

From Formal Participation to Procedural Justice: Inter-Actor Relations in the Musrenbang of Pidie Regency

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ABSTRACT

This study examined policy-actor dynamics in participatory development planning through the Musyawarah Perencanaan Pembangunan (Musrenbang) in Pidie Regency and identified factors constraining meaningful public participation. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed using in-depth interviews, direct observation, and document review, with findings analyzed interactively through data reduction, data display, and conclusion verification. The analysis applied six good-governance dimensions participation, transparency, accountability, rule of law, equity and inclusiveness, and responsiveness while operationalizing procedural justice through equal access, voice, reason-giving, consistency, traceability, and feedback. The findings showed that inter-actor relations remained asymmetric and were strongly influenced by government and established local actors, while ordinary citizens, women, and youth had more limited influence. Average adult attendance in village Musrenbang during 2022–2024 remained below 3%, and approximately 39.5% of community proposals were realized in 2024. Limited outreach, actor dominance, weakened public trust, and unequal access reinforced procedural rather than substantive participation. The study concluded that formal compliance alone had not ensured procedurally just development planning.



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INTRODUCTION

Regional development planning is both a legal process and a public-policy mechanism because it determines the allocation of public resources, the ordering of program priorities, and the groups that ultimately benefit from development. In a decentralized system, therefore, planning quality cannot be assessed solely by whether administrative stages have been completed. It must also be evaluated by the extent to which citizens have a reasonable and relatively equal opportunity to influence decisions that affect their lives. Indonesia's Law Number 25 of 2004 concerning the National Development Planning System recognizes a participatory approach as one component of development planning, while Minister of Home Affairs Regulation Number 86 of 2017 requires the alignment of regional planning through stages involving relevant stakeholders. These provisions place public participation at the intersection of administrative legality and procedural justice: development decisions become more legitimate when the process is open, inclusive, accountable, and provides meaningful opportunities for affected groups to be heard.

The Musyawarah Perencanaan Pembangunan (Musrenbang), or Development Planning Deliberation, is the formal forum intended to connect community aspirations with government development agendas through successive levels of deliberation, from gampong or village, to subdistrict, and finally to regency level. The existence of a participatory forum, however, does not automatically produce substantive participation. Participation may remain limited to physical attendance, the submission of proposals, or the completion of an attendance list when citizens lack adequate information, when deliberative space is uneven, or when there is no clear explanation of how proposals are screened and decided. Studies in Indonesia repeatedly identify incomplete public involvement, the dominance of particular actors, weak government communication, and limited follow-up on citizen aspirations as persistent problems in local development planning (Mustanir & Abadi, 2017; Akbar et al., 2018; Latif et al., 2019). The quality of Musrenbang should therefore be assessed not merely from whether the forum takes place, but from how influence is distributed among the actors who participate in it.

Research on participatory development in different regions further suggests that the central problem is not always the absence of formal participation mechanisms, but the quality of interaction within those mechanisms and the capacity of citizens to convert expressed needs into policy decisions. Studies of Musrenbang and village planning underline the importance of public outreach, information openness, citizen capacity, and government commitment to accommodating locally grounded needs (Fina & Naiheli, 2023; Mardiah & Maulana, 2023; Noviar & Priyanti, 2023). Other studies emphasize that participation becomes more meaningful when groups that are routinely underrepresented receive equal access to planning processes rather than merely formal invitations to attend (Hafidzah & Aini, 2024; Simanjuntak & Sitompul, 2024). At the area-development level, stakeholder synergy is similarly important because fragmented participation can allow development agendas to be controlled disproportionately by actors with stronger political or bureaucratic resources (Hanifah et al., 2024).

These concerns are particularly important in the context of Indonesian decentralization and the strengthening of local government. Changes in village and regional governance have expanded formal spaces for public involvement, yet they have also made visible how strongly local institutional capacity, power structures, and state-society relations shape participatory outcomes. Antlöv et al. (2016) show that broader local authority under village governance reforms created opportunities for community life and participation while simultaneously generating challenges of governance and accountability. From a legal perspective, Vel et al. (2017) similarly argue that changes in village-government law do not automatically transform practice unless local institutions can translate formal norms into working mechanisms. An evaluation of Musrenbang must therefore examine actor relations, patterns of dominance, access to planning information, and the capacity of citizens to affect decisions, rather than simply asking whether the statutory forum was held on schedule.

The empirical context of Pidie Regency illustrates this problem clearly. Administrative data used in the study from the Pidie Regency Development Planning Agency (Bappeda) for 2022–2024 showed that average adult attendance in gampong Musrenbang remained below 3.0%. In addition, approximately 39.5% of proposals originating from community Musrenbang were realized as regional development programs in 2024 (Bappeda Kabupaten Pidie, 2022–2024). These indicators reflect two connected weaknesses. Very low attendance narrows the representational base from which development priorities are formulated, while a limited rate of proposal realization can reinforce the public perception that participation has little practical influence. When such a pattern is repeated without clear feedback, Musrenbang risks being understood as a ceremonial administrative procedure rather than a consequential deliberative process. From the perspective of procedural justice, this raises questions about who gains access to decision making, whose preferences shape priorities, and how decisions are explained to those whose proposals are not accommodated.

Existing literature has made an important contribution by explaining levels of public participation, village-government strategies, barriers to citizen involvement, and the mechanisms through which aspirations are communicated in Musrenbang (Sulaiman et al., 2016; Fina & Naiheli, 2023; Mardiah & Maulana, 2023; Simanjuntak & Sitompul, 2024). Nevertheless, much of this literature treats participation primarily as a discrete variable or localized phenomenon at the village or subdistrict level. Fewer studies place Musrenbang explicitly as a relational arena in which the regional government, the regency legislature (DPRK), subdistrict officials, gampong government, community leaders, women, youth, and ordinary citizens interact while exercising unequal influence over development priorities. Previous studies also tend to discuss participation levels separately from policy outputs. As a result, the relationship between low participation, proposal accommodation, transparency, accountability, inclusiveness, rule compliance, and governmental responsiveness is often not examined within a single analytical chain.

The novelty of this study lies in linking actor dynamics and the quality of Musrenbang governance across three interrelated layers: representation within the forum, the distribution of influence during deliberation, and the ability of community aspirations to be converted into development programs. This approach treats Musrenbang not only as a technocratic-participatory mechanism but also as an institutional arena in which justice, equal access, and reasoned accountability are tested. It also responds to developments in digital local governance, where traceability of proposals and public access to planning information have become increasingly relevant to the relationship between citizens and government (Herdiana, 2019). Accordingly, the study moves beyond the

descriptive conclusion that participation is low and asks how relational structures and institutional mechanisms make participation weak, uneven, or ineffective.

This study aimed to analyze the dynamics and relationships among policy actors in participatory development planning in Pidie Regency and to identify the mutually reinforcing factors that constrain participation in Musrenbang. Academically, it contributes to public-administration and local-governance scholarship by integrating power relations, procedural quality, and participation outcomes in one framework. Practically, it provides a basis for improving the design of Musrenbang through broader representation of underrepresented groups, clearer information on proposal verification, transparent explanations for acceptance or rejection, and stronger horizontal accountability to citizens. These improvements are necessary if Musrenbang is to operate not merely as a legally required administrative stage, but as a planning mechanism that is participatory, procedurally fair, and responsive to public needs.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to examine the processes, interactions, and meanings that emerge in the implementation of the Musyawarah Perencanaan Pembangunan (Musrenbang) in Pidie Regency, Aceh Province. A qualitative design was appropriate because the study was not intended to estimate statistical relationships among variables, but to interpret how actors interact, how roles and influence are distributed, how information circulates, and how community aspirations move through the development-planning process. This orientation is consistent with qualitative research that seeks to understand social phenomena in their institutional and contextual settings and to connect actor experiences with the structures in which those experiences occur (Aspers & Corte, 2019; Busetto et al., 2020). The unit of analysis was the participatory development-planning process conducted through Musrenbang, with particular attention to the relationships among actors involved in agenda formation, deliberation, proposal screening, and policy follow-up.

The research subjects consisted of actors who had direct involvement in and practical knowledge of Musrenbang. They included representatives of the Pidie Regency Development Planning Agency (Bappeda), subdistrict government officials, gampong heads (geuchik), community leaders, youth representatives, and women's groups. These actor categories were selected to obtain perspectives from regional planners, local-government implementers, community representatives, and groups whose needs are affected by development decisions. Informants were selected purposively on the basis of the relevance of their roles, their experience with the planning process, and their involvement in the formulation, screening, or follow-up of community proposals. This approach follows the logic of purposive sampling, in which information-rich participants are selected because they can provide detailed explanations of the phenomenon under investigation (Campbell et al., 2020). The study therefore emphasized diversity of actor positions and the relevance of information rather than numerical representativeness.

Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews and direct observation. The interviews explored participants' experiences of access to Musrenbang, patterns of communication among actors, the submission and verification of proposals, the distribution of influence during deliberation, access to planning information, the accountability of decisions, and government responses to community aspirations. Observation was used to identify the practical context in which participation occurred, including interaction patterns, opportunities to speak, the role of formal and informal actors, and features of deliberation that could not be captured fully through interview accounts. The combination of interviews and observation enabled the study to examine not only what actors stated about participation, but also how participatory relations were manifested in practice.

Secondary data were collected through review of official planning and administrative documents. The documentary evidence included Musrenbang participation statistics, development-planning documents, and Pidie Regency Regional Government Work Plan (RKPD) records concerning the realization of programs originating from community proposals. The documentary component covered administrative evidence for 2022–2024 and was used to examine the consistency between actor accounts and formal records of participation and policy output. Two indicators were particularly important for contextualizing the qualitative findings: average adult attendance in gampong Musrenbang during 2022–2024 remained below 3.0%, while approximately 39.5% of community

proposals were realized as development programs in 2024. These figures were used as contextual and traceability evidence rather than as a basis for statistical inference.

Data collection was organized through methodological and source triangulation. Methodological triangulation combined in-depth interviews, direct observation, and document review so that each type of evidence could complement and test the others. Interviews provided explanations of actor experiences and interpretations; observations supplied contextual evidence about interaction and participation; and documents provided an administrative record of attendance, planning procedures, and policy outcomes. Source triangulation compared information across Bappeda, subdistrict officials, geuchik, community leaders, youth representatives, and women's groups. Consistent information across sources was treated as strengthening an emerging interpretation, while divergent accounts were retained and examined as possible evidence of different institutional positions, interests, levels of access to information, or experiences. This procedure was intended to strengthen the credibility and traceability of the findings in accordance with qualitative trustworthiness principles (Nowell et al., 2017).

The analytical framework was derived from the United Nations Development Programme's good-governance framework (UNDP, 1997) and was focused on six dimensions: participation, transparency, accountability, rule of law, equity and inclusiveness, and responsiveness. Participation was examined through the breadth of representation, involvement in the forum, opportunities to articulate aspirations, and the capacity of community actors to influence priorities. Transparency was assessed through access to information concerning agendas, proposal-verification criteria, budget constraints, and the status of submitted proposals. Accountability focused on the clarity of responsibility for decisions, the reasons proposals were accepted or rejected, and the availability of feedback to citizens. Rule of law was interpreted through the consistency of Musrenbang practice with formal stages, procedures, and planning requirements. Equity and inclusiveness were examined through the relative accessibility of the process to women, youth, and other less-represented groups. Responsiveness was assessed through the connection between community aspirations, government follow-up, and the conversion of proposals into realized development programs.

Procedural justice was used as an interpretive lens linking these six governance dimensions. In this study, procedural justice referred to the fairness of the process through which citizens enter the planning arena, present their views, receive information, and understand the basis on which development priorities are determined. The analysis therefore considered several interrelated procedural elements: equal access to participation; meaningful opportunities to express needs and arguments; access to relevant and understandable information; consistency in the application of planning and verification procedures; transparency of the reasons underlying acceptance, postponement, redirection, or rejection of proposals; and the availability of feedback that enables citizens to trace the treatment of their aspirations. This formulation allowed the study to distinguish formal compliance with Musrenbang procedures from substantive fairness in the distribution of voice, information, and influence.

Data analysis was conducted interactively through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. During data reduction, interview accounts, observational evidence, and documentary information were selected, compared, and grouped according to the research questions, the six good-governance dimensions, and the procedural-justice elements described above. The data-display stage organized findings narratively by linking actor positions, patterns of interaction, barriers to participation, decision processes, and documentary evidence. The analysis then identified recurrent patterns, contrasting perspectives among actors, and relationships between the quality of participation at the input stage and the realization of community proposals at the output stage. The aim was not merely to classify statements into governance categories, but to explain how weaknesses in one dimension could reinforce weaknesses in another.

The process of conclusion drawing emphasized evidentiary convergence and the traceability of interpretation. A finding was not treated as sufficiently supported solely because it appeared in a single interview account. Interpretations were checked against other actor perspectives, observations, and available documentary records. Particular attention was paid to the relationship between low participation, unequal access to information, the dominance of particular actors, limited feedback, and the perceived responsiveness of government. Quantitative administrative indicators were integrated only to clarify the scale and direction of the qualitative problem; no annual counts, disaggregated percentages, or additional numerical claims were introduced where they were not supported by the available research record.

The credibility of the analysis was maintained through continuous comparison across sources and methods. Differences between government and community accounts were not automatically removed or reconciled; instead, they were analyzed as potentially meaningful evidence of unequal information, competing interests, institutional distance, or contrasting experiences of the same planning process. By combining actor-based evidence, observation, and official documents, the study sought to produce a contextual, transparent, and auditable explanation of inter-actor relations in Pidie Regency Musrenbang. The qualitative design does not claim statistical generalizability; rather, it provides an analytically grounded account of how formal participatory mechanisms can remain procedurally unequal when access, information, influence, and feedback are distributed asymmetrically.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Inter-Actor Relations in the Musrenbang Arena of Pidie Regency

The findings show that Musrenbang in Pidie Regency was implemented hierarchically from gampong to subdistrict and regency levels and, administratively, followed the formal structure of regional development planning. Completion of these procedural stages, however, did not necessarily create an equal participatory arena. Relations among actors remained asymmetric. Regional-government actors, subdistrict officials, gampong government, and certain established community figures possessed greater influence in agenda formation and proposal screening, while ordinary citizens, women, and youth tended to occupy a more reactive position. The central finding is therefore not that participatory institutions were absent, but that the capacity to convert preferences into decisions was distributed unevenly among participants.

This asymmetry matters because the quality of participation cannot be measured only by the existence of a forum or the number of people invited. More consequential questions concern who can speak, what information participants possess, whether arguments are considered, and whether the final decision can be traced to the deliberative process. Nabatchi et al. (2017) emphasize that public participation varies in depth and form and becomes meaningful when citizens can contribute to both process and outcomes. In Pidie Regency, the formal architecture of Musrenbang was therefore only a necessary condition for participation, not proof of equal influence. The finding is consistent with Mustanir and Abadi (2017), Akbar et al. (2018), and Latif et al. (2019), who show that local participation in Indonesia remains highly dependent on government communication, citizen capacity, and the dominance of particular actors.

The imbalance of influence can be understood through unequal resources. Government and established actors have better access to planning documents, technocratic terminology, budget information, proposal-verification authority, and bureaucratic networks. They are consequently more likely to understand which proposals correspond to government authority, program nomenclature, fiscal capacity, and agency priorities. Ordinary citizens generally enter the forum with needs expressed in everyday terms. When the planning system rewards technical compatibility, informational inequality can become political inequality: a legitimate need may lose priority not because it lacks social importance, but because it is not expressed in a form that aligns easily with the planning system.

In the Indonesian decentralization context, this result demonstrates that opening a participatory space in law does not automatically dissolve local power structures. Antlöv et al. (2016) show that strengthened local authority creates opportunities for community participation, yet outcomes still depend on institutional capacity and accountability practices. Pidie's Musrenbang should thus be understood as an arena in which participatory norms meet unequal distributions of bureaucratic, political, social, and informational resources. This interpretation is the first link in the procedural-justice chain developed in this study: formal access exists, but the value of that access depends on the distribution of voice, information, and decision-making influence.

Participation: From Procedural Attendance to Deliberative Quality

The participation dimension reveals the clearest gap between formal design and substantive practice. Administrative data used in the study indicate that average adult attendance in gampong Musrenbang during 2022–2024 remained below 3%. This figure should not be interpreted merely as a low attendance rate. It indicates that the representational base for identifying and ranking development needs was very narrow. When only a small proportion of adults enters the forum, the resulting agenda is more likely to reflect the preferences of groups closest to government structures or those possessing

stronger social resources, while alternative perspectives have fewer opportunities to enter the deliberative process.

Earlier research presents a comparable pattern. Sulaiman et al. (2016) show that citizen characteristics, aspirations, and access to information media shape involvement in village and urban-village Musrenbang. Mustanir and Abadi (2017) demonstrate that participation depends not only on whether a forum exists but also on whether interaction allows citizens to become genuinely involved. Akbar et al. (2018) and Latif et al. (2019) likewise connect local development participation to communication, opportunity, and the relationship between citizens and government. In this context, an attendance level below 3% indicates that the participation problem in Pidie begins at the entry stage, before the quality of deliberation itself is even assessed.

Attendance, however, is not equivalent to voice. The findings indicate that ordinary citizens, women, and youth tended to be less active than government actors and established figures. Some physical presence therefore did not develop into deliberative participation. Citizens could attend, submit a proposal, or endorse a meeting result while still lacking comparable bargaining power in the determination of priorities. This form of participation is procedural rather than substantive. Findings by Fina and Naiheli (2023), Mardiah and Maulana (2023), and Noviar and Priyanti (2023) reinforce the point that participation becomes more effective when government sustains communication, creates usable opportunities for citizens to contribute, and follows community aspirations through the planning cycle.

From a procedural-justice perspective, meaningful participation requires more than an invitation. It requires reasonably equal opportunities to enter the forum, obtain relevant information, present reasons, and understand the basis of decisions. This implies that measures of Musrenbang performance should move beyond the number of meetings and attendance lists toward indicators of deliberative quality: diversity of represented groups, opportunities for non-government participants to speak, traceability of proposals, and official responses to proposals that are not prioritized. The objective is not to guarantee that every proposal is accepted, but to ensure that participation has a visible and intelligible relationship to the decision-making process.

Transparency and Accountability: Decision Traceability as a Basis for Public Trust

In the transparency dimension, the study found that information concerning verification criteria, available budget ceilings, proposal-assessment status, and the reasons for acceptance or rejection was not consistently accessible to communities. This limitation generated an information gap between bureaucratic actors and citizens. From the government's perspective, proposal screening may be a technical process governed by program nomenclature, institutional authority, fiscal capacity, and regional priorities. From the citizen's perspective, however, the same process can appear opaque when the criteria and status of a proposal are not explained in understandable terms. Transparency in this setting therefore means more than publishing planning documents; it requires communicating the information that determines the fate of proposals to those who submitted them.

The transparency problem was closely related to the pattern of accountability. Accountability tended to be stronger vertically within administrative structures than horizontally toward citizens. Government institutions could demonstrate that stages had been completed and required documents had been produced, yet community members did not always receive a clear explanation of why their proposals failed to enter the program. This weak feedback mechanism creates a gap between administrative compliance and public accountability. A proposal may be rejected for a legitimate technical, jurisdictional, or fiscal reason, but in the absence of explanation the outcome can still be perceived as arbitrary or as evidence that the forum has little influence.

The 39.5% proposal-realization figure for 2024 is particularly important when interpreted through this lens. The fact that a majority of proposals were not realized does not by itself prove unfairness; governments cannot and should not accept every proposal because resources, authority, and cross-area priorities are constrained. Procedural legitimacy depends instead on whether the selection can be traced and tested. When non-realization is accompanied by understandable reasons and visible status information, citizens can distinguish resource constraints from disregard. When decisions remain opaque, the same outcome creates more space for suspicion of elite dominance or procedural inequity.

The findings also have implications for digital governance. Herdiana (2019) argues that technology in village governance should strengthen governance capacity and government-citizen

relations rather than merely digitize services. Applied to Musrenbang in Pidie Regency, a proposal-tracking mechanism could display the proposal's status from gampong to regency level, the responsible agency, verification result, reason for postponement or rejection, and subsequent implementation. Such a system would turn citizens from passive proposal submitters into actors capable of monitoring a policy process, thereby giving horizontal accountability a more concrete institutional form

Rule of Law: From Administrative Compliance to the Substantive Fulfilment of Participation

Normatively, participatory development planning in Indonesia has a strong legal basis. Law Number 25 of 2004 places participation within the national development-planning system, while Minister of Home Affairs Regulation Number 86 of 2017 structures the stages of regional planning, control, evaluation, and document alignment. The Musrenbang process in Pidie Regency was formally situated within this legal framework. The principal problem identified by the study was therefore not regulatory absence but the distance between compliance with procedural requirements and fulfilment of the participatory purpose embedded in those requirements.

This distance becomes visible when meetings are conducted, minutes are produced, and administrative stages are completed while the quality of involvement remains low, information about screening is limited, and proposal outcomes are not consistently followed by feedback. Under these conditions, the rule of law cannot be understood only as adherence to schedules and documents. A substantively oriented interpretation asks whether the legal requirement of participation produces meaningful access, non-discriminatory opportunity, and decisions that can be explained to those affected. Administrative legality may be achieved while social legitimacy remains weak.

The relationship between law and justice is therefore central to the article. Participation is not merely an administrative technique for collecting lists of proposed projects. It is part of the procedural position of citizens in decisions that allocate public resources. When particular groups face systematic difficulty in entering deliberation, obtaining relevant information, or understanding the reasons behind decisions, the concern is no longer simply "low participation"; it is also the quality of procedural justice in the exercise of governmental authority.

The findings consequently support a broader set of indicators for Musrenbang compliance. Government should be able to demonstrate not only that a meeting occurred and minutes exist, but also that representation was sufficiently diverse, speaking opportunities were not monopolized, selection criteria were made understandable, and decisions were accompanied by a feedback mechanism. Such indicators would not replace formal planning rules. They would help ensure that formal procedure serves its participatory purpose and that legality and procedural fairness reinforce rather than diverge from one another.

Equity and Inclusiveness: Unequal Representation and the Risk of Priority Bias

The equity and inclusiveness dimension shows that inequality in participation occurred not only between government and society, but also within society itself. Women, youth, and groups with less formal social standing tended to occupy a more limited position than gampong elites or established figures. At the same time, physical and infrastructure proposals were more prominent in the planning arena, while economic empowerment, social programs, and the needs of vulnerable groups were more easily marginalized. This pattern is important because unequal participation does not end with unequal speaking opportunities; it can affect the substantive composition of the development agenda.

The connection between representation and policy output is straightforward. A forum dominated by particular groups is more likely to reproduce the preferences of those groups. When women, youth, persons with disabilities, or economically weaker groups lack adequate space to speak, their needs may fail to reach the agenda-setting stage. Inclusiveness therefore cannot be secured by symbolic representation alone. Presence must be accompanied by access to information, a reasonable opportunity to articulate needs, and institutional safeguards so that proposals from less dominant actors are not automatically displaced by proposals supported by stronger political or bureaucratic resources.

Hafidzah and Aini (2024) and Simanjuntak and Sitompul (2024) emphasize the importance of more equal participatory space in village development planning, while Hanifah et al. (2024) highlight stakeholder synergy in area-based development. Read together with the Pidie findings, these studies show that diversity of actors matters only when the forum is capable of managing unequal social

positions. Inclusiveness is thus best treated as an institutional-design issue rather than a matter of organizer goodwill.

The practical implication is the need for affirmative participation mechanisms. These may include minimum representation for women, youth, persons with disabilities, and socioeconomically vulnerable groups; pre-forum needs mapping; and facilitation rules that provide proportionate speaking opportunities to non-elite participants. Such mechanisms do not replace deliberation. They correct the risk that a formally open process will be captured by those who already possess more information, status, or institutional access. In a procedural-justice framework, treating unequally positioned groups identically may preserve rather than remove inequality; more equitable opportunity may require differentiated institutional support.

Responsiveness and the Conversion of Aspirations into Development Programs

Responsiveness links participatory process to policy output. According to the administrative data used in the study, approximately 39.5% of community proposals were realized as regional development programs in 2024. The figure shows that a meaningful portion of community aspirations entered budgeting and implementation, while the majority did not. The result should not be interpreted mechanically as governmental failure because not all proposals can be accepted and because planning must account for fiscal limits, jurisdiction, technical feasibility, and priorities across areas. The governance problem emerges when a limited realization rate is combined with weak transparency and insufficient feedback.

The findings also indicate the influence of top-down planning and legislative policy inputs in the determination of priorities. The coexistence of agenda sources outside Musrenbang is normal in a system that combines technocratic, political, and participatory planning. It becomes problematic when citizens cannot understand how proposals from different channels are compared and why one source of priorities displaces another. If politically connected channels repeatedly override proposals generated through Musrenbang without a traceable basis, the participatory forum can lose legitimacy even when its formal procedures continue.

Fina and Naiheli (2023), Mardiah and Maulana (2023), and Noviar and Priyanti (2023) demonstrate that the continuity of participation is affected by government follow-up. This is relevant to Pidie Regency because repeated proposal submission without information about outcomes can increase the perceived cost of participation. By contrast, when government provides a reasoned response, shows the proposal's status, and establishes a path for follow-up, even an unsuccessful proposal can be experienced as part of a fair process. Responsiveness therefore concerns the quality of the institutional relationship, not simply the proportion of demands that are satisfied.

The study consequently supports a shift from a binary "accepted or rejected" model toward a feedback cycle. Each proposal should ideally receive a trackable status such as accepted, postponed, redirected because of jurisdiction, returned for revision, or rejected with a stated reason. Information should then return to the gampong and to the citizens who participated. This cycle would narrow the distance between deliberation and budget decisions while creating an evidence base for annual evaluation. Procedural responsiveness does not promise that every aspiration will be funded; it promises that every aspiration will be processed in a way that is intelligible, traceable, and accountable.

Barriers to Participation as a Self-Reinforcing Cycle

Triangulation of the findings identified four main barriers: limited government outreach and communication, dominance by particular actors, weakened public trust, and unequal access shaped by social and cultural conditions. These factors did not operate independently. Weak outreach reduced the number and diversity of citizens who knew about Musrenbang; a narrower participant base increased the relative influence of actors who already possessed access; repeated experiences of dominance reduced the perception that ordinary voices mattered; proposals that disappeared without explanation reinforced apathy; and apathy then lowered participation in subsequent cycles. The result was a self-reinforcing pattern in which deficiencies at one stage increased the likelihood of deficiencies at the next.

Communication is an important entry point in that cycle. Administrative channels may effectively reach officials but do not necessarily reach the wider public. Sulaiman et al. (2016) demonstrate the role of information media in shaping aspirations and participation in Musrenbang. In the Pidie context, communication can be widened through official social media, community groups,

gampong notice boards, religious or community announcements, and appropriate local digital channels. Outreach should communicate more than meeting time and place. Citizens also need information about the purpose of the forum, their participatory rights, how to formulate a proposal, and what happens after the meeting concludes.

Actor dominance also shows why participation cannot be reduced to individual willingness. Citizens may attend yet remain passive if the structure of the forum signals that they lack competence, authority, or social safety to disagree. In a local context where social hierarchy can shape interaction, facilitators are particularly important in preventing deliberation from becoming confirmation of proposals already favored by established actors. Balanced speaking time, small-group discussion, explicit mapping of participant groups, and facilitation that invites less dominant voices can reduce concentration of influence without excluding the legitimate role of community leaders or public officials.

Public trust operates as both consequence and cause. When citizens cannot see a relationship between their participation and the policy process, the time cost of attending Musrenbang becomes difficult to justify. This explains why campaigns that merely increase attendance are unlikely to produce lasting reform. A visible causal chain is required: citizens attend; proposals are recorded; proposal status can be followed; reasons for decisions are available; and program outcomes are reported back to the community. Without that chain, additional attendance risks remaining temporary because the institutional incentives for repeated participation do not change.

Synthesis: Musrenbang as an Arena of Persistently Asymmetric Participation

When the six good-governance dimensions are read together, the principal problem in Pidie Regency is not the absence of a participatory mechanism but the quality of relations operating within it. Low participation limits representation; unequal information strengthens actors who already understand the system; vertically oriented accountability reduces decision traceability for citizens; legal compliance remains stronger administratively than substantively; inclusiveness does not yet fully correct differences in social position; and responsiveness is not consistently supported by a clear feedback mechanism. These elements form a connected governance configuration rather than six separate deficiencies.

The distinctive contribution of the study lies in the relationship between representation and the conversion of aspirations into programs. Previous studies often discuss participation primarily through attendance, motivation, or government strategy. The Pidie case suggests that participation should instead be read as a policy chain: who enters the forum, who influences the agenda, how information is distributed, how proposals are verified, who explains the decision, and whether an aspiration is eventually transformed into a program. From this perspective, attendance below 3% and proposal realization of approximately 39.5% are not isolated statistics; they represent two ends of the same process representation at the input stage and responsiveness at the output stage.

This interpretation strengthens the article's contribution to law and justice studies. Justice in development planning concerns not only the distribution of development outcomes but also the fairness of the process that produces those outcomes. A process that is open, inclusive, accountable, and reasonably equal in access can strengthen the legitimacy of decisions even when not every proposal is funded. Conversely, a process that is opaque or consistently dominated by particular actors can produce a decision that is administratively lawful yet socially experienced as unfair. Procedural justice therefore helps explain why formal compliance is insufficient when citizens cannot understand, influence, or trace the decision-making process.

Practically, four reform needs are interdependent: broader representation through outreach and affirmative inclusion; stronger deliberative quality through facilitation that limits dominance; a proposal-tracking and reason-giving mechanism; and stronger horizontal accountability from government to citizens. These reforms are more consequential than merely increasing the frequency of meetings. Applied consistently, they can shift Musrenbang from an administratively participatory forum toward a deliberative, transparent, fair, and responsive planning institution.

Table 4 Synthesis of Good-Governance Findings in Pidie Regency Musrenbang

Dimension	Main finding	Analytical implication
Participation	Average adult attendance below 3%; ordinary citizens, women, and youth relatively passive.	Representation and deliberative quality remain weak; participation tends to be procedural.
Transparency	Verification criteria, budget constraints, proposal status, and reasons for decisions are not consistently easy to access.	Information gaps reduce the traceability of decisions.
Accountability	Responsibility is stronger vertically within bureaucracy than horizontally toward citizens.	Citizens have difficulty evaluating the basis and follow-up of decisions.
Rule of law	Formal stages are implemented, but the participatory substance of the rules is not fully realized.	Administrative legality does not automatically produce social legitimacy.
Equity and inclusiveness	Women, youth, and non-infrastructure needs have a weaker position within the forum.	Unequal representation can bias development priorities.
Responsiveness	Approximately 39.5% of proposals were realized in 2024; feedback is not yet optimal.	Conversion of aspirations into programs remains limited and can weaken public trust when decisions are not explained.

The synthesis in Table 4 shows that weakness in one dimension produces effects in another. Low participation narrows the range of aspirations; limited transparency makes selection difficult to understand; weak horizontal accountability contributes to apathy; and limited responsiveness then reduces incentives for future participation. Reform must therefore be systemic. A single intervention—such as increasing the number of attendees—will not be sufficient unless it is accompanied by information openness, balanced facilitation, traceable proposal status, and a credible feedback mechanism.

Study Boundary and Evidentiary Caution

The study's qualitative design is intended to explain relationships and institutional mechanisms rather than produce population estimates. The attendance and proposal-realization indicators are administrative context for interpretation, not statistical measures from which causal effects are inferred. Likewise, the article does not create annual attendance values, disaggregated participant counts, or verbatim interview quotations that were not contained in the supplied research record. This evidentiary restraint is important because strengthening an academic manuscript should improve the traceability of claims without replacing missing field records with invented detail.

The absence of a verified informant count and verbatim quotations in the manuscript record remains a point that the authors should complete from their original field notes before final submission if those records are available. Nevertheless, the present analysis remains grounded in the documented actor categories, triangulated collection techniques, official planning documents, and the two administrative indicators explicitly supported by the source material.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the dynamics and relationships among policy actors in participatory development planning in Pidie Regency have not yet fully reflected the principles of good governance and procedural justice. Musrenbang is implemented through the required planning hierarchy, yet the existence of a formal forum has not automatically generated substantive participation. Actor relations remain asymmetric because government institutions, administrative actors, and established social-political figures possess greater influence over agenda formation and priority setting, while ordinary citizens, women, youth, and groups with weaker bargaining positions obtain less equal participatory space. This condition is reflected in average adult attendance below 3% during 2022–2024 and a proposal-realization rate of approximately 39.5% in 2024. Low participation is linked not only to attendance itself but also to limited communication, actor dominance, declining trust where proposal follow-up is unclear, and unequal access shaped by social and cultural conditions. The core problem is therefore not the absence of participatory procedure, but the incomplete quality of deliberation,

distribution of influence, transparency, accountability, inclusiveness, and responsiveness within that procedure.

Pidie Regency should strengthen Musrenbang as a deliberative institution rather than treat it primarily as an administrative stage. Reform should combine broader outreach, affirmative access for underrepresented groups, facilitation that prevents domination, transparent selection criteria, a trackable proposal-status system, reasoned explanations for acceptance or rejection, and stronger horizontal accountability to citizens. The procedural-justice perspective developed in this article clarifies that fair planning does not require every proposal to be accepted. It requires citizens to have meaningful access and voice, to understand the rules and constraints, and to receive decisions that are consistent, traceable, and explained. When these conditions are strengthened, formal participation is more likely to become substantive participation and Musrenbang can contribute more effectively to legitimate, responsive, and socially just regional development planning.

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