Participatory planning practice in rural Indonesia: A sustainable development goals-based evaluation

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ABSTRACT
When evaluating the practices of public participation, one should understand how the participatory process is conceived and implemented. Although many studies have been conducted in this regard, there is hardly a study that used Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as the basis for evaluation. In this study, we examine the participatory process of a public participation practice in Indonesia, called Musrenbang, at the village level, applying an SDGs’ based assessment. Using the case of the Deli Serdang district, we investigate the participatory process based on SDG indicators 11.3.2 and 16.7.2, applying a set of criteria suggested by various scholars. The results show a misalignment between the Musrenbang practice and the evaluation criteria due to key problems such as planning schedules that do not meet regulations, lack of knowledge integration and learning processes, as well as power struggles amongst stakeholders.

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Introduction
Public participation has become the central issue of urban planning in recent decades as a response to the inefficiency of dominant top-down models and expert-driven approaches in planning practices (Tandon, 2008). The term refers to various activities that denote peoples’ involvement in the planning and administrative process to influence policies and actions (Cornwall, 2008). It has been practiced in many countries as a prerequisite for successful decentralization, democracy, and good governance (Fung, 2015; Tandon, 2008).

Manifold studies have discussed the goals and benefits of public participation (Arnstein, 1969; Innes & Booher, 1999), the utilization of different approaches or methods (Chambers, 1981, 1994; Healey, 1998), and the factors that influence the success of public participation (Beierle & Konisky, 2000; Irvin & Stansbury, 2004). However, little attention has been given to the field of participation evaluation. Laurian and Shaw (2008) noticed these gaps and argued that planning practitioners and academics need firm definitions, criteria, and methods to evaluate public participation practices. Moreover, the limited literature on public participation evaluation makes it difficult to determine the evaluation methods that fit the specific context of public participation practice.

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The idea of public participation has received enormous attention through Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which were published by the United Nations (UN) in 2015 (Ludwig, 2017). Furthermore, two indicators put notions on public participation. Indicator 11.3.2 targets the proportion of cities with a direct participation structure within civil society, while indicator 16.7.2 targets a proper proportion of the population to be actively involved in decision-making processes (UN, 2017). Both indicators are still in Tier III, which indicates that the settled concept, methodology, and standards of the indicators are not yet available (UN Statistics Division, 2018). Achieving these SDGs by 2030 requires immediate operationalization. Thus, conceptualizing indicators into a more reliable and operational evaluation framework is crucial. It would provide guidelines for many nations to achieve sound public participation in their countries. Furthermore, it would help them to evaluate their public participation practices in achieving SDGs.

Therefore, in this article, we aim to develop a framework of public participation evaluation based on indicators 11.3.2 and 16.7.2 of the SDGs. The framework is built upon our understanding of SDGs’ discourses and the existing evaluation criteria developed by various scholars. Then, we used the framework to evaluate an annual public participatory planning practice in Indonesia, called *Musrenbang*, as the case study. The case study provides evidence of how well the SDGs evaluation framework could measure the success or failure of participatory processes in *Musrenbang*.

### Public participation process evaluation framework

**Relevance and limitations of public participation**

Despite the rapid innovation of participatory methods to engage citizens in the governance process, the dominant form of public participation is commonly exercised through public meetings or public hearings (Fung, 2015; UN-Desa, 2018). This method is useful to disseminate information to large audiences while providing a forum for people to raise their opinions or concerns (Videira, Antunes, Santos, & Lobo, 2006).

Nonetheless, public meetings can also have limitations. A public meeting can cause conflict among participants or reach a deadlock when discussing contentious issues (Videira et al., 2006), while an inadequate deliberative process hinders a collaborative dialogue among stakeholders, making their participation less intensive (Mostert, 2003; Rowe & Frewer, 2005). Furthermore, stakeholders who have more time, better resources, or positions than the broader population often have the opportunity to dominate the participatory process rather than the disadvantaged groups who have a lack of power or the necessary verbal skills to express their opinions (Fung, 2015). Many governments have adopted policies to increase the participation of marginalized groups, such as women, children, people with disabilities, and those working in the informal sectors (Feruglio & Rifai, 2017). However, power relations within these communities usually become the main impediment for them to participate (Mosedale, 2005). The citizens’ voices are considered merely as non-mandatory advice for the government’s development proposals, while their participation is like a rubber stamp to fulfil the requirement of a participatory process (Antlöv, 2003; Fung, 2015; Sutiyo, 2013).

This same situation has also taken place during the *Musrenbang* process, as it is implemented through public meetings. Studies have revealed that the *Musrenbang* is poorly implemented and is similar to a ceremonial meeting (Sopanah, 2012). Thus, the
role of the Musrenbang tends to be limited to only administrative purposes to produce plan documents at the expense of the quality of the process and outcomes of the discussions (Aswad, Heywood, & Susilawati, 2012). Furthermore, in 2008, Indonesia passed the law 10/2008, which regulates a 30 percent quota for women to participate in political activities; however, women are still not fully involved in decision-making processes due to strong patriarchal values within society (Rhoads, 2012). Therefore, unequal power relations exist, as the decisions are mainly made by certain actors who have more power and influence among those in society (Grillos, 2017).

**Evaluation criteria and framework**

Due to the limitations of public participation practices, evaluating the participatory process is necessary to improve its practice (Chess, 2000). As such, the evaluation needs a robust framework that meets the specific goals, purposes, and local context of the participatory practice (Asthana, Richardson, & Halliday, 2002; Fung, 2015; Laurian & Shaw, 2008).

SDGs, as a global agenda, have had significant influences in steering global policies and actions in public participation practices (Tebbutt et al., 2016). Therefore, developing an SDGs’ evaluation framework is relevant to provide a solid basis in participatory theory and practice.

From 232 indicators in the SDGs framework, there are two indicators (11.3.2 and 16.7.2) that offer the notion of how public participation should be applied. As can be seen in Table 1, public participation should be implemented regularly and democratically, as well as in an inclusive and responsive manner (UN-Desa, 2018).

| Targets | Indicators | Tier |
|---------|------------|------|
| **11. Sustainable Cities and Communities** | 11.3.2 Proportion of cities with a direct participation structure of civil society in urban planning and management that operate regularly and democratically | Tier III |
| 11.3 By 2030, enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanization and capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management in all countries | 11.7.2 Proportion of population who believe decision-making is inclusive and responsive, by sex, age, disability, and population group | Tier III |
| **16. Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions** | 16.7 Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels | |

Hák, Janoušková, and Moldan (2016) argued that the experts working on the SDG indicator selection should use relevant science or evidence-based knowledge within a robust conceptual framework to prevent irrelevant or ambiguous criteria. Elder, Bengtsson, and Akenji (2016) suggested that one should think about goals as a means when conceptualizing SDGs. Thus, we argue that making use of the criteria in the existing evaluation framework could provide a more operational evaluation framework of SDG indicators 11.3.2 and 16.7.2 that reflects upon the importance of SDGs in public participation discourses.

Generally, scholars divide the public participation evaluation framework into two main criteria: those criteria that relate to the process of participation (Abelson et al., 2003; Beierle, 2002; Innes & Booher, 1999) and those that relate to the outcome of the process.
(Rowe, Marsh, & Frewer, 2004; Webler, Tuler, & Krueger, 2001). For developing the framework, we chose fifteen criteria based on the goals, purposes, and local context of the Musrenbang practice (see Appendix A).

Thus, we developed the SDGs based evaluation framework by classifying the notions from indicators 11.3.2 (regularly, democratically) and 16.7.2 (inclusive, responsive) into three central themes: regular, democratic/inclusive, and responsive. We added social learning as the fourth theme since the learning process is also an essential factor to achieve SDGs (UN-Desa, 2018), as public participation practice commonly encourages learning experiences and knowledge exchange among participants (Shrestha, Flacke, Martinez, & van Maarseveen, 2018; Shrestha, Köckler, Flacke, Martinez, & van Maarseveen, 2017). Thereafter, we sorted various criteria from the existing evaluation framework into each theme.

The linkage of criteria from the existing framework and the four main themes conceptualize the SDG indicators (11.3.2 and 16.7.2) and facilitate the operationalization and assessment of public participation practices. The conceptual framework is summarized in Figure 1.

Figure 1. SDGs based assessment framework for public participation practice.
Research design and methods

The case study: The Musrenbang practice

Musrenbang is a participatory planning practice that provides a forum for citizens to participate in the development planning processes. According to Sutiyo (2013), after the Reformasi Movement in 1998, followed by the decentralization policy in 1999, there was a need to establish a development forum that involved the public in the planning and decision-making process. This idea was then applied by enacting the law 25/2004, which introduced Musrenbang as a form of public participatory planning and budgeting practice at different levels of government in Indonesia. As stated in the law, the Musrenbang process is executed annually in a public meeting format at each level of government structure, from the village (desa/kelurahan) level to the national (nasional) level. This study focuses on the annual Musrenbang at the village level as the first phase of the hierarchical planning stages in Indonesia, which provides more opportunities for citizens to participate in the processes.

At the village level, the annual Musrenbang is implemented through a public meeting that involves various stakeholders, from government officials, citizens, to other stakeholders, ranging from grass-roots organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community leaders, religious leaders, and private sectors. Two results are expected from the meeting: the village’s policies and plans for composing the village’s annual development planning document (called RKPDesa) and the village’s revenue and spending budget (APBDesa). The agreed upon development proposals are to be brought and discussed at a higher level at Musrenbang (Sopanah, 2012).

Study area

The study area is the Deli Serdang district in North Sumatra, Indonesia. The district covers an area of 2497.72 km², with a population of around 2,155,625 persons, and consists of twenty-two sub-districts and 394 villages (BPS, 2018). In 2013, the Ministry of National Planning awarded the Deli Serdang district the Anugerah Pangripta Nusantara award. This award is given to the best district in Indonesia that produces an outstanding and comprehensive local government work plan document (RKPD). Winning this award indicates that Deli Serdang has implemented an excellent participatory planning process from the village level to the district level. In this paper, we are aiming to understand how and why the implementation of Musrenbang in a district won such a prestigious national award.

To understand the participatory process of Musrenbang, we selected five villages according to the following criteria: (1) the village is located in different sub-districts; (2) the ethnicity of the population is primarily Javanese; (3) the primary livelihood of the population is farming and agriculture; (4) the village officials are willing to participate in this study. The villages where the Javanese ethnic population is dominant were chosen because the Javanese have a consensus-seeking tradition that profoundly influences decision-making and deliberative processes in Indonesia (Boyle, 1998). Therefore, we assume that the Musrenbang is implemented more successfully in the villages where the Javanese are the majority. Based on the criteria, we chose the Denai Lama, Kolam, Kramat Gajah, Sidoarjo I Pasar Miring, and Tandem Hulu II villages as the locations of the case study.
**Methods**

Data collection included direct observation, questionnaires, and semi-structured in-depth interviews. The data were collected from January to May 2018. Using the *participant as observer* role in the observation (Gold, 1958), the lead author made direct observations by attending the public meetings. The observations were written in field notes and recorded for further analysis.

For the questionnaire, we developed sixteen questions derived from the evaluation framework with five different responses (Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree). The questionnaire was created for anonymous responses, while the participants attending the *Musrenbang* (see profile in Appendix B) filled out the self-questionnaire forms (Appendix C). The responses from the questionnaires were then analyzed using descriptive frequency analysis.

We used semi-structured in-depth interviews to capture the perceptions of stakeholders about the implementation of the *Musrenbang* (see Appendix D1, D2). The respondents included village officials, village council (BPD), village community resilience board (LKMD), women representatives (PKK), youth representatives (Karang Taruna), community leaders or religious leaders, village supervisors, the sub-district officials, district officials, and district parliament members.

The lead author acted as the interviewer for the entire interview process. The interviews were conducted in Bahasa, Indonesia and recorded, while the responses were reviewed and cross-checked with stakeholders in other interview sessions to produce reliable and robust data (see Appendix E for detailed information about the interviewees). The interviewees’ names have been kept anonymous. For the analysis, we used qualitative content analysis to scrutinize 56 interviews. A coding strategy was employed as a means to use specific labels to categorize the interviewees’ responses. While we used an evaluation framework to decide coding themes, we also conducted open coding to ensure that the critical emerging aspects of the qualitative data were not missing. The responses from the interviews were sorted according to the framework outlined in sections using ATLAS.ti software.

For stakeholder analysis, we used the extended interest-influence matrix to analyze the levels of interest and influence. This method is useful and provides comprehensive reasons for the interest and influence owned by each stakeholder (Raum, 2018).

**Analysis and results**

**Stakeholder analysis**

Various stakeholders were involved in the *Musrenbang* process in Deli Serdang. We identified nineteen groups of stakeholders who directly or indirectly affected the participatory process in *Musrenbang* (see Appendix F for detail information). We classified them into four different groups:

1. **The upper government**, which includes the Regional Development Planning Agency (Bappeda), Village Citizen Empowerment Department (DPMD), District Council (DPRD), head of sub-district (Camat), and the sub-district office staff. They have significant influence but low interest toward the village *Musrenbang*. The village supervisor (PD) can also be put into this category. Even though they are not a government employee,
they work closely with the upper and village governments. In several villages, they play a significant role in connecting the upper government and the village government and have a significant influence on decision-making processes;

(2) **Village elites**, which include the village head, village secretary, Village Council (BPD), Village Empowerment Board (LKMD), and the head of the neighborhood. These positions are usually elected by the community and have strong influence and interest in the *Musrenbang* processes. Among them, the village head has the most considerable power in directing the meeting to attain his/her interests. Most of the decisions made also are derived from his/her final policies. However, the influence owned by BPD, LKMD, and the head of the neighborhood also requires significant bargaining power in determining the *Musrenbang* result. Thus, the group of village elites usually become the organizers, which enables them to prepare and set how the *Musrenbang* works;

(3) **Village elite’ supporters**, which include the village office staff, the women group (PKK), and the youth group (Karang Taruna). This group has a medium interest and influence on the process. They tend to have similar point of views with the village elites when discussing plans/programs. This group also has a close relationship with the village elites. The chairwoman of the PKK is the village head wife, while the committee usually consists of the wives of the village secretary, village staff, and head of neighborhoods. The youth group seems reluctant to care about *Musrenbang* discussion topics.

(4) **Community-based organizations/ordinary citizens**. This group has high interest but low influence; however, the people in this group are most affected by the policies decided at the *Musrenbang* meeting. Their attendance at the meeting is highly dependent more or less on the village elites, particularly the village head and village staff, who have full authority to decide who should or should not be invited to the meeting.

**Evaluation result**

Based on the evaluation framework, we have identified three main results that portray some gaps in the *Musrenbang* practice, including problems in abiding the laws, integrating/sharing knowledge, and managing power relations. The results also showed that the problems are interrelated.

*Musrenbang is implemented regularly, but not timely*

The *Musrenbang* was implemented in all five villages regularly, as it is obligatory, according to the laws. Interviewee F2, a district official, said that the *Musrenbang* became more popular after law 6/2014 was enacted. Before the law was published, many villages did not conduct the *Musrenbang*, albeit it is compulsory. The villagers consider *Musrenbang* to be a time-consuming procedure with less or no impact on the villages. However, law 6/2014 requires the upper government to decentralize the budgeting policy by allocating a village budget for each village annually and in turn, the village must conduct the *Musrenbang* to access and use the budget. Consequently, nowadays, the *Musrenbang* is conducted more regularly in villages (F2, personal communication, 26 March 2018).

Most interviewees expressed their confusion regarding the laws/regulations that should be followed. The village planning procedures in Indonesia are mainly regulated by two different laws (laws 25/2004 and laws 6/2014), which are published by two different
ministries. The Bappeda, as the responsible institution at the district level, published a guidebook about how the Musrenbang should be conducted. It was written based on law 25/2004 and its derivative regulations (F1, personal communication, 18 April 2018).

The guidebook mandated that the villages ensure that the programs listed in the RKPDesa/APBDesa (annual) documents correspond with the RPJMDesa (middle-term) document. One of our respondents stated, “New programs can be accepted. If there is a new program proposed, we can approve it. However, we have to revise our RPJMDesa” (E7, personal communication, 6 April 2018). This revision process takes time, as it requires the village to hold another Musrenbang with the RPJMDesa revision as the main agenda. For that reason, many village governments often bypass the procedures by only revising the programs without any RPJMDesa Musrenbang. Thus, they “fulfill” all of the administrative documents by creating fabricated meeting notes as if the revision had been through the RPJMDesa Musrenbang process.

Moreover, the differences among laws/regulations also affect the schedule. If we refer to Permendagri 114/2016, the village Musrenbang should be implemented from July to August. However, based on Permendagri 54/2010, which is referred to in Bappeda’s guidebook, it is implemented in January. This situation leads to delays in development implementation since APBDesa as the final product of the planning process is typically finalized in April or May. This means that the villagers only have six or seven months left to execute their development plans.

Similarly, delays are not only caused by planning processes, but also by the village government’s decision to submit their APBDesa late to the upper government for verification. They do this because villages who submit APBDesa early often become the object of prosecutors’ audits or gain NGOs/media attention (E4, personal communication, 6 April 2018). Thus, they tried to avoid such risks, although it causes delays in executing their plans.

Musrenbang is not effective in supporting knowledge integration and learning

From the participants’ profile (Appendix B), it is clear that the participants have diverse knowledge and backgrounds. Unfortunately, the Musrenbang does not support knowledge integration or exchange among participants. The questionnaire revealed that around 90% of the respondents from five villages indicated that they were unable to acquire knowledge and share their knowledge with other participants in the Musrenbang (Figure 2). The percentage consists of 116 out of 133 male respondents and 59 out of 61 female respondents (see profile in Appendix B).

Figure 2. Responses about knowledge sharing during the process.
From the interviews, we found that the interviewees recognized two types of knowledge owned by the stakeholders, namely explicit knowledge from formal education and tacit knowledge from daily practices or experiences. However, knowledge integration or knowledge sharing did not take place effectively in the Musrenbang. A community leader from Denai Lama stated, “It did not happen. If the format and setting of the meeting are monotonous, I think knowledge sharing is not going to happen” (A8, personal communication, 8 March 2018). The head of the LKMD also gave the same response: “There was no knowledge sharing at the Musrenbang. The knowledge sharing occurred in our daily interactions or activities, not in the Musrenbang. For example, we talked about how to get better crops in other places or other occasions. It is not possible to do it during the Musrenbang” (C3, personal communication, 7 March 2018). A village head said that different data standards and formats owned by each neighborhood also make it challenging to integrate the data into a uniform data format that can be read and discussed together as a group (A2, personal communication, 1 March 2018).

The previous result is aligned with the fact that more than half of the total respondents claimed that they have difficulties in defining their real needs and problems in a more comprehensive and integrated way (Figure 3). These answers were given by 66 out of 133 male respondents and 32 out of 61 female respondents (see profile in Appendix B). From the interviews, most interviewees responded that a lack of available data is one of the reasons why they are only able to see problems within their neighborhoods’ perspective, not in a broader context, such as problems that are affecting other neighborhoods or villages. A village head stated, “It would be helpful for participants in the discussion session if data were available for the participants so that they can see and give responses to issues beyond their neighborhoods” (A2, personal communication, 1 March 2018).

![Defining problems in a more comprehensive and integrated way](image)

**Figure 3.** Responses about defining problems.

Practically, the head of the neighborhood plays a significant role in data collection by listing problems and possible solutions. They collect data directly by site-visits but without any supporting data, such as maps, pictures, or statistical data, when determining problems and solutions.
However, there are some weaknesses in this site-visit primary data. Firstly, there is no standard for a data format, as well as the data being difficult to read and understand. Secondly, it is problematic to integrate the data among neighborhoods since each neighborhood has different methods for collecting and presenting the data. Thirdly, the data is only collected and used for a short-term period. Thus, there are no standard guidelines on how to use and manage data for long-term usage.

As a consequence of less knowledge sharing and a lack of data availability, the learning process in *Musrenbang* is also less effective. Figure 4 shows that the majority of the questionnaire respondents said that they learned nothing from other participants, including 121 out of 136 male participants and all (61 out of 61) of the female participants (see profile in Appendix B).

![Figure 4. Responses about learning experiences.](image)

It is also evident that it is not difficult to reach a consensus among *Musrenbang* participants. However, the process often unintentionally brought the participants to follow the mechanisms and accept every decision without arguing about it. As such, the village elites who have more power and influence can choose and make the final decisions; therefore, social learning did not occur during the deliberative processes of the *Musrenbang*.

**Power relations exist in the Musrenbang practice**

Regarding the deliberative process, around 61% of the total respondents expressed disagreement, which indicates that the deliberative process was excellent and was not dominated by individual stakeholders (Figure 5). Contrarily, around 34% of the respondents (mostly respondents with age 21–40 years old) showed agreement that certain elites occupied deliberative processes. Almost half of the respondents were aged 41–50 years old (see profile in Appendix B), and three-quarters of them disagreed that certain people dictated the discussions.
We found this to be contrary, as the deliberative process was dominated by the village elites. This group has more power and influence to control the topic of discussion, while citizen representatives had fewer opportunities to engage in the discussion. Furthermore, the classroom setting of the venue was a bit intimidating for participants. All village elites and honored guests sat in front of the participants with a comfortable chair and tables, accompanied with beverages and snacks (Figure 6), while participants sat only in a chair without a table and with modest snacks. A community leader stated, “The setting unintentionally directs the participants to behave well during the Musrenbang meeting” (A8, personal communication, 8 March 2018). This resulted in ordinary citizens, especially women, feeling less confident to articulate their needs and concerns. As seen in the participants’ profile in Appendix B, women’s participation is relatively high in two villages (Kramat Gajah and Sidoarjo I Pasar Miring) and considerably lower in the other three villages (less than 30%). However, a high proportion of women participants does not guarantee that the women are fully empowered during participatory processes, as they still feel shy or afraid to have a say at the meeting. When we asked a woman representative why no women expressed their ideas or opinions during the discussion, she said, “I was afraid. There were many people at the meeting. If we make mistakes when speaking, people might taunt us. I would feel shy and awkward” (A5, personal communication, 8 March 2018).

![Figure 6](image.png) Typical Musrenbang meeting at the village level using the classroom setting (source: author photo).
The decision-making process is also problematic. Due to village elites’ significant influence in the decision-making process, there is no guarantee that the programs proposed by participants will be adopted or prioritized, which was expressed by a community leader from the Kramat Gajah village (C7, personal communication, 7 March 2018). As regulated in the laws, each village must form a so-called “Team 11”, who is responsible for drafting the RKPDesa document. This team consists of eleven members, with a village head as the team supervisor, the village secretary as the team leader, the head of LKMD as the secretary, and team members from the village staff, community leaders, and citizen representatives. However, this structure clearly shows that Team 11 represents the village elites’ interests and influence, as this team has full authority to accept or reject the proposed programs based on their judgments. Consequently, the final decision in the Musrenbang still resides with the village elites. Nevertheless, since the list of programs produced by Team 11 were then discussed and decided by the whole of the participants at the Musrenbang, this explains why the majority of participants feel satisfied with the decision-making process at the Musrenbang, as they feel involved when deciding the list.

Regarding representativeness, if we compare the number of participants with the total population of the village, the representativeness is questionable. In Denai Lama, the percentage of Musrenbang participants to the total population is around 1,77%, Kolam 0,33%, Kramat Gajah 1,6%, Sidoarjo I Pasar Miring 1,34% and Tandem Hulu II 0,32%. However, there is no clear guidance about minimum attendees to ensure that the meeting is still considered legitimate, even though it was attended by a small proportion of the total village population. From this proportion, it was also found that the number of participants were less than expected and dominated mostly by the village elites and their supporters. A women representative said that the village head has the authority to select the participants of the meeting purposively. As such, he/she tends to invite people who have the same vision as him/her rather than people who oppose him/her (E3, personal communication, 2 May 2018). This situation explains why most respondents agreed with the statement that the participants had represented the whole society. The majority of respondents were pre-selected by the elites, so there is a significant possibility that they have the same views of the elites.

Our findings also show that some relevant stakeholders were intentionally left out, particularly, marginalized groups, such as the disabled and impoverished people in the community. This was exposed by a village supervisor (K2, personal communication, 5 April 2018). Another village supervisor (J2) also said that the village government did not invite disabled citizens because it might not be easy for disabled people to travel to the meeting venue. Furthermore, many facilities and transportation in most villages are not disability friendly, while poor citizens were also not invited due to unclear criteria and their lack of influence within society. Consequently, no one spoke on their behalf and in turn, the real needs of both groups were unintentionally neglected (J2, personal communication, 4 April 2018).

Discussion and conclusions

As a global framework, SDGs tend to have standardized targets and indicators. A solid understanding about a particular context of public participation practice is crucial to
translate the global targets or indicators into actual actions and interventions that offer real impacts to society (Howard & Wheeler, 2015). Thus, our evaluation framework provides a practical way of assessing SDG 11.3.2 and 16.7.2 achievement in a particular public participation practice.

The core findings of this study show that the participatory process of the village Musrenbang faces substantial challenges in practice to match with the SDG goals. All four evaluation themes of the SDGs based assessment framework (regularly, democratically/inclusive, responsive, and social learning) require further actions to achieve a sound public participation practice. Moreover, the implementation of the Musrenbang has severe problems in abiding by existing laws and regulations, supporting knowledge integration and learning processes, and minimizing power gaps among stakeholders. Even though Deli Serdang won the local government work plan in 2013, the implementation of the Musrenbang at the village level to some extent was not well executed. We observed that this happened because the criteria used for the award were different from the criteria of our SDGs framework.

The village Musrenbang has been implemented regularly, as the law obliges it. Law 6/2014 has provided a combination of better financial management systems, new institutional arrangements, and citizen empowerment at the village level (Antlöv, Wetterberg, & Dharmawan, 2016). However, the law might be useful in theory but not easy in implementation. Different laws that regulate the Musrenbang have caused confusion, resulting in delays in planning and carrying out development programs. These delays are not only caused by the contradictions among laws, but also by the willingness of the villages to apply planning procedures and submitting the results promptly. Therefore, the village governments need to be assured that their timely submission is appreciated and has no consequences toward the infringement of the law.

The participants also acknowledged that each participant has their own kind of knowledge, tacitly or explicitly; however, they felt that the Musrenbang was not a suitable place to exchange or integrate that knowledge. Moreover, the formal setting of the public meeting hindered lively discussions among participants, limiting knowledge integration and exchange. The situation was further aggravated due to limited time, strict schedules or agendas, as well as long speeches by honored guests, which unintentionally shaped the Musrenbang as a formal meeting to legalize the proposed development proposals.

This study also revealed that most of the participants agreed that data and information, such as planning area, population, facilities and infrastructure, budget availability and so forth, are essential to supporting participatory planning processes. They found it challenging to identify their common problems due to limited data availability, as the data collected by the head of the neighborhoods is often too local, with different standards and formats. Thus, the villagers found difficulties when compiling and using the data in an integrated way to support the planning process in the Musrenbang.

Lack of knowledge sharing and integration, as well as a lack of data, caused the learning process in the Musrenbang to be less effective. The majority of the respondents felt that they learned nothing new from the deliberative process. If we consider the Musrenbang as a regular participatory process prescribed by the laws, it is promising to serve as a social learning medium, leveling up the stakeholder’s interaction into a learning process (Aswad et al., 2012). A village supervisor stated, “Regarding social learning, I think that when people learn how to articulate their opinions, how to make other people hear
his opinions, that is a social learning process. It is created naturally through their participation at the Musrenbang” (K2, 5 April 2018). Understanding the levels of knowledge and utilizing the stakeholders’ knowledge will be necessary to improve the knowledge integration and learning process in the Musrenbang.

The implementation of the Musrenbang is also prone to power struggles. After the publication of law 6/2014, the village’s authority is becoming more substantial as the new laws decentralized the tasks to plan, execute, and monitor rural development for the village government (Sutiyo, 2013). The opportunities provided by the laws were used by the elites to control the entire participatory planning process in the Musrenbang. Among the four different stakeholder groups that we have identified, the domination of the village elites’ group is apparent to some extent. This group not only has the power to decide who should be invited to the meeting but also has considerable authority in decision-making processes. This situation is quite similar to the findings of the Musrenbang implementation in Solo, where elites have significant power to control final decisions (Grillos, 2017).

This finding contradicts the SDG indicators 11.3.2 and 16.7.2, which explicitly emphasize the proportion of people who are actively involved in participatory processes (UN Statistics Division, 2018). The involvement should also consider sex, age, disability, and population groups representing minorities. In other words, both indicators demand not only more people but also a diversity of people to participate in the process. In reality, only certain people were invited to the Musrenbang, and they were pre-selected by the village elites. Women representatives still cannot fully participate in the process, even though their participation is imposed by the laws, while marginalized groups, such as people with disabilities, have limited access and information to attend the meeting. New ways of thinking and applying the public participation practice, which can facilitate policy-making with local areas directly affected by the decisions made is necessary (Flacke & De Boer, 2017). The involvement of most affected groups, particularly the marginalized groups, in the participatory process is essential to give them more opportunities to sound their real needs and problems.

We also found that ordinary citizens did not find it convenient to articulate their views in front of the public. Thus, the head of neighborhood or community leaders usually represented them at the meeting. Similarly, it is not easy to facilitate a public meeting like the Musrenbang because the public meeting is considered low on the scale of public influence and empowerment (Fung, 2015). Furthermore, the classroom setting at the venue inevitably splits the participants into several groups, all with different powers and influences. The setting benefits the village elites and allows them to control the discussion topics and suggesting solutions while undermining new ideas or solutions coming from the participants. Most of the decisions are finalized by the village elites’ group through Team 11, who have full authority in deciding prioritized programs. All of these problems undermine the achievement of SDG indicators (11.3.2 and 16.7.2) since the participants have a lack of representativeness while the decision-making processes are still dominated by certain groups of stakeholders.

In conclusion, this study clearly shows that the SDG indicators (11.3.2 and 16.7.2) can be a starting point to provide a relevant framework to evaluate a current participatory planning practice. The developed framework is useful to find gaps in the Musrenbang practice at the village level and puts forth notions about aspects that need to be improved.
to enhance current practices. The critical question of whether the developed framework is applicable elsewhere always rests in where public participation takes place, as well as what the local context is. However, evaluating public participation is not a one-size-fits-all policy, but must deal with the particularities of local circumstances (Antlöv, 2003). Therefore, it is crucial to note that both SDG indicators require proper conceptualization and contextualization before conducting an evaluation. Conceptualization is essential for both indicators to be more tangible, understandable, and applicable, while contextualization is crucial to fit the context of the public participation practice being evaluated.

This study also revealed that proper knowledge and procedures are not available to achieve meaningful participation. Therefore, understanding the knowledge owned by stakeholders, providing a platform to integrate their knowledge, and supporting the learning methodology to enhance the stakeholders’ knowledge to be used in the planning process may become feasible solutions to improve current Musrenbang practices. As power relations, knowledge integration, and learning processes were some salient problems identified throughout this study, we suggest investigating these issues for further research so that the influence of these factors to improve the Musrenbang public participation practice can be further explored.

**Author contributions**

A.A., J.F., J.A.M.M. discussed the idea; A.A. undertook the fieldwork, analyzed the results and wrote the manuscript; A.A., J.F., J.A.M.M. contributed to the writing of this manuscript; M.F.A.M.v. M. reviewed this manuscript.

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