

# Optimization of the Role and Function of the Village Head in Resolving Land Disputes (A Case Study in Tabongo Village, Dulupi District, Boalemo Regency)

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This research aims to analyze the optimization of the role and function of the Village Head in resolving land disputes in Tabongo Village and to identify the constraints faced in the process. This study employs a qualitative method with a descriptive case study approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the land dispute phenomenon in a natural context. Data collection techniques were conducted through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation studies involving key informants such as the Village Head, the Village Consultative Body (BPD), community leaders, and the disputing parties. The results indicate that the Village Head's role has been implemented through mediation and deliberation mechanisms, yet it is not yet optimal as it has not been able to provide strong legal certainty and sustainable resolutions. Furthermore, the main constraints identified are the weak land administration and proof of land ownership, as well as a lack of institutional coordination. In conclusion, optimizing the role of the Village Head requires strengthening capacity as a mediator while simultaneously enhancing administrative and legal functions. The implications of this research emphasize the importance of organizing land administration, improving the competence of village officials, and strengthening inter-institutional coordination to achieve effective, fair, and sustainable dispute resolution.

**Keywords:** Optimization; Role and Function; Village Head; Land Disputes

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## 1. Introduction

The village is a legal community unit that possesses attributive authority to regulate community interests based on origins and local initiatives as regulated in Law No. 23 of 2014 [1]. As the spearhead of government, the Village Government is obligated to create stability and remain sensitive to social conflicts, particularly land disputes which represent a basic need of the community. However, the reality in Tabongo Village shows a significant increasing trend in land disputes; recorded at 54 reports from 2021 to 2025, with the highest figure reaching 14 reports in the final year. These issues encompass boundary disputes, inheritance, and overlapping certificates which, if not handled correctly, have the potential to trigger emotional and physical conflicts within the community [2].

To respond to the dispute phenomenon, juridically, Law No. 6 of 2014 concerning Villages and Government Regulation No. 43 of 2014 have actually mandated the Village Head to conduct community development, including the obligation to resolve citizen disputes. This authority is strengthened locally by Boalemo Regency Regional Regulation No. 2 of 2018, which affirms the role of the Village Head as the village peace judge. However, despite a strong legal framework, the fact remains that in Tabongo Village, there are cases

dating back to 2022 that failed in mediation and had to proceed to litigation in court. Such failures are influenced by complex constraints such as weak evidence of ownership and the sectoral ego of the parties involved, indicating that the mediation function of the Village Government has not yet operated optimally.

The issue of village mediation effectiveness aligns with various previous scientific studies that highlight similar obstacles in other regions. A study by Sukaharjo (2024) shows that the increase in disputes is influenced by administrative factors such as overlapping certificates and weak land recording systems, so that the role of the village head as a peace judge is often hindered [3] furthermore, research by Rahman & Putri (2022) found that the success of non-litigation resolution is largely determined by the level of public trust, which requires the village head to be capable of building strong legitimacy [4].

Departing from the gap between regulations and field data in Tabongo Village, and reinforced by the results of these studies, this research is urgent to conduct. This study aims to examine more deeply how the roles and functions of the village head can be optimized in resolving land disputes in Tabongo Village, as well as the specific constraints faced in the resolution process. Through this study, it is hoped that an appropriate formulation will be found so that the village head's role as a mediator can minimize litigation disputes and maintain social harmony at the village level.

## 2. Literature Review and Problem Statement

This study utilizes Role Theory, which views individual behavior as a reflection of social positions accompanied by specific rights, obligations, and norms, where Kahn (1964) [5] in *Organizational Stress* emphasizes that such behavior results from environmental pressures or expectations within a social system. In the context of land disputes, this role is implemented through Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR); as Moore (2014) in *The Mediation Process* asserts, mediation by a third party with moral and legal authority is crucial for achieving a win-win solution and preventing the escalation of conflict into high-cost litigation [6]. The relevance of this role for the Village Head is reinforced by the research of Darman & Liana (2024), which states that although their legitimacy is firmly based on Law No. 6 of 2014, their effectiveness is often hindered by limited legal competence and political pressure [7]. This phenomenon is closely related to Fritz Heider's Attribution Theory, where the success of mediation is attributed to personal characteristics and situational factors, particularly regarding debates over the neutrality of the Village Head when dealing with influential local figures.

This entire theoretical framework underlies this research, which is motivated by the gap between the regulatory mandates of village authorities and the field reality in Tabongo Village, where the dynamics of land disputes continue to increase due to disorganized archiving of land titles and the limited functional capacity of officials. To fill the gap in previous research, which has largely remained descriptive-judicial, this study focuses on evaluating systemic barriers and efforts to optimize the Village Head's role in reaching permanent agreements. Based on these conditions, the problem formulation of this research is aimed at analyzing how to optimize the role of the Village Government in resolving land disputes in Dulupi District and identifying the fundamental factors that hinder the execution of this conflict resolution function.

## 3. Methods

This research employs a qualitative methodology with a descriptive case study design to examine in depth the complexity of land dispute phenomena in the field, in line with the view of Sugiyono (2019) that a qualitative approach is appropriately used in naturalistic settings with the researcher as the key instrument to capture the meaning behind social reality [8]. Using inductive logic, this research is not oriented toward

hypothesis testing, but rather toward building a comprehensive understanding of the typology and resolution of land conflicts in Tabongo Village.

To ensure the depth and validity of the data, data collection was conducted through triangulation techniques including participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation studies. Primary data were obtained from purposively selected key informants such as the Village Head, the Chairman of the BPD, community leaders, and the disputing parties to present a balanced emic perspective, reinforced by secondary data in the form of official Tabongo Village documents such as spatial maps, land ownership archives, and minutes of village meetings as authentic evidence of the legal process at the local level. Data analysis was performed interactively and continuously until completion, encompassing the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification.

In the process, the researcher conducted verification of land document validity, analyzed the roles of the Village Head and BPD, and interpreted interview results with various stakeholders to evaluate the implications of these roles on the effectiveness of dispute resolution. Furthermore, the analysis was strengthened by source triangulation techniques to compare findings from interviews, official documents, and field observations to minimize subjectivity bias and ensure the credibility of the research findings.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

##### Optimization of the Role and Function of the Village Head in Land Dispute Resolution in Tabongo Village

The main findings of the research show that the role and function of the Village Head in resolving land disputes in Tabongo Village have essentially been carried out, yet remain suboptimal. The village government has implemented the mediation function through deliberation and a familial approach as the primary mechanism for dispute resolution. This is evident from the practice of bringing together the disputing parties, facilitating dialogue, and encouraging the achievement of mutual agreements. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of this role is still limited, as dispute resolutions tend to be recurring and have not yet provided strong legal certainty. In the perspective of Role Theory proposed by Robert L. Kahn, these findings indicate a gap between role expectation and role behavior. The community expects the Village Head to be a neutral and fair figure capable of providing definitive dispute resolution. However, in practice, this role has not been fully fulfilled, leading to community dissatisfaction and the potential for prolonged conflict.

Furthermore, the research findings confirm that the role behavior of the village government in land dispute resolution has been conducted through mediation and deliberation, yet still requires strengthening in the aspects of decisiveness, professionalism, and the integration between social and legal approaches. This indicates that the optimization of the role is determined not only by the execution of the mediation function, but also by the institutional capacity to manage administrative and legal aspects simultaneously.

These findings align with the research of Rohaman & Sari (2023), which states that land dispute resolution at the village level is often hindered because village officials focus solely on deliberation without the support of administrative and legal decisiveness [9]. Additionally, research by Putera (2023) also emphasizes that the effectiveness of dispute resolution is strongly influenced by the quality of the role behavior of village apparatus, where a familial approach without strengthening the aspect of legality tends to produce weak agreements that are easily disputed again [10].

While the findings of this research emphasize the importance of integrating legal aspects and professionalism, there are different perspectives in the literature indicating that excessive formalization at the village level can be counterproductive. As proposed by Hidayat (2021), efforts to draw a sharp line

between administrative procedures and deliberation often actually erode the social flexibility that serves as the village government's primary strength in dampening conflict [11].

In line with this, Wicaksono and Utami (2020) argue that excessively rigid demands for bureaucratic professionalism risk creating a distance between village officials and the community, thereby weakening the legitimacy of mediation results that should be based on personal trust. This critique implies that the proposed institutional strengthening efforts must be carried out carefully so as not to stifle the function of local wisdom, which sociologically is far more accepted by rural communities compared to purely legalistic approaches [12].

Based on this analysis, it can be concluded that although the Village Head in Tabongo Village has endeavored to carry out the mediation function through a familial approach, its effectiveness is still hindered by the gap between community expectations for legal certainty and role behavior that is not yet supported by administrative decisiveness.

A reliance on deliberation without the integration of formal legality tends to produce weak agreements; however, these institutional strengthening efforts must be carried out proportionally. The optimization of the village government's role must be able to balance administrative professionalism and local wisdom, ensuring that legal reinforcement does not inadvertently erode the social flexibility and personal legitimacy that have long served as the foundation of trust in rural communities.

### **Constraints Faced in Land Dispute Resolution in Tabongo Village**

The primary findings of the research indicate that the most dominant constraints in resolving land disputes in Tabongo Village are the weakness of land ownership evidence and the disorganized administration of village land records. Many dispute cases are rooted in the practice of oral land grants (*hibah lisan*) without valid written documentation, which complicates the evidentiary process and the decision-making during mediation.

In the perspective of the Theory of Constraints (TOC) proposed by Eliyahu M. Goldratt, this condition indicates the existence of a core constraint that acts as a bottleneck within the dispute resolution system. The ambiguity of ownership evidence and the weakness of land administration cause the entire resolution process whether through mediation or legal channels to become ineffective.

In addition to this primary constraint, this research also identified other supporting constraints, such as a lack of coordination between village institutions, minimal involvement of the Village Consultative Body (BPD), and errors in determining the appropriate resolution path (civil or criminal). These constraints reinforce the primary obstacle and demonstrate that the problem is not merely technical, but also structural and institutional in nature.

These findings bear a strong correlation with previous empirical studies. Research by Prasetyo (2023) states that land disputes at the local level are difficult to resolve due to incomplete administrative data and the weakness of legal evidence regarding land ownership [13]. Furthermore, Kombe (2023) found that the dominant constraints in land conflicts include disorganized administration, weak documentation, and a lack of coordination between local institutions [14]. Other studies by Boteng (2024) and Serwat (2024) also emphasize that structural and policy constraints are the primary factors hindering land dispute resolution at the local level [15] and [16].

While the majority of literature places administrative disorder as the primary constraint, an alternative perspective suggests that weaknesses in legal data are not always an absolute barrier to resolving disputes at the local level. As asserted by Lestari (2022), social recognition and cultural capital often possess a stronger binding force than administrative completeness in mitigating conflicts within grassroots

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communities [17]. Furthermore, Siahaan and Pratama (2023) offer a sharp critique, arguing that an overly rigid emphasis on legal formalities and administrative order risks triggering new escalations of conflict and marginalizing citizens who have limited bureaucratic literacy [18]. Consequently, there is an academic misalignment indicating that the effectiveness of land dispute resolution depends not only on the quality of documentation and policy structures but also on the ability of the formal legal system to respect the living sociological realities within the community.

The conclusion of this analysis indicates that the primary constraint in resolving land disputes in Tabongo Village is a systemic bottleneck rooted in weak formal evidence of ownership and disorganized administration, as explained by the Theory of Constraints. While these findings align with various global studies that position structural and documentation weaknesses as dominant obstacles, this analysis also reveals an academic debate regarding the importance of considering sociological aspects. Ultimately, the effectiveness of dispute resolution at the local level demands not only improvements in administrative governance and strengthened inter-institutional coordination but also requires sensitivity toward cultural capital and social recognition. This ensures that the reinforcement of formal legality does not inadvertently trigger community marginalization or the escalation of new conflicts.

## 5. Conclusion

The conclusion of this research demonstrates that the role and function of the Village Head in resolving land disputes in Tabongo Village has been implemented through deliberation and mediation mechanisms. However, it remains suboptimal in providing legal certainty and sustainable resolution. This is due to a gap between community expectations viewing the Village Head as a neutral and decisive mediator and actual practices that focus heavily on familial approaches without the support of administrative and legal reinforcement. Consequently, this study addresses the research objectives and problem formulation by confirming that the optimization of the Village Head's role has not been fully achieved. Furthermore, it identifies that the primary constraint in land dispute resolution lies in weak land administration and insufficient evidence of ownership, which hinders effective resolution.

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