

ARTICLE

Transformational Leadership in Times of Crisis

Study of Handling COVID-19 in Bumi Raja-Raja

Rachma Fitriati ¹, Dea Alita Marsanty ²

¹Faculty of Administrative Science, Universitas Indonesia

²Indostrategic Research Institute and Faculty of Administrative Science, Universitas Indonesia

rachma.fitriati@ui.ac.id

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Abstract: This study aims to analyze the transformational leadership of Village Heads in efforts to break the chain of the spread of COVID-19 in the Maluku Province area known as Bumi Raja-Raja. Village heads are called "Bapa Raja" because of their position as community leaders, religious leaders, and even traditional leaders because a Bapa Raja must have a noble lineage. This study used a qualitative method with an exploratory and descriptive research approach. Data collection techniques using in-depth interviews, observation and literature review. The results showed that Bapa Raja plays a key role in strengthening local capacity, addressing potential risks, and meeting the basic needs of people in the village. They not only strengthen local empowerment but also overcome and reduce potential and fulfil basic needs in villages by taking concrete action and utilizing local resources pro-actively and having a positive impact in breaking the chain of the spread of COVID-19 and supporting local governments in implementing policies and pandemic response programs. The study recommendation is to strengthen the role of Bapa Raja as a collaborative agent for local governments to increase active community participation in efforts to break the chain of spread of the COVID-19 virus. Thus, in the future, Bapa Raja, as a local leader as well as a traditional & community figure, can be the main force in facing crises while maintaining the stability and prosperity of their community.

Keywords: COVID-19; leadership; transformational; Maluku.

1. Introduction

In early May 2023, the World Health Organization (WHO) officially announced the end of the global health emergency for the Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). This is encouraging news for the global community, which has been required to adapt to social restrictions for almost three years to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus. As is known, three months after its emergence in Wuhan, this virus has spread to 175 countries, with the number of cases having exceeded 500,000 and claimed the lives of nearly 23,000 people worldwide (WHO, 2020). The massive spread of this virus makes the COVID-19 pandemic the most significant global disruption in people's lives since the end of World War II.

The social restriction policy that exists due to the massive spread of the COVID-19 virus in various parts of the world interferes with the ability and mobility of governments of various countries to provide public services (Okoli et al., 2023; UCLG et al., 2020). The impact resulting from the spread of this virus is more than just a health or socio-economic crisis but also a governance crisis (Azhar & Azzahra, 2020; Dye et al., 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic has proven how important the role of leaders is during times of crisis. As the main actor in public services, the government has a big responsibility to make the right decisions for the welfare and security of society. The government must be able to reduce public panic regarding the pandemic situation and, at the same time, is also required to provide targeted public services (Brinkerhoff et al., 2019; Rahim et al., 2020; "Remote Team Leadership Is Situational and Complex," 2023; Sparrow et al., 2020).

Maintaining a balance between short-term and long-term interests is also important for the government. As is known, three months after its emergence in Wuhan, this virus has spread to 175 countries, with the number of cases having exceeded 500,000 and claimed the lives of nearly 23,000 people in the world (WHO, 2020). During times of crisis, they have to make decisions that may be unpopular but are beneficial in the long run for society (Dubicka & Carlson, 2020; Peters & Filgueiras, 2022). The pandemic and crisis that appeared suddenly presented quite a big challenge for countries that were not yet "used to" managing this crisis, including Indonesia.

President Joko Widodo officially announced the presence of the COVID-19 virus in Indonesia on March 2, 2020 (Kementerian Sekretariat Negara Republik Indonesia, 2020). President Joko Widodo officially announced the presence of the COVID-19 virus in Indonesia on March 2, 2020 (Kementerian Sekretariat Negara Republik Indonesia, 2020). Since the first case was detected in Depok City, a series of regulations were immediately formulated and implemented in various forms, such as Government Regulation (PP) Number 21 of 2020 concerning Large-Scale Social Restrictions in the Context of Accelerating Handling of Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) and Guidelines for Social Restrictions Large Scale in the Context of Accelerating Handling of COVID-19. Social restrictions that interfere with ability and mobility in providing public services require the role of all government units in trying to break the chain of spread of the COVID-19 virus.

Furthermore, the Minister of Home Affairs appealed through Minister of Home Affairs Circular Letter No. 440/5184/SJ concerning establishing a Regional COVID-19 Handling Task Force. With this circular, from the central government level to the lowest form of government, namely sub-districts, villages, and even traditional villages such as forests, clans and countries, it is mandatory to collect data on residents regarding the threat of transmission of the COVID-19 virus. Not only that, the Village Head is even obliged to collect data on arrivals from outside the city or

abroad, in collaboration with the nearest Community Health Center to monitor sick residents.

The division of authority in handling COVID-19 by the central government to regional governments is an implication of studies that reveal the correlation between collaborative efforts carried out by the government and the effectiveness of public services (Ansell et al., 2017; Hinton et al., 2021; Kusuma & Akbar, 2021; Soesanto, 2017). For this reason, the determining factor for the success of handling COVID-19 is not necessarily the presence of rules and policies from the government but also collaboration and cooperation from all elements of society to implement them (Amin et al., 2021; Arsandi, 2022). Indonesia, as a country with diverse ethnicities and cultures, cannot be denied that leadership factors are often the key to determining people's behavior towards a policy (Abbas & Asghar, 2010).

In implementing regulations that suddenly limit people's movement, an "approach" is needed to suit the community's characteristics. An adaptive leader role is needed and can present solutions amidst unexpected environmental conditions. According to Santoso et al. (2022) it takes a leader who has effective communication skills and can build strong relationships with the community to stop the chain of the spread of COVID-19 (Biggs et al., 2023; Dumdum et al., 2013; Pounder, 2022). Meanwhile, according to Northouse (2019), a transformational leader is a type of leader who has a strong vision and high commitment.

Transformational leaders must create an inclusive work climate and encourage their members to actively participate, contribute and take responsibility. This can be seen from the organization, which can be agile, collaborative and adaptive. This means ensuring that every team member feels valued, heard and acknowledged. Leaders must promote a culture where differences are valued and considered strengths enriching the team. By creating an inclusive environment, leaders open the door for team members to actively participate in the decision-making process, collaboration, and exchange of ideas (Budiarso et al., 2021, 2022). A transformational leader also encourages his members to contribute actively. They provide opportunities for each individual to contribute their skills and experience.

Leaders provide direction, listen carefully, and appreciate the ideas proposed by team members. By encouraging active participation, leaders create a strong sense of ownership and involvement in the team (Devi et al., 2023; Suryaatmaja et al., 2020). As a form of state obligation, the role of transformational leadership in Indonesia can be seen from the presence of Regional Heads, starting from the central government level to the lowest levels of government, such as Village Heads. In various literature studies, it has been proven that regional leaders have played a very significant role in breaking the chain of spread of COVID-19 with various strategies that refer to the local wisdom of each region (Lestari et al., 2020b, 2020a).

This study analyzes the transformational leadership carried out by the village head, known as Bapa Raja, in Maluku Province as the focus of the research. This region was chosen because of the multicultural characteristics of the region, both in terms of population and government. In research conducted by the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), it was found that Maluku Province is a multicultural region with around 117 languages and dialects and 100 tribes and sub-tribes occupying around 1,340 islands. Therefore, there are various identifications for Maluku residents with native Maluku communities, such as Ambon, Seram, Kei, Buru, and Lease. Apart from that, there are also other ethnic groups such as Buton, Bugis, Makassar, Javanese, Sundanese, Madura, and other ethnic groups better known as migrant populations or new residents (Ajawaila, 2005).

Socio-cultural diversity in Maluku has been formed since this region was known as "the spices island". The richness of Maluku's natural resources, especially cloves and nutmeg, has made the Maluku area known as "the spice route". This title has become a special attraction for Maluku in the eyes of the world. There was once a Portuguese healer named Tome Pirez who expressed his admiration for Maluku in his book entitled "Summa Oriental".

Apart from its diversity and abundant natural wealth, Maluku Province is also famous for having a population with a high sense of solidarity. In the local wisdom of the Maluku people, it is known as "kita semua adalah basudara". The philosophy of "sagu salempeng patah bage dua, potong di kuku rasa di daging, ale rasa bera rasa", "ain ni ain", and "duan lolat" is local Maluku wisdom that has been passed down from generation to generation. This is meaningful in the context of togetherness and shared destiny, whatever the situation. The life of "orang basudara" must share, help and love one another. It's hard to be happy together, whatever the situation.

In Maluku Province, the term "Bapa Raja" refers to the title or title for tribal chiefs or traditional leaders in the traditional government system in the Maluku region. This title has the literal meaning of "Bapa", which means "Father", and "Raja", which means "King" or "Leader". The term Raja in the Maluku community refers to the title of head of state government whose function is to administer customary law and government duties in accordance with applicable statutory provisions. The total number of traditional kings in Maluku Province is 437 people, consisting of 406 male kings and 31 female kings. Therefore, apart from being famous for its sociocultural diversity, Maluku Province is also often called the "Land of Kings".

The influence of Bapa Raja in Maluku society is very significant. They are central in maintaining social stability and cultural heritage and leading and coordinating local communities. The King also plays a role in resolving conflicts, maintaining peace, and protecting the rights and interests of the community (Indiahono et al., 2022). As traditional leaders, the community respects and appreciates Bapa Raja because of their wisdom, justice and impartiality in managing community affairs. They also act as mediators who bridge the relationship between society and modern government (Souhoka & Suanda, 2015).

Bapa Raja's position in the government and cultural structure is quite intense with the people of Maluku, making them the main figures in encouraging the acceleration of handling COVID-19. This study aims to analyze the transformational leadership of "Bapa Raja" in developing strategies to break the chain of COVID-19 in Maluku. In analyzing this discussion, the author limits the discussion to December 2020, considering that there is no vaccination program yet as the government's main policy in handling COVID-19.

Leadership is a fundamental aspect of achieving employee engagement, and this lies in the leader influencing his followers to achieve organizational goals (Popli & Rizvi, 2017). Leaders must play a strategic role in increasing employee engagement by bringing happiness to work (Joo & Lee, 2017). They also establish and maintain the work environment and provide support when needed (Park et al., 2019). Therefore, leadership is among the most influential elements in perceptions of workplace and workforce engagement. In addition, the right leadership style is an important element in promoting employee interaction and performance (Popli & Rizvi, 2015; Tobirin et al., 2023).

When leaders need to increase employee interest, awareness, and acceptance of new visions and missions for the good of the organization, transformational leadership becomes critical in helping organizations redefine missions and visions,

renew member commitment, and reform systems to achieve their goals (Hay, 2006). Transformational leadership is defined as a leadership style that organizes relationships in the face of internal and external change by motivating, improving, and transforming employee actions and aspirations, as well as by integrating empathy, compassion, sensitivity, relationship building, and innovation so that leaders and employees share the vision and values, respect each other and trust each other (Jyoti & Dev, 2015; Men, 2014; Moyo, 2019).

Understanding the characteristics of transformational leadership in an organization consists of four influencing dimensions, including (1) the influence of idealism, (2) inspirational motivation, (3) intellectual stimulation, and (4) individual consideration (Breevaart et al., 2014; Hay, 2006; Jyoti & Dev, 2015). The influence of idealism refers to a charismatic vision and behavior to build trust and confidence and provide a role model for employees to follow. The combination of these dimensions will create organizational performance that exceeds expectations (Hay, 2006).

According to Yücel (2021), explains that transformational leaders play an important role in influencing employee decisions in an organization, so a leader needs to have the capacity to communicate, both internally and externally. Transformational leadership is also very important to encourage employee creativity more effectively by creating a climate of open learning, innovation and problem solving (Jyoti & Dev, 2015). Transformational leadership influences employee work engagement directly and indirectly (Breevaart et al., 2014) as well as their service orientation because they will be more engaged if they observe the transformational characteristics of their leaders (Popli & Rizvi, 2015). Transformational leadership has a critical role in increasing organizational commitment, and this will provide several benefits, such as increasing employee performance, productivity, loyalty, responsibility, job satisfaction, motivation, and a harmonious industrial relations system (Hasmin et al., 2022).

On the other hand, transformational leadership has been evaluated as an effective leadership style because it has a direct and strong ability to create a favorable work environment for higher employee engagement and service orientation (Popli & Rizvi, 2015, 2017). This style allows employees to better understand the organization's activities, supports, concerns, and values that contribute to relationships with organizational members and develop high levels of affective commitment to the organization (Yücel, 2021). In addition, transformational leadership can be helpful in dealing with crises and organizational management because it ensures job satisfaction and motivates employees to work well and effectively in achieving organizational goals (Almohtaseb et al., 2021). In this context, the leadership or main stakeholder known as "Bapa Raja" has responsibility for providing public services and implementing strategies in dealing with the crisis resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic in Maluku Province.

The main issue involves assessing the effectiveness of implementing the responsibilities of leaders and related stakeholders. This study aims to analyze the transformational leadership of "Bapa Raja" as Village Head to break the chain of the spread of COVID-19 in the Maluku Province region, as well as analyze the success of the transformational leadership strategies they apply in managing aspects of government and public services in the context of dealing with emergencies and mitigating the impact of crises involving health and economic aspects.

2. Methods

The method used in this journal is qualitative. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), qualitative research is research with an exploratory and descriptive research approach. Exploratory research aims to explore and understand the meaning of individuals or groups in responding to social or human problems (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007)—such as COVID-19. Considering that crises of this kind often have unique and dynamic characteristics, an exploratory approach allows researchers to identify factors that have not been previously identified related to the role of Bapa Raja as Village Head, who is also a community leader, traditional leader, and religious leader in handling the pandemic. The results of this exploratory research can provide an important basis for further research and better policies in facing similar challenges in the future. Meanwhile, for the descriptive approach, according to Creswell and Poth (2016) and Creswell and Creswell (2018). Qualitative research is descriptive in that the researcher is interested in process, meaning, and understanding gained through words or pictures. With a descriptive approach, this study can explore the role of Bapa Raja as a local leader, focusing on the results of the researcher's observations without getting caught up in comparisons that may not be relevant within the framework of this research. Data collection techniques using in-depth interviews, observation, and literature review (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017; Marshall & Rossman, 1989), through books, journal articles, online media coverage, regulations and government reports related to COVID-19.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Transformational Leadership and the COVID-19 Crisis

Recently, transformational leadership has developed into one of the most prominent leadership styles in various fields, from business to government governance (Islam et al., 2021). The presence of skilled leaders is crucial in maintaining organizational sustainability in today's competitive environment. Leader skills are not only seen from intellectual capacity but also the ability to understand the culture of the organization being led (Ciulla, 2020). This view is explained more deeply in the research (Poturak et al., 2020) which discusses the effectiveness of transformational leadership styles in overcoming cultural differences. This research reveals that society's acceptance of transformational leadership is higher in some cultures.

According to Bowers et al. (2017), the role of leaders is very important in finding solutions during crises. The crisis in this journal's discussion refers to the threat of COVID-19, which continues to soar amidst global conditions still looking for a formula for the immune system against this disease. In times like this, to have adequate resources (community involvement), leaders need to understand community culture in dealing with crises (Alus, 2014). This is one of the advantages of local-level governments, they have a more detailed understanding of the characteristics of society (McLaggan et al., 2013; Senjaya & Anindita, 2020).

Community participation has been recognized as a supporting factor for biomedical and epidemiological interventions. Community engagement is a social process in which vulnerable groups work together to achieve common goals (Gaventa & Barrett, 2012). In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, community leaders and local groups have a central or pioneering role in implementing interventions in the community and ensuring two-way communication occurs (Maak & Pless, 2006). Emphasis on responsible leadership is important in dealing with

crises so that moral and healthy relationships can be established with all parties involved and have a positive impact on society's response.

3.2. Handling COVID-19 in the Maluku Region

Starting from the treatment of one patient under surveillance on March 15, 2020, which was then confirmed as a positive case of COVID-19 on March 22, 2020 (kompas.com, 2020), the spread of COVID-19 in Maluku Province was not only recorded in Ambon City but also Central Maluku Regency, West Seram Regency, East Seram Regency, Buru Regency, South Buru Regency, Southwest Maluku Regency, Southeast Maluku Regency and Tual City.

As of December 31, 2020, there were 5,745 positive confirmed cases in Maluku Province, with details of 1,168 patients under treatment, 4,507 patients had recovered, and 79 had died (Figure 1). The dynamics of the COVID-19 situation in Maluku are still fluctuating and tend to continue to increase. The highest daily increase in confirmed cases was recorded on December 15 with the addition of 137 cases. The development of the COVID-19 pandemic from March to December 2020 shows that Maluku Province has had a fairly high increase in new cases and is even comparable to the death rate.

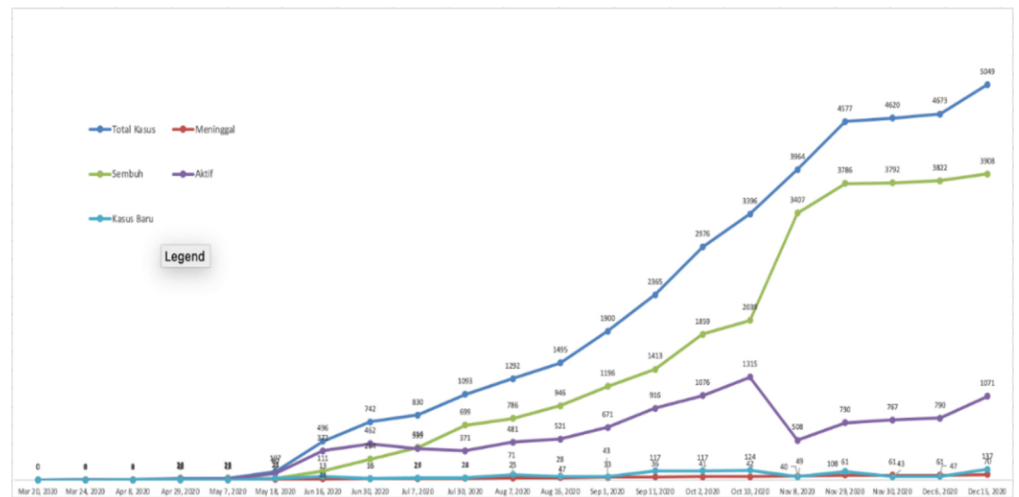


Figure 1. Infographic of the Spread of COVID-19 in Maluku Province As of 31 December 2020

Source: Maluku Province COVID-19 Task Force (2020)

The trend of daily COVID-19 cases in Maluku Province from March 15, 2020, to December 15, 2020, can be seen in Figure 2. This increase in cases includes the transmission of the coronavirus to health workers in Maluku Province. At the beginning of July 2020, health workers on duty at the Regional General Hospital, dr. Haulussy, Ambon, Maluku, died with a swab examination showing positive results for COVID-19. This is the first death of a health worker since the first COVID-19 patient was announced in Maluku on March 22, 2020. Cases in Maluku are now continuing to increase and spread (Christ, 2020).

Figure 2. Trends in Daily COVID-19 Cases in Prov. Maluku Period 15 March-15



Source: covid19.go.id (2020)

All cases originally concentrated on Ambon, Seram, and Buru islands have now spread to Tual City in the southeastern part of Maluku to Southwest Maluku Regency. Four months after the first case was discovered, the green zone in Maluku is now Southeast Maluku Regency, Aru Islands, Tanimbar Islands, and South Buru. The region "closed its doors" to the entry of travelers from outside the region. The local government only allows cargo ships and special flights.

As of the end of December 2020, Eastern Seram Regency was the only green zone (no cases) for the spread of COVID-19 in Maluku Province. The orange zone (medium risk) increases by a percentage of 90%. This figure explains that in the last month, the period 15 November to 15 December, there was a significant increase in areas included in the orange zone, which previously stood at 45% (Figure 3). In fact, in June 2020, the Chief Executive of the Maluku Province COVID-19 Acceleration Handling Task Force, Kasrul Selang, was preparing to implement a new normal life (Herin, 2020b).

In order to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and follow up on Presidential Decree Number 9 of 2020 concerning Amendments to Presidential Decree Number 7 of 2020 concerning the Task Force for the Acceleration of Handling Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), Minister of Home Affairs Tito Karnavian then issued a

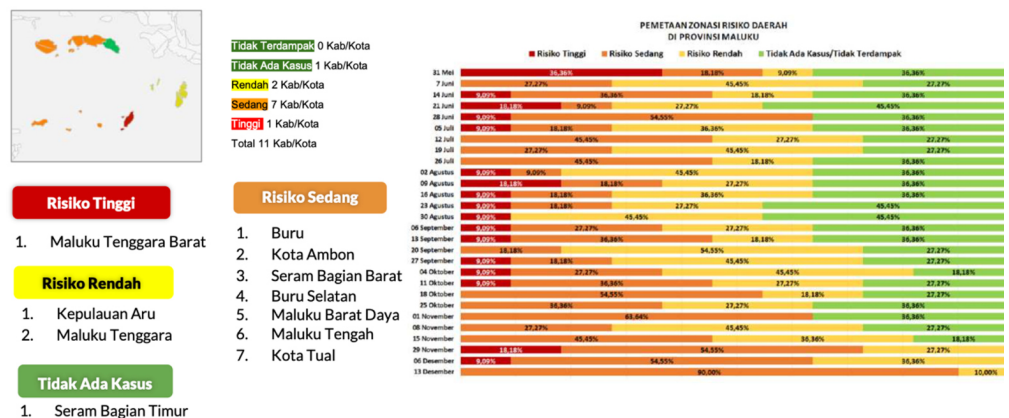


Figure 3. Zoning Mapping of the Spread of COVID-19 in Maluku Province December 2020

Source: covid19.go.id (2020)

Minister of Home Affairs Regulation Number 20 of 2020 concerning the Acceleration of Handling Corona Virus Disease 2019 in the Regional Government Environment.

This regulation was then created as a derivative that discusses the structure and duties of each element of the organization (Circular Letter of the Minister of Home Affairs Number 440/2622/SJ concerning the Establishment of a Regional Task Force for the Acceleration of Handling Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)). The discussion of this Circular Letter from the Minister of Home Affairs assigned the Governor, Regent/Mayor to serve as Chair of the Regional Task Force for Accelerating Handling of COVID-19 and the Regional Secretary as Daily Chief Executive. This rule also emphasizes that assignments cannot be delegated to other regional officials. Apart from government officials, the Task Force membership also involves Forkopimda and heads of vertical institutions/agencies in the regions.

Regarding its duties and roles, the Task Force for the Acceleration of Handling COVID-19 is responsible for carrying out all prevention and handling efforts in accordance with applicable regulations. The functions carried out by the Maluku Province Task Force for the Acceleration of Handling COVID-19 include increasing regional resilience in the health sector, accelerating the handling of COVID-19 through synergy between Regional Apparatus and Vertical Agencies in Maluku Province, increasing anticipation of transmission, increasing/addition, and spread of COVID-19; increasing synergy in operational policy-making; increase preparedness and capabilities in preventing, detecting and responding to COVID-19.

Following up on the Minister of Home Affairs' circular, Maluku Governor Murad Ismail issued Maluku Governor Decree Number 180 of 2020 concerning the Establishment of a Task Force for the Acceleration of Handling COVID-19 on March 29, 2020, with the Governor of Maluku as Chair of the Task Force. The Task Force for the Acceleration of Handling COVID-19 is committed to implementing all efforts to prevent and control the coronavirus in accordance with applicable regulations. The Task Force for the Acceleration of Handling COVID-19 is also tasked with accelerating the handling of the pandemic through synergy between government agencies, business entities, academics, society, and the media.

Apart from forming regulations that will be used as guidelines by relevant government agencies and agencies, the Governor of Maluku is also collaborating with the Bapa Raja from Nagari-Nagari to socialize programs to accelerate the handling of the coronavirus. This communication was carried out as a form of awareness for the Governor of Maluku that cooperation in disaster management is very necessary, considering the limited time, energy, and budget of the government (Yücel, 2021).

3.3. The Role and Responsibilities of the Bapa Raja in Maluku

Apart from the Maluku Provincial Government, which plays a role in managing various forms of social and economic safety assistance, there is also Bapa Raja, who is taking part in efforts to control the spread of the COVID-19 virus using a cooperation approach (Bakare & Oredein, 2022; Yang et al., 2023). As formal leaders of a Nagari, the Bapa Raja must have the ability to invite the community to actively participate in implementing regulations and provisions related to controlling COVID-19 that the regional government has issued (Northouse, 2019; Widyaningrum et al., 2020).

Reflecting on the pattern of the first spread of the virus in Maluku Province, which was caused by people who had just returned from their trip to Bekasi, West Java, several areas in Maluku Province closed access for an undetermined time limit. An example can be seen in Leihitu District, Central Maluku Regency. As a buffer zone for Ambon City, the community is worried about the rate of movement of residents and

immigrants in their area. In this panic-filled situation, there was a significant increase in homecoming traffic. Students, university students, and workers who face the threat of losing their jobs choose to return to their hometowns in the Maluku region. The presence of these travelers further increases the worry of residents.

To reduce public panic, the King's Fathers then accommodated the public's wishes by creating a centralized quarantine and implementing a requirement that residents who had just returned from travel and immigrants entering their territory were required to quarantine for 14 days (Figure 4). After 14 days in the quarantine location and there are no clinical symptoms similar to COVID-19, they are allowed to enter the settlement.

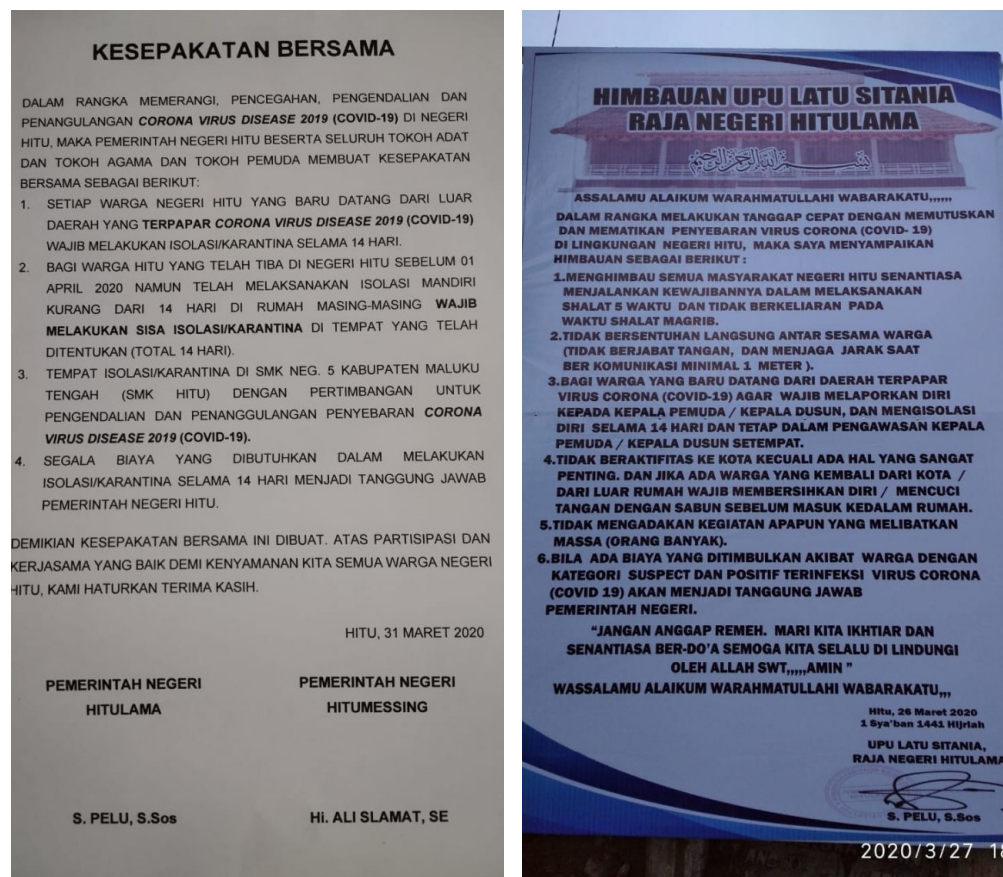


Figure 4. Imperative Sentence in Hitu Lama Village

Source: Central Maluku Regency Government (2020)

In the Maluku people's philosophy of life, there are expressions such as: "ale rasa bera rasa," "sagu salempeng dipatah dua," and "potong di kuku rasa di daging." These expressions show that the people of Maluku attach great importance to the feeling of brotherhood between people, so they must help each other and work together in dealing with problems. In the midst of a significant spike in COVID-19 cases, the regional government has tightened entry and exit points at several administrative border points between Ambon City and Central Maluku Regency. Travelers with non-Maluku ID cards must be quarantined at several training centers, which function as centralized quarantine places by the Maluku Province Task Force for the Acceleration of Handling COVID-19. Meanwhile, travelers with Maluku ID cards can immediately return to their homes, provided they must undergo self-isolation and be monitored by the local RT/RW.

In response to these regulations, several Raja Nagari provided and completed the necessities needed to break the chain of the spread of COVID-19 (Supriyanto et al., 2021; Widyaningrum et al., 2020). A quarantine location has been prepared for travelers in Hitu Village, which consists of Hitu Lama Negeri (Village) and Negeri Hitu Messing. They used the building of SMK Negeri 5 Leihitu, which was temporarily empty (Figure 5). Not only providing complete facilities and infrastructure for implementing quarantine, the Negeri Hitu Lama Fathers and Hitu Messing also guarantee security for people who are in quarantine. The two Bapa Negeri agreed to tighten supervision of conflicts that often occur both among village residents and between neighboring villages.



Figure 5. Self-Isolation of Negeri Hitu Lama in SMK Negeri 5 Leihitu

Source: Lestari et al. (2020a)

Bapa Raja's initiative to become a facilitator inspired village residents to support people who were in quarantine. The support provided is not only in material form, such as food and medical equipment, but also in moral form, such as joint prayer (Siangchokyoo et al., 2020; Yavirach, 2012).

In an effort to break the chain of spread of COVID-19, Bapa Raja also played a role in socializing the implementation of the 3T (testing, tracing, treatment) program from the central government. Even though we understand the worrying condition of Ambon City, the reality is that community discipline is still minimal. Many people still do not wear masks and traders do not care about the rules limiting shop operating times. Mardika Market Traders, Ambon City, Maluku, rejected several city government policies regarding handling COVID-19 in Ambon (CNN Indonesia, 2020). This act of rejection was carried out through a demonstration at Ambon City Hall attended by more than 100 people and was dominated by traders. They protested the policy of limiting community activities, which only allowed traditional markets to open until 16:00 WIT and sell on an odd-even system (Figure 6). This is considered unfair compared to the rules for supermarkets that are allowed to operate longer (MalukuTerkini.com, 2020). Apart from protesting against the Large-Scale Social Restrictions policy, market traders also seemed indifferent to the rules for using masks and avoided being given a rapid COVID-19 test.

This behavior of ignoring health protocols disrupts the handling of the pandemic. The government's efforts to combat the COVID-19 pandemic were not welcomed by traders who felt they were not cared for as a small community group. Traders who took part in the rapid test and had reactive test results refused to carry out quarantine. In dealing with this situation, the Daily Chair of the COVID-19 Task Force made communication efforts with community leaders, one of whom was Bapa Raja,



Figure 6. Mardika Market Traders Protest Regarding Operating Hours

Source: Department of Communication and Information, Ambon City (2020)

to take part in socializing social restriction rules and promoting healthy behavior to reach mutual agreement and prevent further disruption in handling the broader pandemic.

To anticipate more victims dying due to this virus, Bapa Raja also encouraged the public, especially traders, to take rapid tests carried out by Jhon Rehatta as Bapa Raja Nagari Soya. Jhon Rehatta advised the public to take a rapid COVID-19 test due to the death of a trader at Mardika Market, Ambon. Routinely, Jhon Rehatta gives appeals and directly visits the people of Nagari Soya, Sirimau District, Ambon, to provide education about the importance of carrying out rapid COVID-19 tests so that the community is fully involved in breaking the chain of virus transmission (Chen et al., 2016; Sahu et al., 2018; Saira et al., 2020).

As a result, people flocked to community health centers and hospitals to take rapid COVID-19 tests. After the involvement of the King's role directly in the field, in one day, 240 people took the rapid test, most of whom were market traders (Herin, 2020a). Bapa Raja's involvement in directly going into the field and providing education to village residents is in line with the results of studies on the role of leaders in building relationships and presenting innovation to unite shared values and vision (Joo & Lee, 2017; Jyoti & Dev, 2015; Men, 2014; Popli & Rizvi, 2017). This is important because there is a common vision and goal between the community and the leaders (Bapa Raja), which will grow trust so that they can respect each other (Park et al., 2019).

Efforts to combat COVID-19 cannot be done only by focusing on handling health aspects, but attention is also needed to pay attention to non-medical aspects such as purchasing power and access to supplies for household needs. Maluku's economic condition in the first quarter of 2020 experienced a slowdown, as did the national economy due to COVID-19. In dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic in the economic sector, the Maluku Provincial Government is refocusing and reallocating the Regional Budget by rationalizing spending on goods and services and capital spending by at least 50%. For the non-regular program, there was a spontaneous

action by the Maluku Regional Government Civil Service in the form of 2,213 basic food packages distributed to the community.

In this activity, Bapa Raja was instrumental in distributing healthy fish and rice aid from the Fish Quarantine and Quality Control Agency (BKIPM) aimed at 1,813 Heads of Families (KK). Direct Cash Assistance funds have also been allocated through the Village Fund to families affected by COVID-19 spread across 1,804 villages. Micro business assistance in goods was also provided to 825 business actors in 11 districts/cities. The assistance is worth IDR1,875,000 for each business actor. The Maluku Provincial Government also helps the Regency/City Government to provide social assistance for necessities by allocating a budget of 20% to each district/city (Tristanto et al., 2022).

In the implementation of the Social Safety Net (JPS) distribution, no problems were found that led to conflict in the community (Figure 7). However, the biggest obstacle faced is related to data on JPS recipients. If there is data from districts/cities that are less valid, of course, this will hamper the distribution process. In response, there is external supervision to monitor duplicate data. For this reason, each Regency/City Government carries out data sorting so that the data released is accurate and can be accounted for. This is also done so that the distribution of JPS aid is right on target.

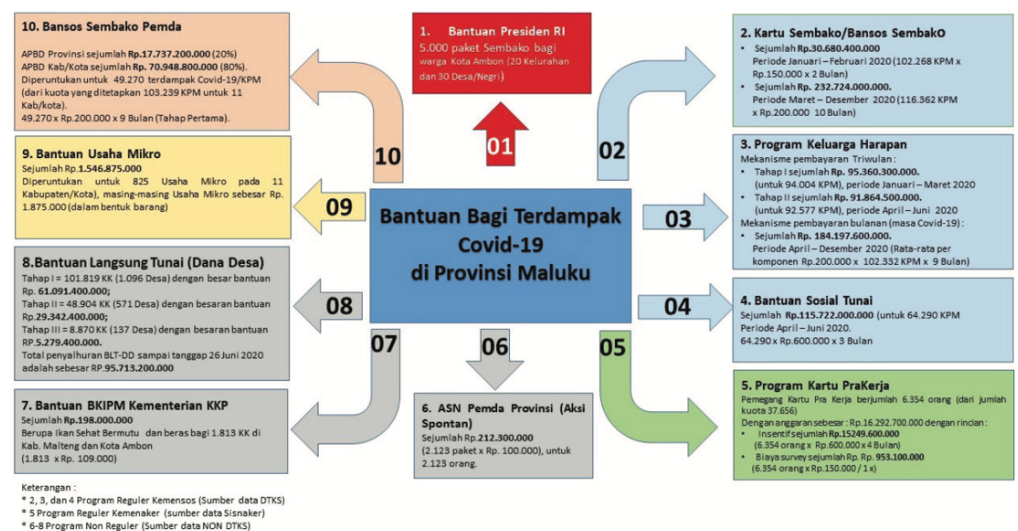


Figure 7. Infographic on Distribution of COVID-19 Aid in Maluku Province

Source: Department of Social Affairs, Maluku Province (2020)

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on all aspects of life. As a society that grew up with ancestral values that prioritize an attitude of solidarity, this pandemic situation encourages the people of Maluku Province to uphold the principle of "baku keku" in togetherness. Kasrul Selang, Daily Chair of the Maluku Province COVID-19 Acceleration Handling Task Force, revealed that the assistance received for residents affected by the pandemic not only came from the Central and Regional Governments but also from the business world, political parties, educational institutions, and religious institutions.

As a community leader with a deeper understanding of the characteristics of his community, Bapa Raja not only socialized the importance of "baku keku" in eradicating the COVID-19 virus in Maluku but also emphasized that the delivery of aid must be able to reach all levels of society across religions (Pounder, 2022; Wang, 2017). For this reason, Bapa Raja and religious leaders are trying to encourage a

sense of brotherhood among their people by allocating aid to those in need, regardless of ethnicity, race, or even religion (Mawela et al., 2017; Reinwald & Kraemmergaard, 2012). A form of tolerance between people is presented in the form of handing over basic food aid as well as promoting healthy living (Figure 8) and distributing health equipment (Figure 9).

Figure 8. Handover of Basic Food Aid by the GPM Poka to Poka Muslim Residents



Source: Lestari et al. (2020a)

Figure 9. Socialization of Prevention of the Spread of COVID-19 by MUI Maluku Province



Source: Lestari et al. (2020a)

Another anxiety that has arisen in society due to COVID-19 is the threat of food scarcity. To overcome this concern, the Regent of Southeast Maluku, together with elements of the TNI/Polri, religious leaders, and Bapa Raja, encouraged the community to grow local food in *ve'e kes yang* or supply gardens (Pounder, 2022). In Central Maluku Regency. The local food crops grown include corn, sweet potatoes, cassava, mangoes, and beans. The King welcomed This program positively, who brought his residents back to cultivating gardens. The Bapa Raja's support is not only as a facilitator but also as a mobilizer.

To start local food planting activities, the regional government, together with the local police in Central Maluku Regency, relocated approximately 1 hectare of unused land. By upholding ancestral values of solidarity, Raja Hitulama Salhana Pellu mobilized his people to help build land for "provision gardens." The help of approximately 277 families, the land could be cultivated for almost five months. Seeing the benefits of this program, the King's Fathers then collaborated with religious figures to restore the power of local food in Maluku. Together with the Maluku Protestant Church (GPM) and 500,000 congregations throughout Maluku, they built congregational gardens (Figure 10).



Figure 10. Planting Local Food Ingredients
in Provision Gardens

Source: Lestari et al. (2020a)

These communication steps that emphasize solidarity for "baku keku" in unity by Bapa Raja explain the importance of a leader having the ability to communicate effectively and facilitate a productive discussion space to create strong ties and increase a sense of belonging to his territory (Almohtaseb et al., 2021; Breevaart et al., 2014; Yücel, 2021).

4. Conclusion

Based on the explanation above, the role of Bapa Raja's transformational leadership in breaking the chain of the spread of COVID-19 is very important in helping local governments at the village level implement their policies and programs related to handling the pandemic. Bapa Raja has shown inspirational and uplifting attitudes and behavior in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. Bapa Raja's success in gathering community support and participation cannot be separated from his transformational leadership character. The care and attention shown by the Bapa Raja towards the community and his ability to motivate and inspire others have made him a role model whom the people of Maluku Province respect.

The behavior of the people who see the Bapa Raja as a role model can be seen from their enthusiasm for following the directions and policies issued by the Bapa Raja regarding handling COVID-19. The public voluntarily follows established health protocols, such as wearing masks, maintaining distance, and washing hands regularly. They also actively participate in activities initiated by the King, such as health education, fundraising, and distribution of aid to people in need.

The public's trust in Bapa Raja as a reliable leader is also reflected in his level of transparency and public accountability in reporting positive cases of COVID-19. The people of Maluku Province are highly aware of the importance of reporting these cases to the authorities for the common good. They trust that Bapa Raja will protect public health and welfare appropriately.

The binding relationship between Bapa Raja and the community also strengthens the community's participation in handling COVID-19. Bapa Raja acts as a leader and a figure close to the people who listens and understands their needs. This creates a strong emotional bond between Bapa Raja and the people of Maluku Province so that

the people feel they are responsible for contributing to efforts to deal with this pandemic. This study is expected to have a significant perspective in expanding understanding in the field of transformational leadership in times of crisis and providing new insights to the academic community.

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