

Deliberative Democracy of Ethnic Peatland Communities in Village Development Planning Deliberations (Musrembangdes) In Barito Kuala Regency

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Abstract. This study examines the social and political dynamics influencing the deliberative democratic process in ethnic communities in peatland areas of Barito Kuala Regency, South Kalimantan. Using a qualitative case study approach in Kolam Kanan Village, Barambai District, the research analyzes the implementation of village deliberations, from Musrenbangdes to Musrembangdes. The findings indicate that these processes generally reflect the principles of deliberative democracy, characterized by open dialogue and inclusive participation. However, final development decisions are not consistently determined through consensus or majority agreement. The study further reveals the significant influence of political factors, where personal proximity to local elites and electoral outcomes shape which development programs are approved. This suggests that while deliberative democracy is practiced procedurally at the village level, substantive decision-making remains strongly influenced by electoral democracy.

Keywords: Deliberative Democracy, Ethnic Peatland Communities, Village Development Planning Deliberations

1 Introduction

The success of village development will be largely determined by the quality of development planning carried out by the village community [1]. One of the facilities provided by the government for each community to play a role in village development planning is the implementation of village development planning meetings (Musrembangdes) [2]. The Village Development Planning Deliberation is an annual deliberation forum for village stakeholders to agree on the Village Development Work Plan (RKP Desa) [3]. Musrenbangdes is implemented to implement a participatory planning model at the village level involving all components of society, community institutions, the private sector, and village government/other government institutions [4]. In village governance, village development deliberations are very crucial because they are the strategic basis

for development policies and the implementation of various programs, activities, and village development potentials.

The question that will arise then is whether community participation in the development planning mechanism process has been carried out under the "bottom-up" model. *democracy* where society is no longer the object of development but becomes the subject of development [5]. This condition emphasizes the importance of the principles of deliberative democracy in Musrenbangdes as an answer to development problems. The concept of "deliberation" can be expressed in the application of representative democracy, which means in other words the deliberation process on a policy by the people's representatives accompanied by the involvement of the people or society through a deliberative process.

On the other hand, Barito Kuala Regency is a transmigrant area and has striking ethnic diversity, including the Banjar, Javanese, Bakumpai, and Balinese. The number of Banjar ethnic groups reached 184,180 people, Javanese people reached 37,121 people, Bakumpai people reached 18,892 people and Balinese people reached 862 people. This ethnic diversity brings a wealth of local wisdom, traditional perspectives, and approaches to viewing development, which can certainly enrich the planning and implementation process in the area. However, traditional scale development policies are often underutilized by the government, which places greater emphasis on principles of bureaucracy. Therefore it is necessary various fundamental ways to overcome it [6].

The academic world is faced with demands for finding new paradigms and/or strengthening development paradigms based on local wisdom of ethnic communities, especially those in Barito Kuala Regency such as the Banjar, Javanese, Balinese, and Bakumpai ethnic groups, towards good practices in development planning. The diversity of perspectives and traditional actions of various ethnic groups is an important issue related to participatory and democratic development planning [7].

This research focuses on looking at the village as an arena for diversity and various forms of deliberative democracy for the Banjar, Javanese, Balinese, and Bakumpai Ethnic Communities specifically in the Village Development Planning Conference (Musrenbangdes) in Barito Kuala Regency. The urgency of research is seen in the demand for a new paradigm search and/or strengthening of development paradigms based on the local wisdom of ethnic communities towards good practices in development planning. Deliberative democracy is considered one of the government's strategic steps by involving the community to realize democratization in the local sphere.

2 Methods

This research uses qualitative research methods descriptive with a case study approach. The emphasis of this research is based on the process of understanding social problems that occur holistically, in detail in a natural setting [8]. Using a case study perspective has several advantages, including providing a point of view from the subject under study and a comprehensive description by showing phenomena experienced by individuals and providing in-depth descriptions needed for assessment or transferability [9]. The descriptive qualitative method approach was chosen because all the results of observations, interviews, and documentation can be constructed in detail from each

informant. This is because each informant has their interpretation of the process of *deliberative democracy* in Musrenbangdes. Apart from that, the qualitative method approach places greater emphasis on observing phenomena, further investigating the substance or meaning of phenomena in the field. Therefore, descriptive qualitative methods greatly influence the strength and depth of the analysis. The type of research used is field research (*field research*). Field research is used to find important variables related to the social unit being studied in more depth. In addition, field research is intended so that researchers can carry out direct and intensive investigations of the social unit being studied. The selection of research informants used techniques of *purposive sampling*. To select the initial informant, the informant is selected through certain considerations. Consider the selection of informants by selecting people who are considered to be sources of accurate data, have insight into what is being researched, and have a broad understanding of the conditions of the research site [10]. The informants for this research were the village head and secretary of Kolam Kanan village, Barambai District, Barito Kuala Regency.

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 Village Deliberation in Kolam Kanan Barambai Village

Law no. 6 of 2014 article 6 paragraph (7) concerning Villages provides the following definition of village deliberation: "Village deliberation is an activity in which village residents have the right and obligation to hold discussions to reach consensus in village development efforts [11]. Musrenbangdes is the highest deliberative forum at the village level organized by the Village Consultative Body (*BPD*) and facilitated by the village government with costs coming from the Village Expenditure Planning Budget (*APBDes*) or non-binding grants and donations from third parties. The Musrenbangdes bring together the *BPD*, village government, and all elements of society to discuss and make decisions on strategic matters or issues occurring in the village, especially village development. Musrenbangdes are held at least once a year and are an application of democratic principles at the local community level in preparing the Village Government Work Plan (*RKPD*). All elements of village society have the right to express opinions and vote in this participatory process. The principles of agreement, justice, and participatory democracy are values that are highly upheld in the Musrenbangdes.

Based on the words of the Village Head and Secretary of Barambai Kolam Kanan Village, the implementation of Village Deliberations (Musrenbangdes) in villages in the Barambai sub-district area must be held before July, and for Barambai Kolam Kanan Village has been held on June 29, 2024. The Musrenbangdes will be held on June 29, 2024. The village head stated that village community participation included traditional, religious, community leaders, and other elements. In the process, Musrenbangdes activities included discussions related to development issues at the village level, then continued with discussions regarding submitting proposals and opinions regarding the solutions provided. Efforts are made to make decisions through deliberation and consensus to achieve results agreement together and rarely carried out by voting. The next step is that the proposals at the Musrenbangdes are accommodated and reviewed by the *RKPD* Team to confirm the correctness of the proposals and categorize them into village, regional, or provincial assets. The results of the *RKPD* Team's research will then be taken to a further level of deliberation, namely

the Village Development Deliberation at the Barambai District level, Barito Kuala Regency. However, as of July 2024, the village secretary admitted that the results of the RKPDes team's research were still not complete.

The Barambai District Musrembangdes is an important stage in the development planning process involving 11 villages in the area. This forum aims to evaluate and prioritize various proposals based on urgent needs and problems in each village. The proposals agreed upon in the Musrembangdes will be formulated into concrete programs and activities, which will then be taken into consideration for the Musrembangdes at the Barito Kuala Regency level. This process ensures that each village has the opportunity to express its priorities, but must also be prepared to compete with proposals from other villages at the sub-district level. The final decision from the Barambai District Musrembangdes will influence the development agenda at the district level and, ultimately, at the provincial level. Thus, this process plays a crucial role in determining the direction and effectiveness of development in the region.

There are layers of complexity in this process, where proposals that have been mutually agreed upon by the village community will compete again at the sub-district level with other villages, and then compete again at the district level with other sub-districts [12]. Even though the final results of the district-level Musrembangdes will be forwarded to the provincial level, village heads are often unaware of this process and only focus on discussions at the district level. Apart from that, in Kolam Kanan village, the role of ethnic communities in Musrembangdes has not been seen as significant. The proposals submitted generally come from elements of village society in general, not specifically from certain ethnic groups. However, there are also special proposals, such as building a Balinese-style gate, which was proposed by the Balinese traditional community and agreed upon at a village meeting. This shows that even though ethnic influence is not yet dominant, some cultural proposals can still be proposed and accepted.

3.2 Deliberative Democracy in Barambai Kolam Kanan Village

In the case of Kolam Kanan village, village deliberations are in line with the principles of deliberative democracy. One of the reasons is that the active participation of village residents is quite optimal. Village meetings provide space for all village residents to be actively involved in decision-making regarding village development and management. Every citizen has the same voting rights. In the process, deliberations are also held to encourage open dialogue and discussion. Citizens can express opinions, ask questions, and exchange ideas freely. Decisions in village meetings are generally taken based on consensus or consensus. This shows that the decisions taken are the result of mutual agreement and not just the will of some parties. This means that decision-making takes place collectively. The decisions taken not only benefit certain individuals or groups but are also in the collective interest of all village residents.

Village deliberations as a form of deliberative democracy on the other hand also provide benefits in improving the quality of decisions, through a long deliberation process, it is hoped that decisions taken in village deliberations will be of better quality because they have gone through careful consideration from various points of view. Apart from that, an open and transparent village

deliberation process can increase community trust in the village government and village deliberations encourage the community to participate more actively in village development.

In its implementation in Kolam Kanan Village, although it has many benefits, village deliberations also face several challenges and obstacles, such as a lack of understanding from village residents. Not all village residents understand the importance of village meetings and how to participate effectively. Apart from that, the village residents' busy schedule with daily activities often makes it difficult for them to find time to attend deliberations. Apart from that, the next challenge is the lack of variety in the proposals. Village community participation in Musrenbangdes mostly takes the form of physical development proposals and infrastructure. In addition, there are suggestions regarding event culture and cultural facilities but hampered by minimal village funds. The village community's mindset is considered inadequate to support village development. Apart from that, there is still sentiment among residents village regarding development carried out elsewhere. Villagers tend to want the same things in their place.

3.3 Social and Political Dynamics in the Deliberative Democracy Process

Another interesting finding in field research is the emergence of a link between elections and Musrenbangdes. Village Development Plan Deliberations (Musrenbangdes) and General Elections (Pemilu) are two important pillars in Indonesia's democratic system, especially at the village level. The two are closely related and influence each other in the village development process. The relationship between Musrenbangdes and Elections can be seen from the following aspects:

- a. **Realization of Campaign Promises:** Candidates for regional head/member DPRD elected in elections generally have campaign promises related to village development. Musrenbangdes is a means to realize these campaign promises. Through musrenbangdes, the community can evaluate the extent to which the elected village head is implementing the programs that have been promised.
- b. **Absorption of Community Aspirations.** Musrenbangdes is a forum for the community to convey their aspirations and needs directly to the elected village head and village officials. The results of the musrenbangdes will be the basis for preparing village development programs and budgets, thereby ensuring that village development is truly in line with community needs.
- c. **Public Accountability.** Through musrenbangdes, the community can participate in monitoring and evaluating the performance of village heads and village officials in implementing village development. A transparent and participatory musrenbangdes process can increase public accountability in village government management.
- d. **Synchronization of Planning and Implementation.** Musrenbangdes is a meeting point between village development planning and implementation in the field. The results of the Musrenbangdes will be a reference in preparing the APBDes and implementing village development programs.

The link between Musrenbangdes and elections shows how democratic processes at the village level influence each other. In the case of Barito Kuala Regency, There is a strong influence of political elements in the implementation of the Musrenbangdes. For example, programs that are

already on the list can be shifted due to the influence of political elements. Personal closeness to the council and regional heads as well as the results of electoral elections determine what programs will be passed or approved in the village. This shows an indication that electoral democracy has an influence on democracy operating at the local level. In other words, deliberative democracy at the level of Barambai Kolam Kanan Village has been implemented in a process, however, the determination of the policies that pass must still be determined by the results of electoral democracy.

In other words, there is also a fairly strong interest relationship between political parties and village development programs. Village Development Plan Deliberation (Musrenbangdes) and political parties are two entities that have an important role in the Indonesian political system, especially at the village level. The two have a complex and dynamic relationship, which can influence the village development process. Some of the connections include: Political parties often have development programs that want to be realized at the village level. Through Musrenbangdes, political parties can push for these programs to be included in the RKPDes. In addition, political parties can influence community aspirations through their cadres in the village. Political party cadres can convey party programs to the community and encourage the community to include these programs in proposals at the Musrenbangdes. Political parties can carry out policy advocacy to support village development programs that are in line with the party's interests.

However, with this situation, there are also many negative implications, especially in the process of deliberative democracy, namely the potential for conflicts of interest. The involvement of political parties can give rise to potential conflicts of interest between the interests of the party and the interests of society as a whole. The quality of village development can also be influenced by party political interests. The development programs chosen may be based more on political interests than on the real needs of society. Additionally, the involvement of political parties can blur the boundaries between political interests and bureaucratic interests, thus hampering the neutrality of the village bureaucracy. In the future, several efforts need to be made, among other things, political parties need to be transparent in conveying their programs to the public and involve the public in the decision-making process. Apart from that, it is also necessary to strengthen supervision, regarding the implementation of Musrenbangdes to prevent irregularities and increase the capacity of village officials to be able to facilitate Musrenbangdes professionally and neutrally.

4 Conclusion

Village deliberations are one of the most concrete forms of implementing deliberative democracy at the village level. By continuing to develop and strengthen village deliberations, it is hoped that a village government can be created that is more democratic, participatory, and responsive to community needs. Deliberative democracy emphasizes the decision-making process through dialogue, discussion, and mature consideration. In this system, every villager has an equal opportunity to participate, express opinions, and convince others of their views. Final decisions are taken based on consensus or majority reached through an open and inclusive deliberation process.

In Barito Kuala Regency There is a strong influence of political elements in the implementation of the Musrenbangdes. For example, programs that are already on the list can be shifted due to the

influence of political elements. Personal closeness to the council and regional heads as well as the results of electoral elections determine what programs will be passed or approved in the village. This shows an indication that electoral democracy has an influence on democracy operating at the local level. In other words, deliberative democracy at the level of Barambai Kolam Kanan Village has been implemented in a process, however, the determination of the policies that pass must still be determined by the results of electoral democracy. Village communities in Barito Kuala Regency only focus on improving basic infrastructure such as roads and bridges. However, the principle of deliberation in deliberative democracy has been implemented well and is one of the government's strategic steps by involving the community to realize democratization. In the local area, it has been implemented optimally. However, in executing the policies that have been formulated, there are funding constraints and policy priorities at the sub-district and district levels. Where often in this determination regions/villages receive direct assistance in developing village infrastructure which also supports elected regional heads in elections. Election factors play an important role in determining direct government assistance in development policy priorities that are accommodated in the musrembangdes in the community of Barito Kuala Regency.

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