



THE ROLE OF LOCAL LEADERS IN PROMOTING VILLAGE DEVELOPMENT: A CASE STUDY OF THE EDUCATION SECTOR IN FATUMASI VILLAGE, TIMOR-LESTE

Anibal dos Santos Orleans*, Rafael Savio, Luis Valentim J. M. S. dos Santos, Agostinho dos Santos Gonçalves, Sebastião Pereira, João Ximenes
Instituto Superior Cristal, Dili, Timor Leste

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 13-06-2026

Accepted: 13-07-2026

Published: 08-07-2026

Keyword: local leadership, village development, education, community participation

ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of local leaders in village development, focusing on the education sector in Fatumasi Village, Timor-Leste. Using a qualitative approach, data were gathered through documentation and in-depth interviews with local leaders, community figures, educators, and residents. Findings indicate that local leaders played a pivotal role in establishing Fatumasi Junior High School, resolving a critical 13-kilometer travel barrier and improving enrollment rates. However, leaders face persistent structural challenges, including inadequate office facilities, limited technological support, low salaries, and delayed government incentives, which impede service delivery. The study concludes that while local leaders are instrumental in driving development, sustained governmental support through institutional strengthening and proper resources is essential to optimize their performance and advance village governance.

INTRODUCTION

Village development is a fundamental component in improving community welfare at the local level, particularly in developing countries. Local leaders hold a strategic role in managing, facilitating, and mobilizing communities toward

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: agostinho@isc-tls.org (Agostinho dos Santos Goncalves), sebastiao@isc-tls.org (Sebastiao Pereira), joaximenes554@mail.com (Joao Ximenes)

ISSN: 2523-613X (Online) - ISCE: Journal of Innovative Studies on Character and Education is licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

positive social transformation. They are not only responsible for implementing national policies but also serve as key intermediaries between the government and the community, ensuring that local needs and aspirations are appropriately addressed. This aligns with Pecamuya (2025), who highlights that local leaders function as central actors in community-based governance. Similarly, Nor & Aslamiah (2025) emphasize that the effectiveness of local leadership is shaped by their proximity to the community and their ability to respond to local needs.

Fatumasi Village provides a clear example of how local leaders play a crucial role in improving community well-being, particularly in education. One of their major contributions was the establishment of the Junior High School in 2004, driven by the urgent need to improve access to education within the village. Before the school's establishment, students had to travel approximately 13 kilometers to reach the nearest school, a significant barrier to continuing education. This situation aligns with Chitondo's (2022) findings, which noted that distance and accessibility strongly influence school participation among children in rural areas. Zhong et al. (2022) similarly argue that the presence of a nearby school significantly enhances student motivation and educational continuity.

The success of educational development in Fatumasi Village is the result of collaborative efforts among local leaders, the community, and the government. Local leaders not only initiated the school's establishment but also mobilized community members, conducted outreach, and encouraged school-age children to pursue education. Moreover, they played an important role in handling land conflicts, maintaining social stability, and raising awareness on environmental issues, roles that align with Jørgensen et al. (2020), who assert that local leaders are vital in maintaining social cohesion and mediating conflicts in rural areas.

However, the study also finds several structural challenges affecting local leadership performance, including limited office facilities, insufficient technological tools, and low financial incentives. These conditions directly affect the effectiveness of public service delivery and the implementation of village development programs. Yar & Yasouri (2024) note that inadequate administrative infrastructure is a common challenge in rural governance, often hindering service quality. In addition, Ilyana & Sholihin (2021) highlight that insufficient and delayed incentives have a significant impact on leadership performance and motivation.

These circumstances demonstrate that, although the role of local leaders is crucial, they operate in a context rife with challenges. Therefore, this research aims to understand how local leaders perform their roles, their contributions, particularly in education, and the obstacles they encounter in developing Fatumasi Village. The study serves as an important basis for strengthening village governance and improving the effectiveness of local leadership in the future.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research approach to explore and understand the role of local leaders in the development of Fatumasi Village, with a particular focus on the education sector. A qualitative approach is considered suitable because it allows the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences, perceptions, and actions of individuals involved in village governance and community development.

Research Design

The research uses a descriptive qualitative design to describe the roles, contributions, and challenges faced by local leaders in a natural setting. This design enables the researcher to capture real conditions and social dynamics within the community without manipulating the environment (Lim, 2024).

Research Site and Participants

The study was conducted in Fatumasi Village, which was selected for its active local leadership and notable initiatives to improve access to education. The participants in this study include local leaders, village council members, youth leaders, school principals, teachers, and community members. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their relevance and involvement in village development activities.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through: (1) In-depth interviews were conducted with informants who directly experience or understand the leadership and development processes in the village, (2) Observation, focusing on community activities, school conditions, and interactions between leaders and residents, (3) Documentation, including village reports, administrative documents, school records, and other supporting materials relevant to the research focus.

These techniques were used to obtain comprehensive, credible data from multiple sources.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed the stages proposed in qualitative research, including data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Mezmir, 2020). (1) Data reduction involved selecting, simplifying, and categorizing interview transcripts and field notes according to the research focus, (2) Data were displayed using thematic grouping to identify key patterns in leadership roles, contributions, and challenges, (3) Conclusion drawing and verification were conducted continuously to ensure that interpretations were grounded in the data collected

Data Validity

To ensure the validity and trustworthiness of the data, the study applied several strategies, including: (1) Triangulation of sources, by comparing information from different informants and data types, (2) Member checking, where findings were confirmed with several informants to ensure accuracy, (3) Prolonged engagement, to build trust with participants and understand the context in depth.

These strategies helped enhance the credibility and reliability of the research findings.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

Result

The findings of this study provide a comprehensive description of the role of Local Leaders in the development of Fatumasi Village, particularly in the education sector, and the challenges they face in fulfilling their responsibilities. The results are presented in several themes that emerged from interview data and field observations.

The Role of Local Leaders in Village Governance

The research findings indicate that local leaders play a strategic role in managing village administration, formulating regulations, and aligning community aspirations with the central government. Local leaders are also responsible for maintaining social order, overseeing governance structures such as the village council and neighborhood units, and ensuring regular monthly evaluations. This role

positions local leaders as the central coordinators and the highest decision-makers at the village level.

[...] Our role as local leaders is to carry out the duties and responsibilities entrusted to us by the community and our superiors, as well as to serve the people [...] [JRdS].

[...] As a member of the village council, I supervise all activities of village members and RT heads, and we conduct evaluation meetings every month [...] [JS].

[...] The progress or setback of development depends on the commitment of local leaders [...] [EAdC].

[...] We collaborate with the community and with the central, national, and international governments to improve village development [...] [JG].

Local Leaders' Involvement in Educational Development

The findings indicate that local leaders play an active role in improving educational access in Fatumasi village. They organize the community, encourage school-aged children to attend school, and facilitate the establishment of a Junior High School in 2004. The school's development shows a significant increase in student enrollment and the number of teaching staff. This involvement demonstrates that education is considered a priority in the village's development.

[...] Education is the key to development. Local leaders must organize and facilitate the community [...] [FPA].

[...] We identify school-aged children and support parents to encourage their children to attend school [...] EdS].

[...] The Junior High School was established in 2004 with 49 students. In the following years, enrollment continued to increase [...] [LAdC].

[...] I taught voluntarily for nine months without salary because I understood that education is the key to development [...] [JPdJ].

Collaborative Efforts of Local Leaders, the Community, and the Government

The research indicates that village development relies heavily on collaboration among local leaders, the community, and the central government. This collaboration is evident in the establishment of Fatumasi Junior High School, the implementation of educational programs, the promotion of conflict resolution, and several plans for establishing Senior High Schools that are still in the planning stage. Strong collaboration has proven effective in overcoming resource limitations.

[...] As community members, we support the local leaders' programs because they bring progress to the village [...] [APdS].

[...] Development runs smoothly when there is cooperation between the central government, local leaders, and the community [...] [GT].

[...] We collaborate with the villages of Leorema, Fahilebo, Metagou, and Mota-Ulun on plans to establish a Senior High School [...] [JG].

The Impact of the School on the Community and Student Mobility

The presence of Fatumasi Junior High School has had a significant positive impact on the community. The travel distance, which was previously 13 km, is now less than 1 km, making access to education much easier and increasing school participation. The annual increase in student enrollment indicates a growing awareness of the importance of education within the community.

[...] I am happy because the school is now close. Previously, our older siblings had to walk 13 km to school [...] [DCS].

[...] With the Junior High School here, children's travel time is now only 45–55 minutes [...] [APdS].

The Role of Local Leaders in Social and Environmental Stability

Local leaders also maintain social stability by resolving land disputes, mediating conflicts among residents, and providing environmental education. Monthly neighborhood unit meetings serve as an effective forum for disseminating

information and fostering two-way communication with the community.

[...] Local leaders always resolve land disputes, fights, and provide education about the environment [...] [APdS].

[...] Every month, we hold regular meetings for evaluation and to socialize activities [...] [JS].

Structural Obstacles: Limited Facilities and Low Salaries

The research identified major obstacles, including minimal office facilities (no computers or administrative equipment) and low salaries for local leaders, which are paid only every three months. These conditions hinder administrative work and slow down many village activities. Local leaders even have to travel to Dili to type documents.

[...] To type activity drafts, we have to go down to Dili to rent a computer [...]. Our salary is only \$40 per month and paid every three months, making it difficult to meet living expenses [...] [JG].

[...] We work from morning to evening, but the salary is not enough for our families' needs [...] [RM].

[...] Being paid every three months hinders our activities as neighborhood unit heads [...] [AdS].

[...] The absence of computers makes preparing exam questions difficult; we have to go to Dili to type them [...] [MR].

Discussions

The Role of Local Leaders in Village Governance

The discussion of the research findings shows that local leaders play a very central role in village governance. They are not only responsible for administering and formulating village policies but also serve as the primary link between the community and the central government. These findings align with Vasstrøm & Normann (2019), who assert that local leaders are key actors in the delivery of policies and community-based development. Furthermore, Sutangsa (2025) emphasizes that the legitimacy of local

leaders is built through their closeness to the community and their ability to respond to residents' needs. In this study, the commitment of local leaders has been shown to significantly influence the smooth implementation of development programs in the village.

Education as a Key Pillar of Village Development

The research findings reveal that education is a priority sector for local leaders, as evidenced by the establishment and development of Fatumasi Junior High School. Attention to education in the village has proven effective in increasing access to learning and reducing the geographical barriers previously faced by the community. This aligns with Rahaju (2024), who states that educational development in rural areas significantly improves community quality of life. Furthermore, Ansori et al. (2025) emphasize that providing nearby educational facilities is crucial for increasing school participation rates. The findings of this study show that investment in education produces long-term impacts on village development.

Collaboration Between Local Leaders, the Community, and the Government in Development

The discussion indicates that the success of village development is determined not only by local leaders but also by the level of collaboration among the central government, the community, and village governance structures. Such a collaborative model is recognized as a strategic approach to sustainable development. Halimah & Kurniati (2025) explain that effective village development requires synergy between government actors and the community. The findings of this study confirm that the establishment of the Junior High School, the improvement of public services, and the plans for a Senior High School are the results of collective efforts between local leaders and the community.

The Impact of Educational Access on Social Mobility in the Community

Easier access to education has brought significant changes to the social mobility of the Fatumasi village community. Shorter travel times and more accessible school

locations have become important factors in sustaining students' learning. Lu et al. (2022) explain that ease of access to education directly influences students' motivation and engagement at school. This is further supported by Al-fallah et al. (2025), who show that distance is a key determinant of educational participation in rural areas. The findings of this study reinforce this literature, demonstrating that the presence of a school in the village positively affects children's educational participation.

The Role of Local Leaders in Maintaining Social and Environmental Stability

The findings indicate that local leaders do not focus solely on physical development but also play a role in maintaining social order and protecting the environment. They handle land disputes, mediate conflicts among residents, and provide education on the importance of protecting the environment. According to Azhari et al. (2024) Local leaders have a vital role in managing horizontal conflicts within the community. Research by Casarrubias et al. (2025) also emphasizes the necessity of leaders' involvement in environmental outreach activities to create socially and ecologically sustainable villages.

Structural Obstacles: Facilities and Funding as Major Challenges

The discussion on structural obstacles shows that limited office facilities and low income are the main issues affecting the performance of local leaders. The lack of resources, such as computers and administrative equipment, slows down and reduces the efficiency of public service processes. This aligns with the findings of Dazhuan et al. (2020), who state that the administrative facility gap between rural and urban areas is a major constraint in village governance. Furthermore, the low incomes of local leaders undermine their motivation and capacity to carry out daily tasks, as Lapuente & Walle (2020) explain, demonstrating that low incentives directly affect the effectiveness of public service delivery.

Intersectoral Linkages in Village Development

The discussion shows that the success of village development cannot focus solely on education but requires support from the health, infrastructure, agriculture, and other

basic service sectors. This aligns with the concept of integrated development, which emphasizes the interdependence of sectors. Sharma et al. (2024) highlight that the provision of facilities such as clean water, sanitation, electricity, and roads greatly affects the effectiveness of educational facilities. The findings of this study reinforce this literature, showing that school development must be supported by adequate village infrastructure to achieve optimal outcomes.

CONCLUSIONS

This study shows that local leaders play a highly strategic role in the development of Fatumasi Village, encompassing governance, social, and educational aspects. They serve as the main drivers of village administration, as connectors of community aspirations, and as facilitators of various community activities. Their role is particularly important because local leaders are in close contact with residents, enabling them to respond to community needs quickly and effectively.

In the education sector, local leaders have made significant contributions to the establishment and development of Fatumasi Junior High School. The presence of the school has improved access to education, reduced students' travel distances, and increased participation among school-aged children. This underscores the importance of education as a key pillar of village development. Furthermore, harmonious collaboration among local leaders, the community, and the central government has proven a key factor in advancing education in the village.

However, the study also identified several obstacles to the effectiveness of local leadership, including limited office facilities, the absence of computers, and low salaries paid only every three months. These challenges directly affect the quality of public services and the effectiveness of village programs. On the other hand, the need for integration across sectors such as education, health, infrastructure, and agriculture indicates that village development cannot reach its full potential without adequate basic facilities.

Overall, this study's findings demonstrate that the success of village development depends heavily on the commitment of local leaders, community support, and the active involvement of the government. Together, these three elements constitute the main pillars for achieving sustainable village development.

REFERÉNCES

- Al-fallah, R., Pratama, R. Y., & Kurnia, U. (2025). Pengaruh Struktur Sosial terhadap Akses Pendidikan di Masyarakat Pedesaan. *J-Diteksi (Jurnal Pendidikan Teknologi Informasi)*, 4(1), 23–26. <https://journal.aisyahuniversity.ac.id/index.php/Diteksi/article/download/1917/874>
- Ansori, A., Sinaga, S. R., & Jamilah, H. (2025). Peran Komite Sekolah dalam Penyediaan dan Pemeliharaan Sarana dan Prasarana Pendidikan. *Al-Basyir: Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan Dan Pemikiran Islam*, 1(1), 18–28. <https://ojs.cahayamandalika.com/index.php/jml/article/download/3928/3101>
- Azhari, A., Iswardhani, I., Macenning, A. R. A. D., Nasir, S. A., & Ridha, A. (2024). Improving Leadership Capacity of Local Leaders through Effective Communication and Conflict Management Training. *Celebes Journal of Community Services*, 3(2), 345–360. <https://ojs.stieamkop.ac.id/index.php/celeb/article/download/1893/1264>
- Casarrubias, C., López, J. L. A., Alviso, C. R., Bello, M. C., & Salinas, S. V. (2025). Community Environmental Leadership and Sustainability: Building Knowledge from the Local Level. *Sustainability*, 17(3626), 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su17083626>
- Chitondo, L. (2022). Effects of Distance to School and Poverty on Learners' Academic Performance in Four Selected Rural Primary Schools in Chibombo District of Central Province. *International Journal of Scientific and Management Research*, 5(4), 257–270. <http://doi.org/10.37502/IJSMR.2022.5419>
- Dazhuan, G., Guipeng, Z., Weifeng, Q., & Mengqi, Y. (2020). Land use transition and rural spatial governance: Mechanism, framework and perspectives. *Journal of Geographical Sciences*, 30(8), 1325–1340. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11442-020-1784-x%0A©>
- Halimah, U. N., & Kurniati, E. (2025). Sinergi Peran Pemerintah dan Masyarakat dalam Mewujudkan Pembangunan Daerah yang Berkelanjutan. *Journal of Social Science and Multidisciplinary Analysis*, 2(2), 1–19. <https://jossama.com/index.php/journal/article/download/42/36>
- Ilyana, S., & Sholihin, M. (2021). The Effect of Incentives And Leadership Styles on Creative Performance. *Journal of Indonesian Economy and Business*, 36(1), 14–30.

<https://www.academia.edu/download/87685982/30453.pdf>

- Jørgensen, A., Fallov, M. A., Casado-diaz, M., & Atkinson, R. (2020). Rural Cohesion: Collective Efficacy and Leadership in the Territorial Governance of Inclusion. *Social Inclusion*, 8(4), 229–241. <https://doi.org/10.17645/si.v8i4.3364>
- Lapuenta, V., & Walle, S. Van de. (2020). The effects of new public management on the quality of public services. *Governance*, 33, 461–475. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gove.12502>
- Lim, W. M. (2024). What Is Qualitative Research? An Overview and Guidelines. *Australasian Marketing Journal*, 00(0), 1–31. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14413582241264619>
- Lu, G., Xie, K., & Liu, Q. (2022). What influences student situational engagement in smart classrooms: Perception of the learning environment and students' motivation. *British Educational Research Association*, 53, 1665–1687. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjet.13204>
- Mezmir, E. A. (2020). Qualitative Data Analysis: An Overview of Data Reduction, Data Display and Interpretation. *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences*, 10(21), 15–27. <https://doi.org/10.7176/RHSS/10-21-02>
- Nor, T., & Aslamiah. (2025). Strategi Kepemimpinan Visioner dalam Implementasi Visi dan Misi Berbasis Kearifan Lokal. *CENDEKIA : Jurnal Ilmu Pengetahuan*, 5(1), 126–138. <https://doi.org/10.63822/atkh3972>
- Pecamuya, R. (2025). Transformasi Tata Kelola Masyarakat Adat: Ketahanan Komunitas dalam Menghadapi MIFEE dan Kebijakan Konservasi di Merauke. *Jejak Digital: Jurnal Ilmiah Multidisiplin*, 1(4), 1343–1355. <https://doi.org/10.63822/atkh3972>
- Rahaju, A. (2024). Peran Pendidikan Masyarakat dalam Meningkatkan Kualitas Sumber Daya Manusia di Daerah Perdesaan. *Journal of Mandalika Literature*, 6(1), 528–536. <https://ojs.cahayamandalika.com/index.php/jml/article/download/3928/3101>
- Sharma, M. K., Adhikari, R., Khanal, S. P., Teijlingen, E. Van, & Acharya, D. (2024). Do school Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene facilities affect students' health status, attendance, and educational achievements? A qualitative study in Nepal. *Health Science Reports Published*, 7(e2293), 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hsr2.2293>

Sutangsa. (2025). *Politik Aksi Nyata (Cet. 1)*. CV. Dira Media Kreasindo.

Vasstrøm, M., & Normann, R. (2019). The role of local government in rural communities: culture-based development strategies. *Local Government Studies*, 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03003930.2019.1590200>

Yar, F. G. M., & Yasouri, M. (2024). Rural Development Challenges in Addition to Effective Solutions to Overcome Obstacles. *Journal of China University of Mining and Technology*, 29(3), 79–90. <https://doi.org/10.1654/zkdx.2024.29.3-6>

Zhong, Q., Wang, Y., Lv, W., Xu, J., & Zhang, Y. (2022). Self-Regulation, Teaching Presence, and Social Presence: Predictors of Students' Learning Engagement and Persistence in Blended Synchronous Learning. *Sustainability*, 14(5619), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14095619>