Complex Adaptive System Approach in Coastal Poverty Alleviation: Evidence from Takalar Regency, Indonesia

Adriana M[1*], Gita Susanti[1]

[1]Administrasi Publik Fakultas Ilmu Sosial Dan Ilmu Politik Universitas Hasanuddin Makassar

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ABSTRACT:
This study examines the implementation of the Complex Adaptive System approach in coastal poverty alleviation governance in Takalar Regency, Indonesia. The research aims to analyze how interactions among multiple actors, adaptive governance mechanisms, and emergent socio-economic patterns shape poverty reduction efforts within vulnerable coastal communities. A qualitative case study approach was employed through in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis involving government institutions, village administrations, community facilitators, non-governmental organizations, and coastal residents. The findings indicate that coastal poverty alleviation in Takalar operates through dynamic interactions among heterogeneous actors rather than through linear bureaucratic mechanisms. Government institutions, local communities, and non-governmental organizations continuously exchange information, coordinate interventions, and adapt policies to environmental and socio-economic changes. The study also reveals that coastal communities develop adaptive livelihood strategies, including fisheries diversification, seaweed cultivation, and community-based enterprises, to strengthen resilience against uncertainty. Furthermore, new socio-economic patterns emerge through collaborative governance, local innovation, and community participation. The novelty of this research lies in integrating the Complex Adaptive System framework with coastal poverty governance analysis at the local government level. The study contributes theoretically to adaptive governance literature and practically provides policy insights for designing more responsive, collaborative, and sustainable poverty alleviation strategies in coastal regions.

Keywords: Adaptive Governance; Coastal Communities; Complex Adaptive System; Community Resilience; Coastal Poverty Alleviation.

Introduction.

Coastal poverty remains one of the most persistent development challenges in many developing countries despite the abundance of marine resources and the increasing attention toward blue economy policies. Coastal communities are frequently positioned within paradoxical socio-economic conditions in which regions with rich fisheries and marine biodiversity continue to experience structural poverty,

vulnerability, and marginalization. This phenomenon is particularly evident in Indonesia, a maritime country with one of the world's longest coastlines and extensive marine resource potential. However, coastal communities, especially small-scale fishermen and seaweed farmers, continue to experience low income, limited access to capital, weak market integration, environmental degradation, and high exposure to climate-related risks. The multidimensional nature of coastal poverty demonstrates that poverty is not merely an economic issue but also a governance, ecological, and social capability problem requiring adaptive and collaborative policy interventions.

Recent studies have emphasized that coastal poverty is closely associated with environmental vulnerability, institutional fragmentation, and unequal access to socio-economic resources. Cheeseman (2025) argues that poor coastal communities are disproportionately vulnerable to environmental change because their livelihoods are heavily dependent on unstable natural resources. Similarly, Folke et al. (2005) highlighted that coastal governance requires adaptive institutional arrangements capable of responding to uncertainty, ecological disruption, and socio-economic transformation. In many developing countries, poverty alleviation policies often fail because governance systems remain rigid, sectoral, and unable to accommodate dynamic interactions between actors and environmental changes. Consequently, traditional top-down policy approaches are increasingly criticized for their inability to address the complexity of coastal poverty.

Within public policy studies, the concept of policy networks has emerged as an important framework for understanding governance complexity involving multiple actors and interdependent relationships. Rhodes (1997) defines policy networks as formal and informal relationships among governmental and non-governmental actors who continuously negotiate interests and resources within policy processes. This perspective challenges the conventional hierarchical governance model by recognizing that policy implementation is shaped through collaboration, negotiation, and interaction among diverse stakeholders. In the context of poverty alleviation, policy networks involve government agencies, local communities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), political institutions, donor agencies, and private actors whose interactions influence policy outcomes.

However, contemporary governance challenges require more than static network coordination. Increasing uncertainty caused by environmental change, fluctuating fisheries production, market instability, and social vulnerability demands adaptive governance systems capable of continuous learning and adjustment. In this regard, the Complex Adaptive System (CAS) approach provides a relevant analytical framework to understand how policy systems evolve through dynamic interactions, adaptation, and emergence. Developed by Holland (1992) and expanded by Geyer and Rihani (2010), CAS conceptualizes governance systems as collections of interconnected actors that continuously interact, adapt, and generate new patterns in response to environmental and institutional pressures. Rather than viewing policy implementation as a linear administrative process, CAS emphasizes non-linearity, feedback loops, self-organization, and adaptive learning.

The relevance of CAS becomes particularly significant in coastal poverty governance because coastal communities operate within highly uncertain ecological and socio-economic environments. Fishermen and seaweed farmers constantly adapt to changing weather conditions, fluctuating fish stocks, market price instability, and environmental degradation. Simultaneously, government institutions must continuously adjust policy interventions to local needs and emerging challenges. Adaptive governance therefore becomes essential in maintaining community resilience and improving policy effectiveness. According to Ostrom (2010), adaptive governance systems are more capable of addressing complex socio-ecological problems because they encourage collaboration, learning, and institutional flexibility among actors.

Empirically, the case of Takalar Regency in South Sulawesi, Indonesia, reflects these complexities. As a coastal region directly connected to the Flores Sea, Takalar possesses significant fisheries and marine resource potential. Nevertheless, many coastal communities remain trapped in structural poverty and socio-economic vulnerability. Data from regional development agencies indicate that although the general poverty rate declined from 8.29% in 2023 to 7.75% in 2024, the number of extremely poor residents significantly increased during the same period. Coastal districts such as Galesong, North Galesong, South Galesong, Sanrobone, and Mangarabombang continue to experience economic instability due to dependence on traditional fisheries, climate uncertainty, coastal abrasion, and limited market access. These conditions demonstrate that poverty reduction cannot rely solely on distributive assistance programs but requires adaptive and collaborative governance mechanisms.

The Takalar local government has introduced various poverty alleviation programs involving the Fisheries Office, Social and Village Empowerment Office, village governments, NGOs, and community groups. These interventions include fishing equipment assistance, cash transfers, seaweed processing training, environmental conservation, and digital governance initiatives such as the SI LEBAH UNGGULAN application. Importantly, these programs demonstrate that poverty governance in coastal areas increasingly depends on interactions among heterogeneous actors rather than isolated bureaucratic actions. The emergence of community-based innovations, informal economic diversification, and local adaptive strategies further illustrates the dynamic characteristics of governance systems in coastal communities.

Several previous studies have discussed adaptive governance, policy networks, and coastal resilience. Booher and Innes (2006) examined collaborative governance and adaptive systems in environmental resource management, while Hosking et al. (2023) explored adaptive pathways in coastal resilience governance. Metz (2017) focused on policy network structures in policy design, and Craney et al. (2022) analyzed adaptive programming in development policies. Although these studies contribute significantly to governance and adaptation literature, most primarily focus on environmental governance, institutional coordination, or policy structures separately. Limited studies specifically examine coastal poverty alleviation through the integration of Complex Adaptive Systems and policy network perspectives within local governance contexts in developing countries.

Furthermore, existing studies tend to emphasize governance mechanisms without sufficiently examining how adaptive interactions influence community capabilities and resilience. This creates an important research gap because poverty alleviation effectiveness should not only be assessed through economic outcomes but also through the expansion of human capabilities and adaptive capacities. In this context, integrating the Capability Approach proposed by Nussbaum (2011) with CAS provides a more comprehensive analytical framework for understanding how adaptive governance enhances community well-being, agency, and resilience.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze how the Complex Adaptive System approach operates within coastal poverty alleviation governance in Takalar Regency, Indonesia. Specifically, the study examines three central dimensions of CAS: actor interactions, adaptability to environmental change, and the emergence of new socio-economic patterns within coastal communities. The novelty of this research lies in the integration of Complex Adaptive System theory and the Capability Approach to analyze adaptive policy networks in coastal poverty governance. Unlike previous studies that primarily focus on institutional coordination or environmental adaptation, this research demonstrates how adaptive interactions among multiple actors contribute to the expansion of community capabilities, resilience, and local innovation. The study contributes theoretically to the development of adaptive governance and policy

network literature while practically offering insights for designing more responsive, collaborative, and sustainable poverty alleviation policies in coastal regions.

Methods

Th This study employed a qualitative research approach using a case study design to examine the implementation of the Complex Adaptive System (CAS) approach in coastal poverty alleviation governance in Takalar Regency, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. The qualitative approach was selected because the study aimed to explore dynamic interactions among actors, adaptive governance processes, and the emergence of new socio-economic patterns within coastal communities. A case study design was considered appropriate because it allows an in-depth understanding of complex social phenomena within their real-life context, particularly when the boundaries between governance systems and community dynamics are not clearly separated.

The research was conducted in five coastal districts of Takalar Regency, namely Galesong, South Galesong, North Galesong, Sanrobone, and Mangarabombang. These areas were selected purposively because they represent the primary coastal zones where fishing activities, seaweed cultivation, and coastal livelihood systems dominate the local economy. In addition, these districts experience various socio-economic and environmental challenges, including seasonal uncertainty, coastal abrasion, fluctuating fishery production, and poverty vulnerability, making them relevant sites for analyzing adaptive governance and poverty alleviation dynamics.

The study focused on multiple actors involved in coastal poverty governance, including the Fisheries Office of Takalar Regency, the Social and Village Community Empowerment Office (Dinas Sosial dan PMD), local village governments, members of the Regional House of Representatives (DPRD), non-governmental organizations such as PPLH Puntondo, community facilitators, fishermen groups, seaweed farmers, and local residents. Informants were selected using purposive sampling based on their involvement, knowledge, and direct experience in poverty alleviation programs and coastal community empowerment initiatives. This sampling strategy enabled the researcher to obtain comprehensive information regarding policy interactions, adaptive responses, and collaborative governance practices.

Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews, observation, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were used to explore the perceptions, experiences, and interactions of actors involved in poverty alleviation governance. Interviews focused on inter-institutional coordination, adaptive policy mechanisms, community responses to environmental uncertainty, and the emergence of local innovations. Observations were conducted in coastal communities and government institutions to understand social interactions, community adaptation strategies, and implementation practices of poverty alleviation programs. Meanwhile, document analysis included regional development plans, local government regulations, official reports, poverty statistics, fisheries program documents, and institutional policy documents relevant to coastal governance and poverty reduction.

This research adopted the Complex Adaptive System (CAS) framework as the primary analytical lens. Three analytical dimensions were employed to interpret the findings: (1) interaction among actors, (2) adaptability to environmental and socio-economic changes, and (3) emergence of new socio-economic patterns. The first dimension examined how governmental and non-governmental actors interacted through coordination, feedback mechanisms, and collaborative decision-making processes. The second dimension analyzed how institutions and coastal communities adapted to uncertainty, including climate variability, fluctuating fisheries production, and changing socio-economic conditions. The third dimension focused on identifying emergent community innovations, adaptive livelihood diversification, and new governance practices resulting from continuous interactions among actors.

Data analysis was conducted using an interactive qualitative analysis model consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. Interview transcripts, field notes, and policy documents were systematically coded and categorized according to the main dimensions of the CAS framework. The analysis process emphasized identifying patterns of interaction, adaptive responses, non-linear relationships, and emergent governance practices within the coastal poverty alleviation system. To strengthen analytical validity, triangulation techniques were applied by comparing findings from interviews, observations, and official documents.

The credibility and trustworthiness of the study were ensured through prolonged engagement in the field, source triangulation, and member checking with several informants to confirm the accuracy of interpretations. Furthermore, reflexive analysis was applied to minimize researcher bias during data interpretation. Ethical considerations were also maintained throughout the research process by ensuring voluntary participation, confidentiality of informants, and informed consent prior to interviews and observations.

Through this methodological approach, the study provides an in-depth understanding of how adaptive governance systems operate within coastal poverty alleviation policies and how interactions among heterogeneous actors contribute to community resilience and socio-economic transformation in Takalar Regency.

Results

Regional Context of Coastal Poverty in Takalar Regency

Takalar Regency is one of the coastal regions in South Sulawesi Province strategically located adjacent to Makassar City and directly connected to the Flores Sea. This geographical position places Takalar as an important socio-economic corridor within the regional development system of South Sulawesi. Covering approximately 566.5 km², the regency is characterized by extensive coastal lowlands and marine-based economic activities that shape the livelihood structure of local communities. Most residents living in coastal areas depend on fisheries, seaweed cultivation, small-scale trading, and other marine-related activities as their primary sources of income. However, despite its considerable marine resource potential, many coastal communities remain economically vulnerable due to environmental uncertainty, fluctuating fishery production, and limited access to socio-economic resources.

The coastal structure of Takalar Regency consists of five main coastal districts, namely Galesong, South Galesong, North Galesong, Sanrobone, and Mangarabombang. Each district demonstrates different socio-economic characteristics and environmental challenges. Galesong functions as one of the major fishing settlements, while South Galesong and Mangarabombang face severe coastal abrasion and environmental degradation affecting fishermen's livelihoods. North Galesong exhibits dense traditional fishing communities with strong dependence on local capital owners and fish collectors, creating asymmetrical socio-economic relations. These conditions indicate that coastal poverty in Takalar is multidimensional, involving economic dependency, environmental vulnerability, and institutional limitations.

In response to these challenges, the Takalar local government introduced the development vision of "Takalar Maju dan Berdaya Saing Melalui Ekonomi Digital" (Advanced and Competitive Takalar through Digital Economy). This vision reflects an effort to integrate digital governance, economic competitiveness, and social welfare improvement into regional development policies. The government emphasized digital infrastructure development, village administrative digitalization, community digital literacy training, and digital-based public service systems to improve governance efficiency and poverty targeting mechanisms. These initiatives demonstrate that poverty alleviation policies in Takalar increasingly adopt adaptive governance principles, where technological innovation, institutional coordination, and community

empowerment are integrated into regional development strategies.

Within this governance structure, the Fisheries Office and the Social and Village Community Empowerment Office (Dinas Sosial dan PMD) play central roles in coastal poverty alleviation. The Fisheries Office focuses on strengthening fisheries productivity, providing fishing equipment assistance, supporting seaweed cultivation, and facilitating community-based fisheries businesses. Meanwhile, the Social and PMD Office coordinates social assistance programs, village empowerment initiatives, and community capacity-building activities. The interaction between these institutions reflects a collaborative governance model in which poverty alleviation is approached not only as a social assistance issue but also as a long-term adaptive development process.

Complex Adaptive System in Coastal Poverty Alleviation

Interaction among Actors

The findings demonstrate that coastal poverty alleviation governance in Takalar operates through dynamic interactions among governmental and non-governmental actors, consistent with the principles of Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS). Rather than functioning through a purely hierarchical administrative mechanism, poverty reduction policies emerge from continuous coordination, negotiation, and feedback processes among multiple actors with different capacities and interests.

The Social and PMD Office collaborates with village governments, PKH facilitators, TKSK officers, and the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) to verify social assistance recipients based on socio-economic classifications. This process illustrates the existence of interdependent institutional relationships where policy decisions rely heavily on local information and field verification. Such interactions create adaptive feedback loops that continuously influence policy implementation and targeting accuracy.

The Fisheries Office further expands this adaptive governance network through fisheries assistance programs and the implementation of the SI LEBAH UNGGULAN digital application. This system integrates local fisheries data with provincial government assistance and donor support, including collaboration with JICA. The application demonstrates how adaptive governance increasingly depends on information integration and digital responsiveness to support evidence-based decision-making. Within the CAS framework, this reflects the system's ability to process information dynamically and adjust interventions according to changing field conditions.

Furthermore, the Regional House of Representatives (DPRD) functions as a political intermediary connecting community aspirations with policy priorities and budgeting processes. Through musrenbang forums, recess activities, and periodic evaluation meetings, bottom-up information flows become incorporated into local governance decisions. Consequently, poverty alleviation policies are not solely determined by bureaucratic procedures but are continuously shaped through social interaction and political negotiation.

Non-governmental organizations also contribute significantly to the adaptive governance system. PPLH Puntondo, for example, conducts environmental education, seaweed processing training, and marine ecosystem conservation activities. These interventions strengthen community participation and diversify local development initiatives beyond formal government programs. The involvement of heterogeneous actors confirms the CAS principle that complex systems evolve through interactions among agents possessing different objectives, knowledge, and adaptive strategies.

Adaptability to Environmental Changes

Another important dimension identified in this study is the adaptive capacity of coastal communities and institutions in responding to environmental uncertainty. Fishermen in Takalar face multiple external pressures, including

unpredictable weather conditions, seasonal fluctuations, declining fish catches, and coastal environmental degradation. These conditions create unstable livelihood systems that require continuous adaptation at both community and institutional levels.

Government interventions such as cash transfers, food assistance, fishing equipment support, and cold storage facilities were introduced to reduce vulnerability during periods of economic instability. However, the findings indicate that local adaptation strategies remain equally important in sustaining community resilience. Fishermen adapt by changing fishing patterns, seeking alternative employment, utilizing previous catch reserves, or shifting toward seaweed cultivation during unfavorable fishing seasons.

The Fisheries Office supports this adaptive process by providing flexible fishing equipment suitable for different weather conditions and by improving fisheries storage infrastructure to stabilize prices during periods of overproduction. This demonstrates that adaptive governance does not merely involve distributing static assistance but requires responsive interventions aligned with local environmental dynamics.

From the CAS perspective, adaptability is understood as a continuous and non-linear process resulting from reciprocal interactions between institutional interventions and community experiences. Policy outcomes therefore cannot be predicted solely through administrative planning because community responses and environmental changes constantly reshape governance dynamics. The same policy intervention may produce different outcomes depending on local social structures, ecological conditions, and adaptive capacities.

These findings reinforce the argument that coastal poverty governance requires flexible institutional arrangements capable of responding to uncertainty rather than relying exclusively on rigid bureaucratic procedures. Adaptive governance becomes essential for strengthening community resilience within highly vulnerable socio-ecological systems.

Emergence of New Socio-Economic Patterns

The study also identified the emergence of new socio-economic patterns resulting from interactions among actors and local adaptive practices. Within the CAS framework, emergence refers to the spontaneous development of new structures, innovations, or behavioral patterns that cannot be fully predicted or centrally controlled.

In Takalar Regency, several community-based innovations emerged from collaborative interactions among government institutions, NGOs, and local communities. These include seaweed-processing groups, small-scale fisheries enterprises, seagrass conservation initiatives, and environmentally oriented "waste-free village" programs facilitated by community organizations. Importantly, these initiatives were not entirely designed through top-down government planning but evolved through continuous experimentation, learning, and local adaptation processes.

The emergence of livelihood diversification strategies further illustrates this adaptive evolution. Women in coastal households received training to process fishery products into higher-value commodities, enabling additional household income generation. Fishermen developed side businesses during low fishing seasons, while collaborative relationships with local collectors and financiers created informal risk-sharing mechanisms within the coastal economy.

These emergent patterns demonstrate that poverty alleviation governance in Takalar extends beyond formal policy implementation. Instead, adaptive interactions among actors continuously generate new forms of social organization, economic innovation, and community resilience. The findings confirm the CAS assumption that complex governance systems possess evolutionary capacities in which relatively simple

interactions may generate sophisticated and unpredictable social transformations.

The results indicate that coastal poverty alleviation in Takalar Regency operates as a dynamic adaptive system characterized by multi-actor interaction, institutional flexibility, environmental adaptation, and emergent community innovation. These findings contribute to the growing literature on adaptive governance by demonstrating that effective poverty alleviation in vulnerable coastal regions requires collaborative, responsive, and evolving governance arrangements capable of integrating social, environmental, and institutional dimensions simultaneously.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that coastal poverty alleviation in Takalar Regency operates as a dynamic governance system characterized by interaction, adaptation, and emergence, consistent with the principles of the Complex Adaptive System (CAS) approach. The findings reveal that poverty reduction policies are not implemented through a purely hierarchical mechanism but evolve through continuous interaction among governmental institutions, village administrations, community facilitators, political actors, non-governmental organizations, and coastal communities. These interactions generate adaptive governance practices that strengthen policy responsiveness and improve the accuracy of social and economic interventions.

The study also highlights the importance of adaptive capacity in responding to environmental uncertainty and socio-economic vulnerability. Coastal communities continuously adjust their livelihood strategies through fisheries diversification, seaweed cultivation, and small-scale economic innovation, while government institutions support these adaptations through flexible assistance and digital governance initiatives. Furthermore, the emergence of community-based enterprises, environmental conservation initiatives, and collaborative local networks indicates that adaptive governance can stimulate socio-economic transformation beyond formal policy objectives.

Theoretically, this research contributes to the development of adaptive governance and poverty studies by integrating the Complex Adaptive System perspective into coastal poverty alleviation analysis. Practically, the findings emphasize the need for collaborative, flexible, and participatory governance models in vulnerable coastal regions. Nevertheless, this study is limited to one regional context and primarily focuses on qualitative institutional dynamics. Future research should explore comparative regional studies and integrate quantitative resilience indicators to examine long-term policy effectiveness and adaptive governance outcomes.

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