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Regional Head Retreat as a Strategy to Harmonize National and Regional Development Programs

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ABSTRACT
Policy synchronization between the central and regional governments is a key factor in ensuring the effectiveness of integrated and sustainable development. However, in practice, there are often disagreements, overlapping regulations, and differences in priorities that hinder optimal policy implementation. One strategy that can be used to improve policy coordination and alignment is the Regional Head Retreat, which functions as a forum for reflection, consolidation, and formulation of joint strategies between the central and regional governments. The Regional Head Retreat is also a more implementative elaboration of Bureaucratic Reform. This is where the implementation of the retreat becomes the basic foundation for the implementation of the new government in each region. This study aims to analyze the role of the Retreat in strengthening policy synchronization, by highlighting the approach of both print and electronic information media and the theoretical basis as the main factors in its success. The research method used is a qualitative approach with a case study of the implementation of the 2025 Retreat in Magelang. The results of the study show that the Retreat designed with an inclusive and evidence-based approach can improve the effectiveness of intergovernmental communication, accelerate policy harmonization, and encourage the implementation of more coordinated development programs. Therefore, Retreat can be a strategic instrument in strengthening central-regional relations, reducing the potential for policy conflicts, and increasing accountability in the preparation and implementation of development programs. The recommendations of this study emphasize the need for more systematic regulations in integrating Retreat as part of the national policy cycle and increasing the capacity of regional heads in utilizing this forum more optimally.

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INTRODUCTION

The Indonesian government system has experienced dynamics since independence, at the beginning of the Indonesian government it implemented a presidential system, then it had time to implement a parliamentary system during the Republic of the United States of Indonesia. During the New Order, the government system in Indonesia tended to be more

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centralistic, the policies implemented tended to be based on instructions from the central government. The dynamics continued until the reformation in 1998, after the reformation the government system shifted to adopting a decentralization system by strengthening the role of regional governments in policy making to maximize all potential in the regions. Decentralization in Indonesia officially began with the enactment of Law Number 22 of 1999 concerning Regional Government, which was later updated by Law Number 23 of 2014. This system aims to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of public services by bringing decision making closer to the community. In this context, regional governments have a strategic role in implementing development, managing regional finances, and providing public services that are in accordance with local needs. However, in practice, the implementation of decentralization policies often faces various challenges, one of which is the imbalance in coordination between the central and regional governments.

Synchronization of programs between the central and regional governments is a crucial aspect in a decentralized governance system. Imbalances in policy planning and implementation often lead to inefficiencies, overlapping policies, and mismatches between national policies and local needs. This mismatch can result in development delays, budget inefficiencies, and low effectiveness of public policies. Some examples of misalignment between central and regional programs can be seen in several cases, including:

a. Family Hope Program (PKH) and Direct Cash Assistance (BLT), there is often a mismatch in beneficiary data between the center and regions. Based on the results of the 2022 BPKP (Financial and Development Supervisory Agency) audit, 20% of social assistance recipient data in 10 main provinces were inaccurate or not synchronized between central data (DTKS) and regional verification. Distribution of assistance is often delayed due to re-verification at the regional level which is not integrated with the center.
b. When the central government implemented the Large-Scale Social Restrictions (PSBB) policy at the beginning of the pandemic, several regions, such as DKI Jakarta, had already submitted PSBB applications earlier, but central government approval was slow to be granted. On the other hand, several other regions imposed restrictions without formal procedures, causing inconsistent implementation of health protocols. Data from the 2021 report of the Committee for Handling COVID-19 and National Economic Recovery (KPCPEN) showed that 45% of regional governments reported unclear technical instructions from the center regarding vaccination distribution. Other data showed that 32% of regions admitted to having difficulty adjusting central policies to local conditions, especially in implementing tiered PPKM. This situation shows that without good coordination, the speed and effectiveness of regional responses to crises can be disrupted. As a result, the pace of handling the pandemic is not optimal and causes public doubt about government policies.

From various sectors ranging from Health to social, miscoordination between the central and regional governments has been proven to be real and has had a significant impact. The absence of an effective coordination system not only slows down development, but also erodes public trust, creates budget inefficiency, and increases disparities between

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regions. Policy reforms that emphasize collaboration, data transparency, and strengthening coordination capacity across levels of government are urgently needed. Therefore, a mechanism is needed that can bridge the various interests between the central and regional governments so that policies implemented at the regional level remain in line with the direction of national development.

In 2025, the government has initiated various strategies to improve policy coordination and synchronization, one of which is through the implementation of Leadership Defense for Regional Heads or also known as the "Magelang Retreat". The Retreat was held after the Simultaneous Inauguration of Regional Heads by the President of the Republic of Indonesia, where this simultaneous Inauguration was the first since Indonesia's Independence. The Magelang Retreat is a strategic forum that brings together regional heads with the central government to discuss, evaluate, and align development policies and programs. The Retreat concept was adopted as a solution to strengthen the coordinative relationship between the center and regions, especially in resolving cross-sectoral and cross-regional policy problems.

However, the implementation of the Regional Head Retreat also faces its own challenges. One of the main challenges is the difference in interests between the central and regional governments. The central government often has a national development agenda that must be implemented throughout the region, while regional governments have more specific priorities based on local conditions. This imbalance can cause tension in the policy alignment process. In addition, the effectiveness of the Retreat also depends on the commitment of the regional head in following up on the results of the discussions and recommendations that have been agreed upon. Without concrete follow-up, the Retreat will only be a ceremonial meeting without any real impact on regional development. On this basis, researchers are interested in conducting an in-depth study of the effectiveness of the Regional Head Retreat in aligning central and regional policies and what factors influence the success of the Regional Head Retreat.

Theoretical Study

Synchronization of central and regional policies is a process of alignment between policies designed by the central government and policy implementation at the regional level. From a public administration perspective, policy synchronization aims to create regulatory harmonization, program implementation effectiveness, and increased synergy between various levels of government. The regional head retreat is one of the strategic instruments that can be used to strengthen policy synchronization. The retreat functions as a forum that brings together regional heads with representatives of the central government to discuss challenges in policy implementation, evaluate program achievements, and develop collaborative strategies to increase the effectiveness of public policies. The Collaborative Governance theory by Ansell & Gash (2008) emphasizes the importance of cooperation between various government actors to achieve more effective policy goals. As a follow-up to the 2025 Regional Head Retreat, its success can be measured by the following indicators, namely the participation of government policy makers, the quality of coordination

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and communication, and communication media between the central government and regional governments.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with case study methods and policy analysis to explore the role of the Regional Head Retreat in the process of policy synchronization between the central and regional governments. The case study was conducted by examining the implementation of the 2025 Regional Head Retreat at Akmil, Magelang. Meanwhile, policy analysis is used to examine how the Regional Head Retreat contributes to policy harmonization and identify factors that support and hinder its effectiveness. Data were collected using content analysis using news as primary data to collect and analyze information. This approach allows research to comprehensively understand the dynamics of coordination between the center and regions and provide policy recommendations that can increase the effectiveness of the Regional Head Retreat as an instrument for public policy synchronization.

DISCUSSION

Regional Head Retreat as Sharpening of Bureaucratic Reform Function is one of the innovative strategies used to accelerate the transformation of regional governance to be more adaptive, responsive, and results-oriented. The concept of this retreat is not just a formal meeting, but is designed as a reflective and strategic space for regional heads to consolidate their commitment to the bureaucratic reform agenda.

The implementation of the Regional Head retreat received various views from various parties, including participants, stakeholders and the community itself. The dynamics of implementation during planning, implementation and post-implementation of the retreat continue to be discussed in the public space. Some believe that the activities carried out are a waste of budget amidst the efficiency policy carried out by the President of the Republic of Indonesia. Here are some responses related to the implementation of the regional head retreat as follows:

Positive Response from Regional Heads to Regional Head Retreat Activities

a. Regent of Keerom, Piter Gusbager,stated that the retreat provided important training for regional heads. He emphasized that coordination and communication between the center and regions are vital to ensure that national policies can be implemented effectively.
b. Deputy Governor of East Java, Emil Dardak,assessed that this activity has a big impact in building emotional connections between regional heads and the central government. Direct discussions like this are considered more effective than online methods because they are able to build togetherness and deeper understanding.
c. Regent of Buton, La Bakry,considers the retreat as a very good moment to establish synergy and strengthen cooperation for mutual progress. He emphasized that the spirit of collaboration between the central and regional governments will be the main

key in realizing sustainable national development and having a direct impact on the welfare of the community.

d. Member of Commission II of the Indonesian House of Representatives, Deddy Sitorus,stated that the retreat was needed so that regional heads would know President Prabowo Subianto's thoughts or visions directly to implement central government programs. He emphasized the importance of a shared understanding of national programs that have implications for the regions.

There are several other views in the form of critical views:

a. Wahyu Iskandar, Director of Public Policy at the Center of Economic and Law Studies (Celios), criticized that the regional head retreat, which has been a forum for coordination, is considered inefficient in terms of budget use. He said that this kind of activity tends to be ceremonial and gives a more symbolic impression than providing a real impact on the effectiveness of government.
b. Yusuf Rendy Manilet, a researcher at the Center of Reform on Economics (CORE), said that the retreat activities of regional heads are unusual if we consider the purpose of the briefing carried out by the Prabowo government. He believes that without the retreat, regional governments can still be encouraged to consolidate with the central government through several regulations that actually already exist.
c. Shofie Azzahrah, a researcher from Next Policy, highlighted that the urgency of the regional head retreat needs to be considered carefully, especially regarding the context of the implementation time and its impact on regional governance. She considered that the momentum of the regional head retreat was not appropriate because it was held ahead of Ramadan, a very crucial period for regional governments in facing challenges such as food stock readiness and controlling regional inflation.

The regional head retreat is a topic that raises various views. On the one hand, this activity is considered a strategic step to strengthen synergy between the central and regional governments and align development visions. On the other hand, there are concerns about budget efficiency and priority of implementation time. Therefore, the implementation of the retreat needs to be carefully designed, ensuring that the benefits obtained are commensurate with the resources used, and do not interfere with important tasks that must be handled immediately by the regional government.

The author argues that the Regional Head Retreat is a strategic forum involving governors, regents, and mayors in an intensive and focused meeting outside the formal work environment. In the context of policy reform, this activity has a very high urgency and deep relevance. The Retreat is not just a ceremonial event, but a reflective and collective medium to align visions, evaluate achievements, and formulate policy directions that are more responsive to community dynamics and global challenges. Some concrete examples include the following:

Government Policy Stakeholder Participation

The participation of central and regional policy makers in the 2025 Regional Head Retreat plays a key role in ensuring the successful implementation of national policies at the local level. The central government, represented by relevant ministries and institutions, acts

as a facilitator in conveying the direction of national policies and providing technical guidelines to regional governments. This participation is realized through strategic discussions, presentation of priority policies, and technical assistance to ensure that each regional head understands and is able to implement national programs according to the characteristics of their respective regions. In addition, the central government also plays a role in identifying obstacles faced by regions and providing concrete solutions to increase the effectiveness of policy implementation. On the other hand, the participation of regional heads is crucial in the policy synchronization process because they are the main implementers in the field. In this Retreat, regional heads have the opportunity to convey aspirations, share experiences in policy implementation, and propose more effective strategies based on local conditions. Through two-way dialogue, the Retreat creates a collaborative mechanism that allows regions not only to be recipients of policies, but also to become active partners in formulating more inclusive and contextual national strategies. With the active participation of both parties, this Retreat is expected to improve central-regional coordination, strengthen trust between government actors, and ensure more efficient policy implementation that is in line with community needs.

Quality of Coordination and Communication

The 2025 Regional Head Retreat held on 21-28 February 2025 at the Military Academy (Akmil) Magelang played an important role in aligning the vision and mission between the central and regional governments regarding priority policies. During the Retreat, regional heads received briefings from various speakers, including Ministers and Heads of Institutions in the Red and White Cabinet, on strategic topics such as transparent and efficient budget management, as well as national resilience and national insight. Thus, the 2025 Regional Head Retreat in Magelang played a significant role in reaching strategic agreements between the central and regional governments regarding priority policies, ensuring harmonious and effective implementation for the welfare of the community.

This Retreat provided an opportunity for Regional Heads to directly understand the direction of national policies from central government officials. In the Retreat, Regional Heads receive briefings from ministers and high-ranking officials regarding priority policies, such as regional financial management, acceleration of infrastructure development, food security, and digitalization of public services. This forum is an interactive forum for regional heads to discuss, convey aspirations, and obtain direct clarification from the central government regarding the implementation of national policies at the regional level. The Retreat creates a forum to share experiences and best practices in implementing policies in their respective regions. Regional heads can learn from the challenges and solutions implemented in other regions, enriching their implementation strategies. In addition to formal aspects, the Retreat also builds personal relationships between regional heads and central officials. This network facilitates communication outside of formal forums, accelerating the resolution of obstacles in policy implementation.

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The existence of communication media between policy makers in the central government and regional governments

ImplementationRegional Head Retreat 2025using variouscommunication mediawhich has been used to ensure the effectiveness of information delivery and coordination between the central and regional governments. communication between the central and regional governments is developed in the form ofvirtual coordination group, such as throughinstant messaging based applicationAndonline meeting platformto facilitate rapid communication regarding policy implementation. In addition,regular coordination forumheld periodically, either in the form of physical meetings or webinars, to evaluate the development of policies agreed upon in the Retreat.Policy monitoring dashboardalso implemented to strengthen transparency and accountability in the implementation of programs in the regions. With the sustainability of various communication media, it is hoped that coordination between the central and regional governments will be more effective, responsive, and able to overcome obstacles in the implementation of national policies at the local level.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study on the synchronization of central and regional policies and the effectiveness of the implementation of the Regional Head Retreat, it can be concluded that the Regional Head Retreat is a strategic instrument that is not only symbolic, but also substantial in encouraging the acceleration of bureaucratic reform at the regional level. The Regional Head Retreat is a reflective and collaborative forum that brings together regional leaders in a calmer atmosphere, away from the hustle and bustle of daily bureaucracy. The goal is not only to formulate technical strategies, but also to build a common perception, consolidate vision, and strengthen collective commitment to the bureaucratic reform agenda. In this forum, regional heads are invited not only to evaluate the achievements of the bureaucracy in their regions, but also to realize their role as the main drivers of change. The urgency of implementing the retreat is very clear from the increasingly complex public demands for fast, transparent, and digital-based services. In addition, the current national bureaucratic reform program has also entered a thematic phase - which is no longer merely focused on internal administration, but on real contributions to poverty alleviation, increasing investment, digitalization of public services, and controlling government spending. The Retreat is a medium to align regional policies and programs with these national priorities in a sharper and more measurable way. Furthermore, the retreat also offers added value as a forum for exchanging ideas and best practices between regions. Regional heads can learn from the successes and failures of other regions in implementing bureaucratic reform. This creates a healthy learning ecosystem and encourages innovation that spreads faster. In addition, this forum also facilitates a cross-sectoral approach, overcomes sectoral egos between OPDs, and strengthens collaborative governance in the regions. The results of the retreat do not stop at discussions, but must be realized in a concrete and measurable action plan. The commitment of regional heads to bureaucratic reform must be manifested in the transformation of the ASN management system, digitalization of service processes, integration of cross-agency data, and increasing the

bureaucratic reform index and SAKIP. For this reason, continuous monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the retreat results are needed. In conclusion, the regional head retreat is an important strategy that must be utilized optimally to sharpen the function and direction of bureaucratic reform. This forum not only strengthens the leadership capacity of regional heads, but also becomes a medium for bureaucratic transformation from administrative to impactful bureaucracy. With a strong commitment and close collaboration between the center and regions, bureaucratic reform in Indonesia can run more effectively, integrated, and oriented towards real community welfare.

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