

Dynamics Of Indigenous Community Representation: Perspectives On The Institutional Capacity Of The Papua People's Assembly

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to analyze the institutional capacity of the Papua People's Assembly (MRP) in the West Papua Province in protecting the rights of Indigenous Papuans (OAP) within the framework of Special Autonomy. By using a qualitative approach and a case study design, the research collects data through in-depth interviews, observations, and the study of official documents. The analysis is conducted using the institutional capacity building framework from Healey et al. (2003) that emphasizes the dimensions of knowledge resources, relational resources, and mobilization capacity.

The research results show that MRP has strong normative legitimacy as a cultural representation of OAP through elements of custom, religion, and women. However, the institutional capacity of MRP still faces limitations, including a lack of population data on OAP, limited formal authority that is only consultative in nature, and weak coordination with local governments. These conditions make the effectiveness of MRP more dominant in symbolic functions and moral advocacy rather than in direct influence on substantive policies. Nonetheless, MRP's openness to new ideas and efforts to build cross-institutional collaborative networks indicate a strategic opportunity to strengthen institutional capacity in the future. This study emphasizes that strengthening the institutional capacity of MRP is a key factor in ensuring the sustainability of the protection of OAP rights. This finding provides a theoretical contribution to the public administration literature regarding customary representation institutions, while also offering practical recommendations for local governments and stakeholders to optimize the role of MRP in the context of special autonomy in Papua.

Keywords: Papua People's Assembly, Indigenous Papuans, Institutional Capacity, Cultural Representation, Special Autonomy

INTRODUCTION

The province of Southwest Papua is a new autonomous region formed through Law Number 29 of 2022 on the Establishment of the Province of Southwest Papua. This region has special authority within the framework of Special Autonomy as regulated in Law Number 2 of 2021 on the Second Amendment to Law Number 21 of 2001. The Papua People's Assembly (MRP) serves as a cultural representation institution for the Indigenous Papuans (OAP) with a mandate to protect fundamental rights, empower women, and maintain interfaith harmony (Edyanto et al., 2021). The existence of the MRP reaffirms the state's commitment to providing political and social space for the indigenous peoples of Papua in local government governance.

Normatively, the position of the MRP has a strong legal basis. Law Number 21 of 2001 jo. Law Number 2 of 2021 affirms the MRP as a cultural representation institution for OAP. Government Regulation Number 54 of 2004 concerning the Papua People's Assembly, which was later amended by Government Regulation Number 64 of 2008, further regulates the composition of membership, working mechanisms, financial status, and facilities for the leadership and members of the MRP. This regulation emphasizes that MRP membership includes three main elements: customary, religious, and women, which are designed to ensure the cultural representation of OAP in local government administration (Koibur, 2024).

Table 1. Population and Percentage of OAP

District/City	Population Number	Percentage of Indigenous Peoples
Raja Ampat	72.605	73.31%
Sorong	124.207	37.38%
Sorong Selatan	57.297	81.76%
Maybrat	48.803	96.04%
Tambrau	32.070	95.67%
Kota Sorong	302.452	32.56%
West Southwest Papua	636.434	69.45%

Source: BPS West Southwest Papua Province (2024)

The proportion of OAP in the Southwest Papua Province is relatively high, accounting for more than half of the total population. Maybrat Regency and Tambrau Regency are recorded as areas with the highest percentage of OAP, while Sorong Regency and Sorong City have the largest population. This situation presents both opportunities and challenges. On the opportunity side, the local government has significant potential human resources to serve as a basis for cultural representation. However, the challenge lies in the selection mechanisms and the establishment of such representation to truly reflect the diversity and interests of the OAP accurately. This mechanism often results in a tug-of-war between the interests of indigenous groups, religions, and women, which risks producing a disproportionate representation. Additionally, differing perceptions regarding the boundaries of indigenous territories and the legitimacy of figures often lead to internal debates that can reduce the effectiveness of the MRP representation.

Despite having a strong legal basis, the role of the MRP still faces several constraints. First, the authority of the MRP is limited to advisory functions for consideration and approval, which raises questions about its effectiveness in influencing public policy (Lele, 2023; Wospakrik, 2020). Second, the mechanisms for representing customary, religious, and women's interests often result in conflicting interests, thus not fully reflecting the ideal representation of OAP (Jati, 2023). Third, the limited human resources and institutional capacity impact the effectiveness of the MRP in carrying out the functions of protection and advocacy for the rights of OAP (Hasibuan, 2022). Therefore, the position of the MRP tends to be dilemmatic, having strong normative legitimacy but weak in policy execution capacity.

This phenomenon occurs not only in Papua but is also found in traditional representative institutions in various countries. Studies on the Maori community in New Zealand demonstrate limitations in representation, forms of institutionalization, and loci of representation that are similar (Haryanto et al., 2018). Likewise, research on indigenous communities in Latin America shows that state recognition of indigenous peoples is often symbolic and rarely materializes in substantive policy practices (Morales Quiroga, 2022). Therefore, analyzing institutional capacity becomes important to understand the extent to which MRP is able to carry out its mandate to protect the rights of OAP amidst limited authority and resources.

To analyze this phenomenon, this research utilizes the Institutional Capacity Building framework from (Healey et al., 2003). This theory was chosen because it offers a comprehensive perspective to assess institutional capacity not only from a structural aspect, but also from social, knowledge, and political sides. Unlike classical institutional theories (North, 1992; Scott, 2001) that emphasize formal regulations and informal norms, Healey's framework allows researchers to assess the extent to which institutions can build adaptive capacity through knowledge, networking, and mobilizing actors. This theory is relevant to evaluate the dynamics of MRP, which functions as a cultural representation institution with strong normative legitimacy, but faces limitations in authority in policy practices.

This research focuses on analyzing the institutional capacity of the Papua People's Council in the Southwest Papua Province in protecting the rights of the Indigenous Papuans. The study is directed at three main dimensions of institutional capacity, namely: (1) knowledge resources, which include access to information, understanding of issues, and openness to new ideas; (2) relational resources, emphasizing

social networks, power relations, and stakeholder engagement; and (3) mobilization capacity, which is the ability of the MRP to use knowledge and networks to promote policy changes. Through this focus, the research aims to explain the strengths and weaknesses of the MRP in carrying out cultural representation functions under the framework of Papua's Special Autonomy.

METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design. This approach was chosen because it is suitable for gaining an in-depth understanding of the dynamics of the MRP institution in the context of protecting the rights of OAP in the Province of Southwest Papua (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Yin, 2016). The selection of informants was conducted using purposive sampling techniques, which involve deliberately choosing participants based on their knowledge, capacity, and relevance to the research issue. The main informants consist of leaders and members of the MRP, the Papua Regional Representative Council (DPRP), traditional leaders, religious figures, and representatives of OAP. This composition is designed to ensure that the data obtained is comprehensive, reflecting diverse perspectives, and relevant to the focus of the research.

Table 2. List of Research Informants

No	Informants	Amount
1	People's Representative Council of Papua (DPRP)	1
2	Leadership of the Papua People's Assembly (MRO)	1
3	Working Group of the Papua People's Assembly (MRP)	3
4	Chairman of the Advisory Council of the Papua People's Assembly (MRP)	1
5	Indigenous Papuans	2
Number of Informants		8

The research data was obtained through three main techniques: (1) observation, which involves direct observation at the MRP Secretariat; (2) in-depth interviews, structured based on the institutional capacity building framework by Healey et al. (2003) targeted at informants; and (3) document studies, which include regulations, institutional reports, and relevant previous research documents. Furthermore, data analysis follows the qualitative stages outlined by Creswell & Creswell (2018), which include: (1) organizing and preparing the data, (2) reading and understanding the data, (3) coding to categorize information by theme, and (4) interpreting findings based on the theoretical framework. This analysis aims to assess the institutional capacity of MRP through the dimensions of knowledge, relations, and mobilization. The validity of the data is maintained through the member checking technique, which involves seeking confirmation from informants regarding the results of interviews and the researcher's interpretations. Meanwhile, the reliability is reinforced by rechecking the interview transcripts and triangulating data sources between the results of observations, interviews, and documents.

RESULTS

In general, the research findings indicate that the MRP has a strong normative legitimacy as a cultural representation of Indigenous Papuans through membership based on customs, religion, and women. However, its institutional capacity still faces a number of limitations, both in terms of knowledge and data, relations with other actors, and the ability to mobilize to advocate for policy changes. This condition makes the MRP more dominant in performing symbolic and advocacy roles compared to substantive functions in the policy formulation process.

Nevertheless, the research also found strategic opportunities for strengthening the capacity of MRP, mainly through the utilization of cross-actor networks, increasing access to population data of Indigenous Papuans, and openness to new ideas that can strengthen the function of cultural representation. Thus, the results of this research not only identify weaknesses but also emphasize the potential for institutional development of MRP within the framework of Special Autonomy for South West Papua.

Knowledge Capacity: Limitations of Data and Access to Information for Indigenous Peoples

Knowledge capacity is one of the main foundations in the framework of institutional capacity building Healey et al. (2003), as it serves as a basis for institutions to identify problems, formulate strategies, and develop effective policies. The findings in this study reveal that the lack of accurate, valid, and integrated data on OAP remains a serious obstacle in carrying out cultural representation functions. This condition has implications for the weak legitimacy of the MRP when it needs to consider affirmative policies, public position selections, and social protection programs. The absence of credible data makes the process of verifying the identity of OAP often rely on subjective claims and inconsistent administrative evidence, raising doubts about the accuracy of MRP decisions. This was expressed by one of the working groups of the MRP in Southwest Papua.

“We are often questioned when providing considerations, because there is no official and usable OAP data as a basis. As a result, the decisions we make are often considered weak administratively and raise doubts from other parties”. (28/7/2025)

Furthermore, the limitation of data not only hinders the internal effectiveness of institutions but also weakens the position of MRP in the policymaking arena, which increasingly demands empirical evidence as a basis for legitimacy. The absence of a database often leads to MRP being perceived merely as a symbolic representation without substantial bargaining power. In fact, the availability of valid information is an essential element to strengthen knowledge-based decision making and enhance the credibility of institutions in the eyes of both the government and civil society.

Indigenous communities must have full control over their own data to strengthen institutional legitimacy and reduce dependence on state institutions (Carroll et al., 2020). This takes into account the role of data which is not merely numbers, but a political and cultural instrument that determines who is recognized, who has access to resources, and how collective identities are positioned within the framework of the nation-state. When data is fully controlled by the state without the involvement of indigenous communities, the process of representation tends to be top-down, resulting in customary institutions functioning merely as symbols of formality without substantive capacity to intervene in policies. A similar condition is observed in Rodríguez-Cáceres & Behrman (2024) study on indigenous communities in Latin America, where the absence of control over data often renders customary institutions as passive actors, merely responding to policies that have already been devised by the government without having the capacity to influence the agenda from the outset.

In addition, the issue of the identity of OAP often leads to disputes on the ground, especially when it comes to access to affirmative policies, employee recruitment, and the determination of political rights in regional head nominations. In such conditions, the MRP often finds itself in a dilemmas position. Without a standardized and universally recognized database, the arguments of the MRP are often considered weak because they lack a strong administrative basis. This is acknowledged by the leadership of the MRP of Southwest Papua.

“If there is a dispute about who is a genuine Papua or not, our position is weak. There is no data we can show as a reference, so our decisions are often debated by others. This situation reduces the authority of the MRP because the community believes we do not have a clear foundation”. (29/7/2025)

The weaknesses of MRP are not only technical but also concern social-political legitimacy. This condition leads to identity disputes as the most frequent issue that undermines the credibility of traditional institutions in the eyes of the state and society. When the representative institutions lack a data-based verification system, any decision made is easily questioned and has the potential to trigger horizontal conflicts.

On the other hand, Cui et al. (2023) study of the Maori community in New Zealand shows a different direction. By building a community-driven registry, the Maori community was able to reduce identity disputes while strengthening the legitimacy of customary representation in the national political arena. This illustrates that community-based data mastery can be the key to transforming reactive customary institutions into proactive and influential ones in public policy.

The availability of credible OAP databases is an important prerequisite for strengthening the role of the Papua People's Assembly in Southwest Papua Province. The lack of valid data often traps the MRP in a

symbolic role, facing a legitimacy crisis and being vulnerable to questions in the strategic decision-making process. Mastery of community-based data, as practiced by the Maori community in New Zealand, can serve as an instrument for institutional transformation from a passive position to a proactive actor in public policy. Therefore, building a participatory and integrated OAP data system is not only important for technical effectiveness, but also crucial for political legitimacy and the sustainability of cultural representation within the framework of Papua's special autonomy.

Relational Capacity: Network Dynamics and Social Legitimacy

The relational dimension is closely related to the institution's ability to build networks of cooperation across actors, both horizontally and vertically. Research findings indicate that the MRP of Southwest Papua occupies a strategic position among several key actors such as local government, the provincial parliament, traditional leaders, religious figures, and civil society. The existence of the MRP as a cultural representation agency provides a great opportunity to become a communication bridge between indigenous communities and the state. However, this relationship does not always function harmoniously. In practice, the interaction of the MRP with other actors is often marked by competing political interests, differing policy orientations, and an inequality of bargaining power. This was expressed by the Leadership of the MRP of Southwest Papua.

“Our relationship with the DPRP sometimes does not align. There are political interests that cause the MRP's voice to not be fully taken into account, even when we have submitted official considerations. This condition often creates frustration because the role of the MRP seems to only be a complement, not an equal partner in the policy process”. (29/7/2025)

This situation often places the MRP in a dilemma: on one hand, it has normative legitimacy recognized by law, but on the other hand, it faces resistance and limitations in influencing decisions. Furthermore, this relational dynamic has implications for the social legitimacy and institutional capacity of the MRP itself. When the MRP fails to build a solid coalition with key actors, the voices they raise on strategic issues tend to be marginalized or merely regarded as inputs without real consequences. In fact, the experiences of customary institutions in other countries show that their main strength lies in the ability to garner support and build cross-sectoral trust. Indigenous institutions in Australia have successfully built trust and influence by implementing a partnership-based collaborative approach, involving shared power, credible leadership, and common goals with the government and civil society (Lyons et al., 2023). Furthermore, Nikolakis & Nelson (2019) demonstrated that political trust in indigenous institutions significantly increases when these institutions actively construct narratives of cultural revitalization and extensive community engagement.

Meanwhile, in practice of policy formulation, the participation of the Papua West South MRP is not always optimally accommodated. Although normatively, the MRP has a mandate to provide considerations related to policies affecting the interests of OAP, the reality on the ground shows that strategic decisions are often made by the local government before this institution is involved. This puts the MRP in a reactive position, where their voice is only treated as an administrative complement, rather than an integral part of the policy formulation process. This was expressed by the Chairman of the Advisory Council of Papua West South MRP.

“We strive to establish communication with the local government, but often decisions are made before we are involved. This situation makes the voice of the MRP seem to lack significant weight in the policy process. As a result, our role is often seen as merely a formality rather than a strategic partner on par with the local government”. (1/8/2025)

Normatively, the MRP has the authority to provide considerations for policies concerning the basic rights of Indigenous Peoples, but in practice, this function is often reduced to a symbolic role due to the dominance of state actors in decision-making. This reflects a pattern of relationships that is still top-down, where traditional institutions are not positioned as equal partners, but rather as mere administrative complements. A similar situation is found in the study by Mavisakalyan & Tarverdi (2023) regarding Indigenous community institutions in Australia, which shows that the involvement of Indigenous communities is often merely procedural without having a real influence on the substance of policies. Similarly, the study by Dawson (2025) on First Nations in Canada emphasizes that the absence of

engagement from the early stages in policy formulation not only reduces the effectiveness of representation but also decreases the level of trust among indigenous peoples towards government institutions and their own representation.

The West Southwest Papua MRP faces serious challenges in building bargaining positions among key actors. The normative legitimacy it possesses does not automatically guarantee the effectiveness of relations if it is not accompanied by strategies to build trust, expand coalitions, and negotiate interests equally. Comparisons with international studies emphasize that traditional institutions can gain more substantial influence when they are able to change the pattern of relations from mere procedural involvement to collaborative governance. Therefore, strengthening the relational capacity of the MRP requires a shift in approach from hierarchical and top-down relationships to equal partnerships based on trust, active participation, and broader social legitimacy.

Mobilization Capacity: The Role of Advocacy and the Symbolic Function of MRP

The MRP more often performs symbolic and advocacy functions, while its formal authority is very limited. This role makes the voice of the MRP often perceived as merely a formality in the policy arena, rather than as a force capable of significantly changing the direction of decisions. These limitations are particularly evident when the MRP provides considerations on strategic issues such as civil servant recruitment, local head elections, or development policies that directly impact OAP, where their inputs are often only recorded without real follow-up. This is justified by the Secretary of the MRP of Southwest Papua through the following statement.

“We can only provide recommendations, we do not have the authority to execute. Sometimes our voices are only considered ceremonial and do not really influence policy direction. This situation makes us feel that the function of the MRP is being limited to mere symbolic representation, rather than as an institution that can truly advocate for the interests of indigenous peoples”. (29/7/2025)

This limitation of mobilization is also caused by structural factors, namely the design of the MRP institutional framework which is not given full legislative functions, making their capacity lean more towards cultural advocacy rather than formal politics. As a result, although the MRP has strong normative legitimacy, their drive to advocate for the interests of OAP becomes weak because it is not matched by adequate legal instruments. According to Nkansah-Dwamena (2023), participatory institutions without support of substantive authority tend to become trapped in tokenism, merely serving to provide symbolic legitimacy for policy processes already determined by dominant actors. Furthermore, this condition was expressed by one of the members of the Papua Barat Daya DPRP.

“The MRP has a moral function, but it does not have coercive power. If our recommendations are not used, then it simply ends there without any consequences for the party that ignores them. Ultimately, the role of the MRP is often seen merely as an ethical symbol without real power to influence the course of public policy”. (2/8/2025)

When the recommendations produced do not have clear legal implications, this institution is vulnerable to being seen merely as a ceremonial body present to legitimize state policies, rather than as an actor that can truly control the direction of policy. A similar condition was also presented by Bremner et al. (2020), which stated that the recommendations of customary institutions are often ignored by the government when they are not accompanied by a clear follow-up mechanism, thus reducing the effectiveness and credibility of the institution.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that the advocacy function of MRP still has strategic value, particularly in keeping cultural issues present in the public space and the regional policy agenda. Although customary institutions do not have formal legislative power, their existence can still exert significant moral and political pressure when they are able to rally broad civil society support (Von Der Porten, 2012). In other words, the mobilization capacity of MRP has the potential to be strengthened through collaborative strategies and network-based advocacy, so that they are not only viewed as symbols but also important actors in maintaining the balance of interests between the state and indigenous peoples. This condition is also emphasized by one of the OAP.

“The community hopes that MRP can advocate more vigorously for the rights of OAP, but our authority is limited, we can only push through advocacy. This situation often makes the community frustrated, as they think MRP's struggle does not yield concrete results that can directly change policies”. (28/7/2025) The findings illustrate a gap in expectations between the community and the institutional capacity of the MRP. On one hand, the OAP community has high hopes that the MRP will act as a strong advocate for their rights. However, on the other hand, the limited authority which is merely advocative prevents this institution from delivering the concrete results they expect. This situation creates a dual frustration: the MRP is burdened by expectations that exceed its formal authority, while the community feels that their struggles are not being effectively channeled. Thus, it is found that there are not only individual complaints, but it also indicates broader structural issues: the MRP has normative legitimacy as a cultural representation, but without coercive legal instruments, that legitimacy is difficult to translate into substantive influence. This emphasizes the need for regulatory reform and strengthening of institutional capacity, so that MRP can bridge the expectations of the community with the realities of public policy, while maintaining its social-political legitimacy in the face of special autonomy challenges.

DISCUSSION

The West Southwest Papua MRP has clear normative legitimacy as a cultural representation body for the OAP. Membership based on customary elements, religion, and women has provided a strong legal foundation, but the substantive capacity of this institution is still weak. This is in line with the findings of Nkansah-Dwamena (2023) which show that community representation institutions often function as tokenistic bodies when normative legitimacy is not accompanied by substantive instruments that enable real influence in policy. Thus, the formal legitimacy of the MRP still needs to be transformed into substantive legitimacy through the strengthening of institutional capacity.

The dimension of knowledge has become the main obstacle for MRP. The absence of an accurate and credible OAP database makes it difficult for this institution to verify identities, provide affirmative considerations, or formulate policy arguments. This finding reinforces the argument of Healey et al. (2003) that knowledge is the main foundation in institutional capacity building. MRP's inability to access data weakens their policy legitimacy and makes it easily questionable. This case is similar to the findings of Rodríguez-Cáceres & Behrman (2024), which show how indigenous communities without control over data are trapped as passive actors in policy-making. Conversely, Cui et al. (2023) emphasizes the importance of a community-driven registry in strengthening the bargaining position of indigenous communities. This means that for MRP, mastery of data is not just a technical need, but a political strategy to enhance legitimacy and representation capacity.

On the other hand, although MRP is in a strategic position among important actors such as local governments, the DPRP, traditional leaders, religious leaders, and civil society, the relationship is not always equal. Often, MRP is only seen as an administrative complement, not a strategic partner. This condition is consistent with the findings of Mavisakalyan & Tarverdi (2023) in Australia and Dawson (2025) in Canada, which highlight the weak procedural involvement of customary institutions in policy formulation. Conversely, the research by Lyons et al. (2023) and Nikolakis & Nelson (2019) emphasizes that the strength of customary institutions lies in their ability to build trust-based collaboration.

The findings regarding the weak relational capacity of the West Daya Papua MRP carry several important implications, both politically, socially, and institutionally. First, from a political perspective, the position of the MRP, which is only seen as an administrative complement, has the potential to weaken the principle of special autonomy that emphasizes the importance of cultural representation of the OAP. If the formed relations remain top-down, then the formal legitimacy held by the MRP will not be able to translate into substantive influence in decision-making.

Second, socially, this condition can lead to disappointment at the level of the OAP community. When traditional representative institutions fail to play a substantive role, the community's high expectations of the MRP may turn into distrust. This situation can deepen the gap between the state and indigenous communities, as well as create vulnerabilities to both horizontal conflict and the erosion of the legitimacy

of customary institutions. The study by Nkansah-Dwamena (2023) emphasizes that participatory institutions that only have procedural roles without real influence will face a legitimacy crisis in the eyes of their constituents.

Third, from an institutional perspective, the weakness of horizontal relations constrains the learning and innovation space of MRP in the policy arena. Indeed, the experience of indigenous institutions in Australia shows that partnerships based on horizontal collaboration can strengthen organizational capacity in the long term, through knowledge transfer, trust-building, and resource sharing (Lyons et al., 2023). In other words, the limitations of relational capacity not only affect the short-term effectiveness of MRP, but also hinder the crucial process of institutional learning that is essential for institutional sustainability.

Meanwhile, the mobility capacity highlights that MRP often plays an advocacy role, while its formal authority is very limited. This leads to the recommendations they produce often being seen as merely ceremonial without binding legal consequences. This condition illustrates a fundamental gap between the normative legitimacy that MRP possesses and the substantial capacity that they can execute. This situation aligns with the findings of Bremner et al. (2020), which show that customary institutions are often overlooked when their recommendations are not accompanied by clear follow-up mechanisms, thus positioning them more as symbols of representation rather than decision-making actors.

Nevertheless, the advocacy role of the MRP still has strategic value, especially in ensuring that cultural issues do not fade from the public sphere and remain part of the regional policy agenda. Von Der Porten (2012) emphasizes that although customary institutions do not have formal legislative power, they can still play a significant role as a moral and cultural voice, exerting political and moral pressure on the government, especially when they are able to build extensive networks with civil society and non-governmental organizations. In other words, strong network-based advocacy can serve as an instrument to enhance the bargaining power of the MRP, not just as a symbolic reminder, but as a strategic actor in maintaining the balance of interests between the state and indigenous communities.

The three dimensions of capacity are interconnected and determine the bargaining position of MRP in the policy arena. The absence of a database weakens policy arguments, unequal relations narrow the space for participation, and the symbolic mobilization function makes recommendations ineffective. However, the findings also indicate opportunities for capacity strengthening, both through the utilization of cross-actor networks, mastery of community-based data, and advocacy and civil society-based mobilization strategies. This confirms the theory of institutional capacity building which emphasizes the importance of synergy between knowledge, relational, and mobilization capacities (Healey et al., 2003).

Theoretically, this research emphasizes that normative legitimacy alone is not enough for traditional representation institutions to have a significant influence in the policy arena. Legitimacy must be supported by tangible institutional capacity, including mastery and control over credible data, the ability to build equal relationships with state actors and civil society, as well as mobilization strategies that can transform symbolic advocacy into more substantive political power. The combination of these three aspects is a crucial requirement for the transformation of the MRP from an institution with a ceremonial role to a proactive and influential actor.

Practically, the implications demand a paradigm shift in the governance of local government. Local governments and the DPRP need to open up opportunities for more equitable participation, not merely procedural, but based on a collaborative partnership where the voices of the MRP are treated as strategic inputs that have consequences on policy direction. On the other hand, the MRP themselves are required to strengthen internally, particularly by building a credible, transparent OAP data system that is recognized across actors, so that every consideration they provide has both administrative grounding and strong social legitimacy. Moreover, the expansion of advocacy networks, both at the local and national levels, also becomes an important instrument to enhance the bargaining power of the MRP, as only through the support of civil society and strategic alliances can they expand their influence in the dynamics of local politics.

CONLUSSION

This research shows that the West Southwest Papua MRP has strong normative legitimacy as a cultural representation of the OAP through membership based on custom, religion, and women. However, its institutional capacity still faces significant limitations, both in terms of knowledge and data, relations with other actors, and mobilization capability. The absence of a credible OAP database weakens the MRP's position in the policy arena, while the tendency for top-down relations limits their voice to mere formalities. Moreover, the limitations of authority often position the MRP more as a symbolic and advocacy body rather than a substantive one. Nevertheless, opportunities for strengthening remain, particularly through the development of participatory databases, strengthening cross-actor networks, and advocacy-based mobilization strategies and collaboration. Thus, MRP is at the crossroads of remaining a symbolic institution or transforming into a proactive actor capable of influencing the direction of public policy within the framework of Special Autonomy.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations. First, the scope of the research is limited to the West Southeast Papua MRP, so the generalization of the results to the MRP context in other provinces is still limited. Second, the limited access to official data and information means that the analysis mostly relies on available interview data and secondary documents. Third, the constantly changing local political dynamics may affect the long-term relevance of the research findings.

For future research, studies on MRP can be directed through a comparative approach with MRP in other provinces or customary institutions in other countries to identify institutional patterns that influence their capacity. Additionally, longitudinal studies are needed to trace institutional dynamics over a certain period, as well as interdisciplinary approaches involving legal, political, anthropological, and public management aspects to obtain a more comprehensive analysis of the role of MRP in the governance of Special Autonomy in Papua.

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