

The Village Head's Leadership Style and Its Impact on the Effectiveness of Community Empowerment Programs through Community Participation

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study aims to examine the effect of the village head's leadership style on the effectiveness of community empowerment programs, including the mediating role of community participation.

Research Method: Using a quantitative correlational design, data were collected via Likert-scale questionnaires from 91 purposively sampled respondents from a population of 1,063 in Rababaka Village. The data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) in SmartPLS 3.0.

Results and Discussion: The findings reveal that leadership style has a positive and significant effect on both program effectiveness and community participation. Moreover, community participation significantly influences program effectiveness and effectively mediates the relationship between leadership style and program effectiveness.

Implications: These findings suggest that village governments should abandon top-down approaches in favor of empathetic and inclusive leadership to foster active citizen involvement. Future research should expand the geographical scope and employ mixed-methods approaches.

Originality: This study uniquely identifies community participation not merely as an administrative requirement but as a crucial mediating mechanism that bridges leadership vision and program success within the specific socio-cultural dynamics of Rababaka Village.

Keywords: leadership style; program effectiveness; community empowerment; community participation.

1. Introduction

National development is fundamentally aimed at achieving equitable and just welfare for the people. In the Indonesian context, villages hold a strategic position as the spearhead of development, since the majority of the population lives and carries out their daily activities in rural areas. Law No. 6 of 2014 on Villages affirms that villages have the authority to regulate and manage the interests of their communities, including in the implementation of development and community empowerment. The empowerment of village communities is a crucial means of enhancing residents' capacity, self-reliance, and participation in the development process. The effectiveness of community empowerment programs is a key indicator in assessing the success of village development. According to Budiani (2007), program effectiveness refers to the degree to which the objectives of an activity are achieved, which can be



operationally measured through four main dimensions: the accuracy of program targeting, the success of outreach efforts, the degree to which program objectives are achieved, and the effectiveness of oversight or monitoring conducted by the implementing agency.

The leadership style of the village head is closely linked to the goals the village government aims to achieve. Therefore, the leadership behavior of the village head is always associated with their ability to direct, motivate, and mobilize their team members to realize effective village governance (Agung *et al.*, 2024; Mahmud, 2024). Leadership is an individual's ability to influence others to act in accordance with expected goals. According to Hart *et al.*, (2008) and Mahmud (2020), leadership is a crucial force behind an organization's success in setting direction and mobilizing resources toward a defined vision. Thus, an organization's success is largely determined by the quality of its leadership. According to Ansori *et al.*, (2025), leadership style refers to the approach a leader uses to guide their team, whether by emphasizing the achievement of targets or the harmony of relationships among members. In line with this, Zulfik *et al.*, (2025) note that this concept also reflects a leader's behavior in motivating and guiding subordinates to achieve work efficiency. Furthermore, Hayat & Ariska (2026) state that leadership style refers to consistent patterns of behavior that influence individuals' actions within an organization. According to Sunardi & Munfarijah (2023), Hayat *et al.*, (2023), Shoalihin *et al.*, (2025), and Mahmud & Sopiah (2022), an appropriate leadership style can boost work morale and lead to optimal performance. In contrast, an inappropriate style can actually reduce employee motivation and performance. According to Hidayah *et al.*, (2025), leadership style can be viewed as a pattern of interaction or a method used by leaders to encourage others to achieve predetermined goals. In this study, five leadership indicators were used, encompassing the competencies outlined by {Formatting Citation}, which consist of: (1) decision-making, (2) motivation, (3) communication, (4) managing subordinates, and (5) accountability.

In practice, a leader cannot work alone but requires support from subordinates or followers. These subordinates are guided so that they can make optimal contributions to the organization, whether in the form of effective, efficient, economical, or productive performance. Based on the findings of Nasir's (2025) study, village heads' leadership in community empowerment plays a role in several key aspects: program planning, community engagement, activity implementation, and evaluation and follow-up. Furthermore, research by Shoalihin *et al.*, (2025) indicates that the role of village heads in implementing village development is regulated by Law No. 6 of 2014. However, these studies have not thoroughly examined the relationship between leadership style and community participation in shaping program effectiveness, nor has any research been conducted specifically in Rababaka Village. Therefore, this study is important for filling this research gap and providing a more contextual understanding of the influence of the village head's leadership style on the effectiveness of community empowerment programs through community participation in Rababaka Village.

Rababaka Village, as one of the villages implementing various community empowerment programs, still faces challenges in optimizing resident participation and ensuring the effectiveness of these programs. Social dynamics, community awareness, and the nature of the relationship between the village government and the community are factors influencing the success of these programs. The problem addressed in this study is the suboptimal effectiveness of community empowerment programs at the village level, often due to low community participation and the village head's failure to fully leverage their leadership role in mobilizing and actively engaging residents. In fact, the success of empowerment programs heavily depends on the synergy between effective leadership and community

involvement. A village head's leadership style that is neither participatory nor adaptive can erode public trust, leading to low levels of engagement in program implementation.

Based on the gap analysis described above, the main research questions in this study concern the extent to which the village head's leadership style influences the effectiveness of empowerment programs and community participation, and whether community participation mediates the influence of leadership style on the effectiveness of these programs. In line with these questions, this study aims to empirically test and analyze both direct and indirect relationships among the relevant variables. The novelty of this study lies in the inclusion of community participation as a mediating variable, as well as in the research setting in Rababaka Village, which possesses unique social dynamics and village governance characteristics that have not been explored in previous studies.

Before moving on to the next section, this research article is organized into several main sections to provide a systematic flow of discussion. The first section is the Introduction, which outlines the problem context, objectives, and the study's urgency. The second section presents the Literature Review, which discusses the theoretical foundations of the research variables. The third section is the Research Methodology, which explains the approach, data collection techniques, and analytical tools used. The fourth section presents the Results and Discussion, which details the statistical findings and their implications. This article concludes with a section summarizing the findings and offering managerial and academic recommendations.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1 Literature Review

2.1.1 Leadership Styles

Leadership styles are the methods a leader uses to influence their team members, whether through an approach that prioritizes task completion or one that emphasizes harmonious relationships (Hidayah *et al.*, 2025). One relevant approach is servant leadership, which is a commitment to a role driven by a spirit of care and sincerity in service. According to Mustafa *et al.*, (2023), this leadership style aims to ensure that everyone's rights and obligations are fulfilled, thereby ultimately fostering the emergence of a new generation of service-oriented leaders. To achieve an effective leadership style, several aspects can serve as benchmarks. According to Robbins & Judge (2022), leadership indicators encompass four main elements: first, empowerment, in which a leader must be able to delegate tasks or collaborate while simultaneously serving as a motivator and initiator for subordinates through setting a good example; second, visionary leadership—a leader's ability to develop and translate a vision into reality. Third, humility, demonstrated by a leader through respect for employees and a refusal to monopolize recognition, instead prioritizing a sense of community. Fourth, trust—that is, placing full trust in employees to carry out their duties and responsibilities without excessive interference from the leader, unless specifically requested.

2.1.2 Community Empowerment

Community empowerment is a process aimed at strengthening communities so they can improve their living conditions. According to Alim *et al.*, (2022), community empowerment is an effort to prepare communities in line with measures to strengthen social institutions. This aims to ensure that

communities possess sufficient capacity to achieve progress, self-reliance, and well-being within a context of sustainable social justice. To measure the success of empowerment efforts, the approach proposed by Mardikanto and Soebiato (2017) highlights four key indicators. First is human development, which focuses on building the capacity of individuals and groups, including enhancing their knowledge, skills, and awareness of their potential and rights. Second is business development, which involves efforts to improve the community's economic well-being through the establishment of productive enterprises, entrepreneurship training, and the development of a sustainable local economy. Third is environmental development, which emphasizes preserving both the physical and social environments to improve infrastructure and strengthen cooperation among residents. Fourth is institutional development, namely the formation and strengthening of community social institutions. These institutions serve as a driving force and an absolute prerequisite for the three preceding elements—people, business, and the environment—to be achieved effectively and sustainably.

2.1.3 Community Participation

Community participation essentially serves as a check on government policy, whereby the community helps monitor and takes an active interest in adopted policies—such as land-use planning, infrastructure development, and the provision of public facilities (Azkia *et al.*, 2026). More broadly, this involvement encompasses various aspects, ranging from providing accurate local information to participating in socio-cultural activities and promoting through social media. Such involvement can take the form of contributions of ideas or labor. There are varying levels of willingness among community members to participate; participation tends to be lower when it arises from their own initiative (unprompted) compared to when they are directly asked to get involved. Participation in the form of labor, meanwhile, constitutes a crucial physical contribution to the success of various development programs at the village level. To measure the extent of community involvement in a program, Cohen and Uphoff's approach, as cited in Huraerah (2022), identifies three key indicators of community participation. First, participation in decision-making, where the community is actively involved in the processes of discussion, planning, and determining policy direction. Second, participation in implementation, which refers to residents' tangible involvement—whether in the form of labor, time, or material resources—in carrying out the planned program. Third, participation in utilization (benefits), namely the community's involvement in receiving, managing, and enjoying the results or positive impacts of the development that has been carried out, which in turn will foster a sense of belonging among residents regarding the program's sustainability.

2.2 Hypothesis Development

H1: *Leadership style has a positive and significant effect on the effectiveness of community empowerment programs.*

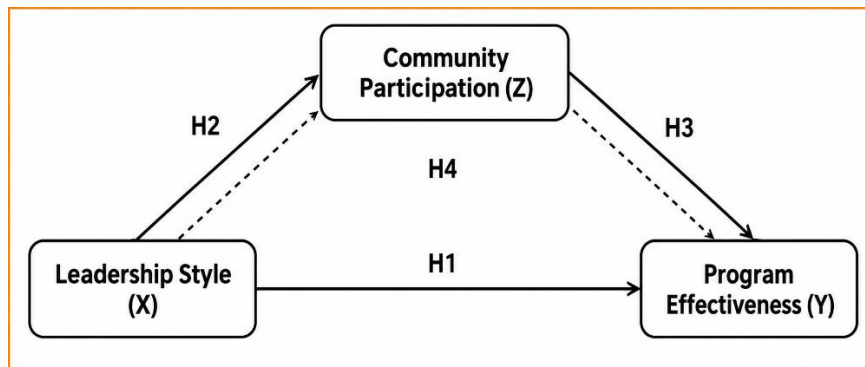
H2: *Leadership style has a positive and significant effect on community participation.*

H3: *Community participation has a positive and significant effect on the effectiveness of community empowerment programs.*

H4: *Community participation mediates the relationship between leadership style and the effectiveness of community empowerment programs.*



Figure 1. Conceptual Framework



3. Research Method

This study employs a quantitative approach with a correlational survey design to test the cause-and-effect relationship between variables. This design was chosen because it was deemed most appropriate for addressing the research question objectively, measurably, rationally, and systematically (Sugiyono, 2019) regarding the influence of leadership styles on the effectiveness of community empowerment programs, both directly and through the mediation of community participation in Rababaka Village. The population in this study comprised the entire community of Rababaka Village, totaling 1,063 people. Given the large population size, the sample was drawn using the Slovin method with a 10% margin of error, yielding a sample of 91 respondents. The sampling technique employed was purposive sampling, in which subjects are selected based on specific criteria or considerations established by the researcher to ensure the data collected is relevant to the study's objectives. The operationalization of variables and measurement indicators in this study is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Variables and Measurement

Variables	Indicators	References
Leadership Style (X)	Empowerment Visionary Humility Trust	Robbins & Judge (2022)
Community Participation (Z)	Participation in decision-making Participation in implementation Participation in utilization (benefits)	Cohen & Uphoff as cited in Huraerah (2022)
Program Effectiveness (Y)	Human development Business development Environmental development Institutional development	Mardikanto & Soebiato (2017)

Source: Previous Research, 2026

The data sources used included primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected directly from respondents via questionnaires administered on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Agree (5) Strongly. Secondary data served as a supplement, obtained from

relevant documents, and were supplemented by systematic direct field observations and oral interviews to gain deeper insights from informants.

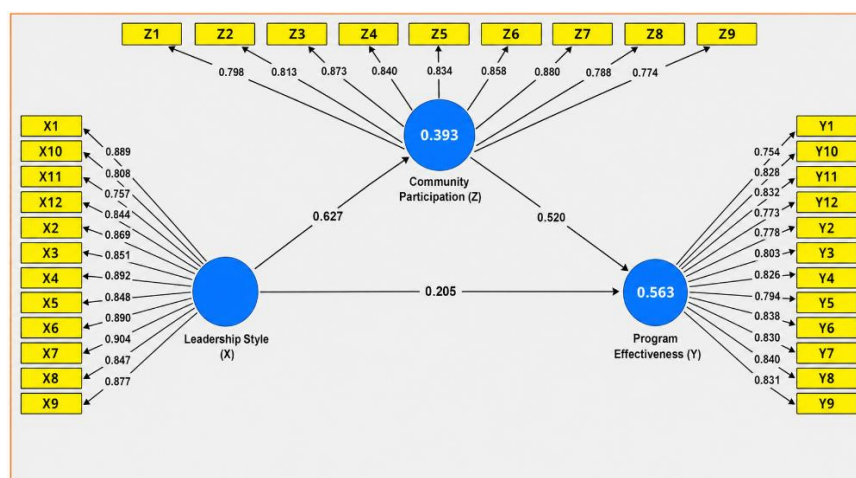
The data analysis technique used in this study was Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS 3.0 to test the direct and indirect relationships among latent variables simultaneously through two main stages: evaluation of the Outer Model and the Inner Model. The Outer Model evaluation was conducted to assess the measurement feasibility of the instruments through a convergent validity test, in which the outer loading values must be > 0.70 and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) must be > 0.50 (Hair *et al.*, 2014). For discriminant validity, the evaluation uses the Fornell-Larcker criteria (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), cross-loadings, and the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio < 0.90 (Henseler & Sarstedt, 2013). Furthermore, construct reliability was assessed based on acceptable thresholds for Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability, namely > 0.70 (Hair *et al.*, 2014). After the measurement model was confirmed to be valid and reliable, the analysis proceeded to the Inner Model stage to evaluate structural fit through the R-square value, predictive validity (Q-square > 0), and effect size (f-square), with measurements based on established standards (Cohen, 1988). In the final stage, the decision to accept the hypothesis is determined by the significance level of the Path Coefficient, provided that the T-Statistics value is > 1.96 and the P-Value is < 0.05 (Hair *et al.*, 2014).

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Analysis Results

This study was conducted in the village of Rababaka to evaluate the effectiveness of a community empowerment program and to examine how the village head's leadership style and residents' participation influenced it. The target population for this study included all members of the Rababaka village community, totaling 1,063 people. From this population, a sample size of 91 respondents was determined using the Slovin method, with a 10% margin of error. These respondents were selected through purposive sampling, in which subjects were chosen based on specific criteria established by the researcher to ensure that the primary data collected via questionnaires would be truly relevant and representative of the research questions.

Figure 2. Path Analysis



Source: Processed Primary Data, 2026

Table 2. Results of the Measurement Model Evaluation

Variables	Item	Loading Factor	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE	Decision
Leadership Style (X)	X1	0.888	0.967	0.971	0.735	Valid & Reliable
	X2	0.869				
	X3	0.851				
	X4	0.892				
	X5	0.848				
	X6	0.890				
	X7	0.904				
	X8	0.847				
	X9	0.877				
	X10	0.808				
	X11	0.757				
	X12	0.844				
Community Participation (Z)	Z1	0.798	0.967	0.950	0.678	Valid & Reliable
	Z2	0.813				
	Z3	0.873				
	Z4	0.840				
	Z5	0.834				
	Z6	0.858				
	Z7	0.830				
	Z8	0.788				
	Z9	0.774				
Program Effectiveness (Y)	Y1	0.754	0.953	0.959	0.659	Valid & Reliable
	Y2	0.778				
	Y3	0.803				
	Y4	0.836				
	Y5	0.794				
	Y6	0.838				
	Y7	0.830				
	Y8	0.840				
	Y9	0.831				
	Y10	0.828				
	Y11	0.832				
	Y12	0.773				

Source: Processed Primary Data, 2026

Table 3. Fornell-Larcker Criteria (Discriminant Validity)

Variables	Z	X	Y
Community Participation (Z)	0.824		
Leadership Style (X)	0.627	0.857	
Program Effectiveness (Y)	0.712	0.631	0.812

Source: Processed Primary Data, 2026

Based on Table 2, all research instruments were found to be valid and reliable. Convergent validity testing was optimally met because all items in the Leadership Style (X), Community Participation (Z), and Program Effectiveness (Y) variables had loading factor values above the 0.70 threshold, and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for all three constructs exceeded the minimum standard of 0.50. Furthermore, the consistency and reliability of the measurement instruments were confirmed to



be excellent through reliability testing, as evidenced by all Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values being well above the minimum criterion of 0.70. Therefore, all indicators comprising the variables were deemed suitable for the structural model testing phase (inner model).

Based on Table 3, the research instrument was found to meet the criteria for discriminant validity well. This is evidenced by the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values on the main diagonal for each variable—namely, Community Participation (0.824), Leadership Style (0.857), and Program Effectiveness (0.812)—which are higher than the correlation coefficients between the other variables. Since each AVE value exceeds the correlations between that construct and other constructs in the model, it can be concluded that each latent variable is unique and empirically distinct from the others, indicating that this instrument is free from cross-construct measurement bias.

Table 4. HTMT test

Variable	Z	X	Y
Community Participation (Z)			
Leadership Style (X)	0.653		
Program Effectiveness (Y)	0.750	0.651	

Source: Processed Primary Data, 2026

Based on Table 4, the measurement model was again confirmed to meet the criteria for discriminant validity. The HTMT correlation values between variables are 0.653 (Leadership Style and Community Participation), 0.750 (Program Effectiveness and Community Participation), and 0.651 (Program Effectiveness and Leadership Style). Given that all of these HTMT ratios are well below the recommended maximum tolerance threshold—that is, less than 0.90—it can be concluded that there are no issues of measurement overlap or bias among the indicators. Thus, each latent variable construct is confirmed to represent distinct phenomena within the research model.

Table 5. Results of the Structural Model Evaluation

Dependent Variable	R-Square	Adjusted R-Square	Q-Square	Description
Community Participation (Z)	0.393	0.387	0.257	
Program Effectiveness (Y)	0.563	0.553	0.362	

Source: Processed Primary Data, 2026

Based on Table 5, this research model demonstrates good explanatory power and predictive relevance. Leadership style explains 39.3% of the variance in Community Participation (R-Square = 0.393), while together, leadership style and community participation explain 56.3% of the variance in Program Effectiveness (R-Square = 0.563). Furthermore, the predictive accuracy of this model is also validated by the Q-Square values for both endogenous variables, which are above zero (0.257 and 0.362), indicating that the model is highly suitable for projecting the phenomena under study.

Table 6. Effect Size (F2) Results

Dependent Variables	f ²	Effect Size
Leadership Style → Program Effectiveness	0.129	Small
Leadership Style → Community Participation	0.649	Large
Community Participation → Program Effectiveness	0.375	Large

Source: Processed Primary Data, 2026

Based on Table 6 regarding the Effect Size test (f^2), we can determine the specific structural contribution of each variable. The direct effect of leadership style on program effectiveness has an f^2 value of 0.129, indicating a "Small" contribution. Conversely, the effect of leadership style on fostering community participation ($f^2 = 0.649$) and the role of community participation in program effectiveness ($f^2 = 0.375$) fall into the "Large" category because they exceed the threshold value of 0.35. These results indicate that although the direct influence of leaders is relatively small, their role becomes vital and has a significant impact when they first successfully mobilize community participation.

Table 7. Hypothesis Test Results (Path Coefficients)

Hip	Relationship Paths	Original Sample (O)	T-Statistics	P-Values	Decision
<i>Direct Relationship</i>					
H1	Leadership style → program effectiveness	0.305	4.357	0.000	Accepted
H2	Leadership style → community participation	0.627	8.706	0.000	Accepted
H3	Community participation → program effectiveness	0.520	7.182	0.000	Accepted
<i>Indirect Relationship (Mediation)</i>					
H4	Leadership style, community participation, program effectiveness	0.326	7.179	0.000	Accepted

Source: Processed Primary Data, 2026

Based on Table 7, which presents the results of the hypothesis tests, it can be concluded that all hypotheses proposed in this study (H1, H2, H3, and H4) were significant and accepted. In the direct relationship test, leadership style was found to have a positive and significant effect on both program effectiveness and community participation. In addition, community participation was also found to have a positive and significant effect on program effectiveness. Furthermore, the mediation effect test (H4) confirmed that community participation mediates the relationship between the village head's leadership style and the effectiveness of community empowerment programs.

4.2 Discussion

4.2.1 The Effect of Leadership Style on the Effectiveness of Community Empowerment Programs (H1)

The results of the statistical test prove that the village head's leadership style has a positive and significant effect on the effectiveness of community empowerment programs in Rababaka Village, as indicated by a T-statistic of 4.357 (> 1.96) and a P-value of 0.000 (< 0.05). This finding supports the first hypothesis and indicates that the more effective, visionary, and adaptive the leadership style adopted by the village head, the higher the success rate of the implemented empowerment programs. This phenomenon can be explained by the theory of Robbins and Judge (2022), which posits that leaders who prioritize empowerment and humility and place full trust in their subordinates can create a conducive organizational climate. In the context of village governance, when a village head can translate their vision into concrete, motivating actions, the pillars of program success—such as human development, business development, and environmental development (Mardikanto & Soebiato, 2017)—will be easier to achieve and sustain over the long term.

The results of this study align with previous research, including Nasir (2025), who stated that the leadership of village heads plays a crucial role from the planning phase through community engagement to the evaluation of empowerment programs at the local level. Similarly, this study reinforces the views of Agung *et al.*, (2024) and Mahmud (2024), who emphasize that a leader's ability to mobilize resources and guide their members is the primary driver of the effectiveness of village government organizations. Interestingly, although statistically significant, the effect size (f^2) indicates that the direct influence of this leadership style is small (0.129). This finding offers a new perspective on the authority or directives of the village head. No matter how visionary their vision may be, it is insufficient if it stands alone without a bridge connecting it to the community.

In the social reality of Rababaka Village, this makes perfect sense because rural communities have sociocultural dynamics that require a participatory, collaborative approach (Shoalihin *et al.*, 2025) rather than a merely directive or one-way leadership style. This finding explicitly refutes the view that a program's effectiveness is determined solely by the availability of village funds; rather, it reinforces the theory proposed by Hart *et al.*, (2008) that the quality of interaction patterns mobilizes these resources toward the established vision. Therefore, to ensure that empowerment programs do not merely become administrative routines, the leadership style of village heads must continue to evolve toward greater empathy and inclusion to address the root causes of residents' problems directly.

4.2.2 The Influence of Leadership Style on Community Participation (H2)

The results of the structural equation model evaluation demonstrate that the village head's leadership style has a positive and significant influence on community participation (H2 accepted), with a T-statistic value of 8.706 (> 1.96) and a P-value of 0.000 (< 0.05). These statistical findings provide a logical explanation: the more adaptive and inclusive the approach used by the village leader, the higher the level of community engagement and enthusiasm. This finding is fully consistent with the concept developed by Robbins and Judge (2022), in which a leadership style that prioritizes empowerment, humility, and the granting of full trust can break down bureaucratic barriers between the government and the community. When a village head positions themselves not merely as an administrative authority but as a servant and role model, the community feels more valued; consequently, the motivation to participate—from the decision-making stage through implementation to utilization (Huraerah, 2022)—grows into a positive collective consciousness, rather than stemming from coercion or merely because they were asked to do so.

The depth of this relationship's impact is further confirmed by an effect size (f^2) of 0.649, which classifies the influence of leadership style on community participation as "Large." This finding is consistent with previous research, particularly studies by Zulfik *et al.*, (2025) and Shoalihin *et al.*, (2025), which affirm that participatory and collaborative leadership styles are key to fostering social engagement among rural communities. In the context of Rababaka Village, the rationale for these findings refutes the skeptical view that low development engagement stems purely from the community's own apathy (Azkia *et al.*, 2026). On the contrary, this research demonstrates a clear empirical fact: active community participation is a direct response to how persuasively and sincerely the village head engages, motivates, and convinces residents that every empowerment program belongs to the community as a whole.

4.2.3 The Influence of Community Participation on the Effectiveness of Community Empowerment Programs (H3)

The test results for Hypothesis 3 indicate that community participation has a positive and significant influence on the effectiveness of community empowerment programs. This is quantitatively demonstrated by a path coefficient of 0.520, with a T-statistic of 7.182 (> 1.96) and a P-value of 0.000 (< 0.05). These findings confirm that the success rate of a program in Rababaka Village is inextricably linked to the extent and depth of its residents' active involvement. This phenomenon is highly rational and aligns with the theory of Cohen and Uphoff (as cited in Huraerah, 2022), which emphasizes that effective participation—from the stage of providing input in decision-making, through implementation in the field, to the stage of utilization—can foster a strong sense of ownership within the community. When the community feels a sense of ownership over the program, efforts to achieve effectiveness—as measured by the pillars of human development, business development, environmental development, and institutional development (Mardikanto & Soebiato, 2017)—will proceed in a structured manner, minimizing resident resistance and ensuring the program's long-term sustainability.

This finding aligns with the study's initial expectations and firmly supports the framework of previous research. These results reinforce the conclusions of Azkia *et al.*, (2026) and Alim *et al.*, (2022), who view community participation as both the driving force and the primary regulator of every village development policy. More than just statistically significant, the effect size test results (f^2) demonstrate surprising precision: the contribution of community participation to program effectiveness falls into the "Large" category with a value of 0.375. This factual evidence automatically refutes the outdated top-down development approach (unilateral instructions from above), as it confirms that no matter how well-designed a program by the village government may be, it will be paralyzed without the infusion of effort, time, and ideas from its residents. Thus, it can be concluded that resident participation in Rababaka Village is no longer merely an administrative formality to fulfill legal obligations, but rather the primary driving force that determines whether the empowerment program successfully empowers residents or merely wastes the budget.

4.2.4 The Mediating Role of Community Participation in the Influence of Leadership Style on Program Effectiveness (H4)

The results of the test for the fourth hypothesis (H4) confirm that community participation partially but significantly mediates the influence of the village head's leadership style on the effectiveness of community empowerment programs. This finding is supported by a mediation path coefficient of 0.326 with a convincing level of significance, namely a T-statistic of 7.179 (> 1.96) and a P-value of 0.000 (< 0.05). This important finding logically summarizes the overall structural dynamics of the research model: an ideal leadership style does not operate in a vacuum to achieve the program's ultimate goals. In line with the perspectives of Robbins and Judge (2022), combined with Huraerah's (2022) theory of participation, a village head's vision, empowerment, and humility act as initial catalysts that foster residents' trust, which is then manifested through active participation in terms of labor, time, and ideas. It is this organic involvement that, in turn, serves as a bridge ensuring the achievement of all program effectiveness indicators—spanning human development, business development, the environment, and institutional aspects (Mardikanto & Soebiato, 2017).

The depth of these findings also provides a concrete answer to the research gap that underpins the novelty of this study in Rababaka Village. While previous studies, such as those by Nasir (2025) and Shoalihin *et al.*, (2025), tended to focus solely on the directive or administrative role of the village head in isolation, this study successfully demonstrates that community participation plays an absolute role as an intervening variable. This finding is particularly compelling when compared to the effect size—specifically, the direct influence of leadership style on effectiveness is classified as “Small” ($f^2 = 0.129$). In contrast, its ability to stimulate participation is “Large” ($f^2 = 0.649$), and participation itself has a “Large” impact on effectiveness ($f^2 = 0.375$). Therefore, this research unequivocally rejects the top-down bureaucratic leadership model and scientifically demonstrates that the effectiveness of empowerment programs is inseparable from the multiplier effect of collaboration, in which village leaders are tasked with igniting the fire of motivation and trust. At the same time, the community takes the lead in executing it as the primary engine of development.

5. Concluding Remarks and Recommendation

This quantitative study aimed to address the issue of suboptimal empowerment programs in Rababaka Village by conducting a PLS-SEM analysis of data from 91 respondents. The results demonstrated that the village head’s leadership style has a positive and significant effect on both program effectiveness and community participation. Furthermore, community participation was also convincingly shown to influence program effectiveness while simultaneously serving as a mediating variable in the relationship between leadership style and the success of the empowerment program.

From both theoretical and practical perspectives, this study provides strategic guidance that village development requires leaders who are empathetic, adaptive, and inclusive, and who move away from a one-sided (top-down) directive approach. The novelty of this research lies in the empirical evidence that community participation is not merely an administrative prerequisite under the law, but rather a crucial mediating variable in the key drivers that bridge the leadership vision toward program effectiveness.

The limitations of this study include the exclusive use of a single location—Rababaka Village—and the susceptibility to subjectivity bias in the questionnaire, thereby limiting the generalizability of the findings. Therefore, future research is recommended to expand the geographical scope, adopt a mixed-methods approach, and explore additional relevant variables such as transparency in village fund management and the competence of village officials.

Statement of Use of Generative AI

During the preparation of this work, the author used generative artificial intelligence tools to support the scientific writing process. Grammarly was used to check grammar, refine writing style, and improve clarity in scientific writing. All interpretations, analyses, and conclusions presented in this study are the sole responsibility of the author.

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