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Bureaucratic Ethics in Enhancing Public Trust in Social Assistance Services: A Case Study of Bululi Village, Asparaga District

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Abstract

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Abstract: This study analyzes the role of bureaucratic ethics in strengthening public trust in government social assistance services at the Bululi Village Office, Asparaga District, Gorontalo Regency. The problems arise due to unequal treatment, lack of fairness in the distribution of social assistance, and low accountability of village officials. Using a qualitative descriptive method, data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation involving both village apparatus and community members. The analysis was conducted through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that: (1) Equality in service delivery remains limited, with preferential treatment for certain groups; (2) Equity in distributing social assistance is often compromised by bias and lack of transparency; (3) Loyalty of officials to institutional values and regulations is challenged by external pressure and informal practices; and (4) Responsibility has been implemented relatively well, although weaknesses remain in discipline and consistency. The study concludes that strengthening bureaucratic ethics—particularly in fairness, accountability, and discipline—is crucial to restoring and maintaining public trust. These findings contribute to the discourse on good governance at the local level and highlight the urgency of ethical reforms in village administration.

Introduction

Public trust in government services is strongly influenced not only by policy outcomes but also by the ethical conduct of bureaucrats. In Indonesia, bureaucratic ethics is often undermined by favoritism, lack of transparency, and weak accountability, resulting in declining community confidence (Dwiyanto, 2019). Max Weber emphasizes rationality, formality, and impersonality as the foundation of bureaucracy, while Mertins Jr. (2010) highlights four ethical principles—equality, equity, loyalty, and responsibility—as essential for ethical service delivery.

Previous studies indicate that bureaucratic ethics positively impacts service quality and community trust (Ilham et al., 2021; Wahyudi, 2023). However, in practice, ethical implementation is often inconsistent, particularly at the village government level. Preliminary observations in Bululi Village revealed unequal treatment in public services, unfair distribution of social assistance, and low discipline among officials, which have contributed to a decline in public trust. This study, therefore, aims to examine how bureaucratic ethics—through the dimensions of equality, equity, loyalty, and responsibility—affects public trust in government services at Bululi Village, Asparaga District.

Method

This research employed a qualitative descriptive approach to gain an in-depth understanding of bureaucratic ethics in public service. The study was conducted in Bululi Village, Asparaga District, Gorontalo Regency, over six months.

Data sources consisted of:

Primary data: obtained from interviews with six key informants, including village officials (head of village, secretary, staff) and community members.

Secondary data: documents such as regulations, service SOPs, and reports related to social assistance distribution.

Data collection techniques included observation of service practices, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's (1994) model, involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing.

Result and Discussion

1. Equality in Public Service

Equality requires that all citizens receive the same treatment in accessing public services without discrimination. Findings show that this principle has not been fully implemented in Bululi Village. Several community members reported slower service compared to those with personal connections to village officials. Such practices contradict Weber's rational-bureaucratic principles and undermine community trust.

2. Equity in Social Assistance Distribution

Equity emphasizes fairness in distributing resources according to people's needs. The study found that the distribution of social assistance in Bululi Village lacked transparency, with several cases where poor households were excluded while better-off families were listed as recipients. This reflects weak adherence to ethical standards and raises issues of social injustice, reducing community trust in government programs.

3. Loyalty of Village Apparatus

Loyalty implies adherence to institutional vision, mission, and regulations. In practice, officials in Bululi Village demonstrated partial loyalty, as they often faced pressures from external actors and informal practices that influenced service delivery. This indicates a conflict between formal loyalty to rules and informal loyalty to personal or political networks. Strengthening organizational commitment is crucial to ensure ethical service delivery.

4. Responsibility in Service Delivery

Responsibility requires accountability and consistency in carrying out official duties. The findings indicate that responsibility is relatively well-practiced in Bululi Village, with officials acknowledging their duties and showing effort in service provision. However, challenges remain in maintaining punctuality, discipline, and consistency, which affect community perceptions of bureaucratic reliability.

Conclusion

This study concludes that bureaucratic ethics significantly affects public trust in government services. In Bululi Village, weaknesses were found in equality, equity, and loyalty, while responsibility showed relative strength. To restore public trust, village governments must strengthen ethical standards by ensuring equal treatment, transparent distribution of resources, organizational commitment, and accountability in service provision. These reforms are vital in promoting good governance and sustainable community development.

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