

# The Role Of The Camat In The Era Of Regional Autonomy

Muhammad Suhardi

[muhammad@ipdn.ac.id](mailto:muhammad@ipdn.ac.id)

Institute of Home Affairs Governance, Indonesia

## Abstract:

This paper aims to examine and analyze the role of the Camat (Sub-district Head) in the era of Regional Autonomy, focusing on their position as the spearhead of governance at the sub-district level. This study adopts a normative-prescriptive approach, seeking arguments from research findings to assess what is right or wrong and to formulate what should be according to the law. In analyzing the Camat's role, Soekanto's concept of Role is employed, which highlights the Camat's position in carrying out their rights and obligations, including the authority vested in them. Based on this analysis, it is found that the Camat holds a highly strategic position within the regional government structure, acting as a direct liaison between the district/city government and the community at the sub-district level. However, this strategic position also brings dilemmas. On one hand, the Camat is expected to perform coordination, supervision, and guidance functions for village/urban village apparatus while implementing policies set by the regional government. On the other hand, the Camat often faces limitations in resources, whether in terms of budget, authority, or administrative support, which can affect the optimization of their role. Thus, the Camat's role in the era of Regional Autonomy is crucial yet challenging. Strengthening capacity and clarifying regulations are necessary to support the Camat in carrying out their duties and functions effectively and efficiently.

**Keywords:** The Role of the Camat; Regional Autonomy; Government Regulation

## 1. Introduction

The sub-district (kecamatan) is a regional apparatus of the regency/municipality that functions as a territorial technical implementer with a specific working area, led by a Camat (Sub-district Head). As part of the regional government structure, the Camat holds a strategic position in coordinating various government programs and public services at the sub-district level. According to Article 4 paragraphs (1) and (2) of Government Regulation Number 19 of 2008 concerning Sub-districts, the Camat is positioned and accountable to the Mayor or Regent through the Regional Secretary. This provision affirms that the Camat carries out technical territorial duties within their respective areas while remaining under the direction and supervision of the regency/municipal government.

The sub-district government, as a regional apparatus, is established through a Regional Regulation (Perda), which regulates the position, organizational structure, duties, functions, and work procedures of the sub-district. In its implementation, sub-districts are classified into two types: Type A and Type B. The classification is determined by several indicators, such as area size, population, and the number of villages or urban villages within the sub-district's working area. This division aims to accommodate the varying workloads faced by each sub-district. Type A sub-districts are established with a heavier workload compared to Type B, as regulated in Article 223 of Law Number 23 of 2014 concerning Regional Government. With this classification, the implementation of government functions at the sub-district level is expected to run more effectively and efficiently, tailored to the conditions and needs of each region.

Furthermore, the existence of sub-districts plays a crucial role in supporting the implementation of regional autonomy. As a regional apparatus, the sub-district is tasked with carrying out part of the authority delegated by the Regent or Mayor, including public service and regional development. The Camat, as the head of the

sub-district, is responsible for ensuring that services to the community run optimally and for coordinating the implementation of various development programs designed by the regional government.

Through clear regulations regarding the Camat's position and duties, it is hoped that the sub-district will become the frontline in realizing a government that is closer to the people, responsive to local needs, and capable of supporting the achievement of equitable and sustainable regional development goals.

Based on Government Regulation Number 17 of 2018 concerning Sub-districts, it is stated that a sub-district (kecamatan) is a regional apparatus of a regency/municipality that also functions as the organizer of general governance at the sub-district level. In this regulation, urban villages (kelurahan) are referred to as sub-district apparatus, meaning that urban villages are no longer considered regional apparatus. This status change is a mandate from Law Number 23 of 2014 concerning Regional Government, which positions sub-districts as work units with greater authority in administering governance in their respective areas. Thus, the Sub-district Head (Camat) holds an important responsibility in carrying out part of the authority delegated by the Regent or Mayor to enhance the effectiveness of regional governance at the sub-district level and to optimize public services, considering that the sub-district is a regional apparatus that directly interacts with the community.

From a historical perspective, the role of the Camat has undergone significant changes since the New Order era. At that time, based on Law Number 5 of 1974 concerning the Principles of Regional Government, the Camat not only acted as the head of the sub-district but also functioned as the head of the territory, executing tasks delegated by the Regent or Mayor. As the territorial head, the Camat acted as the central government's representative at the sub-district level, serving as an extension of the central government. This role demonstrated the strategic position of the Camat in coordinating and controlling the administration of governance at the sub-district level while ensuring that policies from both the central and regional governments were properly implemented.

As the coordinator of governance implementation within their working area, the Camat is responsible for coordinating all activities carried out within the sub-district by various agencies operating in the region. This role is outlined in Article 15 of Government Regulation Number 19 of 2008 concerning Sub-districts, which positions the Camat as the party tasked with ensuring synergy between agencies in implementing government programs and delivering services to the public. In the context of decentralization, the sub-district functions as an administrative governance area that carries out general governance duties in the region as part of deconcentration, as stated by Sadu Wasistono (2003:93). This means that the sub-district plays a crucial role as an extension of the regional government in implementing governmental functions closer to the community.

The regulatory changes over time have required the Camat to continuously adapt to the evolving concept of regional autonomy. Currently, the Camat no longer serves as the sole authority in the sub-district but rather as a leader who coordinates various programs and policies that directly affect the community. The delegation of part of the authority from the Regent or Mayor to the Camat in the era of regional autonomy aims to bring public services closer to the people and increase the effectiveness and efficiency of regional governance implementation. However, in fulfilling this role, the Camat also faces various challenges, such as limited resources, cross-sector coordination, and demands for transparency and accountability in governance implementation.

Based on the description above, the author aims to study and analyze in-depth how the role of the Camat has evolved in the current era of regional autonomy. This research is expected to provide a clearer picture of the Camat's position, duties, and challenges, as well as formulate efforts to strengthen the Camat's role in supporting the implementation of regional governance that is more effective, efficient, and responsive to the needs of the community.

## 2. Literature Review

According to Soekanto (2019:210), role is the dynamic aspect of a person's position (status) in social life. When someone exercises their rights and fulfills their obligations in accordance with the position they hold, they are essentially performing a role inherent to that status. In other words, a role reflects how an individual carries out their social function in various situations that demand certain responsibilities aligned with the position they occupy. Status itself is defined as a set of rights and obligations possessed by an individual within the social structure. When a person consciously and responsibly exercises their rights and fulfills their obligations in accordance with their status, they are performing a social function that contributes to the continuity of the existing social order.

Levinson, as cited in Soekanto (2019:211), proposed that there are three important conditions that must be met in understanding the concept of role. First, a role encompasses the norms associated with a person's position or place in society. In this context, the role serves as a set of guidelines that direct individuals in living within a society, providing instructions on what is expected of someone occupying a particular position in the social structure.

Second, a role is a concept that illustrates the behavior expected to be carried out by individuals within society as a social organization. Every individual occupying a certain position has behavioral expectations that must be manifested in their social interactions. This signifies that a role is not merely an attached status but also a behavioral demand aligned with the collective expectations of the social environment.

Third, a role can also be viewed as an individual's behavior that holds significant meaning in maintaining the social structure of society. In this regard, the role becomes an integral part of the patterns of social relationships that shape and preserve order in communal life. Through the proper execution of roles aligned with social norms and expectations, individuals contribute to maintaining harmony and social stability in their surroundings.

According to Faozan (2013:10), a role is a structured attitude aligned with the position held by an individual, where this role is expected to provide reciprocal benefits to society. This position serves as a medium for individuals to demonstrate self-actualization in the social environment, relating to their rights and obligations. Meanwhile, Arthur and Emily (in Faozan, 2013:11) explain that a role, in general, is the behavior required to realize the rights and obligations expected by society, as well as to bring about changes influenced by social conditions, whether internal or external.

The term "role" is defined as something played or performed (Ministry of National Education, 2014). A role is described as an activity undertaken by someone according to their position or social status in an organization. Terminologically, a role is a set of behaviors expected from an individual occupying a certain position in society. In English, the term "role" is defined as "a person's task or duty in undertaking," meaning "a person's responsibility or obligation in an endeavor or job." A role can be interpreted as a collection of behaviors expected from an individual based on their societal position, while "role performance" refers to the concrete actions taken by someone in a particular event (Torang, 2014).

From the perspectives of several experts, it can be concluded that a role is an activity involving an individual or group of people in exercising their rights and fulfilling their obligations according to their position (status) within an organization. When an individual or group performs both rights and obligations in accordance with their status, they are effectively carrying out a function. From an institutional aspect, a role can be interpreted as an activity carried out by a group of people who hold specific positions, with corresponding rights and responsibilities, within an institution.

### 3. Methodology

This research is normative legal research that aims to study and analyze various legal aspects related to the issues being examined. The approaches used in this research include several complementary methods, namely the statute approach, the conceptual approach, and the historical approach.

The statute approach is employed to examine the laws and regulations relevant to the subject matter under study. Through this approach, the researcher identifies, studies, and analyzes applicable legal provisions to find the legal foundation that serves as the basis for the research.

Furthermore, the conceptual approach is utilized to explore and understand legal concepts related to the research topic. This approach is crucial in formulating the theoretical understanding underlying the legal issues discussed, ensuring that the analysis conducted is grounded in a strong conceptual framework.

The historical approach is used to trace the development of legal rules over time, providing insights into the background and historical reasons behind the emergence of certain legal provisions. By understanding the historical aspect, the researcher can gain a more comprehensive perspective on the issues being analyzed.

The legal materials used in this research consist of primary, secondary, and tertiary legal sources. Primary legal materials include legislation, court decisions, and other official documents with binding legal force. Secondary legal materials encompass various legal literatures, scientific journals, previous research findings, and expert opinions that support the legal analysis and interpretation conducted. Meanwhile, tertiary legal materials are used to provide additional understanding through legal dictionaries, encyclopedias, and various other supporting reference sources.

Once these legal materials are gathered, the next step is to process and analyze them using a normative-prescriptive method. This analytical method aims to construct strong arguments based on the research findings to assess the correctness or incorrectness of certain actions or provisions from the perspective of applicable law. In other words, normative-prescriptive analysis focuses on the logical and systematic formulation of arguments to draw conclusions and provide recommendations in accordance with legal principles.

As explained by Mukti Fajar (2010:184), normative research with this method allows the researcher to conduct an in-depth study of prevailing legal norms and offer prescriptive solutions or advice regarding the legal issues at hand. Through this comprehensive approach, the research results are expected to contribute meaningfully to the development of legal science as well as legal practice in the field.

### 4. Results and Discussions

This study delves into the multifaceted roles of the subdistrict head (Camat) in Indonesia, as outlined by various legal frameworks and scholarly perspectives. Article 221 of Law Number 23 of 2014 explicitly states that "Regency/City regions form subdistricts to enhance coordination in governance, public services, and community empowerment." Furthermore, Article 224, Paragraph 1 asserts that "The subdistrict is led by a subdistrict head who is under and accountable to the regent/mayor through the regional secretary." The authority delegated to the subdistrict head by regional governments is managerial, not operational, as operational tasks are already assigned to specific agencies, bodies, and operational units (Ndraha, 2010:168). This legislative context underscores the subdistrict head's primary purpose: strengthening coordination at the subdistrict level in relation to governmental functions encompassing governance, public service, and community empowerment.

**1. The Subdistrict Head as a Government Leader** As the leader of governance at the subdistrict level, the subdistrict head holds a crucial role in coordinating all work units within their jurisdiction. This coordination ensures that government programs and activities from vertical agencies and provincial governments align with those of the regency/city government.

Government Regulation Number 19 of 2008 on Subdistricts emphasizes this leadership role, stating, "The subdistrict head, or other designations, is the leader and coordinator of governance implementation in the subdistrict's working area, receiving delegation of governmental authority from the regent/mayor to handle certain regional autonomy matters and perform general governmental duties." This provision highlights that, beyond being a formal organizational leader, the subdistrict head also serves as a community leader, whose actions and integrity are constantly scrutinized by the public.

Although the subdistrict head is appointed through a Regent/Mayor Decree rather than elected directly by the people, their capacity and integrity must match those of the regent/mayor due to their frontline position in executing governmental functions. The subdistrict head's contribution to shaping a positive government image is significant, as they directly engage with the public's needs and interests. The role demands swift and precise responses to sudden and diverse tasks, coupled with prompt adherence to superior orders.

However, as the frontline government apparatus, subdistrict heads often encounter limitations in providing certain services. For instance, when citizens seek official documents related to business legitimacy, subdistrict heads cannot issue them due to jurisdictional restrictions. In vast regions with challenging transportation and low community education levels, this constraint places a heavy burden on citizens, who must travel to the regency/city offices to complete their administrative affairs, most of which relate to Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs).

**2. The Subdistrict Head in Public Service Delivery** Law Number 25 of 2009 on Public Services underscores the state's obligation to serve every citizen and resident, fulfilling their fundamental rights and needs. As a state representative in their working area, the subdistrict head plays a vital role in providing public services. Given the complex public service demands, they must often be available around the clock to ensure continuous service delivery.

Wirman Syafri (2016:361) argues that one of the government's primary duties is providing services as a manifestation of public policy, distinguishable between civil services, which are exclusively provided by the government, and public services, which can be provided by both government and private entities.

Following the 1998 Reform Era, there was a profound shift in the relationship between the government and its citizens, including in public service delivery. Previously criticized for being convoluted, slow, expensive, and challenging, government services underwent a transformation toward simplicity, affordability, speed, accuracy, and accessibility — now known as "excellent service."

Article 8, Paragraph 2 of Law Number 25 of 2009 specifies that public service delivery must encompass, at a minimum: service implementation, complaint management, information management, internal supervision, public education, and consultation services. Considering the diversity and complexity of these services, subdistrict heads, as frontline managers and leaders, must inspire their subordinates to deliver the best public services under the principles of simplicity, participation, accountability, sustainability, transparency, and fairness.

**3. The Subdistrict Head in Community Empowerment** Government Regulation Number 19 of 2008 on Subdistricts assigns subdistrict heads the duty of community empowerment, recognizing its critical role in enhancing community participation in development. Without public participation, even the most robust government initiatives are unlikely to succeed.

Community participation and empowerment are interconnected concepts that cannot be separated. Empowerment fosters participation, while participation reinforces empowerment. Through community empowerment, the subdistrict head plays a dynamic and facilitative role, coordinating with the regency/city government to implement various programs, such as:

- Providing social assistance to the community.
- Facilitating development projects with community involvement.
- Strengthening community institutions by enhancing resources, opportunities, and knowledge.
- Accelerating rural development through small industries, traditional crafts, and agribusiness development.
- Supporting economically disadvantaged groups by providing social security in health and employment.
- Developing infrastructure that boosts community welfare.

- Offering training programs to enhance community skills and capacities.

Ndraha, as cited in Walmaliki (1999), emphasizes that community participation can occur through "contact change," where interaction with external parties sparks social change. Participation also entails observing, absorbing, and responding to information — whether by accepting, complying, executing, agreeing conditionally, or rejecting it.

Community involvement in development projects instills a sense of ownership and responsibility toward government programs. Strategic subdistrict programs requiring public participation include education, healthcare, rural development, and flagship initiatives in agriculture, tourism, informal sectors, and beyond. In conclusion, the subdistrict head's role is indispensable in coordinating governance, delivering public services, and empowering communities. These interconnected functions aim to foster harmonious relations between the government and citizens, ensuring efficient service delivery and sustainable community development. Through these roles, subdistrict heads not only implement regional autonomy but also become the linchpins of governmental success at the grassroots level.

## 5. Conclusion

Camat, as the front line in the administration of government in Indonesia, holds a position that is both strategic and dilemmatic. The strategic aspect lies in the dual role played by the Camat: not only as a formal leader of a governmental organization, tasked with ensuring the delivery of the best possible public services, but also as a social leader with territorial responsibility over their jurisdiction. This duality demands that the Camat possesses strong leadership qualities, the ability to coordinate various government programs, and the capacity to build harmonious relationships with the community.

On the other hand, the dilemmas faced by the Camat stem from the high expectations and heavy reliance placed upon them by the community, which are not always matched by the authority they hold. The authority delegated from the regional government to the Camat is primarily managerial rather than operational in nature. As a result, the Camat is often limited to overseeing and coordinating activities rather than directly implementing them. This can create challenges in fulfilling the community's needs and expectations, especially in urgent situations that require immediate action.

Moreover, the Camat's strategic role necessitates the ability to bridge communication between higher levels of government and local communities. They must ensure that policies set by regents or mayors align with the actual conditions and aspirations at the grassroots level. However, the lack of operational authority can sometimes hinder the Camat's effectiveness in addressing community issues swiftly, as decisions and actions often require further approval from higher authorities.

In essence, while the Camat is positioned as a key figure in local governance and community engagement, the imbalance between their responsibilities and their formal powers highlights the need for a more comprehensive delegation of authority. Empowering the Camat with greater operational autonomy could enhance their capacity to deliver public services more efficiently and respond to community needs more promptly. This would not only strengthen local governance but also foster greater trust and satisfaction among the community towards their local government.

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