
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Public Communication Gaps in Banten's Sarjana Penggerak Desa Program

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| ABSTRACT

The 2025 Sarjana Penggerak Desa Program is one of the policy initiatives of the Banten Provincial Government designed to accelerate rural development by strengthening human resource capacity at the village level. This article examines the communication process of the Banten Provincial Government in implementing the program. The analysis focuses on the communication channels used and on how village governments and program beneficiaries interpret the policy messages delivered through the program. This study employs a qualitative approach with a single case study design and is grounded in a social constructivist paradigm. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, non-participant observation, and document analysis. The informants included provincial government actors, technical implementing agencies, village government officials, and program beneficiaries. The data were analyzed thematically using Phil Jones' strategic communication perspective, particularly in relation to audience orientation, message consistency, communication channel selection, and feedback mechanisms. The findings reveal a meaning gap in the implementation of the Sarjana Penggerak Desa Program. The provincial government positions the program as a strategic investment in village human resource development. Some village actors, however, understand it mainly as an administrative responsibility, while beneficiaries tend to perceive it as financial support for education. This difference in interpretation emerges because the communication pattern remains largely hierarchical and administrative. Policy messages flow from the provincial government to technical agencies, then move through district and subdistrict levels before reaching village governments as the main intermediaries. Formal documents, technical guidelines, WhatsApp-based coordination, face-to-face meetings, and social media help maintain procedural clarity in program implementation. Nevertheless, these channels have not fully developed a shared understanding among stakeholders. This article concludes that the effectiveness of policy communication cannot be assessed only by whether information has been delivered. It must also be measured by the extent to which communication builds shared meaning, community ownership, and public participation. Therefore, rural development programs require a more participatory, audience-oriented, and dialogic communication model to support their long-term sustainability.

| KEYWORDS

public communication, strategic communication, meaning gap, Sarjana Penggerak Desa, rural development, social constructivism.

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

ACCEPTED: 01 June 2026

PUBLISHED: 29 June 2026

DOI: 10.32996/jhsss.2026.8.7.5

1. Introduction

Village development is an important part of regional governance in Indonesia. Villages are not merely administrative territories; they are also social spaces that shape the direction and sustainability of development. Within them, human resources, local leadership, citizen participation, social networks, and public trust interact and influence one another. In the context of Banten Province, village development presents its own challenges, as rural areas differ in terms of social conditions, economic capacity, geography, and institutional strength. For this reason, village development cannot be understood only as a matter of infrastructure, fiscal transfers, or basic public services. Another equally important issue is the ability of local communities to understand policy directions, interpret program benefits, participate in implementation, and develop a sense of ownership toward development agendas introduced by the regional government. At this point, social capital becomes a crucial foundation, as rural development requires trust, social networks, information transparency, and the collective willingness of communities to take part in social change (Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Banten, 2024; Dimiyati, 2013; Fitriyah & Pratiwi, 2024; Putnam, 2000; Servaes, 2008).

Access to higher education remains one of the key issues in village development. Unequal access to education can limit the emergence of educated local actors who are able to contribute to community empowerment, village institutional strengthening, local economic development, and social innovation. From a village development perspective, higher education is not simply a means of individual mobility. It can also serve as social capital that strengthens the collective capacity of village communities. Therefore, human resource development policies in rural areas need to be communicated clearly. Such programs should not be understood only as educational assistance, but also as part of a long-term development strategy that promotes village independence and community participation (Fitriyah & Pratiwi, 2024; Melkote & Steeves, 2015; Putnam, 2000).

In response to this need, the Banten Provincial Government introduced the 2025 Sarjana Penggerak Desa Program. The program is designed to support the education of young people from villages while encouraging them to return and contribute as local agents of development in their communities. Viewed from this position, the Sarjana Penggerak Desa Program should not be seen merely as financial assistance for education. It is also a village human resource development policy. Its success depends heavily on how the government communicates the program's objectives, benefits, obligations, procedures, and strategic meaning to village governments, beneficiaries, families, community leaders, and village residents as policy audiences (Dinas Pemberdayaan Masyarakat dan Desa Provinsi Banten, 2025; Waisbord, 2001).

Communication plays a central role in public policy implementation. A program that has been formally designed may not necessarily be understood in the same way by all actors involved. Government communication, therefore, cannot be viewed only as the delivery of information from the government to the public. It also functions as a social process through which policy meaning, legitimacy, public trust, and citizen participation are constructed. In the context of village development, the public sphere becomes important because it provides space for communities to express ideas, needs, and assessments of development programs. Dimiyati (2013) shows that community empowerment in public information transparency can be pursued through structural and cultural approaches, including citizen information centers, public consultations, socialization activities, and meeting forums that help communities understand their right to information. The public sphere also requires equality, opportunity, respect for dialogue, and communicative competence among development actors so that community ideas can emerge meaningfully (Fitriyah et al., 2022). Thus, the effectiveness of policy communication is not determined only by whether information reaches the public. It also depends on whether the message can be understood, accepted, and interpreted appropriately by the intended audience (Canel & Luoma-Aho, 2019; Heath & Johansen, 2018).

In local government practice, policy communication often moves through bureaucratic and hierarchical structures. Official letters, technical guidelines, coordination meetings, administrative instructions, digital coordination groups, and reporting mechanisms are needed to maintain procedural consistency. However, an overly dominant administrative pattern may create problems. The strategic meaning of a program can become narrowed when it enters the implementation stage. A program initially designed as a strategy for village human resource development may be understood more narrowly as a matter of beneficiary selection, fund disbursement, document completion, or technical reporting. At this point, the communication problem is no longer only about information distribution. The main issue lies in the meaning gap among stakeholders.

The meaning gap is a central issue in the implementation of the Sarjana Penggerak Desa Program. The provincial government may frame the program as a strategic investment in village human resource development. However, as the

message moves through technical agencies, district and subdistrict structures, and village governments, its meaning may shift into an administrative responsibility. At the beneficiary level, the program may also be understood more pragmatically as financial support for education. These different interpretations show that procedural clarity does not necessarily produce shared meaning. From a social constructivist perspective, policy meaning does not move automatically from the government to society. Meaning is constructed through interaction, experience, interpretation, and social negotiation (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Crotty, 1998).

Village governments hold a central position in this process. They serve as the final communicative link between the provincial government and village communities. This role is not only administrative, but also interpretive. Village governments translate policy messages, explain procedures, provide clarification to residents, select and verify potential beneficiaries, and frame the meaning of the program in language that is closer to the social experience of the community. This role is consistent with the study by Fitriyah et al. (2022), which shows that village development forums require not only formal spaces, but also dialogic equality and communicative competence so that community ideas can be presented meaningfully. Sihabudin et al. (2018) also show that communication channels and audience characteristics play an important role in program acceptance among local communities. If village governments receive messages only in the form of technical instructions, the strategic meaning of the program may not be fully conveyed to the community. Conversely, when village governments are equipped with clear policy narratives, accessible communication materials, and adequate spaces for dialogue, the program is more likely to be understood as an agenda of empowerment and long-term development.

The Sarjana Penggerak Desa Program should also be understood within the framework of community empowerment. Fitriyah and Pratiwi (2024) emphasize that community empowerment needs to position local potential, cultural values, individual characteristics, and regional characteristics as sources of energy in strengthening community capacity. This principle is relevant to the Sarjana Penggerak Desa Program because the program does not only support individual education. More broadly, it is expected to strengthen village social capacity through the involvement of educated young people as agents of change. For this reason, program communication should not be constructed merely in administrative language. The program's message needs to be framed in a narrative that is understandable, trustworthy, and relevant to local audiences.

Studies on public communication, government communication, and development communication have emphasized the importance of information transparency, community empowerment, citizen participation, communication channel selection, and dialogue in supporting policy implementation (Canel & Luoma-Aho, 2019; Dimiyati, 2013; Fitriyah et al., 2022; Fitriyah & Pratiwi, 2024; Melkote & Steeves, 2015; Servaes, 2008; Sihabudin et al., 2018). Nevertheless, attention to layered communication processes in village human resource development programs at the provincial government level remains relatively limited. Some studies still position government communication mainly as information dissemination. Others focus more on community-level participation or innovation acceptance in local communities. Few studies specifically explain how policy messages move from the provincial government to technical agencies, are then passed on to village governments, and are finally interpreted by beneficiaries within a single chain of program implementation.

This article addresses that gap by analyzing the public communication of the Banten Provincial Government in the implementation of the 2025 Sarjana Penggerak Desa Program. The analysis focuses on three main aspects: the policy communication process, the forms of communication used, and the meanings constructed by village governments and beneficiaries toward the program. To examine these dynamics, this article employs Phil Jones' strategic communication perspective. This perspective is relevant because it emphasizes the importance of audience orientation, clear communication objectives, consistent and meaningful messages, appropriate channel selection, timing, and feedback mechanisms (Jones, 2008).

Through this perspective, this article argues that the success of communication in the Sarjana Penggerak Desa Program cannot be measured only by the orderly flow of information and the completeness of administrative instruments. A more substantive form of success lies in the ability of communication to build shared meaning among the provincial government, village governments, and beneficiaries. Accordingly, this article offers a theoretical contribution to the study of government public communication and development communication, particularly in explaining meaning gaps in the implementation of village human resource development policies. Practically, it provides a reflective basis for local governments to strengthen a more participatory, audience-oriented, and dialogic communication model, so that village development programs do not remain merely administrative instructions but develop into shared agendas that are understood and owned by village communities.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Public Communication in Local Government

Public communication in government refers to the process through which public institutions convey policies, programs, values, and responsibilities to citizens. This process is not limited to the delivery of information. It also involves building relationships that enable citizens to understand, assess, and respond to the policies being implemented. In democratic governance, public communication is closely related to transparency, accountability, legitimacy, public trust, and community participation. For this reason, government communication should not be understood merely as a one-way flow of messages from the state to citizens. It is also a social practice that connects government and society through message exchange, meaning construction, and feedback mechanisms (Canel, 2020; Canel & Luoma-Aho, 2019; McQuail, 2010).

At the local government level, public communication has a more complex dynamic. Communication takes place within a layered administrative structure, involves various actors, and is influenced by social proximity and local culture. The quality of communication is not determined simply by the amount of information distributed. Message clarity, institutional credibility, policy relevance to citizens' needs, and the availability of spaces for response are also important elements (Canel & Luoma-Aho, 2019). For this reason, policy messages need to be designed by considering the social experiences, language, literacy levels, and practical needs of local communities.

Public communication generally performs three main functions: information, persuasion, and participation. The information function ensures that citizens receive accurate knowledge about policies, procedures, rights, and obligations. The persuasion function aims to build acceptance, support, and trust in policy objectives. The participation function provides space for citizens to ask questions, offer input, share experiences, and become involved in the policy process. These three functions need to operate in balance. Communication that focuses only on information dissemination may be procedurally orderly, but it does not necessarily generate a sense of ownership or shared meaning.

In the Indonesian context, public communication cannot be separated from issues of information transparency and community empowerment. Dimiyati (2013) shows that public understanding and participation in information transparency can be strengthened through structural and cultural approaches. These may include citizen information centers, public consultations, socialization activities, and community meeting spaces. This finding is relevant to the Sarjana Penggerak Desa Program. The program does not only require the delivery of administrative information. It also requires communicative spaces that help communities understand the meaning of the program more comprehensively.

Accordingly, public communication in local government needs to be understood as a layered process involving actors, channels, messages, and social context. Provincial governments, technical implementing agencies, village governments, and beneficiaries occupy different communicative positions. Each actor has its own capacity, interest, and experience in receiving and interpreting policy messages. In the Sarjana Penggerak Desa Program, these different positions are important because a message initially framed as a strategic policy for village human resource development may experience a narrowing of meaning as it passes through bureaucratic structures and reaches the community.

2.2 Strategic Communication and Audience Orientation

Strategic communication emphasizes a planned, coherent, and goal-oriented communication process that seeks to shape particular forms of understanding and action among audiences. In the context of public policy, strategic communication serves to bridge policy design with the social realities of the target groups. A well-designed policy may not succeed if the accompanying message is not clearly formulated, does not respond to audience needs, or is not supported by feedback mechanisms. Strategic communication, therefore, is not only concerned with what the government wants to communicate. Attention must also be given to how messages are received, interpreted, and used by audiences (Heath & Johansen, 2018; Jones, 2008).

Phil Jones' strategic communication perspective is used in this study because it places the audience as the starting point of communication planning. Jones (2008) emphasizes that communication strategy needs to be built on several core principles. These include understanding the audience, setting clear communication objectives, developing strong and relevant messages, selecting appropriate channels, determining the timing of message delivery, and establishing feedback mechanisms. These principles help explain why the effectiveness of policy communication cannot be assessed only by

whether information has been delivered. It must also be seen from the extent to which the message can build alignment of meaning between the sender and the receiver.

Audience orientation is particularly important in government communication. Governments often formulate policy messages using bureaucratic language, formal documents, and internal administrative requirements. Citizens as policy audiences, especially village communities, do not always read these messages through the same frame. They interpret policies through social experience, practical needs, economic conditions, access to information, and their relationship with village governments. For this reason, policy messages need to be translated into language that is easier to understand, closer to everyday life, and able to explain program benefits in concrete terms.

Strategic communication faces additional challenges in programs that involve layered government structures. Policy messages move from the provincial government to technical implementing agencies. They are then passed on to district and subdistrict levels, to village governments, and finally to communities or beneficiaries. At each level, the message may be translated, condensed, prioritized, or even narrowed in meaning. Without strong audience orientation and feedback mechanisms, a policy narrative that is initially strategic may turn into an administrative instruction. In this context, strategic communication becomes important for examining communication gaps in the Sarjana Penggerak Desa Program.

Feedback mechanisms are also an important part of strategic communication. Feedback is not only useful for answering technical questions. More broadly, it helps the government understand how audiences interpret the program. In the Sarjana Penggerak Desa Program, feedback needs to move beyond clarification of requirements, procedures, and reporting. The government needs to understand how village governments, families, beneficiaries, and communities understand the program's objectives, perceive its benefits, and place it within the broader village development agenda. In this way, strategic communication does not stop at information distribution. It develops into a process of constructing shared meaning.

2.3 Messages, Channels, and Participation in Village Development Communication

Development communication has shifted from a top-down model of information dissemination toward a participatory model that positions communities as active subjects of development. From this perspective, development is not only a technical process. It is also a communicative process that shapes public understanding, awareness, participation, and trust in policy (Melkote & Steeves, 2015; Servaes, 2008). Therefore, the discussion of village development in this article is not directed toward development theory in general. Its focus lies in how messages, communication channels, and citizen participation shape the meaning of government programs.

The participatory approach emphasizes that communities should not merely be positioned as recipients of information or objects of policy. They need space to understand program objectives, assess their relevance, express aspirations, and become involved in the implementation process. In village-based programs, participation becomes meaningful when communities do not only follow procedures. They also need to understand their position within the program's objectives. Thus, development communication does not simply guide communities to accept a program. It also builds awareness that the program is part of the community's needs and future.

Putnam's (2000) concept of social capital provides a basis for understanding the relationship between trust, social networks, and community involvement in development communication. Trust and social networks can strengthen the acceptance of policy messages, particularly in village contexts where social ties and mutual cooperation remain important. Fitriyah and Pratiwi (2024) also emphasize the importance of local potential, cultural values, individual characteristics, and regional characteristics in the process of community empowerment. This idea is relevant to the Sarjana Penggerak Desa Program because the program does not only support individual education. It is also expected to strengthen village social capacity through the presence of educated young people as agents of change.

The village public sphere is an important element in development communication. Fitriyah et al. (2022) show that the public sphere should not be understood merely as a formal forum. It is also a dialogic space that requires equality, opportunity, respect for difference, and communicative competence. In the Sarjana Penggerak Desa Program, village forums, community meetings, socialization activities, and informal communication can become spaces for explaining program meaning, clarifying procedures, and building shared understanding. If the public sphere is used only to deliver instructions,

community participation tends to remain passive. Conversely, when it is used to build dialogue, communities are more likely to understand the program as a shared agenda.

The study by Sihabudin et al. (2018) on innovation adoption among the remote Baduy indigenous community in Lebak Regency shows that audience characteristics and communication channels influence program acceptance in local communities. This finding is important because communication success is not determined only by message content. The suitability of communication channels to audience characteristics also matters. In the context of village communities, program messages need to be delivered through trusted channels, using familiar language, and involving local actors who have social legitimacy.

2.4 The Construction of Policy Meaning from a Social Constructivist Perspective

The social constructivist perspective views social reality as the result of construction through interaction, interpretation, and negotiation. Berger and Luckmann (1966) explain that social reality is formed through the processes of externalization, objectivation, and internalization. In public policy, policy meaning does not move automatically from government to society. The same message can be interpreted differently by different actors because each actor has different experiences, interests, social positions, and levels of understanding.

In government public communication, the construction of policy meaning becomes important because policies do not live only in official documents. They also live in the understanding of implementing actors and beneficiaries. The provincial government may frame the Sarjana Penggerak Desa Program as a strategic investment in village human resource development. Technical agencies may understand it as a matter of selection and reporting procedures. Village governments may view it as an administrative responsibility. Beneficiaries may interpret it as financial assistance for education. These differences in interpretation show a gap between the policy meaning intended by the government and the meaning received by policy audiences.

A meaning gap does not necessarily indicate that communication has completely failed. Rather, it shows that information distribution alone is not sufficient to build shared understanding. In many cases, policy communication can function well administratively while remaining weak interpretively. Information is delivered. Procedures are carried out. Documents are completed. Yet, the strategic objectives of the program may not be fully understood by the audience. In the Sarjana Penggerak Desa Program, this condition is important because program sustainability requires more than administrative compliance. It also requires ownership, understanding of long-term objectives, and active participation from village communities.

For this reason, the construction of policy meaning needs to be analyzed through communication processes involving various actors. Village governments, as the final communicative link, have an important role in translating policy messages into local language, explaining program benefits, and connecting program objectives with community needs. This role can only be effective when village governments do not merely receive technical instructions, but also understand the strategic narrative of the program. Thus, social constructivist analysis helps explain why public communication needs to be oriented toward meaning-making, not only toward information delivery.

2.5 Previous Studies and Research Gap

Previous studies on government public communication show that transparency, accountability, institutional credibility, and feedback mechanisms are important elements in building relationships between government and citizens (Canel, 2020; Canel & Luoma-Aho, 2019; McQuail, 2010). Studies on development communication also emphasize the importance of participation, empowerment, dialogue, and message alignment with the social context of communities (Melkote & Steeves, 2015; Servaes, 2008). Meanwhile, studies on public information transparency and community empowerment in Banten highlight the importance of communicative spaces, socialization, public consultation, information channels, and cultural approaches in improving public understanding and participation (Dimiyati, 2013; Sihabudin et al., 2018).

Studies on the public sphere and community empowerment also show that development requires equal spaces for dialogue, the strengthening of social capital, and the use of local potential as a basis for empowerment (Fitriyah et al., 2022; Fitriyah & Pratiwi, 2024). This body of literature provides an important foundation for the present study because it confirms that development communication cannot be separated from social context, culture, communication channels, and the role

of local actors. However, most existing studies still tend to focus on institutional communication, information transparency, digital communication, community participation, or innovation acceptance within local communities.

Research that specifically discusses layered communication processes in village human resource development programs at the provincial government level remains limited. In a program such as Sarjana Penggerak Desa, policy messages move across multiple levels. The message begins with the provincial government, moves to technical implementing agencies, then travels through district and subdistrict structures, continues to village governments, and finally reaches beneficiaries. At each level, the message may experience changes in emphasis and meaning. This gap is important because program success is not determined only by procedural accuracy. It is also determined by the ability of communication to build shared meaning.

This article addresses that gap by examining the Sarjana Penggerak Desa Program as a case of public communication in village development. The focus of the study is not limited to the information channels used by the government. It also examines how policy messages are framed, how they move through bureaucratic structures, how they are translated at the village level, and how they are interpreted by beneficiaries. In doing so, this article distinguishes between administrative communication success and substantive communication success. Administrative success relates to the orderly flow of information, completeness of documents, and procedural compliance. Substantive success relates to the formation of shared understanding, community ownership, and public participation in the strategic objectives of the program.

3. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative approach with a single case study design. This approach was selected because the study sought to understand the communication process, experiences, and interpretations of the actors involved in the implementation of the 2025 Sarjana Penggerak Desa Program. A case study design was used because the research focused on one specific policy case: the public communication of the Banten Provincial Government in implementing the Sarjana Penggerak Desa Program. Through this design, policy communication could be examined in depth within the social, institutional, and administrative contexts in which the program was carried out (Yin, 2014).

This study was grounded in a social constructivist paradigm. This paradigm views social reality as something formed through interaction, experience, and interpretation among actors. On this basis, public communication was not positioned as a neutral process of information delivery. Rather, it was understood as a process through which policy meaning is constructed. The program message could be interpreted differently by the provincial government, technical agencies, village governments, and beneficiaries. These differences emerged because each actor occupied a different position and had distinct experiences, interests, and levels of understanding. This perspective was used to examine how the meaning of the Sarjana Penggerak Desa Program was constructed, negotiated, and reinterpreted across different levels of communication (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Crotty, 1998).

The object of this study was the public communication practice of the Banten Provincial Government in the implementation of the 2025 Sarjana Penggerak Desa Program. The unit of analysis covered the formulation of policy messages, the selection of communication channels, the flow of information delivery, the roles of communication actors, feedback mechanisms, and the meanings constructed by village governments and beneficiaries. With this scope, the study did not merely examine whether program information had been delivered. It also explored how policy messages moved through government structures, were translated at the local level, and produced different understandings among the actors involved.

The informants were selected purposively based on their involvement in policy communication, message management, technical implementation, village-level communication mediation, and program reception. They consisted of actors from the provincial leadership communication layer, the administrative leadership bureau, technical implementing agencies, village governments, and representatives of program beneficiaries. This composition was designed to capture the layered character of public communication, from policy message formulation at the provincial level and technical delivery through government structures to the interpretation of the program at the village level.

Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, non-participant observation, and document analysis. The in-depth interviews were used to explore the experiences, considerations, strategies, and interpretations of actors involved in the communication and implementation of the program. Non-participant observation focused on public

communication practices in socialization activities, coordination, consultation, and field activities related to the Sarjana Penggerak Desa Program. Document analysis was conducted on official speeches, press releases, technical guidelines, social media posts, media coverage, program documents, and other communication materials used in the delivery of policy messages.

The data were analyzed using an interactive qualitative analysis model, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification (Miles et al., 2014). In the data reduction stage, the researcher selected information related to the communication process, message forms, communication channels, actor roles, feedback, and program interpretation. In the data display stage, the findings were organized thematically to show the relationship between administrative communication and the construction of policy meaning. In the conclusion-drawing stage, the researcher interpreted the communication patterns that emerged, including the possible gap between the strategic meaning intended by the provincial government and the meaning received by village governments and beneficiaries.

The data analysis was also guided by Phil Jones' strategic communication perspective. The principles of strategic communication were used to examine the extent to which program communication considered audience orientation, clarity of objectives, message consistency, channel relevance, timing of message delivery, and feedback mechanisms (Jones, 2008). This framework helped distinguish between administrative communication success and substantive communication success. Administrative success refers to the delivery of information, fulfilment of procedures, and operation of formal coordination. Substantive success, by contrast, refers to the formation of shared understanding, a sense of ownership, and alignment of meaning among the provincial government, village governments, and beneficiaries.

Data trustworthiness was maintained through source triangulation and methodological triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information from actors at different levels of policy communication, including provincial actors, technical agencies, village governments, and beneficiaries. Methodological triangulation was carried out by comparing data from interviews, observations, and documents. The findings were also verified through repeated readings of the data to ensure consistency between informant statements, policy documents, and the context of communication practices in the field. This step was necessary to ensure that the interpretation did not rely on a single source of data.

This study also observed research ethics. Informants were informed about the purpose of the study, the use of data, and their rights during the interview process. Their identities could be anonymized when necessary to protect confidentiality and ensure their comfort. Informant statements were used proportionally according to the research context and were not directed toward harming any party. Through these principles, the study sought to maintain data integrity, respect the position of informants, and ensure that the analysis of public communication was conducted academically, ethically, and responsibly (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

4. Results and Discussion

The findings show that the public communication of the Banten Provincial Government in implementing the 2025 Sarjana Penggerak Desa Program did not follow a simple linear path. Program communication moved through a layered bureaucratic structure. The message was first framed at the provincial level, then technically translated by implementing agencies, mediated by village governments, and eventually interpreted by beneficiaries. Administratively, the communication process functioned relatively well. Information was delivered through official letters, technical guidelines, cross-agency coordination, digital media, meetings, socialization activities, and online publications. Substantively, however, this communication process had not fully developed a shared understanding of the program's strategic objectives.

The main finding of this study points to a gap between administrative communication success and substantive communication success. Administrative success was reflected in the delivery of information, the operation of formal coordination, and the use of multiple communication channels. Yet substantive success had not been fully achieved. The Sarjana Penggerak Desa Program was still interpreted differently by the actors involved. The provincial government framed the program as an investment in village human resource development. Some village actors understood it as an administrative responsibility. Beneficiaries, meanwhile, tended to view it as educational assistance. These differences show that public communication cannot be assessed only by the smooth distribution of information. It must also be assessed by its ability to build shared understanding.

4.1 Layered Public Communication and the Reduction of Policy Meaning

The public communication of the Sarjana Penggerak Desa Program began at the level of the Banten Provincial Government. At this level, the program was positioned as part of the village human resource development agenda. The provincial government did not present the program merely as financial assistance, but as a strategic form of support to ensure that villages would have educated young people who could return and contribute to local development. The Governor of Banten, Andra Soni, emphasized the importance of ensuring that the program message reached village heads as key actors at the local level:

"What matters is that this message reaches the village heads: this is a goodwill initiative from the provincial government. It is assistance, not an obligation, and it should be used for the future of the village." (Andra Soni, Governor of Banten Province, interview, December 23, 2025).

This statement indicates that, at the provincial leadership level, the program message was directed toward building an understanding that the Sarjana Penggerak Desa Program was a form of development support, not an instruction that burdened villages. The expressions "goodwill initiative from the provincial government," "assistance," and "the future of the village" show that the initial message carried strategic meaning. Higher education was positioned as an instrument for strengthening village human resource capacity, not merely as financial support for education.

However, as the message moved through the bureaucratic structure, its strategic meaning began to be adjusted into technical-administrative language. Program information was not received directly by the community as a development narrative. It first passed through implementing agencies, district and subdistrict structures, and village governments. At this stage, the policy message was transformed into technical guidelines, requirements, selection mechanisms, disbursement procedures, and reporting obligations. This technical translation was necessary to ensure implementation certainty. At the same time, however, it also had the potential to narrow the meaning of the program into a set of administrative instructions.

From Jones' (2008) strategic communication perspective, this condition highlights the importance of message consistency and audience orientation. The strategic message of the program should not appear only at the provincial leadership level. It needs to be maintained in technical documents, coordination forums, socialization activities, media publications, and communication with village communities. Without a strategic narrative accompanying technical instructions, program communication may run procedurally while remaining weak in building shared meaning.

4.2 Technical Agencies and the Management of Administrative Communication

During the implementation stage, technical agencies played an important role in translating policy messages into administrative instruments. The Banten Provincial Office of Community and Village Empowerment served as a bridge between provincial policy direction and program implementation at the district, subdistrict, and village levels. This role shows that public communication in local government programs is not only about disseminating messages to the public. It also involves arranging coordination flows so that the program can operate according to procedure.

The Head of the Village Community Empowerment Division of Banten Province explained:

"We carry out communication in stages, from the province to the district, then to the subdistrict and village. If there are obstacles, we coordinate them through that channel." (Herman, Head of the Village Community Empowerment Division of Banten Province, interview, December 19, 2025).

This statement shows that program communication followed the logic of local government bureaucracy. A staged communication pattern was needed to maintain procedural certainty, implementation consistency, and alignment with the governance of village financial assistance. However, this pattern also shows that policy messages had to pass through several layers of actors before reaching the beneficiaries. Each layer had different interests, pressures, and communication languages. At this point, the possibility of meaning reduction became more open.

In the context of public communication, technical agencies functioned as policy translators. They ensured that the program could be implemented in an orderly manner and in accordance with regulations. Yet this technical function could also make administrative aspects the most dominant message. As a result, village governments and communities were more likely to perceive the program as a series of requirements, procedures, and reporting obligations rather than as an agenda

for village human resource development. This finding shows that communication may succeed administratively without necessarily succeeding substantively.

4.3 Forms of Communication: Formal, Digital, Face-to-Face, and Online Publication

The public communication of the Sarjana Penggerak Desa Program used several forms of communication at the same time. These included formal-administrative communication, digital communication, face-to-face communication, and online publication. These forms complemented one another, although each served a different function in the delivery of policy messages.

Formal-administrative communication was the most dominant form. Official letters, technical guidelines, program manuals, and implementation documents were used as the main references. Formal documents served to maintain legitimacy, procedural certainty, and implementation consistency across levels of government. Within local government bureaucracy, this form of communication was important because the program was related to the governance of village financial assistance, budget use, beneficiary selection, and administrative accountability. However, the dominance of formal documents also meant that program messages tended to be read through the framework of requirements, procedures, and reporting.

Digital communication complemented formal communication. WhatsApp groups and other digital coordination channels were used to speed up clarification, share technical information, and respond to practical problems in the field. Digital channels made coordination faster and more flexible, especially when village governments needed immediate explanations. Nevertheless, the findings indicate that digital communication functioned more as a tool for technical coordination than as a space for participatory dialogue. The interactions that emerged generally revolved around clarifying requirements, procedures, disbursement mechanisms, and reporting. Space for deepening the strategic meaning of the program remained limited.

Face-to-face communication was carried out through meetings, socialization activities, local coordination, and village forums. This form of communication was important because it allowed direct clarification, language adjustment, and the strengthening of understanding according to local contexts. In face-to-face communication, village governments had space to translate technical information into language that was closer to the community. However, the effectiveness of face-to-face communication still depended on how deeply village governments understood the program's strategic narrative. If village governments understood the program only as an administrative obligation, face-to-face socialization also risked becoming a delivery of procedures rather than a process of meaning construction.

Online publications and social media served as initial sources of information and as a means of framing the program in the wider public sphere. Social media could expand information reach, accelerate message dissemination, and introduce the program to the public. However, social media had not yet become the main source for building deeper understanding among beneficiaries. The findings show that beneficiaries still needed confirmation from village governments to obtain clearer explanations. Thus, message legitimacy at the village level was determined not only by the speed of digital channels, but also by social proximity, trust, and the local authority of village governments.

Overall, these forms of communication created a multichannel system. However, a multichannel system does not automatically produce participatory communication. Multiple channels can broaden information distribution, but they do not necessarily deepen understanding. In the Sarjana Penggerak Desa Program, communication channels were already available. The next challenge is to strengthen their dialogic function so that communication does not stop at technical clarification.

4.4 Village Government as a Mediator of Policy Meaning

Village governments occupied a central position in the communication of the Sarjana Penggerak Desa Program because they served as the final link between the provincial government and the community. At this level, policy messages were not only forwarded. They were also translated into language and contexts closer to residents' everyday experiences. Village governments explained procedures, provided clarification, guided prospective beneficiaries, and helped the community understand the program.

The Head of Tanagara Village explained:

"Information from the district was conveyed to the community through a village meeting so that everyone could understand and ask questions directly." (Marsaad, Head of Tanagara Village, Cadasari–Pandeglang, interview, December 25, 2025).

This statement shows that village meetings became an important space in the communication process. Unlike official letters or digital coordination, which tend to be administrative, village meetings allowed residents to receive direct explanations and ask questions. At this point, village governments acted as mediators of meaning, not merely as technical implementers. Through village governments, policy messages could be translated into information that was easier for the community to understand.

Even so, this mediating role depended heavily on how deeply village governments understood the program's strategic objectives. If village governments only received and understood the message as a technical instruction, the message conveyed to the community would also tend to be procedural. Conversely, if village governments were equipped with a clear strategic narrative, village-level socialization could become a space for constructing shared meaning. Therefore, village governments need to be positioned not only as communication channels, but also as interpretive actors who determine how policy is understood at the local level.

4.5 Meaning Gaps among the Provincial Government, Village Governments, and Beneficiaries

The most important finding of this study is the existence of meaning gaps among the actors involved. At the provincial level, the Sarjana Penggerak Desa Program was understood as a strategic policy to strengthen village human resource capacity. The program was associated with the future of villages, the improvement of young people's quality, and long-term development needs. This meaning was visionary because it positioned higher education as an instrument of village empowerment.

At the village government level, the interpretation of the program was more varied. Village governments understood the program as an opportunity to improve residents' access to education and strengthen local human resources. In this interpretation, villages were not only administrative implementers but also institutional beneficiaries, as the program was seen as encouraging the emergence of more educated young villagers. At the same time, however, village governments also viewed the program through an administrative framework because its implementation was tied to technical guidelines, selection, verification, disbursement, and reporting.

At the beneficiary level, the interpretation of the program tended to be more pragmatic. The program was primarily understood as educational assistance or a scholarship because this was the aspect directly experienced by beneficiaries. One beneficiary from Tanagara Village stated:

"At first, I found out about it from social media, then I asked the village government. I understood this program as a scholarship, but the fund disbursement mechanism was somewhat confusing." (Beneficiary from Tanagara Village, interview, December 25, 2025).

This statement reveals two important points. First, social media served as an initial source of information, but clearer understanding was still sought through the village government. Second, beneficiaries interpreted the program mainly as a scholarship or educational assistance. This interpretation was not incorrect. However, it shows that the strategic narrative regarding beneficiaries' contribution to village development had not been fully internalized. Beneficiaries knew that the program supported their education, but they did not yet fully understand their position as prospective village development actors.

This meaning gap indicates that program communication succeeded in delivering basic information, but had not fully built shared understanding of the program's long-term objectives. From a social constructivist perspective, policy meaning does not move automatically from government to society. Meaning is shaped through communication experiences, actor positions, and each actor's social context. The provincial government constructed the program's meaning as an investment in human resources. Village governments interpreted it within the framework of local implementation. Beneficiaries interpreted it through their experience of receiving educational support.

The findings also show that public communication cannot be understood merely as message transmission. Policy messages do not only need to arrive. They also need to be understood in line with the expected strategic meaning. In the Sarjana Penggerak Desa Program, the main problem was not the absence of communication channels. Channels were available in the form of formal documents, digital coordination, meetings, socialization activities, and social media. The main issue lay in the weak alignment of meaning among the provincial, village, and beneficiary levels.

4.6 Audience Orientation and the Limitations of Feedback

Analysis based on the strategic communication perspective shows that communication in the Sarjana Penggerak Desa Program was still more oriented toward bureaucratic implementers than toward the final audience. Village governments became the main audience because they were the local implementers. This is understandable within village governance. However, it also carried consequences. Beneficiaries, families, village youth, and the wider community were not always positioned as the main subjects in the construction of meaning.

The implementer-centered communication orientation caused program messages to be formulated largely in procedural language. The most prominent information concerned beneficiary requirements, selection mechanisms, coordination flows, disbursement, and reporting. This language was important for ensuring administrative order. However, procedural language was not sufficient to explain why the program mattered for the future of the village. From Jones' (2008) perspective, strategic communication must begin with an understanding of the audience. Final audiences do not only need technical information. They also need a narrative that explains the benefits, roles, expectations, and social consequences of the program.

Feedback mechanisms in this program were already available, but most of them remained technical-administrative in nature. Feedback emerged through digital coordination, meetings, or direct communication with village governments. However, the content of feedback was mostly related to questions about requirements, procedures, documents, schedules, and reporting. There was no clearly visible mechanism specifically designed to capture beneficiaries' experiences, family expectations, community perceptions, or public concerns about the program's sustainability.

This limitation indicates that communication had not yet become fully dialogic. The use of many channels does not automatically produce participatory communication if the substance of interaction remains instructional and technical. WhatsApp, social media, and meetings can accelerate information delivery, but they do not always create meaningful dialogue. For communication to become participatory, the government needs to design forums that allow final audiences to express their understanding, questions, expectations, and experiences regarding the program.

In this context, the function of feedback needs to be expanded. Feedback should not only be understood as a mechanism for answering technical questions. It should also serve as an instrument for reading how policy is interpreted. The government needs to know whether beneficiaries understand the program as a mandate to return and contribute to village development, whether families understand the program's long-term objectives, and whether village residents see the program as a shared agenda. Without such information, it is difficult for the government to ensure that the program's strategic meaning truly reaches the intended audience.

4.7 Discussion: From Administrative Success to Shared Meaning

Overall, the findings show that the public communication of the Sarjana Penggerak Desa Program occupied an ambivalent position. On the one hand, program communication already had structure, channels, and administrative legitimacy. Information moved through clear government channels. Formal documents served as references. Digital coordination accelerated clarification. Village meetings opened space for explanation. Social media expanded the reach of information. Administratively, this pattern helped the program run and reduced procedural confusion.

On the other hand, program communication had not fully succeeded in building shared meaning. The meaning of the program remained fragmented according to the position of each actor. The provincial government emphasized the future of villages. Village governments emphasized implementation and verification. Beneficiaries emphasized educational assistance. This fragmentation is important because it shows that public communication cannot stop at procedural clarity. A program intended as an agenda for village human resource development may lose its strategic force if it is understood only as educational assistance.

Within Canel and Luoma-Aho's (2019) framework, public sector communication should bridge the gap between government institutions and citizens. The findings of this study show that this bridge had been formed administratively, but was not yet fully strong interpretively. Village governments did act as connectors between the provincial government and the community. However, this connecting role requires support in the form of narratives, communication materials, and dialogic spaces so that village governments do not merely deliver procedures. In other words, village governments need to be positioned not only as technical implementers, but also as mediators of policy meaning.

These findings are also consistent with the idea of participatory development communication, which emphasizes dialogue, community involvement, and the strengthening of local understanding. Village-based development programs require more than the delivery of information from the top down. They require communication that can connect government objectives with the social experiences of communities. In the context of the Sarjana Penggerak Desa Program, participatory communication is needed so that beneficiaries do not only understand themselves as recipients of assistance, but also as part of the village development process.

Therefore, the public communication model needed here is not one that eliminates administrative communication, but one that extends it. Administrative communication remains important for maintaining certainty, accountability, and implementation consistency. However, it needs to be complemented by substantive communication that explains program meaning, builds a sense of ownership, and opens space for dialogue. This model may be understood as meaning-based participatory public communication, namely communication that combines procedural clarity with the alignment of meaning among stakeholders.

At minimum, this model includes four elements. First, strategic messages must accompany every technical message. Official letters, technical guidelines, and socialization activities should not only explain requirements and procedures, but also clarify that the program is an investment in village human resources. Second, communication materials need to be adjusted to the final audience. Beneficiaries, families, village youth, and communities need simple language, concrete examples, and explanations of their role in the program. Third, village governments need to be equipped with usable narrative tools so that they can explain the program without reducing its meaning to administrative matters. Fourth, feedback mechanisms need to be expanded into listening forums that capture the experiences, expectations, and interpretations of beneficiaries and village residents.

The main contribution of this study is to show that the success of public communication in village development programs cannot be assessed only by the smooth distribution of information. Communication success must also be measured by the government's ability to build shared meaning. In the Sarjana Penggerak Desa Program, the central issue was not the lack of communication channels, but the weak alignment of meaning among the provincial government, village governments, and beneficiaries. Therefore, the public communication needed is communication that does not merely inform, but also explains, listens, interprets, and builds a sense of ownership.

Table 1. Synthesis of Findings Based on the Strategic Communication Perspective

Strategic Communication Aspect	Empirical Findings	Analytical Interpretation	Implications
Audience orientation	The communication flow prioritized village governments as implementers and intermediaries.	The final audience had not been fully positioned as the main subject in meaning construction.	Communication materials need to be specifically designed for beneficiaries, families, village youth, and village communities.
Message consistency	Strategic messages appeared at the provincial level, while technical messages dominated during implementation.	Administrative consistency did not automatically produce consistency of meaning.	Every technical message needs to be accompanied by a strategic narrative about the objective of village human resource development.
Channel selection	Formal documents, digital coordination, village	The multichannel system expanded information reach	Communication channels need to be integrated with

	meetings, and social media were used simultaneously.	but had not fully built dialogue.	clarification forums and more participatory listening forums.
Feedback mechanism	Feedback mostly concerned requirements, procedures, reporting, and technical obstacles.	Dialogue remained administrative and had not sufficiently captured the experiences and interpretations of the final audience.	The government needs to develop feedback mechanisms that read public perceptions, expectations, and sense of ownership.
Policy meaning	The program was interpreted as a strategic investment, an administrative responsibility, and educational assistance.	Different actors constructed different meanings of the same policy.	Meaning alignment needs to be carried out continuously through dialogic, contextual, and audience-oriented communication.

5. Conclusion

This study shows that the public communication of the Banten Provincial Government in implementing the 2025 Sarjana Penggerak Desa Program operated through a layered, hierarchical, and administrative communication structure. This communication pattern was able to channel policy information from the provincial government to technical agencies, village governments, and program beneficiaries. However, the successful distribution of information did not necessarily lead to the formation of shared meaning among the actors involved. The findings indicate that public communication in village development programs cannot be assessed only by whether information has been delivered. It must also be examined in terms of how far policy messages are able to build shared understanding.

The forms of communication used in this program included formal-administrative communication, digital coordination, face-to-face communication, and online publication. These four forms supported coordination, clarified procedures, and helped monitor program implementation. Nevertheless, the dominant communication pattern remained largely technical and bureaucratic. As a result, the strategic meaning of the Sarjana Penggerak Desa Program as an agenda for village human resource development risked being narrowed into administrative assistance or financial support for education.

This study also found differences in meaning construction among the provincial government, village governments, and beneficiaries. The provincial government interpreted the program as a strategic investment in the future of villages. Village governments acted as communication mediators, yet their interpretation at the village level was still strongly influenced by administrative demands, such as selection, verification, fund disbursement, and reporting. Meanwhile, beneficiaries tended to understand the program as direct educational assistance. These differences show that policy messages do not move automatically from the government to the community. Instead, they are reinterpreted according to the position, experience, and interests of each actor.

Theoretically, this study emphasizes that public communication in local government programs should be understood as a process of meaning construction, not merely as a process of information delivery. Through Phil Jones' strategic communication perspective, this study shows that audience orientation, message consistency, channel selection, and feedback mechanisms are important factors in bridging the gap between the policy messages designed by the government and the meanings received by the community. Therefore, the success of public communication should be viewed not only from an administrative perspective, but also from substantive and interpretive dimensions.

Practically, the Banten Provincial Government needs to strengthen a more participatory and meaning-oriented model of public communication. The strategic message of the program should consistently accompany technical messages so that the community understands that the Sarjana Penggerak Desa Program is not merely educational assistance. It is part of a broader agenda for village human resource development. Village governments also need to be equipped with simple, clear, and contextual communication narratives so that they can explain the program to residents without reducing its meaning to administrative matters. Feedback mechanisms should also be expanded, moving beyond technical clarification toward dialogic spaces that can capture the experiences, expectations, and interpretations of beneficiaries and village communities.

This study has limitations because it focuses on a single program case in Banten Province and has not covered a wider range of villages with different socio-cultural characteristics. Future research may expand the study locations and involve non-beneficiary residents, community leaders, beneficiaries' families, and local education actors. Further studies may also use a longitudinal approach to examine changes in public interpretation, community participation, and the sustainability of beneficiaries' contributions throughout the program cycle.

Funding

This research received no external funding. The APC was funded by the authors.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Not available.

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