

The Integration of Informal Institutions in Participatory Governance at the Local Level: A Case Study of Gowa Regency, Indonesia

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Abstract

This study examines the practice of participatory governance in regional development planning in Gowa Regency through an analysis of RPJMD, RKPD, and participatory forum documents. A qualitative approach is employed to explore how participation is constructed and the extent of its influence on policy. The findings indicate that the Musrenbang process has provided a broad space for participation, as reflected in the large number of community proposals, which are predominantly focused on infrastructure needs and the local economy. However, the participation that occurs tends to be procedural in nature and functions more as a mechanism for collecting proposals rather than as a deliberative process. Not all aspirations are translated into policy, as they are shaped by development priorities, budget constraints, and administrative considerations. Monitoring remains largely dominated by the government, while coordination shows a tendency toward centralized authority. Consequently, the resulting policies represent an adjustment between community aspirations and the existing policy framework. This study concludes that participatory governance in Gowa has not fully reflected an equal distribution of influence. Participation exists, but it is not yet decisive.

Keywords

Informal institutions; local governance; participatory governance

Introduction

Participatory governance in public administration has developed as a response to the limitations of hierarchical bureaucratic models in managing the complexity of public interests (Palumbo, 2023). In the global literature, this approach is no longer understood merely as an expansion of participation, but rather as an effort to reconfigure the distribution of authority in decision-making processes (Abas et al., 2023). Thus, the central issue lies not in the availability of participatory spaces, but in how influence is distributed among the actors involved. This shift in perspective redirects attention from procedural aspects toward the power dynamics underlying participatory practices.

This change in focus becomes particularly relevant when examining practices in Indonesia, which have undergone transformation through decentralization policies. The institutionalization of various participatory forums reflects a systematic effort to create space for public involvement in policymaking processes (Hofer & Kaufmann, 2023). However, the existence of such forums does not automatically transform decision-making structures. Participation often remains at the level of attendance, while the capacity to influence policy substance remains limited (Kearney et al., 2023). This procedural nature of participation suggests that the key issue is no longer access, but rather the distribution of influence within governance processes.

The limitations of substantive participation raise questions about the factors that actually shape the distribution of influence in participatory practices (Navitas et al., 2026). In this regard, informal institutions emerge as a variable that cannot be overlooked (Naveed & Shabbir, 2022). Informal institutions operate through norms, social relations, and cultural legitimacy, determining who has the authority to speak and how decisions are

negotiated (Routh, 2022). Consequently, deliberative processes do not occur in neutral spaces, but within social structures that have already configured power relations at the local level (Clark, 2022).

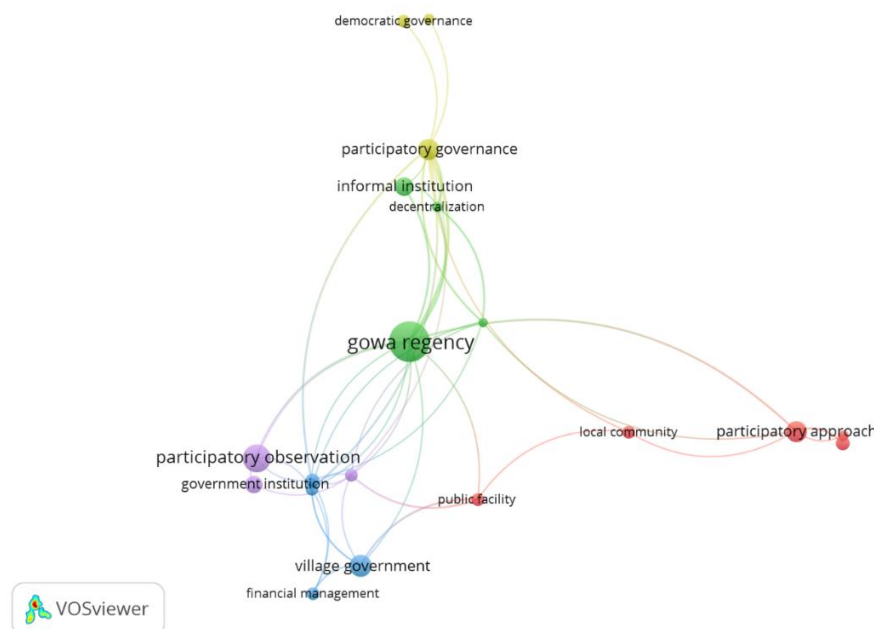
The presence of informal institutions introduces further dynamics in their relationship with formal institutions. This relationship is not hierarchical, but mutually constitutive within governance practices (Cooper et al., 2022). On the one hand, informal institutions can strengthen policy legitimacy because they are rooted in shared values (Ayres, 2022). On the other hand, the dominance of certain actors within informal structures can restrict participatory access and concentrate influence within specific groups (Chumo et al., 2023). Therefore, participatory governance should be understood as the outcome of interactions between formal rules and social practices, rather than merely as a product of institutional design (Blanco et al., 2022).

Nevertheless, the regulatory framework in Indonesia tends to remain focused on the formal dimension of participation (Widjaja, 2025). Law No. 23 of 2014 on Regional Government emphasizes the importance of public involvement in local governance, while Law No. 25 of 2004 on the National Development Planning System regulates participatory planning procedures through formal forums (Syifana et al., 2026). This policy approach indicates that participation is primarily understood as an administrative mechanism (Kiss et al., 2022). As a result, the social dimensions shaping participatory practices are not fully accommodated within the policy framework (Vivier & Sanchez-Betancourt, 2023).

The limitations of this formal approach can be observed concretely in Gowa Regency. Community attendance in sub-district Musrenbang forums reaches approximately 65%, yet only around 30–40% of proposals are incorporated into regional planning (Bappenas, 2021; Badan Pusat Statistik, 2023). At the same time, approximately 50–60% of program discussions take place through informal interactions prior to the official forums (World Bank, 2020). This pattern of decision-making indicates that formal processes are not the sole arena determining policy outcomes, as the distribution of influence largely occurs through non-institutionalized mechanisms.

Empirical findings at the local level also reveal limitations in existing academic studies. Most research on participatory governance continues to focus on formal design and participatory procedures, while informal institutions are treated as a separate phenomenon within social studies. Such analytical separation limits the ability to explain how public decisions are actually produced. Therefore, an approach that integrates formal and informal institutions within a unified analytical framework is needed. To situate this gap within the broader literature, this study conducts a bibliometric mapping of 200 academic publications published between 2022 and 2026 using VOSviewer.

Figure 1
Network Visualization of Bibliometric Analysis Results



Source: Processed by the researcher using VOSviewer, 2026

The network visualization shows that participatory governance occupies a central position and is directly connected to the concept of informal institutions. This indicates that, within the literature, participatory practices are not only understood as formal mechanisms but are also shaped by social norms and non-formal relations within society. In addition, its linkage with decentralization suggests that participation develops within the context of decentralized governance, where local governments have greater space to engage communities. Meanwhile, its association with participatory approaches and local communities highlights that participation is often framed within community-based approaches. These findings suggest that studies on participatory governance tend to evolve along two main dimensions: the formal institutional dimension and the informal social dimension.

The significance of this research lies in the need to understand the distribution of influence in local governance more realistically by considering the interaction between formal and informal institutions. Without an approach that integrates these two dimensions, governance analysis risks remaining confined to procedural aspects and overlooking the mechanisms that actually shape policy outcomes. Within Indonesia's decentralization framework, such an understanding is essential for developing governance practices that are more inclusive and context-sensitive.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to analyze how informal institutions are integrated into participatory governance and how the interaction between informal and formal institutions shapes the distribution of influence among actors at the local level in Gowa Regency.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach aimed at understanding how informal institutions are integrated into participatory governance practices at the local level. This approach enables an in-depth examination of the relationships between social norms, formal structures, and public decision-making processes through document-based analysis, allowing governance practices to be interpreted within their broader social and institutional context.

The research focuses on Gowa Regency, with the unit of analysis consisting of policy and development planning documents that reflect participatory governance practices at the regional level. The selection of this location is based on data availability as well as its relevance in illustrating the interaction between formal mechanisms and social practices in governance.

Data collection is conducted through document analysis. Data are obtained from various official documents published by the government, including regional development planning documents, Musrenbang reports, and relevant regulations. In addition, this study utilizes scholarly articles published in national and international journals as secondary data sources to enrich the analysis. This approach allows for the comparison of multiple perspectives and the identification of consistent patterns in participatory governance practices.

To strengthen the analysis and identify the novelty of the study, a systematic literature review is conducted using VOSviewer software. A total of 200 academic articles published between 2022 and 2026 are analyzed to map research developments and the relationships between relevant concepts. The articles are retrieved using the Publish or Perish application with keywords such as participatory governance, local governance, and informal institutions. The collected data are then managed and refined using Mendeley before being further analyzed in VOSviewer.

Data analysis is carried out with the assistance of NVivo software to systematically organize and code document data. The analytical process includes open coding to identify key themes, axial coding to establish relationships between categories, and selective coding to formulate patterns of relationships among concepts. The results of this coding process are subsequently developed into an analytical narrative derived from the synthesis of findings across policy documents and supporting literature. This narrative is structured by mapping the findings based on the core dimensions of participatory governance, enabling a systematic interpretation of how participation is organized, how influence is distributed, and how formal and informal institutions interact in shaping policy processes at the local level. In this way, the analysis moves beyond descriptive categorization to provide a coherent and conceptually grounded explanation of governance dynamics.

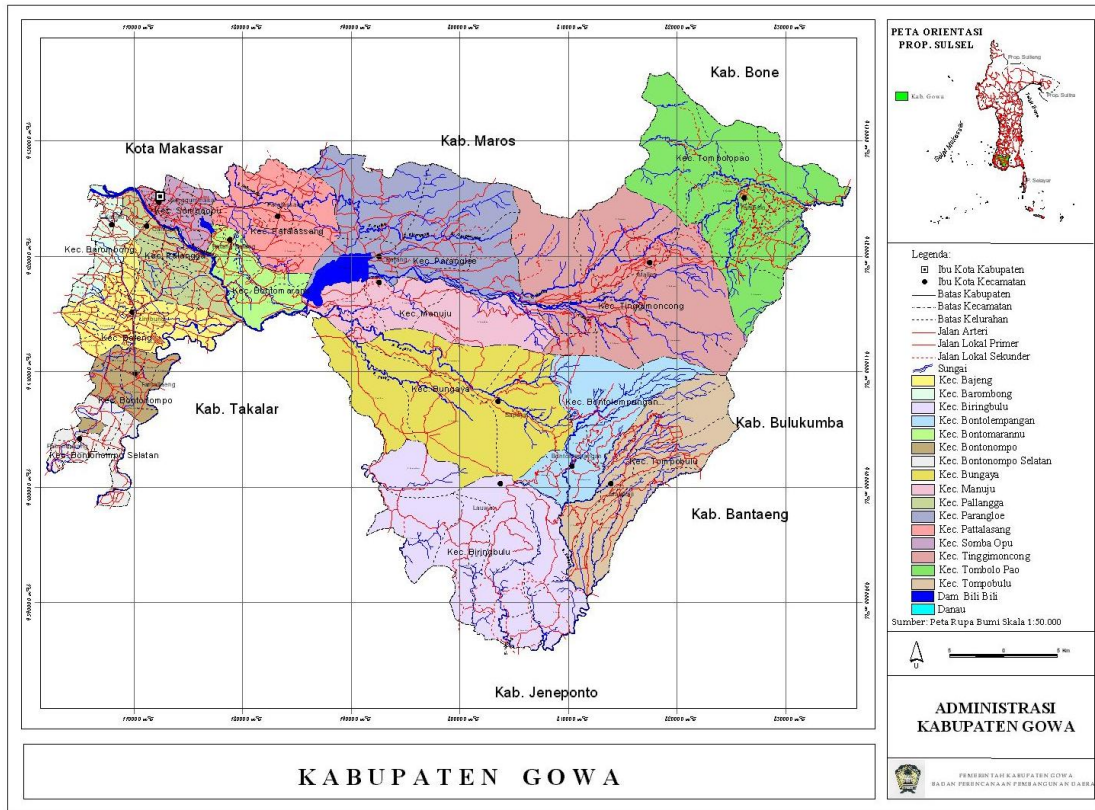
To ensure data validity, this study employs source triangulation by comparing information obtained from various official documents and academic publications. In addition, analytical consistency is maintained through

iterative reading and continuous verification of relationships among categories throughout the coding process, ensuring that the findings are both reliable and analytically robust.

Results and Discussion

1. Overview of Gowa Regency

Figure 2
Map of Gowa Regency



Source: Humas Gowa, 2026

Gowa Regency is one of the strategic regions in South Sulawesi Province, characterized by diverse geographical and social conditions (Alfadillah et al., 2024). Located in the southern part of Sulawesi Island and directly bordering Makassar City, Gowa holds an important position as a buffer zone for the metropolitan area. Administratively, the regency consists of several districts with varying typologies, ranging from lowland areas to hilly and mountainous regions, resulting in differing development needs across areas.

From a demographic perspective, Gowa demonstrates relatively high population growth compared to surrounding regions (Dorward et al., 2023). This growth is closely linked to its proximity to Makassar as an economic center, which stimulates population mobility and increases socio-economic activities. Consequently, Gowa faces complex development pressures, particularly in the provision of basic infrastructure, public services, and regional resource management.

Within the framework of regional development, the Regional Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMD) of Gowa Regency outlines policy directions focused on improving human resource quality, strengthening regional economic competitiveness, and promoting equitable development based on local potential (Abdillah et al., 2025). These policy directions are further elaborated in the annual Regional Government Work Plan (RKPD), which serves as the operational instrument for implementing development programs (Ratmadany, A.M, Bulutoding, L., 2023). Both documents indicate that development planning in Gowa is not solely technocratic but also incorporates a participatory approach through the involvement of multiple stakeholders.

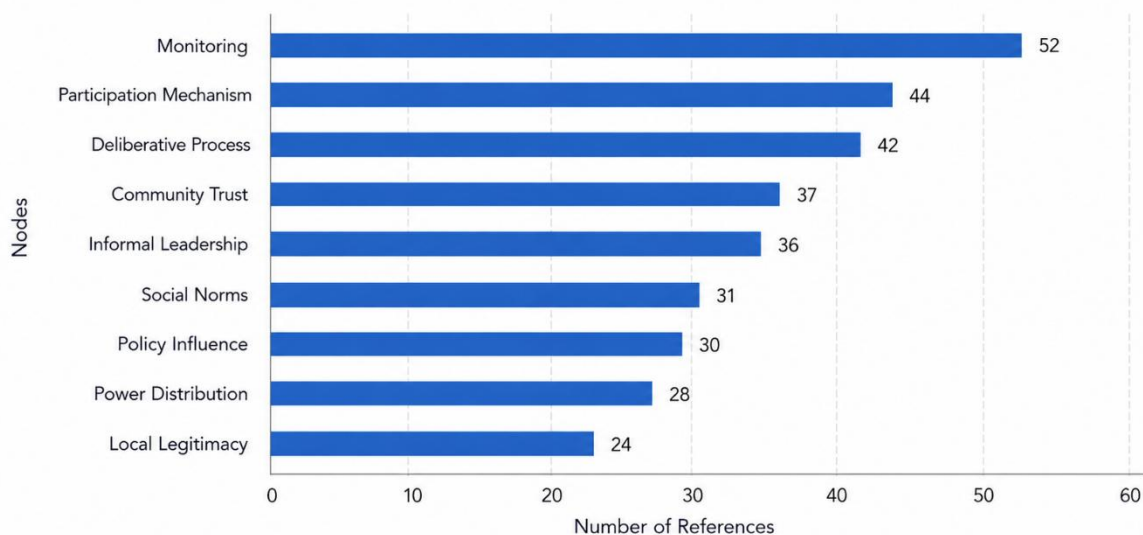
One of the primary mechanisms used in this planning process is the Development Planning Deliberation Forum (Musrenbang), which is conducted in stages from the village level to the district and regency levels (Nurlinah

et al., 2025). Through this forum, communities are given space to express their aspirations, needs, and program proposals relevant to local conditions. In practice, Musrenbang functions not only as a formal instrument within the planning system but also as an arena of interaction between government and society in determining development priorities.

However, the social and institutional complexity in Gowa also influences how participation unfolds (Syamsu et al., 2025). On the one hand, the local government structure provides a formal framework that enables public involvement in development planning. On the other hand, social dynamics, power relations, and the presence of informal institutions at the local level play a significant role in shaping decision-making processes. This condition suggests that governance practices in Gowa are not determined solely by formal regulations but are also shaped by the broader social context within which they operate.

2. NVivo Visualization Results

Figure 3
Thematic Coding Results Bar Chart



Source: Processed by the researcher using NVivo 12 Pro, 2026

The bar chart visualization does not merely display the distribution of coding frequencies; rather, it reveals the underlying structure of power relations and the operational logic of governance at the local level. The dominance of participatory governance, particularly within the subdimension of monitoring (52 references), must be interpreted cautiously. This should not be seen as an automatic indicator of successful participation, but rather as a symptom of what is often referred to in the literature as “residual participation”, a form of engagement where the public is positioned primarily as a post-decision overseer, rather than as an actor shaping policy direction from the outset. In other words, participation exists, but it is located downstream rather than upstream in the governance process.

This condition suggests a tendency for the local government of Gowa Regency to retain dominant control during the planning and policy formulation stages. Although the subtheme of the deliberative process (42 references) appears relatively significant, it remains proportionally lower than monitoring. This indicates that deliberative spaces are likely formalistic in nature, procedurally available for instance through Musrenbang or consultation forums, yet not necessarily substantive in influencing final decisions. In this context, the integration of informal institutions has not yet progressed toward co-decision-making, but remains limited to a consultative role.

Interestingly, within the dimension of informal institutions, the relatively balanced distribution among community trust, informal leadership, and social norms points to a more structural insight, namely that the social foundations for integration are already present and relatively strong. Public trust and the legitimacy of informal leaders are not weak variables; rather, they constitute stable forms of social capital. However, this reveals a paradox, strong social capital does not automatically translate into political power within the policy arena. In other words, there exists a “disjuncture” between social strength and institutional access.

This disjuncture becomes even more evident when examining the dimension of power dynamics. Although it has a smaller number of references (82), its substance is the most decisive. The subthemes of policy influence (30 references) and power distribution (28 references) indicate that the core issue is not the presence or absence of participation, but rather who holds the authority to shape final outcomes. In this context, informal institutions appear to operate at the margins of the power structure, socially recognized, yet not fully institutionalized within formal decision-making mechanisms.

Thus, if this study addresses the notion of “integration,” the visualization findings suggest that such integration remains asymmetrical. The state, represented by the local government, continues to function as the central locus of power, while informal institutions act as complementary elements that reinforce legitimacy rather than as equal partners in determining policy direction. This helps explain why local legitimacy emerges as a subtheme, albeit with a lower frequency, legitimacy continues to be derived primarily from formal structures rather than from negotiated processes between formal and informal actors.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings challenge the normative assumptions within much of the participatory governance literature, which tends to idealize integration as a harmonious process. In the case of Gowa Regency, integration appears instead as a form of latent contestation, informal institutions are accommodated only insofar as they do not disrupt existing power distributions. In other words, what occurs is not full integration, but rather selective incorporation, where informal elements are partially adopted to support system stability without fundamentally transforming the power structure itself.

The implications of this condition are significant. As long as informal institutions are not granted space within the dimension of decision-making power, participatory governance risks remaining at a procedural and symbolic level. It may appear inclusive on the surface, yet remain substantively exclusive. Therefore, the key challenge moving forward is no longer merely to expand participation, but to restructure power relations so that the integration of informal institutions becomes not only a source of legitimacy, but also an integral part of the policy production process itself.

3. Participatory Governance in Regional Development Planning

a. Deliberation in the Development Planning Process

Deliberation constitutes the core of participatory governance, as it is at this stage that public decisions are expected to be shaped through rational and open collective consideration (Rey & Fortin, 2023). Participation cannot be reduced to mere attendance in forums; rather, it requires processes of idea testing, exchange of arguments, and evaluation of policy alternatives (Kennedy & Pek, 2023). In this sense, the quality of deliberation is determined by the capacity of a forum to provide an inclusive discursive space, where proposals are not only expressed but also critically examined before being translated into collective decisions.

In the context of development planning in Gowa Regency, this deliberative function is embedded in the Development Planning Deliberation Forum (Musrenbang), which is conducted in a multi-tiered manner. The Regional Government Work Plan (RKPD) documents indicate that this forum serves as the primary mechanism for capturing public aspirations and aligning them with regional policy directions. Available data show that in one planning cycle, the number of community proposals reached 3,440, with a predominance in the economic and natural resource sectors. This figure suggests that participatory space is widely accessible and actively utilized, indicating that, procedurally, participatory mechanisms are functioning.

However, the large volume of proposals does not automatically reflect a high quality of deliberation. A closer examination reveals that the process within Musrenbang tends to be oriented toward the collection and filtering of proposals rather than toward in-depth argumentation. Planning documents and activity reports predominantly present final outputs in the form of prioritized program lists, while the underlying deliberative processes that shaped these priorities remain largely undocumented. In some cases, the forum concludes with formal agreement and the signing of official minutes by stakeholders, indicating that deliberation is primarily directed toward achieving formal consensus.

Furthermore, the institutional structure of the forum influences the direction of deliberation. The local government plays a significant role in setting agendas, defining the scope of discussion, and directing development priorities. In such a context, equality among participants becomes relative, as not all actors possess the same capacity to influence the course of discussion. Community proposals that do not align with policy

priorities or budgetary constraints are likely to be excluded during the selection process. Consequently, final decisions are shaped not solely by the strength of arguments, but also by the surrounding power structures.

This condition suggests that deliberation in development planning in Gowa has been institutionalized as a procedure, but has not yet evolved into a mature practice of public reasoning. Participation takes the form of proposal submission, yet opportunities for substantive exchange of reasoning remain limited. In other words, while existing forums have expanded access, they have not fully achieved the deliberative quality required for participatory governance.

b. Action: Implementation of Participatory Outcomes

Within the framework of participatory governance, action refers to the extent to which the outcomes of public participation are translated into implemented policies and programs (Palumbo, 2023). Participation does not end with the articulation of aspirations; it requires a clear linkage between community inputs and governmental action. Thus, the key measure of this dimension lies in the system's ability to transform participatory inputs into concrete policy outputs.

In the practice of development planning in Gowa Regency, this linkage is facilitated through the Regional Government Work Plan (RKPD), which functions as the annual operational instrument. The RKPD contains programs and activities derived from the multi-tiered planning process, including Musrenbang. Data indicate that thousands of community proposals submitted through participatory forums are subsequently selected and integrated into regional development priorities (Ara et al., 2024). The dominance of proposals in the economic and natural resource sectors suggests that community needs in these areas are relatively accommodated within policy directions.

However, the implementation of participatory outcomes does not occur in a linear manner. Not all proposals submitted by the community are realized in policy programs. The selection process in the formulation of the RKPD reflects a filtering mechanism influenced by various factors, including budget constraints, alignment with regional development priorities, and synchronization with higher-level government policies. In this context, action does not fully represent a direct translation of public aspirations, but rather the result of adjustments within a broader planning framework.

Moreover, the pattern of development programs reflected in the RKPD documents shows a degree of continuity across years, particularly in priority sectors such as infrastructure and local economic development. This pattern indicates that while participation generates new proposals, the space for policy innovation remains limited. Policy implementation tends to follow established frameworks, with participatory inputs more often absorbed into existing programs rather than generating entirely new initiatives.

On the other hand, the presence of formal mechanisms such as program determination within the RKPD demonstrates that the regional planning system possesses the capacity to translate participation into policy action. However, this capacity operates within structural limits defined by budgeting systems and development priorities. Thus, action in participatory governance in Gowa can be understood as a selective process, where participation serves as an input source but does not fully determine policy outputs. This condition indicates that the implementation of participatory outcomes has been institutionalized, yet it does not fully reflect a strong linkage between public aspirations and policy action. Participation contributes to the planning process, but its realization remains shaped by policy structures and resource constraints.

c. Monitoring in Policy Implementation

Monitoring is often overlooked in participatory practices, even though it is precisely at this stage that the meaning of participation can be assessed, whether it remains substantive or merely procedural (Monsonís-Payá et al., 2023). Within the framework of participatory governance, monitoring is not only an administrative activity but also a space in which the public can ensure that agreed decisions are implemented in accordance with collective interests. In the context of development planning in Gowa Regency, monitoring mechanisms have been institutionalized through performance reporting systems and program evaluations as outlined in regional planning documents (Masombuka & Thani, 2023). Each program included in the Regional Government Work Plan (RKPD) is associated with performance indicators that are subsequently assessed in annual performance reports. Formally, this indicates that the local government possesses adequate instruments to oversee policy implementation.

However, the monitoring process tends to operate within an internal bureaucratic framework. Evaluation is largely conducted by government institutions through structured reporting mechanisms. Available documents provide limited evidence of meaningful public involvement in assessing program implementation. In other words, the participation observed during the planning stage does not extend proportionally into the monitoring phase. This condition highlights a gap between participatory processes and evaluative processes. While communities are given space to articulate proposals, they do not occupy an equivalent position when policies are implemented. As a result, the relationship between aspirations expressed in Musrenbang and outcomes achieved in practice cannot be fully traced from a public perspective. Monitoring continues to take place, but primarily as an administrative obligation rather than as an open process of accountability.

Furthermore, the orientation of monitoring toward performance indicators constrains the depth of evaluation. Program success is measured based on the achievement of predefined targets rather than on the extent to which programs respond to community needs. In such a context, the substantive dimension of monitoring becomes less visible, as evaluation focuses on conformity with plans rather than relevance to public aspirations.

Thus, monitoring in development planning in Gowa reveals a clear pattern. Oversight systems are present and operational, yet they have not fully created space for public involvement. Participation tends to conclude at the initial stages, while the evaluation phase remains under bureaucratic control. This helps explain why, in many cases, participation does not necessarily translate into accountability.

d. Coordination and Distribution of Power

Coordination in development planning cannot be separated from the issue of authority (Gholipour et al., 2025). It is not merely an effort to consolidate various proposals, but also a process that determines policy direction through selection and prioritization (Pan et al., 2022). Within the framework of participatory governance, coordination inherently carries implications for the distribution of power, as every decision reflects which actors hold dominant positions in the process.

In practice in Gowa Regency, coordination takes place through structured stages within Musrenbang and sectoral forums at the regional level. RKPD documents indicate that community proposals originating from village and sub-district levels are not immediately adopted, but instead undergo processes of verification and alignment with regional strategic programs. For instance, in one planning document, regional priorities are concentrated in key sectors such as infrastructure development, local economic strengthening, and the improvement of basic public services (Saragih et al., 2024). This concentration suggests that not all community proposals are afforded equal consideration in policy formulation (Goforth & Nock, 2022). At this stage, the role of the local government becomes decisive. The regional planning agency functions not only as a coordinating body across levels of government, but also as an actor that defines the framework of priorities. Proposals that do not align with policy directions or fail to meet technical criteria are unlikely to proceed further. Consequently, coordination also operates as a filtering mechanism that indirectly limits the range of policy alternatives emerging from participatory processes.

This condition indicates that the distribution of power in development planning is not symmetrical. Communities are given space to express their needs, but this space exists within predefined boundaries. Final decisions remain within the authority of the local government, which possesses greater access to information, resources, and technical instruments. In such a context, the influence of the public on policy outcomes is not fully proportional to the level of participation demonstrated. Thus, coordination in development planning in Gowa functions effectively in integrating diverse interests, yet simultaneously reveals a concentration of authority in decision-making processes. Participation persists, but operates within a framework shaped by existing policy structures.

e. Musrenbang as a School of Democracy

Musrenbang functions not only as a planning instrument but also as a space in which democratic practices are introduced and enacted directly (Ibrohim & Ismanudin, 2025). Within this forum, communities are exposed to decision-making processes that were previously confined to bureaucratic structures. They do not merely express their needs, but also encounter budget constraints, policy priorities, and program selection mechanisms. At this point, participation carries a learning dimension, as communities begin to understand that not all aspirations can be realized simultaneously (Wals, 2007).

In practice in Gowa Regency, Musrenbang is conducted in stages, from the village level to the sub-district and regency levels. Data from planning documents indicate that each sub-district submits proposals that have been agreed upon at the village level. In one implementation of the RKPD Musrenbang, the regency-level forum was attended by representatives from all sub-districts, regional government agencies, and community elements. The signing of formal minutes of agreement further indicates that the participatory process has reached a formal stage in decision-making.

Moreover, data show that community proposals are not only numerous but also diverse, ranging from village infrastructure development and local economic initiatives to basic public services. This diversity suggests that communities possess a relatively strong understanding of their local needs. However, during the deliberation process, not all proposals can be accommodated, as they must be aligned with regional priorities. It is at this stage that learning occurs, as communities begin to recognize the limits between aspirations and feasible policy outcomes.

Nevertheless, the function of Musrenbang as a learning space is not evenly realized. Not all participants possess the same capacity to articulate proposals or to fully comprehend the ongoing processes. In several activity reports, forums are conducted within limited timeframes and follow predetermined agendas, restricting the depth of discussion. As a result, some participants tend to assume the role of information recipients rather than active contributors to deliberation. In addition, public involvement in the forum generally concludes at the stage of proposal submission and formal agreement. After the minutes are signed, the process shifts to technical stages within the bureaucracy without equivalent public involvement. This condition indicates that the learning that takes place is largely limited to familiarity with formal mechanisms, rather than fostering the capacity for critical engagement throughout the entire policy cycle. Thus, Musrenbang in Gowa can be understood as a limited form of a “school of democracy.” While it provides opportunities for participation and follows clear formal procedures, it has not yet fully developed into a space for deep deliberative learning. Participation opens access, but the learning outcomes remain constrained by the structure of the forum and existing institutional dynamics.

f. Outcomes of Participatory Governance

The outcomes of participatory processes are often visible in planning documents, yet the relationship between proposals and resulting policies is not always straightforward (Eriksson et al., 2022). In Gowa Regency, the RKPD reflects relatively consistent development directions. Programs such as neighborhood road construction, irrigation network improvement, and the strengthening of small enterprises appear repeatedly from year to year (Muralidharan et al., 2023). At the same time, Musrenbang records show that community proposals tend to focus on similar areas, particularly basic infrastructure and productive economic activities (Abubakar & Putra, 2025). This suggests a degree of alignment, although not in a fully direct form.

The issue lies in how these proposals are translated into policy. Of the many proposals submitted through Musrenbang, only a portion reappears in planning documents as identifiable programs. The remainder are not entirely discarded but are instead integrated into broader programs or adjusted to fit existing policy frameworks. For example, a single road development project may represent multiple proposals from different areas. In this way, the final output appears coherent in official documents, yet its origins are not always easily traceable. At this point, it becomes evident that policy outcomes are more a result of aggregation than direct translation. The local government does not treat the list of proposals as items to be fulfilled individually, but rather as inputs to be reorganized in accordance with priorities and budgetary capacities. This explains why program patterns tend to recur over time, with changes occurring more in terms of location and scale rather than in the types of policies themselves.

Musrenbang minutes provide additional insight. They record agreements between the government and community representatives regarding priorities to be advanced to subsequent stages (Ibrohim & Ismanudin, 2025). However, once this stage is completed, the process shifts into more technical domains. Program formulation, budget allocation, and activity determination are conducted within bureaucratic mechanisms that no longer involve the public directly. It is at this stage that the gap between participation and policy outcomes becomes more apparent. Thus, the outcomes of participatory governance in Gowa cannot be understood as a direct reflection of community aspirations, but rather as the result of multiple layers of consideration. Public aspirations remain present and can be identified in the general direction of policies, but they do not stand independently. Instead, they become part of a broader process in which regional priorities and resource constraints play equally significant roles.

Conclusion

The practice of participatory governance in regional development planning in Gowa Regency indicates that participatory mechanisms have been institutionally established through Musrenbang and their integration into planning documents such as the Regional Government Work Plan (RKPD). Communities are provided with space to articulate proposals, and to a certain extent, the resulting policy directions reflect alignment with grassroots needs, particularly in the areas of basic infrastructure and local economic development. This suggests that participation does not merely function as a formality, but leaves a trace in policy outcomes.

However, a closer examination reveals that the quality of participation remains limited across different stages. In terms of deliberation, participatory forums function more as spaces for collecting proposals rather than as arenas for in-depth exchange of ideas. At the action stage, not all aspirations are translated into programs, but instead undergo a selection process shaped by policy priorities and budget constraints. In the aspect of monitoring, public involvement has not significantly developed, resulting in oversight that is still largely dominated by internal governmental mechanisms. Meanwhile, in terms of coordination, the process tends to be centralized, with the local government maintaining a dominant role in determining policy direction.

These conditions have implications for the outcomes produced. While policies do reflect certain community aspirations, they are better understood as the result of aggregation and adjustment rather than direct translations of submitted proposals. Participation contributes to the planning process, but does not fully determine final decisions. Thus, participatory governance in Gowa occupies a position between procedure and substance: participation is institutionally present, yet has not fully evolved into a practice capable of distributing influence equitably.

These findings underscore that the main challenge is no longer the provision of participatory space, but the deepening of its quality. As long as deliberative processes remain underdeveloped, power distribution continues to be centralized, and public involvement in monitoring remains limited, participation is likely to remain procedural. In this context, strengthening participatory governance requires efforts to expand discursive spaces, clarify the linkage between proposals and policies, and enable more sustained public engagement throughout the entire development cycle.

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