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Collaborative Governance in the Economic Development of Long Nah Village: Public Administration as a Multidisciplinary and Interdisciplinary Field

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ABSTRACT

Village economic development requires collaboration between government, the private sector, and communities. This study analyses the collaboration between the Long Nah Village Government in East Kutai Regency, Indonesia, and PT Evans Indonesia in developing the village economy, and examines it from the perspective of public administration as a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary field. A descriptive qualitative design was used. Primary data were collected through interviews with purposively selected informants from the village government, the company, and the Long Nah community. Secondary data came from the minutes of a socialisation meeting held on 2 September 2026 and the 2026 memorandum of understanding (MoU). The findings show that the collaboration involves the village government, the company, and the community as principal actors, with the regency government, academics, and non-governmental organisations as supporting actors. The agreement includes a commitment to recruit 70% of the workforce locally and a plan to allocate 20% of economic benefits to the local community. Local recruitment has begun but remains limited, as the company is still rehabilitating the plantation and is not yet fully operational. The constraints identified are gaps between workers' qualifications and job requirements, age limits for certain positions, and the absence of a detailed benefit-sharing mechanism. A multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary analysis shows that these problems can be addressed by integrating perspectives from law, economics, sociology, anthropology, education, and environmental studies.

INTRODUCTION

Sustainable economic development in villages has become an increasingly important issue in Indonesia's national development. Many villages still experience economic and social inequality and struggle to build local economic self-reliance. The 2014 Village Law expanded villages' authority and resources, but it also made village governments responsible for brokering development with actors beyond the state (Antlöv et al., 2016). Village economic development therefore depends not only on the village government's capacity to manage its resources, but also on the collaboration it builds with non-governmental actors. Business partners can open employment opportunities, stimulate economic activity, and contribute to community development.

Oil palm is one of the most significant drivers of rural economic change in Indonesia. Its expansion has raised household incomes and village wealth in many areas (Euler et al., 2017; Qaim et al., 2020), yet its social impacts are neither uniformly positive nor uniformly negative, and benefits often accrue with considerable delay after plantations are established (Santika et al., 2019). Partnerships between companies and local communities have long been used to

involve smallholders in the industry, and evidence suggests that well-designed contracts are essential for communities to share in the gains (Gatto et al., 2017). Poorly designed arrangements, by contrast, can leave participating households vulnerable to poverty (Cahyadi & Waibel, 2016). Reviews of contract farming similarly conclude that welfare effects depend heavily on contract design and on who is able to participate (Bellemare & Bloem, 2018).

Long Nah Village, in Muara Ancalong District, East Kutai Regency, East Kalimantan Province, is closely linked to oil palm plantation activity. The village government and PT Evans Indonesia (PT EI) have formed a collaborative network expected to shape the village economy. The principal actors are the village government, which conveys residents' aspirations, facilitates communication, registers prospective workers, and supervises the agreement; PT EI, the purchaser under a conditional share sale and purchase agreement (*Perjanjian Pengikatan Jual Beli*, PPJB); and the community, which is expected to benefit through local employment and benefit sharing. The supporting actors are the regency government and relevant agencies, which provide guidance and oversight, and academics and non-governmental organisations, which provide assistance and policy literacy.

According to the information obtained, the Long Nah Village Government and PT EI concluded a memorandum of understanding (MoU) in 2026. The agreement includes a commitment to recruit 70% of the workforce locally and a plan to allocate 20% of economic benefits to the whole Long Nah community. The minutes of the socialisation meeting of 2 September 2026 are a separate document that records the socialisation of the planned change of share ownership and management of PT Kalimantan Wahana Berjaya (PT KWB) to the village government, community leaders, and residents.

Initial information indicates that office work requires senior secondary education, while field work such as fertilising is open to candidates with primary or junior secondary education who meet technical and safety requirements, and a maximum age of 45 applies only to certain positions. Requirements are thus differentiated by type of work rather than applied uniformly.

Implementing the local recruitment commitment may nonetheless face challenges if residents' qualifications do not match the company's needs. A public problem may also arise over how the 70% commitment is applied when the community expects broad access to employment. The plan to allocate 20% of economic benefits to all residents likewise requires a clear distribution mechanism. These issues are typical of cross-sector collaborations, which require deliberate design to align divergent interests, resources, and expectations (Bryson et al., 2015).

Collaborative governance offers a framework for analysing such arrangements. It brings public and private stakeholders together in collective, consensus-oriented forums to make and implement public decisions, and it increasingly relies on collaborative platforms that sustain cooperation over time (Ansell & Gash, 2018). Collaboration turns public organisations and citizens into co-creators of public value (Torfing et al., 2019), and the value of services is ultimately realised through the experiences of their users (Osborne et al., 2016). Whether collaborations succeed, however, depends on particular combinations of conditions, such as institutional design, leadership, and trust, rather than on any single factor (Douglas et al., 2020).

Understanding such collaborations also requires knowledge from several disciplines. Public administration has long been described as an interdisciplinary field, and recent mapping of the literature shows how it integrates knowledge from public policy, management, and other fields (LePere-Schloop & Nesbit, 2022). Editors of leading journals have called for research that engages more deeply with adjacent disciplines to address complex public problems (McDonald et al., 2022), while others caution that interdisciplinarity must be purposeful rather than an end in itself (Willems, 2016). Drawing on this view, this study analyses the collaboration between the Long Nah Village Government, PT EI, and the

local community, and examines it from the perspective of public administration as a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary field.

METHOD

This study used a descriptive qualitative design to describe and interpret the processes, experiences, views, and documents relating to the collaboration, an approach suited to examining a phenomenon in depth within its real-life context (Harrison et al., 2017). The study focused on the cooperation between the Long Nah Village Government and PT EI in village economic development, covering the background and public problem that prompted the collaboration, the actors involved and their roles, its chronology, the form of the agreement, and its early results and constraints; the analysis also applied the perspective of public administration as a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary field. Primary data were collected through interviews with informants who knew of or were involved in the cooperation, particularly from the village government, the company, and the community. Informants were selected purposively to ensure that they could speak knowledgeably about the collaboration (Campbell et al., 2020).

Secondary data were obtained from archival and documentary sources held by the Long Nah Village Government and other relevant documents, namely the minutes of the socialisation meeting of 2 September 2026 and the 2026 MoU between the Long Nah Village Government and PT EI. These documents were treated as texts to be read critically for what they do and do not establish (Morgan, 2022); for example, the minutes were read as evidence that socialisation took place, not as proof that the change of ownership had been completed. Interview and documentary data were analysed thematically by coding, grouping, and interpreting patterns of meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2019), and the analysis distinguished between what informants reported and what each document actually records, so that the content of one source was not attributed to another (Nowell et al., 2017).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Background and Chronology of the Collaboration

The cooperation between the Long Nah Village Government and PT EI arose from the need to ensure that oil palm plantation activity in the village benefits the local community. The expected benefits include not only the continuity of the company's operations, but also employment opportunities, higher household incomes, and economic benefits shared across the community. PT Kalimantan Wahana Berjaya (PT KWB) began operating in 2018 and was dormant from 2023 to 2026. In 2026, PT EI entered as the purchaser in the process of changing PT KWB's share ownership and management. Once the process began, the company started to rehabilitate, repair, and maintain the plantation and supporting facilities. At the time of data collection, the company was not yet fully operational, so its labour needs and recruitment were still adjusting to the stages of recovery. This pattern is consistent with evidence that the benefits of oil palm development for communities often arrive with a delay after the start of plantation activity (Santika et al., 2019).

The minutes of the socialisation meeting held on 2 September 2026 at the Long Nah Village Office record the socialisation of the planned change of share ownership and management of PT KWB and refer to the conditional share sale and purchase agreement (PPJB) between PT KWB's existing shareholders as sellers and PT EI as purchaser. The socialisation is described as a precondition for the transfer or takeover of management and as a means for the village government, community leaders, and residents to be informed of and witness the process. The minutes therefore prove that socialisation took place, but do not by themselves prove that the takeover has been completed.

The minutes also record the areas already handed over: approximately 1,188.90 hectares

under a land transfer document registered on 9 September 2019 and referred to again in a May 2026 document, and approximately 76.77 hectares under a land transfer document dated 27 July 2020. The document states that these areas have been compensated and are free of unresolved community claims. This statement is treated here as the content of the minutes and would need to be checked against land records and compensation documents before being used as the basis for a legal conclusion. The minutes record the socialisation and the planned change of ownership and management, whereas the MoU is the main reference for the commitments on local recruitment and benefit sharing. This distinction matters so that the content of one document is not mistakenly attributed to the other.

Local Recruitment and the 70% Commitment

The central public problem is how the Long Nah community can obtain a fair share of the benefits of the company's activities while the company maintains its operational standards and labour requirements. The village government plays a bridging role. The company needs workers who meet competence and safety standards, while the community expects employment opportunities that match residents' education, age, and experience. Such divergent expectations are common in company–community partnerships in the oil palm sector, where the welfare gains for communities depend on how the arrangement is designed and who is able to participate (Bellemare & Bloem, 2018; Gatto et al., 2017).

The commitment to recruit 70% of the workforce locally is a key element of the cooperation, because it is meant to widen residents' access to jobs in their own area. It is being realised, however, while the company is still rehabilitating and maintaining the plantation and is not yet fully operational. The number of workers recruited in the early stage cannot therefore be taken as a final measure of the agreement's success; assessment must take account of operational stages and the number of workers needed at each stage. Evidence from Indonesia shows that oil palm employment can raise household welfare, but that the gains are uneven across groups and depend on households' ability to take up the opportunities offered (Euler et al., 2017; Qaim et al., 2020).

Initial information indicates that senior secondary education is generally required for office and administrative work, while some field work, such as fertilising and certain operational tasks, is open to candidates with primary or junior secondary education provided they meet technical, skill, and safety requirements. Educational requirements therefore cannot be generalised to all positions, and the company should publish the qualifications for each position so that residents know which opportunities are available. The maximum age of 45 years is said to apply only to certain positions. Its application should be explained by the characteristics and demands of each job rather than applied automatically to all work. The village government can request a written explanation of which positions apply an age limit, the reasons for it, and alternative jobs for residents who do not meet the criteria for a given position.

From a collaborative governance perspective, the recruitment issue shows the importance of dialogue and shared understanding (Ansell & Gash, 2008). The company needs to explain the standards it requires, while the village government can help map residents' education, age, experience, and skills. Together they can develop training matched to job needs, so that limited formal education does not automatically close off opportunities but becomes a basis for designing capacity building. For the 70% commitment to be evaluated objectively, the MoU or its implementing documents should specify whether the percentage is calculated on the total workforce, on new hires, or on labour needs at each operational stage, and how "local worker" is defined, for example by residence or civil registration.

The 20% Benefit-Sharing Plan

In addition to local recruitment, the cooperation includes a plan for compensation or economic benefit sharing of 20% for the whole Long Nah community. The plan signals that

the benefits of the company's presence are meant to reach not only residents who work for it directly, but the community more broadly. From a village development perspective, benefit sharing can strengthen social acceptance and increase the contribution of business activity to community welfare. The terms and mechanism of the 20% share, however, must be stated carefully. On the information available, the figure is described as compensation or economic benefit sharing and is associated with the term *plasma* (company-facilitated community plantations), but there is not yet a full account of its basis of calculation, form, timing, or distribution procedure. This article therefore does not conclude that the 20% refers to net profit, plantation area, or any specific obligation until this is confirmed by the MoU and related documents. The caution is warranted: evidence from Indonesia shows that partnership schemes can benefit communities when well designed (Gatto et al., 2017), but can leave participants vulnerable when their terms are unclear or unfavourable (Cahyadi & Waibel, 2016).

Early Results, Constraints, and the Collaborative Process

The company has begun rehabilitating and maintaining the plantation, although it is not yet fully operational. Local recruitment has begun but remains limited and must be seen in light of the company's recovery stage. The main constraints are the incomplete recovery of operations, limited labour needs in the early stage, differences between residents' education and skills and job requirements, age requirements for certain positions, and the lack of detail on the 20% benefit-sharing mechanism in the information available. A further constraint is the need to ensure the continuity of commitments after the change of ownership and management. The current achievements are therefore better described as institutional and early-process outcomes than as final success. Substantive success can be judged only once the company operates more steadily, the 70% commitment can be calculated from workforce data, and the 20% benefit-sharing mechanism begins to operate as agreed.

The cooperation can be analysed through the collaborative governance framework of Ansell and Gash (2008), which emphasises face-to-face dialogue, trust building, commitment to the process, shared understanding, and intermediate outcomes. The socialisation of 2 September 2026 and the 2026 MoU represent an initial communication space and formal commitment. Documents alone, however, do not show that collaboration is working; its effectiveness must be judged by community involvement, information openness, implementation of commitments, and joint evaluation. Cross-sector collaborations rarely succeed without deliberate attention to governance structures, leadership, and accountability over time (Bryson et al., 2015), and their performance depends on combinations of conditions rather than on any single factor (Douglas et al., 2020). Durable collaborative platforms are needed to sustain cooperation beyond one-off events (Ansell & Gash, 2018). A forum held only at the socialisation stage is not enough to oversee all operational stages; regular meetings are needed to discuss labour needs, recruitment results, training, company progress, and the realisation of benefit sharing. Under the 2014 Village Law, the village government is well placed to convene such forums, but its capacity to do so varies and needs support from the regency government (Antlöv et al., 2016).

A Multidisciplinary and Interdisciplinary Review

The problems in the Long Nah–PT EI cooperation show that public administration problems cannot be analysed through a single discipline. Multidisciplinarity places several disciplinary perspectives side by side, whereas interdisciplinarity integrates them into a joint understanding and solution; public administration draws on both (LePere-Schloop & Nesbit, 2022). Table 1 sets out the perspectives relevant to this case.

Table 1. Disciplinary perspectives on the Long Nah collaboration

Discipline	Focus	Issue in the Long Nah case

Public administration	Coordination, accountability, implementation	How commitments are monitored, reported, and evaluated
Law	Legal standing of agreements; employment rules	Status of the PPJB, minutes, and MoU; legality of age and education requirements
Economics	Job creation and distribution of benefits	Whether 70% local recruitment and 20% benefit sharing raise household welfare
Sociology and anthropology	Social conditions, culture, expectations, community–company relations	Residents' expectations of employment and perceptions of fairness
Education	Qualification gaps and skills development	Matching residents' education to job requirements; technical training
Environmental studies	Sustainability of plantation activity	Long-term ecological effects of rehabilitating the plantation

Source: Authors' analysis, 2026

An interdisciplinary approach integrates these perspectives to formulate interconnected solutions. The low formal education of some residents, for example, cannot be solved simply by asking the company to lower its standards across the board. The village government and the company can identify positions suited to residents' abilities, design technical training, strengthen occupational safety, and create a transparent vacancy information system. This solution connects public administration, human resource management, education, economics, and labour policy. The 20% benefit-sharing plan likewise requires law to secure the basis of the agreement, public administration to govern and supervise it, economics to assess its distributive effects, and sociology to ensure social acceptance and fairness. Multidisciplinarity helps identify all dimensions of the problem, while interdisciplinarity combines this knowledge into integrated policy recommendations. This reflects calls for public administration research to engage more closely with adjacent disciplines when addressing complex problems (McDonald et al., 2022), while ensuring that interdisciplinarity serves a clear purpose (Willems, 2016).

Several steps follow. The Long Nah Village Government and PT EI should revisit the MoU to ensure that the 70% local recruitment and 20% benefit-sharing commitments have clear definitions and indicators. The company should present a labour plan for the rehabilitation, preparation, and full-operation stages, including the requirements for each position. The village government can build a database of prospective local workers by education, age, experience, and skills while protecting personal data. The village government, the company, and relevant agencies can organise training matched to field needs, and a regular communication and evaluation forum involving the company, the village government, and community representatives should be established. The 20% benefit-sharing mechanism should be set out in writing, including its basis of calculation, form, recipients, schedule, reporting, and complaint handling. Clear and accountable arrangements of this kind strengthen trust between collaborating parties and make it possible to hold each party to its commitments (Koliba, 2025).

CONCLUSION

The collaboration between the Long Nah Village Government and PT Evans Indonesia arose from the need to ensure that oil palm plantation activity delivers real benefits to the local community. It involves the village government, the company, and the community as principal actors, supported by the regency government, academics, and non-governmental organisations. The village government acts as a bridge between the interests of the company

and the community, while the company is the party that needs labour. The cooperation contains two commitments: recruiting 70% of the workforce locally and allocating 20% of economic benefits to the community.

Implementation is still at an early stage: the company is not yet fully operational, local recruitment remains limited, and the benefit-sharing mechanism has not been fully set out. The constraints to be managed are gaps in education and skills, age requirements for certain positions, and the continuity of commitments after the change of ownership. From a disciplinary perspective, the case affirms that public administration is a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary field that requires the integration of knowledge across disciplines. Multidisciplinarily, the case can be viewed through law, economics, sociology, anthropology, education, and environmental studies; interdisciplinarily, these perspectives must be integrated into more coherent solutions. The collaboration should therefore proceed through a cross-disciplinary approach that maps jobs to local capacities, provides technical training, and governs benefit sharing transparently and accountably.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

DH: conceptualization, investigation, formal analysis, and writing–original draft preparation. M: methodology, theoretical framework development, validation, and writing–review and editing. AL: literature review, data curation, and writing–review and editing. AW: supervision, interpretation of findings, and writing–review and editing. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest related to the research, authorship, or publication of this manuscript.

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