

Decentralitation, Smart Governance, Good Governance, and Human Resource: Roles in Anti-Corruption Reform

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ABSTRACT

This study comprehensively examines governance reforms in the era of decentralization, focusing on comparing the roles of Smart Governance, Good Governance, and Human Resource (HR) capacity in corruption mitigation efforts. Through a literature review approach, this article analyzes various concepts, theories, and empirical findings related to the implementation of these three pillars of governance in the context of dynamic decentralization.

The results show that *Good Governance* provides an essential foundation of ethics, transparency, accountability, forming a normative framework for clean government. Smart Governance complements this with technological innovation, the use of big data, and digital solutions to improve the efficiency of public services, accelerate decision-making, and narrow the gap for corruption. HR capacity, both in technical and managerial competence as well as moral integrity, to be a crucial factor in bridging governance principles with practical implementation in the field. *Smart Governance* as the accelerator, and competent human resources as the implementers, supported by strong regulations and active public participation, the key to creating a robust and effective governance system to overcome the challenges of corruption in the era of decentralization. This research has important implications for the formulation of integrated anti-corruption policies and strategies at the local and national levels.

INTRODUCTION

The era of decentralisation has been the dominant paradigm in global public administration for the past few decades, including in Indonesia. Decentralisation,

which essentially involves the transfer of some authority from the central government to local governments, is believed to bring significant benefits (World Bank, 2000). Its main objectives are to improve the efficiency

of public services, accelerate local development, encourage community participation, and create a government that is more responsive to the specific needs of the region (UNDP, 2010). By bringing decision-making closer to the community, it is hoped that public policies will be more relevant and their implementation more effective (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992). However, behind these promises, decentralisation also brings a series of complex challenges, one of which is the potential for increased risk of corruption (Klitgaard, 1988). The shift of power and resources to the local level, if not accompanied by a strong governance system and adequate human resource capacity, can create new opportunities for harmful corrupt practices (Dwivedi, 2018).

Corruption is a multidimensional phenomenon that hinders economic development, undermines public trust, and erodes the legitimacy of government institutions (Lambsdorff, 2007). At the local level, corruption can manifest itself in various forms, ranging from budget misappropriation, bribery in licensing, to nepotism in employee recruitment (Transparency International, 2023). The impact is strongly felt by the community, particularly in the form of poor public services, inadequate infrastructure, and widening social inequality (Rose-Ackerman, 1999). Therefore, governance reform efforts are crucial in the context of decentralisation to ensure that the promised benefits of decentralisation can be realised without being eroded by corrupt practices. This reform not only focuses on legal and institutional aspects, but also involves cultural change, capacity building, and the use of technology (OECD, 2011).

In facing this complexity, three main concepts emerge as important pillars in efforts to reform governance and eradicate corruption: *Good Governance*, *Smart Governance*, and Human Resource Capacity. These three concepts, despite having different focuses and approaches, are interrelated and complementary in forming

an effective and integrity-based governance system. *Good Governance* provides a fundamental normative and ethical framework, emphasising principles such as transparency, accountability, participation, and the rule of law (United Nations, 2000). *Smart Governance*, on the other hand, utilises advances in information and communication technology (ICT) and data to improve the efficiency, effectiveness, and transparency of public services (Lee, G. et. al, 2012). Meanwhile, human resource capacity is a crucial element that bridges governance principles with their practical implementation, ensuring that there are competent, professional individuals with integrity to run the government (Grindle, 1997).

This study aims to compare the roles of these three pillars in the context of governance reform in the era of decentralisation, particularly in efforts to combat corruption. Through a comprehensive literature review, this article will analyse how each concept contributes individually, as well as how the interaction and synergy between the three can create a governance system that is more resilient and adaptive to the challenges of corruption. A deep understanding of this relationship is expected to provide more holistic and integrated policy implications for local governments and other stakeholders in designing effective anti-corruption strategies.

Decentralisation is not merely the transfer of administrative authority, but rather a political, fiscal, and administrative process that aims to distribute power from the centre to lower levels of government (Rondinelli, Nellis, & Cheema, 1983). Theoretically, decentralisation is expected to improve the efficiency of resource allocation, as local governments have a better understanding of local needs and priorities (Oates, 1972). In addition, decentralisation is also expected to increase government accountability to the community, as the distance between the rulers and the ruled becomes closer,

allowing for more intensive supervision by citizens (Faguet, 2004). Community participation is also one of the main objectives, whereby citizens can be more actively involved in the decision-making process and supervision of development in their region (Blair, 2000).

However, the reality of decentralisation implementation often falls short of these ideal expectations. One of the biggest challenges is the potential for increased corruption (Bardhan & Mookherjee, 2006). With the transfer of authority and large budgets to the local level, without being accompanied by an adequate monitoring system, strong institutional capacity, and high human resource integrity, the door to corruption can be wide open (Treisman, 2007). Local officials may be tempted to abuse their authority for personal or group gain, especially if internal and external oversight mechanisms are weak. Lack of transparency in the procurement of goods and services, weak licensing systems, and political intervention in the bureaucracy are fertile ground for corrupt practices (Johnston, 2005).

In addition to corruption, decentralisation also faces other challenges such as disparities in capacity between regions, where some regions may have better-prepared human resources and stronger institutions than others (Smoke, 2003). Coordination between central and regional governments, as well as between regional governments themselves, is also often a problem (Litvack, Ahmad, & Bird, 1998). Conflicts of interest between local elites and the community, as well as a lack of substantive community participation, can also hinder the achievement of decentralisation objectives (Manor, 1999). Therefore, governance reform is imperative to ensure that decentralisation can run effectively and accountably, and is able to mitigate the risks inherent in it, particularly corruption.

Corruption is a latent enemy of development and democracy (Myrdal, 1968). In the era of decentralisation,

corruption can take on a more local and hidden form, but its impact is no less destructive. When development funds that should be used to build roads, schools or health facilities are instead embezzled, it is the community that suffers most (Mauro, 1995). Corruption causes economic inefficiency, market distortion, and suboptimal allocation of resources (Shleifer & Vishny, 1993). Investors are reluctant to invest in areas with high levels of corruption, hampering local economic growth (Wei, 2000).

More than just financial losses, corruption also damages social and political order. It erodes public trust in the government, creates injustice, and widens the gap between the rich and the poor (Rothstein & Teorell, 2008). When people see that the law only applies to those who do not have power or money, the legitimacy of the state is eroded (Warren, 2004). At the local level, corruption can strengthen local oligarchies and weaken democratic participation, as important decisions are often made behind closed doors in the interests of a small elite (Khan, 2000).

Therefore, efforts to eradicate corruption are not merely a matter of law enforcement, but also involve systemic reform in governance (Pope, 2000). This includes strengthening institutions, increasing transparency and accountability, and, equally important, developing the capacity of human resources with integrity (World Bank, 2000). Without comprehensive and sustained efforts, decentralisation risks becoming a new arena for more structured and difficult-to-eradicate corruption practices.

The concept of *good governance* has become a widely accepted framework in efforts to reform public administration and eradicate corruption around the world (Kaufmann, D. et, al., 1999). Rooted in the idea of good and honest government, *good governance* emphasises a set of principles that every government entity must adhere to. These principles include participation (the public must have a say in decision-

making), the rule of law (a fair legal framework that is enforced impartially), transparency (information must be easily accessible and understandable), responsiveness (institutions must serve all stakeholders within a reasonable time frame), consensus (mediating different interests to reach consensus), equality (all citizens have equal opportunities), effectiveness and efficiency (processes and institutions produce results that meet the needs of the community while making optimal use of resources), accountability (decision-makers are accountable to the public), and strategic vision (leaders and the public have a broad and long-term perspective on governance) (United Nations, 2000).

In the context of decentralisation, *good governance* is becoming increasingly vital. With the transfer of authority, local governments must be able to apply these principles independently (Cheema & Rondinelli, 2007). Transparency in regional budget management, the procurement of goods and services, and public decision-making can significantly reduce opportunities for corruption (Olken, 2007). Accountability ensures that local officials are responsible for their actions and can be held accountable in the event of abuse of authority (Schedler, 1999). Community participation, through mechanisms such as development planning consultations (*musrenbang*) or public oversight, can be an effective external control on corrupt practices (Gaventa, J. et, al., 1999).

Although *Good Governance* provides a strong framework, its implementation often faces challenges. Limited resources, resistance from established bureaucracies, and a lack of public awareness can hinder the realisation of these principles (Grindle, 1997). Furthermore, in today's digital age, traditional *Good Governance* approaches may need to be complemented with new tools and mechanisms offered by technology to achieve greater effectiveness (Bovaird & Löffler, 2003).

Along with the rapid development of information and communication technology (ICT), the concept of *Smart Governance* has emerged as an evolution of *Good Governance*. *Smart Governance* is defined as the use of ICT and data to improve efficiency, effectiveness, transparency, and participation in the governance process, with the ultimate goal of improving the quality of life of citizens (Lee, G. et, al., 2012). This concept focuses not only on the digitisation of services (*e-governance*), but also on the use of data analytics, *big data*, the *Internet of Things* (IoT), *Artificial Intelligence* (AI), and even *blockchain* for smarter and more responsive decision-making (Al-Hujran, O. et, al., 2018).

In the context of combating corruption in the era of decentralisation, *Smart Governance* offers a range of potential solutions. For example, a transparent *e-procurement* system can reduce direct interaction between goods/service providers and procurement officials, thereby minimising opportunities for bribery and collusion (Kalianpur, 2005). *Online* complaint platforms and secure *whistleblowing* systems can facilitate the reporting of corruption cases by the public or civil servants (OECD, 2011). The use of *big data analytics* to monitor local government financial transactions, detect suspicious patterns, or identify anomalies in budget spending can be a powerful tool for preventing and detecting corruption (World Economic Forum, 2020). *Blockchain* technology can even be used to create immutable transaction records, increasing transparency and accountability in public fund management (Tapscott, D., 2016).

Smart Governance can also increase public participation through digital platforms, enabling citizens to provide input, monitor development projects, and access public information more easily (Bekkers, V. J & Homburg, 2007). This indirectly reinforces the principles of transparency and accountability that are at the heart of *Good Governance*. However, the implementation of *Smart Governance* also faces challenges, such as the digital divide,

cybersecurity issues, high investment costs, and resistance from parties who benefit from the old, less transparent system (Anthopoulos, 2017). Furthermore, the success of *Smart Governance* is highly dependent on the capacity of human resources who are able to operate, manage, and utilise the technology effectively (Saxena, 2005).

Although *Good Governance* provides noble principles and *Smart Governance* offers sophisticated tools, neither will be meaningful without adequate Human Resource Capacity (HRC) (Grindle, 1997). Human resources are the main actors who design, implement, and oversee the running of government. In the context of decentralisation, HR capacity in local government is crucial, as local governments are at the forefront of running government and public services (UNDP, 2010).

Human resource capacity covers various aspects, including Technical Competence: The ability to perform specific tasks, such as budget planning, project management, financial auditing, or ICT system operation (OECD, 2008). Managerial Competence: Leadership, decision-making, coordination, and team management skills (Yukl, 2013). Integrity and Ethics: Commitment to the values of honesty, transparency, accountability, and rejection of corruption. This is the moral foundation that prevents abuse of authority (Frederickson, 1997). Adaptability and Innovation: The ability to adapt to change, learn new things, and innovate in finding solutions to public problems (Kanter, 1983). Digital Literacy: The ability to use and understand information technology, which is very important for the implementation of *Smart Governance* (Eshet-Alkalai, 2004).

Weak human resource capacity in local government can be a major loophole for corruption. Incompetent employees may not be able to manage budgets properly, making them prone to errors or even fraud (Klitgaard, 1988). Employees who lack integrity will be easily tempted to accept bribes or engage in collusion (Rose-

Ackerman, 1999). A lack of digital literacy can hinder the adoption of *Smart Governance*, rendering efforts to increase transparency through technology futile (Anthopoulos, 2017).

Therefore, investment in human resource capacity building through education, training, meritocratic recruitment systems, and enforcement of codes of ethics is crucial (World Bank, 2000; UNDP, 2010). Improving human resource capacity does not only mean improving technical skills, but also instilling strong values of integrity and professionalism. Human resources with integrity are the first line of defence against corruption, while competent human resources are the key to implementing the principles of *good governance* and utilising the potential of *smart governance*.

It is important to understand that *Good Governance*, *Smart Governance*, and Human Resource Capacity are not separate entities, but are interrelated and form a holistic governance ecosystem. *Good Governance* provides a philosophical and normative foundation, setting out what should be done and why (United Nations, 2000). *Smart Governance* provides modern tools and mechanisms to achieve the objectives of *Good Governance* more effectively and efficiently (Lee, G & Kwak 2012). Meanwhile, Human Resource Capacity is the implementing agent that operates, manages, and integrates these two concepts into daily practice (Grindle, 1997).

In the context of combating corruption in the era of decentralisation, the synergy between these three elements is crucial. For example, an *e-procurement* system (part of *Smart Governance*) designed to increase transparency (*Good Governance* principle) will only be effective if it is operated by employees who are competent in ICT and have the integrity not to manipulate the system (Human Resource Capacity) (Kalianpur, 2005; Saxena, 2005). Similarly, strong anti-corruption policies (a principle of *Good Governance*) require employees who have a good understanding

of law and ethics (Human Resource Capacity) and are supported by adequate information systems for monitoring (*Smart Governance*) (Pope, 2000; Scholl, 2017).

Without *good governance*, *smart governance* can become a tool that is misused or merely a technology project without any substantive impact (Bekkers, V. J. & Homburg, 2007). Without *smart governance*, the implementation of *good governance* may be slow, inefficient, and prone to manual intervention (Nam & Pardo, 2011). Most importantly, without strong human resource capacity, both *Good Governance* and *Smart Governance* will remain concepts on paper, without effective implementation in the field (UNDP, 2010). Integrity and competent human resources are the bridge that connects the vision of good governance with the practical realities of government.

Therefore, a comprehensive approach to governance reform must simultaneously address the strengthening of these three pillars. Local governments need not only to formulate policies that are in line with the principles of *good governance*, but also to invest in ICT infrastructure and *smart governance* systems, and most importantly, to develop their human resource capacity in a sustainable manner. Only with strong synergy between these three elements can local governments build a governance system that is robust, transparent, accountable and effective in addressing the challenges of corruption in the era of decentralisation.

Decentralisation offers great opportunities for more inclusive and responsive development, but it also carries significant risks of corruption (Shah, 2006). To address these risks and maximise the benefits of decentralisation, governance reform is crucially important. This study argues that the success of governance reform in tackling corruption in the era of decentralisation is highly dependent on the comparison and synergy between *Good Governance*, *Smart Governance*, and Human Resource Capacity.

Through this literature study, we will analyse in depth how each concept contributes to anti-corruption efforts, as well as how positive interactions between the three can create a more robust governance system. An understanding of the comparative and complementary roles of *Good Governance* as an ethical foundation, *Smart Governance* as a technological accelerator, and Human Resource Capacity as an implementer with integrity will provide important insights for policymakers, practitioners, and academics in designing more effective and sustainable anti-corruption strategies at the local and national levels.

METHOD

This research is a study using the literature review method. In this study, the author used the summarize method. The data used in this study came from the results of research that had been conducted and published in national and international online journals using the Google Scholar search engine with the keywords: decentralization, smart governance, good governance, human resources, and corruption. Research journals that met the criteria were then collected and summarized. The summaries of these journals were then analyzed in terms of their content in relation to the research objectives and results/findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Fundamental Role of Good Governance and the Contribution of Smart Governance in Improving Human Resource Capacity and Preventing Corruption

Literature reviews consistently highlight *good governance* as the main foundation for building an integrity-based and corruption-resistant system of government (Kaufmann, D. et, al., 1999). Principles such as transparency, accountability, participation, and the rule of law have proven to be effective antidotes to corruption, especially in the context of

decentralisation. Transparency, for example, in regional budget management and the procurement of goods and services, significantly reduces the scope for malpractice and collusion (Olken, 2007). When public information is easily accessible, the public and the media can act as external watchdogs, forcing officials to act more cautiously and responsibly (Gaventa, J & Valderrama 1999).

Accountability ensures that every official, from the highest to the lowest level in local government, can be held accountable for their decisions and actions. Strong accountability mechanisms, both vertically (to the public) and horizontally (between government agencies), create a system of *checks and balances* that limits the abuse of power (Schedler, 1999). Public participation, through development planning forums or complaint mechanisms, not only increases the legitimacy of policies but also provides channels for citizens to report indications of corruption or irregularities (Blair, 2000). The rule of law, with fair and impartial law enforcement, provides a clear framework for prosecuting perpetrators of corruption and providing a deterrent effect (Rose-Ackerman, 1999).

However, literature also shows that the implementation of *Good Governance* in the era of decentralisation often faces obstacles. Limited resources, resistance from vested interests, and a lack of public awareness and capacity to participate effectively can hinder the realisation of these principles (Grindle, 1997). By therefore, *good governance*, although fundamental, requires support from other elements to achieve maximum effectiveness in combating corruption.

Smart Governance emerged as a response to the need for greater efficiency and effectiveness in governance, utilising advances in information and communication technology (ICT) (Lee, G & Kwak, 2012). In the context of anti-corruption, *Smart Governance* provides innovative tools and mechanisms that complement and reinforce the principles of *Good Governance*. The e-

procurement system is the most prominent example, which drastically reduces face-to-face interactions between suppliers and officials, thereby minimising opportunities for bribery and collusion (Kalianpur, 2005). The transparency of automated and digitally recorded tender processes also increases accountability.

Furthermore, the use of *big data analytics* and *Artificial Intelligence* (AI) offers great potential for detecting anomalous patterns in local government financial transactions, budget expenditures, or even in the behaviour of officials, which may indicate corruption (World Economic Forum, 2020). *Online* complaint platforms and secure digital *whistleblowing* systems provide an easier and more protected channel for the public and employees to report corrupt practices, which are often difficult to do through conventional channels (OECD, 2011). *Blockchain* technology is even being explored to create immutable and transparent transaction records, which could revolutionise the management of public funds and state assets (Tapscott, D. 2016).

However, the literature also reminds us that the implementation of *Smart Governance* is not without challenges. The digital divide, especially in remote areas, can limit community access and participation (Anthopoulos, 2017). Cyber security threats and personal data protection are also serious concerns. In addition, large initial investments and the need for adequate ICT infrastructure often pose obstacles for local governments with limited budgets. Without careful planning and human resource capacity support, *Smart Governance* risks becoming merely a technology project without any substantive impact on eradicating corruption (Bekkers, V. J. & Homburg, 2007).

Literature reviews clearly place human resource capacity as an integral element that often determines the success of governance reform (Grindle, 1997). Human resources are the actors who implement the principles of *good governance* and operate

smart governance technology. Without competent and integrity-driven human resources, even the best frameworks and most advanced technologies will not be able to function effectively.

Human resource capacity encompasses various dimensions. Technical competence ensures that employees have the skills necessary to perform administrative tasks, manage projects, and operate complex ICT systems (OECD, 2008). For example, a competent auditor can detect financial irregularities, and a skilled system administrator can maintain the security of *e-procurement* data. Managerial competencies are important for local leaders to formulate effective anti-corruption policies, manage resources, and motivate subordinates to uphold integrity (Yukl, 2013).

However, the most crucial factor in the context of anti-corruption is the integrity and ethics of human resources. Employees with high integrity will reject corrupt practices, even when opportunities arise (Frederickson, 1997). They act as guardians of morality and ethics within the organisation. Conversely, human resources with weak integrity can easily exploit loopholes in the system, even in well-designed systems (Klitgaard, 1988). The lack of human resource capacity, both in terms of competence and integrity, is one of the main causes of reform failure in many developing countries (Saxena, 2005). Therefore, investment in education, continuous training, merit-based recruitment systems, and strict enforcement of codes of ethics are essential to building strong human resource capacity.

A thorough analysis of the literature clearly shows that *good governance*, *smart governance* and human resource capacity cannot stand alone in efforts to eradicate corruption in the era of decentralisation; rather, they must work in close synergy. These three pillars complement and reinforce each other, forming a holistic and robust governance ecosystem.

Good Governance provides a normative and ethical foundation. It

establishes "what" must be achieved (e.g., transparency, accountability) and "why" (e.g., to prevent corruption and improve public welfare). However, to achieve "what" effectively, it requires "how" provided by *Smart Governance* and "who" provided by Human Resource Capacity.

For example, the principle of transparency (from *Good Governance*) can be efficiently realised through an *online* public information system (from *Smart Governance*), but its effectiveness is highly dependent on the ability of human resources to manage data, maintain its security, and ensure that information is presented in a way that is easily understood by the public (Human Resource Capacity). Similarly, an *e-procurement* system (*Smart Governance*) designed to reduce corruption (a *Good Governance* objective) will only be successful if it is operated by employees who are competent in technology and have the integrity not to manipulate the system (Human Resource Capacity) (Kalianpur, 2005; Saxena, 2005).

This synergy also means that weaknesses in one pillar can undermine the effectiveness of the other pillars. Even a sophisticated *Smart Governance* system will be vulnerable to corruption if it is operated by personnel who lack integrity or if it is not supported by a strong *Good Governance* legal framework. Conversely, the ideal principles of *Good Governance* will be difficult to realise without modern technological tools and without human resources who have the capacity to implement them. Therefore, a holistic approach that simultaneously strengthens these three pillars is the key to creating an effective and sustainable anti-corruption system in the era of decentralisation.

CONCLUSION

Based on a review of the literature, it can be concluded that governance reform in the era of decentralisation in tackling corruption requires an integrated and synergistic approach from *Good Governance*, *Smart Governance*, and Human Resource

Capacity. *Good Governance* provides ethical and accountability principles as a foundation. *Smart Governance* offers technological tools and mechanisms to improve efficiency and transparency. Meanwhile, Human Resource Capacity, particularly integrity and competence, is the bridge that connects these principles and tools with practical implementation. The success of anti-corruption efforts greatly depends on how these three pillars can be strengthened and synergised optimally at the local government level.

Further research could focus on empirical case studies in various local governments to quantitatively or qualitatively test the effectiveness of the synergy between Good Governance, Smart Governance, and Human Resource Capacity in reducing corruption levels, as well as identifying the factors that hinder and encourage the implementation of this integrated approach.

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