

## STRENGTHENING SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

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### Abstract

This research examines social engagement in Sustainable Development Goals in rural areas of West Java Province, Indonesia, which aims to integrate sustainable development into strategies and policies at the community level. Even though the Sustainable Development Goals program has been running since 2015, citizen involvement and participation is still relatively minimal. The research method uses a qualitative approach by utilizing data collection techniques through field research in the form of observation, in-depth interviews and Focus Group Discussions with community leaders and related stakeholders. The main findings show that community groups play an active role in physical development and increase local capacity in resource management, with significant support for the sustainability of programs. The complexity of political, economic, cultural and social factors has influenced social engagement, as well as its implications for achieving sustainable development goals. This research contributes to an in-depth understanding of the role of communities in the context of rural development, with implications for implementing strategies and policy development that are more inclusive and sustainable in the long term.

**Keywords:** *Social Engagement, Sustainable Development Goals, Community, Rural Areas, Middle Class.*

### A. INTRODUCTION

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are the main development agenda agreed upon by all countries under the auspices of the United Nations (UN) which has been ongoing since 2015 (Rosati & Faria, 2019). Implementation of the SDGs is part of the global commitment to achieve sustainable development in accordance with its goals and indicators (Leal Filho et al., 2020). One concrete proof of the implementation of SDGs in Indonesia is the realization of a Village SDGs Program. Village SDGs are government policies to achieve the goals and indicators of SDGs at the village level, especially intended for social, economic, environmental, legal and community governance development at the village level (Gunawan et al., 2020).

The Village SDGs policy refers to the Regulation of the Minister of Villages, Development of Disadvantaged Regions and Transmigration Number 21 of 2020 concerning General Guidelines for Village Development and Village Community Empowerment. There are 18 points of village development goals processed from the global SDGs, namely: villages without poverty, villages without hunger, healthy and prosperous villages, quality village education, involvement of village women, villages worthy of clean water and sanitation, villages with clean and renewable energy, economic growth equitable villages, village innovation and infrastructure, villages without gaps, sustainable villages, responsible village consumption and production, climate change responsive villages, villages that care about the marine environment, villages that care about the land environment, peaceful villages with justice, partnerships for village development, and dynamic village institutions and adaptive village culture (Rosati & Faria, 2019).

Even though the Village SGD program has been running for a long time, community involvement in this program is still not optimal. Data from the Government (BAPPENAS/National Development Planning Agency) for 2023 states that community participation and involvement is still a major concern (The Sustainable Development Goals Report, 2024). Likewise, data from a survey conducted by the Centre for Indonesia's Strategic Development Initiatives (CISDI) in July 2020 on 419 respondents aged 18-60 years showed that there was a significant gap between the government and society at the grassroots level. The majority of respondents stated that they did not know about the SDGs, with 53 percent assessing the SDGs issue as difficult to understand and limited to academics and social workers. Even though 55 percent of respondents felt they had contributed to activities related to SDGs, there are still many SDGs targets that have not been properly socialized to the community, especially village communities. Apart from that, an online survey in April 2019 of 53 respondents regarding the involvement of Civil Society Organizations (CSO) by the government in achieving the SDGs in Indonesia showed that many people were not yet involved in efforts to achieve the SDGs. This low participation is caused by various factors, such as lack of socialization, minimal public understanding of the importance of the SDGs, and limited access to information and resources needed to participate in the program. (Dewi & Sitepu, 2017).

Communities are an important part of the success of the SDGs because they have better access to resources and information, as well as the ability to mobilize change at the local level (Chun et al., 2016). According to Utomo's study (Utomo et al., 2019), social engagement in development programs can be a significant driver in achieving all sustainable development goals because people in the adult age group have the potential to make substantial contributions in various aspects, including economic, social and environmental. In several countries, communities are involved and play a role in national development, such as in Mozambique (Brooks, 2018), Nigeria ((Baviskar & Ray, 2020), India (Baviskar & Ray, 2020), England (Crossick, 2021), and China (Dai & Menhas, 2020).

Implementation of the SDGs in Indonesia has different levels of participation in all regions. One region that recorded a low level of participation was West Java Province, one of the spearheads of SDGs implementation in Indonesia. West Java has four SDGs study centres, which is the largest number in Indonesia, so it could be a potential success for Village SDGs. In reality, even though West Java has great potential to become a model for implementing the SDGs, social engagement in this program is still relatively low. Data from the Indonesian Ministry of BPN/Bappenas (2024) shows that citizen participation in West Java is still relatively low at 38%. The majority of citizen participation still revolves around policy top down from the government which does not involve all lines of life, especially the middle class. This is ironic considering the importance of this province in achieving national SDGs targets. Therefore, research that captures the participation of village residents in the Village SDGs program, especially in the West Java region, is important to understand the factors that influence their involvement and identify strategies that can be used to increase participation.

Several studies on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in recent years have shown certain trends. First, studies on SDGs post-pandemic COVID-19, as done by Bose and Khan (2022), which examines SDG reporting by companies around the world, as well as the role of institutional factors at the country level. This study shows that SDGs reporting is increasing, although there are differences between countries with strong sustainability regulations and countries that are more shareholder-oriented than stakeholder-oriented. Additionally, Sharma et al. (2021) highlight the importance of a circular economy approach in waste management systems to support green recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic, which can help achieve global SDG targets.

Second, studies regarding the role of higher education institutions as part of the stakeholders in supporting the SDGs are increasingly developing. Kioupi and Voulvoulis (2020) developed an assessment framework to evaluate the contribution of educational programs to sustainable development, while Abad-Segura and González-Zamar (2021) explored the global evolution of scientific production and research trends related to sustainable economic development in higher education institutions. Caputo et al. (2021) assessed sustainability reporting practices by higher education institutions or universities and found that attention to social and environmental issues is increasing.

Third, there is a tendency in the study of Big Data in the context of the SDGs. Hassan et al. (2021) highlight the impact of Big Data on sustainable development, while ElMassah and Mohieldin (2020) discuss how the reality of digital transformation can support localization and achievement of the SDGs. Parmentola et al. (2022) examines the potential of blockchain in improving environmental sustainability, and Sætra (2021) proposes a framework for evaluating and uncovering the ESG-related impacts of artificial intelligence (AI) based on the SDGs.

However, there are still gaps in the research literature regarding the role of communities in SDGs programs. The same thing also happens in Indonesia, especially SDGs studies still focus on fisheries and marine resources, such as research by Puspitawati et al. (2022) which examines the design of regulatory reform in aquaculture as well as the urgency of legal reform and trans-sectoral participatory enforcement models. Additionally, Hiratsuka et al. (2019) evaluated land and forest conservation initiatives through social engagement in South Kalimantan Province. Akbar et al. (2020) studied participatory processes in planning practices in rural areas in Indonesia, with an SDGs-based evaluation. Sumardjo et al. (2023) examines social transformation in peri-urban communities towards food sustainability and achieving SDGs in an era of disruption. Abidin & Prasetyani (2021) examines models of empowering women farmers to support the SDGs, with a focus on empowerment patterns in the agricultural sector. Dariah et al. (2019) studied the sustainable development planning framework through a strategic planning approach involving various stakeholders. Mazdalifah et al. (2024) researched media literacy and ICT skills in increasing women's participation towards the SDGs in plantation communities. Nurbaiti & Bambang (2018) researched social engagement in community-based clean water and sanitation programs in rural areas. Lastly, Azahari et al. (2024) examines the role of gender in oil palm plantation villages for the achievement of SDGs, highlighting the role of women in livelihood security and their participation in civil society development.

Most of the researchers above still focus on participatory initiatives in certain sectors such as agriculture, fisheries and forest conservation, but no one has specifically examined social engagement in a more holistic Village SDGs program. Therefore, this research is novel in several aspects. The geographic focus on West Java will specifically seek to examine village social engagement in the Village SDGs program, providing a more contextual and specific understanding of this region. The emphasis on village communities will explore the role and social engagement of villages, which often receive less attention in social engagement studies, but have great potential in supporting the success of SDGs programs (Levy, 1996). A holistic approach to the Village SDGs program will integrate various aspects of social engagement in the context of the Village SDGs program holistically, including understanding, involvement and contribution of the community in achieving sustainable development goals.

Therefore, this research aims to understand strengthening village social engagement in the Village SDGs program in West Java Province. This research aims to identify factors that influence village community involvement in this program, as well as examine strategies that can be used to increase their participation. By highlighting the role and contribution of village communities, this research contributes to deeper insight into the dynamics of social engagement in achieving sustainable development goals, as well as offering practical and

contextual recommendations for policy makers to increase the effectiveness of Village SDGs programs in the region.

The article argues that strengthening social engagement in the Village SDGs program in West Java Province shows various dynamics that influence the effectiveness of this program. Community communities play an important role in supporting the economic, social and environmental aspects of Village SDGs in Indonesia. They have better access to resources and information, as well as the ability to mobilize change at the local level, as has been demonstrated in several case studies in other countries (Ahonkhai et al., 2022; Brooks, 2018; Chun et al., 2016). However, their participation is still hampered by factors such as internal busyness and the influence of social media.

## **B. LITERATURE REVIEW**

One process of community involvement that originates from social interaction is social engagement (Gui et al., 2022). Social engagement refers to various concepts and frameworks that explain how and why individuals or groups in society are involved in development activities or social programs.

One group that could contribute to development is the community, especially in the context of the SDGs. According to Bowen (Bowen, 2021), a community that is able to fulfil hierarchy of needs Abraham Maslow, namely: self-actualization, appreciation, affection, security, and physiological needs. Meanwhile, according to Verba et al., (1996), people from the middle class tend to participate more in development activities and social programs than other economic classes.

Communities play a crucial role in sustainable development, especially in the context of the SDGs in Indonesia. Factors such as effective persuasion strategies, as found by Snyder et al. (2009), as well as leadership that leverages city assets and policies to encourage community engagement, as in the 'Clear the Air Challenge' campaign in Salt Lake City by Johnston et al. (2013), has been shown to encourage positive collective action. Apart from that, social media also plays an important role in reducing the digital divide and facilitating collaboration on development issues, as stated by Ali (2011) and Gaál et al. (2015). Existing social systems, such as shared values integrated into ecosystem management, also provide a strong foundation for community involvement in sustainable development efforts, as discussed by Ives and Kendal (2014) and Grootaert and Van Bastelaer (2002).

Concern has a significant impact in supporting sustainable development initiatives, both from companies and citizens (Rosati & Faria, 2019). Research by Yu (2020) show that corporate philanthropic contributions not only improve a company's image but also support economic growth. In addition, citizen engagement in local care, as emphasized by Thomson (2021) and Sciortino (2017), has an important role in supporting local policies and governance, as well as promoting SDGs initiatives and village development. The literacy factor among the middle class, which increases access to education and information, also strengthens their ability to participate in development initiatives, as found by Chun et al. (2016) and Power et al. (2003). The socio-economic transformation in China, studied by Lin (2015), emphasizes that the existence of education is the key to dynamic social mobility for the middle class, while ideology 'parentocracy', as analysed by Barrett DeWiele & Edgerton (2016), illustrates how the middle class can best manage their children's education to maximize life opportunities, reflecting the reality of social inequality in today's educational context.

There are several challenges that need to be overcome so that communities can maximize their contribution to the SDGs. Factors inhibiting village community participation and involvement in development activities include limited time and resources due to population migration to cities, as studied by Mansuri and Rao (2012) and Au and Henderson (2006). The research highlights that the success of local participation depends largely on the ability to

integrate citizen schedules and needs with development programs. Bartik (2020) emphasizes the importance of local economic development policies to create jobs in the area of origin, reducing the need for migration to cities. In addition, the impact of digital, especially social media use on adolescents, as studied by Bozzola et al. (2022) and Roberts and Marchais (2018), also causes social isolation and decreased participation in community activities in villages, considering that teenagers are more likely to spend time with digital entertainment than participating in traditional group activities.

By strengthening the role of communities in sustainable development, they can increase their ability to achieve SDGs targets more effectively. An inclusive and community-based approach, as advocated by Akbar et al. (2020) in the context of social engagement in village development planning, is the key to ensuring that the contribution of the middle class not only has a positive impact economically but also socially and environmentally at large.

### **C. METHOD**

This research applies a qualitative approach to investigate social engagement in the Village SDGs program in West Java Province as the most populous and largest province in Indonesia. This approach was chosen because it provides the flexibility to explore in depth participants' motivations, perceptions, and experiences, as well as to capture the complexity and social context that influences their involvement in sustainable development. (Lune & Berg, 2017, p. 43).

Field data needs are met through field research in the 4 (four) selected villages, namely Kadugede Village in Kuningan Regency, Kebonpedes Village in Sukabumi Regency, West Java, Indonesia, Cibiru Wetan Village in Bandung Regency, and Gunungsari Village, Ciamis Regency. These four villages were chosen because of their achievements in implementing the Village SDGs which are recognized nationally in 2023. Process field research taking place from 12 January to 23 June 2024, involving field recording and participatory observation to gain direct understanding of program implementation as well as community interaction with initiatives and innovations in implementing the SDGs.

In addition, the data collection technique uses in-depth interviews from various related parties, including district government elements, village governments, village SDGs program implementers, private sector elements, and middle-class village residents. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain perspectives regarding the factors that influence participation in the Village SDGs program, especially for community groups who have practical experience in sustainable development in villages.

Data collection using literature research is also carried out as part of the application of the methodology, with a focus on searching and analysing documents from academic journals, country reports, village documents, and national and international survey reports. This approach aims to deepen theoretical and empirical understanding of the factors that influence social engagement in SDGs programs, as well as to learn from program implementation and highlight various best and similar practices in various contexts.

Data analysis is carried out by organizing and presenting the collected data using techniques restatement data and data displays, such as tables, graphs, and descriptive narratives (Miles & Huberman, 2013). Data interpretation was carried out by applying an analysis model from the Miles and Huberman perspective to identify patterns, themes and relationships between data, to produce a deep understanding of the dynamics of middle-class participation in achieving sustainable development goals through the Village SDGs program in West Java Province, Indonesia.

## **D. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **1. Implementation of SDGs in West Java, Indonesia**

West Java Province is the province with the largest population in Indonesia. The population in West Java Province is projected to reach 49,935,858 people in 2020, with a population growth rate of 1.49%. The average population density reached 1,412 people/km<sup>2</sup>, and the population dependency ratio reached 46.57%. In 2019, Gross Regional Domestic Product (GRDP) grew by 5.07% to reach IDR 1,491,705.81 billion, with the processing industry sector as the main contributor. Per capita income reached IDR 43,092 million, while Regional Original Income (PAD) continued to increase from 2015 to 2019, with 2019 PAD reaching IDR 19,759.78 billion (Locates SDGs Indonesia, 2023).

So far, the implementation of SDGs in West Java has been considered successful. This success can be seen from the increase in the elements of life. Quoting data from Localise SDGs Indonesia (2023), the poverty rate in West Java decreased from 7.45% in 2018 to 6.91% in 2019, but increased again to 7.88% in March 2020. The Gini ratio also increased to 0.403 in 2020 from 0.402 in 2019, depicts increasing social inequality. The percentage of residents without health insurance rose from 3.21% in 2019 to 3.63% in 2020. The literacy rate for residents over 15 years old rose from 98.48% in 2018 to 98.53% in 2019 and 98.63% in 2020.

The SDGs program in West Java achieved success by integrating sustainable development principles in the planning and implementation of local policies. The program covers a wide range of initiatives, from increasing access to health and education services to sustainable infrastructure development and improvement. For example, programs to improve adequate sanitation and clean water have had a significant positive impact, with a significant increase in the percentage of households that have access to clean drinking water and adequate sanitation in recent years. In addition, efforts to increase literacy levels and access to education have made a positive and important contribution to increasing the Human Development Index (HDI) in West Java province.

However, the people of West Java Province still face challenges, such as the low level of social participation and social engagement in the SDGs, especially for those in certain communities, both regionally and at the level of stratification in society. Strategic steps to face and overcome this challenge are needed with strategies to strengthen social protection programs and optimize the distribution of available resources. Stewardship support must also be increased in various forms. In this way, efforts to achieve SDGs targets in West Java can take place in a sustainable and inclusive manner, integrating various parties in supporting sustainable development.

### **2. Social Engagement in Village SDGs**

The four areas that are pilots for Village SDGs development in West Java are Cibiru Wetan Village, Bandung Regency, Gunungsari Village, Ciamis Regency, Kadugede Village, Kuningan Regency and Kebonpedes Village, Sukabumi Regency. The four villages have a positive portrait in implementing the Village SDGs. These four villages have positive and good qualifications in implementing SDGs indicators. The active role of communities belonging to certain groups, such as professions (farmers' groups, fishermen's groups and traders' groups) and social ties (religious and community groups).

In its involvement in village SDGs, there is a phenomenon of the emergence of the middle class. The middle-class community in the four villages is very active. Based on the results of research through interviews, it was found that the level of social engagement of the community in the SDGs is very high. This is described in table 1 and table 2.

**Table 1. Level of Social Engagement in Rural Areas**

Activity	Gunungsari	Kadugede	Kebonpedes	Cibiru Wetan
Program Planning	80	80	75	80
Program Implementation	85	80	75	82
Monitoring and Evaluation	80	70	75	90
Training and Workshops	85	85	80	85
Socialization and Education	90	90	85	92

Source: Obtained from Original Field Data

The research results show that the level of community social engagement in the Village SDGs program in Gunungsari, Kadu Gede and Cibiru Wetan Villages is high compared to social engagement in Kebonpedes Village. In the villages of Gunungsari, Kadugede and Cibiru Wetan, the social engagement figures in the program planning were both 80%. Meanwhile in Kebonpedes it only reached 75%, the highest figure for program implementation was in Gunungsari Village at 85%, the highest monitoring and evaluation was in Cibiru Wetan Village at 90%, training and workshops in Gunungsari, Kadu Gede and Cibiru Wetan Villages both achieved figures. amounting to 85%, and the highest socialization and education in Cibiru Wetan Village at 92%.

Comparison of the level of social engagement. The middle class has a higher level of involvement in all Village SDGs program activities compared to the general public and other groups. This shows that the middle class is more active and involved in various aspects of the program, from planning to outreach and education. This high participation can be attributed to better access to information, opportunities and resources that the middle class has.

The existence of social engagement in sustainable development is also related to several aspects, including Values, norms, local traditions, reputation, and cooperation. The dimensions of social engagement are related to social properties and collective understanding. Based on the results of Focus Group Discussions with Community groups, information was obtained that from a value aspect, the Community was willing to help sincerely because of the moral encouragement they were ready to help anyone in need. Apart from that, from the aspect of collective norms, society has a mutually helpful attitude because they understand the importance of taking the initiative to help anyone. Local traditions also help to strengthen social engagement because they want to preserve traditions. From the reputation aspect, the community has attitudes and actions to maintain their good name as an effort to maintain the good name of the community and village. From the cooperation aspect, they will prioritize the skills they have in accordance with their respective functions. The following table shows the existence of social engagement in people's lives.

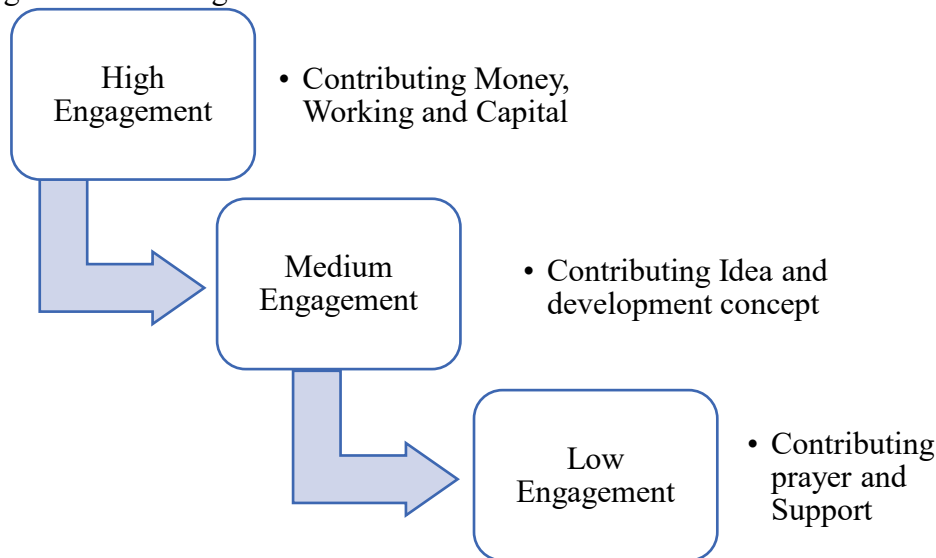
**Table 2. Aspects, Social Properties and Collective Understanding**

No	Dimensions	Social property	Collective Understanding
1	Mark	Willingness to help sincerely	Moral encouragement helps anyone in need The encouragement of the religion adhered to There is exemplary leadership
2	Collective norms	Helping attitude	Taking the initiative to help anyone

3	Local traditions	The attitude of maintaining and preserving local virtues	Preserving positive local traditions as a guide for village community life
4	Reputation	Attitudes and actions to maintain good reputation	Always strive to maintain the good name of the community and institution
5	Cooperation	An attitude of cooperation and working together in accordance with their duties and functions	So that each stakeholder can cooperate with each other according to their respective duties and functions so that an interdependent and mutually beneficial relationship is formed

Source: Obtained from Original Field Data

Furthermore, the types of social engagement in rural SDGs are through several levels ranging from low to higher levels.



**Figure 1. The Type of Social Engagement**

The types of citizen engagement in the Village SDGs program vary from low level to high level. In Kadugede Village, middle class engagement in two main aspects of the Village SDGs, namely the construction of clean water and sanitation facilities and the development of village infrastructure, makes a significant contribution to achieving sustainable development goals. To create a village worthy of clean water and sanitation, Kadugede Village is focusing on building adequate toilets for residents who do not have these facilities. Middle class engagement in this program is divided into three levels: High Participation, Medium Participation, And Low Participation. Several middle-class residents with a high level of engagement donated money and capital to build decent toilets for their less fortunate neighbours. They not only provide funding, but also ensure that the development meets good health and hygiene standards. In addition, the middle class with a medium level of engagement plays an active role by contributing ideas and suggestions regarding the design and location of construction of sanitation facilities. They are involved in village meetings, providing valuable input that helps optimize the use of funds and resources. At low levels of engagement, some middle-class residents donate prayers and moral support to those directly involved in development projects. Even though this engagement is not material, it provides enthusiasm and motivation for project implementers.



The active involvement of the middle class in the Village SDGs program in Kadugede shows that social engagement does not only depend on government assistance. Citizens who have financial independence can be a driving force in village development, ensuring that every project runs smoothly and achieves its goals (Snyder et al., 2009). This engagement not only accelerates development, but also increases the sense of togetherness and social responsibility among village residents.

Based on the results of in-depth interviews with residents and the head of the youth union in Kadugede, information was obtained that they have a responsibility and calling to be involved in village development. Referring to the results of an interview conducted on April 04, 2024, with one of the informants, member of Kadugede Community named Jujun (male), the informants stated the following: *"We as citizens certainly have concerns and feel called to be involved in all aspects of development that provide benefits to residents"*. In addition, the results of an interview on April 20, 2024 with Rika Rinawati (female), a youth organization administrator in Kadugede Village, stated the following: *"Teenagers and youth value togetherness and have been involved from the planning aspect to the end of development activities. We also ensure that funds for development in this village are not diverted"*.

Meanwhile in Kebonpedes Sukabumi Village, building and improving village access roads is another focus of the Village SDGs. Middle class citizens take part in this program through various types of engagement. At a high level of engagement, middle class residents contribute money and capital for the construction of village roads. This assistance allows villages to purchase high-quality materials and pay for skilled labor. At the medium engagement level, they contribute by providing ideas and ideas regarding road improvements and construction. These ideas include selecting durable materials and efficient construction methods. Support in the form of prayers and encouragement is also provided by the middle class at low engagement levels, which helps increase morale and motivation for workers and parties involved in the project. Referring to the results of an interview conducted on March 10, 2024, with one of the informants, the head of Kebonpedes village named Asep Mahmudin (male), the informant stated the following: *"The contribution of middle-class residents is very large in road construction projects in our village. They are often the backbone in various development activities. Residents who have financial capabilities provide significant financial assistance, while others participate by providing creative ideas and innovative solutions to repairing village roads and bridges. Even the moral support and prayers of those who cannot contribute materially remain very valuable to us"*.

Therefore, the Head of Kebonpedes Village, Asep Mahmudin, appreciated the active role of the middle class in developing the village independently. According to him, the middle class in Kebonpedes has an important role in ensuring the success of development projects. Their engagement not only accelerates the development process, but also increases the sense of togetherness and social responsibility among village residents. Asep Mahmudin emphasized that with togetherness and active engagement, sustainable development goals can be achieved, so that the quality of life of all village residents increases. Significant contributions from middle class residents, both in the form of financial assistance and creative ideas, are the backbone of various development activities in the village. Moral support from residents who are unable to contribute materially is also invaluable and helps ensure the success of the projects implemented.

The results of research in Kadugede Village and Kebonpedes Village show that middle class engagement in the Village SDGs program has a significant contribution to achieving sustainable development goals. These findings are in line with various concepts and frameworks that explain social engagement in development, as expressed by Gui et al. (Gui et al., 2022). Social engagement can be seen as a process of community involvement that

originates from social interactions, which includes various levels of contribution ranging from non-participation to citizen power, as described by Arnstein (1969).

Thus, the results of this research show that middle class involvement in the Village SDGs program in Kadugede and Kebonpedes is very important and has a significant impact on achieving sustainable development goals. Support from several literatures also strengthens these findings, showing that with active and inclusive engagement, the middle class can become a driving force in sustainable village development.

### **3. Factors that Influence Social Engagement**

The involvement of the middle class in the Village SDGs program in Kadugede and Kebonpedes is influenced by various encouraging and inhibiting factors. There are several factors that drive the success of middle-class engagement in village SDGs in West Java. The research results showed six driving factors, namely: persuasion factors from village officials, social media factors, embedded social system factors, protection value factors among fellow citizens, philanthropy factors, and literacy factors.

*First*, persuasion factors from village officials. In Kadugede and Kebonpedes Villages, West Java, the persuasion factor of village officials, especially village heads and cadres, plays a crucial role in increasing social engagement in development activities. Research by Snyder et al. (2009), shows that effective persuasion strategies can motivate collective action and increase engagement in social activities. In addition, the approach of Johnston et al. (2013) about effective leadership that uses city assets and partnerships to drive engagement, as in the 'Clear the Air Challenge' in Salt Lake City, is relevant to the strategies used in both villages. Burgess (2016) and Robinson et al. (2014), also highlighted the importance of persuasion techniques and effective leadership models in driving social engagement, which were applied similarly in Kadugede and Kebonpedes to promote sustainable development through active community engagement.

The persuasion factor from village officials, with popular and collaborative leadership strategies, is very effective in increasing social engagement. This approach, supported by the research above, shows that social engagement can be increased through appropriate persuasion strategies, effective leadership, and collaboration between village officials and the community. In Kadugede and Kebonpedes Villages, the persuasion factor has succeeded in encouraging the community to be actively involved in social and development activities, which in turn contributes to achieving sustainable development goals.

*Second*, social media factor. Social media has become an important element in modern life, including in villages. Direct and practical social media, such as WhatsApp, functions as a communication tool that connects village residents and promotes village development activities. For example, when Kadugede Village built toilets and clean water connections, one of the residents used social media to invite other residents to participate. The presence of social media is important to support the successful implementation of SDGs in villages.

In Kadugede and Kebonpedes Villages, West Java, social media, such as WhatsApp, has proven to be an effective tool in coordinating and mobilizing communities to participate in development projects. This is in line with Ali's research (2011) highlight the role of social media in closing the global digital divide and facilitating discussion and collective action at levels previously difficult to reach. The study of Gaál et al. (2015) showed that social media enables knowledge sharing and collaboration among individuals, while the research of Bharati et al. (2015) confirmed its positive impact on knowledge management and the quality of organizational knowledge through the use of social capital. In the context of these villages, the use of social media strengthens communication, increases social engagement, and promotes cooperation in an effort to achieve sustainable development goals.

*Third*, embedded social system factors. Embedded social systems, such as the values of mutual cooperation, are important elements in society that function to bond one another and support the completion of environmental work without reward. This system allows the implementation of the village SDGs program to run effectively, because the community is used to working together and helping each other in completing various tasks and projects.

In Kadugede and Kebonpedes Villages, social values, especially cooperation, play a central role in influencing social engagement in village development activities. Ives and Kendal Research (2014) highlighted those social values such as cooperation influence people's perceptions, attitudes and behaviour towards ecosystem management and conservation, which can increase acceptance of management activities. In addition, Thomas's (2020) study shows that projects that are rooted in existing social systems, such as mutual cooperation, tend to be more successful in driving social engagement because they are able to adapt to community dynamics. Social capital formed through mutual cooperation practices has also been proven to facilitate the provision of goods and services and support poverty reduction and rural development, as confirmed by Grootaert and Van Bastelaer (2002). Thus, the practice of mutual cooperation in these two villages not only strengthens social cooperation, but also increases the success and sustainability of effective implementation of the SDGs program.

*Fourth*, factor of protection value between fellow citizens. The protection value factor between fellow citizens functions to protect the community from aspects of security, comfort and order. The system found in Kadugede Village and Kebonpedes Village is the Environmental Security System (Siskamling). Siskamling involves each family providing their representatives to protect the environment in groups at night from 19.30 to 05.00 WIB. This system helps protect public and private assets from interference and threats from outside parties and strengthens social ties between citizens.

In social development, feelings of closeness between citizens become important in society as a characteristic of social cohesion. Cheung Study (Cheung et al., 2014) found that factors such as work-family conflict and medical costs were significant predictors of the level of social closeness between citizens in various societies, with Thailand showing the highest level of closeness and Taiwan the lower. The Siskamling system in Kadugede Village and Kebonpedes Village reflects protection values that support social cohesion by involving residents in maintaining environmental security. This approach not only protects against external threats, but also strengthens the sense of community and shared responsibility among village residents, in line with findings about the importance of social factors in building closeness between residents as highlighted by research by Cheung et al.

*Fifth*, philanthropic factors. The philanthropy factor in the engagement of village residents, especially those from the middle class, has a strong basis in Islamic religious beliefs, which encourages them to give part of their wealth to development activities. This form of philanthropy is carried out periodically and regularly on a daily, weekly and monthly basis, with the aim of making things easier in personal and social matters. Even several non-governmental organizations are also involved in jointly developing their villages.

In several discussions, philanthropic factors contribute to improving company image and economic performance (Yu, 2020). At the village level such as Gunung Sari, Kadugede and Kebonpedes Villages, philanthropy by residents based on religious values such as infaq and sadaqah also plays an important role in supporting village development and strengthening social cohesion (Sciortino, 2017). Studies show that philanthropic practices contribute and are an important mechanism in supporting sustainable development, influencing local policies, and improving the welfare of communities (Thomson, 2021).

*Sixth*, literacy factor. This factor is the main driving factor in which collective awareness grows among local residents, especially those initiated by traditional leaders, religious leaders and community leaders. They invite residents to preserve positive customs

and habits inherent in their culture and local wisdom. Community leaders provide an understanding that protecting the environment is very important in everyday life. For example, the construction of a public sphere and clean water toilets in Kadugede and Cibiru Wetan villages serves to maintain environmental cleanliness. There are also other examples of assistance from village youths (the local term is Karang Taruna) to help poor community groups as a form of community concern and efforts to avoid poverty in the village.

The existence of middle-class people generally has better access to education and information, allowing them to have broader knowledge about sustainable development issues and participate actively in relevant initiatives (Chun et al., 2016; Power et al., 2003). Higher education can help middle class groups acquire the skills needed to support development programs (Barrett DeWiele & Edgerton, 2016). For example, rapid economic growth in China has changed the social landscape with the emergence of a new middle-class group that uses education as a means of increasing social mobility and economic success (Lin, 2015). Education also plays a key role in encouraging the middle class to engage in their children's education proactively. In Kadugede and Gunungsari Villages, the role of the middle class with high educational literacy is important in supporting SDGs initiatives, both through deeper understanding of development issues in their environment and through real contributions in infrastructure development and social assistance in the surrounding environment.

Meanwhile, there are two factors inhibiting the implementation of SDGs in villages: *First*, the activity of residents to work in the city because of unequal employment opportunities, and *second*, caused by the impact of the emergence of social media or digital media. Third, the existence of opposition groups in rural areas due to losing in competition for power, especially for the position of village head.

*First*, some residents are busy working by going to the city or industrial area so they do not have time to participate, especially in activities to protect the surrounding environment and mutual cooperation activities in development. For example, referring to the confession of a resident of Gunungsari, Agus, 45 years old, and a resident of Kebonpedes Sukabumi, Asep, 35 years old. Both work in the city as private employees. Their busy lives mean they rarely participate in social activities in their village. They have difficulty dividing their time between work and being involved in social activities (Interview, 18 March 2024).

The issue of job migration is an obstacle to development in several countries. Research in China shows that restrictions on rural-to-urban migration can reduce participation in rural development activities (Au & Henderson, 2006). Bartik (2020) suggests that local economic development policies can shape and create jobs in residents' home areas, reduce the need to migrate to cities and increase participation in community activities. In this context, it is important to manage migration and develop policies that can support the strengthening and development of the local economy to increase social engagement in village development.

*Second*, Another inhibiting factor is the impact of digital which causes changes in modern lifestyles, especially among teenagers who tend to prioritize their lifestyle in aspects of entertainment and games.. These two things cause residents to lead more solitary lives and avoid social relationships and interactions, including participating in group activities in the village.

The presence of social media has always been a problem and a paradox. Apart from being useful for the smooth running of life, it also has extensive potential for damage. The use of social media by children and adolescents, as researched by Bozzola et al. (2022), have shown various risks such as social isolation and decreased participation in community activities, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic which has increased the use of platforms such as Instagram, TikTok and YouTube. Although social media has a way of maintaining online communication and learning, excessive use can have a negative impact on teenagers' mental health, reducing direct interactions and participation in mutual cooperation and Siskamling

activities in the village. Meanwhile, Roberts and Marchais (2018) highlighted that although social media provides access to important information such as violence, distortion and manipulation of information can reduce the representativeness of data and social engagement in collective activities. This shows the importance of managing the impact of social media on community participation at the village level, where reliance on digital technology (social media) can divert attention from more direct and real social engagement.

Therefore, the factors driving middle class participation in the village SDGs program in Kadugede, Gunungsari, Cibiru Wetan and Kebonpedes, West Java, must be managed effectively by all related parties. By identifying and utilizing factors such as persuasion from village officials and community leaders, effective social media, embedded social systems, the value of protection between fellow citizens, philanthropic practices based on religious values, and increasing educational literacy, we can help reduce barriers. -obstacles such as job migration and the negative impact of social media. Good management of these factors can optimize community social engagement in village development, as well as ensure the continuity of implementation of the SDGs program as a whole. Thus, stakeholder collaboration between local governments, communities and other stakeholders is crucial to achieving sustainable development goals at the local level.

#### **E. CONCLUSION**

This research found that people, especially the middle class, have varying levels of social engagement, with the majority taking an active role in infrastructure programs such as providing clean water and developing road infrastructure, through two case examples in the villages of Kadugede, Gunungsari, Cibiru Wetan and Kebonpedes, West Java. This social engagement is influenced by economic, social, political factors, and belief in the long-term benefits of these programs. Communities also make significant contributions in providing human resources and specific expertise that support the sustainability of these programs at the local level. The research results illustrate that social engagement in the Village SDGs program not only contributes to physical development, but also to increasing local capacity in managing and maintaining development results. With the active involvement of the community, especially the middle class, there is potential to increase the independence of local communities in overcoming the challenges of sustainable development.

This research is novel in its special focus on the role of middle-class communities in the context of Village SDGs programs, which has rarely been researched in depth before. This research provides in-depth insight into how middle-class communities can act as agents of change in strengthening the achievement of sustainable development goals at the local level, as well as the factors that influence their participation.

However, the research also has limitations, especially in its geographical coverage, which is limited to West Java, so the findings cannot be directly applied to all of Indonesia. Additionally, the use of qualitative methodology limits the broad generalizability of these findings. For future research, researchers suggest expanding the geographic scope and considering a combined qualitative and quantitative approach to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of social engagement among the middle class in sustainable development programs. However, this research makes a significant contribution in deepening understanding about strengthening social engagement from the community in supporting the sustainable development agenda at the village level, as well as providing a basis for further research in broader and more diverse contexts.

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