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Gender Dimension in Meaningful Public Participation: A Comparative Study of Village Regulation Formation in Indonesia and Poland

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the gender dimension of meaningful public participation in the formulation of village regulations in Indonesia and Poland. Unlike previous studies, which generally addressed public participation, gender equality, or local governance separately and were limited to a single country, this study brings these three areas together in a cross-national comparison by assessing not only the presence of women but also their ability to influence decisions.

The method of this study employs a qualitative approach with a normative-sociological comparative design. Secondary data in the form of legislation, scholarly articles, research reports, and policy documents were collected through a literature review and analyzed using document analysis, thematic analysis, and cross-national comparison.

The novelty of this study lies in the development of a comparative framework linking four elements: legal guarantees, access to participation, women's representation, and substantive influence on regulations.

The results show that the legal frameworks of both countries have provided channels for local participation; however, provisions that tend to be gender-neutral have not yet guaranteed women's substantive involvement. In Indonesia, village deliberations are more heavily influenced by social hierarchy, patriarchal norms, the dominance of the male elite, and women's limited access to information and legal literacy, resulting in participation that is often merely procedural. In Poland, public consultations and local councils have more formal institutional structures and relatively more open access, but gender stereotypes and low representation of women in strategic positions still limit their influence on decision-making. Thus, the gap in Indonesia is primarily rooted in sociocultural barriers and participatory capacity, whereas the gap in Poland is more evident in political representation and institutional effectiveness. These differences underscore that legal recognition yields different qualities of participation when institutional contexts differ.

This study concludes that meaningful participation requires gender-responsive consultation designs, the strengthening of women's organizations, legal literacy, political education,

affirmative action policies, and institutional support tailored to each country's context.

Keywords: Gender; Public Participation; Village Autonomy; Community Empowerment; Village Regulations

Abstrak

Penelitian bertujuan ini menganalisis dimensi gender dalam partisipasi publik yang bermakna pada pembentukan regulasi desa di Indonesia dan Polandia. Berbeda dengan penelitian terdahulu yang umumnya membahas partisipasi publik, kesetaraan gender, atau tata kelola lokal secara terpisah dan terbatas pada satu negara, penelitian ini mempertemukan ketiga ranah tersebut dalam perbandingan lintas negara dengan menilai bukan hanya kehadiran perempuan, melainkan juga kemampuan mereka memengaruhi keputusan.

Metode Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain komparatif normatif-sosiologis. Data sekunder berupa peraturan perundang-undangan, artikel ilmiah, laporan penelitian, dan dokumen kebijakan dikumpulkan melalui studi kepustakaan serta dianalisis menggunakan analisis dokumen, analisis tematik, dan perbandingan lintas negara.

Kebaruan penelitian ini terletak pada pengembangan kerangka kerja komparatif yang menghubungkan empat unsur yaitu jaminan hukum, akses terhadap partisipasi, keterwakilan perempuan, dan pengaruh substantif terhadap peraturan

Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kerangka hukum kedua negara telah menyediakan saluran partisipasi lokal, tetapi ketentuan yang cenderung netral gender belum menjamin keterlibatan perempuan secara substantif. Di Indonesia, musyawarah desa lebih dipengaruhi hierarki sosial, norma patriarki, dominasi elite laki-laki, serta keterbatasan akses perempuan terhadap informasi dan literasi hukum sehingga partisipasi kerap bersifat prosedural. Di Polandia, konsultasi publik dan dewan lokal memiliki struktur kelembagaan yang lebih formal dan akses yang relatif lebih terbuka, tetapi stereotip gender serta rendahnya representasi perempuan dalam posisi strategis masih membatasi pengaruh mereka terhadap keputusan. Dengan demikian, kesenjangan Indonesia terutama berakar pada hambatan sosial-kultural dan kapasitas partisipatif, sedangkan kesenjangan Polandia lebih tampak pada representasi politik dan efektivitas kelembagaan. Perbedaan ini menegaskan bahwa pengakuan hukum menghasilkan mutu partisipasi berbeda ketika konteks kelembagaan berbeda.

Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa partisipasi bermakna memerlukan desain konsultasi responsif gender, penguatan organisasi perempuan, literasi hukum, pendidikan politik, kebijakan afirmatif, dan dukungan kelembagaan yang disesuaikan dengan konteks setiap negara.

Kata Kunci: Gender; Partisipasi Publik; Otonomi Desa; Pemberdayaan Komunal; Peraturan Desa

1. INTRODUCTION

Community participation is a crucial foundation for democratic regulation, particularly at the village level, the government closest to the people. In Indonesia, village autonomy is officially recognized through Article 18B of the 1945 Constitution, which provides a constitutional basis for customary law for communities and villages to manage their own interests.¹ Meanwhile, in Poland, the principles of decentralized and local governance are

¹ Dian Andryanto, "Women's Participation in Village Development Planning: Case of Indonesia," *Journal*

regulated by the Law on Local Government, which emphasizes citizen involvement in decision-making at the local level.² Formally, both countries provide inclusive participatory spaces for the entire community. However, in practice, ideal public participation often faces obstacles, particularly gender imbalances, preventing women from fully gaining the opportunity to play a substantial role in the process of formulating village regulations.³

The main focus of this research is the gap between formal recognition of the right to public participation and women's substantive involvement in the development of village regulations. In Indonesia, this issue can be found in the development of village regulations concerning village budgets, asset management, infrastructure development, and social protection. Women can be invited to village meetings through representatives of the Family Empowerment and Welfare Movement (PKK), women's business groups, or health cadres. However, their involvement is often limited to completing attendance lists and submitting proposals, while the determination of priorities and the formulation of norms remain the responsibility of the village head, village officials, the Village Consultative Body, and community leaders, who are predominantly male.⁴ As a result, proposals regarding reproductive health services, protection of victims of violence, childcare facilities, strengthening women's businesses, and access for vulnerable groups to village budgets are not always translated into binding provisions or budget allocations.

Similar conditions are found in Poland at the *gmina* and *sołectwo* levels, local government units functionally comparable to village governance in Indonesia. Women can participate in public consultations on local budgets, social services, land use, or the construction of public facilities, but their representation in local councils and leadership positions remains limited.⁵ For example, women's input on care services, public space safety, transportation access, and family support is often positioned as a consultative aspiration rather than a primary consideration in decision-making.

The differences between the two countries are evident in the sources of the barriers. In Indonesia, women's participation is more strongly limited by social hierarchy, patriarchal culture, and the dominance of village elites, while in Poland, the limitations are more related

of Public Administration Studies 006, no. 02 (December 1, 2021): 13–18, <https://doi.org/10.21776/ub.jpas.2021.006.02.3>.

² Carolyn Barnett and Marwa Shalaby, "All Politics Is Local: Studying Women's Representation in Local Politics in Authoritarian Regimes," *Politics & Gender* 20, no. 1 (March 16, 2024): 235–40, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X22000502>.

³ Dorota Bednarska-Olejniczak, Jarosław Olejniczak, and Viktorie Klímová, "Grants for Local Community Initiatives as a Way to Increase Public Participation of Inhabitants of Rural Areas," *Agriculture* 11, no. 11 (October 28, 2021): 1060, <https://doi.org/10.3390/agriculture11111060>.

⁴ Rosa Husadah, Agus Mulyawan, and Joanita Jalianery, "The Politics and Law of 30% Women's Representation in the Central Kalimantan Provincial DPRD: A Review of the Implications Based on Regulations and Principles of Democratic Justice," *Journal of Law, Politic and Humanities* 5, no. 4 (March 18, 2025): 2316–24, <https://doi.org/10.38035/jlph.v5i4.1463>.

⁵ Gülşen Doğan, "Family-Oriented Discourse and Policymaking in Right-Wing Populist Governments: A Comparative Study of Türkiye and Poland," *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 26, no. 1 (January 2, 2025): 63–88, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21567689.2025.2493095>.

to gender stereotypes, disparities in political representation, and the weak influence of consultative input on final decisions. These examples demonstrate that formal participation cannot be called meaningful participation if women do not have equal opportunities to set agendas, debate drafts, and influence the substance of regulations. Therefore, the legal issue examined is not simply the availability of participation channels, but rather the ability of the legal and institutional frameworks in both countries to ensure women's real influence at every stage of local regulation formation.

Various previous studies have highlighted the importance of public participation in local governance and the need for inclusivity in the policy-making process. These findings generally emphasize that public involvement can strengthen policy legitimacy, increase government accountability, and promote sustainable development.⁶ On the other hand, research related to gender and development shows that women's participation in decision-making plays a crucial role in producing policies that are more responsive to the social needs of the community.⁷ However, most studies are still limited to the national or sector-specific level and rarely specifically discuss the relationship between gender dimensions, meaningful public participation, and the formation of village regulations in a comparative cross-country perspective.⁸ Furthermore, research that combines normative legal analysis with social dynamics and communal empowerment efforts within a single comprehensive analytical framework is still very limited, leaving significant gaps that require further exploration.

Current conditions indicate that various women's empowerment policies and programs have not fully addressed gender inequality in public participation. In Indonesia, village deliberations, which should be a space for deliberation, are still dominated by men, while women are often only partially involved and do not receive equal opportunities to influence the substance of decisions.⁹ In Poland, formal mechanisms such as public consultation and local councils also do not fully guarantee balanced representation and influence of women in decision-making.¹⁰ Poland was chosen as a comparison subject because it has a decentralized local government system, more institutionalized public consultation mechanisms, and gender

⁶ Ioannis Balampanidis et al., "‘Bridges Over Troubled Waters’? The Competitive Symbiosis of Social Democracy and Radical Left in Crisis-Ridden Southern Europe," *Government and Opposition* 56, no. 1 (January 2, 2021): 59–81, <https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2019.8>.

⁷ Marie E. Berry, Yolande Bouka, and Marilyn Muthoni Kamuru, "Implementing Inclusion: Gender Quotas, Inequality, and Backlash in Kenya," *Politics & Gender* 17, no. 4 (December 5, 2021): 640–64, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X19000886>.

⁸ Elin Bjarnegård, Sandra Håkansson, and Pär Zetterberg, "Gender and Violence against Political Candidates: Lessons from Sri Lanka," *Politics & Gender* 18, no. 1 (March 26, 2022): 33–61, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X20000471>.

⁹ Kurniawati Hastuti Dewi et al., "Non-Electoral Political Participation among Members of Indonesian Women's NGOs: The Role of Gender Training, Social Bases, and Political Efficacy," *Asian Women* 41, no. 2 (2025): 43, <https://doi.org/10.14431/aw.2025.6.41.2.43>.

¹⁰ Małgorzata Marks-Krzyszowska, Krystyna Dzwonkowska-Godula, and Anna Miklaszewska, "Types of Rural Residents in Central Poland in Terms of Their Local Participation: The Perspectives of the Local Authorities and the Inhabitants," *Sustainability* 14, no. 20 (October 19, 2022): 13512, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su142013512>.

equality policies influenced by European Union legal standards. These characteristics differ from Indonesia, which implements village governance through community-based deliberations within a more diverse social, cultural, and institutional context. Nevertheless, both countries face similar challenges, namely the gap between normative recognition of public participation and women's substantive involvement. This comparison allows the study to identify the influence of institutional design, political culture, and consultation mechanisms on the quality of women's participation in two different local government systems.

Thus, Poland is not positioned as a fully successful model, but rather as a benchmark for assessing how a decentralized framework and the institutionalization of public consultation create different opportunities and obstacles for women. Therefore, a contextual approach that combines strengthening women's capacity with improving institutional mechanisms is necessary so that their participation extends beyond formal presence and can have a real impact on the formation of local regulations.

Recent studies show that the relationship between public participation, village governance, and gender equality is still discussed separately. Syukri (2023) found that the institutionalization of participatory village governance in Indonesia is more focused on economic and infrastructure development than on gender structural transformation. As a result, gender mainstreaming policies have not adequately strengthened women's positions in village decision-making processes.¹¹ Furthermore, Annahar, Widianingsih, Muhtar, and Paskarina (2023) showed that the implementation of inclusive village governance differs between villages due to the influence of government capacity, leadership, information transparency, and support from community organizations. Although this study addresses women as a vulnerable group, their analysis did not specifically measure their influence on the substance of village regulations.¹² In the Polish context, Marks-Krzyszowska, Dzwonkowska-Godula, and Miklaszewska (2022) found that rural residents' engagement in local public affairs was relatively low, and that fully engaged citizens were small. However, this study focused on a general typology of citizen participation and did not analyze gender differences in experiences and the impact of participation.¹³

These three studies shed light on the current state of limited participatory governance at the local level, but they leave three gaps. First, research on Indonesia has not yet linked women's representation to their ability to influence the agenda, article formulation, and final decisions in the formation of village regulations. Second, studies in Poland still treat rural residents as a general category, thus, the gender dimension of access, representation, and

¹¹ Muhammad Syukri, "Gender Policies of the New Developmental State: The Case of Indonesian New Participatory Village Governance," *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 42, no. 1 (April 2, 2023): 110–33, <https://doi.org/10.1177/18681034221149750>.

¹² Nasrun Annahar et al., "The Road to Inclusive Decentralized Village Governance in Indonesia," *Sustainability* 15, no. 11 (May 25, 2023): 8616, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su15118616>.

¹³ Marks-Krzyszowska, Dzwonkowska-Godula, and Miklaszewska, "Types of Rural Residents in Central Poland in Terms of Their Local Participation: The Perspectives of the Local Authorities and the Inhabitants."

influence has not been specifically examined. Third, no studies have been found that compare Indonesia and Poland using the same analytical framework to explain the relationship between legal norms, institutional design, social barriers, and the quality of women's participation. Thus, this study differs from previous studies in placing gender as the primary analytical variable and using meaningful public participation as a benchmark. Participation is assessed not only by women's presence in forums but also by access to information, opportunities to express views, involvement in formulation, and ability to influence decisions.

Based on these gaps, this study aims to analyze how gender dimensions influence the quality of public participation in the formation of village regulations in Indonesia and local regulations at the gmina and sołectwo levels in Poland. The study also identifies differences in the structural, social, cultural, and institutional barriers faced by women in the two countries. The research's novelty lies in the development of a comparative framework linking four elements: legal guarantees, access to participation, women's representation, and substantive influence on regulations. This framework allows the study to distinguish procedural participation from meaningful participation and explains why relatively open legal recognition can result in different levels of women's involvement. The research results are expected to provide a conceptual basis for formulating mechanisms for the formation of gender-responsive local regulations, including women's involvement from the start of agenda development, openness of drafting, provision of equal deliberation space, and the obligation to respond to submitted input.

2. METHOD

This research is a normative legal study with a comparative legal, regulatory, and conceptual approach. The regulatory approach is used to identify guarantees of public participation and gender equality in the formation of regulations at the village or local government level. The conceptual approach is used to explain meaningful public participation based on four indicators: access to information, the opportunity to express opinions, involvement in discussions, and the ability to influence decisions. The comparative legal approach is used to examine the similarities and differences between regulatory design, participation channels, women's representation, and community influence in Indonesia and Poland. This study does not use interviews, surveys, or field observations, so statements about social practices are based on the results of previous empirical research and verifiable institutional reports.

Indonesia and Poland were selected purposively because both are unitary states that implement decentralization and provide space for community participation in local governance, but have different legal traditions, institutional structures, and socio-political environments. Indonesia regulates village government as a government unit with the authority to establish village regulations through community-based deliberations. Poland regulates local government through gmina, while sołectwo functions as an auxiliary unit in rural areas. Therefore, the two are not treated as completely identical government units, but are compared based on functional equality in local decision-making and citizen involvement. This selection

allows the study to explain the influence of differences in institutional design on the quality of women's participation.

Indonesian primary legal materials include the 1945 Constitution; Law Number 6 of 2014 concerning Villages as last amended by Law Number 3 of 2024; Law Number 12 of 2011 concerning the Establishment of Legislation and its amendments; Law Number 23 of 2014 concerning Regional Government; Regulation of the Minister of Home Affairs Number 111 of 2014 concerning Technical Guidelines for Village Regulations; Regulation of the Minister of Home Affairs Number 114 of 2014 concerning Guidelines for Village Development; and regulations governing village deliberations and development. Polish primary legal materials include the Constitution of the Republic of Poland, *Ustawa z dnia 8 marca 1990 r. o samorządzie gminnym* or the Law on Gmina Government, regulations regarding access to public information, petitions, local referendums, local government elections, and decisions of gmina councils regarding procedures for public consultations. The Gmina Governance Act was chosen because it regulates citizen consultation, the position of *sołectwo*, the authority of the council, the creation of local laws, and citizens' legislative initiatives.

Data sources were obtained through literature review and document searches. In addition to primary legal materials, the study utilized secondary legal materials in the form of peer-reviewed journal articles, books, research reports, and publications from national and international institutions on public participation, local governance, and gender equality. Documents were selected if they were published by authorized institutions or academic publishers, directly related to Indonesia or Poland, available in a verifiable form, and contained information on regulatory development, public consultation, women's representation, or barriers to participation. Legal documents were searched through official government databases, while secondary literature prioritized publications from the 2014–2025 period to ensure the analysis reflects developments after the enactment of the Village Law in Indonesia.

The analysis was conducted in four stages. First, legal materials were inventoried and grouped by hierarchy, country, substance, and stage of regulatory development. Second, each provision was interpreted grammatically and systematically to determine the form of participation rights, authorized parties, consultation procedures, and the existence of gender-responsive provisions. Third, the data were entered into a comparison matrix using the same indicators for both countries, including legal basis, access to information, women's representation, mechanisms for expressing opinions, responses to input, and influence on final decisions. Fourth, the comparison results were analyzed using the similarities and differences method to separate factors originating from legal design from social, cultural, and institutional factors.

The validity of the research was ensured through source triangulation, which involved comparing regulatory provisions with scientific articles and institutional reports. The validity of legal interpretations was checked by cross-referencing regulatory texts, recent amendments, and implementing documents. Consistency of the analysis was maintained by applying the same comparative indicators to both countries and noting any differences in

levels of government and legal terminology. Conclusions were drawn only if a finding was supported by at least two different types of sources. This step was necessary to reduce bias in document selection and prevent generalizations unsupported by the research data.

3. DISCUSSION

3.1. Gender Dimensions in Meaningful Public Participation in Village Regulation Formation: A Comparison of Indonesia and Poland

The analysis shows that gender issues in the formation of local regulations are not only related to the number of women present, but also to their position in setting the agenda, presenting arguments, formulating policy options, and influencing final decisions. Therefore, meaningful public participation in this study is assessed through four elements: access to information, opportunities to speak, involvement in discussions, and influence on the substance of regulations. The framework shows that Indonesia and Poland both provide channels for participation, but produce different patterns of women's involvement due to differences in government structures, representation mechanisms, and power relations at the local level.

Comparing the two countries requires first clarifying the units being analyzed. Villages in Indonesia are governmental units authorized to formulate village regulations in collaboration with the village head and the Village Consultative Body.¹⁴ In Poland, gmina is the basic unit of local government that has the authority to form local regulations through the gmina council, while sołectwo is an auxiliary unit in rural areas and does not have a status that is completely equal to a village in Indonesia.¹⁵ Therefore, the comparison is made on the basis of functional equality, namely the process of involving the community in the preparation of decisions and regulations that affect the lives of rural residents, not on the basis of equality of constitutional status.

Table 1. Comparison of Gender Dimensions in the Formation of Local Regulations in Indonesia and Poland

Analysis aspects	Indonesia	Poland	Comparative analysis
The government units analyzed	The village as a government unit that can form village regulations	Gmina as the basic unit of local government and sołectwo as the auxiliary unit in rural areas	The two are compared based on their local decision-making function, not as identical institutions.
Legal Foundation	1945 Constitution; Village Law; regulations	Polish Constitution; Ustawa o samorządzie	Both systems recognize participation, but have

¹⁴ Rani Eka Diansari, Adiza Alhassan Musah, and Jaizah Binti Othman, "Factors Affecting Village Fund Management Accountability in Indonesia: The Moderating Role of Prosocial Behaviour," *Cogent Business & Management* 10, no. 2 (December 12, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2023.2219424>.

¹⁵ Arwanto Harimas Ginting et al., "Village Government's Risk Management and Village Fund Administration in Indonesia," *Sustainability* 15, no. 24 (December 9, 2023): 16706, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su152416706>.

	regarding the formation of village regulations and village deliberations	gminnym; gmina council regulations regarding resident consultation	not established uniform measures to assess women's substantive influence.
Formal participation channels	Village deliberations, village development planning deliberations, conveying aspirations to the Village Consultative Body, and community group forums	Resident consultations, gmina council meetings, citizen-initiated resolution formation, participatory budgeting, and sołectwo meetings	Indonesia relies more on community deliberation, while Poland uses more institutionalized procedures for local consultation and representation.
Descriptive representation of women	Women can be present through women's representation elements in the Village Consultative Body, PKK, health cadres, and business groups.	Women participated as members of gmina councils, regional heads, members of community organizations, and residents in consultations.	Formal representation is increasing in both countries, but the number of women does not automatically determine influence on decisions.
Substantive influence	Often limited because the budget agenda and priorities have been controlled by the village head, village officials, and local elites.	More procedurally open, but consultative input is not always binding on the gmina board and women are not yet equally represented in leadership positions.	Indonesia's barriers are more informal and hierarchical; Poland's barriers are more related to the design of representation and the binding power of consultation.
Dominant barriers	Patriarchal culture, economic dependency, limited information, meeting times, and the dominance of village elites	Voter preference for male candidates, leadership stereotypes, low trust in citizen influence, and the non-binding nature of consultations	Gender inequality persists through different mechanisms: social exclusion in Indonesia and political-procedural filtering in Poland
Participation pattern	Tends to move between symbolic and consultative participation	Tends to be consultative and representative, but does not always determine decisions	Participation in both countries has not yet fully reached the level of partnership or power sharing.
Need for improvement	Involvement of women from the time of agenda setting, capacity building, and the obligation to respond	Strengthening the linkages between consultation, women's representation and board decisions	Reforms must be directed at increasing women's influence, not just increasing their presence.

Source: Processed from Indonesian and Polish laws and regulations

In the Indonesian context, the Village Law has provided a space for women's groups to participate in village deliberations and development. However, empirical evidence shows that the institutionalization of forums is not always accompanied by an equal distribution of power.¹⁶ Syukri's (2023) research in three villages in Jambi, Central Java, and East Nusa Tenggara found that participatory village governance is more focused on infrastructure and economic development than on changing gender relations. Women are more easily involved when programs relate to family health, household welfare, or productive economic activities, but they receive less space in discussions of strategic issues, budget oversight, and changes in village power structures. These findings demonstrate a disconnect between women's practical interests and strategic gender interests. While meeting family needs is beneficial, it does not necessarily strengthen women's ability to control village decisions and resources.¹⁷

Variations between villages also demonstrate that the quality of participation is not solely determined by national regulations. Research by Annahar et al. (2023) in Ngroto, Putat Lor, Sumberpucung, and Purwodadi found that pre-deliberation forums at the group, hamlet, or interest level can expand opportunities for residents to formulate their aspirations before village deliberations. More inclusive practices emerge when communities receive information, capacity building, and support from organizations outside the village government. Conversely, in villages where processes are dominated by elites, community participation results only in the provision of information and consultation without equal deliberation. Women are present as group representatives, but their capacity to influence development priorities depends heavily on the openness of the village head and the strength of women's organizations.¹⁸ Thus, the problem is not the absence of a forum, but rather the lack of guarantee that the proposals submitted will be discussed, given reasons for acceptance or rejection, and translated into regulations or a budget.

More recent findings reinforce this criticism. Haryanto, Berenschot, and Aspinall (2025), based on ethnographic research and recordings of deliberations in 18 villages, found that village deliberations in many locations were irregular and remained dominated by elites. Even in relatively open forums, residents tended to express demands politely and avoided direct criticism of village officials. This pattern resulted in "participation without accountability," whereby citizens could express their views, but the forums were ineffective in holding village governments accountable for their decisions.¹⁹ In unequal gender relations, these barriers can

¹⁶ Michał Gulczyński, Monika Köppl-Turyna, and Jarosław Kantorowicz, "Limited Impact of Introducing Proportional Representation on Women's Representation: Insights from a Quasi-Experiment in Local Elections," *Political Studies* 73, no. 4 (November 4, 2025): 1632–53, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00323217241308098>.

¹⁷ Syukri, "Gender Policies of the New Developmental State: The Case of Indonesian New Participatory Village Governance."

¹⁸ Annahar et al., "The Road to Inclusive Decentralized Village Governance in Indonesia."

¹⁹ Haryanto, Ward Berenschot, and Edward Aspinall, "Participation without Accountability: Deliberative

operate more strongly against women because norms of politeness, deference to male leaders, and the division of domestic roles limit their ability to express resistance openly.

In Poland, the institutionalization of participation at the gmina level appears more formal, with citizen consultations, council meetings, citizen resolution initiatives, and participatory budgeting. However, this procedural formality also has limitations. Research by Marks-Krzyszkowska, Dzwonkowska-Godula, and Miklaszewska (2022), which involved interviews with six rural gmina heads and a survey of 700 residents in the Łódzkie region, found that only a small segment of the population was fully engaged in public affairs. Low confidence in citizens' ability to influence government, a lack of information, time constraints, and apathy hindered participation.²⁰ The study did not specifically focus its analysis on women, but its findings suggest that the existence of consultation procedures does not guarantee an equal relationship between local governments and residents.

Gender issues in Poland are also evident in the relationship between women's candidacy and electability. Gulczyński, Köppl-Turyna, and Kantorowicz (2025) examined the change in the city council election system from a majoritarian system to an open-list proportional representation system with gender quotas. Their results showed that the change increased women's chances of becoming candidates but did not significantly affect the proportion of women elected. In 2024, women held 34.3% of city council seats, up from 17.9% in 2002, but still below gender parity. The study also found that voters more often gave preference to male candidates.²¹ This finding is important because it shows that affirmative action policies at the nomination stage can lose effectiveness when candidate order, party behavior, and voter preferences do not change.

A critical comparison shows that Indonesia and Poland face a gap between formal participation and substantive influence, but the mechanisms of exclusion differ. In Indonesia, social proximity in village deliberations does not always translate into equality. Patronage relations, the authority of village heads, the dominance of male figures, and women's dependence on local social networks can hinder the expression of criticism. A legally open forum can thus remain socially closed.²² In Poland, consultation procedures are more standardized and women's representation in local councils is relatively higher, but women's influence is filtered through party nominations, preference votes, council composition, and the status of consultative input, which is not always binding.²³ A more formal system is not

Democracy in Village Indonesia," *South East Asia Research* 33, no. 1 (January 2, 2025): 49–67, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0967828X.2025.2483162>.

²⁰ Marks-Krzyszkowska, Dzwonkowska-Godula, and Miklaszewska, "Types of Rural Residents in Central Poland in Terms of Their Local Participation: The Perspectives of the Local Authorities and the Inhabitants."

²¹ Gulczyński, Köppl-Turyna, and Kantorowicz, "Limited Impact of Introducing Proportional Representation on Women's Representation: Insights from a Quasi-Experiment in Local Elections."

²² Leah Hibbs, "I Was Able to Take Part in the Chamber as If I Was There' – Women Local Councillors, Remote Meeting Attendance, and Covid-19: A Positive from the Pandemic?," *Journal for Cultural Research* 26, no. 1 (January 2, 2022): 6–23, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14797585.2021.2011365>.

²³ Mustafa Kennedy Hussein, "Women's Participation in Local Development – A Case Study of Zomba

necessarily more gender responsive if women are only participants in consultations without adequate control over the final decision.

These findings also refute the notion that increasing the number of women automatically results in meaningful participation. Descriptive representation remains necessary because it opens women's access to decision-making bodies, but it is not sufficient to guarantee substantive representation. Participation can only be considered meaningful if women are involved from the outset in setting the agenda, receive draft documents in a timely manner, have an equal opportunity to raise objections, and can track the impact of their input on the final formulation.²⁴ By this measure, Indonesia still faces the problem of elite domination and weak accountability of deliberation, while Poland faces limitations in transforming formal representation into political influence.

Therefore, improvements in Indonesia need to be directed at holding women's forums before village meetings, presenting draft regulations in an easily understood format, adjusting meeting times to accommodate caregiving responsibilities, and requiring village governments to document follow-up on each proposal. In Poland, strengthening is needed through transparency of consultation results, requiring gmina councils to provide reasons for rejected input, increasing the position of women in council leadership, and evaluating the gender impact of local regulations. These differences in strategy emphasize that gender-responsive participation cannot be built through a single, universal model but must be tailored to the power constraints within each local government system.

3.2. Factors Causing Gender Imbalance and Exploring Communal Empowerment Strategies to Substantially Increase Women's Participation

The analysis shows that gender imbalances in public participation are not caused by a single factor, but rather are shaped by the interplay between gender-based division of labor, resource inequality, social norms, institutional design, and participation procedures. These factors operate at different stages. Limited time, information, and mobility hinder women's access to forums; patriarchal norms influence women's courage and acceptance of their opinions; and elite dominance and weak follow-up to consultations limit women's influence after participation. Therefore, the issue of women's participation cannot be simply explained by low attendance. Analysis must assess the process from access to forums to the transformation of women's input into legal provisions, programs, or budget allocations.

A comparison of Indonesia and Poland shows that the underlying causes of inequality differ. In Indonesia, socio-cultural barriers and informal power relations are more dominant in determining who speaks and whose proposals are prioritized in village deliberations.²⁵ In

District Council in Malawi," *Development Southern Africa* 38, no. 6 (November 2, 2021): 954–66, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0376835X.2021.1891022>.

²⁴ Barbara Kiełbasa and Renata Śliwa, "Rural Housewives Clubs- Unlocking the Potential of Women's Agency in Local Development in Poland," *Journal of Rural Studies* 124 (May 2026): 104112, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2026.104112>.

²⁵ Jessica Kim and Kathleen M. Fallon, "Making Women Visible: How Gender Quotas Shape Global Attitudes toward Women in Politics," *Politics & Gender* 19, no. 4 (December 31, 2023): 981–1006,

Poland, women have relatively more open access to education, community organizations, citizen consultations, and elections to gmina councils.²⁶ However, this involvement remains filtered through the nomination system, voter preferences, the composition of local institutions, and the non-binding nature of consultations. Thus, Indonesia faces more issues of access and elite domination, while Poland faces a gap between women's social capacity and their influence in formal political institutions.

Table 2. Factors Causing Gender Imbalance and Community Empowerment Strategies in Indonesia and Poland

Dimensions	Indonesia	Poland	Critical Analysis	Empowerment Strategy
Access to information	Information regarding agendas, draft regulations, and village budgets is not always received by women in a timely manner or in an easily understood form.	Consultation information is more institutionalized, but limited knowledge of procedures and low confidence in the benefits of participation reduce engagement.	Information availability does not equate to accessibility. Formal publications do not guarantee women's ability to use that information.	Simplifying regulatory drafting, disseminating information through women's organizations, and providing legal and budget education.
Division of work and time	Domestic responsibilities, caregiving, and productive work limit women's attendance at meetings.	Family workload and time constraints continue to influence rural women's public activities.	A seemingly neutral forum schedule and design can have different impacts on women and men.	Adjusting schedules, providing parenting support, hosting hybrid forums, and developing group-based consultations.
Gender norms and leadership legitimacy	Leadership and budgetary matters are often perceived as men's domains, while women are more often directed towards family and welfare	Leadership stereotypes persist through preferences for male candidates and traditional role divisions in rural areas.	Gender norms limit the areas women are considered worthy of discussing and result in different assessments of their leadership.	Organizing political education, leadership training, equality campaigns, and increasing the visibility of women leaders.

<https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X23000089>.

²⁶ Victoria Melkisedeck Lihiru, "Promoting Women's Political Participation in Tanzania: Assessing Voluntary Gender Quotas in CCM's and CHADEMA's Constitutions," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 49, no. 5–6 (November 2, 2023): 1003–21, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057070.2023.2327265>.

issues.				
Representation in local institutions	Women's representation in the Village Consultative Body is available, but the number and bargaining position are not always adequate.	The number of women on local councils is increasing, but has not yet reached parity and does not automatically generate substantive influence.	Descriptive representation is necessary, but must be accompanied by access to strategic positions and agenda-setting processes.	Implementing affirmative action, strengthening cadre development, assisting female members, and placing women in planning and budgeting functions.
Participatory process structure	Deliberations can be dominated by village heads, village officials, and community leaders, while residents' suggestions are not always followed up on.	Resident consultation is more formal, but community input can still serve as recommendations.	The barrier lies not only in the opportunity to speak, but also in the absence of an obligation to explain the influence of input on decisions.	Develop a list of responses, implement a proposal tracking mechanism, provide written reasons for rejection, and carry out independent monitoring.
Capacity of women's organizations	The PKK, business groups, health cadres, and local organizations have networks, but their activities often focus on program implementation.	Koła Gospodyń Wiejskich or Rural Women's Associations build networks, skills and social capital, but are not always connected to policy formation.	Women's organizations can strengthen collective capacity, but also risk maintaining traditional role divisions if they do not have an advocacy function.	Transforming program implementing organizations into policy partners through advocacy training and formal collaboration with local institutions.
Economic and technical resources	Economic dependency, limited digital literacy, and lack of technical support reduce women's autonomy.	Access to resources is relatively better, but not evenly distributed across rural communities and certain age groups.	Economic independence increases the ability to participate, but does not automatically change political power relations.	Providing business support, technology access, technical assistance in preparing proposals, and funding for women's organizations.
Sustainability of	Programs often rely on village	Programs may be supported by	Project-based empowerment	Provide regular funding, establish

empowerment	heads, facilitators, universities, or external organizations.	grants and formal organizations, but relationships with local governments vary.	tends to produce temporary changes if not institutionalized.	a permanent consultative forum, establish substantive participation indicators, and conduct gender-based evaluations.
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Source: Results of thematic and comparative analysis based on literature studies and document analysis (2026)

The first structural factor relates to the distribution of time, information, education, income, and access to technology. In Indonesia, rural women simultaneously juggle domestic work, caregiving, economic activities, and social activities. Meetings held at specific times without support from caregiving can create obstacles, even if the invitation is open.²⁷ This situation demonstrates that textually neutral procedures are not necessarily fair in their impact. Women present also may not have prior access to draft regulations, development plans, or budget documents. Consequently, they are forced to respond to agendas prepared by the village government without sufficient time and information to prepare arguments.²⁸

In Poland, the structural problem is not primarily a lack of information channels, but rather a lack of confidence that participation can change decisions.²⁹ Research by Marks-Krzyszkowska, Dzwonkowska-Godula, and Miklaszewska (2022), based on interviews with six rural gmina heads and a survey of 700 residents in the Łódzkie region, found that very few residents are fully engaged in public affairs. Low trust in government, a lack of information about participation opportunities, limited time, and a feeling of lack of influence are the causes of passivity.³⁰ These findings suggest that access to education and institutionalization of consultation are insufficient if citizens cannot see the connection between their involvement and policy change.

The second factor is socio-cultural norms that determine the division of roles and legitimacy of leadership. In Indonesia, women are more likely to be accepted when discussing maternal and child health, household consumption, social activities, or micro-enterprises.³¹ In

²⁷ Signe Bock Seggaard, Ulrik Kjaer, and Jo Saglie, "Why Norway Has More Female Local Councillors than Denmark: A Crack in the Nordic Gender Equality Model?," *West European Politics* 46, no. 2 (February 23, 2023): 401–24, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2022.2050590>.

²⁸ Øyvind Søråas Skorge, "Mobilizing the Underrepresented: Electoral Systems and Gender Inequality in Political Participation," *American Journal of Political Science* 67, no. 3 (July 26, 2023): 538–52, <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12654>.

²⁹ Marks-Krzyszkowska, Dzwonkowska-Godula, and Miklaszewska, "Types of Rural Residents in Central Poland in Terms of Their Local Participation: The Perspectives of the Local Authorities and the Inhabitants."

³⁰ Marks-Krzyszkowska, Dzwonkowska-Godula, and Miklaszewska.

³¹ Branko Stanić, "Gender (Dis)Balance in Local Government: How Does It Affect Budget Transparency?," *Economic Research-Ekonomska Istraživanja* 36, no. 1 (March 31, 2023): 997–1014, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1331677X.2022.2081232>.

contrast, discussions about asset management, land use, infrastructure development, and budget oversight are often positioned as male-dominated. This division limits women's participation to practical interests without providing adequate space to advocate for strategic interests, such as changing the distribution of power and resources.³² Syukri (2023) shows that participatory village governance policies primarily position women as beneficiaries of development rather than as actors determining development orientation. The focus on infrastructure and economic growth has resulted in gender structural transformation being de-emphasized.³³

Gender norms in Poland operate through more indirect mechanisms. Gulczyński, Köppl-Turyna, and Kantorowicz (2025) found that the implementation of open-list proportional representation accompanied by gender quotas increased women's chances of becoming candidates, but did not significantly increase the proportion of women in city councils. Voters more often gave preference to male candidates. Although the number of women in city councils increased from 17.9% in 2002 to 34.3% in 2024, this increase did not result in gender parity.³⁴ This evidence suggests that changes to nomination rules may lose their corrective power if they are not accompanied by changes in party behavior, candidate placement, and voter perceptions of female leadership.

The third factor relates to institutional design. In the Indonesian context, village deliberations may provide a space for discussion, but they don't always provide an accountability mechanism for citizen input. Women's suggestions may be recorded without clarity about whether they will be incorporated into draft regulations, work plans, or village budgets. This reliance on the village head's openness leads to varying levels of participation across villages.³⁵ Research by Annahar et al. (2023) shows that inclusive practices are more readily found in villages that receive information exposure, capacity building, and support from external organizations. Conversely, forums in elite-dominated villages tend to focus on information dissemination and consultation. This difference demonstrates that substantive participation requires the ability of community organizations to negotiate interests, not simply the existence of forums.³⁶

In Poland, public consultation procedures are more institutionalized, but not all citizen input is binding on the decisions of the gmina council. Women's involvement as consultation participants also does not equate to holding positions that can determine agendas,

³² Rohmini Indah Lestari et al., "The Village Fund Program and Indonesia's 18th Sustainable Development Goal: A Bibliometric and Content Study," *International Journal of Sustainable Development and Planning* 18, no. 11 (November 30, 2023): 3505–18, <https://doi.org/10.18280/ijstdp.181115>.

³³ Syukri, "Gender Policies of the New Developmental State: The Case of Indonesian New Participatory Village Governance."

³⁴ Gulczyński, Köppl-Turyna, and Kantorowicz, "Limited Impact of Introducing Proportional Representation on Women's Representation: Insights from a Quasi-Experiment in Local Elections."

³⁵ Syukri, "Gender Policies of the New Developmental State: The Case of Indonesian New Participatory Village Governance."

³⁶ Annahar et al., "The Road to Inclusive Decentralized Village Governance in Indonesia."

formulations, or votes.³⁷ Thus, the institutional challenges in both countries take different forms. Indonesia faces informal dominance that limits deliberation, while Poland faces a formal distance between consultation and decision-making authority. Both result in similar consequences: women can attend and speak without guarantees that their opinions will influence policy.

Community empowerment can reduce these inequalities if it focuses on building collective capacity. An example from Sukaharja Village, Bogor Regency, shows that leadership and advocacy training for 30 women from the Family Welfare Movement (PKK), Village Consultative Body (BPD), integrated health post (Posyandu) cadres, business groups, and local leaders resulted in the formation of two advocacy groups and increased participant engagement in village meetings. This example demonstrates the importance of combining procedural knowledge, public speaking skills, and collective organization. However, short-term program results cannot be directly interpreted as structural change. Success needs to be reassessed based on the sustainability of the groups, the number of proposals submitted to policy, and changes in village budget allocation.³⁸

In Poland, Koła Gospodyń Wiejskich (KGW) provides an example of a women's community organization that builds networks, organizational skills, and self-confidence. Janowski's (2023) research found that KGW collaborates with local government and community organizations, but only 25.2% of respondents indicated the organization's role in representing rural women's interests to public administration institutions. This finding highlights the paradox of empowerment: women's organizations can be powerful in social and economic activities, but they do not necessarily have equal access to policy-making arenas.³⁹

Kiełbasa Studies and Śliwa (2026) studied 386 women who were members of KGWs in Poland's Carpathian Macroregion and found that the organizations increased their sense of empowerment, social skills, entrepreneurial capacity, and collaboration with local institutions. However, strengthening social and economic capacity can only be considered political empowerment if it results in the ability to influence policy. If KGWs are positioned solely as implementers of cultural activities, social services, or economic programs, they risk maintaining the traditional division of labor. Therefore, the government needs to recognize KGWs as consulting and advocacy partners, not simply as organizers of community activities.⁴⁰

Based on this comparison, a women's empowerment strategy needs to be developed through three levels of intervention. At the individual level, women need legal literacy, political

³⁷ Frank C. Thames and Stephen Bloom, "When Are Gender Quotas Fulfilled? Party Strategy and Historical Memory in Ukrainian City Elections," *Politics & Gender* 19, no. 2 (June 20, 2023): 457–81, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X22000125>.

³⁸ Xiaolu Li and Yang Tang, "The Distributional Impacts of High Speed Rail: Evidence from China," *Economic Modelling* 132 (March 2024): 106640, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econmod.2023.106640>.

³⁹ Marcin Janowski, "Study on the Condition, Needs and Problems of Regional Social Economy Entities on the Example of Rural Housewives' Circles in Poland," *European Research Studies Journal* XXVI, no. Issue 2 (2023): 70–84, <https://doi.org/10.35808/ersj/3139>.

⁴⁰ Kiełbasa and Śliwa, "Rural Housewives Clubs- Unlocking the Potential of Women's Agency in Local Development in Poland."

education, budget literacy skills, proposal-making skills, and speaking skills in forums. At the collective level, women's organizations need to develop a shared agenda, gather evidence, share advocacy roles, and build coalitions with other community groups. At the institutional level, village governments and gminas must provide easily accessible information, involve women's organizations from the outset in developing the agenda, document all input, and explain the reasons for its acceptance or rejection.⁴¹

Affirmative action also needs to be understood more broadly than attendance quotas. In Indonesia, affirmative action can include women's representation on village regulation drafting teams, women-specific preparatory forums prior to deliberations, and resource allocation to strengthen the capacity of women's organizations. In Poland, such policies can include strengthening women's positions in gmina council leadership, improving candidate placement, and requiring gender impact analyses of draft local regulations.⁴² Both countries also need indicators that measure the number of women's proposals that are discussed, accepted, incorporated into regulations, and supported by the budget.

This analysis emphasizes that community empowerment should not stop at increasing women's self-confidence or social activism. The key measure is changing power relations: whether women are able to set agendas, obtain resources, hold officials accountable, and influence decisions. Strategies that only provide training without improving institutional procedures will result in women becoming more skilled but remaining confined to unresponsive forums. Conversely, procedural reforms without strong women's organizations can result in spaces for participation that are available but not effectively utilized. Substantive participation therefore requires a simultaneous relationship between individual capacity, collective power, and institutional obligations to act on women's voices.

Overall, the research findings demonstrate that gender imbalances in public participation are shaped by the interplay between legal norms, institutional design, social dynamics, resource distribution, and women's organizational capacity. The analysis of regulations extends beyond formal recognition of the right to attend and express opinions, but also extends to assessing the extent to which women exercise these rights to set agendas, formulate proposals, oversee deliberations, and influence final decisions. Cross-country comparisons reveal distinct mechanisms of exclusion. In Indonesia, women's involvement is more limited by the dominance of village elites, patriarchal norms, unequal access to information, and weak accountability for deliberations. In Poland, local channels for consultation and representation are relatively more institutionalized, but women's influence remains filtered by nomination mechanisms, voter preferences, the composition of the gmina council, and the status of consultative input, which is not always binding. These findings

⁴¹ Hannah Salamon, "The Effect of Women's Parliamentary Participation on Renewable Energy Policy Outcomes," *European Journal of Political Research* 62, no. 1 (February 2, 2023): 174–96, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12539>.

⁴² Elżbieta Korolczuk, "Challenging Civil Society Elites in Poland: The Dynamics and Strategies of Civil Society Actors," *East European Politics and Societies: And Cultures* 37, no. 3 (August 1, 2023): 880–902, <https://doi.org/10.1177/08883254221132282>.

highlight that equal legal recognition does not always translate into equal quality of participation.

The relationship between the legal and social dimensions is then placed at three interdependent levels of empowerment. At the individual level, women need legal literacy, budget literacy, and argumentative skills. At the collective level, women's organizations need to function as spaces for consolidating interests and advocacy, not simply as implementers of social programs. At the institutional level, village governments and gmina must ensure transparency in planning, involvement from the start of agenda setting, documentation of input, and the provision of justification for proposals accepted or rejected. This framework shifts the measurement of participation from attendance to influence by assessing access, representation, quality of deliberation, follow-up on input, and policy change. Thus, a gender-responsive public participation model must link legal guarantees with changes in social relations, strengthening collective capacity, and institutional obligations so that women's involvement can have a real impact on local regulations.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that legal recognition of public participation does not automatically guarantee women's meaningful involvement in the formation of local regulations. In Indonesia, inequality is primarily influenced by the dominance of village elites, patriarchal norms, limited access to information, the division of domestic labor, and weak follow-up on women's proposals in village deliberations. In Poland, consultation and representation mechanisms at the gmina level are relatively more institutionalized, but women's influence is still limited by leadership stereotypes, a preference for male candidates, imbalances in board composition, and the non-binding status of consultative input. These differences suggest that barriers to women's participation operate through informal social domination in Indonesia and political-procedural filtering in Poland. In both systems, descriptive presence and representation are insufficient if women cannot set the agenda, participate in the formulation, and influence the final decision. Theoretically, this research broadens the understanding of meaningful public participation by positioning gender as a key element in assessing the quality of the regulatory process. Participation is measured not only by attendance at forums, but also through the interrelationships between access to information, representation, quality of deliberation, follow-up on input, and influence on policy substance. The framework also demonstrates that legal guarantees, social dynamics, collective capacity, and institutional design must be analyzed as a continuum. Therefore, descriptive representation of women needs to be distinguished from substantive representation because an increase in the number of women in local forums or institutions does not necessarily translate into changes in the distribution of power and policy priorities.

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