



Local Government and Efforts to Build Inclusivity of Community-Based Environmental Policies

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes how the Denpasar City government builds community-based environmental policy inclusivity, focusing on public participation mechanisms, implementation challenges, and collaborative strategies. Using a Participatory Action Research approach—through participatory observation, in-depth interviews with eleven key informants, focus group discussions, and policy document analysis—the findings reveal persistent obstacles, including limited cross-sector coordination, restricted public access to deliberative spaces, and a dominant top-down policymaking approach. Nonetheless, community-based collaboration models, strengthened local institutional capacities, and the integration of local wisdom enhance policy legitimacy and effectiveness. The study contributes to participation-based environmental governance theory and offers practical recommendations for developing inclusive, sustainable, and community-responsive environmental policies at the local government level.

INTRODUCTION

Global environmental issues have become increasingly a major concern in the last two decades due to the impact of climate change, ecosystem degradation, and increasing urbanization pressures. Various international reports emphasize that the success of environmental governance depends not only on formal policies, but also on the extent to which they are able to involve broad community participation (Bäckstrand & Kronsell, 2020). At the global level, the concept of sustainable development emphasizes inclusivity in environmental policy formulation in order to be able to respond to complex challenges that are multidimensional. However, in reality, many environmental policies are still top-down and not fully responsive to the needs of communities at the grassroots level (Friedrichs, 2021). This condition creates a gap between policy design and the reality of implementation on the ground.

The local context in Indonesia shows a similar phenomenon, where environmental policies often do not fully accommodate the interests of communities directly affected by environmental damage. In coastal cities such as Denpasar, Bali, the pressures of urbanization and tourism have implications for increased waste production, degradation of air quality, and reduced green space. Local governments actually have strategic authority in the formulation of adaptive policies, but challenges arise when the community is only placed as policy objects, not subjects who play an active role (Turner et al., 2021). This shows the urgent need to review the extent to which regional environmental policies are inclusive and community-based.

Several previous studies have emphasized the importance of public participation in environmental governance. Gaventa and Martorano (2022) found that community-based conservation programs in various developing countries have a great opportunity to strengthen ecosystem protection if local participation mechanisms are supported by governments. However, the results of the study also highlight the weak capacity of local institutions to manage participation effectively. Meanwhile, a study by Leal Filho et al. (2023) on the implementation of environmental policies in urban areas confirms that the aspect of community inclusivity is often ignored in decision-making, thus causing social resistance. These findings indicate that community involvement has not been fully prioritized in environmental policy in Indonesia.

On the other hand, the international literature provides the perspective that participatory mechanisms not only increase the legitimacy of policies, but also strengthen the effectiveness of implementation. Cooke et al. (2022) through a systematic review showed that active community involvement in climate mitigation and adaptation is positively correlated with the sustainability of environmental programs. A similar thing is confirmed by Nair et al. (2023), who found that participatory spaces open to local communities are able to expand the reach of environmental governance across scales. Thus, the research gap lies in how the model of collaboration between local governments and local communities can be integrated into policies contextually, especially in areas with strong local wisdom such as Bali.

Although the literature shows the urgency of public participation, research that explicitly highlights the dynamics of environmental policy inclusivity at the local government level is still limited. Most studies place more emphasis on the technical aspects of environmental control or institutional effectiveness without examining in depth how communities are involved in policy formulation (Liao & Warner, 2020; Khan et al., 2024). In fact, understanding the dimension of inclusivity is very important so that policies are not only administrative documents, but also instruments that are alive and relevant to the needs of society. Therefore, this study seeks to answer this gap by examining in depth the role of the Denpasar regional government in building inclusive environmental policies.

This research specifically aims to analyze the efforts of the local government of Denpasar City in realizing the inclusivity of community-based environmental policies. The focus of the research is directed at three main aspects, namely the government-initiated public participation mechanism, challenges in policy implementation, and collaborative strategies that can strengthen environmental governance at the regional level. With this framework, the research is expected to be able to provide an empirical picture of the extent to which local community involvement can improve the effectiveness of environmental policies.

The theoretical contribution of this study is to enrich the literature on inclusive environmental governance by presenting an empirical context from Denpasar, Bali. This research also adds a new perspective to the discourse of Participatory Action Research, namely by linking it to strengthening local institutional capacity and integrating local wisdom in environmental policies. Thus, this research not only answers academic needs in filling research gaps, but also provides a conceptual framework that can be used for comparative studies in other areas.

Practically, this research contributes to the formulation of regional policies that are more responsive, sustainable, and rooted in the needs of the community. The results of the research can be an input for local governments to improve cross-sector coordination, expand deliberative space, and reduce the dominance of the top-down approach in policymaking. In addition, the resulting recommendations are expected to strengthen synergy between the government, local communities, and supporting stakeholders so that environmental policies in Denpasar can become a model of inclusivity that is relevant to other regions in Indonesia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Local Government and Environmental Governance Efficiency

In the Asian context, Zhang, Li, and Wang (2021) found that the effectiveness of urban governance is positively correlated with the success of environmental management in resilient cities in the Asian region. These findings confirm that the concept of good governance that includes transparency, accountability, and cross-sector coordination is an important foundation for environmental sustainability (Zhang et al., 2021). In line with these findings,

Cavalheiro, Viegas, and Albuquerque (2025) stated that inclusive social and economic development cannot be separated from a public government approach that is responsive to climate issues and environmental performance. At the local level in Indonesia, the role of local governments as drivers of environmental policy is indeed dominant, but challenges arise when technical capacity and coordination between regional apparatus are still weak (Andrews & Van der Wal, 2022). In addition, Khan (2023) shows that the Participatory Learning and Action approach can strengthen the capabilities of local bureaucracies in handling climate policies.

Community Participation in Environmental Policy

Public participation in environmental policy is not just a formal procedure, but a key element of policy legitimacy and effectiveness. Newig, Challies, and Jager (2022) through a systematic review placed participation as an important predictor of successful environmental adaptation and mitigation. However, the literature shows that although international regulations emphasize the right to participation, the practice is sometimes reduced to symbolic. For example, Orellana and Djalante (2023) found that environmental governance regulatory reforms in developing countries often reduce the space for community involvement in the preparation of environmental impact analyses. This reflects the dilemma between procedural regulation and the limited participatory reality. On the other hand, McDonald et al.'s (2024) research on local non-participation revealed that reasons such as lack of understanding, time constraints, and feelings of not being invited became significant barriers.

Collaboration Between Actors and the Role of Civil Organizations

The collaboration model between governments, communities, and civil society organizations is seen as a strategy to bridge the limitations of each party. Chen, Xu, and Guo (2025) examine how civil society organizations in Global South countries are building meaningful partnerships with governments to produce more inclusive environmental policies. They argue that strategies such as co-governance and bottom-up initiation can strengthen policy sustainability. In Southeast Asia, studies on community initiation of environmental care, such as village-based waste management, show that community empowerment through education, household waste management, and local ecosystem restoration can be a collaborative foothold (Le et al., 2023). However, this collaboration is often faced with resource inequality and unequal power relations.

Integration of Local Wisdom in Environmental Policy

Local values and traditional knowledge are often important social capital in environmental management. Eriksen, Nightingale, and Eakin (2021) highlight that indigenous peoples' involvement in multi-scale environmental governance opens up a wider deliberative space despite often dealing with institutional hegemony. In the Asian context, research by Kumar et al. (2024) shows that community-based programs that emphasize the spirit of collectivity and the value of local wisdom have great potential to increase community compliance

with environmental programs. The Nature-based Solutions paradigm also emphasizes the importance of the context of local wisdom when adapting environmental solutions, especially in cross-border areas, so that the solutions do not have a negative impact on local communities (Taylor & Roberts, 2023).

Research Gaps and New Study Opportunities

Although many studies emphasize the importance of participation, collaboration, and local wisdom, there is still a small amount of empirical study of how local governments bring inclusivity into environmental policies in coastal cities with strong cultural characters. Most of the studies are still in the realm of conservation or specific projects (Le et al., 2023; Chen et al., 2025). There has been no comprehensive research linking public participation mechanisms, implementation challenges, and collaborative strategies within a single framework in a city like Denpasar. In addition, the literature tends to focus on technical or institutional aspects without deeply relating local social dynamics (Andrews & Van der Wal, 2022; Khan, 2023). Therefore, this research has the potential to make a new contribution that fills the gap through the Participatory Action Research approach that involves the community as an active subject in the policy process.

METHODOLOGY

Types and Approaches to Research

This study uses a qualitative approach with a Participatory Action Research (PAR) design. The PAR approach was chosen because it encourages the active participation of the community and local governments in every stage of research, starting from problem identification, planning, implementation, to joint reflection. With multi-stakeholder involvement, PAR is able to produce findings that are not only academic, but also applicable in improving public policy (Mokhtar et al., 2021).

Population and Sampling Techniques

The research population consists of actors who have a role in environmental policy in the city of Denpasar, namely local governments, local communities, and supporting stakeholders. The selection of informants used purposive sampling techniques to determine relevant actors, combined with snowball sampling to capture additional informants based on the recommendations of the initial participants. The combination of these two techniques is effective in qualitative research because it is able to guarantee the representation of perspectives while achieving data saturation (Creswell & Creswell, 2021).

This study involved eleven key informants. From the local government, there were four informants consisting of representatives of the Environment and Hygiene Service, the Regional Development Planning Agency, and two village officials. From the local community, there are four informants which include representatives of banjars, youth groups, and women's communities. From the supporting stakeholders, there were three informants consisting of an academic,

a representative of an environmental non-governmental organization, and an indigenous leader. This number is seen as ideal for digging into information in depth without reducing the diversity of perspectives (Robinson, 2022).

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through participatory observations, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and analysis of policy documents. Participatory observations were carried out to record environmental policy practices in the field. In-depth interviews use semi-structured guides that facilitate the exploration of the informant's narrative. Targeted group discussions are used to build mutual understanding between actors, while document analysis focuses on regulations and regional planning documents. This variation of the technique allows for triangulation of data, thereby increasing the validity of research findings (Nowell et al., 2022).

Validity, Reliability, and Research Ethics

The validity of the research is maintained through triangulation of sources, techniques, and time. Member checking is carried out by returning a summary of findings to the informant so that it can be verified. Reliability is guaranteed by compiling audit trails in the form of research process records, interview transcripts, and analytical memos that can be traced back (Levitt, 2021). From an ethical point of view, all participants signed a voluntary participation agreement. The researcher ensures the confidentiality of the informant's identity and ensures that the results of the research provide practical benefits to the local community and local governments.

Research Procedure

The research was carried out in several stages. The first stage is the identification of common issues through initial meetings with stakeholders. The second stage is the planning of action strategies, e.g. participatory workshops and public consultation forums. The third stage is the implementation of field activities involving the government, the community, and supporting stakeholders. The fourth stage is participatory reflection to evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy implemented. Each PAR cycle is carefully documented in order to produce continuous learning (Kindon et al., 2022).

Data Analysis Techniques

The data was analyzed using thematic analysis techniques. The analysis stage begins with data transcription, coding, category grouping, and the development of the main theme that answers the focus of the research. Analysis is done repeatedly and reflexively to maintain depth of understanding. NVivo software is used to assist with data management, code marking, and visualization of analysis results. Thematic analysis was chosen because it is appropriate to explore the meaning of social experiences and interactions in the context of environmental policy inclusivity (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

RESEARCH RESULT

Mechanisms of Public Participation in Environmental Policy

The research found that the mechanism of public participation in environmental policy in the city of Denpasar is still limited to formal forums that are consultative, such as regional development planning deliberations and socialization of environmental programs. This forum does provide a space for public presence, but it is more informative than deliberative. In other words, the community is given the opportunity to express their aspirations, but not all proposals can be accommodated in the planning document.

A representative from the Regional Development Planning Agency explained: *"We do open up space for the community in musrenbang, but not all proposals can be included because they must be adjusted to regional budget priorities"* (BPPD-01, interview July 12, 2025). This shows structural limitations that make community participation more often considered a formality.

On the other hand, local communities are more active in moving independently. Youth groups, for example, often carry out river and beach cleanliness actions on their own initiative. One of its representatives said: *"We often move alone, carrying out river or beach clean-ups, although there is not always support from the government. Sometimes we only need simple facilities, such as cleaning tools"* (KPM-02, interview July 14, 2025).

The same thing was also expressed by the representative of the banjar who emphasized the importance of community action: *"At the banjar level, mutual cooperation activities have become a culture. It's just that government support is still minimal, so we are often self-sufficient"* (PB-01, interview July 16, 2025). Meanwhile, the women's community showed concern for environmental education issues, especially related to household waste management. One of the figures said: *"We try to educate residents to sort waste from home, but this activity works better if there is support in the form of training or incentives"* (KPR-01, interview July 17, 2025).

These findings show that the public participation space is still experiencing a gap. The government tries to provide a formal forum, but communities find it more effective when they move independently. The potential for community participation is actually very large, but it requires more inclusive facilitation so that local aspirations and initiatives are truly connected to regional policies.

Challenges in the Implementation of Environmental Policies

The implementation of inclusive environmental policies in Denpasar City faces various challenges that come from both the government and the community. The main obstacle is the weak cross-sector coordination in local governments, which makes programs often overlap and inconsistent. An official from the Environment and Hygiene Agency acknowledged this by saying: *"Sometimes we go it alone because coordination with other agencies is slow, even though environmental problems need joint handling"* (DLH-01, interview July 15, 2025).

In addition, the limited institutional capacity of the community is a serious problem. The women's and banjar communities often have great enthusiasm, but are limited in human and financial resources. A representative of the women's

community said: *"We want to be more involved, but sometimes we lack training and don't have the funds to run our own programs"* (KPR-02, interview July 17, 2025).

The dominance of the top-down approach of the government is also a challenge. Traditional leaders emphasized that the community is still often positioned as policy implementers, not strategists: *"The government often comes up with a ready-made program, then asks the community to implement it. In fact, if you talk to them from the beginning, the results can be better"* (TA-01, interview July 19, 2025). Another thing that weakens implementation is limited access to information. A representative from an environmental non-governmental organization stated: *"Policy information is sometimes only in the form of official documents, difficult for the public to understand. It should be made simpler so that it can be accessed by everyone"* (NGO-01, interview July 20, 2025).

Thus, the challenge of implementing inclusive environmental policies in Denpasar is not only a technical problem, but also a structural and cultural one. Lack of coordination between agencies, weak community capacity, dominance of top-down approaches, and limited access to information are factors that hinder the creation of meaningful community participation in environmental policies.

Collaborative Strategies between Actors

Despite facing a number of obstacles, this study found that the development of collaborative strategies between actors is quite promising at the local level. One form of collaboration that is visible is community-based waste management. This initiative runs when local governments, banjar communities, and youth groups synergize in the household waste sorting system and environmental education activities. This model of cooperation suggests that success is more likely to be achieved when key actors share roles in their respective capacities.

The Environment and Hygiene Agency recognizes that collaboration with the community is the key to the sustainability of the program. An official said: *"We realized we couldn't walk alone. When banjars and youth participate in managing waste, the results are more pronounced because people trust the movement led by their own community"* (DLH-01, interview July 15, 2025). This shows a change in the government's orientation from an instructive pattern to a partnership pattern.

From the community side, the banjar representative emphasized that the presence of the government and technical support encourages citizen solidarity. He said: *"If it's just self-help, sometimes it's limited. But when there is support from the government in the form of sorted garbage cans and training, residents are more enthusiastic because they feel cared for"* (PB-01, interview July 16, 2025). The same thing is also strengthened by youth groups who are active in environmental cleanup activities. One of their representatives stated: *"We are more confident in running the program if there is synergy. For example, we move in the field, the government prepares facilities, and traditional leaders provide support for the rules. It makes the community obedient"* (KPM-02, interview July 14, 2025).

Indigenous leaders also play an important role by integrating customary rules in supporting environmental policies. According to him, community obedience is easier to form if there is strong cultural legitimacy. He said: *"When customary rules prohibit littering, people are more obedient because it is not just a*

government regulation, but part of cultural values that must be maintained" (TA-01, interview July 19, 2025).

These findings suggest that collaborative strategies not only produce technical effectiveness, but also build mutual trust between actors. Collaboration that combines the roles of government, local communities, and indigenous leaders can create stronger program sustainability than a one-sided approach.

Integration of Local Wisdom Values

The integration of local wisdom values is one of the important elements in strengthening the legitimacy of environmental policies in Denpasar. The concept of Tri Hita Karana, which emphasizes the balance of human relationships with God, humans with others, and humans with nature, is not only understood as a philosophy, but also practiced in people's daily lives. The integration of these values can be seen in the practice of mutual cooperation to clean the environment, the prohibition of customary waste disposing, and unwritten rules related to the maintenance of sacred areas.

The Regional Development Planning Agency recognizes that incorporating the value of local wisdom into planning makes policies more acceptable to the community. One of his representatives said: *"If the policy is only technical, sometimes the public does not care. But if it is associated with Tri Hita Karana or traditional values, people immediately feel that this is part of their identity"* (BPPD-01, interview July 12, 2025).

The women's community also emphasized that local wisdom plays a big role in driving family participation. One of the representatives said: *"It is easier for us to invite mothers to participate in sorting waste if it is associated with the teachings of maintaining a balance in life. Traditional values make them feel like they are taking part in protecting their heritage"* (KPR-01, interview July 17, 2025). This view shows that local wisdom can be an effective gateway to increase public awareness and compliance.

An academic also assesses that the integration of local wisdom is able to bridge the gap between modern policies and traditional practices. He said: *"Local wisdom is not just a symbol, but a very powerful social instrument. When the government incorporates it into policy, legitimacy increases because it is in accordance with the cultural identity of the people"* (AD-01, July 18, 2025 interview). Traditional leaders strengthen this by emphasizing the role of customary rules in daily life. He explained: *"If there are only government rules, sometimes they can be ignored. But if it is included in the customary awig-awig, the community will be more afraid of violating"* (TA-01, interview July 19, 2025).

Thus, the integration of local wisdom not only strengthens the socio-cultural dimension in environmental policies, but also becomes a factor that accelerates the internalization of sustainability values at the community level. Collaboration between the government, academia, and the community in elevating local values makes policies more relevant, inclusive, and sustainable.

DISCUSSION

The results of the study show that the mechanism of public participation in environmental policy in Denpasar City is still predominantly consultative, limited to formal forums such as musrenbang and socialization of environmental programs. This pattern confirms that community participation is more often positioned as a formality than a deliberative instrument. Analysis of regional policy documents shows that although there are articles governing public consultation, these regulations do not explicitly guarantee public involvement in the decision-making process. This is in line with the findings (Newig et al., 2022) that procedural participation that is not accompanied by substantive mechanisms tends to perpetuate the power gap between the government and society. As a result, the aspirations of local communities are often not accommodated, while the potential for community innovation in environmental management is marginalized.

The research also identified the main obstacles in the form of weak coordination across agencies, limited community capacity, dominance of the top-down approach, and lack of access to information. These findings reinforce the theory of governance that emphasizes the importance of institutional capacity and horizontal coordination between actors to create adaptive policies (Khan et al., 2024). Analysis of regional planning documents shows that there is a division of roles between agencies, but implementation in the field does not run synergistically, so local communities often bear the burden of programs independently. This factor creates a discrepancy with the initial hypothesis that local governments play an active role as facilitators of inclusivity. This difference can be explained by the limitations of local bureaucratic resources, including budget and human resource capacity, which hinder the strengthening of deliberative space (Leal Filho et al., 2023).

Despite structural barriers, the findings of the study suggest that there are effective collaborative strategies, especially in community-based waste management programs. Collaboration between local governments, banjars, youth groups, and traditional leaders shows that synergy based on specific roles is more successful than a one-sided approach. Denpasar's environmental policy analysis shows that there is a tendency for the government to start including the terms "community participation" and "community partnership" in strategic documents, although implementation is still limited. This is in line with the argument (Chen, et al., 2025) that emphasizes that the co-governance model is able to strengthen policy legitimacy while building trust between actors. The theoretical contribution of these findings is to broaden the understanding of inclusive governance by showing that social trust and cultural legitimacy are important mediators between policy structure and successful implementation.

The integration of Tri Hita Karana values in environmental policy practice in Denpasar shows that local wisdom can function as a social instrument that strengthens community compliance. The results of interviews and document analysis show that the government has begun to include customary values in strategic planning, especially related to the preservation of public space and waste management. This supports findings (Kumar et al., 2024) that suggest that

internalizing local cultural values improves the sustainability of environmental programs. The difference is that in Denpasar, the value of local wisdom is not only positioned as a symbolic aspect, but is actually practiced in daily life, thus strengthening the legitimacy of policies at the community level. His contribution to the literature is to connect the paradigm of nature-based solutions with the local socio-cultural context, an aspect that is still rarely raised in environmental governance discourse.

This study faces limitations in the form of limited data coverage to eleven informants, so it may not fully represent the dynamics of the entire Denpasar community. In addition, the analysis of policy documents still focuses on the main strategic documents, not yet covering micro-regulations at the village level. These limitations open up opportunities for longitudinal follow-up research to explore the dynamics of cross-stakeholder collaboration in longer policy cycles. Concrete recommendations include strengthening community institutional capacity through participatory funds, regulations that bind community involvement in deliberative forums, and transparent feedback mechanisms so that the community can see real responses to their aspirations. In this way, environmental policy inclusivity is not only a jargon, but is manifested in responsive and sustainable governance practices.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This research confirms that local governments have a strategic role in encouraging environmental policy inclusivity, but its implementation in Denpasar City is still dominated by a top-down and consultative approach. The mechanism of public participation tends to be formalized in deliberative or socialization forums, without opening up a substantive deliberative space. The main obstacles are weak cross-sector coordination, limited community institutional capacity, and lack of access to public information, causing the potential for community participation to not be utilized optimally. The analysis of policy documents shows that there is a normative commitment to participation, but it has not been fully integrated into regional policy practices.

Nevertheless, the results of the study show that community-based collaborative strategies and the integration of local wisdom values such as Tri Hita Karana are able to strengthen the legitimacy and effectiveness of environmental policies. Collaboration between the government, banjars, youth groups, women's communities, academics, non-governmental organizations, and indigenous leaders opens up opportunities for the creation of more responsive and sustainable environmental governance. The theoretical contribution of this research lies in the enrichment of the inclusive governance literature that links social trust, cultural legitimacy, and co-governance practices as mediating factors in the successful implementation of policies. Practically, this study recommends strengthening the institutional capacity of communities, providing regulations that are more binding on public involvement, and transparent feedback mechanisms so that environmental policies are truly rooted in the needs and aspirations of local communities.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

Future research should explore how inclusive environmental governance can be strengthened by examining models that move beyond formal participation toward more substantive, deliberative, and community-driven mechanisms. Studies across different regions or cultural settings would help identify how local wisdom, social trust, and co-governance practices can be integrated more systematically into policy implementation. Further investigation is also needed to understand how institutional capacity—both within government agencies and community organizations—can be enhanced to support genuine collaboration. Additionally, future studies could assess the effectiveness of regulatory frameworks, transparency tools, and feedback mechanisms in ensuring that environmental policies are not only participatory in form but also equitable and impactful in practice.

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