

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.38035/jlph.v4i5>

Received: 1 June 2024, Revised: 8 July 2024, Publish: 10 July 2024

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## Urgency of Policy Changes in Domestic Official Travel Costs in Order to Improve the Quality of Public Services in Mahakam Ulu Regency

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**Abstract:** The mechanism for financing official travel was changed to at cost for regional officials and a lump sum for regional legislative members through the issuance of Presidential Regulation No. 53 of 2023 as an amendment to Presidential Regulation No. 33 of 2020 concerning National Unit Price Standards. Pros and cons may arise with this policy. Putting that aside, the urgency of the issuance of Presidential Regulation No. 53 of 2023 for improving the quality of public services is an interesting thing to study as a form of sustainability of the bureaucratic reform agenda launched by the government. Moreover, this urgency becomes more interesting if contextualized with Mahakam Ulu Regency, which incidentally is a border area that is synonymous with the complexity of providing public services. This article aims to analyze the urgency of changing domestic official travel costs policies in order to improve the quality of public services in Mahakam Ulu Regency. A qualitative approach was applied by reviewing many relevant documents. The results of the analysis show that the quality of public services shows the urgency to be improved in Mahakam Ulu Regency due to the low HDI, high development inequality, and the implementation of bureaucratic reform which is still not optimal, thus affecting the quality of public services provided. In the new mechanism for official travel costs, the quality of public services in Mahakam Ulu Regency will be affected because it is related to the increased motivation of official travel agents to go directly into the community so that they know the real and comprehensive needs of the community, increased feedback (feed back) community towards the implementation of various Mahakam Ulu Regency Government programs thereby improving the quality of public services because of the precise improvements made, policy proposal initiatives originating from regional legislative members are much more oriented towards the interests of the community, minimizing corrupt practices, increasing budget efficiency in the delivery of public services, and increasing accountability and transparency in the implementation of public services.

**Keyword:** Public Policy, Bureaucratic Reform, Public Service, Financing Official Travel.

## INTRODUCTION

To realize superior governance, bureaucratic reform must start early. Bureaucratic reform must be seen as one of the expected reform goals. Bureaucratic reform is one of the reform agendas that must be implemented in order to create a government that upholds the principles of good governance (Motloung & Hofisi, 2023; Moonti, 2019). In Indonesia, the term "reformation" began to become a discourse and conversation in 1997. This was due to demands from various components in Indonesia to overthrow the incumbent when there was an economic crisis, even a multidimensional crisis which caused Indonesia to experience decline in all sectors of life, including politics, law, economic, social, cultural, as well as defense and security (Rustamana, Adillah, & Zatus, 2023; Diprose, McRae, & Hadiz, 2019; Chung, 2021).

Based on Presidential Regulation Number 81 of 2010 concerning Grand Design for Bureaucratic Reform 2010-2025, it is stated that in order to accelerate the achievement of good governance, it is necessary to carry out bureaucratic reform in all ministries, institutions and regional governments. This presidential regulation stipulates that every government agency is obliged to carry out bureaucratic reform. Bureaucratic reform is a significant change in bureaucratic elements, including institutions, apparatus mentality, statutory regulations, apparatus human resources, management or administration, apparatus accountability, supervision, and public services (Turner, Prasajo, & Sumarwono, 2022; Ramadhan et al., 2022). Of the 8 (eight) areas of change that are expected, changes to improve the quality of public services are the essence of reform as an automatic result of all elements of bureaucratic reform (Ishak, 2022; Simandjorang & Kurniawan, 2022).

In reality, public services from one region to another are not the same. With the regional autonomy system implemented in Indonesia, differences in the quantity and quality of services show differences between one region and another (Prabowo, 2019; Berenschot & Mulder, 2019). Among the influencing factors are the resources owned (Ostrom & Ostrom, 2019), the human resource capacity of the apparatus (Berman et al., 2021), and the level of innovation carried out by the relevant regions (Chen, Walker, & Sawhney, 2020).

However, with the adoption of regional autonomy, the goal expected by the central government is to bring public services closer to the community (Dick-Sageo, 2020). Moreover, Indonesia is known as a large region and geographically it has its own characteristics from one region to another. In this context, the role of providing public services cannot be solely assigned to the central government. The role of regional governments has certainly become very crucial with the implementation of the regional autonomy system in Indonesia.

With regional autonomy, regional governments have great authority to regulate and manage their regions (Dick-Sageo, 2020; Talitha, Firman, & Hudalah, 2020). In other words, regional governments have enormous and broad authority to provide services to the community in accordance with the desires and needs of the community. Therefore, one of the things that is important in referring to this view is that public services provided by regional governments should be in accordance with or be an embodiment of the demands of the community's needs.

The various aspirations of the community should be optimally absorbed by the regional government and then converted into forms of public services that are provided and accepted by the community. These various aspirations must of course be listened to directly by the local government from the community. In this way, local governments will know where the problems and actual needs of the community are.

Official trips undertaken by regional officials and regional legislative members are very important in that context. With official trips carried out by regional officials and regional legislative members, the public can convey their input directly to the government and later convert it into programs that become executive or legislative initiatives. The

importance of this lies in the number and quality of official travel undertaken by regional officials and regional legislative members.

Talking about official travel, we will also talk about the costs involved in carrying out the official trip. In other words, talking about the quantity and quality of official travel will depend on the specified official travel cost scheme. Even though the budget may be limited, when the official travel cost scheme is right, it will greatly determine the quantity and quality of official travel carried out by the local government.

The central government sees the context of official travel as a way to accommodate various community aspirations and improve the quality of public services in the regions. Therefore, the central government made adjustments regarding this matter by issuing Presidential Regulation no. 53 of 2023 as an amendment to Presidential Regulation no. 33 of 2020 concerning National Unit Price Standards. The most striking change is related to changes in the regulation of domestic official travel costs which were previously determined to be at cost for regional officials and a lump sum for regional legislative members.

This policy may have pros and cons. However, what is the urgency of the issuance of Presidential Regulation no. 53 of 2023 for improving the quality of public services is an interesting thing to study as a form of sustainability of the bureaucratic reform agenda launched by the government. The urgency of changing domestic official travel cost policies becomes more interesting if contextualized in one of the regions categorized as frontier, outermost, underdeveloped and border areas. This is because generally, public services provided in frontier, outermost, underdeveloped and border areas are not optimal. Various problems in the implementation of public services also appear to be more complex than in other regions. Moreover, usually the implementation of public services in frontier, outermost, underdeveloped and border areas is more top-down and often ignores the demands of the community's needs. The area studied in this article is Mahakam Ulu Regency as one of the border areas in Indonesia. Thus, this article aims to analyze the urgency of changing domestic official travel costs policies in order to improve the quality of public services in Mahakam Ulu Regency.

## **METHOD**

This article applies a qualitative approach as an approach in writing. The data collected comes from various secondary data such as books, journals, news and government documents. Review of the various data collected resulted in information that was analyzed and presented in the discussion in this article. In other words, qualitative data analysis techniques were used in writing this article.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **The Urgency of Improving the Quality of Public Services in Mahakam Ulu Regency**

Mahakam Ulu Regency is the youngest district in East Kalimantan Province because it is a new autonomous region resulting from the expansion of West Kutai Regency which was established through Law Number 2 of 2013 concerning the Establishment of Mahakam Ulu Regency in East Kalimantan Province. Therefore, in the nine years since it has been established as a district, the development of Mahakam Ulu needs to continue to be improved by optimizing all available resources so that they are of productive value, especially in providing public services so that it leads to improving the quality of life and welfare of the community.

Based on Law Number 2 of 2013, Mahakam Ulu Regency is divided into 5 (five) Districts and 50 Villages. The five sub-districts are Long Hubung District, Laham District, Long Bagun District, Long Pahangai District, and Long Apari District. The problem of poverty is an important one that must be overcome by providing quality public services. In 2018, the number of poor people in Mahakam Ulu Regency was 3,150 people (11.62%).

Unfortunately, this figure is relatively stagnant or in 2022 and 2023 with the number of poor people around 11.55% and 11.38%. The Covid-19 pandemic has also caused the potential for an increase in the poor population in Mahakam Ulu Regency.

The implementation of public services in Mahakam Ulu Regency will be closely related to the focus on social welfare of the community in the analysis of the development results of Mahakam Ulu Regency which can be seen from several aspects, including: population aspects, educational services, health services, employment, women's empowerment and child protection, to arts, culture and sports. However, from these aspects there is a main aspect as well as the ultimate impact in looking at the social welfare of society, namely through analysis of the achievement of the Human Development Index (HDI) from year to year.

By combining three basic components (health, education and economy), HDI is one of the reference indices for regional development for monitoring and evaluating regional government performance. Unfortunately, when compared with other districts/cities in East Kalimantan, Mahakam Ulu's HDI is quite far behind with only a score of 69.59 in 2023. Mahakam Ulu's HDI achievement is also still below the East Kalimantan Province's HDI.

Apart from the importance of the quality of public services in relation to HDI, the still high inequality of development in Mahakam Ulu is another aspect of its urgency. This is indicated by the high number of Regency Roads in a condition of disrepair and heavy damage (unstable soil conditions mean that the use value of road infrastructure is often below the expected target, the geographical condition of Mahakam Ulu Regency makes it difficult to clear land to open access to villages that are still isolated, lack of availability of tools to support the implementation of work and adequate quality and quantity of human resources to carry out work to accelerate road infrastructure improvements), inadequate supply of community electricity (distribution map of the population which is far from one another, so that providing electricity requires large costs, the lack of existing electricity generation capacity, and the high costs of using other alternative electricity sources), the unavailability of a clean water network to residents' homes (geographical factors cause delays in the creation of a clean water network, there is no regional water company/similar that can supply water clean throughout the Mahakam Ulu area, limited quantity and reliability of raw water sources, and people who are still accustomed to water from the Mahakam River for bathing, washing and toilet activities), and telecommunications and internet accessibility is still uneven (the geographical conditions of Mahakam Ulu Regency cause unequal accessibility of villages to access the internet).

Within the Mahakam Ulu Regency Government, it also shows that the implementation of bureaucratic reform is still not optimal, thus affecting the quality of public services provided. This is indicated by the level of quality of public services that has not met public expectations. The signs are that there are still public services that are less responsive, less informative, less accessible, less coordinated, bureaucratic, less willing to listen to complaints/suggestions/aspirations from the public, and inefficiencies in the delivery of public services, and there is no measuring tool for public satisfaction with public services. Apart from that, the implementation of bureaucratic reform which is still not optimal is also indicated by the not yet optimal performance of government administration which is indicated by the lack of synchronization between documents, including planning, budgeting and evaluation documents, human resources which are still limited both in quantity and quality, minimal availability and publication. sectoral data that can be used for planning, monitoring and evaluation, and the lack of optimal facilities and infrastructure supporting government administration.

As a result, the explanations above show the urgency of improving the quality of public services in Mahakam Ulu Regency.



## **The Urgency of Changing the Policy on Domestic Official Travel Costs to Improve the Quality of Public Services in Mahakam Ulu Regency**

One way to improve the quality of public services can be done by making changes to local government expenditure mechanisms. One of them is related to official travel costs. Previously, in Presidential Regulation no. 33 of 2020 concerning National Unit Price Standards, official travel costs are regulated by the central government and apply to regional governments, including the Mahakam Ulu Regency Government. The central government through the Ministry of Finance then reviews the effectiveness and efficiency of the policy. Taking into account the differences that occur between regions, the mechanism for official travel costs was then changed to at cost for regional officials and a lump sum for DPRD members through the issuance of Presidential Regulation No. 53 of 2023 as an amendment to Presidential Regulation no. 33 of 2020 concerning National Unit Price Standards.

For Mahakam Ulu Regency itself, travelers traveling on business within the city require the consumption costs required in one day to travel on business within the region to be IDR. 195,000,- per person traveling on business. This fee includes the cost of eating and drinking three times a day and additional money. Apart from that, for transportation, the cost of transportation using a motorbike taxi in one area such as in Long Hubung, Laham and Long Bagun sub-districts costs IDR. 40,000,-, this cost includes round trip costs from one area within the region, while in two other sub-districts, namely Long Pahangai and Long Apari, it costs Rp. 60,000 for round trip transportation costs within one region within the region. The need for consumption costs and transportation costs is considered quite high considering the distance and geographic location of a sub-district which gives rise to increased consumption costs and so on. In addition, accommodation costs are calculated at cost. For the record, the figure for official travel costs within the city stated in Presidential Regulation Number 33 of 2020 for Mahakam Ulu Regency is IDR 170,000,- which is of course not relevant to the actual conditions.

This change in domestic official travel costs policy will certainly have a significant influence on local governments in their efforts to improve the quality of public services. With the new official travel costs policy, at least it provides its own meaning in efforts to improve the quality of public services in Mahakam Ulu Regency, which include the following:

1. Increased motivation for business travelers to go directly into the community so they know the real and comprehensive needs of the community. This is mainly related to planning public service programs or regional development. Good and quality planning is planning that is able to accommodate various community interests and needs. With high motivation from government officials in carrying out official trips with the aim of accommodating the aspirations of the community, at least the quality of the planning of various Mahakam Ulu Regency Government programs can improve.
2. Increased community feedback regarding various implementation of Mahakam Ulu Regency Government programs thereby improving the quality of public services due to the precise improvements made. The new domestic official travel cost mechanism allows business travelers to work more optimally so that they are able to more optimally accommodate various feedback on the various programs implemented. This is very important for the sustainability of the program and improvement of various things if problems and obstacles are encountered in implementing the program.
3. Policy proposal initiatives originating from regional legislative members are much more oriented towards the interests of the community. With the new official travel expense mechanism, regional legislative members can freely meet with the public to hear various community aspirations. In this way, policy proposals originating from regional legislative members truly demonstrate policies that are oriented towards the interests of society.
4. Minimize corrupt practices within the Mahakam Ulu Regency Government. With the new official travel expense mechanism, business travelers can stay calm and focus on their

- work when traveling on business. This means that there are no opportunities for corruption by looking for financing loopholes, because with the at cost mechanism at least the financing of business travelers is more guaranteed.
5. Increase budget efficiency in providing public services in Mahakam Ulu Regency. With the at cost mechanism, the budget that comes out can be ensured in accordance with needs. In this way, regional expenditure will become much more efficient than before.
  6. Increased accountability and transparency in the implementation of public services. The quality of public service delivery will show greater accountability and transparency with the new official travel costs mechanism. Business travelers will be responsible for all their expenses in accordance with the work duties they carry out. Apart from that, local governments will be more transparent with this new official travel costs mechanism.

## CONCLUSION

The quality of public services shows the urgency to be improved in Mahakam Ulu Regency due to the low HDI of Mahakam Ulu Regency. Apart from the importance of the quality of public services in relation to HDI, the still high inequality of development in Mahakam Ulu is another aspect of its urgency. Apart from that, the Mahakam Ulu Regency Government also shows that the implementation of bureaucratic reform is still not optimal, thus affecting the quality of public services provided.

One way to improve the quality of public services can be done by making changes to local government expenditure mechanisms. One of them is related to official travel costs. In the new mechanism, official travel costs include an at cost mechanism for regional officials and a lump sum for regional legislative members through the issuance of Presidential Regulation No. 53 of 2023 as an amendment to Presidential Regulation no. 33 of 2020 concerning National Unit Price Standards. The quality of public services in Mahakam Ulu Regency will be affected by the existence of this new mechanism in several ways, such as increasing the motivation of business travelers to go directly into the community so that they know the real and comprehensive needs of the community, increasing community feedback. towards the implementation of various Mahakam Ulu Regency Government programs so as to improve the quality of public services due to the precise improvements made, policy proposal initiatives originating from regional legislative members are much more oriented towards the interests of the community, minimizing corrupt practices within the Mahakam Ulu Regency Government, increasing budget efficiency in administration public services in Mahakam Ulu Regency, and increasing accountability and transparency in the implementation of public services.

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