

*Co-designing Curriculum for Rural Education in Indonesia: Promoting Relevance and Engagement for Holistic Education Development*

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**Abstract**

This research aims to explain the process and impact of the co-design of curriculum in some rural schools in West Nusa Tenggara, East Nusa Tenggara, North Kalimantan and East Java, Indonesia. The methodology used in this research is descriptive qualitative with data collection techniques through interviews, group discussions and document analysis. This research identifies stakeholders involved in the curriculum co-designing process, namely teachers, students, parents and the community members. The process in four regions begins with the initial exploration stage, consisting of understanding the local context and building stakeholder capacity and capabilities. However, East Java province is exempt from the second phase of initial exploration due to its stakeholders' sufficient capacity and capability. The process continues with the discovery phase to identify the educational needs, the development phase to conceptualize and refine the curriculum, and the delivery phase to implement and revise the current curriculum. There are three main characteristics of this process including inclusiveness, collaboration and iteration which contribute to the development of a curriculum that is adapted to the local context and cultural values. The co-design process is proven to increase active participation from students in the learning process and active contribution from the local community which simultaneously develops holistic education. The research further demonstrates that the process of co-designing curriculum requires the unwavering commitment and cooperation of all parties involved to enhance collaboration and improve capacity building, as well as substantial assistance from government agencies and other pertinent institutions to advocate for holistic education and curriculum evaluation.

Keywords: Co-Design, Curriculum, Holistic Education Development, Rural Area

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## Introduction

The provision of education in Indonesia encounters many obstacles in meeting the varied requirements of a vast and heterogeneous population. One of the primary obstacles is the disparity in the availability and caliber of educational opportunities between urban and rural regions. There exist notable gaps in education between urban and rural areas in Indonesia. According to data from UNESCO (2019), school enrollment rates in rural areas of Indonesia are lower than in urban areas, especially in middle and high schools. Moreover, the completion rate of junior secondary school among individuals aged 15 and over in rural Indonesia stood at 37.8%, while urban regions exhibited a higher rate of 60.5% (World Bank, 2020). It is also worth noting that access to early childhood education is comparatively limited in rural areas. Based on the statistics provided, it is evident that the enrollment rate for early childhood education among children aged 3-6 years was 34.3% in rural areas; however, this number accounted for 52.4% in urban areas (World Bank, 2020). The matter at hand holds significant importance, as indicated by statistical data revealing that over 45% of Indonesia's population resides in rural regions (BPS, 2019).

These disparities highlight the obstacles that rural communities experience in gaining access to high-quality education, as well as a pressing need for individualized interventions to address them. To alleviate these tensions, it is also necessary to improve infrastructure, teacher training, and access to technology. However, Indonesia is a culturally diverse nation with more than 300 distinct ethnic groups (BPS, 2020). Meanwhile, curricula that are frequently developed with a top-down approach tend to disregard the local context and the distinctive requirements of rural communities (Suryadarma & Jones, 2013). This condition requires an all-inclusive and diverse educational approach in order to accommodate a variety of requirements (Suryadarma, 2013).

Traditional curriculum design methods frequently take a top-down approach, placing a heavy emphasis on meeting national and international standards without adequately considering the social, cultural, and economic context of students (Schiro, 2013). This approach, while assuring a level of uniformity and standardization, may not effectively meet unique local contexts and needs, frequently resulting in a disconnect between the curriculum and the realities of learners (Bishop & Glynn, 1999; Gay, 2010). As a result, students may experience a sense of alienation from the material being taught, which has the potential to reduce motivation and achievement. In rural and culturally diversified communities, this disconnect can exacerbate educational disparities (Aikman & Rao, 2012).

Understanding the unique challenges and opportunities in this context is essential to designing effective and sustainable education interventions in rural areas. Through this research, education stakeholders will be better equipped to adapt education to local requirements, promote holistic development, and contribute to Indonesia's goals for sustainable development. This study concentrates on the "Co-Designing Curriculum" approach for rural education in Indonesia, with an emphasis on incorporating the local context into the curriculum. This approach acknowledges that effective educational solutions necessitate a comprehensive comprehension of the social, cultural, and economic context of the communities served (Sanders & Stappers, 2008). Therefore, incorporating local stakeholders such as instructors, students, parents, and community members into the curriculum development process can increase educational relevance and participation. A more inclusive and participatory approach will be more effective, especially in rural areas or communities with unique requirements.

This study sought to examine the processes and outcomes of curriculum co-design in Indonesian rural education institutions. This includes evaluating the collaborative role of stakeholders in implementing the joint design of curricula in rural areas and determining how this approach can promote holistic educational development in harmony with the local context. A specific study case will be used to examine the co-designing curriculum in education in Indonesia implemented by the Innovation for Indonesia's School Children (INOVASI) Programme. This programme is a partnership between the Governments of Australia (GoA) and Indonesia (GoI) to identify and support changes to education practises, systems and policies using a bespoke approach: local solutions to local learning challenges in four provinces in Indonesia, including West Nusa Tenggara, East Nusa Tenggara, North Kalimantan, and East Java.

## **Conceptual Framework**

### **Co-Design in Education Curriculum**

Co-design is a collaborative and participatory approach that facilitates the joint involvement of designers and users in the development of the ultimate product or service, with the aim of accommodating the requirements and preferences of the end-users (Sanders & Stappers, 2008). This method is frequently implemented within the business sector when companies strive to fulfil client expectations and meet their demands effectively. The objective of this procedure is to enhance the agency of all individuals involved through the establishment of mechanisms that guarantee the inclusion, acknowledgment, and integration of every perspective within the ultimate framework (Bjögvinsson, Ehn, & Hillgren, 2012). The characteristics of participatory design/co-design, as outlined by Sanders and Stappers (2008), Bjögvinsson, Ehn, and Hillgren (2012), Simonsen and Robertson (2012), encompass the following aspects:

- a) Collaborative: This procedure entails the active and coordinated participation of multiple stakeholders.
- b) Empowerment: The co-design approach places a strong emphasis on empowering participants and acknowledging the significance of each individual's voice.
- c) Iterative Process: The iterative approach necessitates ongoing evaluations and modifications in order to attain optimal outcomes.
- d) Practical Applications: Co-design is centred around addressing practical challenges that are pertinent to the intended recipients.
- e) Inclusivity: This methodology places significant emphasis on the active participation of all relevant stakeholders, particularly those who are frequently marginalised or overlooked within conventional design processes.

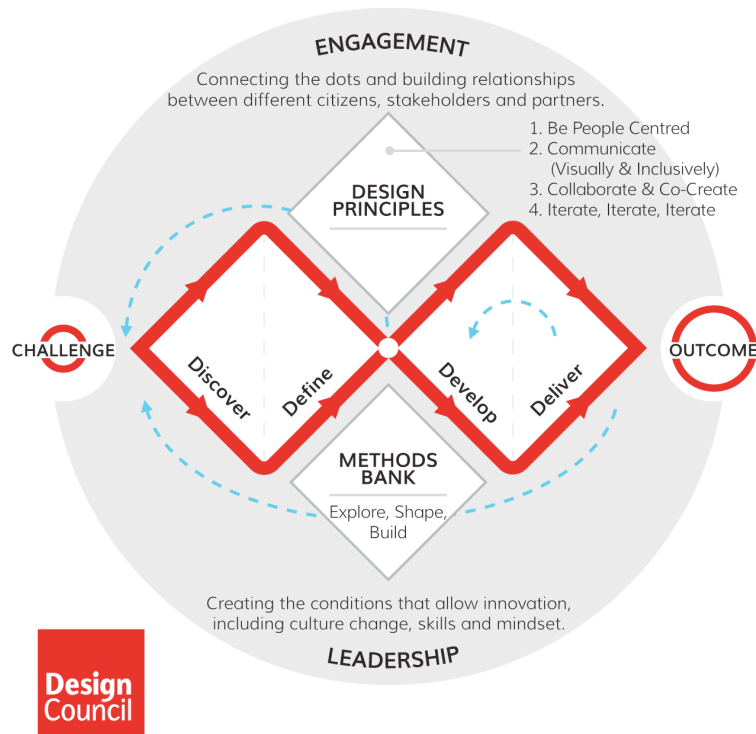


Figure 1. Co-Design Process: The Design Council's Double Diamond  
(Retrieved from: Design Council, 2019)

Co-design, within the framework of an educational curriculum, maintains a participatory and comprehensive approach wherein diverse stakeholders, including educators, learners, guardians, and members of the local community, engage in collective efforts to collaborate on the design and advancement of the curriculum. There are some co-design principles in the development of educational curricula. *First*, the collaborative process of co-design in educational curricula places emphasis on the involvement of various stakeholders in order to develop educational solutions that are suitable for the specific local environment (Sanders & Stappers, 2008). *Second*, the concept of learner empowerment involves engaging students in the design process, so enabling them to assume responsibility for their curriculum. This approach has been found to have a positive impact on motivation and active involvement in the learning process (Bavill et al., 2011). *Third*, the utilization of co-design in curriculum development enables the incorporation of local cultural values and social circumstances, hence enhancing the relevance and appeal of education for learners (Bishop & Glynn, 1999). *Last*, the process of iteration and reflection requires continuous adjustment and contemplation to ensure that the curriculum remains adaptable and sensitive to evolving requirements (Brown, 2008).

### Holistic Education Development

The objective of a holistic approach to education is to provide comprehensive education to individuals, encompassing various dimensions such as intellectual, social, emotional, physical, and spiritual components (Miller, 2007). The approach aims to offer a comprehensive educational experience that takes into account significant facets of human development. In order to effectively evaluate holistic education, it is imperative to consider and examine each dimension within its respective context.

- a) The Cognitive Development Dimension encompasses the cultivation of critical thinking abilities, creativity, problem-solving aptitude, and academic consciousness. The examination of this particular facet of assessment requires careful consideration of how students demonstrate the application of their knowledge and abilities in authentic and practical situations (Paul & Elder, 2006).
- b) The physical development dimension encompasses the student's overall physical well-being, motor skills proficiency, and engagement in physical activities. The authors Gallahue and Donnelly (2007) argue that physical health serves as the fundamental basis for achieving successful learning and growth.
- c) The Emotional Development Dimension encompasses various aspects such as self-awareness, self-regulation, resilience, and the capacity to cope with stress. The incorporation of emotional intelligence into the curriculum has the potential to facilitate this developmental process (Goleman, 1995).
- d) The social development dimension encompasses the capacity of pupils to establish and sustain positive interpersonal connections, demonstrate empathy, and collaborate effectively. The importance of social development in the acquisition of training and interpersonal skills is significant (Zins et al., 2004).
- e) The dimensions of moral development encapsulate the student's perception of fairness, adherence to ethical principles, demonstration of respect towards others, and engagement in civic activities. The integration of moral principles into curricula has the potential to promote this developmental process (Lickona, 1996).

## **Methods**

This study employs a qualitative research methodology to gain a comprehensive understanding of the processes and impacts associated with curriculum co-design within the specific context of rural education in Indonesia. This methodology enables researchers to investigate the perspectives, encounters, and interpretations linked to the co-design procedure from diverse stakeholders (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The data was gathered via many methodologies, encompassing in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis. According to Krueger and Casey (2014), in-depth interviews are a valuable research method that enables researchers to obtain comprehensive perspectives from individuals. On the other hand, focus group discussions offer valuable insights into social dynamics and collective opinions. Besides, document analysis provides written documentation that serves as evidence of current practises and rules (Bowen, 2009). The utilisation of numerous data sources, methodologies, or theories in the triangulation method serves to establish the credibility and soundness of research findings, resulting in a comprehensive and harmonious representation (Denzin, 1978). The study encompassed informants, consisting of teachers, students, parents, and local community members. These individuals were selected from rural regions in Indonesia, including West Nusa Tenggara, East Nusa Tenggara, North Kalimantan, and East Java. In order to foster a comprehensive and nuanced comprehension of the phenomenon under investigation, it is imperative to include a diverse range of stakeholders, ensuring the inclusion of multiple views in the research process (Flick, 2018).

## **Findings and Discussions**

### **Co-Design in the Education Curriculum Development Process: Case Studies in Four Provinces Implementing INOVASI Programs in Indonesia**

This research successfully delineated the process of co-designing an educational curriculum, encompassing the many stages of co-design and elucidating the respective roles assumed by the stakeholders engaged in this process. The stages exemplify an inclusive and adaptable approach, wherein stakeholders play an active role in every facet of curriculum design, and the design itself demonstrates flexibility and responsiveness to feedback and evolving requirements. The collaborative and iterative approach in this program encompasses multiple stages, which include:

#### A) Preliminary Investigation

1. **Comprehending the Local Context:** This phase entails the recognition of the requirements, obstacles, and distinctive attributes of the local community through on-site visits to rural educational institutions, facilitating engagement with students, educators, parents, and community members. It is crucial to comprehend the significance of this concept in order to guarantee the relevance and adaptability of the curriculum being produced, as emphasised by Bjögvinsson, Ehn, and Hillgren (2012).
2. **Enhancing the Capacity and Capability of Stakeholders:** Workshops are organised with the aim of providing training to educators and parents on the fundamental concepts of collaborative design. Engaging in this activity facilitates the development of the requisite competencies for active involvement in the design process, particularly in the regions of West Nusa Tenggara, East Nusa Tenggara, and North Kalimantan. Surprisingly, the aforementioned step did not transpire in the region of East Java. This observation suggests the presence of variations in the starting capabilities or strategic strategy employed by the respective regions. The process of capacity building plays a crucial role in enabling the empowerment and active engagement of all stakeholders in the design process, as highlighted by Sanders and Stappers (2008).

#### B) Discovery

1. The identification of educational needs and problems has significant importance in identifying the focal points within the curriculum and effectively addressing the specific obstacles encountered by local communities (Miller, 2010). A series of open dialogues were undertaken with students in order to ascertain their areas of interest in the realm of education, as well as to determine any perceived deficiencies within the existing curriculum.

#### C) The development and prototyping

1. **Brainstorming and Conceptualization of Curriculum:** A collaborative session was conducted, involving educators, students, and parents, to generate ideas and conceptualise a novel curriculum that would effectively address the specific requirements of the local community. The involvement of stakeholders in interactive and cooperative dialogues holds significance in the formulation of the preliminary framework of the curriculum (Brown & Wyatt, 2010).
2. **Curriculum Refinement:** Following multiple iterations of input and modifications, the curriculum concept underwent refinement to verify its alignment with the specific local context, needs, and expectations.

#### D) Deliver

1. **Curriculum Implementation:** The implementation of the new curriculum was carried out through a pilot programme, wherein teachers had extensive training and students actively engaged in learning that was more contextualised and stimulating. The

execution of the implementation process is facilitated through the active involvement and collaboration of all relevant parties.

2. Curriculum Revision in Response to Feedback: Following the completion of the testing semester, comprehensive feedback is gathered from all relevant parties, and subsequent modifications are implemented to the curriculum in order to effectively address any identified issues or obstacles. This redesign acknowledges the iterative nature of the design process, wherein the feedback is utilised to facilitate ongoing enhancements (Cresswell, 2014).

<b>Stage</b>	<b>Sub Stage</b>	<b>Location</b>
Initial Exploration (Discover)	Understanding the local context	All regions
	Building stakeholders capacity and capabilities	West Nusa Tenggara, East Nusa Tenggara, North Kalimantan
Discovery	Identifying educational needs and challenges	All regions
Develop/ Prototyping	Brainstorming and conceptualizing the curriculum	All regions
	Refining the curriculum	All regions
Deliver	Implementing the curriculum	All regions
	Revising the curriculum based on feedback	All regions

Table 1. Co-Design Curriculum Stages in Four Provinces Implementing INOVASI Program

In the West Nusa Tenggara region, there is a significant focus on identifying local educational difficulties. The co-design method yields a curriculum that places emphasis on the acknowledgment of local culture and regional languages, thereby fostering a sense of pride and identity among pupils. In the region of East Nusa Tenggara, the practice of co-design entails active community participation in the identification of economic education requirements. The curriculum that ensues places a strong emphasis on local agricultural practices and the development of commercial acumen, so equipping students with enhanced readiness for the regional labor market. In the context of North Kalimantan, the co-design approach prioritizes the comprehensive comprehension of the environmental context and explores the potential of education in contributing to conservation efforts. The curriculum that has been developed includes modules that focus on the preservation of forests and river ecosystems, aligning with the specific geographical environment of the area. The co-design approach in East Java does not encompass the incorporation of stakeholder capacity and capability development stages. The outcome is a curriculum that is expedited in its development process. The geographical positioning of East Java province on Indonesia's highly populated island, along with its convenient access to a wide range of public services and facilities, potentially influencing variations in the province's capacity and capability to effectively implement co-design strategies.

### **Characteristics of Co-Design in the Process of Developing the Education Curriculum in Indonesia**

The approach of Co-Designing Curriculum for Rural Education in Indonesia is characterised by inclusivity, collaboration, and iteration. This strategy aims to develop a curriculum that is pertinent, influential, and suitable to rural Indonesia's specific circumstances and requirements via a focus on empowerment, involvement, and continuous reflection.

Inclusivity and empowerment are crucial in fostering a more equitable and just society. In order to achieve this, it is important to consider the role of reflexivity and agreement. This procedure promotes active contemplation and consensus-building among participants regarding objectives, approaches, and anticipated outcomes. According to Bjögvinsson, Ehn, and Hillgren (2012), the establishment of a shared understanding and the assurance of equal participation enable the inclusion of all perspectives and ensure that every individual's voice is acknowledged. Codetermination refers to the inclusive practise wherein various stakeholders, such as teachers, students, parents, and community members, are afforded the opportunity to actively engage in the process of decision-making. This practise guarantees that all individuals are actively involved in the process of selecting both the trajectory and substance of the educational programme.

Collaborative development ensures the engagement and participation of all stakeholders, which is integral to curriculum building, facilitating a comprehensive representation of diverse perspectives and requirements (Sanders & Stappers, 2008). The design process incorporates both formal and informal processes to facilitate consensus and agreement, hence promoting equitable representation and collective decision-making.

The iterative process is characterised by the continual participation of all relevant stakeholders, which facilitates the incorporation of changes and adaptations throughout the development process (Scharmer & Kaufer, 2013). A reexamination of developmental phases allows for the possibility of revisiting previous stages, so facilitating the implementation of changes and adjustments informed by feedback and experiential knowledge. Sustained reflection involves the ongoing examination of goals, methods, and outcomes, which facilitates ongoing enhancement and collective knowledge acquisition. This practise ensures that processes remain adaptable to evolving demands and dynamics.

### **The Impact of Co-Designing Curriculum: Holistic Education Development Evaluation**

The findings of the evaluation of co-designing curriculum for rural education in Indonesia demonstrate a noteworthy influence on several facets pertaining to the comprehensive growth of pupils, encompassing:

1. **Cognitive Development:** The co-design process, characterised by stages of brainstorming and discussion, has been found to facilitate the enhancement of students' critical thinking abilities, creativity, problem-solving skills, and academic performance. This strategy promotes the development of critical thinking and creative problem-solving skills among students, equipping them with the necessary tools to navigate academic and real-world obstacles.
2. **Physical development** encompasses various aspects of an individual's well-being, including their physical health, motor skills, and engagement in physical activities such as games and ice-breaking exercises during the co-design process. These factors serve as indicators of a favourable impact on students' physical development. This intervention facilitates the development of positive lifestyle behaviours and enhances motor proficiency.
3. **Emotional growth** is facilitated by the co-design process, as it contributes to the cultivation of self-awareness, self-regulation, resilience, and stress management skills. The significance of this matter lies in the necessity for students to be exposed to a diverse range of perspectives during debates, as this facilitates the development of empathy and a deeper comprehension of others.



4. Social development encompasses the acquisition and refinement of abilities related to the establishment and sustenance of positive interpersonal connections, the demonstration of empathy, and the cultivation of effective collaboration. These proficiencies are further augmented throughout the co-designing stage. Engaging in activities that foster teamwork and social skills can be beneficial for individuals in their everyday lives.
5. Moral development is a multifaceted process that encompasses the cultivation of various qualities such as justice, ethical behaviour, respect for others, and civic involvement. These attributes are fostered through active participation and deliberation within the co-design process. The inclusion of character formation and the cultivation of strong ethical ideals are beneficial aspects of education.

In a general sense, the implementation of the co-design approach within the rural curriculum in Indonesia has yielded favourable outcomes in terms of the pertinence, involvement, communal ties, and comprehensive growth of students. This is a significant stride towards fostering a comprehensive and influential educational system that effectively addresses the requirements and ambitions of all involved parties.

Co-designed curricula possess enhanced relevance since they integrate local context, cultural values, and real-world applications, aligning more closely with students' lives. According to Schwartz and Arena (2013), the use of this approach guarantees that the content being taught aligns with the specific requirements and ambitions of the students, hence facilitating a more profound comprehension and engagement with the subject matter. The co-design approach facilitates sustainable development and the preservation of local culture by including an appreciation for the local context and cultural values.

The act of actively participating in the co-design process has been found to result in a heightened degree of engagement among students. According to Woolner et al. (2015), individuals demonstrate increased engagement in their education and a greater recognition of the practical applicability of their learning in daily life and local communities through their involvement in curriculum development. The co-design method enables students to establish connections and engage with their immediate community, so enhancing their educational experience. According to Sanders and Stappers (2008), this facilitates students' comprehension and admiration of their culture and heritage, while also affording the community avenues to contribute to the field of education.

The holistic development approach places emphasis on the comprehensive growth of students, encompassing not only academic learning but also socio-emotional and cultural learning. According to Miller (2007), this practise contributes to the development of well-rounded persons who acquire the essential skills and attitudes required for achieving success in both personal and professional domains. The process of co-design facilitates the empowerment of various stakeholders, encompassing teachers, students, parents, and members of the local community. According to Bjögvinsson, Ehn, and Hillgren (2012), this phenomenon contributes to the establishment of a collective feeling of ownership and accountability within the realm of education. This strategy fosters innovation in the field of education by creating opportunities for the generation of innovative ideas and the implementation of novel strategies that are tailored to address individual requirements and local attributes.

## **Conclusion and Recommendation**

### **Conclusion**

The co-design of curricula in rural schools in Indonesia is a complex endeavour that involves the active participation and collaboration of multiple stakeholders, such as teachers, students, parents, and members of the local community. By employing this methodology, the research team engages in direct interaction with the individuals who will experience the impact of the curriculum. This facilitates the integration of a profound comprehension of the regional context and cultural principles into the educational programme, yielding subject matter that is both pertinent and captivating to the pupils. Put simply, the curriculum that emerges is not just grounded in theoretical abstractions and concepts but also takes into account the practicalities and genuine requirements of the communities being catered to.

The curriculum that is collaboratively constructed demonstrates efficacy in enhancing educational pertinence for pupils, aligning closely with their specific local circumstances. This phenomenon fosters a heightened sense of affiliation and engaged participation within the immediate vicinity, hence enhancing pupils' sense of belongingness to their cultural heritage and customary practises. Furthermore, this methodology facilitates the comprehensive growth of pupils, encompassing not only their academic progress but also their social, emotional, and moral development. This phenomenon results in an enhanced and more profound educational experience, encompassing not just theoretical knowledge found in textbooks but also the cultivation of personal attributes and practical competencies essential for navigating daily existence.

### **Policy Recommendations**

1. **Enhancing Collaboration:** The formulation of policies should build a comprehensive structure that fosters and promotes collaborative curriculum development, encompassing the active participation of all relevant parties, particularly in rural regions. By implementing this approach, it can be ensured that the inclusion of diverse perspectives will be prioritised, leading to the delivery of education that is more aligned with the specific requirements and preferences of the local community.
2. **Capacity building:** This is a crucial aspect of the co-design process since it involves investing in training and development opportunities for teachers and other stakeholders. This investment is necessary to ensure their successful engagement in the process. The acquisition and refinement of the requisite information and abilities for engaging in this collaborative method necessitate systematic instruction and ongoing development.
3. **Advocate for Holistic Education:** Policies ought to prioritise the comprehensive advancement of pupils, encompassing not alone academic accomplishments but also the cultivation of their holistic development. This comprehensive framework encompasses various dimensions of a student's personal growth, encompassing academic, social, emotional, physical, and moral domains.
4. **Curriculum Evaluation:** The application of an evaluation framework is crucial in assessing the efficacy of the existing curriculum in facilitating the promotion of relevance, engagement, and holistic development. Continuous assessment will aid in the modification and enhancement of the curriculum to guarantee its alignment with the specific requirements and obstacles of the local context.

## **Limitations**

This research is limited to certain areas in Indonesia, such as West Nusa Tenggara, East Nusa Tenggara, North Kalimantan, and East Java. Therefore, the findings may not be generalizable to all rural areas in Indonesia. This may affect the depth and richness of the data collected. Using a qualitative research design provides an in-depth understanding of processes and outcomes but may lack in producing findings that can be measured and quantified. In addition, the unique nature of the culture and local context of each area studied may influence the interpretation and relevance of the findings in other contexts. Further research is needed to understand in depth how the co-design process can meet the specific needs and challenges of various rural communities in Indonesia.

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