


# Empowering Villages through Inclusive Village Design as a Means of Strengthening Local Democracy and Local Wisdom-Based Law

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## **Abstract:**

*Strengthening local democracy based on local wisdom and inclusive protection of the rights of vulnerable groups is an important foundation for realising participatory, responsive and equitable village governance. Community service activities in Talulobutu Village were carried out to address the challenges and obstacles to low participation of vulnerable groups in village deliberations and the absence of legal instruments that guarantee their involvement. The methods used in this community service included field observations, the implementation of legal and human rights education, legal advocacy assistance in the drafting and design of village regulations based on the Inclusive Village concept, and the implementation of monitoring and evaluation. The results of this community service have succeeded in providing new understanding and increased awareness of local democracy. In addition, another result is that the integration of the local wisdom values of Huyula (mutual cooperation) and Dulohupa (consensus deliberation) has strengthened social legitimacy in the formation of inclusive village policies. Thus, this community service has made a real contribution to the development of democratic and inclusive local law, and has become a model for village empowerment that emphasises equality, participation, and respect for human rights.*

**Keywords:** Local Democracy; Local Wisdom, Inclusive Rights, Vulnerable Groups

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## **Introduction**

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Local democracy development is an effort to strengthen the active involvement of a community of citizens, which better guarantees a culture of democracy in order to strengthen the legal awareness of local citizens in rural areas, which is part of a democratic legal framework. Local democracy can be designed to be more inclusive and rooted in local values, and has great potential to develop a model of participatory democracy that is adaptive to the socio-cultural context of communities at the grassroots level. This is because the future evolution of the political system towards progressive democratic governance is recognized as a fundamental condition for improvement in the social, political, cultural, and economic spheres.

The Republic of Indonesia is a country that promotes democratic values, which are inseparable from its commitment to protecting, respecting, and enforcing human rights. This includes the responsibility to ensure the continued fulfillment and development of these rights, especially for vulnerable groups in society. Democratic values stem from the basic concept of equality, which emphasizes the urgency of eliminating all forms of discrimination and guaranteeing equal access to services, education, employment, and active participation in community life.(Rahman dan Tenriliweng 2024)

Local democracy is inseparable from the general understanding that the people are considered key to implementing good and proper governance policies and to forming a community based on the issues faced by the people themselves. Local democracy is therefore also a fundamental part of the development of law. Universally, democratic principles are widely recognized by the global community and can be viewed as a truth that has been built through a process of internalization, acculturation, and transformation within the framework of Indonesian local culture.(Aryani dkk. 2024)

Society is an element in building democracy based on efforts to protect the interests not only of the local community but also to protect the inclusive rights of vulnerable groups in areas that lack adequate access to justice. However, the right to freedom of expression and the right to elect leaders in the democratic process are part of the constitutional rights guaranteed to the community by Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia. In practice, however, it is difficult to understand and implement these rights.(Diharjo dkk. 2024) Antlov argues that citizen participation involves the structured involvement of community groups in the process of formulating and drafting public policy.(Dina Mariana dkk. 2017) Because participation is

one of the constitutional rights of every community group to express their opinions and be fully involved in the direction of policy-making programs.

Villages with local democracy should establish a foundation of equality and equity in safeguarding, providing, and protecting the inclusive rights of vulnerable groups. The concept of inclusivity can literally be interpreted as “everyone,” for example, a village for all, or it can also mean that the village is inhabited by everyone and that the village supports everyone.(Marianata 2019) If we look at the definition of Vulnerable Groups, they are “a group of individuals who experience discriminatory treatment and require special attention. In their lives, they face barriers to accessing resources and human rights.” (“Vulnerable Gropus” 2025) Therefore, based on this understanding, villages have an obligation to involve all elements of society in formulating and implementing policies. However, this involves not only formulating policies, but also ensuring that the rights of all elements of society, including vulnerable groups, to access services and empowerment are fulfilled.

Villages must be accompanied by legal policies in ensuring inclusive rights for vulnerable groups in order to provide certainty of community involvement for vulnerable groups. The formulation of legal policies in the form of draft village regulations can legitimize the protection of inclusive rights at the village level. With such legitimacy, the certainty of protection of inclusive rights for vulnerable groups can be guaranteed. Although normatively the principle of democracy is guaranteed in the constitution and Village Law No. 6 of 2014, in practice there is still a gap between the ideal of democracy and the socio-political reality in villages. In addition, the role of villages is a manifestation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically in point 16, which emphasizes the orientation to strengthen fair and harmonious communities as a prerequisite for sustainable development, guarantee access to justice for all individuals, and build efficient, accountable, and participatory institutions at every level of government.(Irawan dan Haris 2022)

Gender inequality and marginalization, disability, ethnicity, and origin have a significant impact and profound implications for personal and public life. Governments and basic service providers have a responsibility and potential to strengthen equality and protect the rights of vulnerable communities. Therefore, local democracy is not only about elections, but also about accountability, citizen participation, and open governance.(Sutanto 2025) The presence of the village government is the most important

factor in realizing basic principles in protecting and increasing citizen participation, promoting openness among all elements of society, especially vulnerable groups.

Villages, recognized as the smallest entities in the government hierarchy, occupy an important position in the implementation of local democracy and the development of laws that are responsive to community needs. In order to realize the development of laws that are responsive to inclusive rights in rural areas, innovative measures are also needed to ensure the certainty and presence of village governments in protecting the rights of vulnerable groups. This must be integrated with the values of local wisdom in Talulobutu Village, so that these values are harmonious and have added value in terms of cultural and social awareness. Thus, the existence of indigenous peoples in various regions of the Republic of Indonesia represents a national treasure that is unmatched in other countries. The norms inherent in the lives of indigenous peoples should also be taken into account, as they are an integral part of cultural identity and serve as social capital. (Hr dan Harakan 2017)

Talulobutu Village, one of the villages that promotes local wisdom values, still faces major challenges in raising public awareness of the importance of local democracy. So far, the decision-making process in the form of Village Consultative Meetings (Musdes) has not been fully followed by some community groups. In addition to a lack of public awareness, the Talulobutu Village Government does not yet have a village regulation (Perdes) on Inclusive Villages so that participation can involve vulnerable groups who have rarely been able to participate in discussing policies at Village Consultative Meetings (Musdes). In fact, in carrying out the functions of local democracy, the Village Government is basically obliged to carry out government affairs and fulfill the interests of the village community in its functions based on village regulations that emphasize the principle of community participation. This reflects the implementation of democratic values at the local level, as well as being a form of implementing the principle of openness in every process of village administration. (Rosidin 2019)

The community groups in Talulobutu Village are quite diverse, with almost all types of community groups represented in Talulobutu Village. These include people with disabilities, the elderly, indigenous peoples, and youth groups. Due to the diversity of community groups, Talulobutu Village has not been able to fully realize the participation of the entire community, so a concrete program is needed so that these groups can be directly involved, especially vulnerable and marginalized groups. A concrete program

must be presented because of the low level of community participation in local democracy through the Village Consultative Meeting (Musdes). In addition to increasing understanding and awareness, a local legal basis is also needed to support this so that it can run with a definite and sustainable foundation. The legal policy basis must be participatory and inclusive in nature, involving all elements of the community, including vulnerable groups such as people with disabilities, the elderly, and the poor.

## Methods

The research method employed in this community service activity includes four interrelated stages: field observation, legal and human rights education, legal advocacy assistance, and monitoring and evaluation. The observation stage aims to identify the characteristics and needs of vulnerable groups in Talulobutu Village, including the elderly and persons with disabilities, as well as their involvement in village policy-making. Subsequently, legal and human rights education activities are conducted to raise awareness and understanding among vulnerable groups and village stakeholders regarding inclusive rights and participation in village deliberations (Musdes). The following stage involves legal advocacy assistance to ensure the formulation of inclusive policies and the establishment of a task force representing vulnerable communities. Finally, monitoring and evaluation are carried out collaboratively with community elements to assess the effectiveness, impact, and sustainability of the program in protecting and promoting the inclusive rights of vulnerable groups at the village level.

## Result and Discussion

Community service activities through village empowerment by designing an inclusive rights monitoring village as a means of strengthening local democracy and developing local wisdom-based law are initiatives undertaken with the aim of helping the local community in Talulobutu Village to increase their understanding and awareness of village development through local democracy based on local wisdom as a form of protection for vulnerable groups. The objective of this activity stems from the challenges faced by the local community and the Village Government in developing the village through a joint process, where there are still fundamental problems, namely low participation and protection of the constitutional rights of vulnerable groups, thus requiring the strengthening and protection of equal rights for vulnerable groups.

Through the strengthening of local democracy in Talulobutu Village, greater opportunities can be provided to gain an understanding of political rights, the right to access the law, and other rights in order to achieve equality or parity between different community groups. In line with this, one of the important basic principles is the guarantee of equality for all before the law. Every individual has the right to obtain recognition, guarantees, protection, and legal certainty, as well as fair treatment before the law.(Abdussamad 2021) In practice, many legal policies fail because they are based solely on a doctrinal approach. For example, regulations that do not take into account the socio-cultural conditions of society are rejected by the community itself.(Syafi dkk., t.t.)

The first step of this program was conducted through field observations, with the aim of obtaining data and a more in-depth picture of the social conditions, legal access, and local cultural wisdom in Talulobutu Village in fulfilling the rights of vulnerable groups. The observation activities were carried out using a participatory approach that emphasized the direct involvement of the local community. Through this method, the dynamics of the rights fulfillment process could be understood more deeply based on the social realities developing in the field. In its implementation, persons with disabilities were also involved so that their perspectives could be accommodated equally. Vulnerable groups who have had limited access to legal information were given the opportunity to share their experiences and needs. Thus, this observation not only produced data, but also encouraged the strengthening of legal awareness and democratic participation in Talulobutu Village.

After conducting field observations, important data was obtained to be used as material for proper planning in solving the problems faced. Based on the results of the observation, it was found that the community faced several problems, such as a lack of understanding of the law, low participation in village deliberations, especially among persons with disabilities and the elderly, and the absence of policies that support the protection of inclusive rights to access the law and the provision of assistance for the empowerment of persons with disabilities and the elderly. The problems faced by the community are not in line with the principle of protection for marginalized groups. Government efforts to improve the welfare of the community have encountered many obstacles, such as a lack of public awareness of citizen participation in development planning and community empowerment. Most of the community is only involved in the development and empowerment process. This is due to several influencing factors,

namely a lack of information and a lack of opportunity to participate in the village development planning process in village deliberations.(Jacob 2025)

The presence of vulnerable groups such as people with disabilities and the elderly should contribute to a process of equality in local democracy. The interests of vulnerable groups are part of the development and welfare process in rural areas, not just an interest during the electoral process when electing regional heads or village heads. Democracy is not only exercised during elections, but is also reflected in the daily lives of rural communities in Indonesia, one example being through the practice of village deliberation, popularly known as “rembug desa”. Village deliberations serve as a mechanism for reaching a consensus among residents, so that every individual in the village community shares collective responsibility for implementing the decisions that have been agreed upon.(Turmudi dan Iksan 2024) Therefore, the lack of understanding among local communities regarding the importance of village deliberation as a form of local democracy is something that must be addressed through empowerment activities that strengthen the knowledge of local communities.

Community service in the form of outreach to strengthen local democracy and human rights education aims to provide an understanding of the importance of the local democratic process in determining village policies. Legal and human rights education serves to increase the understanding of village governments in order to provide tangible protection to vulnerable groups through village policies. The outreach activity was carried out by inviting academics from the Faculty of Law and government officials represented by the Social Service Agency as resource persons, so that the discussion during the outreach could be viewed from the perspective of formal law and social protection policies regarding the inclusive rights of vulnerable groups, such as people with disabilities and the elderly. It is hoped that this outreach activity will strengthen the local community's understanding of the importance of Local Democracy and Human Rights Legal Education, as well as the hope that the village government can formulate inclusive policies for vulnerable groups in Talulobutu Village.

The main points of this outreach activity were the importance of local democracy as the foundation for village participation and the protection of vulnerable groups through inclusive village policies. This outreach emphasized the role of the village government and local community in implementing local democracy as a unified discussion of interests in developing a village that represents all existing groups. The

speakers explained the legal position of the village government in formulating inclusive policies as part of the government's implementation of disability empowerment programs, provision of accessible public infrastructure, and social security for the elderly. By integrating a human rights perspective into village policies, real protection for vulnerable groups can be realized.

Legal and human rights education, as conveyed by the speaker, emphasizes that village government activities in conducting village deliberations must comply with the provisions set forth in the Indonesian Ministry of Villages, Disadvantaged Regions, and Transmigration Regulation No. 16 of 2019. The provisions explain that the objectives of the Village Deliberation are as follows: 1) to enhance the role of the Village Deliberation as a forum for the community to participate in the implementation of the Village Law; 2) to make the Village Deliberation Forum the highest forum for decision-making in the administration of Village Government; and 3) to encourage all village stakeholders to work together to improve the administration of the Village Deliberation Forum to be more democratic, participatory, inclusive, transparent, accountable, and fair. Community participation in village deliberations has so far been low, which is a challenge for the Talulobutu village government.

Democracy is understood as a form of government that has the authority to determine the direction of decision-making. Hallim, through his research on citizen participation in building democracy and responsive laws, explains that a democratic country is one that places civil power in accordance with the will of the people, either through direct or representative mechanisms.(Nino 2024) The speaker also shared Habermas' theory of deliberative democracy, which is divided into three types of rationality: instrumental rationality oriented towards goals, strategic rationality, and communicative rationality. This theory asserts that the crisis of modernity arises from an imbalance in the use of rationality, which ultimately impacts the collective consciousness of society.(Publik dkk. 2024)

In addition to providing legal and human rights education to local communities and village officials, another form of community service is providing legal assistance to the Talulobutu Village Government in formulating inclusive policies based on the protection of the rights of vulnerable groups. This assistance is carried out intensively by involving several elements of society from various community groups that are classified as vulnerable. The assistance in drafting and designing these policies was carried out

through face-to-face meetings and gatherings at the village hall. The results of this assistance in drafting and designing policies will later be discussed in the form of inclusive policies to be established by the Talulobutu Village Government. Through face-to-face meetings and forums at the village hall, this activity aims to encourage constructive dialogue between the village government and the community. Ultimately, the main objective of this assistance is to produce inclusive policies that provide tangible protection and recognition of the rights of vulnerable groups in Talulobutu Village.

Villages have many authorities that are stipulated in Law Number 6 of 2014 concerning Villages, including the main duties and functions in making village regulations. Because these regulations will be more tailored to the interests and objectives of the community, community involvement in the drafting process is very important to ensure that their implementation runs smoothly.(Ermalinda dkk. 2025) In formulating legislation, it is clear that public participation is essential in order to develop good regulations.(Laoh 2025) In addition to community involvement, advanced and developed villages involve the active participation of citizens in the formulation of regulations, decision-making, and the implementation of development programs carried out by the village government.(Yulianingrum dkk. 2024)

Local wisdom values in the formation of inclusive policies have been implemented to support the development of local laws. “Huyula” means mutual cooperation as a form of togetherness in carrying out communal activities. The value of “Huyula” has the principle of kinship and togetherness in developing villages, which reflects the involvement of all groups or elements of society. With this value, it is hoped that the formation of laws will reflect more meaningful values for the common good. Then, the value of “Dulohupa” is a form of problem solving and decision making through deliberative forums that involve all parties. This value reflects joint decision making in responding to problems and challenges faced together. The value of “Dulohupa” has been reflected in the policy-making process by holding meetings in the village hall and meeting with the community as a step to ensure that the interests of vulnerable groups are represented.

The result of this policy formulation is two important documents, namely the draft Village Regulation on the Establishment of Monitoring Villages for the Inclusive Rights of Vulnerable Groups and the draft Village Head Decree on the Task Force for Monitoring the Inclusive Rights of Vulnerable Groups. The formulation of these legal documents is

part of the mastery of knowledge and understanding of the significance of regulations in governance practices, which is an essential aspect for promoting and ensuring the successful implementation of village development programs. The results of the preparation and drafting of these documents are part of strategic efforts to address issues related to low community involvement in local democracy through Village Consultative Meetings, as well as a lack of understanding and activities aimed at raising public awareness of law and human rights. In addition, there are no village regulations that can accommodate activities that can improve the function of local democracy and involve and ensure that vulnerable groups take part in the ongoing local democratic process.

The draft village regulation contains the following provisions:

a. General Provisions

This section contains information about the language and legal terms used in village regulations, including: village terminology, village authority, village government, Village Government consists of the Village Head, Village Consultative Body, Village Consultative Meeting, Village Regulations, Participatory Development, Village Community Empowerment, Rural Areas, Monitoring Villages, Inclusive Rights, Vulnerable Groups, and Village Community Institutions.

b. Purpose and Objective

This section contains material on the establishment of the Inclusive Rights Monitoring Village, which was formed to create an inclusive, democratic, and just village, raise awareness of the law and human rights in the community, and strengthen the active role of the community in monitoring village policies that uphold the values of local democracy.

c. Institutional

This section contains material related to the institutional framework of the inclusive rights monitoring village established by the village government together with the community. It has an institutional structure consisting of a supervisor, a protector, and an executive board comprising a chairperson, a secretary, and community representatives from vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities, community leaders, youth, and women.

#### d. Duties and Functions

Contains material on the duties and functions of the Inclusive Rights Monitoring Village. The duties and functions referred to are implementing village policies from an inclusive perspective, providing recommendations to the Village Government regarding policies for the protection of vulnerable groups, organizing legal and human rights education at the village level, and facilitating community reporting and advocacy related to violations of inclusive rights.

#### a. Financing

The content of the material on financing discusses funding for the Inclusive Rights Monitoring Village program sourced from the Village Revenue and Expenditure Budget (APBDes), assistance from the central government, local government, and legitimate third parties, as well as other legitimate and non-binding sources. Financial management is carried out in a transparent and accountable manner.

#### b. Closing Provisions

The closing provisions contain material regarding promulgation, while other matters not yet regulated in the Village Regulations will be followed up through the issuance of a Village Head Decree as a regulatory instrument. In addition, the promulgation of regulations is added to the Village Gazette.

## Conclusion

Community service activities in Talulobutu Village show that strengthening local democracy based on local wisdom and protecting the inclusive rights of vulnerable groups are strategic steps in realizing participatory, responsive, and equitable village governance. Low participation of vulnerable groups, limited understanding of the law, and the absence of village regulations that guarantee inclusiveness are the main challenges that must be addressed immediately. The results of this activity show that the integration of local wisdom values such as Huyula (mutual cooperation) and Dulohupa (consensus) can strengthen social legitimacy in the formation of inclusive policies rooted in local culture. Through this approach, a draft Village Regulation on Inclusive Rights Monitoring Villages and a Village Head Decree on the Inclusive Rights Monitoring Task Force were developed as legal instruments to protect, accommodate, and empower vulnerable groups. This community service activity not only provides solutions to the

problems of low public awareness and participation, but also gives birth to a village empowerment model that emphasizes substantive democracy, social justice, and respect for human rights.

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