# Addressing Education Inequality in Indonesia Through Rural Development: Desamind's Leadership Communication and SDG Alignment

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**Abstract**

This study investigates the success of Desamind, a social organization under the Desamind Indonesia Foundation, in empowering youth through leadership communication strategies for rural development in Indonesia. Combining collaborative leadership and utilizing digital functionalitis, Desamind focuses on enhancing education, social conditions, the economy, and the environment in rural communities, aligning its initiatives with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to promote education and reduce inequalities. The research examines Desamind's leadership communication strategy and its effectiveness in implementing programs. This study employs a qualitative approach using document study and in-depth interview methods to explore Desamind's leadership communication strategy and its effectiveness in running their programs. The findings highlight the critical role of effective communication in achieving organizational goals. Desamind emphasizes effective communication and collaboration with youth, communities, and partners to foster trust and adaptability in rural development initiatives. By adopting a community-driven approach, Desamind integrates local needs and encourages stakeholder participation, enhancing ownership and program success. Initiatives like the Desamind Scholarship and Leadership Camp are pivotal in empowering youth and improving educational access in rural areas. The study highlights the importance of strategic leadership communication, combining humble, servant, and adaptive leadership styles to align with sustainable development goals. Key findings reveal that Desamind's leadership style fosters collaboration and positive change, engaging various stakeholders through a pentahelix collaboration framework, which ensures multisector support for its programs in rural areas. The study concludes that strategic leadership communication is essential for the success of rural development initiatives. Future research could explore these strategies across different regions in Indonesia to further validate and expand upon these findings.

Keywords: Leadership Communication, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Education Inequality, Rural Development, Youth Empowerment

## INTRODUCTION

Education is a powerful tool for transforming lives and communities, yet millions of children in rural areas around the world still don't get this fundamental right. In Indonesia, educational inequalities are clearly evident, with many rural communities facing significant challenges in accessing quality education. The SEMERU Institute found that most of the poorest people in Indonesian villages don't have a diploma or only finished elementary school (Warda *et al*., 2019) . This lack of education stops personal growth and keeps people in poverty.

In facing this issue, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) are vital in addressing socio-economic challenges, including educational inequality, in countries like Indonesia. NGOs bring innovative solutions, advocate for policy changes, and mobilize resources to reach underserved populations. They play a crucial role in implementing community-based approaches to education, which are essential for bridging gaps left by government efforts. In

developing countries, NGOs are often the primary drivers of educational initiatives, leveraging their flexibility and expertise to improve access to quality education (Abiddin *et al.*, 2022; Chaturvedi *et al.*, 2021).

Effective leadership with a well-defined communication strategy is essential for NGOs to operate smoothly and achieve their goals. Strong leadership communication ensures that the organization's mission and objectives are clearly articulated, motivating stakeholders and fostering collaboration. A leader's ability to communicate effectively can significantly impact the NGO's success in implementing programs, securing funding, and influencing policy. Therefore, the effectiveness of a leader's communication strategy is paramount to the success of an NGO's initiatives, particularly in the education sector (Abiddin *et al.*, 2022; Chaturvedi *et al.*, 2021).

Desamind, a social organization under the Desamind Indonesia Foundation, was formed to aim in solving these problems. They work with rural communities to improve education, social conditions, economy, and the environment to develop Indonesia. Desamind wants to change the fixed mindsets that stop people from growing and facing challenges. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a plan to solve these problems. SDG 4 aims to give everyone a good education, and SDG 10 aims to reduce inequalities within and between countries. Desamind's work helps achieve these goals by showing that focused efforts can improve education and equality.

Educational inequality in Indonesia is a serious problem that affects many areas, including the economy, how wealth is shared, and even crime levels. Previous study highlighted the gender gap in educational achievement, particularly outside of the Java-Bali region, which underscores the need for targeted interventions to promote gender equality in education (Karimah & Susanti, 2022). This is crucial not only for social justice but also for economic development, as increasing gender equality positively impacts regional economic growth. (Setyadharma *et al.*, 2021) explore into the relationship between education and rural income inequality in Indonesia. Their findings suggest that higher education levels lead to lower rural income inequality, emphasizing the importance of improving education to reduce income gaps in rural areas. Additionally, efforts to reduce environmental deterioration also contribute to lower income inequality, highlighting the interconnectedness of education, environmental sustainability, and income distribution in rural development processes. Other studies examine the health education focus on the knowledge, awareness, and perception of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) among women in Asia, particularly in Southeast Asia. These studies underscore the impact of education on health behavior, with low levels of

knowledge and awareness of STIs prevalent among vulnerable groups such as sex workers, transgender women, and rural housewives. Investing in educational initiatives targeting these groups is crucial for preventing STIs and promoting public health in less developed regions/countries (Balakrishnan *et al*., 2023; Kaur *et al*., 2023).

From all previous studies, none have examined the leadership communication strategy of an NGO leader with the ultimate goal of addressing these issues. This paper tells the success story of Desamind in helping youth focusing on education through leadership communication strategies for rural development in Indonesia. By looking at Desamind's programs and their impacts, this research shows how important education is in reducing inequalities and supporting sustainable development in rural communities. In the next sections, we will discuss Desamind's initiatives and how they match SDGs 4 and 10, and share the findings from our study. This study aims to help the ongoing discussion on how to effectively solve education disparities and promote fair development through effective leadership communication strategies.

**METHOD**

This study employs a qualitative approach using document study and in-depth interview methods to explore Desamind's leadership communication strategy and its effectiveness in running their programs. The qualitative approach is suitable for understanding the depth and complexity of the communication strategies used by the organization, focusing on the experiences and perspectives of key stakeholders.

The document study involves collecting and analyzing information about Desamind's programs from various platforms, including news articles, official reports, social media posts, and Desamind's own publications. This method provides a comprehensive overview of Desamind's activities, strategies, and public perception. The document study allows the researcher to gather secondary data that supports the understanding of how Desamind communicates its mission, engages with the community, and implements its programs (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Saunders *et al*., 2019).

The data collection process involves gathering documents related to Desamind's activities and conducting semi-structured interviews with the BOD (Board of Director). The interview is designed to be flexible, allowing for the exploration of topics that emerge during the conversation. The analysis of the collected data follows a thematic approach, identifying key themes and patterns in the leadership communication strategies used by Desamind. The document study and interview data are triangulated to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings. The primary aim of this research is to understand how Desamind applies leadership

communication strategies to successfully run its programs. By analyzing both the documentary evidence and the insights from the BOD, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive view of the communication practices that contribute to Desamind's success.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Desamind

Desamind Indonesia Foundation is a social organization dedicated to empowering rural communities in Indonesia through education and social initiatives. Founded by a group of passionate individuals, Desamind aims to bridge the gap between global competence and grassroots understanding. Their diverse programs include the Desamind Scholarship, Desamind Leadership Camp, Mind-Talk, Mind-Cloud & Mind-Stream, and the Lilin-Lilin Desamind Community. Additionally, they recognize contributions to village development through the Desamind Awards. With a strong presence in Central Java and various branches across Indonesia, Desamind promotes the importance of rural communities under the motto "Ingat Bangsa, Ingat Desa" which translates to "Remember the Nation, Remember the Village." Their efforts focus on fostering education, community development, and creative media to drive positive change in rural areas (Desamind, 2021).

Desamind Indonesia Foundation supports the value of SDG 4, quality Education, through its various educational initiatives. One of the key programs is the Desamind Scholarship, which provides financial assistance to ongoing diploma or undergraduate students (D4/S1) from village communities, encouraging them to empower their communities through education. Additionally, the Desamind Leadership Camp (DLC) is another program aimed at fostering leadership skills among young individuals, further contributing to the development of quality education in rural areas.

### SDGs Implementation of Desamind

The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) include various global development aims, such as providing quality education for everyone which stated in SDGs number 4. In Indonesia, research and studies have focused on improving education within the SDG framework. Perales Jarillo *et al*. (2019) emphasized the importance of online education in achieving SDG-related educational goals, like overcoming geographical barriers and promoting lifelong learning. The study of the International University of La Rioja showed that online education can help people from different backgrounds get engineering training, helping to meet the quality education goals (Jarillo *et al*., 2019)

Desamind is also committed to SDG 4, which aims to provide quality education. They have been actively enhancing education in various remote and underdeveloped villages across

Indonesia. One notable example is Tepa Village on Babar Island in Maluku Province. Tepa Village faces many challenges in accessing quality education due to its remote location, limited electricity, and poor internet connectivity. In this village, electricity is available only from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. via the State electric company (PLN), and during the day, the village relies on diesel engines. The internet signal is weak, with only satellite internet available. Additionally, there is no airport on the island, and the only access to Tepa Village is by ships from Ambon or Kupang, which come only twice a month and take three to four days to reach Tepa Harbor (Adrian, 2024).

Despite these challenges, the people of Tepa Village are determined to pursue education. Thus, Desamind established a low-tech environment laboratory in Tepa to develop students' computational thinking skills. This initiative aims to prepare children for technology, helping them quickly adapt and apply these skills in their daily lives. Through these efforts, Desamind is significantly addressing educational disparities and promoting quality education in line with SDG 4.

**Leadership Communication Strategy of Desamind**

Desamind is actively contributing to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. By focusing on rural village development in Indonesia, Desamind addresses educational disparities between urban and rural areas. The organization builds trust and collaboration with stakeholders, including local communities, government bodies, academic institutions, and private companies, to create a supportive ecosystem for educational initiatives. Effective leadership communication strategies are crucial for aligning stakeholder goals and ensuring program success. According to Men (2014) , effective communication enhances organizational commitment and performance by fostering trust and collaboration. Barrett (2006) also emphasizes the importance of strategic communication for inspiring and motivating teams.

Hardika Dwi Hermawan, S.Pd., M.Sc., president director of Desamind employs a multifaceted leadership style at Desamind, integrating humble leadership, servant leadership, and adaptive leadership to align with the organization's mission and values. **Humble Leadership:** Hardika emphasizes humility in his leadership approach, which involves actively listening to and learning from team members. This creates an inclusive and collaborative organizational culture where every member feels valued and motivated to contribute. Humble leadership is crucial in fostering a sense of belonging and mutual respect within the team, which is essential for the volunteer-driven nature of Desamind. According to

Owens & Hekman (2012) , humble leadership can lead to higher team performance and engagement by promoting a culture of openness and continuous learning. **Servant Leadership**: In addition to humility, Hardika focuses on servant leadership, which prioritizes the needs and development of team members. By ensuring that team members have the necessary tools, resources, and support, he empowers them to succeed and grow. This leadership style is particularly effective in non-profit organizations like Desamind, where the mission is to serve and uplift communities. Greenleaf (1977) introduced the concept of servant leadership, highlighting its effectiveness in creating a supportive and empowering environment that enhances team performance and satisfaction. **Adaptive Leadership**: Hardika also practices adaptive leadership, which involves being flexible and responsive to changing situations while maintaining the core values and goals of the organization. This approach is vital in the dynamic and often unpredictable context of rural development. Adaptive leadership allows Desamind to navigate challenges and seize opportunities effectively, ensuring the organization's resilience and sustainability. Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky (2009) in (Thelwall, 2009) describe adaptive leadership as the ability to mobilize people to tackle tough challenges and thrive in changing environments. By combining these three leadership styles, Desamind creates a robust and dynamic leadership framework that aligns with Desamind's mission to foster local champions for rural development in Indonesia.

Desamind also employs a pentahelix collaboration framework to ensure multisector collaboration in its programs, involving government, academics, business actors, communities, and media. This approach has significantly impacted the investment in various programs such as Beasiswa Desamind, Investasi Ternaik, and Subsidi Program Desamind Chapter. By engaging these diverse stakeholders, Desamind creates a strong synergy and multisector support for each initiative. For instance, Beasiswa Desamind receives backing from foundations like Pijar Foundation, while business actors provide financial support through productive charity investments. Local communities actively participate in program implementation, ensuring that investments have a positive and sustainable impact, as seen in the collaboration with Komunitas Cipaku Peduli. Partnerships with academic institutions such as Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta (UMS) and Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM), as well as private companies like Zahira Mitra Syariah and PT. Herba Emas, further strengthen Desamind's programs through research, development, and practical expertise. The pentahelix model is recognized for its effectiveness in fostering innovation and sustainable development by leveraging the strengths of different sectors. According to Yigitcanlar *et al*., (2019) the pentahelix model facilitates knowledge exchange and resource sharing, which are crucial for

addressing complex societal challenges. Additionally, Purnomo *et al*. (2021) highlight that this collaborative approach enhances the scalability and impact of development initiatives by integrating diverse perspectives and expertise.

In order to develop villages effectively, it is crucial to engage with the community and all relevant stakeholders comprehensively. Desamind employs several strategies to build trust and collaboration among various stakeholders involved in its programs. Firstly, the organization ensures good management by adhering to a proper quality assurance framework, which makes every step structured and measurable. Secondly, Desamind involves human resources with adequate skills and knowledge to support the success of the programs. Thirdly, effective communication is maintained with all parties, including youth, communities, and collaboration partners, to ensure clear, open, and reciprocal information exchange. Transparency in all actions and decisions is emphasized, along with adaptability to various situations, which helps maintain trust and flexibility in collaboration. Additionally, Desamind adopts a community-driven development approach, ensuring that local needs, aspirations, and potentials are integrated into every stage of the program. This approach encourages active participation from all stakeholders in planning and implementation, fostering a sense of ownership and direct contribution to the program's success. Continuous listening and responding to feedback from various groups involved also help in improving and refining the programs sustainably. Supporting literature underscores the importance of these strategies. For instance, Bryson *et al*. (2015) highlight that effective collaboration requires transparent communication, shared goals, and mutual trust among stakeholders. Similarly, Emerson *et al*. (2012) emphasize that building trust through consistent and open communication, as well as involving stakeholders in decision-making processes, is crucial for successful collaborative governance.

**CONCLUSION**

The study concludes that strategic leadership communication is essential for the success of rural development initiatives. By combining humble, servant, and adaptive leadership styles, Desamind creates a robust and dynamic leadership framework that aligns with its mission to foster local champions for rural development in Indonesia. Effective communication practices are critical in achieving organizational goals and driving positive change in rural areas. Additionally, Desamind's efforts significantly contribute to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4, which aims to provide quality education, and SDG 10, which focuses on reducing inequalities. Through initiatives like establishing a low-tech environment laboratory in remote villages, Desamind addresses

educational disparities and promotes lifelong learning opportunities, thereby supporting sustainable development in rural communities. Future research could expand the geographic scope by investigating Desamind's leadership communication strategies in various regions of Indonesia, providing a broader understanding of how these strategies can be adapted and scaled across diverse rural settings.

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