



Achievement-Based School Principal Leadership in Improving the Quality of Education at the Buffer Schools of the Nusantara Capital City (IKN)

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Abstract

This study aims to describe and analyze the planning, organizing, strategies, impacts, and challenges of performance-based school principal leadership at SMP Negeri 27 Penajam Paser Utara in efforts to improve the quality of education. The research employs a qualitative approach using a case study method. Data collection techniques include observation, interviews, and documentation. The findings are as follows: (1) Performance-based leadership at SMP the Buffer Nusantara Capital City (Ibu Kota Nusantara) emphasizes continuous teacher competency development through routine training and systematic evaluation using a participatory transformational approach; (2) Leadership organization involves structured and synergistic resource management, supported by ongoing monitoring and program evaluation to maintain the quality of education; (3) Leadership strategies focus on strengthening teachers' professional capacity, developing a culture of innovative quality, implementing school-based management (SBM), engaging the community, and managing facilities that support optimal learning; (4) The impact of performance-based school principal leadership is evident in improved learning quality, school community motivation, discipline, academic achievement, and innovation; (5) Challenges in performance-based leadership include limited resources, diverse teacher motivation, resistance to innovation, and heavy workloads, which are addressed through routine evaluations, effective communication, and conflict and time management strategies.

Keywords: Educational Quality Improvement; Nusantara Capital City (IKN); Performance-Based; Public Junior High School; School Principal Leadership

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1. Introduction

The development of the Nusantara Capital City (IKN) in East Kalimantan is not merely a relocation of the government center but also a national strategic megaproject expected to serve as a catalyst for social and economic transformation (Luthfi et al., 2020). This transformation has a profound impact, particularly in the buffer zones such as Penajam Paser



Utara and Kutai Kartanegara regencies, which have experienced significant demographic and socio-economic changes (Syiah Kuala, 2020).

The surge in demand for quality public services, especially in the education sector, has become a primary requirement for the IKN buffer areas (Yusnita et al., 2025). The influx of government officials and workers with high educational needs, along with the demand for excellent human resources, necessitates a rapid transformation into an education ecosystem that prioritizes quality, innovation, and global competitiveness. Enhancing managerial capacity and human resource quality in schools is critical, with school principals playing a pivotal role as the driving force behind educational quality transformation (Fauzan et al., 2025; Waruwu et al., 2025). However, the disruptive challenges of IKN require performance-based leadership that emphasizes accountability, performance measurement, data-driven decision-making, and the role of the principal as a transformational leader (Dwiyono & Tannarong, 2024).

SMP Negeri 27 Penajam Paser Utara serves as a flagship example in the core IKN region, successfully achieving national-level accomplishments despite limited facilities and resources. This success is supported by private sector interventions and demonstrates that high achievement is attainable even amid significant challenges. Nonetheless, performance gaps remain evident between flagship schools and others still employing traditional management models. This gap is corroborated by studies showing a positive correlation between effective school principal leadership and educational quality, although previous research primarily focused on stable regions. The IKN buffer zones differ, being in a rapid transition phase with uncertainties, thus lacking extensive literature that deeply examines this unique context (Taufik Nor, 2024).

The reality on the ground, particularly in Sepaku District, the core location of IKN, presents a contrasting and compelling picture. On one hand, there are "islands of excellence" such as SMP Negeri 2 Penajam Paser Utara and SMP Negeri 27 Penajam Paser Utara. As the youngest school, SMP Negeri 27 Penajam Paser Utara has demonstrated significant achievements at the sub-district, district, provincial, and national levels. These achievements have been realized despite limitations ranging from an inadequate number of ideal teachers to basic facility shortcomings, such as the absence of a school library, no laboratory, and classrooms located very close to the highway used for IKN development activities.

This study addresses this gap by comprehensively investigating the formulation and implementation process of performance-based school principal leadership in the IKN buffer area. It focuses on how IKN development aligns with measurable performance targets, strategies to cultivate a culture of achievement, and effective leadership models for accelerating education quality improvement. Emphasizing contextual and empirical performance-based leadership, this research aims to contribute theoretically to educational leadership and practically to adaptive school quality improvement policies responsive to the dynamics of IKN development. Specifically, the study explores aspects of planning, organizing, leadership strategies, implementation impact, challenges, and evaluation of leadership at SMP Negeri 27 Penajam Paser Utara as a representative model of adaptive educational leadership in a national strategic region.



SMP Negeri 27 Penajam Paser Utara exemplifies adaptive success in IKN's core Sepaku District, achieving national accolades despite constraints like teacher shortages, absent libraries/laboratories, and proximity to development highways bolstered by private interventions. Yet, performance disparities persist with traditional-model schools, underscoring the research gap.

This study explicitly addresses it by investigating performance-based principal leadership formulation and implementation in IKN buffer areas. Primary aim: To analyze alignment with IKN targets, achievement culture strategies, and models accelerating quality improvement.

2. Method

2.1. Research Type and Approach

This study adopts a qualitative case study design to achieve an in-depth, comprehensive, and contextual understanding of performance-based leadership practices employed by the school principal to enhance educational quality at SMP Negeri 27 Penajam Paser Utara, a Nusantara Capital City (IKN) buffer school.

2.2. Research Location and Time

The study was conducted at SMP Negeri 27 Penajam Paser Utara, Jl. Negara Km. 46, Desa Bumi Harapan, Kecamatan Sepaku, Kabupaten Penajam Paser Utara, East Kalimantan 76147, Indonesia, from September 4 to November 4, 2025.

2.3. Data Sources

Data validity was ensured via source and method triangulation. Source triangulation involved cross-verifying data from the principal, teachers, students, administrative staff, and school documents. Method triangulation integrated in-depth interviews, non-participant observations, and documentation analysis. This approach minimized bias, enriched phenomenological insights, and confirmed consistency through member-checking with primary informants, yielding credible findings for accountable educational quality recommendations.

2.4. Data Collection and Analysis Techniques

Data Collection: Three techniques were employed:

- a. Non-participant observation: Unstructured, immersive observation of principal and staff activities in performance-based management, conducted without intervention across school routines.
- b. Semi-structured in-depth interviews: Conducted with eight purposively selected key informants (principal, vice principal, four experienced teachers, two high-achieving students). Selection criteria: Informants had ≥ 2 years direct involvement in school leadership/performance initiatives, diverse roles for comprehensive perspectives, and voluntary participation. Sample size justification: Saturation achieved after eight interviews (Guest et al., 2006), balancing depth with feasibility in a single-case study. Protocol: 45-60 minute audio-recorded sessions using guiding questions (e.g.,



"Describe performance targets and alignment strategies"; "What challenges arise in IKN context, and how addressed?"). Transcripts anonymized.

- c. Documentation: Official records (e.g., performance reports, strategic plans) and visual evidence (photos/videos) of management implementation.

Data Analysis: Followed *Miles* and *Huberman* (2014) interactive model: (1) Reduction coding/selecting principal strategies, patterns, and steps; (2) Display narrative summaries and thematic matrices; (3) Conclusion/Verification pattern/theme emergence, triangulated via cross-checks and informant reconfirmation for accuracy.

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1. School Principal Leadership

Leadership in education is defined as the ability to influence and motivate individuals or groups to achieve predetermined educational goals (Dwi Aprina et al., 2023). In the school context, leadership is not limited to the principal but also involves teachers, administrative staff, and even students who positively impact the school community. The primary characteristics of educational leadership include a clear vision, effective communication skills, and decisiveness in decision-making, all focused on improving the quality of learning (Fauzi, 2021).

The term leadership originates from the word "leader," which refers to a person who leads, while the leader is the position held. Etymologically, the term leadership derives from the base word "pimpin" (to lead), giving rise to the verb "memimpin," which means to guide and direct (Siti Umami, 2021).

Leadership is a process of influencing individuals to take actions that support the achievement of shared goals (Handayani L et al., 2024). A leader must have strategies to motivate and encourage others to carry out the leader's desired objectives. This effort will be more successful if the school principal's leadership avoids relationships with teachers based solely on power and instead prioritizes effective collaboration (Darmansah et al., 2024). Performance-based school principal leadership involves the ability to design data-driven school development strategies, stimulate innovation, and create a culture of quality within the school environment.

Based on the theories above, it can be concluded that performance-based school principal leadership is a behavior and set of actions occurring between individuals and groups that encourage movement toward specific goals, in accordance with the leader's expectations or the vision and mission stated by the organization.

3.2. Performance-Based Management Planning

Table 1. Planning for Educational Quality Improvement

No	Planning Aspect	Activities/Strategies
1.	Principal's strategy in planning performance-based educational quality improvement	Development of teacher competencies through routine training and systematic evaluation; participatory planning with staff.



No	Planning Aspect	Activities/Strategies
2.	Principal's role in motivating teachers and students to achieve maximum performance	Recognition of outstanding teachers, continuous student development, intensive communication, aimed at improving competitive graduate standards.
3.	Effective leadership style of the principal in supporting educational quality achievement	Implementation of regular coordination meetings; development of the independent curriculum; comprehensive curriculum documents with environmental and character insights..
4.	Constraints and challenges faced by the principal in implementing performance-based leadership	Quarterly evaluation meetings addressing teacher resistance, limited resources, and work culture adaptation.
5.	Principal's efforts to build a conducive work culture and school climate for academic achievement	Work culture and discipline workshops; open communication, recognition, coaching, fair discipline, psychological support, and strengthening collaboration.

The principal of SMP Negeri 27 Penajam Paser Utara implements strategies for improving educational quality through routine training and periodic evaluations, supported by a participative and communicative leadership style. This approach aligns with participative and transformational leadership theories that emphasize organizational member involvement and empowerment, thus explaining why the planning and execution of learning processes are effective and jointly committed (Dwiyono et al., 2022).

Enhancement of educational management through leadership capable of motivating teachers and students employs recognition and intensive communication, consistent with motivation theory (Kalbarczyk et al., 2025). This study demonstrates that adaptive and participative leadership practices can significantly improve the school climate, which has implications for more inclusive educational planning policies and effective human resource management. Challenges such as teacher resistance to performance evaluation and resource limitations correspond to organizational change theories (Mulawarman W.G et al., 2022). The principal addresses these obstacles by adjusting work culture and improving internal communication, critical aspects of educational administration to ensure continuity of change and innovation in learning.

Based on interviews, observations, and documentation regarding Performance-Based School Principal Leadership in Planning Educational Quality Improvement at SMP Negeri, the principal and vice principal of Public Junior High School 27 Penajam Paser Utara implement performance-based quality improvement strategies through regular teacher competency development via training and periodic evaluation of student learning outcomes. Planning is conducted systematically and participatively, involving all staff to ensure that achievement targets are measurable. Collaboration among teachers and monitoring of student progress are maintained through intensive communication to facilitate smooth program implementation, as presented in Table 1. Planning for Educational Quality Improvement.



3.3. Performance-Based School Principal Leadership Organization

Table 2. School Principal Organization in Educational Quality Improvement

No	Object of Observation	Focus	Interview Summary
1.	Quality Management Team Organization	How the principal forms and organizes the educational quality management team	Integrated resource management, budget prioritization for achievement programs, orderly administration to support teaching and learning processes.
2.	Organizational Structure	Clear and organized structure supporting educational quality	Clear definition of functions and responsibilities, effective data management, and communication between departments.
3.	Teacher and Staff Collaboration	Collaboration among teachers and staff supporting student achievement	Regular coordination meetings, strategy sharing, collaboration with administrative staff to ensure program implementation according to plan.
4.	Program Monitoring and Evaluation	Routine monitoring and evaluation covering academic achievement and student character development	Comprehensive evaluations for continuous improvement of learning programs.
5.	Organizational Challenges and Solutions	Role adjustments, policy adaptation, human resource limitations, and manual administrative systems	Regular communication, training, solid coordination, and implementation of administrative technology for efficiency and error reduction.

The research findings illustrate that performance-based school principal organization at the IKN buffer public school is effective in enhancing educational quality through systematic and integrated resource management. The establishment of a quality management team and optimal utilization of facilities and budget support the attainment of maximum learning outcomes, consistent with Total Quality Management principles (Azainil et al., 2021). This addresses how leadership structure and organizational management directly impact sustainable educational quality improvement.

A clear organizational structure and effective coordination between departments are critical factors in maintaining smooth learning and school administration processes. These findings align with organizational structure theory (Jr Calimlim et al., 2025) which emphasizes the importance of proper information flow to support organizational goals. The synergistic collaboration among teachers and staff identified in this study strengthens program implementation efficiency and fosters a productive work environment (Sariakin et al., 2025).

Routine monitoring and evaluation that assess not only academic achievement but also student character and skills conform to the Continuous Improvement Process model (CIP) (Fauziyyah et al., 2024; Sok et al., 2025) demonstrating an adaptive approach responsive to educational needs. This explains why the school can identify strengths and weaknesses and undertake continuous improvements as part of sustainable quality enhancement.



Despite challenges such as limited resources and policy changes, the principal overcomes these barriers through adaptive leadership, effective communication, ongoing coaching, and technological utilization (Handayani et al., 2025). The contribution of this research is significant to the field of educational management, particularly in educational leadership, policy and planning, as well as economic and political aspects of education.



Figure 1. Awards for Outstanding Teachers and Students

Based on interviews, observations, and documentation regarding Performance-Based School Principal Organization in Educational Quality Improvement at the IKN buffer public school, effective organization is a key factor supporting the achievement of educational quality. The principal successfully formed a structured and integrated quality management team, optimally utilizing human resources, facilities, and budget to support student achievement, as illustrated in Table 2, School Principal Organization in Educational Quality Improvement.

3.4. Performance-Based School Principal Leadership Strategies

Table 3. Educational Quality Improvement Strategies

No	Object of Observation	Focus	Interview Summary	Percentage (%)
1.	Educational Quality Improvement Strategy	Design and implementation of strategies for improving educational quality	Routine training and capacity-building workshops for teachers and staff; mentoring and performance evaluation.	Teacher A: 100%, Teacher B: 100%, Teacher D: 100%
2.	Quality Culture and Innovation	Implementation of quality culture and	Application of creative teaching methods, training, and creativity	Teacher A: 90%, Teacher B: 90%



No	Object of Observation	Focus	Interview Summary	Percentage (%)
		innovation in the school	development workshops for teachers.	
3.	School-Based Management (SBM)	Implementation of school-based management for resources	Pengelolaan terencana sumber daya SDM, sarana, dan dana dengan partisipasi seluruh warga sekolah. Planned management of human resources, facilities, and funds with participation from the entire school community.	Teacher A: 95%, Teacher B: 95%
4.	Parental and Community Involvement	Active involvement of parents and community in education	Communication forums, participation in school activities, community collaboration with relevant stakeholders.	Teacher C: 85%, Teacher D: 85%
5.	Facilities and Learning Environment Management	Management of facilities and learning environment	Maintenance of facilities, regular monitoring, involvement of students and teachers in maintaining the school environment.	Teacher D: 90%, Administrative Staff: 90%

The principal's strategies for improving educational quality at the IKN buffer public school demonstrate a holistic and sustainable approach proven effective based on data and analysis results. Routine training, workshops, mentoring, and constructive evaluation significantly enhance the capacities of teachers and supporting staff, consistent with human resource development theory (Komariyah, 2022). This approach improves teaching quality while optimizing the staff's role in supporting the learning process, addressing the research objective of understanding how quality improvement is achievable through human resource development.

The quality culture and innovation within the school are fostered through structured activities such as morning literacy programs and character habituation, creating a creative and productive learning climate aligned with organizational culture theory (Haeruddin, 2025). This explains why teachers and students are motivated to excel and continuously adapt to modern learning needs (Cynthia W Williams, 2025). These findings reinforce the understanding that a strong organizational culture is a determinant factor in school success.

The implementation of School-Based Management (SBM) has proven to be an important strategy for managing resources in a participative and organized manner. The principal facilitates collaboration among school members, applying decentralization principles that provide autonomy and accountability (Yolanda et al., 2025). Data indicates that SBM accelerates responses to specific school needs and enhances the effectiveness of learning programs, aligning with the study's focus on optimizing school resources.

Parental and community involvement as pillars of educational quality add significant value to school development. Active communication and cooperation increase resource support and student motivation, consistent with the school-community partnership concept (Pratikno et



al., 2022). This finding confirms the importance of social synergy as part of the principal's strategies to create a supportive and sustainable learning environment.

The management of facilities and a conducive learning environment through routine maintenance and regular monitoring is also identified as a major supporting factor. A comfortable physical and psychological environment increases student motivation and concentration, in line with learning environment theory (Nurlaili et al., 2021). These results explain how systematic and comprehensive resource management contributes to overall educational quality improvement.

The integration of human resource management theory, organizational culture, SBM, community partnership, and learning environment theory applied by the principal explains the effectiveness of the quality improvement strategies at Public Junior High School 27 Penajam Paser Utara. This study addresses how these strategies complement each other and generate tangible positive impacts on student achievement and learning.



Figure 2. School Program Development Workshop

Based on interviews, observations, and documentation regarding the School Principal's Strategies for Educational Quality Improvement at Public Junior High School 27 Penajam Paser Utara, the principal implements various effective strategies. Capacity building for teachers and supporting staff is conducted through routine training, workshops, ongoing mentoring, and constructive performance evaluations. These efforts help improve teaching quality and overall school operations, as presented in Table 3. Educational Quality Improvement Strategies.

3.5. Impact of Performance-Based School Principal Leadership

Table 4. Impact of Leadership on Educational Quality Improvement

No	Impact Aspect	Main Strategies
1.	Influence of principal leadership on the quality of learning	In-house training, ICT training, teacher recruitment.



No	Impact Aspect	Main Strategies
2.	Leadership impact on teacher and student motivation	Subject teacher working groups (MGMP), training/seminars, capacity building, awards.
3.	Principal's role in improving discipline and school culture	Discipline and school culture programs.
4.	Principal leadership on students' academic achievement	Independent Curriculum, competency documents, character curriculum.
5.	Principal's contribution to the development of learning innovation	Workshops and innovation training.

The impact of performance-based school principal leadership at Public Junior High School 27 Penajam Paser Utara significantly enhances educational quality by fostering a conducive learning atmosphere and motivating teachers' innovation, consistent with transformational leadership theory emphasizing inspiration and empowerment. Interview data confirm the principal's decisive and communicative role in supporting teaching quality through the provision of adequate learning resources.

This leadership style also increases motivation among teachers, students, and administrative staff through support, recognition, and open communication, aligned with motivation theories that highlight the importance of appreciation (Olino, 2025; Wiegerová & Gavora, 2025). Such a supportive work environment explains the observed improvements in learning effectiveness and administrative service quality reflected in the research data.

The principal's role in building discipline and school culture enforces consistent rules and behavioral exemplars, supporting the formation of responsible student character in accordance with organizational culture theory (Cherop Consolata et al., 2025; Duran & Cemaloglu, 2024). The data indicate that routine discipline programs and effective communication form the foundation for creating an orderly and conducive school environment. The principal's visionary leadership is proven effective in improving academic achievement by guiding teachers and students through a planned process and involving them in evaluation, consistent with contingency leadership theory which adapts leadership to context (Afany & Syukri, 2024; Mulawarman W.G et al., 2024). These findings address the research objective concerning leadership influence on academic outcomes.

The principal's contribution to learning innovation exemplifies adaptive leadership that supports creativity and change, reinforcing innovative leadership theory that fosters a dynamic learning climate (Hong Phong, 2025; Lebang et al., 2025). Data also indicate that provided training and facilities contribute to the ongoing motivation and competency enhancement of teachers. Performance-based leadership at this school cultivates a productive and sustainable learning environment through transformational, communicative, and visionary approaches. These findings are consistent with various leadership and educational management theories emphasizing the importance of integrated leadership strategies in quality improvement.



Based on interviews, observations, and documentation regarding the Impact of Performance-Based School Principal Leadership on Educational Quality Improvement at SMP Negeri 27 Penajam Paser Utara, the principal's leadership has a significantly positive impact on enhancing educational quality. The principal successfully creates a conducive learning atmosphere and motivates teachers to innovate while improving teaching quality through the provision of adequate learning resources. The principal's participative and communicative attitude also fosters active involvement of teachers and students, creating a harmonious and productive environment.

3.6. Challenges and Evaluation of Performance-Based School Principal Leadership

Table 5. Challenges and Leadership Evaluation

No	Object of Observation	Main Activities/Strategies
1.	Leadership challenges and evaluation	1. School Work Meetings, Semester/Annual Evaluations 2. Supervision & Monitoring 3. Principal Performance Assessment
2.	Evaluation of leadership effectiveness	Formation of Evaluation Team: 1. Planning and scheduling evaluations 2. Evaluation of learning achievements, graduate profiles, assessment results, teaching quality, student feedback
3.	Strategies to overcome resistance to policy changes	1. Socialization of School Work Programs 2. Evaluation of operational curriculum and documents 3. School accreditation
4.	Conflict handling & time management	1. Teacher and Staff Development Meetings 2. Dissemination of evaluation results 3. Recommendations and follow-up actions from evaluations

The challenges faced by performance-based school principal leadership at SMP Negeri 27 Penajam Paser Utara reflect the complexity of managing limited resources and diverse teacher competencies. This is consistent with situational leadership theory (Pardosi & Utari, 2021) which stresses the need to adjust leadership styles based on subordinate readiness. Structural constraints, including limited facilities, teaching staff, and budgets, require the principal to innovate and adapt in order to maintain educational quality despite resource limitations (Dash, 2025)

Periodic leadership evaluations using coaching, mentoring, training, and subject teacher working groups (MGMP) indicate the application of organizational learning principles (Li C. et al., 2025). This evaluative approach supports capacity building for teachers and reflection on leadership effectiveness, transforming the school into a learning organization responsive to internal needs and changes. Transparency and participation in decision-making strengthen accountability and stakeholder engagement (Makirimani & Naicker, 2024).

Overcoming resistance to education system policy changes requires intensive communication and continuous socialization, in line with organizational change theory (Salim et al., 2024). The principal actively conducts evaluations of curriculum development and



implementation to unify vision and encourage gradual adaptation among the school community. This approach reduces resistance and broadens acceptance of educational innovation within the school (Kemethofer et al., 2025).

Conflict resolution and time management are addressed through open communication, familial mediation, and efficient scheduling. This aligns with conflict management theory (Igwe & Ligaya, 2025), which underscores collaboration and compromise as keys to organizational harmony. Effective time management supports balancing the learning process and teachers' professional development for optimal productivity (Amanda K-H, 2023).

Based on the analysis, the challenges and evaluation of performance-based leadership at this school demand that the leader be adaptive, communicative, and reflective. Continuous evaluations, appropriate change communication strategies, and effective conflict management allow the principal to overcome obstacles and consistently improve quality. This reinforces contemporary leadership and educational management theories (Muuo Gideon et al., 2025).

The primary challenges include limited resources, varied teacher motivation, and resistance to innovation. Systematic and participatory evaluation through coaching, mentoring, and training constitute key strategies for developing leadership quality. Intensive communication and effective conflict management strengthen the change process and create a conducive school environment, making the principal's leadership increasingly effective in sustainably improving educational quality.

Based on interviews, observations, and documentation regarding the challenges and evaluation of performance-based school principal leadership in enhancing educational quality at SMP Negeri 27 Penajam Paser Utara, the main barriers include limited resources such as facilities, teaching staff, and budget, as well as differences in teacher motivation and competence requiring special attention. Additionally, the readiness and support of the school community for innovation and change are sometimes insufficient, especially given teachers' workload and limited time, which hinder optimal implementation of professional development.

4. Conclusion

Performance-based school principal leadership at SMP Negeri 27 Penajam Paser Utara, a Nusantara Capital City (IKN) buffer school, emphasizes continuous teacher competency development via systematic training and evaluation within a transformational model involving participatory staff engagement. Structured, synergistic organization—bolstered by ongoing monitoring underpins quality improvements. Applied strategies include professional capacity building, quality/innovation culture cultivation, school-based management, and parent/community involvement to foster conducive learning environments. Communicative, participative, visionary leadership significantly impacts learning quality, motivation, discipline, achievement, and instructional innovation. Challenges such as resource limitations, motivation variance, innovation resistance, and workload are mitigated through routine evaluations, communication, conflict resolution, and time management, sustaining quality enhancement.



This case illustrates performance-based leadership implementation in IKN buffer settings, offering insights for similar transitional contexts—not generalizable recommendations. Key limitations include: single-case focus limiting transferability; potential researcher bias despite reflexivity; self-reported data risks; and exclusion of long-term outcomes. Future multi-site studies in diverse IKN zones are recommended. The findings highlight optimized human resource, facility, and budget management for student performance in resource-constrained environments, alongside evaluation guidelines for leadership challenges to ensure systematic sustainability.

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