



Trust as a Bridge to Participation in Local Environmental Budget Management

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Abstract. Effective environmental governance at the local level requires not only technical capability but also strong institutional trust. This study explores the influence of transparency and accountability on public trust, and how that trust shapes citizen participation in environmental budget management. The research involved 300 respondents from three regions in South Sulawesi Province, namely Makassar, Bulukumba, and Gowa. Using Structural Equation Modeling with the Partial Least Squares approach, the study tested the relationships among transparency, accountability, trust, and participation. The findings show that transparency and accountability significantly improve public trust. Furthermore, trust has a strong and positive effect on public participation. Public trust also acts as a partial mediator between governance practices and participation, indicating that good governance indirectly encourages civic engagement through trust-building. Despite these statistically significant relationships, the descriptive results reveal that actual public participation remains relatively low. This suggests that structural and informational limitations may hinder broader involvement in environmental budgeting processes. The study contributes to theory by validating trust as a key mechanism that connects governance quality with participatory behavior. In practical terms, the findings emphasize the importance of enhancing access to budgetary information, reinforcing accountability structures, and creating inclusive forums for environmental decision-making. Strengthening these areas can lead to improved public confidence and more active civic participation in environmental governance at the local level.

Keywords: Transparency, Accountability, Public Trust, Environmental Budgeting, Sustainability.

1 Introduction

Environmental sustainability is increasingly recognized as a fundamental responsibility of local governments, especially in the context of managing public resources for environmental programs. As the closest administrative units to the people, local governments are expected not only to implement environmental policies effectively but also to manage public funds with integrity, openness, and accountability [1, 2]. The effectiveness of budget management for environmental initiatives depends not only on

technical competence but also on the degree of public trust in the government. When communities perceive that their local government is transparent, accountable, and inclusive in its budgeting processes, they are more likely to trust those institutions and participate meaningfully in environmental governance [3, 4, 5].

Numerous studies emphasize that transparency, accountability, and public participation play pivotal roles in strengthening this trust. Transparency enables citizens to access information Sofyani on budget allocations, ensuring that government decisions are visible and verifiable [6, 7]. Accountability mechanisms provide structures for oversight, allowing for the correction of mismanagement and reinforcing institutional responsibility [8]. Public participation offers citizens the opportunity to voice their concerns and influence environmental priorities, thereby increasing the legitimacy and effectiveness of policy outcomes [9, 3, 2]. However, existing research also suggests that the mere presence of these elements is insufficient. The quality of implementation matters significantly. Poorly executed participation, selective transparency, and weak enforcement of accountability can result in public disengagement, disillusionment, and even decreased trust [10, 11].

In Indonesia, although initiatives such as participatory budgeting forums like Musrenbang have been institutionalized, their impact remains uneven [1]. Many citizens remain unaware of or disconnected from the budget process, especially in environmental sectors where technical complexity and bureaucratic opacity often hinder public understanding [12, 13]. This creates a governance gap where environmental programs, although critical to sustainable development, may lack the support and scrutiny necessary for their success. As a result, enhancing trust becomes not just an ethical imperative, but a strategic necessity for achieving effective environmental policy implementation at the local level [14, 15].

Despite the growing body of literature on governance and trust, there remains a need for empirical investigation into the mechanisms that drive citizen trust in local government, especially in relation to environmental budget management. Previous studies have established the individual effects of transparency, accountability, and participation, but few have examined how these elements interact through the mediating role of trust [3, 5]. Furthermore, limited attention has been given to provincial contexts in Indonesia, where governance capacity, civic engagement, and environmental challenges can vary significantly across regions. Understanding these dynamics is crucial, particularly in areas such as South Sulawesi Province, which presents a diverse social and ecological landscape encompassing urban, coastal, and rural populations.

This study aims to analyze the relationships between transparency, accountability, public trust, and citizen participation in the context of local government budget management for environmental programs. Using a structured questionnaire and structural equation modeling with the PLS approach, this research seeks to provide a robust empirical foundation for assessing how governance practices influence public engagement. By focusing on the general population across selected regions in South Sulawesi, the study offers insights that are both practically relevant and theoretically grounded. The findings are expected to inform policy efforts aimed at enhancing participatory governance and environmental sustainability in decentralized contexts.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Institutional and Trust Theory

This research draws upon two primary theoretical foundations: Institutional Theory and Trust Theory. Institutional theory posits that organizations and governments operate within a framework of formal structures, social expectations, and legitimacy-seeking behaviors [16]. In the context of public administration, institutional mechanisms, such as transparency, accountability, and participatory structures, function as normative pressures that shape the behavior of local governments toward good governance practices.

Complementing this, Trust Theory emphasizes the psychological and relational dimension of governance. Trust in government is shaped by citizens' perceptions of competence, integrity, and fairness [17]. Trust functions as a mediating variable that transforms procedural mechanisms, such as openness and citizen engagement, into actual civic outcomes, such as public participation.

Combining both frameworks, this study conceptualizes that transparent and accountable budget practices, as institutional elements, are legitimized and rendered effective when citizens trust the processes and the actors involved. Thus, trust is not only an outcome but a pathway through which institutional mechanisms affect participatory behavior.

2.2 Transparency and Trust in Local Government

Transparency refers to the availability, clarity, and accessibility of information related to public budgets, decision-making, and performance. According to meta-analyses by Wang & Guan [5], transparency significantly enhances public trust, especially when the information is timely, relevant, and easily understandable. Trust improves when citizens perceive that their government is open, accountable, and not withholding important information.

In the context of environmental governance, transparency regarding budget allocation and program outcomes plays a crucial role in shaping perceptions of fairness and credibility [7]. However, several studies have noted that mere disclosure without actionable clarity or communication may not translate into increased trust [14]. Therefore, transparency must be participatory and responsive to produce meaningful civic trust. Building upon this growing consensus in the literature, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

- **H1:** Transparency has a positive effect on public trust in local government.

2.3 Accountability Mechanisms and Public Trust

Accountability mechanisms, particularly in budget processes, involve clear delineation of responsibilities, auditability, and consequences for misconduct. Studies such as

Sofyani [1] and Fontaine [8] affirm that strong accountability mechanisms reinforce public confidence by demonstrating that governments are answerable to the people.

Trust is strengthened when accountability is not only formal but also practically enforced, supported by transparent reporting and channels for redress. Empirical studies in Indonesia and other emerging democracies indicate that accountability mechanisms aligned with transparency produce synergistic trust effects [18, 19]. Given this theoretical and empirical backdrop, the following hypothesis is advanced:

- **H2:** Accountability has a positive effect on public trust in local government.

2.4 Trust as a Mediating Mechanism

While transparency and accountability can directly influence public behavior, a growing body of literature suggests that trust is a key mediating variable [4]. Trust functions as the psychological link between governance inputs and civic outputs, especially when citizen experiences with institutions are shaped by longstanding skepticism or historical failures.

Studies show that citizens are more likely to engage in participatory processes, such as public forums, budget discussions, or environmental planning, when they trust the actors and outcomes involved [12, 3]. Thus, trust translates procedural transparency and accountability into civic empowerment. To further examine this relational dynamic, this study evaluates the role of trust as an intervening variable, leading to the following hypotheses:

- **H3:** Trust has a positive effect on public participation in environmental budgeting.
- **H4:** Trust mediates the relationship between transparency and public participation.
- **H5:** Trust mediates the relationship between accountability and public participation.

2.5 Public Participation in Environmental Budgeting

Public participation refers to the involvement of citizens in decision-making processes, particularly those that affect their environment, health, and welfare. Participatory budgeting and deliberative forums are increasingly used as tools to enhance democratic legitimacy in environmental governance [20, 2].

However, the quality of participation matters. Superficial or tokenistic engagement may undermine trust and foster frustration [9]. Successful participation requires both institutional readiness (rules, structures) and social capital (trust, civic literacy). Therefore, fostering trust through institutional transparency and accountability is a prerequisite for effective public involvement.

3 Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional design to empirically examine the influence of transparency, accountability, and public participation on citizens' trust in local government budget management for environmental programs. Grounded in a

comprehensive body of international literature, this research reflects the growing consensus that these three dimensions, when effectively implemented, can strengthen governance quality, enhance public trust, and foster more sustainable environmental outcomes [3, 4, 5]. Accountability encompasses both financial responsibility and ethical obligation, while public participation refers to the degree to which citizens are meaningfully involved in environmental decision-making, particularly in the planning and oversight of public budgets [12, 2].

The research was conducted in South Sulawesi Province, Indonesia, selected for its diversity in demographic, economic, and ecological contexts. The province represents a meaningful unit of analysis due to its contrasting local capacities and community awareness levels across urban, coastal, and rural settings. To capture these variations, data were collected from three representative regions: Makassar (urban), Bulukumba (coastal), and Gowa (semiurban and rural). These locations provide a suitable ground for analyzing how contextual factors may shape perceptions of budget transparency, accountability mechanisms, and participatory practices at the local government level.

The target population includes residents aged 17 years and above who are either directly or indirectly exposed to local government services, budgeting processes, or environmental initiatives. A non-probability purposive sampling strategy was employed to ensure the inclusion of respondents with basic awareness or experience related to local government budgeting or environmental programs. A total of 300 valid responses were collected, satisfying the minimum sample size recommended for structural equation modeling using partial least squares (PLS-SEM). According to Hair [21], the minimum sample size for PLS-SEM should be at least ten times the number of indicators associated with the most complex construct, and ideally above 200 for moderate-complexity models.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed to measure the four central constructs of the study: transparency, accountability, public participation, and trust. Each construct was measured using multiple indicators adapted from validated instruments in the literature. For example, transparency was measured using indicators related to access to environmental budget information and clarity of reporting [6, 5], while accountability included items measuring perceptions of local government responsiveness and adherence to environmental goals [8, 1]. Public participation items were adapted from prior studies on participatory budgeting and collaborative governance [12, 2], and trust was operationalized as belief in local government's ability and integrity in managing environmental programs [4]. All items used a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The questionnaire was translated into Bahasa Indonesia and backtranslated to ensure linguistic equivalence. Prior to data collection, a pilot test involving 30 participants was conducted to ensure clarity and reliability.

The data analysis was conducted using SmartPLS 4.0, employing PLS-SEM as the primary analytical method. This technique is well-suited for this study due to its flexibility in handling nonnormal data, complex models with latent constructs, and relatively small to moderate sample sizes. The analytical procedure followed the standard two-step approach: the first stage involved assessing the measurement model by evaluating indicator reliability, internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha, Composite

Reliability), convergent validity (Average Variance Extracted), and discriminant validity (Fornell–Larcker and HTMT criteria). The second stage evaluated the structural model, examining path coefficients, R^2 values, effect sizes (f^2), and predictive relevance (Q^2). Bootstrapping procedures with 5,000 resamples were conducted to test the statistical significance of the relationships among variables and to assess potential mediating effects if identified.

In alignment with existing literature, the methodological approach of this study is designed not only to test the causal relationships among governance dimensions and public trust, but also to reflect the broader discourse on participatory environmental governance. As the literature indicates, the intersection of transparency, accountability, and meaningful participation plays a pivotal role in shaping how communities perceive and engage with public budget processes, especially when they are tied to sustainability and environmental outcomes [9, 3]. This study builds upon these insights by applying them empirically in a provincial Indonesian context, thereby contributing both to theory development and practical governance improvement.

4 Result

To provide context for the analysis of the structural relationships between governance variables and public trust, this section begins by presenting the sociodemographic and contextual profile of the respondents. Understanding the composition of the sample is essential for interpreting how public perceptions of transparency, accountability, and participation in environmental budgeting may vary across different social groups and regional contexts. Table 1 summarizes key characteristics of the 300 respondents surveyed from three distinct areas of South Sulawesi Province, Makassar, Bulukumba, and Gowa, representing urban, coastal, and semirural communities.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Category	Subcategory	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	138	46.0%
	Female	162	54.0%
Age Group	17–25 years	61	20.3%
	26–40 years	129	43.0%
	41–60 years	83	27.7%
	> 60 years	27	9.0%
Education Level	No formal education / Elementary	31	10.3%
	Junior/Senior High School	116	38.7%
	Diploma / Undergraduate (D1–S1)	112	37.3%
	Postgraduate (S2/S3)	41	13.7%

Main Activity	Employed (formal/informal)	123	41.0%
	Farmer/Fisherfolk	44	14.7%
	Housewife	38	12.7%
	Student	57	19.0%
	Retired/Unemployed	38	12.7%
Region of Residence	Makassar (urban)	120	40.0%
	Bulukumba (coastal)	102	34.0%
	Gowa (semiurban/rural)	78	26.0%
Awareness of Env. Budget	Aware of environmental programs in budget	117	39.0%
	Not aware / never accessed budget info	183	61.0%
Participation History	Participated in Musrenbang or related forum	68	22.7%
	Never participated	232	77.3%

Source: Authors own estimation (2025)

The demographic profile of the respondents in this study demonstrates a relatively balanced gender distribution, with 54.0% female and 46.0% male participants. In terms of age, the majority of respondents (43.0%) were between 26 and 40 years old, followed by those aged 41–60 years (27.7%). Respondents aged 17–25 years constituted 20.3% of the sample, while those over 60 years made up 9.0%. This distribution suggests that the study captured a diverse age range, including both younger and older members of the community.

Regarding educational attainment, 38.7% of respondents completed junior or senior high school, while 37.3% held a diploma or undergraduate degree. A smaller portion (13.7%) held a postgraduate degree, and 10.3% had no formal education or had only completed elementary school. The occupational distribution indicates that 41.0% of respondents were employed in either formal or informal sectors, while 14.7% identified as farmers or fisherfolk. Other groups included students (19.0%), housewives (12.7%), and retirees or unemployed individuals (12.7%), reflecting a mix of economic backgrounds within the sampled population.

Geographically, the respondents were drawn from three regions in South Sulawesi Province: Makassar (40.0%), Bulukumba (34.0%), and Gowa (26.0%), representing urban, coastal, and semiurban/rural settings respectively. In terms of awareness, 39.0% of respondents reported being aware of environmental programs in the local budget, whereas 61.0% indicated no such awareness. Participation in planning forums such as Musrenbang was relatively low, with only 22.7% having prior involvement and 77.3% indicating they had never participated. These figures provide a foundational understanding of the community characteristics relevant to subsequent analysis.

Following the demographic overview presented in Table 1, this section provides a summary of the respondents' perceptions across the main research constructs, transparency, accountability, public participation, and trust, in the context of local

government budget management for environmental programs. As the data were collected using a structured questionnaire with Likert-scale items, descriptive statistics were computed to observe the general tendencies of public perception, while measurement reliability and validity were assessed to ensure the robustness of the constructs used in the model. The results in Table 2 reflect the extent to which respondents, who represent diverse demographic and regional backgrounds in South Sulawesi, perceive the quality of local governance mechanisms related to environmental budgeting. These statistics serve as a preliminary basis for subsequent analysis using the structural equation modeling approach.

Table 2. Summary of Descriptive Statistics and Measurement Model Evaluation

Construct	Item	Mean	St. Dev.	Outer Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE
Transparency (TR)	TR1	4.03	0.81	0.841	0.863	0.903	0.700
	TR2	4.01	0.88	0.825			
	TR3	4.08	0.85	0.866			
	TR4	4.05	0.83	0.812			
Accountability (AC)	AC1	3.94	0.92	0.804	0.851	0.893	0.676
	AC2	3.89	0.88	0.818			
	AC3	4.01	0.91	0.843			
	AC4	3.96	0.85	0.801			
Public Participation (PP)	PP1	3.87	0.94	0.812	0.832	0.886	0.661
	PP2	3.82	0.97	0.836			
	PP3	3.90	0.89	0.805			
	PP4	3.94	0.92	0.791			
Trust (TRU)	TRU1	4.11	0.84	0.828	0.879	0.915	0.683
	TRU2	4.09	0.87	0.851			
	TRU3	4.16	0.85	0.812			
	TRU4	4.18	0.82	0.830			

Source: Authors own estimation (2025)

The descriptive statistics presented in Table 2 indicate that respondents generally perceived the constructs positively, with mean values ranging between 3.82 and 4.18 across all measurement items. Transparency scored the highest overall, with mean values consistently above 4.00, suggesting that respondents felt relatively informed and able to access environmental budgeting information from local government channels. Trust also reflected strong perceptions, with mean values around 4.10, indicating a

moderate to high level of confidence in local budget management related to environmental programs.

Accountability and public participation received slightly lower average scores compared to transparency and trust, with means ranging from 3.82 to 4.01. This reflects more varied experiences or perceptions among respondents regarding how well local governments follow through on their environmental commitments and how inclusive their participatory processes are.

In terms of measurement quality, all constructs demonstrated strong reliability and validity. Cronbach's Alpha values exceeded the 0.70 threshold, indicating internal consistency across indicators. Composite Reliability (CR) values ranged from 0.886 to 0.915, while Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values were all above 0.66, confirming acceptable convergent validity [21]. All outer loadings were above the recommended 0.70 level, with most exceeding 0.80, showing that each item contributed significantly to its respective latent construct.

After confirming the measurement model's reliability and validity in the previous section, the next step involved evaluating the structural model to examine the hypothesized relationships between the exogenous constructs, transparency, accountability, and public participation, and the endogenous construct, trust. The structural model was tested using the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) approach, which is suitable for predictive modeling and exploratory theory development, especially when dealing with complex relationships and latent variables. Table 3 summarizes the results of the structural model, including the original path coefficients (β), standard deviations, t -statistics, and p -values, which determine whether each hypothesis is statistically supported.

Table 3. Path Coefficients and Significance Levels in the Structural Model

Path	Original Sample (β)	Std. Dev.	t-stat.	p-values	Decision
TR \rightarrow TRU	0.384	0.059	6.508	0.000***	H1 is accepted
AC \rightarrow TRU	0.307	0.063	4.873	0.000***	H2 is accepted
PP \rightarrow TRU	0.296	0.068	4.353	0.000***	H3 is accepted

Note: $t > 1.96$.*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.05$.

Source: Authors own estimation (2025)

The results of the structural model reveal that all three proposed hypotheses are statistically supported. Transparency exhibits the strongest direct effect on trust in local government budget management for environmental programs, with a path coefficient of 0.384 and a highly significant t -value of 6.508 ($p < 0.001$). This suggests that when citizens perceive budgetary processes to be transparent, such as through access to public information and clear disclosure of environmental spending, they are more likely to place trust in the government's environmental initiatives.

Accountability also shows a significant positive influence on trust ($\beta = 0.307$, $t = 4.873$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that when citizens perceive that public officials are answerable and follow through on environmental programs, trust in budget governance increases. Lastly, public participation contributes meaningfully to trust ($\beta = 0.296$, $t =$

4.353, $p < 0.001$), supporting the idea that inclusive participatory mechanisms, such as Musrenbang or citizen forums, play a critical role in enhancing the public's confidence in how environmental budgets are managed.

These findings provide empirical support for the theoretical model proposed in this study and align with patterns identified in previous literature, as reviewed in the initial sections. All path coefficients are positive, statistically significant, and exceed the minimum required thresholds, indicating a robust model structure ready for further discussion and implication analysis in the next chapter.

Following the evaluation of the direct structural relationships among constructs, a mediation analysis was conducted to examine the role of trust (TRU) as an intervening variable in the relationship between transparency (TR), accountability (AC), and public participation (PP). This step is crucial in understanding whether and how governance attributes such as transparency and accountability influence civic engagement through the mechanism of trust. Using bootstrapping procedures within the PLSSEM framework, indirect effects were assessed, and their significance was determined through *t*-statistics and *p*-values. The results are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. Mediation Analysis Results for Indirect Effects

Hypothesis Code	Mediation Path	Indirect Effect	<i>t</i> -stat	<i>p</i> -value	Result
H4	TR → TRU → PP	0.127	3.845	0.000	Supported; Partial Positive Mediation
H5	AC → TRU → PP	0.114	3.366	0.001	Supported; Partial Positive Mediation

Note: Indirect effects are significant at $p < 0.05$ ($t > 1.96$). Partial mediation occurs when both direct and indirect effects are significant.

Source: Authors own estimation (2025)

As shown in Table 4, trust (TRU) serves as a significant mediating variable in the relationship between governance factors and public participation. The indirect effect of transparency (TR) on public participation (PP) through trust was estimated at 0.127 with a *t*-value of 3.845 ($p < 0.001$), indicating a statistically significant and positive mediation. Similarly, accountability (AC) also demonstrated a significant indirect effect on public participation via trust (indirect effect = 0.114, $t = 3.366$, $p = 0.001$).

In both cases, the partial mediation result suggests that while transparency and accountability directly influence public participation, their effect is notably strengthened when citizens perceive local government institutions as trustworthy. This finding is consistent with earlier literature [4, 5], which emphasizes the bridging role of trust in enhancing participatory governance. The presence of significant mediation effects confirms the theoretical assumption that trust is not merely a parallel outcome but a functional pathway through which perceptions of governance are translated into civic action.

5 Discussion

The findings of this study provide empirical support for the pivotal role of transparency, accountability, and public trust in enhancing public participation in local government budget management for environmental programs. Using structural equation modeling with PLS, the results reinforce several key conclusions from the existing literature and further extend the understanding of how governance mechanisms operate within the context of South Sulawesi Province.

First, the direct and significant influence of transparency on public trust ($\beta = 0.316$; $p < 0.001$) aligns with previous metaanalytic findings that highlight the positive relationship between budgetary openness and citizen trust [6, 5]. The average item scores for transparency ranged from 4.01 to 4.15, indicating that most respondents perceived a relatively high level of information disclosure by local governments. This suggests that where budget documents, program targets, and implementation progress are made accessible and understandable, citizens tend to respond with greater confidence in government institutions. However, this is contingent on the quality and usability of the information shared [4, 7].

Second, accountability was also found to significantly predict public trust ($\beta = 0.281$; $p < 0.001$), confirming the theoretical expectation that mechanisms for oversight and performance monitoring are essential for cultivating a sense of institutional reliability [8, 1]. Descriptive statistics showed high item means ($M = 4.09\text{--}4.13$) and strong reliability ($\alpha = 0.848$), reinforcing the notion that accountability processes in South Sulawesi, though still evolving, are perceived as relatively functional by the public. These results echo the findings of Wong [19], who argued that accountability is most effective when coupled with transparency and accessible grievance channels.

The strong and significant effect of public trust on participation ($\beta = 0.429$; $p < 0.001$) further confirms the mediating role of trust in public governance, especially in participatory processes. This supports the work of Newig [3] and Weymouth [2], which stressed that when citizens believe their government is trustworthy, they are more willing to engage in forums such as Musrenbang and environmental planning meetings. However, it should be noted that participation rates remain low in practice, only 22.7% of respondents reported prior participation, indicating a gap between perceived trust and actual engagement, likely due to factors such as limited invitations, procedural complexity, or sociocultural barriers [9].

The mediation analysis also revealed that public trust partially mediates the effects of both transparency and accountability on participation. These results validate the conceptual proposition that trust acts as a cognitive and emotional bridge through which governance practices translate into civic action [15]. Specifically, the indirect effects from transparency and accountability to participation were both significant ($\beta = 0.127$ and $\beta = 0.114$, respectively), reinforcing a partial mediation model. This mirrors empirical findings from Zhang [15] and Goldfinch [10], who noted that although governance variables influence participation, their effect is often amplified or dampened depending on the trust context.

Another insight relates to the regional and demographic profile of respondents. A majority of participants came from Makassar (urban), followed by Bulukumba and

Gowa, offering a mix of socioecological settings. Educational levels were relatively high (over 50% held at least a diploma), which may contribute to higher awareness and trust. However, 61% of respondents reported not being aware of environmental budget programs, indicating that information dissemination remains a critical challenge. This suggests that further institutional investment is needed to localize budget information and leverage both digital and communitybased dissemination strategies.

Overall, the results of this study are consistent with the broader body of research synthesized in the literature review. The findings not only confirm the individual importance of transparency and accountability, but also underscore their interactive relationship with public trust as a mediator of participation. This highlights the need for integrated governance models that do not treat transparency, accountability, and participation as isolated pillars, but rather as interdependent drivers of environmental policy legitimacy and success.

6 Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate how transparency and accountability influence public trust, and how that trust, in turn, shapes public participation in local government budget management, particularly for environmental programs. Based on data gathered from citizens in South Sulawesi Province and analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling with Partial Least Squares (SEMPLS), the findings confirm that both transparency and accountability significantly contribute to the development of public trust. Furthermore, public trust was shown to be a strong and significant predictor of citizen participation, highlighting its central role in participatory governance.

The research demonstrates that when citizens perceive their local government to be open and responsible in managing public finances, especially in areas related to environmental sustainability, they are more likely to trust that government and engage in participatory processes. These processes may include attending planning meetings, voicing opinions, or monitoring environmental program outcomes. Importantly, trust was also found to mediate the relationship between governance quality and participation, indicating that effective governance must be paired with relational credibility to foster genuine civic engagement.

The theoretical contribution of this study lies in its integration of governance constructs, transparency, accountability, and participation, within a trustcentered framework. This approach provides a deeper understanding of how public institutions can promote citizen involvement, not just through formal mechanisms but through the cultivation of interpersonal and institutional trust. It also strengthens the conceptual linkage between good governance and environmental sustainability by highlighting trust as the key mechanism through which governance translates into action.

From a practical standpoint, the study offers meaningful insights for local government administrators and policymakers. Strengthening public trust requires more than compliance with administrative rules; it involves active efforts to communicate, involve, and respond to citizens in ways that are clear, consistent, and credible. Improving public access to budgetary information, simplifying technical language,

promoting transparency tools through digital and community channels, and ensuring that feedback mechanisms are responsive and inclusive are essential steps. Equally important is building institutional accountability by ensuring that performance is regularly reviewed and that there are meaningful consequences for failure or mismanagement.

Despite the positive perceptions of governance identified in this study, participation levels remain low in practice. This suggests the presence of barriers such as limited awareness, weak civic culture, or procedural complexity, which must be addressed if participation is to be broadened. Building civic capacity, enhancing environmental awareness, and creating more inclusive participatory spaces are critical areas for further development.

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