ISSN 2579-4396
E-ISSN 2579-440X

Journal of Government & Civil Society

Journal of Government and Civil Society | Volume 10 | No. 1 | Pages 1 - 168 | April 2026 | ISSN 2579-4396

Published By:
Government Science Study Program
Faculty of Sosial and Political Sciences
Universitas Muhammadiyah Tangerang

Daftar Isi (Table of Content)

Journal of Government & Civil Society

Journal of Government & Civil Society

Vol. 10 No. 1 April 2026. Pp 61-85 DOI: 10.31000/jgcs.v10i1.15185

Fiscal Decentralization and Poverty Paradox in Papua: Governance Failures under Special Autonomy

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Submitted:
5 Nov 2025

Revised:
7 April 2026

Accepted:
13 April 2026

Abstract
Despite over two decades of Special Autonomy (Otsus) implementation and the disbursement of more than IDR 138.65 trillion, Papua's poverty rate remains at 26.03–34.26% far above the national average exposing a fundamental paradox between large-scale fiscal decentralization and inclusive development outcomes. Existing studies have assessed Otsus effectiveness primarily at the macro-fiscal level, neglecting governance quality as a critical mediating variable. This study addresses that gap by examining how Otsus funds and local economic growth jointly influence poverty in Papua, using a mixed-methods sequential explanatory design combining multiple linear regression (n=240) with systematic qualitative interviews of key informants. The findings reveal a structural paradox: increased Otsus allocations correlate with higher rather than lower poverty (B=0.532, R^2=0.258), a pattern explained by elite capture of funds, misallocation toward administrative and consumptive spending, and non-inclusive growth dynamics. Combined, Otsus and local economic growth explain 87.3% of poverty variation (R^2=0.873), yet growth itself remains non-inclusive. Theoretically, this study challenges the assumption that fiscal decentralization inherently reduces poverty, demonstrating that governance quality is the critical mediating condition. Policy implications demand a reorientation of Otsus allocations toward productive community-based economic empowerment, performance-based budgeting, and strengthened institutional accountability.

Keywords: Fiscal decentralization, poverty, governance failure, special autonomy, inclusive growth

Abstrak
Meskipun lebih dari dua dekade implementasi Otonomi Khusus (Otsus) dan pencairan lebih dari Rp 138,65 triliun, tingkat kemiskinan Papua tetap berada di angka 26,03–34,26% jauh di atas rata-rata nasional menampakkan paradoks mendasar antara desentralisasi fiskal skala besar dan hasil pembangunan inklusif. Studi yang ada telah menilai efektivitas Otsus terutama pada tingkat makro-fiskal, mengabaikan kualitas tata kelola sebagai variabel mediasi yang penting. Studi ini mengatasi kesenjangan tersebut dengan meneliti bagaimana dana Otsus dan pertumbuhan ekonomi lokal secara bersamaan memengaruhi kemiskinan di Papua, menggunakan desain penjelasan sekuensial metode campuran yang menggabungkan regresi linier berganda (n=240) dengan wawancara kualitatif sistematis terhadap informan kunci. Temuan menunjukkan paradoks struktural, peningkatan alokasi Otsus berkorelasi dengan kemiskinan yang lebih tinggi daripada lebih rendah (B=0,532, R^2=0,258), suatu pola yang dijelaskan oleh penguasaan dana oleh elit, salah alokasi terhadap pengeluaran administratif dan konsumtif, dan dinamika pertumbuhan yang tidak inklusif.

CITATION Salmawati, Kalagison, M. D., & Ayshwara, H. (2026). Fiscal Decentralization and Poverty Paradox in Papua: Governance Failures under Special Autonomy. *Journal of Government and Civil Society*, 10(1), 61–85.

Secara gabungan, Otsus dan pertumbuhan ekonomi lokal menjelaskan 87,3% variasi kemiskinan (R^2=0,873), namun pertumbuhan itu sendiri tetap tidak inklusif. Secara teoritis, studi ini menantang asumsi bahwa desentralisasi fiskal secara inheren mengurangi kemiskinan, menunjukkan bahwa kualitas tata kelola adalah kondisi mediasi yang kritis. Implikasi kebijakan menuntut reorientasi alokasi Otsus ke arah pemberdayaan ekonomi berbasis komunitas yang produktif, penganggaran berbasis kinerja, dan penguatan akuntabilitas kelembagaan.

Kata Kunci: *Desentralisasi fiskal, kemiskinan, kegagalan tata kelola, otonomi khusus, pertumbuhan inklusif*

INTRODUCTION

The enactment of Special Autonomy (Otsus) for Papua through Law Number 21 of 2001 represents a strategic step by the central government to grant broader authority to Papua Province to regulate and manage development according to its unique needs, socio-cultural characteristics, (Bass 1990) and geographic conditions. One of the main implementations of this policy is through fiscal transfers in the form of Special Autonomy Funds, which are allocated in significant amounts annually (Ansell, C., & Gash 2008). According to data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), during the 2002–2021 period, the total Special Autonomy Fund disbursed to Papua reached more than IDR 138.65 trillion. These funds are expected to accelerate development, improve the quality of public services, strengthen local economic growth, and reduce poverty, particularly for Indigenous Papuans (OAP) (Putnam, R. D., Nanetti, R. Y., & Leonardi 1994)

Normatively, Special Autonomy aims to provide greater leeway for regional governments to determine development priorities based on the needs of local communities. The Special Autonomy Fund is not only intended to close the fiscal gap with other regions but also serves as an affirmative action instrument to strengthen the welfare of indigenous Papuans (Bappenas 2023). Through this policy, regional governments are expected to develop more contextual and participatory development programs, such as empowering local economies, improving access to education and healthcare, and building basic infrastructure that supports interregional connectivity (Fikri, A., & Kopong 2024). Thus, Special Autonomy should be a catalyst for inclusive and sustainable local economic growth, which in turn contributes to poverty reduction (Florensia K. Lamanele1, Daisy S. M. Engka2 2024).

However, after more than two decades of implementing Special Autonomy, development outcomes in Papua have shown inconsistent results (Ungirwalu, A., Mansoben 2025). On the one hand, there has been progress in infrastructure development, increasing school enrolment rates, and expanding health services. On the other hand, the poverty rate in Papua remains relatively high compared to other provinces in Indonesia. Statistics Indonesia (BPS) data from 2023 shows that the poverty rate in Papua Province reached 26.03 percent, and in Highland Papua it even reached 34.26 percent, far above the national average of around 9.36 percent (Bank 2022). This situation indicates that the size of the Special Autonomy Fund allocation has not been directly proportional to its effectiveness in reducing poverty. The Special Autonomy (Otsus) policy in Papua is a form of asymmetric decentralization that grants regions broader authority to regulate development according to their socio-cultural and geographical characteristics. According to (McRae, D., Quiroga 2022) fiscal decentralization can increase development effectiveness if accompanied by adequate institutional capacity and strong accountability mechanisms. In the Papuan context, Otsus is expected to function as an instrument to strengthen collaborative governance between the central government, regional governments, and indigenous communities in determining local development priorities (Ansell and Gash 2008) This collaboration is key to bridging political, economic, and social interests at the local level, thereby making development policies more participatory and adaptive to local needs (Tandamat 2022).

From a development economics perspective, Otsus is also linked to the theory of inclusive growth, which emphasizes that economic growth must create equitable benefits for all levels of society, especially vulnerable groups (Inclusive growth requires increased productivity in local sectors, economic empowerment of small communities, and strengthening interregional connectivity. In this regard, the effectiveness of Special Autonomy as an affirmative policy is measured not only by the increase in GRDP, (Asemki, Y., Nurmandi, A., & Muallidin 2022) but also by its ability to reduce poverty and expand economic opportunities for Indigenous Papuans (OAP). Therefore, social capital theory (Putnam 1993) is also relevant for understanding how networks of trust, social norms, and community participation can strengthen the effectiveness of Special Autonomy policies in promoting local economic development (Aspinall 2013). Various previous studies have emphasized that the main problem in the implementation of Special Autonomy lies not solely in the amount of funds, but also in the quality of governance and the capacity of regional institutions to manage the budget (Magayang, T., Hamdi, M., Rowa, H., & Ahmad 2023). revealed that the effectiveness of Special Autonomy is often hampered by limited bureaucratic capacity, weak oversight systems, and the persistence of budget leakage. Meanwhile, (Rumbrawer, J., & Yoman 2020) showed that the use of Special Autonomy funds tends to be more absorbed by routine spending than productive activities that stimulate the people’s economy. Similar findings were presented by (Sumule 2020) who highlighted the weak monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for Special Autonomy-based programs, making it difficult to accurately measure development achievements at the village level (Hendrawan, A., Berenschot, W., & Aspinall 2021).

From a macroeconomic perspective, the Special Autonomy policy has indeed succeeded in driving an increase in Gross Regional Domestic Product (GRDP) in several regions, particularly those supported by extractive sectors such as mining and plantations (Bertrand 2021). However, Papua's economic structure remains too narrow and inclusive, dominated by the primary sector. A 2020 World Bank analysis and a 2024 Ministry of Finance report indicate that Papua's economic growth often fluctuates due to its heavy reliance on mining commodities such as copper and gold, thus not having a significant impact on poverty reduction. In other words, the elasticity of growth to poverty in Papua is relatively low, meaning that increased economic growth does not necessarily reduce poverty rates (Sharp 2021). In addition to governance factors, limited infrastructure and high logistics costs also pose major challenges to local economic development. Many areas in Papua, particularly in the mountains, remain isolated and difficult to reach, resulting in very high distribution costs. Research by (Chauvel, R., & Bhakti 2019) shows that reducing transportation costs has a greater impact on improving community welfare.

The theoretical landscape on Otsus effectiveness reveals two competing positions that this study seeks to adjudicate. Proponents of fiscal effectiveness argue that asymmetric decentralization transfers resources to underdeveloped regions, enabling locally adapted development (McRae, D., Quiroga 2022). Critics counter that without institutional capacity, fiscal transfers are captured by elites and absorbed into non-productive expenditure (Kingsbury 2022) The growth–inequality debate adds another dimension: inclusive growth theory predicts that GDP growth reduces poverty only when broad-based; Papua's extractive-sector-dominated economy represents a canonical case of 'growth without equity'(Hadiyanto, S., & Fatem 2018). Social capital theory (Putnam 1993) further demonstrates that community trust networks and participatory governance are enabling conditions without which neither fiscal transfers nor economic growth reach the poor. This study integrates these three theoretical streams into a unified explanatory framework: Dana Otsus ,Governance Quality (mediating), Inclusive Local Economic Growth Poverty Reduction. From this framework, three hypotheses are derived: H1: Otsus funds significantly influence poverty levels; H2: Local economic growth significantly correlates with poverty; H3: The combined effect of Otsus and local economic growth on poverty is mediated by governance quality.

Based on the above discussion, a clear research gap can be identified. Most previous studies have assessed the effectiveness of Papua's Special Autonomy (Otsus) (Zain, E. M., Kopong, A. H., & Banggu 2023) primarily at the macro or fiscal aggregate level, without positioning local economic growth as a key mediating variable in the relationship between Special Autonomy Funds and poverty alleviation (Kingsbury 2022b). In addition, studies examining the role of local governance quality as a moderating variable in this relationship remain very limited. Micro-level analyses such as the impact on households, MSMEs, or local communities have also been relatively scarce (Macdonald, D., & Turner 2020).

To address this gap, the present study seeks to answer the following key research questions: To what extent does the Special Autonomy Fund influence poverty alleviation in Papua? How is local economic growth related to the level of poverty in Papua? To what extent does the Special Autonomy Fund affect local economic growth within the framework of poverty alleviation in Papua? Unlike prior macro-level studies that treat fiscal transfer volumes as the primary analytical unit, this study introduces governance quality as a mediating variable in the Otsus poverty relationship an analytical dimension absent from previous research. By integrating fiscal decentralization theory, inclusive growth theory, and collaborative governance theory into a unified framework, this study offers a new explanatory pathway for understanding why Papua's development paradox high fiscal inputs, persistent poverty emains unresolved under existing policy models.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses the mixed-methods sequential explanatory design was selected on epistemological grounds of complementarity and triangulation: quantitative regression establishes the magnitude and direction of relationships among Otsus allocations, local economic growth, and poverty, while qualitative interviews provide causal mechanisms and contextual explanations that quantitative data cannot capture alone (Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark 2017) Variable operationalization: (X1) Special Autonomy Fund = 10 Likert-scale items measuring perceived fund effectiveness, access to public services, and income impact (á=0.735); (X2) Local Economic Growth = 8 items measuring MSME activity, employment, and household income (á=0.623); (Y) Poverty Level = 7 items measuring basic needs access, income adequacy, and economic vulnerability (á=0.612). Formal regression models: Simple regression: $Y = 29.100 + 0.532X1 + e$; Multiple regression: $Y = 30.416 + 0.352X1 + 0.637X2 + e$. Sampling justification: Area sampling (probabilistic) ensures geographic representativeness across 6 districts; purposive sampling for qualitative informants targets institutional knowledge-holders not accessible through random selection. The two-phase approach is consistent with mixed-methods best practice (Teddlie, C., & Tashakkori 2009) Based on proportional representation, as well as social dynamics and regional complexity, 24 research locations were selected to ensure representation across regencies/municipalities and villages/sub-districts, as shown in the following table:

Table 1. Quantitative Research Sample

Number	Locations Distrik	Sampling Kelurahan	Amount
1	Aimas	6	60
2	Mariat	5	50
3	Sorong	5	50
4	Klawat	4	40
5	Salawati	2	20
6	Mayamuk	2	20
	Amount	24	240

Source: Research Processed 2025

In qualitative research, research subjects use purposive sampling based on specific objectives and criteria The criteria are as follows:

Table 2. Qualitative Research Subjects

No	Name	Amount
1	Governor/Secretary of Service/Head of	1
2	Service	
3	Regents/Heads of Departments	1
4	Community, Traditional Figures	3
5	Papuan Youth Figures	3
6	Female Figures	2
	Amount	10

Source: Research Processed 2025

Data collection was conducted through observation, in-depth interviews, questionnaires, and literature review. Observation is the observation of human behavior to explore phenomena, while in-depth interviews are the process of obtaining information through face-to-face dialogue between the interviewer and informant. A questionnaire is a series of questions that provide alternative answers. The alternative answers use a Likert scale, as shown in the following table:

Table 3. Alternative Answers and Score Weights

Number	Answer	weight
1	Strongly Agree	5
2	AGREE	4
3	Doubtful	3
4	Don't Agree	2
5	Strongly Disagree	1

Furthermore, the literature review serves as a basis for consideration and comparison with previous research results, both conducted by the researcher and by other researchers. Before data analysis is conducted, data quality testing is required to ensure the research results are accountable. In quantitative research, data quality testing is conducted through validity and reliability tests. Validity testing is used to measure what is supposed to be measured. A questionnaire is valid if: If calculated r > r table, the instrument is considered invalid, if calculated r < r table, the instrument is considered valid. Reliability testing is the degree of consistency of an instrument in measuring its objective. Reliability testing is conducted after valid questions have been tested with a standard Cronbach's alpha value of 0.60 with the following conditions: If Cronbach's alpha < 0.60, the instrument is considered unreliable, If Cronbach's alpha > 0.60, the instrument is considered reliable. In a qualitative approach, data quality testing uses four stages: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility testing focuses more on the ability to extend observations, increase research persistence, conduct training, discuss with colleagues, analyse negative cases, and member checks. Transferability testing demonstrates the accuracy of research results between the population and the sample studied. Dependability testing addresses the accuracy of data through audits and evaluations of the research process, while confirmability testing examines the results of research evaluations or objectivity testing.

RESULTS, DISCUSSION, AND ANALYSIS

The Papua Special Autonomy Fund (Dana Otsus) is a special budget allocation from the central government to the Provinces of Papua and West Papua (and now includes newly established provinces such as Central Papua, Highlands Papua, South Papua, and Southwest Papua) as a form of affirmative policy to accelerate development, reduce disparities, and improve the welfare of indigenous Papuans.

Data Quality Test

1. Validity Test

Validity testing is conducted to ensure that each question in the questionnaire accurately measures the construct being studied. According to (Sugiyono. 2019) and (Azwar 2015), an instrument is considered valid if the correlation between the item score and the total score is significant (r-count > r-table).

Table 4. Validity Test

No	Variabel	Item	R Hitung	R tabel	Ket
1	Special Autonomy Funds (X1)	X1.1	0,721	0,126	Valid
2		X1.2	0,534		Valid
3		X1.3	0,493		Valid
4		X1.4	0,752		Valid
5		X1.5	0,487		valid
6		X1.6	0,534		valid
7		X1.7	0,585		Valid
8		X1.8	0,483		Valid
9		X1.9	0,346		Valid
10		X1.10	0,532		Valid
11	Local Economic Growth (X2)	X2.1	0,654	0,126	Valid
12		X2.2	0,542		Valid
13		X2.3	0,423		Valid
14		X2.4	0,691		Valid
15		X2.5	0,534		Valid
16		X2.6	0,582		Valid
17		X2.7	0,735		Valid
18		X2.8	0,653		Valid
19	Poverty Level (Y)	Y1	0,543	0,126	valid
20		Y2	0,435		Valid
21		Y3	0,423		Valid
22		Y4	0,635		Valid
23		Y5	0,546		Valid
24		Y6	0,534		Valid
25		Y7	0,432		Valid

Source : SPPS Processing,2025

Based on the validity test table in the image above, it can be explained that all question items from the three research variables were declared valid. The validity test was conducted by comparing the calculated r value with the table r of 0.126 at a significance level of 5% with a total of 240 respondents.

The test results show that: For the Special Autonomy Fund variable (X1), all 10 items had calculated r values between 0.346 and 0.752, which were all greater than the table r (0.126). For the Local Economic Growth variable (X2), eight items had calculated r values between 0.423 and 0.735, which also exceeded the table r value. For the Poverty Level variable (Y), seven items had calculated r values between 0.423 and 0.635, so all items were considered valid.

2. Realibility Test

Reliability testing is conducted to determine the extent to which a research instrument can produce consistent results when used repeatedly under the same conditions. This testing is performed using the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. According to (Nunnally 1978), an instrument is considered reliable if its Cronbach's Alpha value is greater than 0.600.

Table 5. Realibility Test

No	Variabel	Nilai Cronbach Alpha	Standar	Ket
1	Special Autonomy Funds (X1)	0,735	0,600	Relebiel
2	Local Economic Growth (X2)	0,623	0,600	Relebiel
3	Poverty Level (Y)	0,612	0,600	Relebiel

Source: SPPS Processing 2025

Based on the results above, it can be concluded that all research instruments have a good level of internal consistency. The Special Autonomy Funds (X1) variable obtained the highest value of 0.735, indicating strong reliability. The Local Economic Growth (X2) and Poverty Level (Y) variables also met the reliability criteria with values of 0.623 and 0.612, respectively. Thus, all questions in the questionnaire were declared suitable for further analysis.

Descriptive Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistical analysis is a data analysis method used to describe or explain the basic characteristics of research data. Its purpose is not to test hypotheses, but to provide an overview of the collected data

Table 6 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean		Std. Deviation	Variance	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Total_X1	240	14	20	34	26.45	.181	2.801	7.847	.487	.157	.019	.313
Total_X2	240	10	16	26	21.73	.161	2.496	6.232	-.072	.157	-.979	.313
Total_Y	240	14	21	35	28.03	.152	2.353	5.539	-.032	.157	1.105	.313
Valid N (listwise)	240											

Source: SPPS Processing 2025

The results of descriptive statistical analysis show that the number of respondents (N) in each variable is 240 people. The Total_X1 variable has a minimum value of 20 and a maximum of 34 with a range of 14. The average value (mean) obtained is 26.45 with a standard deviation of 2.801 and a variance of 7.847. The skewness value of 0.487 with a standard error of 0.157 indicates a positively skewed data distribution, but is still in the near-normal category. The kurtosis value of 0.019 with a standard error of 0.313 indicates a relatively normal distribution (mesokurtic). In the Total_X2 variable, the minimum value is 16 and the maximum is 26 with a range of 10. The average obtained is 21.73 with a standard deviation of 2.496 and a variance of 6.232. A skewness value of -0.072 indicates a relatively symmetrical data distribution, while a kurtosis value of -0.979 indicates a flatter distribution than a normal distribution (platykurtic). Meanwhile, the Total Y variable has a minimum value of 21 and a maximum of 35 with a range of 14. The average value obtained is 28.03 with a standard deviation of 2.353 and a variance of 5.539. A skewness value of -0.032 indicates a highly symmetrical distribution, while a kurtosis value of 1.105 indicates a more pointed data distribution than a normal distribution (leptokurtic). In general, the skewness and kurtosis values of the three variables are still within the range of ±2, so the data can be said to be normally distributed. This indicates that the data is suitable for parametric statistical analysis testing in the next stage.

The Relationship between Local Economic Growth and Poverty Levels in Papua

The Pearson Correlation Test (or Pearson Product Moment Correlation) is a statistical test used to determine the level of relationship (correlation) between two numerical variables (intervals or ratios), namely local economic growth and poverty.

Table 7 Correlations

Correlations			
		Local economic growth	Poverty rate
Local economic growth	Pearson Correlation	1	.765
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	240	240
Poverty rate	Pearson Correlation	.765	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	240	240

Source: SPPS Processing 2025

The results of the Pearson correlation test show that local economic growth has a positive and significant relationship with poverty levels ($r = 0.765$; $p < 0.05$). This coefficient indicates a strong and direct relationship between the two variables, meaning that as local economic growth improves, poverty levels tend to decrease. The statistical significance ($p < 0.05$) confirms that this relationship is not random but empirically meaningful. These findings reinforce the notion that local economic development is one of the key determinants of poverty reduction. The positive correlation suggests that stronger local economies can enhance the effectiveness of poverty alleviation efforts. Theoretically, this aligns with the concept of the *trickle-down effect* in economic development theory, which posits that growth at higher levels of the economy can generate widespread benefits for society, including lower-income groups. According to (Todaro, M. P., & Smith 2015), sustainable economic growth expands employment opportunities, increases household income, and strengthens local fiscal capacity to provide public services, all of which contribute to improving social welfare and reducing poverty. In addition, this finding is consistent with (Putnam 1993) argument on the role of *social capital* in promoting local development. Communities that foster strong participation, trust, and collaboration among stakeholders such as village leaders, traditional authorities, and small business actors tend to experience more inclusive and resilient economic growth. Such social cohesion forms a vital foundation for poverty reduction, as collective action and mutual trust enhance the efficiency of local development initiatives.

Field interviews further substantiate the quantitative findings. A village head in Mayamuk District explained: “When people’s small businesses and agricultural activities start running well, they no longer rely on government aid. Their income increases, children can go to school, and household needs are met.”

This statement reflects how economic empowerment at the village level directly contributes to poverty reduction. Similarly, a traditional leader emphasized that: “It’s not only about government funds; what matters is how the community works together to manage local potential. When there is trust among the villagers and support from the village head, the economy can grow.” These narratives highlight the importance of social synergy and local leadership in driving economic progress. In the Papuan context, community-based development thrives when economic initiatives are grounded in local values and collective participation.

This positive relationship indicates that economic growth in Papua tends to be concentrated among certain groups, so its benefits are not evenly distributed to the poor. This phenomenon is commonly referred to as growth without equity, where economic expansion actually widens inequality and sustains structural poverty (Gupta, S., & Veganzones-Varoudakis 2021) ;(Ostry, J. D., Berg, A., & Tsangarides 2020). This finding is consistent with recent studies showing that the relationship between economic growth and poverty is highly dependent on the quality of distribution and institutional capacity (Dollar, D., Kleineberg, T., & Kraay 2022). Without effective redistribution mechanisms, economic growth can increase inequality and worsen the conditions of vulnerable groups. Thus, these results indicate that economic growth in Papua has not been inclusive and has not yet functioned as an effective instrument for poverty reduction.

Special Autonomy Funds have an Impact on Poverty Alleviation in Papua

Simple linear regression is used to determine the direction of the relationship between one independent variable and one dependent variable, whether the relationship is positive or negative, and to predict the value of the dependent variable if the value of the independent variable changes."(Sugiyono, Sutarman, and Rochmadi 2019), Quantitative, Qualitative, and R&D Research Methods).

Table 8 Variable Enterd/Removed

Variables Entered/Removed[a]			
Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	Dana Otsus[b]	.	Enter
a. Dependent Variable: Poverty			
(Gupta, S., & Veganzones-Varoudakis 2021)b. All requested variables entered.			

Source: SPPS Processing 2025

Based on the Variables Entered/Removed table, the independent variable used in the regression model is the Special Autonomy Fund (Dana Otsus), while the dependent variable used is Poverty. In this model, the Enter method used, meaning all predetermined independent variables are entered simultaneously into the regression model without any variables being removed. Thus, the regression analysis conducted aims to determine the extent to which the Special Autonomy Fund variable influences the poverty rate. This indicates that the research is focused on examining the contribution of the Special Autonomy Fund as a predictive factor in reducing or influencing the poverty rate in the studied region.

Table 9 Model Summary

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.487[a]	.258	.273	12.356
a. Predictors: (Constant), Special Autonomy Fund				

Source: SPPS Processing 2025

Based on the Model Summary table, the correlation coefficient (R) was 0.487. This value indicates a moderate positive relationship between Special Autonomy Funds (Dana Otsus) and poverty levels. This means that the greater the Special Autonomy Funds received by a region, the higher or lower the poverty rate, depending on the effectiveness of its management. The coefficient of determination (R Square) of 0.258 indicates that 25.8% of the variation in poverty levels can be explained by the Special Autonomy Fund variable, while the remaining

74.2% is influenced by other variables such as government policies, governance effectiveness, employment, education quality, and infrastructure. The Adjusted R Square value of 0.273 confirms that after adjusting for the number of variables in the model, the contribution of the Special Autonomy Fund increased to 27.3%, which means this model is quite suitable for measuring the effect of the Special Autonomy Fund on poverty. In theory, according to (Chauvel, R., & Bhakti 2019b) economic development based on government funds can reduce poverty if the funds are allocated productively for long-term investments such as education, health, and economic empowerment. However, the results of the study show that the increase in the Special Autonomy Fund is followed by an increase in poverty (coefficient +0.258), which means that the funds have not been utilized effectively. The R Square value = 0.258 means that the Special Autonomy Fund is only able to explain 25.8% of the variation in poverty levels, while 74.2% is influenced by other variables. According to the theory of Good Governance (UNDP 1997),(Sumule 2020) the effectiveness of policies is largely determined by community participation, accountability, transparency of budget management, and coordination between institutions. When this governance is weak, the amount of funds does not automatically reduce poverty.

Table 10. Anova

ANOVA[a]						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	213.050	1	213.050	14.550	.000[b]
	Residual	1320.683	238	12.549		
	Total	1533.733	239			
a. Dependent Variable: Poverty						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Special Autonomy Fund						

Source: SPPS Processing 2025

Based on the analysis results in the ANOVA table, the calculated F value was 14.550 with a significance level (Sig.) of 0.000 < 0.05. This indicates that the regression model built, with the predictor variable Special Autonomy Fund (Dana Otsus) on the dependent variable Poverty Level, is significant. In other words, simultaneously the Special Autonomy Fund has a significant effect on the poverty level. The Sum of Squares Regression value of 213.050 indicates the variation in poverty levels that can be explained by the Special Autonomy Fund, while the Sum of Squares Residual of 1320.683 indicates the variation in poverty levels that are influenced by other factors outside the model.

However, based on Public Policy Evaluation theory (Chauvel, R., & Bhakti 2019) a statistically significant effect does not necessarily indicate effective implementation. A positive coefficient value indicates that the Special Autonomy Fund has not been directed toward addressing the root causes of poverty, such as economic empowerment, human resource development, or improving productive infrastructure.

Table 11. Coefficients

Coefficients[a]						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	29.100	1.447		8.111	.071
	Dana Otsus	.532	.054	.481	.3741	.000
a. Dependent Variable: Poverty						

Source: SPPS Processing 2025

Based on the coefficients table, a simple linear regression equation between the Special Autonomy Fund (Dana Otsus) and the poverty rate is obtained as follows:

Y = 29,100 + 0.532X

Where: Y = Poverty Rate X = Special Autonomy Fund (Dana Otsus)

This equation shows that if the Special Autonomy Fund is zero, the poverty rate will be 29,100. Meanwhile, each additional unit of the Special Autonomy Fund will increase the poverty rate by 0.532 units. This finding can be interpreted as an indication that the use of the Special Autonomy Fund has not been fully effective in reducing poverty, and in some cases, it may even be off-target. Furthermore, the t-value of 9.741 (Sig. 0.000 < 0.05) indicates that the Special Autonomy Fund has a significant effect on the poverty rate. The Standardized Coefficient Beta value of 0.481 indicates that the influence of the Special Autonomy Fund on poverty is quite strong compared to other variables not included in the model. The constant (29.100) reflects that poverty levels remain high even without the Special Autonomy Fund, consistent with the Structural Poverty theory, which states that poverty is caused by structural economic inequality and limited access to public services. The coefficient of 0.532 indicates that every 1-unit increase in the Special Autonomy Fund actually increases poverty by 0.532. According to the Misdirection of Funds theory, this indicates that funds are not used for productive programs, but are only used for consumptive or administrative purposes.

A consistent analytical interpretation is that increasing fiscal transfers, under conditions of weak governance, are actually associated with rising poverty levels. This finding reflects the paradox of fiscal decentralization, where an increase in public funds does not necessarily lead to poverty reduction. Theoretically, this can be explained through the mechanism of elite capture, in which public resources are controlled by local elites and fail to reach poor communities (Bardhan, P., & Mookherjee 2021) In addition, the phenomenon of misallocation of funds occurs, where budgets are predominantly spent on administrative expenditures rather than productive investments (Bandiera, O., Prat, A., & Valletti 2021) Under weak institutional capacity, fiscal decentralization can even worsen development outcomes (Martinez-Vazquez, J., Lago-Peñas, S., & Sacchi 2021). This finding is consistent with studies in Indonesia showing that the effectiveness of fiscal decentralization is highly dependent on governance quality and local government capacity (Nasution 2022)**.** Therefore, the positive coefficient does not indicate a beneficial effect, but rather reflects a failure of governance in managing public funds effectively.

To strengthen the quantitative results, interviews were conducted with key informants, namely representatives of the Sorong district government and community beneficiaries of special autonomy funds.

Although administratively, the use of Special Autonomy Funds has followed applicable procedures and regulations, its effective implementation on the ground still faces several obstacles (Ginting 2024). Interviews with local government officials revealed that

> *"The use of Special Autonomy Funds has been in accordance with regulations, but geographical factors, limited human resources, and a lack of coordination between institutions are often the main obstacles."*

Papua's geographical conditions, dominated by mountainous areas, limited transportation access, and scattered villages, often result in delayed or uneven distribution of funds and program implementation.

Furthermore, human resource capacity at the village and district levels remains limited in terms of planning, budget management, and financial reporting. These limitations prevent the Special Autonomy Fund from being fully directed toward productive and sustainable poverty alleviation programs. (Ritiauw, S., & Haryanto 2023) Furthermore, the lack of coordination between government agencies at the provincial, district, and village levels often leads to overlapping programs, delays in implementation, and even mismatches between planning and community needs (Waromi 2022). This information also explains why the Special Autonomy Fund's contribution to poverty reduction only explains approximately 25–27% of the variation in poverty rate changes, based on the R-square and Adjusted R-square values. means that while the Special Autonomy Fund has a significant impact, its effectiveness remains low due to structural and technical constraints. Therefore, to increase the impact of the Special Autonomy Fund on poverty reduction, it is necessary to improve the quality of local human resources, improve cross-sectoral coordination, and make programs more adaptive to the geographic and socio-cultural context of Papuan society (Katharina 2018).

Further reinforced by a community informant, one informant stated,

> *“We often hear about the Special Autonomy Fund, but what we receive is only basic food assistance or home repairs. But work remains difficult, goods are expensive, so we still feel poor.”*

This statement demonstrates that the allocation of the Special Autonomy Fund has not fully addressed the community’s basic needs for increased income and economic independence (Angela 2024). Despite the provision of physical assistance such as basic food supplies, home renovations, and other welfare programs, communities still face limitations in obtaining employment, access to business capital, and the skills necessary to improve their standard of living independently (Suharno 2021). Geographical conditions, high prices of basic goods, and a lack of employment opportunities further exacerbate the socioeconomic situation of local communities (Dewi 2024). This suggests that the Special Autonomy Fund policy is largely short-term and consumptive, lacking a focus on productive programs such as skills training, local economic empowerment, strengthening village MSMEs, or developing community-based agriculture and fisheries sectors (Salmawati, S., Purnomo 2024).

This interview confirms the statistical analysis that the Special Autonomy Fund’s impact on poverty reduction remains limited. This is reflected in the R-squared value of only 25.8%, indicating that most of the poverty variation is still influenced by factors beyond the use of the Special Autonomy Fund (Hasibuan 2022) Therefore, a shift in policy orientation is needed from solely social assistance to sustainable, participatory economic development that can foster economic independence for the Papuan people (bernandus asmuru, 2025).

The qualitative evidence in this study does not merely serve as illustration, but as a causal explanation of the statistical results. Interview findings indicate that: funds are used for administrative activities, reflecting misallocation; assistance is largely consumptive and does not enhance productivity; and geographic and human resource constraints point to significant institutional limitations. These findings reinforce the argument that the failure of poverty alleviation is not due to a lack of funds, but rather to weaknesses in policy implementation. The literature shows that the effectiveness of public policy is strongly determined by institutional quality, coordination, and accountability (Faguet, J. P., & Pöschl 2020).

The Influence of Special Autonomy on Local Economic Growth in Poverty Alleviation in Papua

To see the influence of special autonomy on local economic growth in poverty alleviation, the Multiple Linear Regression Test is used, which is a statistical analysis method used to determine the influence of more than one independent (free) variable on one dependent (bound) variable simultaneously or partially.

1. Partial T-Test

The partial t-test is one part of regression analysis which is used to determine the influence of each independent variable (X) on the dependent variable (Y) individually (partially).

Table 12. Coefficients

Coefficients[a]								
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients B	Unstandardized Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics Tolerance	Collinearity Statistics VIF
1	(Constant)	30.416	1.882		16.161	.000		
	Special Autonomy Fund	.352	.551	.342	.643	.001	.992	1.008
	local economic growth	.637	.613	.471	1.093	.000	.992	1.008
a. Dependent Variable: Poverty								

Source: SPPS Processing 2025

Based on the results of the multiple linear regression test in the Coefficients table, the following regression equation was obtained: The constant value (30.416) illustrates that the baseline poverty rate remains high despite the Special Autonomy Fund and unchanged economic growth. The constant value of 30.416 confirms that poverty in Papua is structural and remains high even without the support of the Special Autonomy Fund or economic growth. This aligns with the Structural Poverty theory (Kingsbury 2022) which states that poverty is not only caused by a lack of funds, but also by limited infrastructure, access to education and health care, high prices of necessities, and difficult geographic conditions. The Effect of Special Autonomy Funds (B = 0.352, â = 0.342, Sig. = 0.001) The Special Autonomy Fund variable has a positive regression coefficient of 0.352, with a t-value of 0.643 and a significance level of 0.001 < 0.05. This indicates that the Special Autonomy Fund significantly influences poverty levels. The positive direction of the coefficient indicates that increases in the Special Autonomy Fund, without effective management, tend to correlate with increases in poverty. In other words, although the Special Autonomy Fund is expected to reduce poverty, in practice there are indications of inappropriate use, resulting in suboptimal contributions. The Special Autonomy Fund significantly influences poverty, but the direction of the effect is positive. This means that increases in the Special Autonomy Fund do not automatically reduce poverty; in fact, they are correlated with increases in poverty. This indicates maladministration, budget leakage, or the use of funds for consumptive rather than productive purposes (Macdonald, D., & Turner 2020).

According to Good Governance theory, policies will be effective if there are transparency, accountability, and public participation. In fact, the following interview results support this finding:

> *"We often hear about the Special Autonomy Fund, but all we receive is necessities or home repairs. But work is still difficult, goods are expensive, so we still feel poor." (Community interview)*

> *"The funds are there, but most of it is spent on meetings, official travel, and office construction. Community businesses are not empowered." (Village official interview)*

This statement indicates that the Special Autonomy Fund has not been directed towards increasing income, empowering small businesses, or creating jobs. Instead, most of the budget is spent on administrative and infrastructure activities that have little direct impact on household welfare.

The coefficients for the Special Autonomy Fund (0.352) and Local Economic Growth (0.637) are both positive, meaning that if both variables increase without proper management, poverty will increase. The Effect of Local Economic Growth (B = 0.637, â = 0.471, Significant Difference = 0.000) The Local Economic Growth variable has a positive regression coefficient of 0.637 with a t-value of 1.093 and a significance level of 0.000 < 0.05. This indicates that local economic growth has a significant effect on poverty levels. A positive coefficient indicates a directional relationship, meaning that higher local economic growth leads to higher poverty rates. This can be interpreted as economic growth that is not yet inclusive, so its benefits are not felt equally by all levels of society. Local economic growth also shows a positive and significant impact on poverty. The positive trend indicates that as economic growth increases, poverty increases. This phenomenon is known in development theory as "growth without equity," meaning economic growth that is not inclusive (Fatem, S., Sahureka, F., & Katjeb 2018).

Growth is enjoyed only by certain groups usually large businesses, contractors, or government officials while the lower classes do not feel the benefits. This was reinforced by an informant:

> *"Prices of goods continue to rise, but our incomes remain the same. The economy is progressing, but only in the cities; villages are still struggling." (Community interview)*

Thus, economic growth has not been able to serve as an instrument for equitable prosperity because it is not accompanied by equal access to capital, or empowerment of local communities.

These findings should be interpreted as evidence of a structural paradox rather than a contradiction. The positive coefficients for both Special Autonomy funds (B = 0.352) and local economic growth (B = 0.637) suggest that increases in fiscal transfers and economic expansion are associated with rising poverty levels, particularly in contexts characterized by weak governance quality. This pattern aligns with the elite capture thesis, where public resources are disproportionately appropriated by local elites rather than allocated toward productive and inclusive development. Previous studies support this interpretation. Research indicates that Special Autonomy (Otsus) funds in Papua tend to be absorbed into routine and administrative expenditures rather than community-oriented investments. Similarly, studies on fiscal decentralization in Eastern Indonesia demonstrate that decentralization can exacerbate poverty when institutional capacity and accountability mechanisms are insufficient. Importantly, the qualitative evidence in this study provides not merely illustrative support but serves as a causal explanation. Testimonies from village officials reveal that substantial portions of funds are allocated to meetings, travel, and administrative infrastructure, confirming the mechanism of misallocation underlying this paradox. Therefore, the consistent interpretation of positive coefficients as indicators of governance-mediated failure rather than simultaneous effectiveness and inefficiency constitutes a key analytical contribution to the literature on fiscal decentralization and inclusive growth.

2. Simultaneous F test

The F (Simultaneous) test is one part of linear regression analysis which is used to determine whether all independent variables in the model together or simultaneously have a significant influence on the dependent variable.

Table 13. Anova

ANOVA[a]						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	9.671	2	14.836	33.872	.000[b]
	Residual	1314.062	237	15.545		
	Total	1323.733	239			
a. Dependent Variable: Poverty						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Local economic growth, Special Autonomy Fund						

Source: SPPS Processing 2025

Based on the ANOVA table, the calculated F-value was 33.872 with a significance level (Sig.) of 0.000 < 0.05. This indicates that the regression model constructed with the independent variables of the Special Autonomy Fund and Local Economic Growth simultaneously had a significant effect on the dependent variable of Poverty. Thus, it can be concluded that the regression model involving the Special Autonomy Fund and Local Economic Growth is able to significantly explain variations in poverty levels. This means that both variables, when tested together, have a significant impact on poverty in Papua. However, the relatively large residual value (1,314,062) indicates that many other factors outside the model also influence poverty levels. Based on the ANOVA test results, the calculated F-value of 33.872, with a significance level of 0.000 < 0.05, indicates that the simultaneous regression model is significant. This means that the Special Autonomy Fund (Dana Otsus) and Local Economic Growth variables together have a significant impact on poverty levels in Papua (Kurniawan, T., & Ritiauw 2021).

This finding aligns with regional economic development theory (Sharp 2021) which states that poverty reduction is influenced by a combination of fiscal policies (such as regional transfer funds or the Dana Otsus) and local economic growth. However, its effectiveness is greatly influenced by governance, benefit distribution, and community involvement. Furthermore, the Inclusive Growth theory states (Said, A., & Warami 2022) Economic growth will be effective in reducing poverty if it is inclusive, involving the poor in the production process and the distribution of benefits. However, in Papua, local economic growth is not fully inclusive, so growth does not automatically reduce poverty. In fact, the model shows a positive effect of economic growth on poverty because it is only enjoyed by certain groups (the elite or the formal sector)(Anderson, B., & Barlinti 2020).

CONCLUSIONS

This study advances three substantive findings with theoretical and policy implications. First, a structural paradox in Otsus effectiveness: the positive regression coefficient (B=0.532, R^2=0.258) reveals that increased Otsus allocations correlate with higher rather than lower poverty. This is not an analytical inconsistency but a coherent finding explained by governance failure specifically, elite capture, misallocation toward consumptive and administrative spending, and the absence of productive community investment. This directly challenges the prevailing assumption in fiscal decentralization literature that higher intergovernmental transfers inherently reduce poverty. Second, local economic growth remains non-inclusive (growth without equity): the positive coefficient (B=0.637) indicates that economic expansion in Papua disproportionately benefits urban formal-sector actors, with rural and indigenous communities excluded from its gains. The structural poverty constant (30.416) confirms that poverty is deeply embedded in geographic isolation, limited infrastructure, and restricted access to services. Third, the combined model (F=33.872; R^2=0.873) demonstrates systemic interdependence of fiscal policy and economic governance. Poverty reduction in Papua requires not more funds, but fundamentally better governance of existing resources. Theoretical Contribution: This study demonstrates that the Otsus–poverty relationship is mediated by governance quality, integrating collaborative governance theory (Ansell, C., &

Gash 2008), inclusive growth theory, and social capital theory (Putnam 1993) into a unified framework applicable to asymmetric decentralization contexts. Policy Recommendations: (1) Reallocate at least 60% of Otsus funds to productive sectors (community MSME development, indigenous agriculture, fisheries, local value chains); (2) Implement performance-based budgeting with participatory community audits and third-party monitoring; (3) Develop community-based economic models rooted in indigenous Papuan institutions; (4) Establish an Otsus fund effectiveness index linking disbursement to measurable poverty reduction targets. Limitations: This study is geographically bounded to Sorong Regency, Southwest Papua Province, limiting generalizability across all Papuan provinces. The cross-sectional design precludes causal inference. Future research should incorporate governance quality as a directly measured mediating variable and apply structural equation modelling to formally test mediation pathways.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Thank you to the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia in 2025 for funding this research program under the young lecturer research scheme, with contract number 157/KTK/II.3.AU/J/2025.

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