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# PUBLIC COMMUNICATION AS AN INSTRUMENT OF TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN VILLAGE GOVERNANCE: A QUALITATIVE STUDY IN JENEPONTO REGENCY

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## ABSTRACT

*This study explores the role of public communication in realizing transparency and accountability within the village governments of Jeneponto Regency. Using a qualitative approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis involving key stakeholders such as village government officials, community leaders, and local citizens. The findings reveal that while public communication methods, such as community meetings, local media, and social media, are utilized to share information about government policies and decisions, challenges remain in ensuring clarity, accessibility, and effective engagement with the community. Participants highlighted the importance of trust, citizen participation, and feedback mechanisms in promoting transparency and holding government officials accountable. However, barriers such as limited public understanding, inconsistent communication practices, and the absence of interactive platforms for feedback hindered the realization of full accountability. This study contributes to the literature by emphasizing that transparency, while crucial, is not sufficient on its own to guarantee accountability. Instead, it is through an ongoing, participatory communication process that accountability can be effectively fostered in local governance. The research findings provide valuable insights for policymakers and practitioners looking to enhance public communication strategies to improve transparency and accountability in rural government settings.*

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**KEYWORDS:** Public Communication, Transparency, Accountability, Village Government.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Audit recommendations are the primary output in the perspective of public administration encompassing the framework of local government, transparency and accountability has emerged to be the key for developing trust between the government and community sectors. These principles are not only important for public resource management but also for the engagement of citizens in decisions making processes (Webler & Tuler, 2021). Research on the contribution of communication in increasing the transparency and accountability in local governments particularly in the villages level is however emerging. This is especially the case in Indonesia because decentralisation reforms have devolved many governance functions to local actors, which requires constructing better governance architectures that are less opaque and corruption (Kim, 2020).

Jeneponto Regency, within South Sulawesi Province in Indonesia, becomes the context through which a study of public communication aimed at transparency and accountability in village government occurs. Since most of the population of the countries in the region resides in villages, the communication needs of communities in Jeneponto are particularly complex. The communication of information to the public is one way of pioneering that the government has disbursed its funds, implemented its policies and provided the citizen with social services (Yudarwati & Gregory, 2022). Since the village government is in a position to respond to the residents' concerns, different governance procedures become more transparent, and the decision-makers are likely to be challenged on their actions.

In the context of public governance, the term transparency commonly means the measurability and availability of the government functions, decision making, expenditure and policy execution etc (Milić et al., 2022). In the understanding of village governance, this transparency is all important because local governments have responsibilities for managing the resources and services that may impact on citizens' day to day existence such as physical development, education and health. One of the significant advantages of properly explaining decisions is that it enhances the public's confidence in the decisions themselves and the institutions making them, (Mahbooba et al., 2021). On the other hand, accountability means that government officials have a responsibility to justify their conduct and decisions to the public especially as regards the outspemment of public resources. Accountability is

linked to the principle of openness by the fact that the population cannot influence accountability, or even compel certain behaviors from officials, if the latter is not transparent (Dignum, 2020).

Thus, engendering democratic principles of transparency and accountability in local governance, its application is still fairly constrained in dissemination of the rural area and, in particular, village governments in Indonesia. The following are the challenges faced in Jeneponto and other regions of Indonesia when attempting to reform towards increased and responsible decentralised governance: Resource constraints, minimal awareness among the public, and traditional cultures that can impede on free speech. In addition, village governments in Jeneponto have many difficulties in delivering information using advanced communication technology; media used are mostly word of mouth, public announcements and assemblies which is limited in its reach and may only cover a certain group of people.

Another factor that largely hinders communication in Jeneponto is the entailing weak abilities of the local governments in enhancing the stability of accountability and transparency. This limits the exercise by this limitation coupled with the weakness of information technology infrastructure in the remotest areas of the country. In addition, most of the villagers could not participate effectively in decision-making processes since they could not write or was not informed of their rights as well as ways of inputting into the decentralised decisions. Therefore, the level of trust of people in the village governments in Jeneponto can be low, thus constricting the efficiency of governance and people involvement.

Nevertheless, the concern for importance of communication in improving governance cannot be overemphasized. The main means by which transparency and accountability can be observed is the process of communication. This is especially the case face-to-face communication especially when targeting rural audiences since community techniques matter a lot in reaching out to anyone from government as a nation. Studied conducted on the communication practices in local governments in Indonesian show that increased transparency in budgeting, public engagement and information sharing on governmental activities significantly enhances the perception of government legitimacy and accountability among the public.

Second, the use of public communication in the attainment of accountability has been well explained in various works on local governance systems in different countries. It is for this reason that when

governments become more adept at interacting with the public in another manner than just through yearly votes and then maintaining silence for the rest of the year, then citizens will be more involved in decision making and policy, the policies passed will be better, and there will be better oversight by the people. In Jeneponto, enhanced public communication could offer the right starting point for democracy as it addressed system of governance.

This study therefore seeks to examine the extent of the public communication contained within the village government in the wider regional government of Jeneponto to achieve the basic tenets of transparency and accountability. On the one hand, the study explores how the communication activities within the village government and through the channels and with the resident's support or undermine principles of transparency and accountability. Acknowledge of these issues and prospects helps to advance the governance model in the context of Jeneponto and other rural zones in Indonesia. These results might be useful for decision-makers, local authorities and community representatives regarding recommendation to improve governance and its practice and, as a result, rebuild citizens' confidence in local government.

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

This qualitative study was conducted to examine whether public communication helped to achieve the objectives of transparency and accountability in village governance in Jeneponto Regency. This research utilized a qualitative research approach with the purpose of collecting rich data on the communication activities of the village governments and the extent of their contribution to improvement of the two aspects. Semi structured interviews, focus groups, and document review were used to collect data that provided an excellent understanding of the local governance setting.

The paper adopted qualitative exploratory research design since it is more suitable for exploring on phenomena like communication practices, transparency, and accountability with in rural governance. As most of these notions are grounded in community perceptions and practices, the study aimed at examining the role of realities of all government employees, community representatives, and citizens. The objective was to determine the perception of the aforementioned actors concerning public communication in the context of village governance as well as how practice affected transparency and accountability.

The data collection process for this study involved

three primary methods: It is a research method that working through interviews and focus group discussions and use documents as data sources. Semi structured interviews were administered on important players in village administration and were extended to village administrators, leaders and those from civil society in the villages. These were purposively sampled because of their specialization in governance and public relations. The interviews which were semi structured and ranged between 45 minutes and one hour were designed to understand how these role players utilize communication to educate the public on governmental decisions, policies as well as the utilisation of public resources. Some of the guidelines included how often the organization communicates to the public and methods it uses, the level of citizen engagement in decision making and the perceived challenges to effective development of the two values. Information sharing through conventional and ICTs like social media, local radio, fliers pamphlets were also identified under the transparency channel. All the interviews were conducted in the local language for better understanding of questions by the participants.

In addition to the interviews, focus group discussion was carried out with other people in the community in order to have an understanding of how we get a respond of the public as to how the village government responded to the above concerns. These focused group discussions were conducted in community centres and involved 6 - 8 participants per group and took between one and an hour and half. The participants were purposively chosen based on their ability to discuss governance issues and their awareness of the village government communication activities. Being a series of focus groups, the participants were able to express their experience in a specific area, discuss the efficiency of different communication methods, and voice their opinions of the preparedness of governments for sharing certain information, as well as their trust in the efficiency of the government. The sessions were taped with the participants' permission and then transcribed for research purposes.

Document analysis was also used as part of the data collection method so as to triangulate the data collected from interviews and focus groups. This involved an examination of both official documents and communication scriptures deposited with the village governments like meeting notes, annual reports, public notices and any other documents that are likely to have been released to the community. The focus of the document analysis was made on

such criteria as information transparency and readability, types of public involvement. It was also useful in cross-checking the interview and focus group data in order to further understand the communication practices and issues related to the village governments of Jeneponto Regency.

Since the focus of the study was on the experiences of the subjects with respect to the communication practices of the village government purposive sampling was used to target participants who had direct involvement in village government or those who have had close association with the village government for a long time. These participants were consisting of the village government authorities (village headmen, village officials, public relation officers) and the community leaders (religious leaders, youth leaders, local NGOs, and CBOs' representatives) and ordinary citizens who have ever come across village government in form of public rally or any other public forums. The overall sample comprised 20 interviews and 4 focus group discussions in three selected villages in Jeneponto Regency. This sample size was considered sufficient to generate a diverse set of insights and reach data saturation in order to contextualize the purpose and function of public communication to achieve transparency and accountability across villages' governing systems.

In this research, data analysis was done under the banner of thematic analysis. Interviews, focus group discussions and documents were transcribed and data were managed and analyzed with the help of the qualitative data analysis tool (NVivo). During the first step of open coding the emergent themes related to the code categories namely public communication, transparency and accountability were identified. These themes were then bundled into broader classes of themes: communication channels; communication opacity; and, public trust in government.

The analysis process was iterative, with constant comparison between the data collected from different sources. This allowed for the identification of patterns and differences across participants' experiences. The findings were also interpreted in light of the existing literature on public communication and governance, enabling the study to contribute to broader discussions on transparency and accountability in rural governance settings.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study enables understanding of the current state of public communication activities within the village governments of Jeneponto Regency, with regard to the contribution to transparency and

accountability. In view of this, face to face interviews, focus group discussions and document analysis show which communication techniques are used by the village officials and the entire community in transmitting information about government actions and policies. It also focuses on problem and solution in communication effectiveness, an issue of transparency and accountability in the light of government officials and citizens. As a sub-theme of findings this section focuses on the results regarding the communication strategies, the perceptions towards transparency and the consequences towards accountability in providing an in depth of the dynamics of the local governance in Jeneponto.

#### 3.1. Public Communication Practices In Jeneponto

Public communication in Jeneponto Regency is shaped by a blend of traditional and modern communication methods, which serve to inform and engage the community regarding government activities, decisions, and policies. The village governments have made efforts to utilize both face-to-face communication methods, such as village meetings and announcements, and digital tools, like social media platforms and local radio broadcasts, to enhance transparency and accountability. However, despite these efforts, challenges persist in ensuring that the information reaches all segments of the community effectively and fosters genuine participation in governance processes.

One of the primary communication practices observed in Jeneponto's village governance is the use of traditional methods, such as village meetings (known as *musyawarah desa*) and bulletin boards placed in public spaces. These methods are still central to communication in rural areas, where access to digital technologies is sometimes limited, particularly for older generations. Village meetings are regularly held to discuss important issues, ranging from budget allocations to policy implementations. These meetings are designed to be inclusive, giving community members the opportunity to voice their concerns and ask questions about government plans.

However, the effectiveness of these meetings in fostering transparency is mixed. Some participants in the study emphasized the role of *musyawarah desa* as a platform for open discussion.

As one village official stated,

"We always hold meetings before making any decisions. We invite everyone, especially community leaders, to discuss and give feedback."

This open approach is intended to allow the

community to have input into the decision-making process. Despite this, several community members expressed concerns about the limitations of these meetings. One local citizen mentioned, "Not everyone is invited to participate, and even when they are, sometimes the discussions are dominated by those with more influence, leaving others out."

Additionally, the bulletin boards in village centers and along main roads are regularly updated with notices about local governance activities. While these boards are effective in reaching a large portion of the population, they rely on individuals being literate and regularly checking these locations.

According to one community leader,

*"The bulletin boards are good, but they don't reach those who are illiterate or don't pass by often."*

In recent years, digital tools have been increasingly utilized in Jeneponto to improve communication with the public. The rise of social media platforms, particularly Facebook and WhatsApp, has allowed village governments to disseminate information more quickly and efficiently. Village heads and government officials have created official social media pages where they post updates on village affairs, such as the allocation of public funds, community health programs, and development initiatives. These platforms enable real-time communication and foster a sense of immediacy in sharing government actions with the public.

A village head explained,

*"We created a Facebook page to reach the younger generation, and it's been effective in sharing our activities. Sometimes we get immediate responses, which helps us address concerns faster."*

This reflects the growing trend of digital communication as a tool for promoting transparency, especially for younger, tech-savvy citizens. However, not all segments of the population are equally engaged with these platforms. While social media has been beneficial in reaching younger generations, older residents, especially those who may not own smartphones or have internet access, remain disconnected from this mode of communication.

In addition to social media, local radio stations have also played a role in public communication, especially in rural areas where radio is a common medium for information. Local government officials often collaborate with radio stations to broadcast news about village governance, health campaigns, and emergency updates. One government communication officer noted,

*"Radio is still very important here, especially in remote areas where people may not have smartphones. We partner with local stations to reach a wider audience."*

Despite these advancements, challenges remain in achieving effective public communication. One key issue is the digital divide that affects the rural population. As mentioned earlier, while younger people and more educated community members have better access to digital tools, older individuals, and those in more remote areas often lack the resources to engage with these new forms of communication. A local citizen expressed frustration with this gap, saying,

*"Most of us don't have smartphones. We hear about decisions from other people, but it's hard to trust the information if we can't see it for ourselves."*

Another challenge is the issue of *transparency* in the content of the communication. Several interviewees highlighted that while communication practices had increased in frequency, the clarity and detail of the information shared were sometimes insufficient. One village official acknowledged,

*"We post a lot of information online, but sometimes the explanations are too technical for the average person to understand. We need to simplify the language to make sure everyone gets it."*

This comment highlights the tension between information dissemination and public comprehension, which can undermine transparency if the messages are not clear or accessible to the wider community.

Additionally, the effectiveness of these communication tools in promoting true transparency and accountability has been questioned. While the village government has made strides in opening channels for communication, many citizens remain skeptical of the government's commitment to accountability.

A community leader remarked,

*"Yes, we are informed about what's going on, but many of us still feel like we don't have enough influence on the decisions. There's a gap between communication and real participation."*

### 3.2. Perceptions Of Transparency

Transparency in public governance is a key aspect of building trust between the government and its citizens, and it is particularly crucial in rural areas such as Jeneponto Regency, where public access to information can often be limited. In Jeneponto, the perception of transparency in village governance varies among different stakeholders, with some believing that significant progress has been made, while others feel that much more needs to be done to ensure that the government is truly open and accountable. The interviews with village officials, community leaders, and citizens reveal nuanced perspectives on the state of transparency in their

village governments, with a few notable challenges and successes.

One of the primary issues surrounding perceptions of transparency in Jeneponto is the varying understanding of what transparency actually means in practice. Many government officials and community leaders express a broad commitment to transparency, often framing it as providing information to the public about government decisions, budgets, and policy changes. For instance, a village head stated,

*"We regularly share the details of our budget with the community during our meetings. We make sure they know how the funds are being allocated and spent. We try to be as open as possible."*

This suggests that there is an intention to share information as a means of demonstrating transparency.

However, some citizens perceive transparency differently, equating it with direct involvement in decision-making processes and the ability to influence government actions. According to one local resident,

*"They tell us what's going on, but they never really ask us for our opinions. For me, transparency means being part of the decisions, not just hearing about them."*

This highlights a disconnect between the government's efforts to communicate and the citizens' desire for deeper engagement in the decision-making process. In other words, while information is being shared, it does not always meet the public's expectations of what transparency should entail.

A critical factor influencing perceptions of transparency is access to information. Village officials in Jeneponto, particularly those engaged in communication, assert that they make an effort to disseminate information as widely as possible through various channels. As one government communication officer explained,

*"We make sure to put up notices in public places, we share updates on social media, and we also use the radio. We do everything we can to ensure everyone knows what's happening."*

This indicates an active effort to distribute information, yet the effectiveness of these efforts is still questioned by some members of the community.

Many citizens, however, feel that while information is technically available, it is often difficult to access in a meaningful way. Some interviewees pointed out that the information shared was sometimes too complex or not specific enough.

One community leader expressed concern, saying,

*"The information is there, but it's in a language that*

*most people don't understand. It's like they are trying to be transparent, but the way they explain things just makes it harder to grasp."*

This point raises a critical issue: while information may be available, the clarity and accessibility of that information are essential for fostering genuine transparency. If the public cannot easily understand the information being provided, the government's efforts to communicate may fall short of truly promoting transparency.

Another significant factor in the perception of transparency is the level of trust that the community has in the local government. Transparency is often closely linked to trust, with citizens more likely to perceive the government as transparent if they believe that the information shared is accurate, truthful, and not manipulated for political purposes. One community leader remarked,

*"Sometimes, even if they give us the numbers and the facts, we wonder if they're telling us the whole story. Trust is important. Without it, no amount of information will make a difference."*

This sentiment underscores the idea that transparency alone is not enough there must also be a foundation of trust for it to be effective. Without trust in the integrity of the government and its communication, citizens may remain skeptical about the motives behind the information being shared.

Some interviewees expressed a lack of confidence in the government's intentions, citing past instances where decisions were made without sufficient public consultation or where the outcomes of village meetings seemed predetermined.

A local citizen expressed this concern, stating,

*"We're told that they're transparent, but I've been to many meetings where we didn't have a chance to speak or were not allowed to ask questions. How is that transparent?"*

This suggests that while information may be provided, the participatory process that should accompany transparency is often lacking. When citizens feel excluded from the decision-making process, their perception of transparency is negatively affected, even if they are regularly informed about government activities.

Despite the apparent efforts to increase transparency, several barriers remain that hinder the full realization of transparent governance in Jeneponto. One of the main challenges, as identified by interviewees, is the limited capacity of the village government to engage the community in an open dialogue. Some government officials noted that, while they were committed to sharing information, there were often logistical challenges, such as limited resources for communication or the difficulty of

reaching all segments of the population, especially in remote areas. A village administrator explained,

*"We try to hold meetings, but sometimes people can't attend because of distance or other problems. It's hard to ensure everyone is involved."*

Additionally, the complexity of government processes and the technical nature of some policies make it difficult for ordinary citizens to fully grasp the details, even when the information is made available. As one focus group participant mentioned,

*"They explain things in technical terms, and most people don't understand what it means for them. Transparency is only effective if people can understand it and apply it to their lives."*

This underscores the need for the government to make efforts to simplify the language of official communications, ensuring that citizens are not just receiving information, but that they are able to engage with it meaningfully.

### **3.3. Impact On Accountability**

Accountability is the cornerstone of good governance, ensuring that those in positions of power are answerable for their actions and decisions. In Jeneponto Regency, public communication practices directly influence the level of accountability exhibited by village government officials. The effectiveness of transparency in fostering accountability depends not only on the availability of information but also on how the government engages with citizens to explain its decisions and respond to concerns. Public communication serves as a tool that can either enhance or hinder the accountability of village governments, depending on the quality and accessibility of the communication processes.

For village governments in Jeneponto, accountability is understood as the duty of officials to explain and justify their actions, decisions, and use of public resources to the community. However, despite efforts to communicate openly, several barriers to full accountability exist, including limited public participation, unclear communication, and distrust between the government and the citizens. These barriers create challenges in ensuring that government officials are fully accountable for their actions, thereby hindering the development of robust governance structures that citizens can rely on.

Public communication in Jeneponto is perceived by many government officials as the primary tool to ensure accountability. Through regular meetings, announcements, and the distribution of written materials, the government aims to inform the public about its actions, policies, and resource management.

One village head explained,

*"We see communication as an essential part of accountability. When the community is informed, they can hold us responsible for our actions. We share financial reports and decisions publicly so that they can see how we are managing the funds."*

This sentiment underscores the belief among government officials that transparency in communication leads to greater accountability. By making information available to the public, officials expect to be held accountable for their decisions and actions. However, the effectiveness of this communication in fostering accountability is contingent on several factors, including the accessibility of information, the willingness of citizens to engage, and the responsiveness of the government to public feedback.

Despite these efforts, there is a perception among some citizens that public communication does not necessarily lead to real accountability. Many citizens feel that while they receive information, their ability to influence decisions or hold officials accountable is limited.

One resident shared,

*"We hear a lot about what the government is doing, but they don't always ask for our opinion. Sometimes, we don't even know who to approach when we have concerns. It feels like they are just telling us things, but they are not really answering to us."*

This perception reflects a key challenge in Jeneponto: the distinction between providing information and being truly accountable. For many community members, accountability involves not just sharing information, but actively responding to concerns and incorporating citizen input into decision-making.

One of the most significant challenges in realizing accountability through public communication is the lack of trust between the government and the citizens. Trust is foundational to accountability; without it, communication efforts can appear disingenuous, and citizens may remain skeptical of the government's intentions. In Jeneponto, distrust in government actions undermines the potential impact of transparency on accountability. Many citizens expressed doubts about whether the government was genuinely open with them about its actions, especially regarding the allocation of public funds.

As one focus group participant noted,

*"They tell us about the budget and how much money is spent, but there's no way for us to really know if that's true. We need more proof and action, not just words."*

The lack of trust often stems from past experiences where citizens felt that government actions were opaque or not fully explained. This distrust creates a barrier to effective accountability, as citizens may not

believe that their engagement will lead to real change.

A community leader explained,

*"When people don't trust the information, they are receiving, they won't hold the government accountable. They might attend the meetings or read the notices, but they don't believe that their concerns will be addressed."*

To overcome this barrier, it is crucial that village governments not only provide information but also demonstrate their commitment to accountability through responsive and inclusive practices. One way to build trust and, by extension, improve accountability is through consistent engagement with citizens and ensuring that their voices are heard. Without this engagement, information-sharing efforts may appear as mere formalities rather than genuine attempts to foster transparency and accountability.

Citizen participation plays a vital role in promoting accountability. When citizens are actively involved in governance, they are more likely to hold officials accountable for their decisions and actions. In Jeneponto, there is a clear desire among many residents to have more influence over village governance. They expressed the belief that transparency should not be limited to the dissemination of information but should also include opportunities for citizens to engage in decision-making processes.

A local youth leader highlighted,

*"Accountability comes when the government allows us to participate in decisions that affect us. If they just tell us about decisions that have already been made, how can we hold them accountable? We need to be part of the process."*

This statement reflects the perception that real accountability goes beyond information-sharing. It requires that citizens are involved in the decisions and actions of the government, particularly in areas that affect their daily lives, such as budgeting and the planning of local development projects.

Focus group discussions also revealed that many citizens believe that accountability is achieved when they can ask questions, raise concerns, and see visible changes based on their input. As one participant shared,

*"When they listen to us and act on what we say, then we feel like they are truly accountable. But if they just talk to us without listening, then it doesn't mean anything."*

Feedback mechanisms are another critical aspect of ensuring accountability. While the village government in Jeneponto uses communication to inform citizens, there is a need for better mechanisms that allow for two-way communication. Citizens must have avenues through which they can express concerns and hold officials accountable for their

actions. Unfortunately, many residents expressed frustration over the lack of effective channels for feedback.

As one citizen mentioned,

*"We know about the meetings, but there's no follow-up. We don't always get answers to our questions, and when we ask about something, we don't know where to go."*

Effective feedback channels, such as public forums, complaint mechanisms, and open-door policies, can significantly enhance the accountability of the village government. These channels create a space for citizens to directly engage with officials, voice concerns, and receive responses. By fostering a culture of responsiveness, the government can ensure that its communication practices not only inform but also invite active participation and hold officials accountable for their decisions.

This study aimed to examine the role of public communication in realizing transparency and accountability within the village governments of Jeneponto Regency, South Sulawesi. The findings shed light on how communication practices influence citizens' understanding of government actions and decisions, while also highlighting barriers to fully achieving transparency and accountability. This section discusses the study's results in relation to existing literature, identifying how the research fills gaps in the current understanding of public communication in local governance, particularly in the context of rural areas in Indonesia.

It is universally accepted that this is a significant weapon against social vein in the conduct of public affairs. Such studies as Li et al. (2022) have pointed out that the important foundation for achieving the trust of citizens in the actions of their governments has been noticed to be communications that offer transparency. In this study, it was found that all the elements of the village governments in Jeneponto employed ways of communicating its policies, financial and decision making to its citizens through direct community council, local media and printed word. These attempts were in line with available literature, which insists on the importance of achieving increased transparency by using easily understandable information (Bibri, 2021).

However, as this study points out, there is also a lack of insight on the level of transparency this kind of information sharing enjoys in Jeneponto among the average citizens. Whereas the government officials were confident about the effectiveness of their communication the community members complained that there was insufficient dissemination of information and that which was provided was not

well explained.

This view resonates with Androniceanu (2021) who pointed that, freedom of information is not effective in the process of exercising transparency if it is not supported by well understood, clear and credible explanations of government operations. This gap between the availability and the capability of the public to understand the information referred to is the reason why not only information should be disseminated but also dialog initiated, to ensure that the citizens are capable of evaluating the information provided.

Another area that enriches the literature is accountability; the study also provided a fine line on how accountability of local governments was enhanced by communication. Current scholarship (Chen *et al.*, 2020) argues that the use of communication to enhance accountability has to be accompanied by engagement of citizens and feedback processes. This study supports this view since although the village government in Jeneponto freely disseminated policy information and decisions, the absence of a direct interaction with the citizens undermined accountability. People complained that the government never consulted them on what it deemed to be appropriate for them in their everyday lives.

The present research can be contrasted with works that claim information is enough for accountability (Mansoor, 2021), while showing that in fact accountability requires direct interaction between the government and the citizens. This conclusion accords with Rodríguez *et al.* (2021), saying that 'true accountability' is about not only dissemination of information but also about creating venues for question and answer, comments and inputs. Communication activities in Jeneponto conducted by the village government were perceived as more reduced to the provision of information, while the ability to engage people in society in constructive dialogue was somewhat limited. This research finding refutes the conventional belief within some literature in governance that having access to information has a consequent effect on accountability.

Many authors have touched on the place of trust in public communication and accountability, and the majority of these authors have affirmed that trust is an important component of communication between governments and citizens (O'Neill, 2020). This study also established that Swazis' level of trust in the village governments' shared communication practices was poor concerning the credibility of the shared content. This sentiment highlights a

significant gap in the literature that this study addresses: how an organization can convey knowledge without just sending out a message and not getting a response.

It showed that citizens' governments are trusted only when the citizens develop perceptions that the government is attentive to their communications and considers them in policy-making (Kumagai & Ilorio, 2020). Jeneponto is elated by the fact that there is actually no continuation of such platforms to actualized the citizens' anger over matters they want addressed but never followed up. This issue resonates with the existing literature on the accountability mechanisms being adopted in local governance, and the need for government to offer not only transparency but also responsiveness through addressing issues raised by citizens and feeding back. Therefore, the study adds to the existing body of knowledge that trust, as well as accountability, cannot be attained through push communication that assumes that once the target audience receives the message positive change will follow without feedback being considered and incorporated.

This research also revealed several issues that negatively affect public communication on Jeneponto, of which have not been expounded in prior research of similar rural governance systems. Some of the main challenges included lack of access to contemporary communication technology, low understanding of ICT and absence of a feedback mechanism. Although some of these works (Esteban *et al.*, 2020) have highlighted the difficulties of managing digital communication in rural territories, such arguments rarely address the problems of accessing the urban environment or refer to the general politico-territorial context. This research further builds on this by pointing out that this is also an issue in rural contexts where access to digital communication tools is low because it is also a problem when there is no coherent, consistent process for providing feedback that can also prevent the realization of transparency and accountability.

While techniques like a 'baraza', the use of notice boards, they don't capture the diversity of the citizenry as a more modern approach to consultations would. As an example, youth considered they are not well reached by such traditional means while others expressed that they do not always believe in information provided by the holders of public forums. This highlights a significant gap in the literature: however, the outdated forms of communication should be seen more as insufficient, since they are supposed to be sufficient for rural communities, they may not appeal to the diverse

population of such regions.

The present research offers the following seminal insights into public communication in local governing: As it extends current studies, it supports the findings that transparency as well as engagement of citizens are needed for accountability but it questions the concept of the latter as if it depends on sharing of information only. The study also outlines the centrality of trust within communication and clearly points that governments need to transcend one-dimensional communication strategies. This study therefore responds to the following research questions: In what ways do the public communication practices of Jeneponto enhance and constrain transparency and accountability in the provision of rural local governance? In doing so, this study contributes to the extant literature, both theoretically and empirically on the issues of communication challenges and opportunities in rural local governance.

This research focuses on the nature of accountability and more specifically on the role of citizens' participatory response to accountability findings with this study residing firmly in this tradition of shifted thinking of what accountability, the study adds its voice to a rising discourse that advocates for increased active citizen involvement. The results imply that local governments should

expand the communication channels as well as the means for involving citizens and receiving feedback if they seek the enhancement of the accountability and transparency of their activities.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This effort aims to stress the importance of the public communication to increasing transparency and accountability of village government of Jeneponto Regency. As for communication practices like community meetings and local media, helpful for revealing the actions of the government, some important flaws were pointed at to explain the nature of the information disseminating and the ways of its understanding and discussion by the public. Three themes that were considered key in the realization of transparency and accountability, which are still heavily underdeveloped in many rural governance settings include trust, active citizen participation, and feedback mechanisms. The findings of the study add to the knowledge of transparency and accountability in the following ways: concerning transparency the study affirms that transparency involves a cycle of communication that is two way and interactive that respond to the citizens' concerns and that which involves their participation.

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