community expectations, and contextual realities rather than through the mechanical execution of predetermined administrative procedures.

6. Implications: From Administrative Planning to Contextual Public Service Planning (CPSP)

Taken together, the findings reveal a consistent pattern across the cases examined. Although public service planning formally follows established administrative procedures, the effectiveness of planning is shaped by factors that extend well beyond technical guidelines and performance indicators. Throughout the planning process, local institutional arrangements, social relationships, customary authority, and contextual knowledge continually influence how priorities are defined, programmes are implemented, and public services are ultimately experienced by communities.

These observations suggest that conventional planning approaches provide only a partial explanation of how public service planning operates in practice, particularly within regions characterised by institutional diversity and asymmetric decentralisation. The empirical evidence presented in this study indicates that planning cannot be understood solely as an administrative exercise. Instead, it evolves through continuous interaction among government actors, local institutions, community values, and the changing realities encountered during implementation.

Building on these findings, this study proposes the Contextual Public Service Planning (CPSP) framework (Figure 1). Rather than viewing local context as an external factor influencing implementation, CPSP conceptualises context as an integral component of the planning process itself. Within this framework, planning is understood as an adaptive process in which problem

identification, priority setting, programme design, implementation, and evaluation are continuously shaped by interactions between formal administrative systems and locally embedded institutional practices.

This perspective broadens existing understandings of public service planning by shifting analytical attention away from procedural compliance alone. The findings suggest that planning effectiveness is equally dependent on its capacity to respond to local realities, accommodate institutional diversity, and produce services that are regarded as legitimate and meaningful by the communities they are intended to serve. In this sense, CPSP offers a conceptual lens for understanding why planning outcomes differ across contexts, even where administrative procedures remain largely the same.

CONCLUSIONS

The evidence presented in this study suggests that the principal challenge facing public service planning in Papua does not arise primarily during programme implementation. Rather, it originates much earlier, at the stage where planning priorities are formulated and translated into administrative programmes. Planning systems that rely predominantly on uniform procedures and performance indicators often struggle to accommodate the institutional diversity and social realities found across Papua's Special Autonomy.

Field findings further demonstrate that planning decisions are inseparable from the contexts in which they are produced. Social relationships, customary authority, land tenure arrangements, geographical conditions, and local institutional practices all influence how priorities are negotiated and how public services are ultimately delivered. Ignoring these dimensions during the planning process reduces the likelihood that programmes will respond effectively to the needs of local communities.

Another important insight emerging from the study is that planning rarely unfolds exactly as prescribed in formal planning documents. In practice, local actors continuously interpret, negotiate, and adapt planning decisions as circumstances evolve. Such flexibility should not be viewed as a departure from sound planning; rather, it represents an essential feature of planning in settings characterised by institutional diversity and complex governance arrangements.

Taken together, these findings provide the empirical basis for the Contextual Public Service Planning (CPSP) framework proposed in this study. Instead of treating local context as an external condition affecting implementation, CPSP conceptualises context as an integral element shaping every stage of the planning process—from problem definition and priority setting to programme implementation and reflective evaluation.

More broadly, this study contributes to public administration scholarship by shifting attention from procedural compliance towards contextual legitimacy as a key dimension of planning effectiveness. The findings suggest that planning is more likely to produce meaningful public outcomes when administrative systems are sufficiently flexible to engage with the institutional, cultural, and social realities of the communities they serve.

Recommendations

The findings point to several practical implications for strengthening public service planning, particularly in regions characterised by institutional diversity and asymmetric decentralisation.

First, planning processes should provide greater opportunities for incorporating local knowledge from the earliest stages of policy formulation. This involves more than expanding public

participation through formal consultation mechanisms; it requires recognising the institutional roles of customary authorities, community leaders, and other locally legitimate actors whose perspectives shape collective decision-making.

Second, planning systems would benefit from greater flexibility in determining programme priorities and performance indicators. While national standards remain important for accountability, allowing limited adaptation to local contexts would enable regional governments to address problems that cannot be adequately captured through uniform administrative measures.

Third, institutional capacity-building should extend beyond technical planning skills. Public officials also require competencies in stakeholder engagement, negotiation, collaborative problem-solving, and contextual analysis, particularly when operating within socially and culturally diverse environments.

Finally, future research could examine the applicability of the Contextual Public Service Planning (CPSP) framework in other decentralised or asymmetric governance settings. Comparative studies across different regions would provide valuable opportunities to refine the framework further and assess its broader relevance for public service planning beyond the Papua context.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used ChatGPT (OpenAI, GPT-5) to assist with English language editing, improve readability, enhance clarity, and refine the overall presentation of the manuscript. The AI tool was used solely to support the writing process and did not contribute to the study design, data collection, data analysis, interpretation of findings, or scientific conclusions. All outputs generated with AI assistance were carefully reviewed, revised, and verified by the authors, who take full responsibility for the content of this publication.

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