

# *Cultural Barriers in Involving Children in Development Planning*

## *---The Case of Surakarta Children Forum*

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**Abstract**—Convention on Children Right mandates that children voice should be accommodated in development plan. In 2016, 52 Children Forums have been established in Surakarta City serving as a child participation medium, but in reality Children Forum has not been fully involved in Deliberation of Development Planning. This research wanted to find out the factors inhibiting child participation in development planning. This study was a qualitative research. Informants were selected purposively consisting of the Surakarta Regional Development Planning Board and the Agency for Community Empowerment, Women and Child Protection; builders of Children Forum; as well as the members of the Children Forum. Data analysis using interactive model of analysis encompassing : data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The result of research found that Children Forum was involved in development planning at village level only not at City level. The voice of Children Forum has not been realized into pro-children program. It was because of internal condition such as children's low awareness of their rights, low communication and decision making abilities, and less self-confidence. External condition resulted in it as well, cultural values establishing adults (parents, community and local government apparatus)'s point of view about the importance of children participation in development.

**Keywords**—*Children participation; Children Forum; Development Planning; Cultural values*

### I. INTRODUCTION

Children participation in development is a process of dialog and information sharing between children and adults to make decision related to children need and importance, in which children are positioned equally and appreciated for their opinion and aspiration. Children participation in development planning will give the children an opportunity of influencing public policy pertaining to their interest and rights (Hart, 1992) [1] ; Convention on Children Rights of 2009 [2]).

Recalling the importance of children participation, Surakarta City Government released Mayor's Regulation Number 18-A of 2012 [3] stating that Children Forum is an element of community involved in Deliberation of Development Planning. Deliberation of Development Planning (Musyawarah Perencanaan Pembangunan thereafter called Musrenbang) is a forum of development stakeholders in the attempt of developing local development plan.

Surakarta City Government's policy involving Children Forum in development planning process is a breakthrough in the public policy formulating mechanism.

Regarding the existence of Children Forum in Surakarta City, the result of Yuliani, Sudaryanti and Hadi's [4] studies found that the existence of Children Forum in Surakarta City can be stated as less effective, because their establishment since 2008, there are only few Children Forums are involved actively in all stages of Development Planning until 2015. Participation of Children Forum is still limited to Musrenbang at kelurahan (village) level. Budget plan and allocation had not fully accommodated yet the aspiration the children deliver in Musrenbang. Development program for children is largely the activities formulated in adults (parents, community, and local government apparatus)'s perspective of interest. It proves that children participation in development has not been an actually active participation yet.

Horelli et al. 1998; Chawla 1999; 2002; Driskell 2002 (in Sotkasiira, Haikkola dan Horelli: 2010) [5] found that scarce youngster participation is the one growing itself. Children Participation needs intellectual, emotional and social structure resources enabling them to be involved in adult world to make their participation effective. In practice, only very few youngsters have sufficient resource and skill to influence their surrounding environment.

Considering the problems above, this study wants to find out what cultural values inhibit the Children Forum to participate actively in Deliberation of Development Planning in Surakarta City.

### II. METHODS

This research was a qualitative descriptive research. Informants were selected purposively consisting of the Surakarta Regional Development Planning Board, the Agency for Community Empowerment, Women and Child Protection; builders of Children Forum; and children who are members of the Children Forum. This study also utilized secondary data source deriving from documents, archives, government regulations and data obtained from newspapers, magazines, and internet-related research themes. Data collection was carried out using observation, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) methods. Data analysis was carried

out using an interactive model including three components: data reduction, data presentation, drawing conclusions [6].

### III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

#### A. Participation of Surakarta Children Forum in Development Planning

Surakarta Children Forum is an organization of young people set up by the Government of Surakarta as a medium of conveying children aspirations and participation, particularly in urban development planning deliberation or *Musyawarah Perencanaan Pembangunan*. *Musyawarah Perencanaan Pembangunan* (Musrenbang) is a forum of actors to construct annual planning and budgeting of national and regional development. The development of Children Forum in Surakarta began around 2008. Until 2015, 51 Children Forums have been established at village levels, one (1) at district level, and one (1) at municipal level.

Yuliani, Haryanti and Humsona [7] found that children's participation in deliberation of Development Planning is still limited to the formation of the medium only, not to the substance of the children involvement in determining the pro-child development programs. The factors contributing to lower participation in the Children Forum in Musrenbang are : 1) children are less self-confident; 2) urban government bureaucracy still finds the establishment of Children Forum serving limited to be precondition, legitimacy or formalization for complying with rule demand, rather than for meeting the substantial function of children forum; 3) Less political support because Legislative Local Assembly (DPRD) has not considered yet the importance of children participation in development plan, DPRD's focus on physical or infrastructure construction only; and 4) most builders are old, preoccupied with their own affairs, and understand child world less competently.

#### B. The Cultural Barriers

Yuliani, Haryanti and Humsona [7] identified some constraints with the development of a model of children participation in development based on children right fulfillment values. The constraints derived from internal condition including children's low awareness of their rights, low communication and decision making abilities, and less self-confidence. External condition resulting in it is among other Eastern (particularly Javanese) cultural values establishing adults' point of view about the importance and the manifestation of children participation in development that in turn will influence children profile and character.

Cultural value factor becomes a main inhibitor. Javanese cultural value considers the male adults' position high as patron. Family head and male adult figure should be respected. In *serat Wulangreh* by Paku Buwono IV [8], there are five individuals to be respected obligatorily: (a) parents or fathers and mothers, (b) parents in law, (c) eldest brother, (d) teacher, (e) king. Children are obligatorily subjected to any decision or rule the parents make. Such norm makes children having no bravery to express their wish and even to criticize their parents' decision because it is considered as not proper or modest [9].

It is also true for the position of children in development planning discussion. David Alfian, the builder of Children Forum for Kelurahan Jajar mentions that the inhibitor of Children Forum's active participation in Musrenbang is that children have not understood completely yet the function and the role of Children Forum related to children's right in development plan (interview on April 16, 2015). It is because democratic value in relation to children and parents is not internalized since they were child, in either family or community environment. In Javanese culture, children are not considered as independent individual entitled to express his/her aspiration and interest. The importance of children is represented or decided by parents' perspective. As a result, in development planning discussion, children are less self confident or not dare to express their aspiration. Their voice is defeated with adults' (interview with Dwi Firman, Builder of Children Forum for Kelurahan Gilingan 9-4-2015). Tias, the head of Children Forum for Kelurahan Gilingan, confirmed her statement: "Our voice is usually defeated with adults', and young child's voice is like considered inadequately" (Interview on April 9, 2015).

Matthew and Kirby and Bryson in Cavet and Sloper [10] argued that adults' less confidence in children's ability makes the program "adult focus". As a result, more agendas and processes of program implementation are controlled by adults and parents. Matthews found that non-participatory culture is still very strong and there is "invisible network" or a kind of control by adults making the children's thought and decision not taken into account. Percy-Smith mentioned that the inhibitor of children participation is the presence of social-economic power limiting children participation in development planning, for example the difficulty relation to local government and the failure to unite diverse voices (in Cavet dan Sloper [10]). For that reason, according to Shier (in Thomas) [11] the form of active participation may occur only when adults want to share their power by means of delegating or transfer some of their power to children.

### IV. CONCLUSION

A Children Forum established by Surakarta City Government is still limited to a media of expressing children's aspiration, but has not ensured yet that the children's voice is actually accommodated in development planning. The elimination of children's ideas from Musrenbang and budget allocation and program implementation prioritized to adults' needs are evidences that pro-child development policy has not been a mainstream yet in Surakarta City Government's environment. Stakeholders (adults occupying in government position, parents, teachers, and community)' reluctance to receiving or accommodating children's ideas, thoughts or opinion proves that development plan is still oriented to adult interest perspective. It occurs because Javanese cultural value respects highly parent figure and children are not positioned as an independent individual with capacity of making public decision.

To develop children participation in development planning, a foundation should be established, namely socialization and internalization of democratic value to enable the children expressing their aspiration in development planning forum,

and it can be achieved only when there is an attempt of making the stakeholders (particularly parents, civil people [school, Children Forum Builder, mass organization, and non-government organization/NGO] and state [related SKPD]) aware of children participation. For that reason, the measures to be taken are to make parents or stakeholders aware of the importance of right in development plan and to develop a child-friendly participation method or approach.

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