

Institutional Capacity and the Local Governance Gap: Explaining the Limited Effectiveness of Affirmative Policies in Papua

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Abstract: This study examines the role of institutional capacity in shaping the effectiveness of affirmative policy implementation within the local governance context of Southwest Papua. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through interviews, document analysis, and institutional reports. The findings reveal that, despite strong normative recognition of Indigenous Papuans (OAP), affirmative policies remain largely symbolic and have not produced substantial structural changes. This condition is driven by the misalignment between institutional design, institutional capacity, and governance structure. The study offers a theoretical contribution by proposing the Local Governance Gap Model (LGGM), which explains how the interaction of these dimensions constrains policy effectiveness in decentralized and asymmetric governance contexts. In addition, this research introduces a distinction between symbolic and substantive policy outcomes as a critical analytical lens. This study extends institutional capacity theory by positioning capacity as structurally embedded rather than purely organizational. Unlike previous studies that focus on institutional roles or policy implementation in isolation, this research integrates institutional capacity, affirmative policy, and governance structure into a unified analytical framework. The findings highlight that effective affirmative governance requires alignment between authority, capacity, and governance context to move beyond symbolic recognition toward substantive outcomes.

1. Introduction

Special Autonomy in Papua represents an affirmative policy framework designed to address the historical marginalization of Indigenous Papuans (OAP) and ensure equitable access to political representation, public services, and socio-economic opportunities. Law No. 21/2001 and its amendment through Law No. 2/2021 institutionalize preferential mechanisms, including affirmative recruitment, protection of customary land rights, and safeguards for vulnerable groups such as Papuan women. Within this framework, the Papuan People's Assembly (MRP) is positioned as a cultural representative institution mandated to provide consideration, consent, and oversight in policies affecting OAP rights

(Scott, 2001). This reflects a broader governance approach where cultural legitimacy is embedded within formal institutional arrangements (Anaya, 2004; Cornell, 2015).

Demographically, Southwest Papua Province presents both opportunities and challenges for the implementation of affirmative policies. As shown in Table 1, OAP constitute approximately 69.45% of the total population, with the highest concentration in Maybrat and Tambrau Regencies. In contrast, Sorong City and Sorong Regency have the largest populations but relatively lower proportions of OAP. This distribution indicates that the design of affirmative policies and cultural representation mechanisms cannot rely solely on population numbers; it must also consider the cultural foundations and social vulnerabilities of OAP in both urban and rural contexts.

Table 1. Population and Percentage of Indigenous Papuans in Southwest Papua 2024

Regency/City	Total Population	Percentage of Indigenous Papuans (OAP) (%)
Raja Ampat	72.605	73,31%
Sorong	124.207	37,38%
Sorong Selatan	57.297	81,76%
Maybrat	48.803	96,04%
Tambrau	32.070	95,67%
Kota Sorong	302.452	32,56%
Southwest Papua	636.434	69,45%

Source: Statistics Indonesia (BPS) of West Papua Province, processed by the author (2025).

The table indicates significant demographic variation across regions, with OAPs dominant in districts such as Maybrat and Tambrau but relatively marginalized in urban areas like Sorong City. This uneven distribution suggests that affirmative policy cannot be uniformly designed, but must adapt to varying socio-political contexts. In regions where OAPs are minorities, the risk of exclusion from political and economic processes becomes more pronounced, requiring stronger institutional intervention. Recent studies confirm that demographic structure plays a critical role in shaping policy responsiveness and the effectiveness of indigenous representation (Baudoin Farah, 2024; Kadaryanto et al., 2025). Therefore, the MRP is expected to function as a strategic intermediary, ensuring that cultural considerations are integrated into policy processes across heterogeneous contexts.

Despite this normative mandate, the MRP's institutional role remains largely consultative, with limited influence over binding policy decisions. This condition reflects a broader problem in affirmative governance, where legal recognition does not automatically translate into policy effectiveness. As emphasized in institutional theory, formal legitimacy must be supported by operational capacity to produce substantive outcomes (Healey et al., 2003; Scott, 2001).

On the other hand, formal performance data in the LAKIP report show several notable achievements, such as high realization in deliberations on Special Regional Regulations (Perdasus) and policy recommendations. However, these quantitative results do not necessarily indicate an enhanced influence of the MRP within the regional policy cycle, suggesting a gap between administrative performance and substantive policy impact. This condition suggests that institutional effectiveness cannot be measured solely through output indicators, but must also consider the extent to which policies influence governance outcomes for Indigenous Papuans.

Table 2. Performance Indicator Achievements of MRP in Southwest Papua

Strategic Performance Indicators	Target (2025)	Realization (2025)
Deliberation meetings on regional budget (APBD) and strategic OAP agendas	100%	50%
Initiatives of regional regulations (Perda/Perdasus)	10	14
Special Regional Regulations (Perdasus) enacted under the priority legislative program (Prolegda)	4	4
Regional Regulations/Special Regional Regulations enacted in accordance with Prolegda	6	6
Follow-up actions on recommendations for accountability reports (LKPJ) and working meetings (RDP)	-	-

Source: Institutional Performance Documents of the MRP Southwest Papua Province, processed by the author (2025).

The table shows that several performance indicators have been achieved or even exceeded, particularly in administrative and deliberative activities. However, indicators related to strategic functions remain limited. This suggests a gap between administrative performance (output) and policy impact (outcome). In other words, institutional activity is high, but its influence on policy transformation remains weak. Similar patterns have been observed in studies of collaborative governance, where procedural achievements do not necessarily lead to substantive change without sufficient institutional leverage (Ansell & Torfing, 2021; Emerson et al., 2012).

Existing studies on Papua’s Special Autonomy have largely focused on political economy, elite capture, and decentralization dynamics (Chauvel & Bhakti, 2003). Other research highlights the symbolic legitimacy of MRP but also its limited authority in decision-making processes (Morales Quiroga, 2022; Rakia et al., 2022). However, there remains limited scholarly attention to how institutional capacity specifically shapes the effectiveness of affirmative policies, particularly in newly established regions such as Southwest Papua. Previous studies have not sufficiently examined how institutional performance, policy outputs, and governance practices reflect underlying capacity constraints (Putra et al., 2024). This indicates a clear research gap in understanding the relationship between institutional capacity and affirmative policy outcomes within local governance contexts. Most existing literature treats affirmative policy and institutional capacity as separate issues, rather than analyzing their interaction as a determinant of policy effectiveness.

This study contributes to the literature by offering an empirical extension and contextual validation of institutional capacity theory within affirmative governance. By integrating institutional capacity building (Healey et al., 2003), affirmative policy, and local governance, this research develops an analytical nexus that explains how relational, knowledge, and mobilization capacities influence policy outcomes. Furthermore, the study utilizes empirical institutional data, including performance indicators and governance practices, to assess how affirmative mandates are operationalized in a newly established province.

Based on this gap, the research problem is formulated as follows: to what extent does the institutional capacity of the MRP influence the effectiveness of affirmative policy implementation for Indigenous Papuans in Southwest Papua? Accordingly, this study aims to analyze the dimensions of institutional capacity and evaluate their role in shaping affirmative policy outcomes within the framework of local governance.

2. Literature Review

Affirmative Policy for The Protection of Indigenous Peoples' Rights

Affirmative policy is commonly understood as a state intervention aimed at correcting structural inequalities by providing preferential access to marginalized groups in political, economic, and social domains (Crosby et al., 2006). In the context of Indigenous peoples, such policies are not only compensatory but also transformative, aiming to secure cultural recognition, territorial rights, and equitable participation in governance processes (Anaya, 2004; Dhillon, 2022). However, the effectiveness of affirmative policy varies significantly across contexts, depending on institutional arrangements and governance capacity.

Existing studies reveal contrasting findings. On one hand, research in Indigenous governance highlights that affirmative policies can enhance representation and bargaining power when supported by strong institutional structures (Cornell, 2015). On the other hand, studies in Indonesia suggest that affirmative policies often remain symbolic due to elite capture, weak implementation mechanisms, and limited institutional authority (Rakia et al., 2022). This divergence indicates that affirmative policy outcomes are not solely determined by legal frameworks, but are highly contingent on the capacity of institutions responsible for implementation.

Thus, while prior research provides important insights into the normative foundations of affirmative policy, it tends to underexplore how institutional capacity conditions its effectiveness at the local level of governance. This limitation is particularly evident in studies of Papua, where affirmative policy is often analyzed from legal or political perspectives, rather than as a function of institutional performance.

Institutional Capacity Building as an Evaluative Framework

The institutional capacity-building (ICB) framework developed by Healey et al. (2003) provides a useful analytical lens for addressing this limitation. Unlike conventional institutional approaches that emphasize formal structures, Healey conceptualizes institutional capacity as a dynamic interaction among three dimensions: relational capacity, knowledge resources, and mobilization capacity. These dimensions determine how institutions engage with stakeholders, generate and utilize knowledge, and influence policy processes.

Previous applications of the ICB framework demonstrate its relevance in assessing governance effectiveness, particularly in contexts involving multi-actor interactions and marginalized groups (Beebejaun, 2017; Eversole, 2010). However, most studies apply the framework in relatively stable governance environments, where institutional roles and authority are clearly defined. In contrast, the Papua context is characterized by asymmetric power relations, institutional hybridity, and contested authority, which require a more contextualized interpretation of institutional capacity.

This study, therefore, does not merely apply Healey's framework, but extends it contextually by examining how each dimension operates within a special autonomy regime. In this context, relational capacity is shaped by unequal power relations between MRP, the provincial government, and DPRP. Knowledge capacity is constrained by the absence of an integrated OAP database. Mobilization capacity is limited by non-binding institutional authority.

This adaptation highlights that institutional capacity in Papua is not only a matter of internal capability, but also of structural positioning within the governance system. Consequently, the framework is used not as a static model, but as a diagnostic tool to explain institutional constraints in affirmative policy implementation. This perspective allows the analysis to capture how power asymmetries and

institutional arrangements shape the actual influence of MRP in policy processes. It also enables a more context-sensitive interpretation of capacity, where effectiveness is determined not only by institutional resources but by the ability to navigate complex governance environments.

Local Governance in Cultural Representative Institutions

Local governance theory emphasizes the importance of collaboration among multiple actors in managing public issues, particularly in decentralized and culturally diverse contexts (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Emerson et al., 2012). In such settings, governance effectiveness depends on the ability to align institutional interests, coordinate actions, and manage power asymmetries.

However, empirical studies show that collaborative governance often fails to produce substantive outcomes when power relations are imbalanced or when institutional actors lack sufficient capacity (Ansell & Torfing, 2021). In the Papua context, governance is further complicated by the coexistence of formal bureaucratic systems and customary authority structures, creating a hybrid governance environment (Jayasinghe et al., 2020).

Previous research tends to treat institutional capacity, affirmative policy, and local governance as separate analytical domains. This study argues that these variables are interdependent and interact through specific causal mechanisms. Institutional capacity influences how effectively affirmative policies are formulated and implemented, while governance structures determine whether institutional efforts translate into policy outcomes.

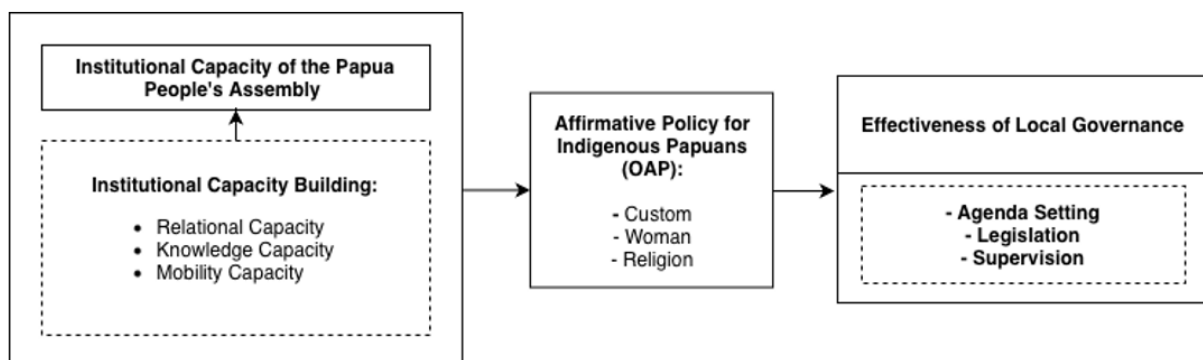


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Institutional Capacity–Affirmative Policy–Local Governance Nexus
Source: Author’s conceptual development based on Healey et al. (2003) and the empirical context of the MRP in Southwest Papua

This research framework integrates the concept of institutional capacity building with the effectiveness of affirmative policies in local governance (Healey et al., 2003). The MRP in Southwest Papua holds strong normative legitimacy as a cultural representative institution of OAP; however, its implementation performance is contingent upon the strength and interaction of its institutional capacities. Relational capacity determines the extent to which the MRP can build political alliances and exert influence within decision-making arenas involving the Provincial Government and DPRP. Knowledge capacity shapes the institution’s ability to produce and use evidence-based arguments in addressing affirmative issues, while mobilization capacity reflects its capacity to translate recommendations into binding or influential policy actions.

Rather than operating in a linear manner, these three capacities interact dynamically and are mediated by the structure of local governance, including power asymmetries, coordination mechanisms,

and institutional arrangements. In this framework, institutional capacity functions as a causal mechanism that influences how affirmative policies are formulated, negotiated, and implemented. These capacities are therefore hypothesized to determine the effectiveness of affirmative policy implementation in protecting customary rights, women's rights, and religious rights, as reflected in DUMAS data and the MRP's performance achievements in LAKIP.

Furthermore, the model incorporates a feedback dimension, where the outcomes of affirmative policies can reinforce or weaken institutional capacity over time, particularly in terms of legitimacy and stakeholder trust. Strong affirmative policy effectiveness, in turn, is expected to contribute to more inclusive, responsive, and culturally grounded local governance that better accommodates the interests of Indigenous Papuans in Southwest Papua.

Research Gap

Previous studies on Papua's Special Autonomy have provided important explanations regarding decentralization, elite politics, indigenous representation, and the limited authority of the Papuan People's Assembly (MRP). However, most of these studies tend to examine affirmative policy, institutional authority, and local governance as separate analytical issues. As a result, there remains limited scholarly attention to how institutional capacity specifically shapes the effectiveness of affirmative policies, particularly for Indigenous Papuans in newly established regions such as Southwest Papua.

The main research gap lies in the lack of studies that explain why legally recognized cultural representative institutions, such as the MRP, often fail to produce substantive policy outcomes. Existing literature frequently emphasizes formal mandates, symbolic legitimacy, or administrative performance, but pays less attention to the gap between institutional outputs and actual policy impact. This limitation is important because high institutional activity, such as deliberative meetings, recommendations, and regulatory initiatives, does not necessarily indicate that affirmative policies have generated structural improvements for Indigenous Papuans.

Based on this gap, this study integrates institutional capacity, the effectiveness of affirmative policies, and local governance structures into a unified analytical framework. Rather than viewing the limited effectiveness of affirmative policy merely as a problem of weak regulation or political will, this study argues that the issue is rooted in the misalignment between institutional design, institutional capacity, and governance structure. Therefore, this study contributes by developing the Local Governance Gap Model (LGGM), which explains how these interactions produce predominantly symbolic outcomes and constrain the transition toward substantive affirmative policy impacts.

3. Research Methods

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative case study design to examine the institutional capacity of the Papuan People's Assembly (MRP) in Southwest Papua and its implications for the implementation of affirmative policies. A case study approach is appropriate because it enables in-depth exploration of institutional dynamics within a specific governance context, particularly where formal mandates and practical implementation may diverge (Yin, 2018).

The selection of Southwest Papua as the research site is theoretically and empirically justified. As a newly established province following regional expansion, Southwest Papua represents a critical institutional setting where affirmative governance is in its formative stage. Unlike more established

provinces, institutional arrangements in this region are still evolving, making it a relevant case for examining how institutional capacity is constructed, negotiated, and operationalized. Moreover, the province exhibits significant demographic variation in the distribution of Indigenous Papuans (OAP), creating diverse governance challenges that require adaptive affirmative policy implementation. Therefore, Southwest Papua serves both as a critical case for identifying institutional constraints and as a representative case of post-expansion governance in Papua.

Table 3. List of Research Informants

No	Institution	Number of Informants
1.	Provincial Parliament of Southwest Papua (DPRP)	1
2.	Papuan People’s Assembly (MRP) of Southwest Papua	5
3.	Indigenous Papuans (OAP) of Southwest Papua	2
	Total	8

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and limited observation. A total of eight informants were selected using purposive sampling, based on their direct involvement in policy processes related to the MRP. These informants include members of MRP, government officials, and stakeholders engaged in indigenous affairs. Although the number of informants may appear limited, the selection prioritizes information-rich cases rather than numerical representation. Data saturation was achieved when no new themes or significant variations emerged from subsequent interviews, particularly regarding institutional roles, constraints, and policy processes. This aligns with qualitative research standards, where depth and relevance of information are more critical than sample size (Creswell, 2018).

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, following a systematic multi-stage procedure. First, all interview transcripts and documents were subjected to open coding, where initial categories were identified based on recurring patterns related to institutional roles and policy processes. Second, these codes were organized into axial categories, grouping them into broader themes corresponding to the three dimensions of institutional capacity: relational, knowledge, and mobilization (Healey et al., 2003). Third, a selective coding process was conducted to refine and integrate themes, thereby identifying key explanatory patterns linking institutional capacity to affirmative policy outcomes. This analytical process ensures that empirical findings are directly aligned with the theoretical framework, enabling both validation and contextual extension of institutional capacity theory.

To ensure the validity and credibility of the findings, this study applies several qualitative validation strategies. Member checking was conducted by sharing interview summaries and preliminary interpretations with selected informants to confirm the accuracy of the data and the researcher’s interpretation. This process allowed for clarification and, where necessary, correction. In addition, an audit trail was maintained throughout the research process, documenting data collection procedures, coding decisions, and analytical steps. This documentation enables transparency and allows the research process to be traced and evaluated. Furthermore, data triangulation was achieved by comparing interview data with official documents, such as LAKIP reports, DUMAS records, and regulatory frameworks, thereby ensuring the consistency and reliability of the findings.

4. Results and Discussion

The Papuan People’s Assembly (Majelis Rakyat Papua/MRP) is a cultural representative institution of Indigenous Papuans (OAP) that holds a special mandate under Papua’s Special Autonomy framework. Its

roles include granting consent, providing consideration, and protecting the fundamental rights of OAP, particularly in the domains of customary authority, religion, and women’s empowerment. Normatively, this mandate positions the MRP as a key actor in implementing affirmative policy at the local level (Kania, 2019). The role of affirmative measures is crucial due to demographic disparities in OAP composition. The smaller the proportion of OAP within the population, the more intense the political and economic competition becomes, necessitating stronger affirmative interventions to ensure equal opportunities (Timisela et al., 2020).

Based on Performance Accountability Reports (LAKIP) and Decision Documents (2023–2024), the implementation of the MRP’s affirmative functions in Southwest Papua faces several challenges as outlined below.

1. The MRP’s institutional role remains largely consultative, resulting in decisions that are not binding for the executive and legislative branches.
2. The management of OAP data is not yet optimal, limiting its use as a foundation for evidence-based affirmative policy.
3. Advocacy efforts on issues concerning Papuan women, customary rights, and religion remain weak due to the dominance of other political actors.

In 2023–2024, the largest share of public complaints submitted to the MRP in Southwest Papua concerned issues affecting Papuan women, followed by violations of customary rights, while religious issues constituted the smallest proportion. The dominance of complaints related to women’s issues indicates the persistent gender-based vulnerabilities embedded in local power relations, while the prevalence of complaints concerning customary affairs reflects widespread conflicts over land ownership and natural resources that have not yet received adequate policy protection. These DUMAS patterns demonstrate that the burden of issues brought to the MRP is heavily concentrated in the domains of women and customary rights, suggesting that affirmative measures remain in a responsive phase rather than achieving a transformative impact.

Table 4. Categories of Public Complaints, 2023–2024

No	Category	Issue Reported	Level of Complaints
1.	Customary Affairs	Customary land disputes, marginalization of communal rights, rejection of investment	High
2.	Women	Discrimination, gender-based violence, limited access to public services and social protection	Medium
3.	Religion	Intolerance, representation of religious leaders, protection of OAP religious rituals	Low

These findings reaffirm the gap between the MRP’s normative mandate and its actual institutional position, a condition similarly identified by Siahay & Salle (2025) in the broader Papua context. Although legally positioned as a protector of cultural rights, the MRP tends to act more as a symbolic actor than a determinative one in local policy-making processes in Southwest Papua. This is consistent with scholarly literature indicating that cultural representative institutions in Indonesia continue to exhibit strong dependence on the state, making their effectiveness highly contingent upon power relations with local government actors (Meteray, 2025; Sarjito & Mursidi, 2025).

Relational Capacity of the MRP

The MRP Papua Barat Daya's relational capacity is primarily shaped by its interactions with key governance actors, particularly the Provincial Government and the DPRP. Empirical findings indicate that these relationships are characterized by asymmetric power structures, where the MRP occupies a consultative rather than a decisive position within the policy-making process. While the institution is formally involved in deliberative forums, its recommendations are not binding, limiting its ability to influence final policy outcomes.

This condition reflects an imbalance in power distribution and institutional authority, a critical factor in determining the success or failure of collaborative arrangements (Ansell & Gash, 2008). Recent studies further confirm that collaborative governance often operates under a structural power asymmetry, in which state actors retain dominant control over decision-making processes, thereby limiting the influence of weaker institutional actors (Klijn et al., 2010; Torfing et al., 2012). This suggests that the normative assumption of equal participation in collaborative governance is frequently not realized in practice.

This finding refines existing collaborative governance theory by demonstrating that formal inclusion in deliberative processes does not automatically translate into substantive influence, particularly in contexts marked by institutional asymmetry. In line with recent governance research, collaborative arrangements may become procedural rather than transformative when weaker actors lack both authority and access to decision-making arenas (Ansell & Torfing, 2021). In the case of MRP, relational capacity is constrained not only by limited networks but, more importantly, by its structural positioning within the governance system, which limits its bargaining power.

Furthermore, this condition can be interpreted as a limitation of agenda-setting capacity, a crucial dimension of institutional influence. Rather than initiating policy agendas, the MRP tends to respond to issues raised by other actors or emerging social problems. This reactive pattern indicates that relational capacity has not yet evolved into strategic coalition-building or policy entrepreneurship. Contemporary studies on governance in indigenous and marginalized contexts highlight that without strong relational positioning and coalition networks, representative institutions tend to remain peripheral despite formal recognition (Lightfoot, 2016).

Thus, the findings of this study extend collaborative governance theory by emphasizing that relational capacity must be understood as structurally embedded, rather than merely network-based. In asymmetric governance settings such as Papua, institutional effectiveness is determined less by participation and more by the ability to negotiate power within hierarchical policy structures.

Knowledge Capacity

The MRP Papua Barat Daya's knowledge capacity is fundamentally constrained by the absence of a comprehensive, integrated database on Indigenous Papuans (OAP). Empirical findings indicate that policy recommendations and institutional arguments are often based on fragmented information, ad hoc reports, and limited documentation rather than on systematic, verifiable data. This condition weakens the MRP's ability to formulate strong evidence-based policy positions in deliberative processes.

From the perspective of institutional capacity building, knowledge resources are not merely technical inputs, but constitute a strategic asset that shapes institutional authority and legitimacy (Healey et al., 2003). The absence of a reliable data system, therefore, has broader implications beyond administrative limitations. It directly affects the MRP's ability to construct persuasive policy narratives and to position itself as a credible knowledge authority within governance networks.

Recent literature on evidence-based policymaking emphasizes that data availability and quality are critical determinants of policy influence, particularly in complex governance environments (Kano & Hayashi, 2021; Parkhurst, 2017). Institutions that lack control over policy-relevant knowledge tend to be marginalized in decision-making processes, as their arguments are perceived as normative rather than empirical. In the case of MRP, this condition reinforces its positioning as a symbolic representative institution, rather than a technocratic actor capable of shaping policy outcomes.

Furthermore, the absence of an integrated OAP database undermines institutional legitimacy, especially in the context of affirmative policy. Legitimacy in governance is increasingly linked to institutions' capacity to demonstrate accountability, transparency, and evidence-based reasoning (Sørensen & Torfing, 2021). Without reliable data, the MRP faces difficulties in justifying policy recommendations, prioritizing issues, and evaluating policy impacts. This creates a gap between its normative mandate and its practical effectiveness.

This finding also reveals a deeper structural issue: knowledge capacity is not only about data availability, but about knowledge governance, who produces, controls, and legitimizes knowledge within the policy process. In Papua's governance context, where state institutions dominate formal data systems, the MRP lacks epistemic authority, limiting its influence in policy debates. As noted in recent studies, institutions representing marginalized groups often experience epistemic marginalization, where their knowledge claims are undervalued or excluded from formal policy arenas (Fricker, 2007).

Thus, the limitation of knowledge capacity in MRP is not merely technical, but fundamentally political and institutional. It constrains the institution's ability to engage in evidence-based policymaking, weakens its legitimacy, and ultimately reduces the effectiveness of affirmative policy implementation. This finding reinforces the argument that strengthening institutional capacity must include developing independent, credible, and policy-relevant knowledge systems.

Mobilization Capacity

Mobilization capacity of the MRP Papua Barat Daya reflects the institution's ability to translate its normative mandate into concrete policy influence. Empirical findings indicate that the MRP predominantly operates in a reactive mode, responding to emerging issues rather than proactively shaping policy agendas. This pattern is not merely behavioral but is structurally embedded in the MRP's institutional design and authority distribution.

Table 5. Limitations in the MRP's Mobilization Capacity

Policy Stage	MRP's Role	Authority Status
Verification and approval of gubernatorial/vice-gubernatorial candidates of OAP status	Initial approval authority	Binding only at the administrative stage
Appointment and election of regional heads	Not involved	Non-binding
Enforcement of customary and women's rights	Advocacy and mediation	Recommendatory

The table reveals a clear pattern of restricted authority across policy stages, in which the MRP's role is either limited to early administrative processes or confined to non-binding, recommendatory functions. Even in areas central to affirmative policy, such as the protection of customary and women's rights, the institution lacks enforcement power. This structural limitation explains why mobilization

capacity remains weak: the MRP lacks sufficient institutional leverage to translate its recommendations into binding policy decisions.

From the perspective of institutional capacity theory, mobilization capacity is closely linked to the ability to initiate agendas, coordinate collective action, and influence policy outcomes (Healey et al., 2003). The findings of this study indicate that the MRP's mobilization capacity is constrained by a lack of agenda-setting authority, which prevents the institution from acting as a policy driver. Instead, it functions primarily as a policy responder, engaging only after issues emerge or are defined by other actors.

This condition aligns with recent governance studies, which argue that institutions lacking agenda-setting power are structurally disadvantaged in influencing policy outcomes, regardless of their formal recognition (Acebillo-Baqué et al., 2025; DeLeo et al., 2024). In such contexts, policy processes are dominated by actors who control agenda formation, while other institutions remain peripheral. The MRP's limited involvement in strategic stages, such as regional head selection, further reinforces its marginal position within the policy cycle.

Moreover, the findings demonstrate that mobilization capacity is not an isolated dimension, but is closely interconnected with relational and knowledge capacities. Weak relational positioning limits coalition-building, while insufficient knowledge resources reduce the credibility of policy advocacy. As a result, the MRP faces compounded constraints that hinder its ability to mobilize support and influence policy decisions. This interdependence confirms that institutional capacity operates as a systemic construct, where deficiencies in one dimension weaken overall institutional performance (Sørensen & Torfing, 2021; Torfing et al., 2012).

Thus, this study extends institutional capacity theory by emphasizing that mobilization capacity should be understood as the ability to control or influence policy agendas, rather than merely participating in policy processes. In the case of MRP Papua Barat Daya, the absence of agenda-setting power results in a predominantly reactive institutional role, limiting its effectiveness in implementing affirmative policies.

Effectiveness of Affirmative Policy in Local Governance

The effectiveness of affirmative policy in Southwest Papua constitutes the central analytical finding of this study, particularly in distinguishing between symbolic outcomes and substantive outcomes. While the institutional design of Special Autonomy formally recognizes the protection of Indigenous Papuans (OAP), empirical findings indicate that such recognition has not been fully translated into tangible policy impacts.

Symbolically, the MRP demonstrates a relatively strong performance. The institution actively participates in deliberative forums, provides policy recommendations, and facilitates the articulation of OAP interests through consultative mechanisms. These activities reflect procedural inclusion, in which indigenous representation is formally accommodated within governance structures. From a normative perspective, this aligns with the principles of affirmative policy, which emphasize recognition and representation as essential components of justice (Anaya, 2004).

However, at the substantive level, the effectiveness of affirmative policy remains limited. The findings show that key issues, such as the protection of customary land rights, the reduction of gender-based violence, and equitable access to public services, have not experienced significant structural improvement. This indicates a gap between policy intent and policy outcomes, where affirmative measures serve more as symbolic recognition than as instruments of transformative change.

This distinction can be understood through the lens of institutional capacity. As demonstrated in previous sections, limitations in relational, knowledge, and mobilization capacities constrain the MRP's ability to influence policy outcomes. Consequently, affirmative policies remain embedded in a procedural logic, in which compliance with formal mandates is prioritized over substantive impact. Recent studies highlight that affirmative policies often fail to produce meaningful change when institutional actors lack the capacity to enforce or operationalize them (Baudoin Farah, 2024; Morales Quiroga, 2022).

Furthermore, the findings suggest that symbolic and substantive outcomes are not mutually exclusive, but exist along a continuum shaped by institutional capacity and governance context. In the case of MRP Papua Barat Daya, symbolic outcomes serve as an initial stage of policy recognition, but without sufficient institutional capacity, they do not progress into substantive transformation. This reinforces the argument that affirmative policy effectiveness is capacity-dependent, rather than solely determined by legal frameworks.

From a theoretical standpoint, this study contributes by reframing affirmative policy effectiveness as a two-dimensional construct. On the one hand, symbolic effectiveness refers to the extent to which policies provide recognition, participation, and representation for Indigenous Papuans within formal governance structures. On the other hand, substantive effectiveness captures the degree to which these policies generate measurable impacts and lead to structural changes in addressing inequalities. This distinction highlights that affirmative policies may achieve formal legitimacy without necessarily producing tangible improvements, thereby underscoring the importance of institutional capacity in bridging the gap between symbolic recognition and substantive outcomes.

This distinction extends existing literature by demonstrating that affirmative policies may appear successful in formal evaluations yet remain ineffective at addressing underlying inequalities. In this sense, the MRP's performance reflects a broader pattern in governance systems where institutional legitimacy is maintained symbolically, but policy transformation remains limited. Thus, the effectiveness of affirmative policy in Southwest Papua is best understood not as a binary success or failure, but as an incomplete transition from symbolic recognition to substantive change, shaped by the institutional capacity of the implementing actor. Strengthening this transition requires enhancing the MRP's ability to influence policy processes, mobilize resources, and assert authority within the governance system.

Local Governance Gap

The findings of this study reveal a structural misalignment between institutional mandates, governance practices, and policy outcomes in the implementation of affirmative policies for Indigenous Papuans (OAP). This condition is conceptualized as the Local Governance Gap, referring to the divergence between formal institutional roles and their actual influence on the production of effective governance outcomes.

This study conceptualizes the Local Governance Gap through an analytical model comprising three main components: determinants (inputs), process (mechanisms), and outcomes. At the determinant level, three key factors shape the governance process, namely institutional design, institutional capacity, and governance structure. Institutional design reflects the MRP's formal authority and regulatory framework, which remains largely non-binding and consultative. Institutional capacity, comprising relational, knowledge, and mobilization dimensions, serves as the central mechanism enabling the institution to engage in policy processes. Meanwhile, governance structure, characterized by power asymmetry and hierarchical decision-making, conditions the extent to which institutional capacity can be translated into policy influence.

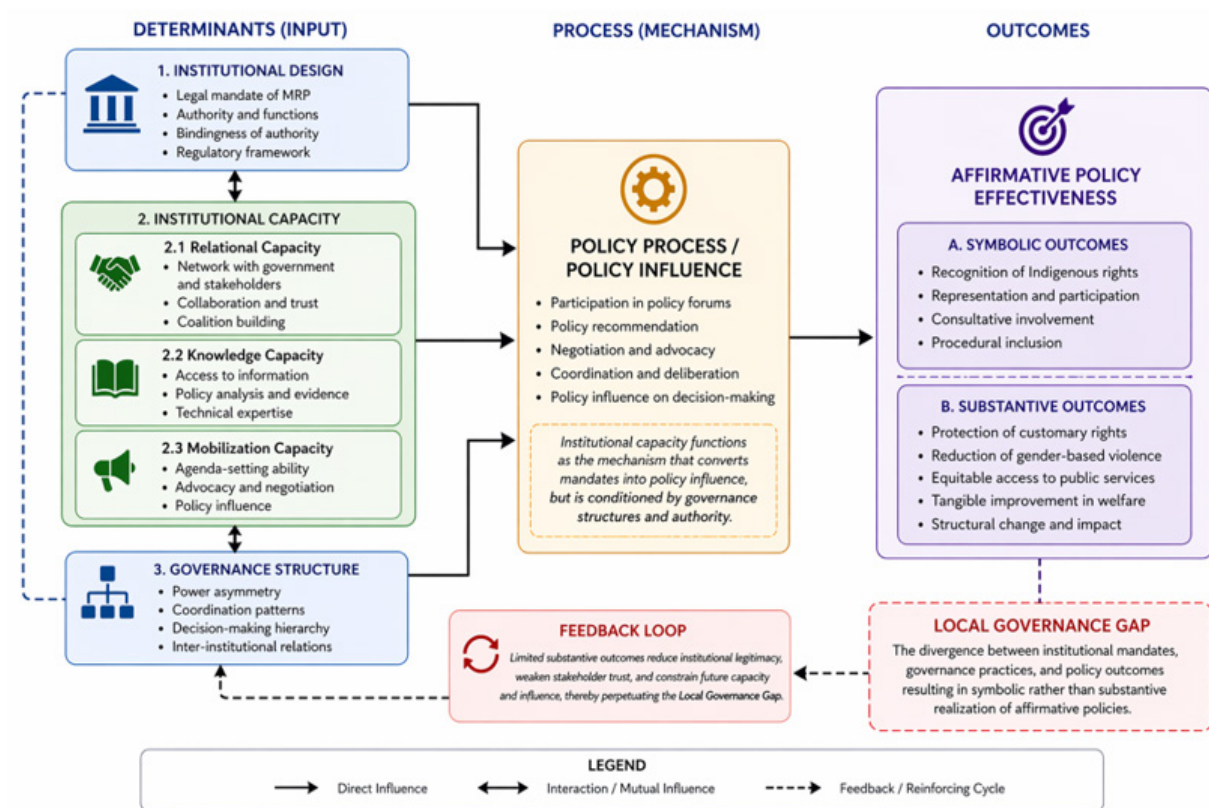


Figure 2. Local Governance Gap Model (LGM)
Source: Author’s compilation (2026).

At the process level, institutional capacity operates as the primary mechanism of policy influence, shaping the extent to which the MRP can participate in policy forums, provide recommendations, engage in negotiation, and influence decision-making processes. However, this mechanism is not autonomous, as it is constrained by both institutional design and governance structure. As a result, the policy process does not fully translate institutional mandates into effective policy outcomes.

At the outcome level, affirmative policy effectiveness is reflected in two distinct forms: symbolic outcomes and substantive outcomes. Symbolic outcomes include recognition, participation, and procedural inclusion of Indigenous Papuans within governance processes. In contrast, substantive outcomes refer to tangible improvements such as the protection of customary rights, reduction of gender-based violence, equitable access to public services, and broader structural change. The findings indicate that policy outcomes are predominantly symbolic, while substantive transformations remain limited.

The divergence between these expected and actual outcomes constitutes the Local Governance Gap, which emerges when institutional arrangements and capacities are insufficient to produce substantive policy impact. This gap highlights that the presence of affirmative policies does not automatically guarantee their effectiveness, particularly when institutional influence is constrained.

Furthermore, the model demonstrates that the Local Governance Gap operates through a feedback loop mechanism. Limited substantive outcomes weaken institutional legitimacy and reduce stakeholder trust, thereby constraining future institutional capacity and policy influence. This reinforcing cycle perpetuates the gap between normative commitments and governance performance over time. Thus,

the Local Governance Gap Model (LGGM) provides a comprehensive analytical framework that explains how the interaction between institutional design, institutional capacity, and governance structure shapes the effectiveness of affirmative policy. The model emphasizes that policy effectiveness is contingent upon the alignment of these elements, and that misalignment leads to the persistence of symbolic rather than substantive governance outcomes.

5. Conclusion

This study shows that the effectiveness of affirmative policy in Southwest Papua remains limited, despite strong normative recognition under Special Autonomy. The findings indicate that this limitation is driven by the misalignment between institutional design, institutional capacity, and governance structure, resulting in policy outcomes that are predominantly symbolic rather than substantive. Institutional capacity, relational, knowledge, and mobilization act as the key mechanisms linking mandates to outcomes, but are constrained by non-binding authority and asymmetric power relations.

Theoretically, this study contributes to public administration and governance by proposing the Local Governance Gap Model (LGGM), which explains how the interaction between institutional design, capacity, and governance structure shapes policy effectiveness. The model extends institutional capacity theory by positioning capacity as structurally embedded rather than purely organizational. In addition, the study introduces the distinction between symbolic and substantive outcomes as a critical dimension in evaluating affirmative policy. These findings highlight that effective governance in decentralized and marginalized contexts requires not only institutional inclusion but also alignment between authority, capacity, and governance structure. Strengthening these elements is essential to ensure that affirmative policies move beyond symbolic recognition toward substantive impact.

6. References

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