

## Implementation of the Iwaka District Expansion Policy in the Perspective of Asymmetric Decentralization in Papua

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the implementation of the *Iwaka District expansion policy* in Mimika Regency within the framework of asymmetric decentralization in Papua. The policy reflects an effort to operationalize Indonesia's special autonomy mandate (Law No. 2 of 2021) by extending state presence and improving public service delivery in geographically remote areas. Using a qualitative descriptive approach and a single-case design, the research collected data through in-depth interviews, field observations, and document analysis conducted in August 2025. Data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model, focusing on four dimensions of policy implementation proposed by Edwards III—communication, resources, disposition, and bureaucratic structure—complemented by Grindle's policy content-context framework and Rondinelli's theory of asymmetric decentralization. The findings indicate that although the *Iwaka* expansion has not fully met administrative criteria under Government Regulation No. 17 of 2018, its implementation demonstrates strong social legitimacy and affirmative intent to enhance service accessibility. The main challenges include limited human resources, inadequate infrastructure, and weak inter-agency coordination. Overall, the *Iwaka* case highlights that successful implementation of asymmetric decentralization depends not only on legal compliance but also on contextual governance capacity, local participation, and institutional adaptation. The study concludes that the *Iwaka* expansion serves as a strategic instrument for strengthening local governance and state legitimacy in Papua's special autonomy region.

**Keywords:** asymmetric decentralization, policy implementation, district expansion, local governance, Papua, public service delivery

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### INTRODUCTION

Decentralization is a key milestone in Indonesia's governance reform. The implementation of regional autonomy through Law No. 22 of 1999 and its refinement in Law No. 23 of 2014 on Regional Government marked a paradigm shift from a centralized system to a governance model that is more participatory and adaptive to local conditions (Ahmad, 2024). In this context, decentralization is expected to strengthen public service effectiveness, accelerate development, and promote interregional equity (Mitsuhara et al., 2017; Tidjani et al., 2025).

However, decentralization in Indonesia cannot be uniformly applied due to geographic, social, and cultural variations across regions (Marcellin et al., 2020; Nelwan, 2024). Consequently, the state adopts *asymmetric decentralization*, an autonomy model that provides special treatment for regions with distinctive characteristics, such as the Special Region of Yogyakarta, Aceh, and Papua (Hartono & Kastowo, 2021). The enforcement of Law No. 2 of 2021 on Special Autonomy for the Province of Papua represents recognition of Papua's distinctiveness, both in socio-cultural terms and in its development challenges.

According to Rante, Koenti, and Sulistyaningsih (2018), special autonomy status in Papua aims to address development disparities rooted in earlier centralized policies and to ensure a more equitable distribution of welfare through devolved authority and special funding (Special Autonomy Fund). Nevertheless, the implementation of special autonomy has not fully

improved the quality of life in Papua. The province's Human Development Index (HDI) remains the lowest nationally, and social conflicts have become more complex (Herdanawari, 2024).

These conditions indicate that special autonomy requires more operational derivative policies, particularly at the level of government closest to citizens, namely districts and sub-districts (kecamatan) (Vel & Schouten, 2019; Buehler, 2020). A strategic policy that reflects the application of asymmetric decentralization at the local level is the expansion of Iwaka District in Mimika Regency, Papua Tengah Province (Fitriani et al., 2019). Under Government Regulation No. 17 of 2018 on Sub-Districts, the formation or expansion of a sub-district must satisfy basic (population, land area), technical (village coverage, infrastructure), and administrative (age of the parent sub-district, spatial conformity) requirements (Sinaga, 2021; Harjanto et al., 2020; Nasution, 2022; Sumarto & Hutagalung, 2021).

The author's field findings (2025) show that several basic requirements, especially population size and the availability of public service infrastructure, have not been fully met. Even so, expansion is driven by considerations of affirmative public service and spatial justice for communities living in remote areas with limited access to government facilities. *Iwaka District* covers 485.67 km<sup>2</sup> with seven scattered villages and difficult terrain, so expansion is viewed not merely as an administrative exercise but as a tangible form of state presence in peripheral areas (Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Mimika, 2025).

Empirically, *Iwaka* communities depend largely on primary sectors such as agriculture and fisheries and face limited access to education and health services (Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Mimika, 2025). In this context, district expansion is considered an affirmative strategy to shorten service distances and strengthen the institutional capacity of district government as the state's representative at the grassroots level. From a public policy perspective, district expansion can be understood as the implementation of an affirmative policy within a decentralization framework. Grindle (1980) explains that policy implementation success depends on two core components: policy content and implementation context. Edwards III (1980) adds that success is affected by four variables: communication, resources, implementer disposition, and bureaucratic structure. These theories underpin the analysis of the extent to which the *Iwaka District* expansion can be implemented in line with the principles of *asymmetric decentralization*.

Within decentralization theory, Rondinelli (1981) argues that *asymmetric decentralization* provides room for jurisdictions with special characteristics to adapt governance to local needs and values. Similarly, Hidayat (2010) emphasizes that decentralization in Papua should operate as a mechanism for redistributing power and resources to achieve social justice for Indigenous communities. This approach aligns with local governability (Pierre & Peters, 2000), which views local government effectiveness as determined not only by institutional design but also by the capacity of local actors (formal and informal) to manage power relations and social networks.

Research by Basri, Silo, Ohoiwutun, and Muhdiarta (2024) in Jayapura Regency shows that devolving authority from regents to district heads can improve public service effectiveness when accompanied by sufficient staff capacity and clear regulations. Yet constraints such as budget limitations, low bureaucratic capacity, and weak accountability remain fundamental challenges—lessons that are relevant for Mimika (Basri et al., 2024). Furthermore, Ahmad

(2024) highlights that policy success in special autonomy regions depends on the integration of regulations, institutional capacity, and data-driven development governance; in this regard, *Iwaka District in Figures* (2025) serves as an empirical basis for assessing policy readiness.

Based on this framework, the study aims to (1) analyze how the *Iwaka District* expansion is implemented within the *asymmetric decentralization* framework in Papua and (2) assess the extent to which the policy strengthens public services and the state's presence in the special autonomy region. The benefits of this research are expected to make a double contribution. Practically, the results can serve as evaluation and reference material for the local governments of Mimika and Central Papua in developing more effective, inclusive, and sustainable district expansion strategies. Academically, this research enriches government and public policy scholarship, especially regarding the implementation of *asymmetric decentralization* at the local level, by examining the relevance of policy implementation theories (Grindle, Edwards III) in the context of Papuan specificity.

## **METHOD**

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to understand the implementation process of the *Iwaka District* expansion within Papua's *asymmetric decentralization*. The research used a case study design with Mimika Regency as the focus, as the *Iwaka* expansion exemplified the practice of *asymmetric decentralization* in a special autonomy region.

The research site was *Iwaka District* (area approximately 485.67 km<sup>2</sup>; seven villages; limited-service access). Fieldwork was conducted in August 2025 during the finalization and administrative verification stages of the expansion. Participants included Mimika Regency officials (Bappeda, Governance Division, Community and Village Empowerment Office), the *Iwaka District* Head and village officials, customary, community, women, and youth leaders, and academic advisors. The study analyzed the implementation of district expansion using Edwards III's (1980) four dimensions: communication, resources, implementer disposition, and bureaucratic structure.

Data consisted of primary sources (semi-structured in-depth interviews and field observations) and secondary sources (BPS 2025 reports, Government Regulation No. 17/2018, Law No. 2/2021, and relevant journal articles). Triangulation was conducted by comparing interviews, observations, and official documents. Data analysis followed the Miles and Huberman (1994) interactive model: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Findings were interpreted in relation to implementation theory (Grindle, 1980; Edwards III, 1980), *asymmetric decentralization* (Rondinelli, 1981; Hidayat, 2010), and local governability (Pierre & Peters, 2000). The researcher was the key instrument, supported by interview guides, observation sheets, and a documentation checklist. Ethical considerations included informant confidentiality, obtaining official permissions, and using data solely for academic purposes.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The author's field findings (2025) indicate that *Iwaka's* expansion is driven by urgent public service needs rather than sheer compliance with Government Regulation No. 17/2018. *Iwaka* covers 485.67 km<sup>2</sup> with seven villages; inter-village distances are relatively long, and many roads remain unpaved. As a result, access to education and health services is limited; the

teacher–student ratio is around 1:47, and health personnel number about 0.8 per 1,000 residents (Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Mimika, 2025). Substantively, the policy direction is consistent with asymmetric decentralization adapting governance to local conditions (Rondinelli, 1981) and acting as a resource redistribution mechanism for spatial justice (Hidayat, 2010).

Regarding policy communication, the local government conducted public outreach and consultations across stakeholders (district/village heads, Ondoafi customary leaders, women, and youth). However, information on administrative consequences was uneven across villages, leaving participation concentrated among local elites. In Edwards III's (1980) framework, uneven communication risks misalignment between policy intent and implementation. Similar lessons from Jayapura show that the success of delegated authority hinges on the intensity of coordination among local actors (Basri et al., 2024).

In terms of resources, constraints were found in human resources (of 123 village-level officials, 28 hold diploma/undergraduate degrees), government facilities, and transport infrastructure (Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Mimika, 2025). This indicates a gap in policy content (Grindle, 1980): the expansion policy is not yet paired with comprehensive strategies for capacity-building and basic infrastructure. Even so, implementer disposition is strong: local officials and leaders express enthusiasm, viewing expansion as a way to shorten service chains and improve representation. This social support an implementation asset in Edwards III (1980) enhances policy legitimacy despite incomplete administrative requirements.

Concerning bureaucratic structure, overlapping roles persist between the Community and Village Empowerment Office and the Governance Division in district supervision. Cross-organizational synchronization is suboptimal, reducing vertical coordination efficiency (see Edwards III, 1980; Basri et al., 2024). From a local governability lens (Pierre & Peters, 2000), the government has involved Ondoafi in determining village boundaries and the prospective district capital evidence of co-governance aligned with local participation (Rondinelli, 1981). However, the absence of an implementation roadmap covering institutional setup, staffing, infrastructure, and financing causes the process to lean political rather than technocratic (cf. Hidayat, 2010).

Overall, the Iwaka expansion satisfies some principles of asymmetric decentralization recognizing local distinctiveness and fostering participation yet remains constrained by human resources, infrastructure, and bureaucratic synchronization. In Grindle's (1980) terms, success depends on both content and context; thus, sustainability hinges on strengthening multi-level communication, building capacity, and ensuring measurable gains in public services.

## CONCLUSION

The study concludes that the *Iwaka District* expansion serves as an affirmative strategy to improve public service access within Papua's special autonomy framework, aligning with asymmetric decentralization principles that adapt governance to local geographic, social, and cultural contexts. Although not all administrative criteria of Government Regulation No. 17/2018 were fully met, successful implementation hinged on inclusive communication, sufficient resources, committed implementers, and coordinated bureaucratic structures. High social support exists, but sustained success depends on capacity-building and institutional coordination to ensure service improvements. Policy recommendations include developing a

phased implementation roadmap, enhancing staff capacity and clarity of roles, establishing inclusive public participation mechanisms, creating legal frameworks for funding and coordination, and conducting data-driven periodic evaluations via open dashboards. For future research, a mixed-methods approach is suggested to quantitatively assess the socio-economic impacts of the expansion while retaining qualitative insights for deeper understanding.

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