From Participation To Transformation: Outcomes Of Inclusive Governance For Marginalized Communities In Rural Indonesia

[1]**Fitrah Rabiah Al Adawiah** [2]**Muh. Tang Abdullah**

[1,2]Public Admnistration, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Hasanuddin University, Makassar, 90241, Indonesia

*Corresponding author:** Email: fitadawiah119@gmail.com

*Absctract.** *Public engagement has been widely recognized as a cornerstone of inclusive governance and sustainable development, yet empirical studies often overlook its tangible outcomes, particularly in rural and marginalized contexts. This study analyzes the outcomes of public engagement in the Estungkara Program, implemented in Tompobulu District, Maros Regency, Indonesia. Guided by the Direct Public Engagement Framework (Nabatchi & Amsler, 2014), the research explores how participatory practices influence individual empowerment, community solidarity, and institutional reform. A qualitative case study approach was employed, involving in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis with local government officials, community leaders, and marginalized groups. Findings reveal that the Estungkara Program has contributed significantly to improving access to basic services and civil documentation at the individual level, strengthening social capital and collective action at the community level, and enhancing transparency and legitimacy in village governance at the institutional level. These outcomes demonstrate that participatory initiatives, when designed and implemented inclusively, can generate transformative impacts beyond formal consultation. The study contributes to the global discourse on inclusive governance by highlighting the importance of evaluating outcomes, and provides practical lessons for policymakers and practitioners seeking to design participatory frameworks that address structural barriers and empower marginalized communities.*

*Keywords:** *Public engagement, Inclusive governance, Rural development, Marginalized communities, Participation outcomes, Indonesia*

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive governance has become central to contemporary debates on democratization and sustainable development. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) highlight that inclusive and participatory decision making is essential for achieving equitable outcomes and ensuring that "no one is left behind" (UNDP, 2017). Within this framework, public engagement is understood not merely as procedural consultation but as a substantive democratic practice that can strengthen transparency, legitimacy, and accountability in governance (Nabatchi & Amsler, 2014; OECD, 2020). Despite widespread adoption of participatory mechanisms, scholarly attention has often concentrated on the *design* of engagement rather than its *outcomes*. This imbalance leaves open important questions about whether participatory initiatives produce tangible benefits, especially in marginalized rural settings where barriers to inclusion are particularly acute (Rowe & Frewer, 2005; Fox, 2015).

The literature on citizen engagement underscores both the promise and the limitations of participatory governance. Large-scale reviews suggest that citizen voice can contribute to improved service delivery, strengthened civic identity, and more accountable institutions, but effects are highly context dependent (Gaventa & Barrett, 2012; Hickey & King, 2016). Mansuri and Rao (2013) further argue that participation works best when coupled with enabling environments and institutional support, otherwise initiatives risk degenerating into tokenism. Comparative research has demonstrated that outcomes of engagement include not only individual-level changes such as empowerment and capacity building but also community-level outcomes such as social capital and institutional-level impacts including policy responsiveness (Andersson et al., 2020).

Evidence from deliberative democracy research further enriches this discussion. Deliberative processes are found to enhance civic competence, tolerance, and political efficacy when designed to encourage

genuine dialogue (Carpini et al., 2004; Curato et al., 2017). Experimental studies reveal that deliberation improves the quality and fairness of collective decisions, as seen in minipublics across different countries (Grillos, 2022; Knobloch & Gastil, 2022). Similarly, participatory budgeting in Brazil has shown that deliberative engagement can redirect public spending toward health and sanitation, with measurable improvements in infant mortality (Gonçalves, 2014; Touchton & Wampler, 2014). These findings highlight the potential of participatory programs to generate transformative outcomes, but also caution that such results depend heavily on institutionalization and inclusivity (Wampler & Goldfrank, 2021).

Indonesia provides a particularly compelling setting for analyzing these dynamics. Following the enactment of the Village Law (No. 6/2014), village governments gained unprecedented autonomy to design and implement development programs. The reform aimed to deepen democracy and accelerate rural development by empowering local communities (Antlöv et al., 2016). Yet, persistent challenges such as elite capture, weak capacity, and social stigma toward marginalized groups have constrained inclusive participation (Mukhlis et al., 2025; World Bank, 2023). Recent analyses reveal significant variation in outcomes across villages, underscoring the need to identify models that successfully institutionalize inclusivity (Suryadarma & Antlöv, 2023).

Within this context, the Estungkara Program in Tompobulu District, Maros Regency, represents a deliberate attempt to advance inclusive governance. Developed through collaboration between local government and civil society organizations, Estungkara seeks to place marginalized groups—such as women, people with disabilities, indigenous residents, and the poor—at the center of participatory decision making. What distinguishes Estungkara from conventional participatory models is its explicit emphasis on outcomes: not only creating inclusive spaces but also producing concrete changes such as expanded access to civil documentation, empowerment of vulnerable groups, and transparent governance processes.

This study aims to analyze the outcomes of public engagement in the Estungkara Program using the Direct Public Engagement Framework (Nabatchi & Amsler, 2014). Specifically, it examines outcomes at three levels: individual outcomes such as access to services and empowerment; community outcomes including strengthened social capital and leadership; and institutional outcomes such as legitimacy and transparency. By situating Estungkara within both global and Indonesian literatures, this research contributes to addressing the gap between the theory of participatory design and the reality of participatory outcomes. It also offers lessons for policymakers and practitioners seeking to institutionalize inclusive governance in marginalized rural contexts.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study design to provide an in-depth exploration of the outcomes of public engagement in the Estungkara Program in Tompobulu District, Maros Regency. A qualitative approach was chosen because the research sought to capture not only formal mechanisms of participation but also the lived experiences, perceptions, and transformations of marginalized groups. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), qualitative case studies are appropriate when the objective is to explore complex social processes in bounded systems. In this study, the Estungkara Program represented a bounded case within which outcomes of public engagement could be systematically examined.

Research Setting

The research was conducted in Bonto Somba and Bonto Manurung villages in Tompobulu District, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. These villages were selected purposively because of their socio-economic vulnerabilities, geographic isolation, and persistent challenges of marginalization. Bonto Somba is officially classified as a disadvantaged village characterized by limited infrastructure, high poverty rates, and the presence of indigenous communities who face cultural stigmas. Bonto Manurung similarly experiences restricted access to services and includes marginalized populations such as women, persons with disabilities, and low-income households. The combination of structural barriers and active participation in the Estungkara Program made these settings highly relevant for examining inclusive governance outcomes.

Participants and Sampling

Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure representation of key stakeholders involved in or affected by the program. Ten informants were engaged, consisting of: (1) local government officials from village and district levels; (2) representatives of civil society organizations, including the Sulawesi Community Foundation; (3) community leaders such as village heads, farmers' association leaders, and women's group leaders; and (4) marginalized residents including indigenous people, women, and persons with disabilities. Purposive sampling allows researchers to identify participants who can provide rich insights into the phenomenon under investigation (Palinkas et al., 2015).

Data Collection

Data were collected over a period of three months using three complementary methods. First, **in-depth interviews** were conducted with all key informants using semi-structured guides. The interviews explored experiences with the Estungkara Program, perceptions of inclusivity, and observed outcomes. Second, **participant observation** was conducted in community forums and program activities, with attention to how marginalized groups engaged and interacted. Observation provided contextual understanding and enabled triangulation with interview findings (Spradley, 1980). Third, **document analysis** was undertaken on policy documents, agreements, and village records, including the Memorandum of Understanding between the local government and civil society organizations as well as minutes of village meetings.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which is suitable for identifying recurring patterns across qualitative datasets (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The Direct Public Engagement Framework developed by Nabatchi and Amsler (2014) guided the coding process. Transcripts and notes were coded manually, and emerging themes were categorized into individual, community, and institutional outcomes. Coding consistency was ensured through iterative cross-checking of categories against the framework. Triangulation was achieved by comparing evidence from interviews, observations, and documents, thereby enhancing validity.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical guidelines for social science research. Approval was obtained from the local research committee, and informed consent was secured from all participants. Because the study involved marginalized groups, confidentiality and anonymity were prioritized. Pseudonyms were assigned to informants, and sensitive information was carefully managed to prevent potential harm. These steps are consistent with international standards of ethical qualitative research (Israel & Hay, 2006).

RESULTS

The findings of this study are presented according to the three levels of outcomes outlined in the Direct Public Engagement Framework (Nabatchi & Amsler, 2014), namely individual, community, and institutional outcomes. Evidence was drawn from in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Together these sources provide a comprehensive picture of how the Estungkara Program shaped inclusive governance in Bonto Somba and Bonto Manurung villages.

Individual Outcomes

Access to Civil Documentation and Services

One of the most significant individual outcomes was improved access to civil documentation. Prior to the Estungkara Program, many residents lacked official documents such as identity cards, family registers, and birth certificates. This exclusion hindered their access to health insurance, education, and social protection schemes. Interviews revealed that through advocacy and facilitation by Estungkara, dozens of villagers obtained documentation. As one woman explained, *"Before, I did not have a birth certificate and could not register my children at school. Now, after the program, the documents are complete and my children can attend without difficulty."*

This transformation reflects the program's structural intervention in addition to its deliberative approach. Documentation not only granted access to services but also symbolized recognition as full citizens. This aligns with Gaventa and Barrett's (2012) mapping of engagement outcomes, where enhanced rights and entitlements were central benefits of participatory initiatives.

Empowerment and Confidence

Beyond access to services, individual empowerment emerged as a crucial outcome. Women, people with disabilities, and youth reported greater confidence in speaking at community forums. Observations confirmed that women who once remained silent in village meetings began voicing concerns about health, education, and livelihoods. A local facilitator noted, *"Now women raise their hands to speak, and even the head of the village listens. It was different before Estungkara."*

This outcome resonates with findings from deliberative democracy literature suggesting that inclusive dialogue enhances political efficacy and civic skills (Carpini et al., 2004; Curato et al., 2017). In this case, empowerment was not limited to symbolic participation but manifested in behavioral shifts.

Recognition and Civic Identity

The acquisition of documents and new roles in public forums fostered a stronger sense of civic identity. Residents who were once invisible to the state began to view themselves as legitimate stakeholders. For persons with disabilities, recognition translated into invitations to planning meetings and inclusion in village development decisions. This aligns with Fox's (2015) emphasis on "voice plus teeth," where citizen participation coupled with state responsiveness produces meaningful accountability.

Community Outcomes

Strengthening Social Capital

At the community level, Estungkara facilitated the strengthening of social capital. Forums such as *musyawarah desa* provided spaces where diverse groups; farmers, women, youth, and indigenous residents, could interact. Observation revealed increased trust among groups that had previously been segregated. For instance, indigenous participants expressed that they now felt welcome in village meetings, reducing long-standing stigma.

This dynamic confirms Kinney's (2012) argument that participatory governance enhances bonding and bridging social capital. Estungkara created opportunities for residents to cooperate across group boundaries, laying the foundation for more cohesive communities.

Collective Action and Economic Empowerment

Another outcome was the emergence of collective initiatives. In Bonto Manurung, a women's cooperative was formed to provide microloans and organize home-based food enterprises. In Bonto Somba, farmers' groups used forums to collectively negotiate for agricultural inputs and training from local authorities. These initiatives reflect how deliberative engagement can translate into practical, community-driven development actions.

Such findings mirror international experiences where participatory budgeting and local forums generate collective goods and community projects (Gonçalves, 2014; Touchton & Wampler, 2014). In Estungkara, collective action was not externally imposed but emerged organically from community interactions fostered by inclusive participation.

Emergence of Inclusive Leadership

Community-level change also included shifts in leadership dynamics. Local leaders who previously dominated decision-making began adopting more participatory practices. Women and youth stepped into leadership roles within cooperatives and farmers' groups. A youth leader explained, *"Before, we were only listeners. Now, we can also lead discussions and propose ideas."*

This echoes Mansbridge's (1995) assertion that participatory experiences cultivate new democratic leaders. By broadening leadership bases, Estungkara contributed to a cultural shift from hierarchical to participatory community governance.

Institutional Outcomes

Transparency and Accountability

At the institutional level, Estungkara enhanced transparency. Village planning and budgeting processes became more visible through documentation and public sharing of decisions. Residents reported that they felt better informed about budget allocations, reducing suspicions of misuse. One informant stated, *"We now know how much money is allocated and for what purpose. This builds our trust in the village head."*

This outcome aligns with Rowe and Frewer's (2005) typology, which identifies transparency as a key criterion for effective engagement. The institutionalization of public reporting enhanced accountability and legitimacy.

Policy Responsiveness
Village development priorities shifted significantly under Estungkara. Instead of focusing solely on infrastructure, plans included services for women, children, and persons with disabilities. This reorientation demonstrated responsiveness to marginalized voices. For instance, in Bonto Somba, a budget line was created for disability support, while in Bonto Manurung, resources were allocated for maternal health.
These changes are consistent with Wampler and Goldfrank's (2021) findings on participatory budgeting, where deliberative processes reshape policy agendas toward social welfare priorities.

Legitimacy and Institutionalization
Perhaps the most important institutional outcome was enhanced legitimacy. Marginalized groups began perceiving themselves as rightful stakeholders. This perception was institutionalized through village regulations mandating the participation of women, youth, and persons with disabilities in decision-making. This legal codification ensures sustainability beyond the Estungkara intervention.
This development reflects OECD (2020) recommendations for embedding participatory practices into formal institutions rather than treating them as temporary initiatives. It also resonates with Goodin and Dryzek's (2006) argument that deliberation improves macro-political legitimacy when it is scaled up through institutional uptake.

Table 1 Summary of Finding

Level Outcome	Key Findings	Illustrative Evidence
Individual	Access to civil documentation; empowerment; civic identity	Women obtained birth certificates; persons with disabilities invited to meetings
Community	Social capital; collective initiatives; inclusive leadership	Women's cooperative, farmers' group advocacy, youth leaders emerging
Institutional	Transparency; policy responsiveness; legitimacy and institutionalization	Budget priorities shifted to health/disability; regulations mandate inclusion

Overall, the Estungkara Program demonstrated that inclusive public engagement can generate multidimensional outcomes. At the **individual level**, citizens gained recognition and agency. At the **community level**, networks, trust, and leadership capacities expanded. At the **institutional level**, governance became more transparent, responsive, and legitimate. Importantly, these levels were interconnected. Individual empowerment enabled collective initiatives, which in turn influenced institutional reforms.
Such cascading effects illustrate the interdependence of outcomes, supporting theoretical claims that participatory governance yields broad societal impacts when inclusivity is genuine (Gaventa & Barrett, 2012; Fox, 2015). In rural Indonesia, where exclusion has been entrenched, Estungkara demonstrates the possibility of transforming governance by combining deliberation with structural interventions that address barriers to participation.

DISCUSSION
This study set out to analyze the outcomes of public engagement in the Estungkara Program in Tompobulu District, Maros Regency, using the Direct Public Engagement Framework (Nabatchi & Amsler, 2014). The results demonstrate that inclusive governance initiatives can produce transformative outcomes at multiple levels when they are designed not only to create participatory spaces but also to address structural barriers to inclusion. The following discussion connects these findings with existing literature and identifies the study's contributions.

Individual Outcomes: Empowerment Beyond Access
The findings show that villagers gained civil documentation, access to basic services, and greater confidence to participate in decision making. These outcomes resonate with Gaventa and Barrett's (2012) mapping of engagement, which identifies enhanced rights and entitlements as one of the clearest results

of citizen participation. Similarly, Fox (2015) argues that participatory initiatives generate meaningful accountability when citizen voice is coupled with state responsiveness. In Estungkara, responsiveness was evident in the facilitation of documentation processes and recognition of marginalized voices.

Deliberative democracy theory suggests that participation enhances civic knowledge, tolerance, and political efficacy (Carpini et al., 2004; Curato et al., 2017). The empowerment observed in Estungkara aligns with this, as women, youth, and people with disabilities began speaking in forums where they had previously been silent. However, the Estungkara case extends the theory by showing that empowerment also depends on removing structural barriers, such as the absence of legal identity documents. Without this intervention, deliberation alone might have remained symbolic (McComas, 2003). Thus, the findings highlight that empowerment in marginalized rural contexts requires both deliberative opportunities and structural support.

Community Outcomes: Social Capital and Collective Action

At the community level, Estungkara fostered social trust, cooperation, and new leadership. These outcomes confirm Kinney's (2012) argument that participatory governance enhances social capital by facilitating collaboration across groups. The emergence of women's cooperatives and farmers' associations echoes global evidence that participatory institutions can generate collective goods and new civic capacities (Mathews, 1994; Mansbridge, 1995).

Internationally, participatory budgeting in Brazil has demonstrated how communities can reorient spending toward social priorities and achieve measurable welfare gains (Gonçalves, 2014; Touchton & Wampler, 2014). Estungkara reflects similar dynamics in a different cultural and institutional context: collective action was initiated by local groups and sustained through inclusive forums. The program thus illustrates how deliberation can translate into community resilience when participation is broad-based and linked to practical outcomes.

The development of inclusive leadership further underscores the transformative potential of participatory programs. Observations that youth and women assumed leadership roles align with Mansbridge's (1995) proposition that participatory experiences cultivate new democratic leaders. This shift from hierarchical to participatory leadership is particularly significant in rural Indonesia, where decision making has traditionally been dominated by local elites (Antlöv et al., 2016). Estungkara therefore contributes to democratization not only by broadening participation but also by reshaping leadership practices.

Institutional Outcomes: Transparency, Legitimacy, and Responsiveness

At the institutional level, Estungkara improved transparency, responsiveness, and legitimacy. Villagers reported greater access to budgetary information and trust in local leaders, outcomes consistent with Rowe and Frewer's (2005) criteria for effective engagement. This institutional transformation reflects Goodin and Dryzek's (2006) observation that deliberation strengthens legitimacy when its outputs are taken up by formal decision-making structures.

Policy responsiveness was also evident, with development priorities shifting toward health, education, and disability inclusion. This mirrors findings from participatory budgeting research, where deliberation reorients spending toward social welfare (Wampler & Goldfrank, 2021). In Estungkara, such responsiveness demonstrated that marginalized voices were not symbolic but influential in shaping policy.

Most importantly, inclusivity was institutionalized through village regulations requiring the participation of women, youth, and marginalized groups. This aligns with OECD (2020) recommendations for embedding deliberative practices into governance structures. Institutionalization ensures that participation continues beyond project cycles, addressing McComas's (2001) critique that many participatory initiatives fail to produce long-term impact.

Novelty and Contribution

The Estungkara case contributes to the global literature in three main ways. First, it provides empirical evidence from the Global South, a context often underrepresented in studies of deliberative democracy and participatory outcomes. Most existing research draws on urban or developed settings; this study highlights how participatory programs can succeed in rural communities facing poverty, geographic isolation, and social stigma (Suryadarma & Antlöv, 2023; World Bank, 2023).

Second, the study extends deliberative theory by showing that outcomes depend on the interaction between deliberation and structural interventions. While deliberative democracy emphasizes dialogue,

Estungkara demonstrates that meaningful empowerment requires practical support, such as securing legal documentation and creating accessible forums. This finding complements critiques that participation without structural change risks being tokenistic (Hickey & King, 2016).

Third, the study highlights the interdependence of outcomes across levels. Individual empowerment fostered community solidarity, which in turn strengthened institutional legitimacy. This cascading effect supports Gaventa and Barrett's (2012) notion of multi-level outcomes but provides new empirical detail on how these dynamics unfold in marginalized rural settings.

Practical Implications

For policymakers and practitioners, the Estungkara experience underscores that inclusive governance requires more than procedural participation. It necessitates deliberate efforts to dismantle structural barriers, empower marginalized groups, and institutionalize inclusivity through formal regulations. Programs designed with both deliberative and structural components are more likely to generate sustainable outcomes.

These lessons are particularly relevant for countries pursuing the SDGs and aiming to strengthen local democracy. As shown in Brazil's participatory budgeting and Kenya's deliberation experiments, inclusive engagement can improve governance and welfare outcomes when institutionalized (Grillos, 2022; Touchton & Wampler, 2014). Estungkara offers a comparable model in rural Indonesia, demonstrating that marginalized communities can become active agents of governance when given the opportunity and support.

Limitations and Future Research

This study was limited to two villages, which restricts the generalizability of findings. Future research should adopt comparative designs across multiple regions to examine variations in outcomes. Quantitative studies could complement qualitative insights by measuring long-term impacts on poverty, education, and health indicators. Further research is also needed on the role of technology in supporting inclusive engagement in rural areas, building on evidence that ICT-enabled participation can enhance state responsiveness (Peixoto & Fox, 2016).

Conclusion of the Discussion

The Estungkara Program illustrates how inclusive public engagement can generate outcomes across individual, community, and institutional levels. These findings confirm and extend existing theories, demonstrate novelty in the Global South context, and provide practical guidance for policymakers. By embedding inclusivity in both deliberative design and structural reforms, participatory governance can move from symbolic inclusion to transformative outcomes

CONCLUSION

This study examined the outcomes of public engagement in the Estungkara Program, implemented in two rural villages of Tompobulu District, Maros Regency, Indonesia. Drawing on the Direct Public Engagement Framework (Nabatchi & Amsler, 2014), the analysis demonstrated that inclusive participatory initiatives can produce transformative results at individual, community, and institutional levels. At the individual level, residents who previously lacked recognition and access to services obtained civil documentation, which not only allowed them to access health, education, and social protection programs but also enhanced their confidence and civic identity. Women, youth, and people with disabilities began to actively participate in forums where their voices had long been absent.

At the community level, Estungkara fostered stronger social capital, collective action, and the emergence of inclusive leadership. The creation of women's cooperatives and farmers' groups illustrated how deliberative forums enabled collaboration and resilience. These developments reduced stigma, built trust across groups, and encouraged participatory leadership beyond traditional elites.

At the institutional level, the program contributed to improved transparency, responsiveness, and legitimacy in village governance. Planning and budgeting processes became more visible, and priorities shifted toward marginalized groups. Importantly, inclusivity was institutionalized through village regulations that mandated the participation of women, youth, and persons with disabilities. This codification ensured that inclusivity would persist beyond the program cycle.

The findings extend existing theories of deliberative democracy and citizen engagement in three important ways. First, they provide empirical evidence from the Global South, where rural communities continue to face structural exclusion. Second, they highlight that empowerment requires both deliberative spaces and structural interventions, such as facilitation of legal documents. Third, they show the interdependence of outcomes across levels: individual empowerment strengthens community solidarity, which in turn reinforces institutional legitimacy.

From a practical perspective, the Estungkara experience demonstrates that inclusive governance requires more than opening participatory spaces. Policymakers must address structural barriers, empower marginalized communities, and embed inclusivity in formal regulations. These lessons are directly relevant to the pursuit of the SDGs and to ongoing efforts to strengthen local democracy worldwide.

The study does have limitations. Its focus on two villages restricts generalizability, and future research should include multiple cases and employ mixed-method approaches to capture long-term impacts on social and economic outcomes. Nonetheless, the findings provide valuable insights into how participatory initiatives can be transformative when designed inclusively and coupled with structural support.

In conclusion, the Estungkara Program illustrates the potential of inclusive public engagement to drive meaningful change in marginalized rural settings. By linking deliberation with structural interventions, the program not only expanded citizen voice but also generated tangible outcomes that advanced equity, legitimacy, and transparency in governance. As such, it contributes to both academic debates and policy practice on how to design participatory institutions that move beyond symbolic inclusion toward sustainable transformation.

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