

**TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP AS A SOLUTION TO ACCELERATE  
SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT IN PAPUA**

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**Abstract**

*Social development in Papua still faces complex challenges in the form of socio-economic inequality, low community participation, and weak trust in the government. This study aims to analyze the urgency of transformative leadership as a conceptual and strategic solution to accelerate equitable social development in Papua. This study uses a qualitative approach with discourse analysis methods on various secondary data sources, such as policy documents, previous research results, and relevant scientific literature. The analysis was conducted descriptively through the stages of data reduction, presentation, and drawing interpretive conclusions. The results show that social development in Papua is still top-down and has not optimally supported the local community. Transformative leadership has proven relevant because it is able to shift the development paradigm from an administrative one to a participatory one oriented toward humanitarian values. Transformative leaders act as agents of change who foster community awareness, trust, and independence by building on local cultural values such as mutual cooperation and deliberation. This study confirms that the synergy between inclusive policies, transformative leadership, and community participation is key to realizing equitable, inclusive, and sustainable social development in Papua.*

**Keywords:** Transformative leadership; social development; Papua.

**Abstrak**

Pembangunan sosial di Papua masih menghadapi tantangan kompleks berupa ketimpangan sosial-ekonomi, rendahnya partisipasi masyarakat, dan lemahnya kepercayaan terhadap pemerintah. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis urgensi kepemimpinan transformatif sebagai solusi konseptual dan strategis dalam mempercepat pembangunan sosial yang berkeadilan di Papua. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode analisis wacana terhadap berbagai sumber data sekunder, seperti dokumen kebijakan, hasil penelitian terdahulu, dan literatur ilmiah yang relevan. Analisis dilakukan secara deskriptif melalui tahapan reduksi data, penyajian, dan penarikan kesimpulan interpretatif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pembangunan sosial di Papua masih bersifat top-down dan belum berpihak secara optimal kepada masyarakat lokal. Kepemimpinan transformatif terbukti relevan karena mampu mengubah paradigma pembangunan dari yang bersifat administratif menjadi partisipatif dan berorientasi pada nilai-nilai kemanusiaan. Pemimpin transformatif berperan sebagai agen perubahan yang menumbuhkan kesadaran, kepercayaan, dan kemandirian masyarakat dengan berpijak pada nilai-nilai budaya lokal seperti gotong royong dan musyawarah. Penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa sinergi antara kebijakan inklusif, kepemimpinan yang transformatif, dan partisipasi masyarakat merupakan kunci untuk mewujudkan pembangunan sosial Papua yang berkeadilan, inklusif, dan berkelanjutan.



**Kata Kunci:** Kepemimpinan transformatif; pembangunan sosial; Papua

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

Social development in Papua is currently in a phase that requires a fundamental paradigm shift. Over the past two decades, the government has paid great attention to Papua through the Special Autonomy (Otsus) policy and increased transfers of central funds to the regions. However, various social welfare indicators show that development achievements have not been in line with expectations. Based on data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS, 2023), the poverty rate in Papua is still the highest in Indonesia, while the Human Development Index (HDI) remains below the national average. The development gap between urban and rural areas, weak access to education and health, and low community participation in the planning and implementation of development programs show that the policies that have been implemented have not resulted in significant social change. This condition indicates that the challenges of social development in Papua are not only technical, but also structural and cultural.

The development paradigm that has been oriented towards economic growth and the provision of infrastructure has not fully touched the social dimension of the Papuan people. Various programs are often implemented top-down without paying attention to the aspirations of the local community and the cultural wisdom that lives in the community. As a result, people often feel that they are objects, not subjects of development. This phenomenon creates social distance between the government and citizens, which has an impact on low public trust in state policies. Physically-oriented development without social transformation results in the sustainability of development becoming fragile because it is not supported by changes in values, awareness, and community participation. Therefore, the acceleration of social development in Papua requires a leadership model that is able to bridge state policies with local socio-cultural realities in a participatory, adaptive, and equitable manner.

Leadership is a strategic factor in driving social change. Leaders who are only oriented towards administrative power will not be able to cultivate deep public awareness and involvement. Papua needs the type of leader who is able to inspire and foster the collective spirit to transform. Transformative leadership is one of the relevant approaches to answer these challenges. Bass & Riggio (2006) and Armiyanti et al., (2023) explains that transformative leadership is not just about the ability to influence, but also about generating

intrinsic motivation, forming shared values, and directing collective behavior toward a larger vision. Transformative leaders put public interests above personal interests, foster social trust, and encourage community empowerment through active participation.

Transformative approaches are important in Papua because the social, political, and cultural complexities in the region demand a leadership style that is able to accommodate plurality and local wisdom. The social structure of Papuan society that is still rooted in the customary system demands leaders who not only understand formal governance, but also respect traditional social mechanisms. According to Northouse (2025), effective leadership in a pluralistic society requires the ability to build a shared vision that transcends ethnic and cultural differences. Transformative leaders in Papua are expected to combine the values of modernity with Melanesian cultural values such as mutual cooperation, deliberation, and social solidarity. This kind of leader not only executes policies, but also becomes a moral symbol and an agent of social change that fosters people's confidence and independence.

Various realities in Papua show that there is an inequality between *das sollen* and *das sein* in the implementation of social development. Normatively (*das sollen*), the Special Autonomy policy is designed to accelerate equitable development, strengthen indigenous peoples' participation, and create equitable welfare. However, empirically (*das sein*), its implementation has not fully reflected this goal. The evaluation of LIPI (2021) shows that many Special Autonomy programs are not oriented towards community empowerment and are often not in accordance with real needs in the field. The large development funds allocated do not always have an impact on improving the quality of life of the community due to weak governance, corruption, and lack of supervision. This gap creates a crisis of public trust in the effectiveness of development policies and shows that social development in Papua is more administrative than transformative.

Transformative leadership has the potential to be a bridge to closing the gap. Leaders who have a transformative vision not only manage resources, but also shape organizational and societal cultures that are adaptive to change. Sondakh (2019) emphasized that disadvantaged regions need leaders who are able to mobilize the social capital of the community through communication, political education, and community empowerment. Andika et al. (2021) added that transformative leadership is an important instrument in encouraging public governance reform because it emphasizes the moral and humanitarian

dimensions in the development process. In the Papua region, this kind of leadership is able to change the development paradigm from "building for the people" to "building with the people," so that the community is no longer a passive policy recipient, but an active actor in the development process.

The novelty of this research lies in the placement of transformative leadership as a strategic approach to accelerate equitable social development in Papua. Some previous research has touched on aspects of leadership in Papua, such as Tumiwa (2020) and Muhdar et al. (2025) that highlight structural barriers in local leadership, and Yoman (2021) which reviews the importance of moral leadership in overcoming social crises. However, these studies have not integrated the conceptual dimension of transformative leadership as a comprehensive solution to the social development gap that occurs between policy and reality. This article offers a conceptual analysis that focuses on the relevance, roles, and strategies of transformative leadership in strengthening social development based on Papuan local values. This approach incorporates a theoretical framework Bass & Riggio (2006) with the principles of social justice and local wisdom, thus providing a new perspective for leadership studies in disadvantaged areas.

In addition, this study also enriches the literature on social development in Eastern Indonesia by placing transformative leadership as an instrument of concrete social change. Many previous studies have focused on the economic or political dimensions of development, while socio-cultural dimensions related to local leadership and values have not been extensively explored. Therefore, this research not only fills theoretical gaps, but also offers practical contributions for local governments and local leaders in designing inclusive and community-participatory-based policies. Strengthening the capacity of transformative leadership is believed to be able to overcome the stagnation of social development through increasing public trust, community participation, and the effectiveness of regional policies.

The main objective of this study is to provide a conceptual and empirical analysis of the role of transformative leadership as a solution to accelerate social development in Papua. In particular, this research aims to identify contemporary issues affecting social development in Papua, explain the urgency and relevance of transformative leadership in responding to social and structural challenges, and offer a conceptual model of transformative leadership that can be used as a reference for equitable social development strategies. This research is expected

to contribute to the development of academic discourse on leadership and social development in disadvantaged areas, as well as become the basis for the formulation of more participatory, ethical, and human-oriented development policies.

## **II. THEORETICAL STUDIES**

### **Transformative leadership**

Transformative leadership is one of the leadership paradigms that emphasizes fundamental changes in the value system, orientation, and behavior of an organization or society. This concept was first introduced by James MacGregor Burns (1978) and later further developed by Bernard Bass (1985) and Bass and Riggio (2006). According to Bass and Riggio, transformative leadership is a process in which a leader seeks to influence his followers to transcend self-interest, internalize shared values, and achieve higher-than-expected results. Transformative leaders not only motivate externally, but also foster moral awareness, trust, and commitment to collective goals. This model emphasizes four main dimensions, namely idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. These four dimensions are the basic framework for assessing the effectiveness of leadership in creating sustainable social change.

Leaders who have the ideal influence become a high moral and integrity example for their followers. Through this example, leaders build legitimacy and public trust as the foundation of social relations. Inspirational motivation refers to the leader's ability to instill meaning in a common goal and awaken a collective spirit to achieve a long-term vision. Intellectual stimulation encourages innovation and creativity by opening up a space for critical thinking for people to find solutions to their own social problems. While individual attention underscores the importance of empathy and personal support in the empowerment process. These four aspects show that transformative leadership is not only oriented to material results, but also to the formation of social and moral awareness of society. In the framework of social development in Papua, this characteristic is relevant because it combines strategic capabilities and humanitarian values in a single unity of leadership actions.

A number of studies have confirmed the importance of transformative leadership in the context of regional development. Mora & Ticlau (2012) demonstrates that transformative leadership can accelerate change in public organizations because it encourages participation, policy innovation, and a sense of collective responsibility. Sondakh (2019) emphasizing that

leaders in disadvantaged areas need to have the ability to integrate development visions with local values so that policies are more accepted by the community. In a broader perspective, Bass (1999) assesses that transformative leadership functions as a social driver that is able to form social capital through trust, communication networks, and reciprocal norms. This social capital is the basis for the community to actively participate in development. Therefore, transformative leadership theory provides a powerful analytical framework for understanding how a leader can drive social change in a region as complex as Papua.

### **Social Development**

Social development theory is closely related to transformative leadership approaches because both focus on humans as the center of change. The concept of social development refers to a systematic process that aims to improve the quality of life of the community as a whole through strengthening social, economic, and cultural capacity (Midgley, 1995). Social development is not only interpreted as the provision of infrastructure, but also as a process of transforming values, behaviors, and social relations that allow people to be independent. According to Chambers (1997), sustainable development requires community involvement in every stage of decision-making so that development outcomes are rooted in real needs. In the context of Papua, this approach has high relevance because the social and cultural structure of indigenous peoples emphasizes the principles of collectivity, mutual cooperation, and balance of relations between humans and the environment. This means that effective social development in Papua cannot be separated from a leadership model that respects local wisdom and encourages social participation.

The concept of social justice is also an integral part of social development theory. Umam (2019) argues that equitable development demands equitable distribution of benefits and recognition of the social rights of marginalized groups. In this case, leaders play the role of guarantors of justice and drivers of social solidarity. Transformative leaders will view development not just as an economic achievement, but as an effort to uplift human dignity through policies oriented to human values. This perspective is important for Papua, where structural inequality and social marginalization remain major challenges. Transformative leaders play a role in correcting these inequalities through policies that encourage the redistribution of resources, strengthening the capacity of local communities, and the establishment of more inclusive social structures.

The relationship between transformative leadership and social development is synergistic. Transformative leadership provides a value framework and moral direction for social development, while social development provides a concrete space for the application of those leadership values. Visionary and inspirational leaders can change the dynamics of society from passive to participatory, and from dependent to independent. According to Snoop Dogg (2019) Social transformation occurs when leaders are able to change the structure of public consciousness towards a new orientation that is more productive and adaptive to change. This is in line with Burns' (1978) view that true leadership is a moral process in which leaders and followers increase each other's awareness of human values. In the context of Papua, this synergy can be realized through community-based development policies, where leaders play the role of facilitators and catalysts for change.

Transformative leadership is also relevant to social change theory, which emphasizes that social change cannot occur without change agents who have moral legitimacy and the ability to mobilize resources. According to Umam (2019) Every social system needs an adaptation mechanism in order to survive environmental pressures and changes in values. In the case of Papua, transformative leaders serve as agents of adaptation that connect the national political system with local social values. Leaders like this can bridge modernization policies with traditional social structures that are still strong, so that the development process runs without causing social conflicts. Thus, transformative leadership is not only a managerial strategy, but also a social mechanism to maintain community cohesion and stability in the development transition period.

Various cutting-edge studies show that transformative leadership contributes significantly to development success in regions with cultural diversity and geographical complexity. The State Administration Institute (2022) found that leadership training in Papua that is oriented towards transformational values is able to increase the effectiveness of local governance. Setyawan et al., (2024) adding that the young generation of Papuans who internalize the value of transformative leadership show a higher tendency to engage in social activities and community innovation. These findings reinforce the assumption that transformative leadership can be a key strategy in accelerating social development in Papua, especially when combined with policies of decentralization and capacity building of indigenous peoples.

Based on theoretical analysis and previous research results, it can be concluded that transformative leadership has an important position as a driving factor for sustainable social development. Transformative leaders are able to change the orientation of development from just a physical project to the establishment of an inclusive and equitable social structure. This theory provides a conceptual basis for research on the role of leadership in accelerating social development in Papua, as well as being a foothold for formulating a conceptual model that integrates local values, leadership ethics, and community participation as the main components in realizing a prosperous and dignified Papua.

### **III. RESEARCH METHODS**

This research is a qualitative research with descriptive-analytical specifications that aims to deeply understand the phenomenon of transformative leadership as a solution to accelerate social development in Papua. The approach used is qualitative discourse analysis that focuses on exploring meanings, values, and conceptual ideas in relevant texts, policies, and literature. This research places text and data as social constructs that reflect leadership practices and social development in Papua, so that the analysis not only highlights the content of policies, but also the structure of discourse and the social context that surrounds it. The source of data for this research is secondary, obtained from various official documents, the results of previous research, scientific books, national and international journal articles, reports of government institutions such as BPS, Bappenas, and LIPI, as well as other credible sources that support theoretical discussions. Data collection techniques are carried out through literature studies (library research) by selecting, studying, and synthesizing various references that are relevant to the focus of the research. The collected data was analyzed using a descriptive discourse analysis method through three stages: (1) data reduction by selecting information that is in accordance with the theme of transformative leadership and social development, (2) presentation of data in the form of a systematic conceptual description, and (3) drawing interpretive conclusions to find the relationship between theory and development reality in Papua. Through this approach, the research is expected to produce a comprehensive conceptual understanding of the relevance and implementation of transformative leadership in accelerating social development based on values, culture, and community participation in Papua.



#### **IV. RESEARCH RESULTS**

##### **Contemporary Issues of Social Development in Papua**

Social development in Papua is currently still facing a number of complex structural and cultural problems. Social and economic inequality, weak governance, and marginalization of indigenous peoples are the main factors that hinder the acceleration of development. Based on the Bappenas report (2023), although Papua has received Special Autonomy funds for more than two decades, the poverty rate remains above 26%, far exceeding the national average of around 9–10%. This condition shows that decentralization policies and the allocation of large funds have not been able to produce meaningful changes in people's welfare. The economic growth that occurs tends to be non-inclusive and has not had a significant impact on improving the quality of life of indigenous peoples living in inland and coastal areas.

One of the main issues affecting social development in Papua is the low participation of the community in the development process. Development programs are still dominated by a top-down approach that places the community as the beneficiary, not the main actor. As a result, many policies are not rooted in the real needs of local communities and often lead to social resistance. Yoman (2021) emphasized that development in Papua often ignores socio-cultural structures such as the role of *ondoafi*, tribal chiefs, and customary institutions, which actually function as social mediators and guardians of community stability. When these traditional structures are not involved, social distancing and a crisis of trust between the community and the government arise.

Other issues are inequality in basic services and weak capacity of public institutions. The LIPI (2021) and BPK RI reports show that the management of Special Autonomy funds and Village Funds in Papua still faces challenges of transparency and accountability. Weaknesses in governance cause public services in the fields of education, health, and social welfare to not run optimally. Hard-to-reach geographical conditions also exacerbate the gap between regions. Remote mountainous and coastal areas still experience isolation, both economically and socially, which has an impact on the low human development index.

In addition to structural factors, cultural and psychological dimensions also affect the slowness of social development. Many Papuans still show dependence on government policies and do not have a strong bargaining position in development. Kogoya (2021) said

that weak local leadership plays a role in the formation of this culture of dependence. Regional leaders who do not have a transformative orientation tend to place the community as recipients of programs, not development partners. Thus, the sustainability of social development becomes difficult to achieve because it is not supported by community awareness and independence. These issues show the need for a new leadership model that is able to encourage participatory, equitable, and value-based social change.

### **The Urgency and Relevance of Transformative Leadership**

Transformative leadership is a relevant approach to addressing social development challenges in Papua because it emphasizes moral values, collective vision, and community empowerment. This leadership model places leaders not as administrative bureaucrats, but as agents of social change who are able to build awareness and citizen participation. According to Bass and Riggio (2006), transformative leaders are able to inspire followers to achieve a common goal through motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual attention. This type of leader prioritizes paradigm change and social behavior, not just the achievement of economic targets. This principle is very much in line with the Papuan context, where development requires an approach that is not only rational and structural, but also emotional and cultural.

The relevance of transformative leadership in Papua can be seen in the need to rebuild social trust between the community and the government. So far, many development programs have failed because they do not involve the community substantively in planning and implementation. Transformative leaders have the ability to bridge that gap through participatory and dialogical communication. Nasikun (2000) emphasized that in a plural and complex society, visionary and humanist leaders are key elements in building social integration. Such leaders are not only oriented towards material results, but also seek to strengthen social cohesion and the value of justice.

Transformative leadership is also relevant to strengthen the implementation of the Special Autonomy policy in Papua. Although structurally Special Autonomy provides great authority for the regions, realization on the ground is still hampered by weak local leadership capacity. LIPI (2021) shows that most Special Autonomy policies are still carried out in a top-down pattern and have not been fully on the side of indigenous peoples. Transformative leaders can change this paradigm by translating autonomy policies into more contextual

actions, such as expanding access to community participation, developing a community-based economy, and strengthening the values of local wisdom. Kleden (2006) said that ethical and humanitarian-oriented leaders are able to connect modernization with social justice. In the context of Papua, this means that leaders must be able to maintain a balance between physical development and human development.

Transformative leadership also has an important moral dimension in dealing with social crises that arise due to inequality and modernization. Leaders in Papua must function as moral agents who instill the values of honesty, responsibility, and social concern. Sondakh (2019) reminded that in disadvantaged areas, transformative leadership is the main instrument to mobilize the social capital of the community. By integrating Melanesian values such as mutual cooperation and deliberation, leaders can build a collective identity that is the basis for social transformation. Therefore, transformative leadership is not just a theoretical concept, but a practical necessity to create sustainable social change in Papua.

### **Challenges and Opportunities for Implementing Transformative Leadership in Social Development in Papua**

The implementation of transformative leadership in Papua faces challenges that are not light. One of the main challenges is the dominance of the traditional leadership pattern that is power-oriented, where position is still seen as a symbol of social status, rather than a responsibility to serve. Tumiwa (2020) emphasized that rigid bureaucratic structures and patronage culture are serious obstacles to the emergence of social innovation. Many local leaders are more oriented towards short-term political interests than long-term visions of change. As a result, public policy often loses its transformational direction and tends to mimic the central model without adjustment to local socio-cultural conditions.

Another significant challenge is the low leadership capacity and community participation. Most regions in Papua are still experiencing limited human resources in the fields of administration, public management, and development planning. Research by the Ministry of Home Affairs (2022) shows that collaboration between local governments and customary institutions in social planning is still very limited. Without leadership that is able to prioritize dialogue and empowerment, development policies will continue to be elitist and exclusive. In addition, the culture of transactional politics also weakens the legitimacy of leaders in the eyes of the public, making it difficult to build sustainable trust.

But behind these obstacles, there are strategic opportunities for the implementation of transformative leadership in Papua. The Momentum of Special Autonomy volume II opens up new space for regional leaders to innovate social policies that are more contextual. Decentralization provides opportunities for the emergence of local leaders who understand the character and needs of their own communities. The increasing awareness of young Papuans on the issue of social change is also an important potential. Wonda (2023) revealed that the young generation of Papua has begun to interpret leadership not as power, but as a moral responsibility to fight for social justice. In addition, more and more academic institutions and civil society are involved in social leadership training programs in Papua, such as those conducted by Cenderawasih University and the State Administration Institute (2022), which focus on the formation of visionary and integrity leadership characters.

The implementation of transformative leadership in Papua requires an implementable strategy based on local values and cross-sectoral collaboration. This can be done through strengthening the capacity of regional leadership based on Melanesian values such as mutual cooperation and deliberation, the establishment of social dialogue forums between the government, indigenous institutions, and civil society, and the integration of transformative leadership education into regional apparatus training programs. In addition, it is necessary to build a social performance evaluation mechanism that assesses the extent to which leaders are able to increase public participation and trust. These strategies are expected to be concrete solutions for the realization of inclusive, just, and sustainable Papuan social development. With visionary, ethical, and rooted leadership in human values, Papua can move towards true social transformation and strengthen the foundations of sustainable development.

## **V. CONCLUSION**

Social development in Papua is still faced with various fundamental problems, such as socio-economic inequality, weak community participation, and low trust in the government. This condition shows that the top-down development approach has not been effective in responding to the needs of the community as a whole and fairly. Therefore, a change in the development paradigm is needed that places people, social values, and local wisdom as the center of development policy.

Transformative leadership is a relevant conceptual solution because it emphasizes visionary, inspiring, and participatory values in moving society towards more meaningful

social change. Transformative leaders not only play the role of policy makers, but also as agents of change who are able to foster public awareness, trust, and independence. By strengthening local leadership capacity, taking advantage of opportunities from Special Autonomy policies, and building collaboration between governments, indigenous institutions, and civil society, Papua has the potential to realize inclusive, just, and sustainable social development.

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