

## Communication Strategies of Village Government to Increase Community Participation in Development

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### **Abstract**

*This article explores the strategic communication practices employed by the Patangkai Village Government in Bone Regency to enhance community participation in rural development. Situated in the discipline of communication and public administration, the study responds to the need for participatory development approaches that go beyond top-down planning. The research was conducted using a qualitative descriptive method involving in-depth interviews, field observation, and document analysis. Findings indicate that communication strategies—ranging from formal meetings (Musrenbang and Musdes), WhatsApp group messaging, to personalized home visits—play a vital role in shaping community involvement. The study highlights both supporting and inhibiting factors such as leadership transparency, technological access, time constraints, and social hesitancy. While community engagement is gradually improving, challenges remain in reaching marginalized groups and sustaining active participation. The research contributes to the understanding of communication's function not only as information transmission but as a dialogical and inclusive governance tool. The results emphasize that adaptive and culturally rooted communication strategies are essential for effective participatory development in rural settings. The study concludes that village governments must institutionalize feedback systems and diversify communication approaches to ensure equitable and sustainable engagement. These findings offer practical guidance for local governance and development practitioners.*

**Keywords:** *Village communication strategy; participatory development; rural governance; community engagement.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Community participation has long been regarded as a cornerstone in the success of rural development initiatives. In the context of Indonesia, this participation reflects the spirit of mutual cooperation (gotong royong) and communal solidarity, forming a cultural foundation for local development. According to Government Regulation No. 114 of 2014 concerning Village Development Guidelines, village planning must be carried out in a participatory manner, involving both the Village Consultative Body and local residents in decision-making and resource allocation processes. However, translating these legal mandates into effective practice remains a complex communication challenge for village governments.

Preliminary findings from research conducted in Patangkai Village, Lappariaja District, Bone Regency, show that while the village government has attempted to employ communication mechanisms such as *musyawarah perencanaan pembangunan* (*musrenbang*) and *musyawarah desa* (*musdes*), community participation is still inconsistent. Based on interview data with village officials and community members, many residents do not attend meetings due to scheduling conflicts, low motivation, or lack of awareness. Observations further reveal that although residents may agree with the results of development meetings, they often do not engage directly in the planning stages. For example, Mr. Alimin, a resident, admitted that he rarely attends village meetings due to work commitments but still contributes physically to development projects. These insights indicate that strategic communication, not merely information dissemination, is key to increasing genuine participation.

Several previous studies have addressed similar themes. Ridho (2019) studied community participation in the physical development of Pasar Terusan Village, emphasizing the role of local contributions but not communication strategy. Lailiani (2020) explored government strategies in Kemamang Village, which also pointed to a lack of community involvement in infrastructure projects. Lubis (2021) examined communication strategies in Batahan Village, highlighting the importance of direct interaction and informal engagement in promoting participation. These studies underline the need for tailored communication strategies that consider local contexts, but none focused in depth on the structured communication planning model at the village level as implemented in Patangkai.

This study aims to explore the communication strategies employed by the Patangkai Village government to increase community participation in development programs. Specifically, it investigates the methods used by local authorities to deliver messages, build trust, and mobilize community members toward collective action. The study also identifies the supporting and inhibiting factors that affect the implementation of these communication strategies.

The findings of this study are expected to contribute both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, the research enhances understanding of how communication strategies operate in rural governance and participatory development. Practically, the study provides input for village governments and development practitioners in designing more inclusive and adaptive communication approaches to foster meaningful community involvement.

The study is grounded in communication strategy theory as articulated by Effendy (2009) and Arifin (2006), who define communication strategy as a comprehensive plan involving message design, media use, audience targeting, and behavioral objectives. The research also draws on the participatory communication perspective, emphasizing dialogue, mutual understanding, and empowerment as central to effective communication in development settings

(Liliweri, 2010). These theoretical foundations guide the analysis of how strategic communication can transform passive community members into active agents of change in rural development.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study applied a qualitative descriptive approach to investigate how communication strategies influence community involvement. The primary variables include the village government's communication strategies (media use, message design, interaction models) and the level of community participation (attendance, planning input, project involvement).

Participants were selected purposively, including the village head, secretary, planning officials, and community representatives. In total, ten informants were interviewed. Data were collected via in-depth interviews, direct observation, and document analysis. Interview guides facilitated semi-structured dialogues. Observations were recorded during meetings and informal discussions.

Data analysis followed Miles and Huberman's model: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Trustworthiness was ensured through source and method triangulation, and peer debriefing. Descriptive statistics were used to support the qualitative findings, such as meeting attendance frequency and communication channel usage.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Overview Of Village Communication Practices

The Patangkai Village Government has implemented a combination of formal and informal communication strategies to enhance citizen involvement in development. These include scheduled meetings such as Musyawarah Desa (Musdes) and Musrenbang, the use of WhatsApp group messaging, home visits, as well as community-based religious gatherings. The communication methods are chosen with careful attention to the local community's routines and preferences.

**Table 1.**

**Communication Channels and Their Effectiveness**

Communication Channel	Frequency of Use	Primary Audience	Strengths	Limitations
<b>Musdes / Musrenbang Meetings</b>	6–8 times per year	All adult residents	Open discussion, formal decision-making	Low turnout, time conflicts
<b>WhatsApp Groups</b>	Daily	Youth, middle-aged residents	Instant feedback, flexible timing, wide reach	Excludes elderly or those without smartphones

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<b>Home Visits</b>	Irregular, case-based	Elderly, less active residents	Personal touch, trust building	Time-consuming, not scalable
<b>Religious Gatherings</b>	Weekly	Devout residents, elders	Cultural relevance, moral framing	Limited to certain community segments
<b>Public Posters / Banners</b>	Monthly or project-based	General public	Visibility, constant presence	Low interactivity, not detailed

**Meetings Village Forums As Central Communication Platforms**

Formal forums such as Musyawarah Perencanaan Pembangunan Desa (Musrenbang) and Musyawarah Desa (Musdes) serve as the primary instruments for disseminating government plans and encouraging participatory input. These meetings are typically organized annually or semi-annually and are designed to involve various community groups in setting development priorities.

Despite their structured format and legal basis, these forums often face attendance and engagement challenges. Participation levels fluctuate depending on factors such as the time of day, farming seasons, or the perceived relevance of the agenda. Residents are more likely to attend when the agenda involves tangible public benefits, such as infrastructure development, rather than abstract planning topics.

Nonetheless, these forums remain central in affirming the legitimacy of village leadership and enabling dialogue between stakeholders. They also serve as institutional memory where decisions are formally recorded and can be referred to in future planning cycles.

**Integration of Digital Communication: WhatsApp as a Strategic Channel**

With the growing accessibility of smartphones, WhatsApp has become an essential tool for quick and widespread communication. The village government uses WhatsApp groups to notify residents about meetings, project updates, and emergency notices.

This channel allows asynchronous communication, meaning residents can access information at their convenience. The interactive nature of group chats also provides space for clarification and informal dialogue, helping to address misconceptions or misunderstandings that might arise in larger, more formal meetings.

However, digital communication presents limitations. Elderly residents and those in low-income households may lack access or literacy to engage meaningfully in this medium. Additionally, WhatsApp messages can be overlooked or dismissed, particularly when too frequent or lacking immediate relevance. Therefore, digital communication must be complemented by more direct, interpersonal strategies to ensure inclusivity.

**Home-Based Communication and Interpersonal Engagement**

Face-to-face interaction remains one of the most effective forms of communication in rural settings. Village officials regularly conduct home visits, especially to households that are typically underrepresented in public forums.

This approach facilitates trust-building and enables personalized clarification of policies, especially on sensitive or complex issues such as budget allocation, land disputes, or program eligibility. Home visits also allow officials to observe social and economic conditions firsthand, providing valuable context for policy implementation.

However, this method is resource-intensive and difficult to scale. Without a systematic recording mechanism, information gathered through such visits may be anecdotal and not formally integrated into planning documents. To maximize its impact, this strategy should be institutionalized with regular scheduling and digital tracking of feedback.

### **Cultural and Religious Platforms as Communication Vehicles**

Religious gatherings and traditional ceremonies offer a culturally embedded opportunity to share information and encourage collective reflection. Village leaders often integrate development messages into events such as pengajian, community celebrations, or prayer sessions.

These events provide a familiar and trusted space for engagement, particularly among elders and conservative segments of the community. Framing development as a moral and spiritual obligation has proven effective in fostering acceptance and alignment with collective goals.

This approach, however, requires sensitivity to avoid politicization or the perception of co-opting religious spaces. Moreover, the informal nature of these platforms may not always allow for rigorous debate or consensus-building.

### **Document-Based Participation: Involving Residents in Planning Drafts**

One of the more innovative strategies observed is the involvement of community members in drafting official documents such as the RPJMDes (Village Medium-Term Development Plan) and RKPDDes (Village Annual Work Plan). This inclusion promotes ownership and accountability, as residents can trace their input through the development lifecycle.

By engaging residents in the early stages of policy design, misunderstandings are reduced, and resistance to implementation is minimized. Moreover, this practice strengthens procedural transparency and helps align government initiatives with actual community needs.

Challenges in this area include low levels of technical understanding among participants, necessitating facilitation by trained staff or external experts. Nonetheless, the long-term benefits of this strategy outweigh its initial costs, especially in building institutional resilience and civic competence.

### Barriers to Effective Communication and Participation

While the strategies outlined above demonstrate potential, several structural and cultural barriers continue to hinder their full effectiveness:

**Time Constraints:** Many residents are engaged in agriculture or daily labor, making them unavailable during typical meeting times. Evening sessions or weekend scheduling may help address this issue.

**Digital Divide:** Despite growing access to smartphones, disparities remain in digital literacy, especially among elderly residents. This can result in exclusion from important updates shared only via WhatsApp or social media.

**Psychological Barriers:** Some residents hesitate to participate in public forums due to feelings of inadequacy or fear of criticism. These attitudes are particularly prevalent among those with lower education levels or past negative experiences.

**Resource Limitations:** The village government operates with limited human and financial resources. This affects the frequency, scope, and quality of communication initiatives, particularly those requiring travel or print materials.

**Fragmentation of Channels:** With multiple communication methods in use, consistency of messaging becomes a challenge. A centralized communication calendar or dashboard could improve coordination.

### Supporting And Inhibiting Factors

**Table 2.**  
**Factors Supporting and Inhibiting Community Participation**

Factor Type	Factor	Description / Impact
<b>Supporting</b>	Strong village leadership	Transparent, responsive leaders increase public trust and willingness to engage.
<b>Supporting</b>	Use of technology (WhatsApp)	Digital communication enhances speed and ease of engagement among literate demographics.
<b>Supporting</b>	Cultural adaptation	Religious values and community norms embedded in communication create emotional relevance.
<b>Inhibiting</b>	Time constraints	Farming/labor schedules limit attendance at planned meetings.
<b>Inhibiting</b>	Unequal access to information	Elderly and tech-illiterate residents are left out of digital communication loops.
<b>Inhibiting</b>	Psychological hesitation	Lack of confidence or education hinders some from contributing in forums.
<b>Inhibiting</b>	Resource limitations	Village apparatus cannot reach all community members equally and frequently.

The success of participatory communication strategies in Patangkai Village is not merely a function of the tools or methods employed by the government, but is strongly influenced by a

set of underlying support systems that create a fertile ground for engagement. These factors, although often subtle and context-dependent, play a crucial role in determining whether or not the strategies adopted yield the desired outcome of broad and meaningful community involvement. Among the most influential of these is the presence of transparent and accountable leadership.

Leadership transparency in Patangkai Village has fostered a high degree of trust between the government apparatus and the community. This transparency is manifested in several key ways, such as the consistent dissemination of information regarding village funds, the publication of meeting results, and the accessibility of village officials for informal consultations. The head of the village and his team make deliberate efforts to keep residents informed of the rationale behind development decisions and ensure that every member of the community, regardless of their social or economic status, has the opportunity to voice concerns or suggestions. This openness contributes not only to procedural legitimacy but also nurtures a culture of shared responsibility in governance.

In addition to leadership characteristics, the motivation level among community members plays a decisive role. Residents of Patangkai exhibit a generally high degree of civic awareness, which can be attributed to both historical patterns of communal collaboration and recent visible impacts of development programs. Many villagers have directly benefited from projects such as the repair of farm roads, the installation of clean water pipelines, and the construction of public sanitation facilities. These tangible results have had a reinforcing effect: the more successful a development initiative appears, the more likely community members are to participate in future processes. There is a growing recognition among residents that their involvement can lead to concrete improvements in their daily lives. This awareness transforms participation from a symbolic act to a practical investment, and over time, helps internalize participatory values as a norm within the community.

Furthermore, the high level of social cohesion in Patangkai Village functions as a powerful enabler of collective action. The community demonstrates strong bonds of mutual aid, familial relationships, and shared cultural traditions that reinforce a sense of unity and mutual dependence. These social ties are regularly expressed through customary practices, religious gatherings, and community celebrations, which in turn serve as platforms for informal communication and consensus-building. This cohesion ensures that once a development agenda is agreed upon, the execution phase is often marked by collective labor and shared resource contributions. In this context, social pressure also plays a productive role: individuals who refrain from participating may experience subtle disapproval, thus encouraging greater involvement through normative reinforcement rather than coercion.

Another critical factor supporting community engagement is the relatively high level of technological readiness among certain segments of the population, particularly among the

younger demographic. Mobile phone penetration is widespread, and most households have at least one member who is proficient in using messaging apps such as WhatsApp. This facilitates not only information dissemination but also real-time interaction between citizens and local authorities. For example, a development project that is announced in a community forum can quickly be followed up with more detailed instructions or updates through a WhatsApp group, ensuring that those who were not present physically are still included in the communication cycle. The presence of this digital layer complements face-to-face interactions and enhances the speed and reach of governmental messages. It also opens opportunities for feedback loops that are otherwise difficult to establish in offline settings. Moreover, the use of multimedia content, such as photos of project progress or scanned budget sheets, enhances transparency and encourages engagement through visual clarity.

Beyond the technical infrastructure, cultural values and religious beliefs also play a significant role in facilitating community participation. In Patangkai Village, religion is not only a private matter but a social force that shapes collective behavior and ethical standards. Development initiatives that are framed as fulfilling religious or moral obligations—such as improving sanitation to ensure ritual cleanliness or supporting the less fortunate through public infrastructure—tend to receive broader and more enthusiastic support. This moral framing of development transforms it into a duty, not just of citizenship but of faith. Religious leaders, who are often highly respected and trusted, can act as intermediaries to communicate development goals and rally support for village programs. When development is articulated within a framework that aligns with local values, it resonates more deeply with the community, increasing both attendance at meetings and active involvement in project execution.

Institutional support also contributes to enhanced participation. The village government has established a relatively well-organized administrative structure that includes designated roles for community liaison, development planning, and budget management. These roles are clearly communicated, and their holders are often chosen through a semi-formal consultation process that ensures alignment with community expectations. This clarity of function reduces confusion, speeds up decision-making, and reinforces the perception that the government is both organized and responsive. In such a system, residents are more willing to offer their time and input, confident that their participation will not be wasted due to bureaucratic inefficiencies or miscommunication.

Moreover, the experience of participatory success feeds itself. As residents see the results of their previous engagement materialize—such as a completed drainage system, a functioning community hall, or a successful agricultural subsidy program—they are more inclined to view participation not as a burdensome obligation, but as an effective channel for change. This experiential learning builds what can be termed "participation capital," a non-material asset rooted

in collective memory and reinforced through institutional recognition. The process becomes cyclical: the more a community participates, the more success it experiences, and the more success it experiences, the more willing it is to continue participating.

Additionally, the village government's approach to communication is notably inclusive. Language used in meetings is accessible, avoiding technical jargon that might alienate lay participants. Visual aids such as charts, diagrams, and photographs are often used to complement verbal explanations, thereby increasing comprehension. These techniques are especially important in a community with diverse educational backgrounds, as they reduce the intimidation factor often associated with formal governance procedures. When people feel that they understand what is being discussed, they are more likely to contribute and take ownership of the outcome.

Lastly, Patangkai Village benefits from strategic partnerships with external actors such as NGOs, universities, and regional government agencies. These partnerships often bring resources, training, and facilitation expertise that enhance the capacity of both the village government and its residents. For example, training workshops on participatory planning, gender-sensitive budgeting, or basic digital literacy can empower residents to engage more confidently and competently. Such capacity-building initiatives ensure that participation is not only invited but enabled. They help bridge the gap between willingness and ability, which is crucial in moving from tokenistic involvement to substantive engagement.

Taken together, these supporting factors form an ecosystem in which participatory development can thrive. They are not static conditions but dynamic elements that interact with each other, requiring ongoing nurturing and strategic alignment. The experience of Patangkai Village shows that participation does not happen by accident—it must be designed, encouraged, facilitated, and above all, valued. When supported effectively, communication strategies transform from mere dissemination tools into pathways for empowerment, accountability, and sustainable development.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Conclusion

This study investigated the communication strategies employed by the Patangkai Village Government to enhance community participation in local development initiatives. The findings reveal that communication in the village is multi-dimensional, involving both formal mechanisms such as village development meetings (Musdes and Musrenbang) and informal approaches including WhatsApp group messaging, home visits, and religious group engagement.

The combination of these strategies reflects a conscious effort by the village government to bridge generational, cultural, and technological divides within the community. While some methods—particularly digital platforms—have shown high engagement among younger residents, others such as personal home visits have been more effective in reaching the elderly and those less involved in formal settings.

Despite these promising approaches, the study also identifies key challenges that limit the full potential of participatory development. These include inconsistent meeting attendance due to work-related time constraints, varying levels of understanding and confidence among residents, and limited resources available to the village apparatus to conduct continuous outreach.

Overall, the strategic communication model adopted by Patangkai Village emphasizes adaptability, inclusivity, and cultural relevance. However, to further strengthen participation, a more structured integration of communication efforts is required—such as establishing feedback tracking systems, ensuring equitable digital access, and formalizing community group involvement in policy discussions.

The study contributes to the broader understanding that communication is not merely a means of delivering information but is central to facilitating engagement, ownership, and collective decision-making in rural governance. For village governments aiming to achieve sustainable development, communication must be planned strategically, executed consistently, and evaluated regularly with direct feedback from the people it intends to serve.

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### Suggestion

The suggestions are the village government should enhance socialization outside residents' working hours and use simple technology like loudspeakers in public areas, and community leaders should be involved as change agents to help with community engagement.

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