



The Effectiveness of Subdistrict Head Leadership in Increasing Community Participation in Nanggalo Subdistrict, Padang City

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ABSTRACT

Although the government has provided various participatory forums at the subdistrict level, community involvement in development planning and evaluation remains relatively low. Previous research has generally focused on the role of subdistrict heads in improving bureaucratic performance and public services, while studies on the effectiveness of participatory leadership in increasing community participation remain limited. This study aims to analyze the effectiveness of the Nanggalo Subdistrict Head's leadership in increasing community participation and to identify the strategies, dynamics, and barriers that influence residents' involvement in development. The study employs a qualitative approach with an interpretive paradigm through a single-case holistic case study design in Nanggalo Subdistrict, Padang City. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis involving the subdistrict head, subdistrict officials, community leaders, and residents selected through purposive sampling. Analysis was conducted interactively through data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The results indicate that the effectiveness of the sub district head's leadership is determined by the ability to establish dialogic communication, facilitate collaboration, and strengthen public trust. Community participation remains dominant during the program implementation phase, whereas involvement in decision making and evaluation is not yet optimal. This study found that social proximity has a dual impact: it enhances participation while simultaneously potentially creating network exclusivity and information access disparities.

Keywords: Participatory Leadership; Community Participation; Social Capital; Public Communication; Local Government

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INTRODUCTION

Public participation is one of the key principles of democratic governance and sustainable development. Public involvement in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of development initiatives is a critical factor in ensuring that government programs align with the needs and aspirations of the community. Furthermore, public participation also contributes to enhancing transparency, accountability, and the effectiveness of regional development (Nihayah & Dewi, 2024; Tahir et al., 2020). Public participation in development still faces various challenges. Various studies indicate that community involvement is generally more prominent during the implementation phase of activities compared to the planning and decision making phases (Akbar Roihan & Hambali, 2024; Sagita, 2016). This situation suggests that participatory development has not yet been fully optimized. Low levels of community involvement in the development process risk resulting in programs that fail to adequately reflect community needs and diminish the effectiveness of government led development initiatives (Sihombing, 2021). Sub districts hold a strategic position as they serve as a bridge between local governments and the community. Unlike local governments, which focus on formulating macro policies, sub-districts interact directly with the community through public services, development coordination, and community empowerment activities. Therefore, the success of participatory development at the local level is greatly influenced by the sub-district head's ability to establish communication, coordination, and collaboration with the community (Firman et al., 2026; Pane et al., 2025).

The Nanggalo subdistrict of Padang was selected as the research site because it actively involves the community in various development forums, such as the Development Planning Consultative Meeting

(Musrenbang) and the Development Coordination Meeting (Rakorbang). These forums serve as a platform for the community to voice their aspirations and development needs for the region. However, as is the case in many other regions, efforts to enhance community participation remain a challenge that requires special attention to ensure that the development carried out is truly participatory and responsive to community needs. This study employs the perspectives of participatory leadership, facilitative leadership, and transformational leadership. These three perspectives emphasize that leaders do not merely function as decision-makers but also as facilitators capable of fostering communication, trust, and community engagement in achieving shared goals (Daeli et al., 2025; Hijab et al., 2025; Marlina & Aminuddin, 2025). In the context of subdistrict governance, the effectiveness of a subdistrict head's leadership is not only measured by their success in performing administrative functions but also by their ability to encourage community participation in development. Most studies indicate that a district head's leadership influences improvements in employee performance, work discipline, organizational effectiveness, and the quality of public services (Afrida & Husna, 2022; Haifa & Firdaus, 2025; Hergiansyah et al., 2025; Reinold et al., 2023). Other studies indicate that leadership also plays a role in increasing community engagement in various development programs and public activities (Athaya Syarif et al., 2024; Kamila et al., 2020). However, most of these studies still focus on internal bureaucratic aspects or merely describe the level of community participation without providing an in depth explanation of how sub district head leadership can encourage community participation.

Based on a review of previous research, several research gaps have been identified. First, research on sub-district head leadership is still dominated by studies on employee performance and public services. Second, there is still limited research explaining the mechanisms underlying the relationship between sub-district head leadership and community participation. Third, studies on sub-district head leadership in an urban context remain relatively scarce compared to research at the village level or within bureaucratic organizations. This study offers novelty in its effort to explain the effectiveness of district head leadership in enhancing community participation through dialogic communication, social closeness, and the building of public trust. Thus, this study examines district head leadership not only from an administrative perspective but also from a relational perspective that influences community engagement in development. This study is situated within the fields of local government leadership, community participation, and collaborative governance. It is expected to enrich the literature on participatory leadership in local government, particularly regarding the relationship between district head leadership and community participation. Practically, the results of this study can serve as input for local governments and subdistrict administrations in formulating more participatory leadership strategies to enhance community involvement in development. This study aims to analyze the effectiveness of the leadership of the Head of Nanggalo Subdistrict in increasing community participation, identify the obstacles faced, and explain the strategies used to encourage community involvement in regional development.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with an interpretive paradigm to gain an in-depth understanding of how the effectiveness of the subdistrict head's leadership influences community participation in development. This approach was chosen because the study focuses on interpreting the experiences and perceptions of the actors involved in the development process. The method used is a case study with a holistic single case study design (Yin, 2018). This design was chosen because the study focuses on a single case namely, the effectiveness of the Nanggalo Subdistrict Head's leadership in enhancing community participation which is analyzed as a unified social system. The research was conducted in Nanggalo Subdistrict, Padang City. This location was selected purposively because it actively conducts participatory development forums such as Musrenbang and Rakorbang and possesses the characteristics of an urban area with a heterogeneous population. Furthermore, increasing community participation remains a challenge in supporting regional development.

Research informants were selected using purposive sampling, consisting of the Nanggalo Subdistrict Head, the Subdistrict Secretary, relevant section heads, community leaders, RT/RW heads, community members who are active in development activities, and those who are less active. The selection of these two groups of community members aimed to obtain diverse perspectives on the effectiveness of the subdistrict head's leadership. Data collection was conducted until data saturation was reached, defined as the point at which the information obtained became repetitive and no new significant data was found. Data was collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured approach,

lasting 45–90 minutes, recorded with the informants' consent, and transcribed verbatim. Documentation included Musrenbang reports, Rakorbang minutes, sub district profiles, as well as relevant planning documents and development activity reports. This study employs dimensions of leadership effectiveness grounded in the theories of participatory leadership, facilitative leadership, and transformational leadership, namely: (1) communication and openness, (2) facilitation of participation, (3) collaboration and coordination, (4) motivation and community empowerment, (5) responsiveness to community aspirations, and (6) building public trust. These dimensions form the basis for the development of interview guidelines and data analysis.

Data analysis utilized the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which includes data condensation, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The analysis was conducted through open coding, axial coding, and selective coding to identify themes related to the effectiveness of sub-district heads' leadership and community participation. To ensure research quality, source triangulation, methodological triangulation, and member checking techniques were employed. Additionally, the study applied the principles of trustworthiness, which include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The entire research process was documented through field notes, interview transcripts, and analysis results as an audit trail. This study focuses on a single subdistrict; therefore, the findings are not intended for statistical generalization but rather to provide an in depth understanding of the effectiveness of subdistrict head leadership in enhancing community participation within the context of local government.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Communication Patterns of District Heads in Building Participatory Relationships

The research findings indicate that the communication patterns employed by the Nanggalo Subdistrict Head tend to be interpersonal, persuasive, and dialogic. Communication takes place not only through formal channels such as government meetings, Development Planning Consultations (Musrenbang), and the dissemination of administrative information but also through informal approaches, such as direct visits to local communities, participation in social activities, and personal interactions with community leaders and residents. This communication pattern indicates that the sub district head's leadership is not solely focused on administrative functions but also on building social relationships with the community. The community views the sub-district government's openness in communication as a factor that encourages increased resident engagement in development activities. One informant stated:

"In the past, people rarely participated in community meetings because they felt the government only provided one-sided information, but now the district head often comes in person and is willing to listen to residents' opinions."

(Community Informant A, 2026)

A similar statement was made by another informant:

"Now the district head comes directly to the community more often, so people feel closer to him and don't hesitate to voice their complaints or suggestions."

(Community Informant B, 2026)

A community leader also stated:

"The community is now more open about expressing its concerns because the subdistrict head is not only present at official events but also attends community activities or addresses community issues."

(Community Leader, 2026)

The findings indicate that interpersonal communication plays a crucial role in fostering emotional closeness between the government and the community. The social closeness built through direct interaction is able to reduce the psychological distance and *power distance* between the government and citizens. This creates a sense of security for the public to voice their aspirations and strengthens their confidence that their opinions will be heard and acted upon. The effectiveness of dialogic communication in Nanggalo Subdistrict is inextricably linked to the heterogeneous nature of the community. This heterogeneity is evident in differences in age, educational level, occupation, and the degree of social engagement among residents. Some residents work as private sector employees, business owners, and informal sector workers with limited time to participate in

government activities. Additionally, varying levels of education and access to information influence how the community receives and responds to government messages.

As an urban area, Nanggalo Subdistrict is also characterized by high community mobility, relatively dynamic social interactions, and looser social networks compared to rural areas. These conditions mean that formal communication relying solely on circulars, announcements, or official forums has not been able to optimally reach all segments of the community. Consequently, some members of the community risk experiencing an information gap and viewing development as solely the government's responsibility. Interpersonal communication through direct visits and social interaction proves more effective, as it allows the subdistrict head to tailor messages to the diverse characteristics of the community. This approach also fosters a more equitable space for dialogue, enabling residents to feel valued and have the opportunity to voice their aspirations openly. A subdistrict official explained:

“Direct communication is more effective than simply conveying information through letters or announcements because people feel more valued when they are invited to discuss matters in person.”

(Subdistrict Official, 2026)

These findings align with the perspective of *participatory leadership*, which emphasizes the importance of two-way communication in fostering community engagement, as well as *transformational leadership*, which views communication as a means of building a shared vision and public trust (Daeli et al., 2025; Hijab et al., 2025). However, unlike previous studies that generally view communication as an instrument for conveying information and bureaucratic coordination (Afrida & Husna, 2022; Haifa & Firdaus, 2025), this study demonstrates that in the context of a heterogeneous urban subdistrict, the effectiveness of communication is determined by a leader's ability to integrate formal and informal approaches in accordance with the community's social characteristics. This finding expands the study of participatory leadership by demonstrating that interpersonal communication functions not only as one of the instruments of leadership but also as a connecting mechanism that transforms the sub-district head's leadership into community participation through the establishment of social closeness and public trust. In other words, the success of participatory leadership at the subdistrict level is determined not only by the intensity of information dissemination but by the leader's ability to build social relationships that are adaptive to the community's characteristics. The communication patterns implemented have not yet fully reached all segments of the community. Some residents still exhibit low participation due to time constraints, low social engagement, and unequal access to information. One informant stated:

“Sometimes people don't attend because they receive information about the event too late or because it conflicts with their daily work.”

(Community Informant C, 2026)

Some residents prefer to obtain information through community leaders rather than interacting directly with the subdistrict government. This indicates that the effectiveness of government communication is also influenced by social networks and the characteristics of the local community. The findings of this study indicate an interrelated relationship between dialogic communication, social closeness, public trust, and community participation. The more intensive the interpersonal communication established by the sub district head, the stronger the social closeness and public trust in the sub district government, which ultimately drives increased community participation in development.

Dynamics of Community Participation in Subdistrict Development Programs

Research findings indicate that community participation in Nanggalo Subdistrict takes various forms in development activities and public services. This participation is not limited to the presence of in deliberations and community service activities, but also includes providing suggestions, involvement in the implementation of environmental programs, and social support for subdistrict government activities. Based on Cohen and Uphoff's (1977) theory of participation, community participation encompasses four stages: decision making, implementation, utilization of outcomes, and development evaluation. Research findings indicate that community participation in Nanggalo Subdistrict remains predominantly focused on the implementation stage of activities, such as community service projects, environmental initiatives, and social community activities. Conversely, community involvement in the decision-making and program evaluation stages remains relatively

low. Findings from observations and a review of documents from the 2026 Nanggalo Subdistrict Musrenbang (Development Planning Consultation Forum) indicate that the level of community attendance in planning forums does not yet reflect the representation of all social groups. Participants in the deliberations are still dominated by community leaders, RT/RW heads, and adults, while the involvement of youth, informal sector workers, and people with high job mobility tends to be lower. This situation indicates that the available formal participation spaces have not yet been fully able to reach all segments of society.

An informant stated:

“People are usually more active once activities are underway, such as community service or environmental activities, but many still do not attend meetings.”

(Community Informant C, 2026)

These findings indicate that patterns of community participation tend to be operational rather than participatory in the decision-making process. According to Cohen and Uphoff (1977), participation concentrated at the implementation stage reflects instrumental participation, whereas participation that involves the community from the planning stage through to evaluation indicates substantive participation. Thus, the quality of community participation in Nanggalo Subdistrict still needs to be improved so that the community does not merely act as program implementers but also as active participants in determining the direction and evaluating development. Low participation during the decision-making and evaluation stages is influenced by several factors. First, some community members still view development as the government’s primary responsibility, so citizen involvement is not yet regarded as a shared necessity. Second, time constraints due to work demands, particularly among urban residents, prevent all citizens from attending deliberative forums. Third, there remains a perception that community aspirations are not always acted upon, which reduces motivation to participate. An informant explained:

“Sometimes people want to participate in activities, but the timing often conflicts with work, so not everyone can attend.”

(Community Informant D, 2026)

The effectiveness of the subdistrict head’s leadership is a key factor in overcoming barriers to participation. Research findings indicate that the Nanggalo Subdistrict Head has sought to increase community engagement through a proactive outreach approach, adjusting the timing of activities, utilizing community leaders as communication intermediaries, and making direct visits to residential neighborhoods. These strategies aim to expand access to information and reach community groups that have historically been underrepresented in formal forums. Community participation levels are also influenced by the social closeness between the sub-district government and the community. A community leader stated:

“If the community feels involved from the start, they are usually more enthusiastic about participating in development activities because they feel that the program is also a joint effort.”

(Community Leader, 2026)

This finding indicates that *a sense of ownership* regarding development programs is a key factor in increasing community participation. The higher the level of community involvement in the early stages of development, the greater their commitment to supporting the implementation and sustainability of the program. This study also found disparities in participation among different community groups. Residents who have closer social ties with community leaders or government officials tend to be more active in development activities compared to residents who have limited access to such social networks. Additionally, the participation of younger age groups in deliberations and development activities remains relatively low compared to that of adults. The low youth participation indicates a gap between conventional participation mechanisms and the preferences of the younger generation, who tend to prioritize digital communication, time flexibility, and more adaptive forms of engagement. This situation indicates the need for innovative participation mechanisms, such as the use of digital media and community-based communication forums, to make the development process more inclusive.

Community participation is influenced not only by administrative factors, but also by social capital, communication networks, and relational closeness. On one hand, strong social ties can encourage community engagement. However, on the other hand, reliance on specific social networks has the potential to create

disparities in participation and hinder the realization of the principle of inclusivity in participatory development. Consequently, the aspirations of community groups with limited social access risk not being optimally accommodated. The findings of this study align with those of (Nihayah & Dewi, 2024), who state that community participation in governance is influenced by the openness of government communication and the level of public trust. Additionally, (Sagita, 2016) explains that community involvement in local government is significantly influenced by participatory spaces and the social relationships established by the government. Unlike previous studies that emphasized the importance of providing formal participatory spaces, this study demonstrates that the quality of community participation is determined not only by the availability of participatory forums but also by the district head's leadership ability to foster a sense of ownership, social trust, and inclusive engagement mechanisms for diverse community groups. The dynamics of community participation in Nanggalo Subdistrict indicate that increasing participation cannot be achieved solely through the expansion of formal participatory spaces. Participatory leadership by the subdistrict head plays a crucial role in transforming dialogic communication into *a sense of ownership*, building social trust, and fostering more substantive community participation at all stages of development.

Social and Communication Barriers to Increasing Community Participation

Research findings indicate that the social and communication barriers observed in Nanggalo Subdistrict are inextricably linked to the effectiveness of the subdistrict head's leadership in managing relations between the government and the community. In this context, the subdistrict head's leadership serves not only as an administrator of government affairs but also as a communication facilitator responsible for identifying underserved community groups and developing adaptive participation strategies. The Nanggalo subdistrict head has undertaken various efforts to address participation barriers, such as a proactive outreach approach, direct visits to community neighborhoods, engaging community leaders as information liaisons, and adjusting the timing of activities to better align with the conditions of urban communities. However, the effectiveness of these strategies remains limited because the dissemination of information tends to rely on pre-existing social networks. This situation indicates the dominance of *bonding social capital* strong social ties within specific groups, such as relationships between government officials, community leaders, and residents active in social activities. This type of social capital has proven effective in encouraging participation among groups already connected to the government. However, the dominance of *bonding social capital* also has the potential to create information exclusivity and participation disparities, as communities with limited social access tend to receive information more slowly and have fewer opportunities for involvement.

The subdistrict government needs to strengthen *bridging social capital* that is, social networks capable of connecting various community groups with different ages, occupations, educational levels, and degrees of social engagement. Strengthening *bridging social capital* is essential to ensure that the participatory development process not only involves active community groups but also reaches those who have historically been underrepresented. As an urban area with high community mobility, Nanggalo Subdistrict requires a more flexible and multi channel communication strategy. The use of digital media, such as neighborhood level (RT/RW) WhatsApp groups, the subdistrict's official Instagram account, online information portals, and digital based feedback forums, can serve as alternatives to reach the working-age population, the younger generation, and community members who lack the time to attend in-person forums. Strengthening digital communication must be balanced with direct communication approaches because not all residents have the same level of digital literacy or access to technology. The elderly and the (those with limited internet access) are at risk of facing an information gap if development communication relies solely on digital media. Therefore, integrating face to face and digital communication is a more inclusive strategy for expanding the scope of community participation.

In contrast to the study by (Firman et al., 2026), which emphasizes the positive role of social relationships in supporting governance, this study shows that social relationships have a paradoxical nature. On one hand, social closeness can strengthen public trust and increase community participation. However, on the other hand, social relationships that are overly concentrated within specific groups have the potential to create network exclusivity, information access gaps, and participation disparities. These findings expand the literature on participatory leadership and social capital by demonstrating that social closeness does not always result in equitable participation. The effectiveness of a sub-district head's leadership is determined by their ability to balance the utilization of *bonding social capital* with the strengthening of *bridging social capital* through inclusive and adaptive communication strategies. The relationships between concepts identified in this study indicate that

the dominance of *bonding social capital* can lead to unequal information distribution and participation disparities. Conversely, district head leadership that can implement inclusive communication strategies and strengthen *bridging social capital* has the potential to foster broader, more equitable, and sustainable community participation.

Participatory Leadership Strategies to Enhance Community Engagement

The research findings indicate that the Nanggalo Subdistrict Head employs a participatory leadership strategy that emphasizes interpersonal communication, social closeness, and direct engagement with the community. This strategy is implemented through consultative forums, outreach on development programs, field visits, and direct communication with community leaders and local residents. This approach plays a crucial role in fostering participatory relationships between the subdistrict government and the community. The effectiveness of the district head's leadership in this study was analyzed based on six indicators, namely: (1) communication and openness, (2) facilitation of participation, (3) collaboration and coordination, (4) community motivation and empowerment, (5) responsiveness to community aspirations, and (6) building public trust. The research results indicate that the leadership strategies implemented by the Nanggalo Subdistrict Head have met all six indicators, albeit with varying levels of achievement. The Nanggalo Subdistrict Head actively fosters two-way communication through direct visits to community neighborhoods and the involvement of local leaders in the dissemination of development information. This strategy is not only oriented toward communicating government programs but also aims to build public trust and *a sense of ownership* regarding regional development. A subdistrict official explained:

"If we rely solely on notification letters or official announcements, the public often responds poorly. However, when the subdistrict head comes directly to the community and engages in dialogue, the public's response is usually much better."

(Subdistrict Official, 2026)

This statement indicates that formal administrative communication has not been fully effective in reaching all segments of society. The research findings identified that groups that are relatively less reached by formal communication include the younger generation, informal sector workers, private-sector employees with high mobility, and residents with limited involvement in community activities. The ineffectiveness of formal communication is influenced by several factors, including the public's limited time to attend in-person forums, low interest in government activities, and information dissemination patterns that still rely on circular letters and community leaders as intermediaries. These conditions result in some members of the public receiving information late or not at all regarding development programs. Engaging community leaders is a key strategy for expanding the reach of government communication. The subdistrict government utilizes the RT/RW network, community leaders, and community groups as liaisons between the government and residents. A community leader stated:

"People are more likely to participate in activities if they are invited directly by the neighborhood leader or if the subdistrict head is present among the community."

(Community Leader, 2026)

These findings indicate that local social relationships play a crucial role in fostering community participation. However, overreliance on specific social networks also has the potential to lead to disparities in participation, as community groups with limited social access tend to be less involved in the development process. The participatory leadership strategy implemented by the Nanggalo Subdistrict Head still faces several limitations. The interpersonal approach requires intense interaction and adequate resources, so it has not yet been able to reach all segments of the community equally. Community participation is still dominated by groups that have been active in environmental activities, while the younger generation and people with high job mobility tend to be less involved. One informant explained:

"The people who frequently participate in these activities are usually those who are already active in the community, while young people or residents who are busy with work rarely get involved."

(Community Informant F, 2026)

These findings indicate that the effectiveness of participatory leadership is determined not only by the intensity of interpersonal communication but also by the leader's ability to develop strategies that are adaptable

to the diverse characteristics of the community. While previous research emphasized interpersonal communication and informal approaches as the primary factors in increasing community participation (Marlina & Aminuddin, 2025), this study demonstrates that the effectiveness of participatory leadership at the subdistrict level depends on the subdistrict head's ability to integrate face-to-face communication, leverage social networks, and innovate more inclusive communication channels. Participatory leadership strategies must be supported by the use of digital media, such as RT/RW level WhatsApp groups, official sub district social media accounts, and online feedback forums to reach community groups that find it difficult to attend conventional forums. The integration of digital and interpersonal communication is crucial so that community participation does not rely solely on social closeness and the physical presence of leaders. These findings expand the study of participatory leadership by demonstrating that the effectiveness of subdistrict heads is determined not only by their ability to build social closeness but also by their capacity to transform social relationships into an inclusive communication system that reaches various community groups equally.

In line with Kotter's (1996) perspective, effective leaders not only guide the organization but are also capable of building a shared vision through persuasive communication and strong interpersonal relationships. Research by (Marlina & Aminuddin, 2025) also indicates that facilitative leadership can enhance community participation through collaborative approaches and participatory social relationships. The effectiveness of Nanggalo Subdistrict Head's leadership is reflected in his ability to foster open communication, facilitate participation, strengthen collaboration, respond to community aspirations, and build public trust. However, achieving more equitable participation requires strengthening communication strategies that are inclusive, adaptive, and capable of reaching community groups that have historically been underrepresented in the development process.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the effectiveness of Nanggalo Subdistrict Head's leadership in enhancing community participation is determined by the ability to establish dialogic communication, facilitate collaboration, and foster participatory social relationships through interpersonal and facilitative approaches. Although community participation has increased, citizen involvement remains concentrated primarily at the program implementation stage, while participation in decision making and evaluation has not yet been optimal due to time constraints, low participatory awareness, and uneven information distribution. The main contribution of this study lies in the finding that social closeness has a paradoxical nature in participatory development: on one hand, it can strengthen community trust and engagement, but on the other hand, it has the potential to create network exclusivity and participation disparities. This finding expands the study of participatory leadership and social capital by emphasizing that the effectiveness of sub district heads' leadership depends not only on their ability to build bonding social capital but also on their capacity to develop bridging social capital through inclusive and adaptive communication strategies. Although limited to the context of the case study in Nanggalo Subdistrict, this research can serve as a reference for the development of a participatory leadership model based on public communication and digital transformation at the subdistrict government level.

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