



Strengthening Village Governance through a Workshop on Politically-Informed Participatory Development Planning

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Riwayat Artikel:

Naskah Masuk: 31 Oktober 2025;

Revisi: 28 November 2025;

Diterima: 26 Desember 2025;

Tersedia: 31 Desember 2025

Keywords:

Community

Empowerment;

Musrenbang; Participatory

Planning; Political

Dimension; Village

Governance.

Abstract: Participatory village development planning is often treated as a technical-administrative routine. In practice, however, planning is inseparable from political dynamics that shape who participates, whose interests prevail, and how scarce resources are allocated. This community empowerment program (PKM) in Kedung Udi Village, Trawas District, Mojokerto Regency, East Java, aimed to strengthen village governance by enhancing the capacity of village officials and community representatives to design and facilitate participatory planning while explicitly addressing the political dimension of planning. The main intervention was a workshop conducted on 22 August 2025, preceded by coordination and situational observation. Workshop modules emphasized: (1) planning as a political decision; (2) navigating dual arenas: formal (Musdes/Musrenbang and RPJMDes, RKPDes, APBDes) and informal (elite networks and gatekeeping); (3) multi-level contestation and policy alignment; and (4) practical tools, including power-interest mapping, programmatic agreements, program tagging for alignment with district planning documents, and transparency/anti elite capture mechanisms. The program resulted in improved participant literacy regarding power relations in planning and produced a follow-up action plan oriented toward institutional advocacy, continuous social control, and routine capacity reinforcement through a university and village partnership.

1. INTRODUCTION

Effective village development requires good governance and meaningful public participation that begins at the planning stage. However, empirical studies indicate that participation in local development planning is often symbolic and dominated by a limited group of actors, resulting in the marginalization of vulnerable community members (Arnstein, 1969; Cornwall, 2008). Unequal access to information and inadequate facilitation capacities further weaken the quality of public deliberation, leading to development plans that are poorly aligned with actual community needs (Mansuri & Rao, 2013). Therefore, strengthening participatory governance at the village level is essential to ensure inclusive decision-making and sustainable development outcomes (UNDP, 2014).

The participatory governance literature stresses that participation is not a single condition but a spectrum. Arnstein's (1969) ladder highlights differences between tokenistic participation and participation that redistributes decision-making power. Cornwall (2008) further argues that 'participation' often becomes a contested label, varying across actors and contexts; therefore, clarity is needed on who participates, in which processes, and for whose

benefit. Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) approaches position local residents as knowledge holders and promote collective learning through tools for social mapping, problem diagnosis, and priority setting (Chambers, 1994). In political theory, participation is not only procedural; it is also an educative process that can strengthen civic competence, legitimacy, and responsiveness in democratic governance (Pateman, 1970).

At the same time, participatory development may be vulnerable to elite capture. Evidence synthesized by the World Bank indicates that externally induced participation can be dominated by local elites when institutional safeguards, monitoring, and enabling state capacity are weak (Mansuri & Rao, 2013). In this PKM, the workshop material by Affandi (2025) served as a key reference by explicitly framing planning as a political decision: outcomes depend on who decides, who benefits, and how resources are allocated. Hence, strengthening participatory planning requires political literacy and institutional design, not merely administrative training.

This PKM had three objectives: (1) to enhance participant capacity in participatory village development planning; (2) to strengthen village governance through practical tools that connect citizen aspirations, Musrenbang processes, and alignment with district planning documents; and (3) to formulate stakeholder recommendations for sustaining improvements through village government action and continued support from UNESA.

2. METHODS

The PKM was implemented in Kedung Udi Village, Trawas District, Mojokerto Regency, East Java. The approach followed participatory community empowerment principles and adult learning (learning by doing). Activities included: (a) initial coordination with village leadership; (b) situational observation to identify planning challenges; (c) a thematic workshop on 22 August 2025; and (d) simulation-based exercises and group work to produce practical outputs.

Workshop modules were adapted from the material ‘Political Dimensions in Village Development Planning’ (Affandi, 2025), covering: (1) planning as a political decision; (2) dual arenas of planning (formal and informal); (3) multi-level contestation and the importance of aligning village priorities with higher level planning; and (4) practical tools, including power–interest mapping, programmatic agreements, program tagging, institutional MoUs for inter-organizational collaboration, transparency, and anti-elite-capture measures. Group work included stakeholder mapping, priority formulation, deliberation design, and drafting a follow-up action plan.

Evaluation was qualitative, based on: (1) participant reflection at the end of sessions; (2) assessment of group outputs (stakeholder maps, priority matrices, and action plans); and (3) facilitator field notes on deliberation dynamics, including dominance patterns, argument quality, and feasibility of proposed follow-up steps.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Initial observations indicated that village planning tended to be perceived as an administrative obligation, with limited citizen involvement and a tendency toward top-down decisions. These conditions can reduce public trust and weaken the legitimacy of priorities generated through Musdes/Musrenbang.

The workshop reframed planning as a political technocratic participatory process that requires institutional design. Participants learned to distinguish formal channels (Musdes/Musrenbang and RPJMDes, RKPDes, APBDes) from informal influences (elite networks, patronage, and gatekeepers). This distinction helped participants recognize why personal lobbying and informal negotiation are vulnerable to bias and why institutional advocacy can enhance accountability and resilience against political turnover.

Through practical tools, participants developed power interest maps to categorize actors as supporters, swing actors, and resisters, and to choose engagement strategies accordingly. Participants also designed anti-elite-capture measures, including process openness, public information disclosure, and citizen complaint channels. Programmatic agreements were introduced to convert deliberation outputs into commitments with priorities, indicators, budgets, timelines, and reporting responsibilities, thus enabling monitoring and social control. An institutional perspective also highlights that clear rules, monitoring, and enforcement mechanisms are crucial to sustain collective action and to constrain opportunism in local governance (Ostrom, 1990).

To address multi-level dynamics, participants were introduced to program tagging and linking village priorities in the annual plan (RKPDes) to district-level documents (RPJMD/RKPD) to increase the likelihood of support from district agencies. Discussion of the planning timeline served as a ‘political calendar’ guiding when and where village issues should be raised across Musrenbang stages.

Overall, the workshop generated three key lessons. First, capacity building for participatory planning must incorporate power-relation literacy to prevent Musrenbang from becoming ceremonial. Second, simple but disciplined tools (stakeholder maps, programmatic agreements, tagging, and transparency) increase replicability across planning cycles. Third,

sustainable empowerment requires iterative learning and accompaniment through a university and village partnership, especially during document drafting and monitoring phases. This is consistent with political science arguments that civic engagement and social capital can underpin institutional performance, government responsiveness, and accountability (Putnam, 1993).

4. IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

For Kedung Udi Village Government: (1) institutionalize a simple SOP for Musdes/Musrenbang ensuring inclusive representation (youth, women, small farmers, and marginalized groups) and data-informed deliberation; (2) adopt power-interest mapping and programmatic agreements as internal attachments to the planning process; (3) implement transparency and anti-elite-capture measures through public disclosure of budgets and procurement, notice boards, and complaint channels; (4) use a planning ‘political calendar’ and program tagging to align priorities with district planning; and (5) form a cross-institutional working group (village government, BPD, LPM, community leaders) to maintain continuity and social control throughout the year.

For UNESA: (1) provide follow-up mentoring through ‘document clinics’ for RPJMDes/RKPDes/APBDes and ‘institutional advocacy clinics’ to support program tagging and formal collaboration with district agencies/CSR partners; (2) develop concise modules and worksheets that villages can reuse in subsequent planning cycles; (3) build a simple monitoring framework combining process indicators (representation, deliberation quality, information openness) and output indicators (documents, agreements, follow-up actions); and (4) integrate PKM insights into teaching and applied research on village governance and the politics of planning.

5. CONCLUSION

This PKM in Kedung Udi Village demonstrates that strengthening participatory village development planning should not be reduced to technical training. By incorporating the political dimension of planning and by introducing practical institutional tools such as stakeholder mapping, programmatic agreements, program tagging, and transparency/anti-elite-capture mechanisms, planning forums have greater potential to become inclusive, accountable, and responsive to citizen needs. Sustained impact depends on consistent application of these tools across planning cycles and on continued accompaniment through a university-village partnership.

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