

Democratic Innovation from West Sumbawa Regency, Indonesia: Analysis of *Forum YASINAN* as an Instrument of Community Participation in Development

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Abstract: This article aims to explain how the *Forum YASINAN*, as an actualization of democratic innovation, can become an instrument of public participation in regional development in the West Sumbawa Regency. Studies have shown that the lack of public involvement in encouraging public policy and democratic political processes is a problem in developing countries, particularly at the local government level. However, this study demonstrates how local governments can solve community problems through democratic innovation. This study was conducted in West Sumbawa. This study used democratic innovation and participatory democracy as the framework for thinking by interviewing the initiators of *Forum YASINAN*, representatives of beneficiary communities from eight sub-districts in West Sumbawa, a literature study, and field observations. The findings indicated that *Forum YASINAN*, conducted by the West Sumbawa Regency Government, has become an innovation that can increase public participation in the development process. One of the innovative aspects of the *YASINAN Forum* is that the Regent and Deputy Regent provide an informal space for the community to evaluate public services. It simultaneously encourages community participation as *demos* in which they can voice their aspirations to control the government through informal channels. The forum, which is held every week in turn in each sub-district, shows the local government's strong willingness to encourage public participation. This study contributes by showing how governments can solve community problems through democratic innovation in the case of the West Sumbawa Regency.

Keywords: *democratic innovation; forum YASINAN; participatory democracy; public participation*

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INTRODUCTION

Participation as an essential value of democracy has long been recognized as necessary for realizing good governance (Michels & De Graaf, 2010; Mindarti, 2016) because increased community involvement encourages local governments to produce better public policies to solve citizens' problems. Democracy at the local level is essential for democratic practice because people can freely express their problems and simultaneously expect the best solution from the government (Forbrig, 2011). On the other hand, democracy at the local level is also seen as a critical arena for the emergence and implementation of democratic initiatives that can ultimately transform a country's social and economic sectors.

However, weak governance at the local level often means that residents have fewer opportunities to participate in designing public policies that impact their daily lives. In developing countries, the ineffectiveness of public participation practices is caused by the lack of democratic citizen participation (Manowong & Ogunluna, 2006; Almer & Koontz, 2004). Meanwhile, a relationship between citizens and the government is realized if there is active public participation (Jacobs et al., 2009; Bryson et al., 2013; Nyarangaa et al., 2021; Quick & Bryson, 2022). The existence of a solid and productive relationship between community and state institutions is key to the development of democracy (Nabatchi & Leighninger, 2015).

So far, there has been a tendency for some parties to see the practice of democracy at the local level as a pathology of ideal democracy as imagined by universal democracy. Democracy is often seen as a problem rather than a new arena or structure to build it (Bayo et al., 2018). Simultaneously, decentralization policy provides opportunities for democracy and public participation in these regions. Although not all regions demonstrate ideal democratic practices, as theorized, many parties agree that the local government is today's locus of Indonesian politics.

As a consequence of the decentralization policy, the regional government, as the dominant political actor at the local level, continues to strive to improve public services and improve democracy through various policy innovations (Asrori & Kartika, 2018). In recent years, many studies have discussed how innovation is carried out to provide more space for the public to be involved in the democratic political process, both at the national and local levels. Local governments compete to provide their citizens with the best service through various program innovations (Dharmanu, 2017; Wiryanto, 2021). The Indonesian Institute for Public Governance (IIPG) in the 2019 Anugerah Pandu Negeri (APN) event, for example, gave awards to six regional heads as Innovative Leaders: West Java Governor Ridwan Kamil, Central Java Governor Ganjar Pranowo, Banyuwangi Regent Azwar Anas, Sleman Regent Sri Purnomo, Surabaya Mayor Tri Risma Harini, and Denpasar Mayor Ida Bagus Rai Dharmawijaya (*investor.id*, 26/10/2019).

In West Sumbawa Regency, the local government created an innovation designed as a citizen forum to encourage public participation in regional development. The weekly routine innovation is the Yasinan Forum, which was carried out based on the West Sumbawa Regency Regional Regulation Number 3 of 2016. This forum is a public participation instrument initiated by the West Sumbawa Regency Government to involve the broadest possible community in overseeing regional development. At a practical level, Forum YASINAN begins with a series of socio-religious activities every Friday night, including the Maghrib prayer in congregation, Surah Yaseen recitation, and Isha prayer in congregation, followed by a free forum for the community to express all types of complaints related to both public and other aspects of service (Mustofa, 2021). The YASINAN Forum aims to evaluate the administration of the government, implementation of development, and communication of public complaints.

Forum YASINAN is an event that accommodates public complaints against the performance of the West Sumbawa Regency Government, which are usually submitted directly in front of regional leaders or through other participation channels, such as the Regency Inspectorate, complaint boxes, mass media, local newspapers, the local government's official website, and call centers. This forum has become a complaint facility that is considered the most effective compared to other complaint systems because all complaints submitted are directly received by the Regent/Vice Regent of West Sumbawa, which all leaders of regional apparatus organizations accompany. Each complaint was also responded to and followed up on quickly.

Forum YASINAN is held in the Regent of West Sumbawa residence hall, called Central or in the sub-district, according to a rotating schedule determined every week. The division of sub-districts and villages was also carried out so that all residents could attend. Aside from being cultural and religious, Forum YASINAN is also a forum to build friendships, a way of communicating with the people, and a forum for direct reporting on the implementation of local government programs in the community. With this description, this study will explain the impact of Forum YASINAN on increasing public participation in development from the perspective of democratic innovation and participatory democracy.

The involvement of public participation in realizing development goals, both conventionally and using new formulas, has become a concern in recent decades. Public participation in developmental activities is related to what citizens want because the central issue in public participation relates to who can participate (Nabatchi & Leighninger, 2015). Although

conventional public participation is considered less effective and reduces the credibility of the government (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004; Nabatchi & Amsler, 2014), it is designed to accommodate citizens' diverse interests in an equal and democratic manner.

Innovation in public services has been high in many Western democracies (Sørensen, 2016; Elstub & Escobar, 2019; Bentzen et al., 2020; Binnema et al., 2020). Many researchers' first waves of interest in public innovation have focused on service innovation. By contrast, the second wave was interested in political innovation, especially in democratic institutions, policy processes, and content. Although many studies have been conducted on democratic reform in local governments, few have focused on democratic changes from an innovation perspective. For example, Sorensen and Vabo (2020) began to develop a theoretical framework for studying democratic innovation to identify the latest trends related to democratic innovation in local governments in several countries such as Denmark, Finland, Norway, Slovenia, England, the Netherlands, and Switzerland.

Studies related to democratic innovation have surged in recent years (Jäske, 2018; Mikami, 2019; Elstub & Escobar, 2019; Roiseland & Vabo, 2020). Representative democracy has been criticized for failing to solve some of today's most pressing problems and creating a gulf between political elites and citizens (Christensen, 2017). In response to this phenomenon, local governments have begun experimenting with various new forms of democracy that involve the community in the political process. The public innovation perspective developed by Sorensen and Vabo (2020) contributes to the understanding of how democratic innovation can occur in local governance.

Thus, democracy will constantly change and experience development in all aspects, including in the context of local governments. According to Saward (2000), no stories of democracy exist in the absence of innovation. One of the defining features of democracy is its restlessness, dynamism, and openness to new ideas. Democratic innovation refers to a critical commitment to the democratic values of public participation and political equality. According to Torfing (2016), innovation generally refers to the deliberate development and realization of new creative ideas. The definition of 'new' does not have to mean 'not seen before,' but it could be that the given context is something new. Innovation tends to adapt to innovations developed elsewhere. The diffusion of innovation produced elsewhere has led to many innovative practices. Therefore, in a broader framework, all resources and creative efforts to provide space for public participation can be considered assets or a means of encouraging the implementation of democratic innovations (Nabatchi & Amsler, 2014).

Democratic innovation used in this study is an extension of the concept proposed by Smith (2009), who defined it as an institution specifically designed to increase and deepen citizen participation in the political decision-making process. In this study, democratic innovation is understood as an institution or forum specifically designed to increase citizens' participation by encouraging the presence and aspirations (voice) of all citizens regarding public issues faced daily to respond to and resolve directly by the local government. It departs from the main feature of democratic innovation, such as forums or institutions open to all citizens (Smith, 2009). Participation in democratic innovation is an attempt by citizens to become directly involved in the development process.

According to Nabatchi and Leighninger (2015), participation is a series of activities in which the public's concerns, needs, interests, and values are incorporated into the decision-making process and the design of public problem-solving actions. There is indirect participation (for example, where citizens choose a representative or intermediary to act on their behalf) and direct participation (where citizens are personally and actively involved in simultaneously providing input, making decisions, and solving problems). Whatever the choice of participation, it is rooted in the definition of democracy.

Furthermore, (public) participation is a basic form of democracy. The worldwide wave of innovation is driven by fundamental changes in the capacities and attitudes of citizens and the need for public institutions to respond to changes in democracy. From the local government's perspective, public participation provides a way to solve public problems. Public participation is also a way to facilitate differences in public views in a dialogue forum to convince the public that all points of view are always considered before becoming a part of public policy (Creighton, 2005).

Meanwhile, the participatory democracy perspective makes participation vital to democracy. According to Rousseau, every citizen's participation in political decisions is very

important for the state to carry out its functions. The practice of delegating power in decision-making causes citizens to become alienated from politics. It is often seen in formal procedural democracies and electoral activities at various levels in democratic countries. Meanwhile, the participatory democracy perspective states that participation can provide space for citizens to vote in decision-making, thus allowing them to exert influence on the decision-making process formally and informally (Michels, 2011).

Participatory democracy departs from a critique of empirical democracy, which states that citizens do not have the tendency or ability to participate. Therefore, participatory democracy will help citizens participate in the political context and formulation of public policies. Participatory democracy states that under the right conditions, citizens must be able and willing to participate effectively in the democratic process. From the perspective of participatory democracy, citizens are sometimes apathetic in politics because of socioeconomic inequalities and a lack of forums and opportunities to participate (Böker & Elstub, 2015).

Participatory democracy requires citizens to participate directly in the regulation of essential institutions in society. Therefore, they have raised citizen participation as a leading political practice (Vitale, 2006). The underlying notion of participation is that citizens in a democracy should be involved in formulating the substance of laws and policies and not just delegate responsibility for substantive engagement with their representatives (Cohen, 2009). There are at least two reasons why participatory democracy is more acceptable than liberal democracy. First, the interpretation of participatory democracy is more authentic and normative than the interpretation of liberal representative democracy. When citizens make collective decisions that affect themselves, wherever decisions are made, in the political, social, and economic spheres, political equality and personal autonomy are enhanced.

Democracy has deepened and enhanced because greater citizen participation can increase trust in political institutions, allowing for better public support (Della Porta, 2013). Second, if more space for public participation is opened, it will contribute to efforts to reduce socioeconomic disparities, thus leading to political equality and, consequently, a more substantive democracy. According to Elstub (2018), the fewer social groups that participate in politics, the less power they have to organize, make demands, articulate demands, and carry out their aspirations, leading to the domination of decision-making by other dominant socioeconomic groups but does not protect their interests and may even limit opportunities for other groups to participate. Therefore, an open space for public participation in the political process encourages citizen activity in politics.

This research aims to explain how the YASINAN Forum, as an actualization of democratic innovation, can be an instrument of public participation in regional development in the West Sumbawa Regency. Based on previous studies, each study only focuses on discussing certain elements of democracy and the relevance of citizen participation in democracy (Hendriks et al., 2007; Michels, 2011), public involvement in local government (Nabatchi & Amsler, 2014), and public trust and support for democratic innovation (Jäske, 2018). Meanwhile, few studies have comprehensively revealed the practice of community involvement in encouraging the emergence of public policies and democratic political processes. Therefore, the novelty and contribution of this study are to identify and specifically describe the form, method, and impact of the Forum YASINAN as an instrument of community participation engagement to realize development goals. Thus, this study is expected to show how the government, through the case of the West Sumbawa Regency, can solve community problems through democratic innovation.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study was conducted in West Sumbawa Regency from June 2021 to December 2021. This study uses a descriptive analysis method to explain the YASINAN Forum as a form of democratic innovation based on community participation. The choice of qualitative methods stems from the fact that this method can help to explain complex questions in depth (Hamilton & Finley, 2019). Data were collected through fieldwork, observations, and a literature review. The research participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique whereby the chosen informants possessed the necessary information for this study. Qualitative research aims to obtain a representative sample of the population and gather diverse perspectives and experiences related to the analyzed topic (Ritchie et al., 2003). Primary data were obtained through interviews with

the Regional Secretary of West Sumbawa Regency, one of the initiators of the YASINAN Forum, and the main person responsible for the implementation of the program in the field.

Meanwhile, the Head of the Community and Village Empowerment Office was chosen because it is one of the important leading sectors that moves village and community governments to participate in the program. Interviews were conducted to obtain information on how the idea of the Forum YASINAN originated and how it was practiced in the field. Furthermore, interviews were conducted with eight community representatives from eight sub-districts in West Sumbawa who had attended and expressed their aspirations and were followed up in the YASINAN Forum.

A literature review was conducted to support this research by complementing the data collected during interviews. By studying relevant documents, such as local government documents, West Sumbawa Central Bureau of Statistics documents, 15 scientific journals, books, and online media as secondary data, the author found additional information on how public services in other areas inspired the West Sumbawa government to implement a similar service model with different packaging. These documents were studied to answer research questions about the forms and ways to realize government goals while still involving community participation. The data obtained were then described and analyzed using descriptive techniques with an interactive analysis model. The interactive analysis model was chosen because it is credible for maintaining the data validity. It consists of an interrelated flow of activities starting from before, during, and after data collection, ultimately forming an analysis, namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. These three types of analysis and data collection activities form an interactive model or cyclical process, as shown in Figure 1.

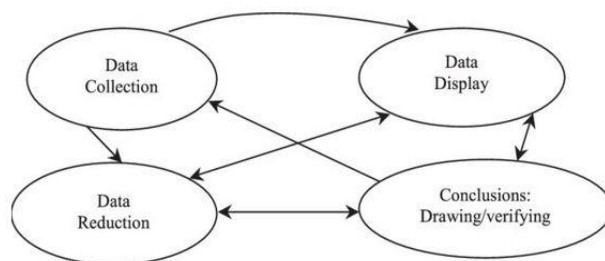


Figure 1. Components of data analysis: interactive model
Source: (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Amaratunga et al., 2002)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Getting to know Forum YASINAN

Forum YASINAN is an acronym for Forum *pelaYAnan* (Service Forum), *Setara* (equal), *INklusif* (inclusive), and *ANdalan* (reliable). According to the Regent of West Sumbawa, HW Musyafirin, who is also the initiator of the forum, Forum YASINAN is an innovation by the local government to bring public services closer and faster, based on the aspirations of the people presented in the forum. Normatively, in the Regional Regulation of West Sumbawa Regency Number 3 of 2016 concerning the Regional Program for Mutual Assistance Empowerment, it is stated that Forum YASINAN is a forum that facilitates a series of socio-religious activities every Thursday night that begins with the evening prayer in congregation, Surah Yaseen recitation, and Isha prayer in congregation followed by the evaluation of government administration, implementation of development, and communication of public complaints, based on the fact that people sometimes cannot meet directly with their leaders when expressing their aspirations in the context of regional development. On this basis, Forum YASINAN is designed to bring people's communication closer to the local government.

Apart from being a cultural and religious forum, Forum YASINAN is an alternative way to build friendships and informal communication between the government and the people. For example, this informality is demonstrated by the absence of protocols involving private secretaries, aides, or escorts from the Civil Service Police, such as those at the regent's office. At this forum, the public can meet the regent directly. Forum YASINAN activities generally include a congregational Maghreb prayer, a Surah Yaseen recitation by the community and multiple stakeholders, and a session to convey community aspirations regarding public services. Any issues

conveyed by the community will be followed up that night, and the head of the relevant Regional Work Unit (SKPD) will provide solutions.

Meanwhile, regarding participants, the division of sub-districts and villages was arranged as much as possible so that all residents could attend the forum. However, there is no prohibition for people who do not have a schedule but have problems that need to be addressed before attending the forum. Currently, Forum YASINAN is held at the regent's residence, and the system is being updated, where the regent and his staff take turns meeting the people according to their area.

Furthermore, Syahrul Mustofa (2021) explained that Forum YASINAN, as one of the activities in the Regional Mutual Assistance Empowerment Program (PDPGR), is a forum for planning, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating governance and development held in an open, participatory, accountable, inclusive and innovative manner that functions and plays an essential role in maintaining and safeguarding democracy in the process of local government administration. According to Mustofa, the forum has many objectives that are closely related to broad community participation in realizing good governance. As an innovation, public participation in the forum is necessary to encourage local governments' achievements in development. There are several objectives for the implementation of the YASINAN Forum;

First, the pillars of public participation should be strengthened by increasing the quantity and quality of governance, development, services, and community empowerment. *Second*, public accountability needs to be strengthened. The pillar of public accountability is realized by making Forum YASINAN a means or media to evaluate, supervise, and publicly hold government administrators accountable for their policies, programs, and activities in the community, carried out routinely, openly, and democratically. In this context, all organizers in the forum are obliged to openly account for their roles and functions as well as their performance to the public. *Third*, the pillars of transparency need to be strengthened. Transparency can only be built through the openness of data and policy information through programs and activities that are currently or have been implemented by the government. In addition, the pillar of transparency will be realized when the community quickly obtains access to the local government's performance achievements.

Fourth, the inclusion of the service pillars should be strengthened. This pillar is strengthened by providing equal positions, rights, and opportunities in the regional development process, as well as special rights and treatment for vulnerable citizens to exercise their rights in the development process. Therefore, the government and community verify and analyze the data together to ensure that all beneficiaries of development programs/activities follow the specified targets. Recipient data were obtained from and by the Gotong Royong Agent, which was then corrected in the YASINAN Forum. Thus, deviations and discriminatory treatment of target recipients of government programs can be avoided.

Fifth, the pillars of innovation must be strengthened. In Forum YASINAN, strengthening the innovation pillar began by exploring the real problems faced by the community and presenting innovative solutions to these problems. Through the forum, the government can explore and obtain ideas, thoughts, inputs, and criticism from various parties to find the best solution for each problem that arises in implementing regional development. *Sixth*, the pillars of collaboration should be strengthened. Through the YASINAN Forum, regional development stakeholders at all levels and regions jointly determine development planning, implementation, and supervision (Mustofa, 2021). Based on these objectives, Forum YASINAN can be considered an informal democratic forum to unite the people and state administrators to resolve public service affairs, as emphasized by the Regional Secretary of West Sumbawa Regency;

"The Yasinan Forum is a forum to absorb the aspirations of the community openly as well as a joint correction effort that in running the government, the involvement of all parties has its space. The Yasinan Forum is an inclusive forum that involves the collaboration of all parties in the implementation of development in the region. The Yasinan Forum is also a means for the community to shed all grievances and criticisms of the local government as a form of public accountability. Bureaucratic performance can be measured from a clear response from the government" (Amar, Interview June 3, 2021).

Mechanism of Implementation of Forum YASINAN Activities

As a forum intended to increase public participation, Forum YASINAN differs from other dialogue activities. When other activities are carried out rigidly, formally, and unidirectionally, the

Forum YASINAN is held informally without strict protocol rules. Participants came from all walks of life throughout the West Sumbawa Regency (KSB); some came from outside the KSB. Other participants were representatives of Regional Apparatus Organizations (OPD), District Heads, Village Heads, Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprise (UMKM) actors, and community groups (farmers, street vendors, etc.). The Regent and Deputy Regent, as the main actors in the YASINAN Forum, are always present in every YASINAN activity (Mustofa, 2021). In several meetings, it is not uncommon for officials from the center, province, and other regencies/cities to attend a series of Forum YASINAN activities in West Sumbawa. Technically, the implementation of the YASINAN Forum can be explained in the following stages:

- 1) Forum YASINAN participants filled out the attendance list, ate together, performed Maghreb prayers at the congregation, and read Surah Yaseen and prayers.
- 2) The activity continues with an opening by a moderator or facilitator appointed by the local government to facilitate the dialogue.
- 3) Presentation of current issues and reports from OPDs and other public organizations include program campaigns, financial reports, presentations on current issues, and performance reports from one or several OPDs.
- 4) The submission of community aspirations is alternately carried out, both individually and in groups. The public was allowed to interact directly with concerned officials. The community is not limited to expressing its aspirations.
- 5) Respond directly to questions and community criticism from the relevant OPD, Regent, and Deputy Regent.
- 6) The moderator closes Forum YASINAN, usually at 22.30 WITA (Central Indonesian Time). Before the event is closed, the KSB Regent first provides directions related to complaints from the public. After the regent's briefing was completed, the event was closed.
- 7) Individuals or groups that still want to express their aspirations (do not want to submit an open forum) can submit their problems, complaints, wishes, or hopes directly to the Regent and Deputy Regent after the event. The activity ends when all aspirations of the residents have been conveyed. Sometimes, the event lasts until the early hours of the morning.
- 8) During the implementation of YASINAN on the following Thursday night, the implementation of recommendations or follow-ups on the aspirations and complaints of the public is evaluated, whether it has been implemented or whether there are obstacles. This activity was carried out to ensure follow-up with the recommendations given previously.

Communication in Forum YASINAN is dialogical or two-way between public officials and the community and is communicatively carried out. The community is alternately given space to communicate directly with the public officials in the KSB. After conveying their aspirations to the government, they immediately responded to people's aspirations. The dialogue in the Forum YASINAN was also broadcast live through the KSB PR social media channel to expand information for the public. Even the Deputy Regent of KSB broadcasts Forum YASINAN's activities live through his social media. Several community members who attended also broadcast the activities of the YASINAN Forum so that it is widely known to the public (Mustofa, 2021).



Figure 2. Forum YASINAN Activities
Source: <https://sumbawabaratkab.go.id/>

The Manifestation of Democratic Innovation in Forum YASINAN

Participation is an essential element in the establishment of a democracy. Most democratic theories consider participation a central concept (Held, 2006). Democracy does not exist without participation. However, participation is often interpreted only as participation in elections, and when citizens finish voting, their participation ends. The participants' participation was greater than that. Rousseau stated that participation is essential for producing rules or policies that are acceptable to everyone. Democratic innovation is a mechanism or instrument designed to provide space for direct public participation in policymaking (Smith, 2009). Democratic innovation complements the existence of representative democracy by channeling citizens' knowledge and opinions to decision-makers in various ways.

According to Amar Nurmansyah, Forum YASINAN is an innovative effort by the local government to absorb people's aspirations as well as a form of government openness and a tangible manifestation of a joint correction effort that in running the government, the involvement of all parties has room. Because democracy presupposes the broadest possible public involvement, all parties in the YASINAN Forum are given space. As stated by Amar Nurmansyah:

"In Forum YASINAN, there are no barriers or boundaries, and they are very inclusive. There is no difference between people entitled to services and the government, which is the bureaucracy that provides services to the community. In addition, (this forum) also serves as a medium to bring together issues that need to be responded to immediately and followed up in real terms. It is a form of government openness in which all parties determine the government's success in development. Thus, Forum YASINAN was decided to be one of the government's innovation instruments that involves all parties in the implementation of development in the region" (Amar, Interview June 3, 2021).

The YASINAN Forum is designed for public participation and provides an open space for the public to express their aspirations. It allows the community to submit complaints freely, criticize the government, receive explanations, find solutions, and obtain evaluations. Any community questions and problems raised during the forum will undoubtedly receive answers or solutions one month later when the schedule returns to the questionnaire. It is also a form of assessment of the performance of adaptive responsive bureaucracy. There was a clear and measurable response. When bureaucracy often responds in superficial ways, a clear and measurable response will provide an output that can be accounted for. The YASINAN Forum has become a significant medium for the community. Not only are agencies under the local government involved in responding to public services, but also agencies outside local government such as the State Electricity Company (PLN), the One-stop Administration Services Office (Samsat), the police, The Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI), and religious courts.

An institution specifically designed to increase and deepen citizen participation through the presence and aspirations (voices) of all citizens regarding public issues is always enthusiastically welcomed by the community. It can be seen from the many people who attend every Forum YASINAN event. Moreover, the YASINAN Forum is an arena for local governments to respond fully to community problems. Amar Nurmansyah explained this as follows:

"Approximately 500 to 600 people usually attend the YASINAN Forum. To ensure that no aspiration was missed, all community questions were recorded at all times in the Forum YASINAN. At the same time, all Regional Apparatus Organizations (OPD-Organisasi Perangkat Daerah) leaders were confirmed to be present when the event was held. They had to respond immediately by explaining the time. Following up through the service naturally requires time. Direct service will be realized the next day or two days later. Through this Forum, YASINAN, the regent, wants to instill the values that this bureaucracy is about serving, not being served. The Forum YASINAN conveys the real needs of the community" (Amar, Interview June 3, 2021).

As a manifestation of democracy, the YASINAN Forum facilitates various ideas and thoughts from the community regarding public services. This forum is a tangible form of equal, inclusive, and reliable service that deepens community participation in the policy planning, making, and evaluation processes. Through this forum, the government changed its approach to resolving public affairs from a dominant government to a community perspective. Forum YASINAN is a new model and way for the government to absorb public aspirations and make them the basis for policymaking (Mustofa & Halikin, 2020). At the same time, the community is also educated to

become accustomed to deliberation and consensus because their aspirations are also discussed internally before being finally conveyed in the forum.

This article delves into the idea that the Yasinan Forum embodies democratic innovation, as described by Smith (2009), by providing spaces for citizen participation and encouraging public policymaking because the Yasinan Forum offers various innovations that enable direct and deliberative democracy, allowing citizens to have their voices heard. The Yasinan Forum has evolved from being a cultural and religious forum to a traditional consultative participation forum that facilitates public services. Although there is no survey on the level of public satisfaction with the Yasinan Forum, the public trusts the government, and the forum's effectiveness in resolving the everyday problems of citizens serves as an important indicator of public satisfaction. Jäske (2018) revealed that in the Finnish context, where citizen participation is traditionally consultative and not primarily focused on the satisfaction of results, even though it is included in public service satisfaction measures.

Forum YASINAN: Community Participation Arena

Community participation is the key to good governance. Therefore, facilitating and opening the broadest possible democratic space for people embodies the true meaning of democracy (Nabatchi & Leighninger, 2015). The development process ran well through community participation. The YASINAN Forum is an arena for meetings between officials and people. The physical presence of the community, conveying all complaints and problems they face, indicates public involvement. In addition to being an arena to involve the community in development, Forum YASINAN also functions as an effective means of communication between the government and the people, making officials more responsive to the problems and desires of the people. The theory of participatory democracy states that citizens who are active in the democratic process will be more educated because they will always exercise control and, at the same time, be able to criticize the government.

According to HW Musyafirin, the YASINAN Forum is the official arena for the public to convey complaints and demand feedback from the government in the West Sumbawa Regency. Thus, several complaint services and the delivery of aspirations have not been optimal in responding to the problems faced by the people of West Sumbawa. Suggestion boxes, call centers, reporting applications, and others have not worked because they tend to be one-way, resulting in low community participation and involvement in development activities. Therefore, the YASINAN Forum, which is held every Thursday night, is essential for the community to submit complaints. YASINAN's agenda is live-streamed via radio and social media for the West Sumbawa regional government's public relations. As a broad arena of public participation, it is egalitarian and equal. Complaints and aspirations are immediately responded to and followed up by local governments (Open Government Partnership, 2021).

Furthermore, HW Musyafirin explained that Forum YASINAN is intended to channel complaints and aspirations and as an open space to monitor and evaluate regional development processes. Thus, the government can be more accountable for providing public services because the community encourages government accountability. In addition to accountability, this forum encourages openness because the public can directly hear development reports in West Sumbawa and participate in overseeing the solutions to be implemented. From 2015 to 2021, Forum YASINAN positively impacted the development of West Sumbawa, as seen in several aspects, such as increasing public trust in the government, increasing community participation in regional development, and encouraging collaborative work in the field. These three aspects allow local governments to fulfill their community rights faster and better. Poverty is reduced, the human development index is increasing, the management of earthquake impacts is faster, and social protection and empowerment are adequate without complaints. The most encouraging recent achievement is that the West Sumbawa Regency became the first district in Indonesia to complete five pillars of total sanitation based on the community (Open Government Partnership, 2021).

Some of the impacts that can be seen from the presence of the YASINAN Forum as an instrument of local government in absorbing community aspirations for development and public service delivery, for instance, can be seen in the percentage of poor people in the West Sumbawa Regency from 2018 to 2022, which has a downward trend. In 2018, the percentage of people with low incomes was 14.17 percent, decreasing to 13.02 percent by 2022. It means that there was a

decrease of 1.15 percent. At the same time, the declining poverty rate in West Sumbawa is also indicated by data from the West Sumbawa Central Bureau of Statistics, as shown in the table below:

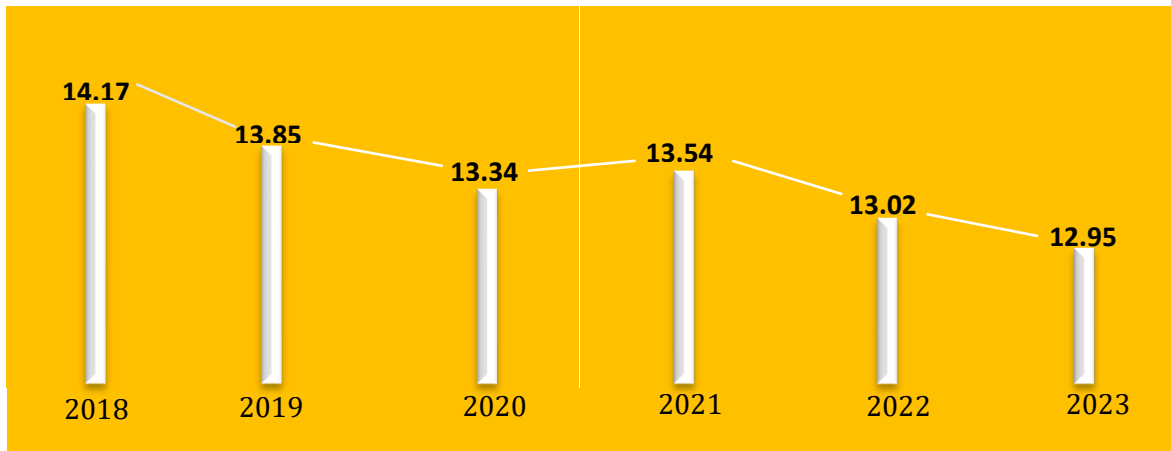


Figure 3. Percentage of Poor People in West Sumbawa Regency 2018-2023 (thousand people)
 Source: Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) West Sumbawa Regency, 2024

Furthermore, the cooperation and collaboration of all stakeholders have impacted the declining poverty rate in West Sumbawa. The government of West Sumbawa conducted various interventions in all sectors, including the economy, agriculture, Small and Medium Enterprises (SME), fishermen, ranching, and other fields. Data collection on people with low incomes was conducted rigorously by *Agen Gotong Royong*, the government’s partners at the lowest level, in coordination with related agencies (PPID KSB, 2023). Based on factual data, the government provides quality services to communities. The progress of the intervention of various government programs in general, including poverty reduction, was also monitored in the YASINAN Forum.

In addition, some of the impacts of the YASINAN Forum include the increasing human development index in West Sumbawa. For instance, data from the West Sumbawa Central Bureau of Statistics for 2022 reveals that increasing the human development index from 2020 to 2022 has exceeded national achievements. The achievement of West Sumbawa's Human Development Index of 72.65 in 2022 is included in the high category in NTB Province, as shown in Table 1.

Tabel 1. Human Development Index (HDI) of West Sumbawa Regency and West Nusa Tenggara Province, 2020-2023

Region Level	Human Development Index			
	2020	2021	2022	2023
West Sumbawa Regency	71,63	71,85	72,65	74,84
West Nusa Tenggara Province	68,25	68,65	69,46	72,37
National	71,94	72,29	72,91	74,39

Source: Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) West Sumbawa Regency, 2023

Thus, the YASINAN Forum is more than an informal forum; its presence strengthens community participation. In a democracy, citizens need space to participate outside formal channels of participation, such as the selection of candidates for each election episode. Citizens need more space to participate actively in the development process. In Indonesia, regional leaders seek to innovate to facilitate public services and participate in the development process, both online and offline. Some of these are e-government innovations in the form of Mobile Smart Applications that allow the people of Surabaya to have an online platform to interact with the government and their complaints to be immediately responded to by relevant agencies (Fachrudin & Yuwono, 2017). Meanwhile, in Bandung, the Regional Development and Empowerment Innovation Program provides space for the community within the region to be actively involved in the pillars of decentralization, innovation, and collaboration (Pitriyanti & Harsasto, 2019). Another arena of participation can be seen in the Neighborhood Association-

based Development Program (PBRT) in West Sumbawa Regency, where residents are given autonomy to discuss and determine their own needs by maximizing the role of the Neighborhood Association (RT) in absorbing aspirations arising from community deliberation or consultations to be followed up by the government in three forms of action; small, medium, and large-scale plans (Wahyudi, 2016).

The YASINAN Forum is a democratic space. Communities are encouraged to be involved in various local government activities. In the YASINAN Forum, the government and community can examine what the community needs directly related to problems faced in the region, government solutions to overcome them, and mechanisms to ensure these activities follow the people's will. The existence of a forum for people's involvement also opens up space for the emergence of more effective communication between the government and the people. The active participation of citizens encourages the government to respond to people's wishes and formulate more targeted policies. Thus, in the long term, people's participation leads to trust, solidarity, and networks. Furthermore, social capital is a collective force that accelerates regional development. Therefore, public involvement in the development processes must continue to be strengthened (Kurniadi et al., 2009).

Almost all interviewees confirmed that the YASINAN Forum facilitated the community's involvement in development. All informants agreed that the presence of the Forum YASINAN made them feel involved in the development process in West Sumbawa. The government has no space to address all the public problems and complaints. The YASINAN Forum is an egalitarian and open space for community participation. According to Surya Nullah, a Kalimantanong Village, Brang Ene District resident, Forum YASINAN is a very positive forum for the community. He said,

"We feel very represented and involved in the development process in West Sumbawa. Before Yasinan was born, we submitted a complaint to the village. The response was positive, but it took a long process to follow up because they had to go to the office. Meanwhile, at Forum YASINAN, the relevant agencies responded immediately to aspirations because they were required to attend YASINAN every night." (Surya, Interview December 14, 2021).

The YASINAN Forum encourages people to become more concerned about politics, policies, and development in West Sumbawa. It cannot be separated from the fact that there is space for equality and inclusiveness provided by Forum YASINAN. There are no social, economic, or political barriers. The YASINAN Forum presents a free participation space for the community to meet their leaders. People's enthusiasm every time an activity is carried out shows how participatory democracy works. Facts on the ground also negate the concerns of Böker and Elstub (2015), who identified public apathy in politics, one of which is the lack of space and opportunities available to citizens. Empirical findings show how the YASINAN Forum is used by the community to be actively involved in promoting political and government development through their presence and voice in the forum.

CONCLUSION

Research on democratic innovations conducted in West Sumbawa has shown that democracy continues to evolve in local contexts. Forum YASINAN, an innovative breakthrough from political actors at the local level, provides evidence that informal democracy encourages public participation in development as practiced in the West Sumbawa Regency. Communication that has tended to be rigid and formal through official forums in the government can be shifted to informal meeting rooms, where everyday public problems are resolved. The community feels close to the government because it can interact in an informal forum that is far from being rigid. What can be learned from the Forum YASINAN supports the claim that participatory democracy can grow and be accepted by the community because there are no barriers. The YASINAN Forum is a manifestation of democratic innovation and an arena for community participation in development.

This finding also encourages us to question the roles of representative democracies. Above all, it is interesting that public problems do not have to be resolved within a rigid and formal bureaucratic framework. In practice, at the local level, especially in West Sumbawa, deep informal democracy can be an essential alternative for encouraging public participation in development.

Although the critical finding of this research concerns the existence of formal democracy, it is also a critical note and suggestion so that the state's formal institutions can respond quickly to public aspirations. Political actors should quickly and accurately identify ways to make it easier for the public to express aspirations, including changing service patterns and mechanisms and absorbing public aspirations to encourage accelerated development at the local level.

At the same time, the author acknowledges that this study has a limitation. Focusing only on one locality in Indonesia, especially the West Sumbawa Regency, may not yield a high generalizability. When describing the West Sumbawa YASINAN Forum, our findings may not be sufficient to understand the factors that drive community enthusiasm to utilize this forum. The results of this study provide an adequate explanation for the context of one region. The diverse characteristics of communities in each region of Indonesia cannot be explained by relying on a single case of success in one region. Further research can compare similar innovations from several regions to trace the main factors that encourage people to attend the forum for democratic innovation in the context of development in the region and refine this research.

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