

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Sustainability Reporting Maturity in East Java Local Governments

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## ABSTRACT

This study explores the maturity and functional orientation of sustainability reporting (SR) practices in Indonesian local government entities, focusing on whether disclosures function primarily as symbolic managerial communication or as substantive, performance-based accountability mechanisms. Using qualitative content analysis of sustainability-related documents from the East Java High Court and the Banyuwangi Water Resources Agency, the study applies the Public Sector Sustainability Disclosure Index (PSSDI) to assess disclosure depth and orientation. The findings reveal a consistent pattern across both cases: SR is dominated by narrative and policy-oriented disclosures emphasizing commitments and compliance, while measurable targets, outcome-based indicators, and integrated performance evaluation are largely absent. Although both entities selectively reference global frameworks such as the GRI Standards, these references operate mainly as normative signals rather than operational measurement systems. The limited use of quantitative metrics, absence of external assurance, and weak integration with public-sector performance management instruments indicate that SR remains at an early stage of institutionalization. The results suggest that legitimacy-seeking behavior and normative isomorphism exert a stronger influence on reporting practices than accountability or performance imperatives. Overall, the study provides empirical evidence of the symbolic nature of SR in subnational governments and highlights the need for a context-sensitive, performance-oriented reporting framework tailored to public-sector settings in developing countries.

**Keywords:** public accountability; disclosure quality; institutional pressures; performance indicators; symbolic compliance; environmental metrics; narrative reporting; governance capacity

## 1. Introduction

The growing global demand for transparency and accountability in reporting organizational impacts has placed unprecedented pressure on both private and public institutions to disclose environmental, social, and economic performance in a structured and credible manner <sup>[1], [2]</sup>. Public sector organizations (PSOs), in particular, face heightened expectations due to their central role in managing public resources, delivering

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essential services, and shaping long-term societal welfare. International evidence indicates that the public sector accounts for nearly 40% of total global economic activity, magnifying its environmental and social footprint as well as its responsibility to demonstrate responsible stewardship through Sustainability Reporting (SR) [3]. As a result, PSOs are increasingly expected not only to comply with regulatory requirements but also to align their disclosures with internationally recognized sustainability reporting standards.

Despite this growing pressure, sustainability reporting in the public sector especially in developing countries remains at a formative or “infancy” stage. Prior studies document sporadic adoption, fragmented reporting formats, weak regulatory enforcement, and the absence of standardized reporting practices across public institutions [4], [5], [6], [7]. These structural weaknesses often translate into reports that lack depth, comparability, and decision-useful information. Instead, public-sector sustainability disclosures frequently rely on broad narratives, descriptive accounts of programs, and compliance-oriented statements that emphasize intentions rather than measurable outcomes [8], [9]. Consequently, SR in the public sector tends to function more as a symbolic communication device aimed at impression management and legitimacy building [10], rather than as an operational accountability mechanism capable of supporting performance evaluation and sustainability governance.

This symbolic orientation is particularly evident in how sustainability information is framed and organized. A substantial body of sustainability accounting literature distinguishes between management-oriented disclosures and operational performance disclosures. Management reporting typically emphasizes policies, commitments, governance structures, and program descriptions, whereas operational reporting focuses on quantified performance indicators, measurable targets, and outcome-based metrics related to resource use, emissions, and environmental impacts [11], [12], [13]. Empirical studies consistently show that organizations especially in the public sector tend to prioritize Environmental Management Performance disclosures while neglecting Environmental Operational Performance indicators that would enable substantive assessment of sustainability outcomes [14], [15], [16].

Against this broader backdrop, this study intentionally adopts an exploratory and diagnostic perspective, aiming to capture the *current state of sustainability reporting practice* among Indonesian local government entities rather than to generalize across the entire public sector. The empirical focus is limited to two institutions in East Java (Banyuwangi Water Management Agency and the East Java High Court) primarily due to structural constraints in data availability. At present, only a small number of local government entities in Indonesia publish sustainability-related reports in a format that resembles standalone sustainability reporting. As such, the limited sample size reflects not a methodological weakness, but the empirical reality of sustainability reporting adoption in the Indonesian public sector, and is therefore analytically meaningful for exploring early-stage reporting dynamics.

The empirical evidence from these two entities aligns with global patterns identified in prior public-sector sustainability reporting studies. Although both institutions explicitly reference internationally recognized reporting frameworks particularly the GRI Standards, their reports are dominated by narrative-based disclosures centered on institutional commitments, compliance activities, community programs, and administrative achievements [17], [18]. Quantitative performance indicators, measurable targets, and outcome-focused evaluations remain limited and weakly integrated into the reporting structure. This suggests that the use of GRI Standards in these entities is largely procedural, functioning as a legitimizing reference rather than as a fully operationalized performance measurement system.

From a theoretical perspective, this phenomenon can be interpreted through the combined lenses of institutional theory, legitimacy theory, and stakeholder theory. Institutional theory explains why public organizations adopt globally accepted practices, such as GRI-based sustainability reporting, in response to normative pressures and expectations of appropriateness, even when internal capacities for substantive implementation remain underdeveloped [4], [5]; Legitimacy theory further elucidates how symbolic disclosures operate as mechanisms to maintain social approval without necessarily improving actual environmental or social performance [10]. Meanwhile, stakeholder theory highlights that public organizations tend to prioritize disclosures that satisfy powerful or visible stakeholders, while avoiding detailed operational data that could expose performance gaps or inefficiencies [19].

The central issue, therefore, lies not merely in the presence of sustainability reporting, but in its functional orientation. Whether SR operates primarily as a symbolic, management-oriented communication tool or as a substantive, performance-based accountability mechanism represents a critical indicator of reporting maturity within PSOs. When sustainability reports remain narrative-heavy, compliance-driven, and weakly quantified, they reflect what has been described as a “weak sustainability worldview,” in which reporting supports organizational legitimacy without fundamentally challenging underlying governance structures or performance systems [9].

Building on this perspective, the present study examines the depth, orientation, and maturity of sustainability reporting practices among selected local government entities in East Java. While the analyzed reports explicitly reference the GRI Standards as a disclosure guide, the analytical measurement in this study is conducted using the Public Sector Sustainability Disclosure Index (PSSDI). The PSSDI is specifically designed to assess sustainability reporting in government and local government contexts by integrating the *impact materiality logic* of the GRI Standards with the *financial materiality orientation* embedded in IFRS S1 and IFRS S2 [20]. This hybrid framework allows for a more context-sensitive evaluation of public-sector sustainability disclosures, particularly in settings where formal sustainability governance systems are still emerging.

Using a systematic qualitative content analysis of publicly available sustainability-related reports [21], [22], [23], this study addresses the following research question: *To what extent do the sustainability reports of the East Java High Court and the Banyuwangi Water Management Agency disclose economic, environmental, and social information in accordance with the PSSDI framework, and to what degree are these disclosures dominated by management-oriented (narrative and compliance-driven) reporting rather than operational, performance-based reporting?*

By addressing this question, the study provides empirical insight into the maturity of sustainability reporting adoption in Indonesian local governments, identifies patterns of selective or “cherry-picking” disclosure that may signal symbolic compliance, and contributes to the broader literature on sustainability accounting in the public sector of developing countries. In doing so, it highlights the structural and institutional constraints that must be addressed to support a transition from symbolic sustainability reporting toward substantive, performance-driven public-sector accountability.

## 2. Methods

This study adopts a qualitative research design to classify the maturity, depth, and functional orientation of sustainability reporting practices among selected local government entities in East Java. The methodological approach is explicitly aligned with the study’s objective to assess whether sustainability disclosures function primarily as management-oriented, symbolic communication or as substantive,

performance-based accountability mechanisms. Given the narrative-driven, institutionally embedded, and non-standardized nature of public-sector sustainability reports in Indonesia, qualitative content analysis, supported by interpretive document analysis, is employed to enable a systematic and context-sensitive examination of disclosure practices <sup>[22], [23]</sup>. Rather than testing causal relationships, this study is diagnostic and exploratory. It seeks to document existing disclosure patterns and to provide an analytically grounded explanation of why sustainability reporting in the entities exhibits particular characteristics. This design is particularly appropriate for early-stage sustainability reporting contexts, where reporting practices are still evolving, and formal performance measurement systems remain underdeveloped.

## **2.1. Research strategy and analytical logic**

The analytical strategy is structured to ensure consistency between the study's conceptual framing and its empirical procedures, without reiterating theoretical discussions already established in the Introduction. The analysis focuses on identifying how sustainability information is disclosed, the depth of that disclosure, and the extent to which reporting practices reflect symbolic compliance or substantive performance orientation.

Qualitative content analysis is conducted using a latent-oriented approach, emphasizing interpretation of meaning, intent, and contextual framing rather than frequency-based counts <sup>[23]</sup>. This approach enables the study to capture the underlying institutional logics, legitimacy-seeking behavior, and stakeholder-oriented disclosure choices embedded in sustainability narratives. While institutional theory, legitimacy theory, and stakeholder theory inform the interpretation of findings, they serve as analytical lenses applied during the discussion stage rather than as categories imposed during coding.

## **2.2. Sampling and data collection**

The empirical material consists of sustainability-related public documents issued by two local government entities in East Java: East Java High Court and Banyuwangi Water Management Agency. These entities were selected through purposive sampling because they represent one of the very few local government institutions in Indonesia that have publicly issued sustainability-related reports resembling standalone sustainability disclosures.

The restricted sample size reflects the empirical reality of sustainability reporting adoption in the Indonesian public sector, where most government agencies have not yet published sustainability reports. Accordingly, the selected documents are analytically meaningful for examining early-stage reporting practices. The analyzed materials include sustainability reports, annual reports, and standalone environmental or social disclosure documents, which together constitute the primary accountability instruments available to external stakeholders <sup>[8], [24]</sup>.

The unit of analysis is defined as paragraphs or extended clauses, rather than isolated words or sentences. This choice reflects the interpretive orientation of latent content analysis, where meaning emerges from narrative structure and contextual framing <sup>[22], [23]</sup>. Each textual unit is interpreted within two complementary contextual layers:

1. Document-level context, including the purpose of the report, the institutional mandate of the issuing organization, and the functional role of specific sections within the document.
2. Narrative-level context, including disclosure intent, framing strategies, and indications of legitimacy-seeking or stakeholder-oriented communication.

This dual contextualization strengthens analytical rigor and internal validity, particularly when distinguishing symbolic narratives from substantive performance disclosures <sup>[21], [22]</sup>.

### 2.3. Measurement instrument and coding scheme

To systematically evaluate disclosure depth and orientation, this study applies the Public Sector Sustainability Disclosure Index (PSSDI) developed by [20]. The PSSDI is specifically designed for government and local government contexts and addresses the limitations of corporate-oriented sustainability indices when applied to public-sector organizations.

The PSSDI integrates the impact-materiality orientation of the GRI Standards with the financial-materiality logic embedded in IFRS S1 and IFRS S2, making it particularly suitable for assessing sustainability reporting maturity in public institutions operating under budgetary, regulatory, and accountability constraints distinct from those of the private sector. The coding scheme is deductively structured around two analytical themes commonly used in sustainability reporting research:

**Table 1.** Coding Scheme

| Coding Theme   | Disclosure Focus   | Description   |
|--|--|---|
| Theme 1: Management Performance (Symbolic Reporting)     | Policies, commitments, programs, governance structures, compliance | Narrative disclosures emphasizing intentions, systems, and activities without measurable performance evidence [9]                   |
| Theme 2: Operational Performance (Substantive Reporting) | Quantitative indicators, input/output metrics, targets             | Measurable performance indicators such as energy use, water consumption, waste generation, emissions, and GHG data [11], [12], [13] |

Importantly, these themes are not treated as assumptions about reporting behavior, but as analytical categories used to classify empirical disclosures. Their relative dominance emerges from the coding results and forms the basis for interpretation in the Results and Discussion sections.

### 2.4. Scoring procedure and reliability assessment

Each coded disclosure item is assessed using an ordinal scoring system to capture variation in disclosure depth and quality, moving beyond binary presence–absence coding.

**Table 2.** Scoring Criteria

| Score | Description  |
|-------|--|
| 0     | No disclosure related to the coding category                                   |
| 1     | Narrative or descriptive disclosure without measurable performance information |
| 2     | Quantitative disclosure linked to indicators, targets, or outcomes             |

Following the coding process, scores are aggregated at the dimension and entity level in accordance with the PSSDI framework. The resulting composite scores are then classified into sustainability reporting maturity levels as defined by [20], ranging from early symbolic adoption to more advanced, performance-oriented reporting stages.

This two-step procedure, scoring followed by maturity classification, allows the study to both quantify disclosure depth and interpret reporting orientation within a broader developmental framework. The maturity classification provides a structured basis for explaining why the analyzed reports remain predominantly symbolic and how institutional, organizational, and stakeholder-related factors shape these outcomes.

## 3. Results

The content analysis of sustainability-related reports published by the Banyuwangi Water Resources Agency (2019) and the East Java High Court (2023) reveals a consistent disclosure pattern across the two subnational public-sector entities. Overall, sustainability reporting remains predominantly symbolic and

managerial, with limited progress toward performance-oriented, outcome-based disclosure practices. Using the Public Sector Sustainability Disclosure Index (PSSDI) as the analytical framework, the results demonstrate that reported information prioritizes policy narratives, program descriptions, and formal compliance statements over measurable sustainability impacts and evaluative performance evidence. Table 3 presents the disclosure scores and corresponding maturity levels derived from the PSSDI assessment.

**Table 3.** The Disclosure scores and maturity levels

| Institution                       | Score | Maturity Level |
|-----------------------------------|-------|----------------|
| Banyuwangi Water Resources Agency | 25%   | Managed        |
| East Java High Court              | 28%   | Managed        |

*Source: Research Data, 2025*

As shown in Table 3, both institutions fall within the “Managed” maturity level, indicating that sustainability reporting processes are present but remain basic and limited in scope. At this level, reporting is characterized by partially documented procedures, incomplete indicator coverage, and a strong reliance on narrative explanations. Disclosure practices are not yet systematic, show inconsistencies across reporting periods, and are weakly connected to organizational strategy, risk management, or performance evaluation mechanisms. The relatively close scores (25% and 28%) further suggest a shared institutional pattern rather than entity-specific anomalies.

Although both organizations reference internationally recognized sustainability frameworks, most notably the GRI Standards, this alignment functions primarily as a referential or symbolic scaffold rather than an operational reporting architecture. Sustainability-related information is predominantly conveyed through descriptive accounts of governance arrangements, integrity initiatives, legal services, and administrative achievements. These narratives are rarely linked to measurable outputs, outcomes, or long-term sustainability targets. As a result, the adoption of international standards serves legitimacy signaling purposes rather than structuring internal performance management or decision-support systems.

Quantitative disclosures, where present, are largely confined to inventory-level data. Environmental information, such as electricity consumption, water use, fuel use, and greenhouse gas emissions, is reported sporadically and lacks clear baseline definitions, explicit targets, or longitudinal trend analysis, as referenced in ISO 14064. The absence of benchmarking and temporal comparison limits the interpretability of these figures and prevents their use as indicators of sustainability performance improvement or organizational learning. Furthermore, sustainability indicators are not integrated with fiscal data, budget allocations, or efficiency metrics, reducing their relevance for public accountability and policy evaluation.

From an institutional perspective, neither entity demonstrates formal sustainability governance structures. The analysis finds no evidence of dedicated sustainability committees, cross-unit coordination mechanisms, or internal control systems specifically designed for sustainability data management. The Banyuwangi Water Resources Agency explicitly frames its report as an initial disclosure effort, implicitly acknowledging limited institutional readiness. Additionally, the absence of external assurance mechanisms further constrains the credibility and reliability of the disclosed information.

Taken together, the empirical findings confirm that sustainability reporting among the observed East Java subnational government entities is characterized by high narrative density, low performance measurability, and weak institutional embeddedness. Within the PSSDI maturity logic, both reports are firmly situated in an early or infancy phase of development, where legitimacy-oriented disclosure dominates over substantive communication of sustainability performance and outcomes.

## **4. Discussion**

### **4.1. Symbolic sustainability reporting and managed-level maturity in subnational public institutions**

The findings confirm that sustainability reporting practices in the observed East Java subnational government entities remain situated at a managed but still early stage of maturity, as indicated by the PSSDI scores of 25% and 28%. At this level, reporting processes exist and are partially documented, yet they remain fragmented, narrative-driven, and weakly institutionalized. The detailed content analysis across governance, strategy, risk management, and metrics and targets pillars shows that disclosures are primarily descriptive, emphasizing policies, programs, and procedural compliance rather than measurable sustainability performance.

From a legitimacy theory perspective, this pattern reflects a strategic response to external expectations rather than an internally driven accountability mechanism [10], [25], [26], [27]. Both organizations disclose sustainability-related information to signal conformity with prevailing norms of “good governance,” integrity, and environmental responsibility [26]. However, the absence of formal sustainability mandates, dedicated governance structures, and integrated performance measurement systems indicates that these disclosures function largely as symbolic legitimizing devices [10], [26], [27]. This is particularly evident in the governance pillar, where neither entity demonstrates explicit supervisory responsibility for sustainability or climate-related issues, nor mechanisms to ensure competencies, reporting routines, or performance oversight related to ESG dimensions.

The managed-level classification is further substantiated by the lack of target-setting and outcome orientation across both cases. While the Banyuwangi Water Resources Agency reports limited environmental data such as energy use, water consumption, and greenhouse gas inventories following ISO 14064, these disclosures are not accompanied by quantified targets, defined time horizons, or evaluative benchmarks. Similarly, the East Java High Court presents extensive operational and governance performance indicators, yet none are linked to environmental or climate-related outcomes. As a result, sustainability reporting remains disconnected from strategic planning, risk prioritization, and performance evaluation cycles.

These findings are consistent with prior public-sector sustainability literature in developing-country contexts, which shows that early-stage reporting is often characterized by high narrative density and low measurability, reflecting institutional capacity constraints rather than a lack of normative awareness. In this sense, the results should not be interpreted as reporting failure, but rather as evidence of an incipient institutionalization phase, where sustainability disclosure is present but not yet operationalized as a management tool.

### **4.2. Functional heterogeneity, selective standard adoption, and the limits of accountability**

The second major theme emerging from the analysis concerns the role of organizational function and institutional mandate in shaping the orientation of sustainability disclosures, particularly in the absence of mandatory public-sector sustainability reporting requirements. Although both entities achieve similar maturity scores, the content, emphasis, and rationale of their disclosures differ substantially, reflecting functional heterogeneity as well as the voluntary nature of sustainability reporting within Indonesian subnational governments. In the current regulatory context, sustainability disclosures are not legally enforced but are produced voluntarily as part of broader transparency, reform, and reputation-building efforts.

The Banyuwangi Water Resources Agency, due to its direct engagement with natural resource management and environmentally sensitive public services, voluntarily emphasizes environmental programs,

resource efficiency initiatives, and infrastructure-related sustainability narratives <sup>[17]</sup>. These disclosures appear to be motivated by heightened public visibility, stakeholder scrutiny, and exposure to environmental risk, which collectively increase the perceived legitimacy benefits of demonstrating environmental responsibility. In contrast, the East Java High Court voluntarily prioritizes governance integrity, judicial performance, and service delivery indicators aligned with expectations of procedural fairness, institutional credibility, and public trust <sup>[18]</sup>. In this case, sustainability-related disclosures function less as environmental accountability tools and more as signals of organizational integrity and administrative professionalism.

This variation supports key insights from institutional theory, particularly the notion of selective and decoupled adoption of global standards under normative isomorphic pressures. References to international frameworks such as the GRI Standards appear in both reports; however, the analysis demonstrates that these references function primarily as symbolic alignment mechanisms rather than as comprehensive reporting architectures <sup>[28]</sup>, <sup>[29]</sup>. GRI-related elements are adopted voluntarily and selectively, often detached from internal control systems, enterprise risk management processes, or integrated performance frameworks. Consequently, global standards are not translated into actionable indicators, climate risk assessments, or forward-looking, outcome-based targets.

The limitations of accountability are further reinforced by systemic data readiness and governance gaps. Neither organization integrates sustainability or climate considerations into formal risk management processes, scenario analysis, or medium-term financial planning. External assurance is absent, and sustainability-related information is not embedded within existing bureaucratic evaluation instruments <sup>[30]</sup>. Even where performance management systems such as SAKIP (the Government Performance Accountability System) are emphasized, sustainability indicators remain peripheral and weakly connected to outcome-based evaluation <sup>[31]</sup>. This finding reinforces concerns in the literature that voluntary sustainability reporting in the public sector often complements rather than restructures established accountability mechanisms.

These findings suggest that sustainability reporting in Indonesian subnational governments is constrained not only by technical measurement challenges, but also by institutional design, voluntary disclosure incentives, and function-specific priorities. A uniform, private-sector-oriented reporting model is therefore ill-suited to this context. Instead, the evidence supports the need for a hybrid public-sector sustainability reporting framework that accommodates functional diversity while imposing minimum requirements for measurability, governance integration, and performance linkage <sup>[20]</sup>. Such a framework would allow sustainability reporting to evolve from a legitimacy-oriented, voluntary communication practice toward a more substantive instrument for accountability, performance management, and public value creation.

Taken together, the discussion demonstrates that the sustainability reports of the East Java High Court and the Banyuwangi Water Resources Agency disclose economic, environmental, and social information in a limited, uneven, and functionally differentiated manner when evaluated against the PSSDI framework. While elements of all three sustainability dimensions are present, disclosure depth remains shallow and structurally unbalanced, with a strong dominance of management-oriented narratives emphasizing policies, programs, and formal compliance claims. Operational and performance-based disclosures such as quantified targets, outcome-oriented indicators, climate risk integration, and strategic linkages are largely absent or only weakly articulated. As a result, sustainability reporting in both entities functions primarily as a voluntary legitimacy-seeking instrument rather than as a mechanism of substantive accountability or performance evaluation. Despite selective engagement with global sustainability standards, reporting practices remain decoupled from internal management systems and public-sector accountability architectures. This indicates that the

observed subnational institutions occupy an early, managed stage of sustainability reporting maturity, where disclosure serves symbolic and reputational purposes but has yet to be internalized as an operational tool for decision-making and public value delivery.

## **5. Conclusion**

This study concludes that sustainability reporting practices among subnational government entities in East Java remain at an early, managed stage of maturity, characterized by the dominance of managerial narratives and symbolic disclosures rather than performance-based and outcome-oriented accountability. Based on qualitative content analysis using the Public Sector Sustainability Disclosure Index (PSSDI), the sustainability-related reports of the Banyuwangi Water Resources Agency (2019) and the East Java High Court (2023) demonstrate that sustainability reporting is currently mobilized primarily as a legitimacy-seeking instrument, rather than as an integrated component of public-sector performance management.

Although both entities selectively reference internationally recognized sustainability frameworks, most notably concepts associated with the GRI Standards, these references serve primarily as normative signals rather than operational measurement systems. The absence of quantified targets, clearly defined time horizons, longitudinal performance tracking, impact-oriented indicators, and external assurance indicates that sustainability disclosure has not yet been institutionalized within core bureaucratic routines. Interpreted through legitimacy theory, this pattern reflects an organizational strategy aimed at maintaining social acceptance and regulatory conformity. In contrast, institutional theory explains it as a form of normative isomorphism, in which formal alignment with global norms is decoupled from substantive internal transformation.

The findings further reveal that data readiness and measurement reliability constitute systemic constraints on substantive sustainability reporting. Sustainability-related information remains fragmented, reported largely at an inventory level, and weakly connected to established public-sector performance evaluation instruments such as the Government Performance Accountability System (SAKIP). This condition limits the usefulness of sustainability reporting for policy learning, benchmarking, and strategic decision-making, reinforcing its current ceremonial function. Importantly, this limitation should not be interpreted solely as a methodological shortcoming, but rather as an empirical reflection of the prevailing state of sustainability governance in subnational public organizations within developing-country contexts.

At the same time, the study demonstrates that organizational mandate and functional orientation significantly shape the content and emphasis of sustainability disclosures. The East Java High Court prioritizes governance integrity, institutional control, and legal performance narratives aligned with its accountability relationship to central authorities and the public. In contrast, the Banyuwangi Water Resources Agency discloses relatively more environmental information due to its direct engagement with natural resource management and operational environmental impacts. This functional differentiation underscores the inadequacy of uniform, one-size-fits-all sustainability reporting models and highlights the need for a context-sensitive public-sector reporting approach that accommodates organizational heterogeneity while preserving minimum standards of comparability, measurability, and transparency.

The findings confirm that sustainability reporting by local governments in East Java remains situated within a symbolic phase, in which policy narratives and compliance claims prevail over verifiable sustainability performance. The study, therefore, underscores the strategic importance of developing a hybrid public-sector-oriented sustainability reporting framework that bridges international sustainability standards with domestic performance management systems, strengthens data governance capacity, and gradually

introduces target-setting and verification mechanisms. Such a framework is essential to support the transition from symbolic disclosure toward operational, performance-oriented sustainability reporting in the public sector.

Finally, this study acknowledges its scope limitations, particularly the restricted sample size and variation in reporting periods. These limitations arise from the empirical reality that sustainability reporting among Indonesian local governments remains rare and inconsistently disclosed through official public channels, with sustainability reporting still predominantly undertaken by corporate actors. Accordingly, the study does not seek statistical generalization but rather provides an in-depth analytical snapshot of current sustainability reporting practices in Indonesian subnational governments. As such, its value lies in offering empirically grounded insights into early-stage reporting dynamics and in informing future research and policy development to strengthen sustainability governance in the public sector.

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## **Conflict of interest**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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