

The Role of Citizen Forums in Monitoring Public Services

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ABSTRACT

Pelayanan Publik merupakan suatu sistem, dalam arti forum warga atau masyarakat sebagai pemohon atau pengguna layanan harus diberikan akses yang seluas-luasnya berkaitan dengan proses pemecahan masalah dan pengambilan keputusan dalam penyelenggaraan pelayanan publik. Prinsip keterbukaan mempunyai peranan penting untuk terbangunnya pelayanan publik yang berkualitas. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode deskriptif. Pendekatan ini dipilih karena bertujuan memahami secara mendalam bagaimana forum warga berperan dalam melakukan pengawasan terhadap pelayanan publik, serta dinamika interaksi antara warga dan pemerintah dalam forum tersebut. Hasil penelitian telah menemukan bahwa Forum warga memiliki peran strategis dalam pengawasan pelayanan publik, yaitu sebagai wadah partisipasi masyarakat, mekanisme kontrol sosial, media dialog dan kolaborasi, serta pendorong transparansi dan akuntabilitas. Namun, keberhasilan forum warga sangat bergantung pada kapasitas warga, dukungan kebijakan pemerintah, serta kemauan politik aparat untuk

terbuka terhadap kritik dan masukan masyarakat

ABSTRACT

Public service is a system, meaning that citizen forums or the public as applicants or users of services must be given the broadest possible access to the problem-solving and decision-making processes in the provision of public services. The principle of openness plays a crucial role in establishing quality public services. This study uses a qualitative approach with descriptive methods. This approach was chosen because it aims to deeply understand how citizen forums play a role in overseeing public services, as well as the dynamics of interactions between citizens and the government within these forums. The research results have found that citizen forums have a strategic role in overseeing public services, namely as a forum for public participation, a mechanism of social control, a medium for dialogue and collaboration, and a driver of transparency and accountability. However, the success of citizen forums is highly dependent on the capacity of citizens, support for government policies, and the political will of officials to be open to public criticism and input.

INTRODUCTION

Public service is one form of state responsibility in meeting the basic needs of the community and realizing general welfare. However, in practice, public services often face various problems, such as poor service quality, lack of transparency, convoluted bureaucratic practices, and the potential for abuse of authority. This situation demands active public participation in overseeing the implementation of public services to ensure they are more transparent, accountable, and responsive to citizen needs (Lathifah et al., 2024).

One form of such participation is through citizen forums, which are participatory platforms or spaces that gather aspirations, criticisms, and input from the public to be conveyed to public service providers. Citizen forums serve as a means of two-way communication between the public and the government, enabling the public to act not only as recipients of services but also as monitors and strategic partners in improving the quality of public services (Anam & Anwar, 2020).

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The preamble to the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia mandates that one of the objectives of the founding of the Republic of Indonesia is to advance the general welfare and to educate the nation. This mandate implies that the state is obliged to fulfill the needs of every citizen through a system of government that supports the creation of excellent public services in order to fulfill the basic needs and civil rights of every citizen to public goods, public services, and administrative services (Sutrisno et al., 2023).

In the current era of globalization, the provision of public services does not only rely on one service provider, but public services also demand participation from citizen forums in the provision of public services with the aim of monitoring the implementation of public services by the government (Putra et al., 2023).

Excellent public service is an attitude or method of satisfying customers. Excellent service is the best service, exceeding, surpassing, and outperforming the services provided by other parties or previous services. Simply put, excellent service is the best service in meeting customer expectations and needs. In other words, excellent service is service that meets quality standards. Service that meets quality standards is service that meets customer/community expectations and satisfaction (A. Hakim, 2015).

The New Public Service Approach is actually in line with the "Exit" and "Voice" Theory, previously developed by Albert Hirschman. It states that public service performance can be improved if there are "exit" and "voice" mechanisms. The "exit" mechanism means that if public service is of poor quality, consumers should have the opportunity to choose another public service provider they prefer. The "voice" mechanism, on the other hand, provides an opportunity to express dissatisfaction with the public service provider (Anwar et al., 2015).

The "exit" and "voice" theories align with classical political theory, which states that power tends to corrupt or be abused, while absolute power will inevitably be abused. Therefore, to improve the quality of public services, equal bargaining power is required between consumers and public service providers. Theoretically, this equal bargaining power can be achieved by improving consumers' bargaining power by controlling the authority/power of public service providers (Thamrin, 2017).

Today, public service delivery is still facing challenges that do not meet the needs and changes in various aspects of social, national, and state life. For example, consider the process of obtaining an ID card in Indonesia. An ID card (KTP) is a form of identification. This card is mandatory for Indonesian citizens aged 17 or older or married. The application deadline is 14 days after marriage or turning 17, and it is free. As a sample case, several facts indicate the opposite, where prospective ID card holders are charged additional fees, often referred to as bribes, even at the neighborhood association (RT) level (Effendy, 2017).

It's still fresh in the memory how the tax official, Gayus Halomoan Tambunan, was implicated in a tax case involving "big-time players," which undoubtedly hurt taxpayers' feelings and exacerbated negative public sentiment toward tax institutions. Tax reform has indeed been rolled out since 2002 and has had a positive impact, as evidenced by various barometers and studies that the tax is no longer the most corrupt institution and that state revenue targets have been achieved. However, the tax agency still needs extra effort to improve its image (L. Hakim & Dewanti, 2020).

Judging by the descriptions above, the state of public services remains very poor, still rife with practices of Collusion, Corruption, and Nepotism (KKN) and rife with a corporatist paradigm seeking personal gain. This poor public service is further exacerbated by the low participation of citizen forums in reminding public officials, including civil servants (PNS), to work more professionally (Dewi et al., 2025).

Excellent public service is one of the demands of society in the reform era in terms of government that requires transparency, the elimination of Collusion, Corruption, and Napotism (KKN), and bureaucratic reform. In the Regulation of the Minister of State Apparatus Empowerment Number PER/15/M.PAN/7/2008 concerning General Guidelines for Bureaucratic Reform, it is explained that one of the objectives of bureaucratic reform is to build, shape the profile and behavior of state apparatus with the ability to provide excellent service. Therefore, it is clear that public service has a very strategic role as one of the functions of government in addition to regulation and empowerment.

Public service is a system, meaning that the citizen or community forum as applicants or service users must be given the broadest possible access related to the problem-solving and decision-making processes in the implementation of public services. The principle of openness plays a crucial role in establishing quality public services. Based on the Ministerial Regulation above, it is explained that the specific goal to be achieved is a transparent (open) bureaucracy that can provide excellent service to the public, with the hope that the general goal of Bureaucratic Reform is a change in mindset and work culture (culture set) as well as the government management system (Wirananda et al., 2022) This principle of openness must be one of the main foundations in the practice of governance, that the task of public service itself is one of the main tasks of the government in serving the community (Prasetya et al., 2021).

Efforts to achieve transparency in public service delivery are essential for ensuring transparent, accountable, effective, and non-discriminatory public services. Implementing a cultural value of openness will also encourage increased participation by citizen forums or the community in monitoring and evaluating public service delivery (Alamri et al., 2024).

Essentially, the role of the citizen forum here is expected to contribute to the implementation of public services, ensuring appropriate public services and providing convenience for the community. As we all know, current public services fall far short of public expectations, with many service providers still committing improper acts. The complex system of a service seems to reflect the dismal state of public service in this country. In fact, the prevailing stigma among the public that the government serves the public has shifted to the public serving the government (Zuhal et al., 2025).

Based on the explanation above, this research was conducted to explain and analyze how citizen forums play a role in monitoring public services and their contribution to increasing transparency, accountability, and the quality of public services.

RESEARCH METHODS

Types of research

This research uses a qualitative approach with descriptive methods. This approach was chosen to gain a deeper understanding of how citizen forums play a role in overseeing public services, as well as the dynamics of interactions between citizens and the government within these forums.

Research Location

The research locations were determined through purposive sampling, specifically in areas/sub-districts/districts that have active citizen forums as a means of monitoring public services. This location selection was based on the consideration that citizen forums in those areas have been operating regularly and have activities relevant to public service monitoring.

Research Subjects and Informants

Research informants were determined using purposive sampling, selecting informants deemed to have in-depth knowledge of the role of citizen forums. The research informants consisted of:

1. Citizens Forum Management (chairman, secretary, active members).
2. Communities/Residents who have used the forum to convey complaints or input.
3. Government apparatus (for example, village heads, regional apparatus, or agencies related to public services).
4. Partner Institutions (if any, for example the Ombudsman or NGOs that accompany citizen forums).

The number of informants is determined based on the principle of reaching saturation point, namely when the information obtained is repeated and there is no significant new data.

Data collection technique

The data in this study were collected using several techniques, namely:

1. In-depth Interviews were conducted directly with the residents' forum administrators, the community, and government officials to explore the role of the residents' forum and the obstacles faced.
2. Participatory Observation The researcher directly participated in and observed the activities of the citizen forum, including the process of conveying aspirations, discussions, and follow-up actions taken.
3. Documentation Collecting related documents, such as minutes of forum meetings, complaint reports, photos of activities, and regulations that form the basis for the formation of the citizen forum.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was carried out using the Miles & Huberman interactive analysis model which consists of three stages:

1. Data Reduction: sorting, selecting, and summarizing data from interviews, observations, and documentation according to the research focus.
2. Data Presentation (Data Display): arranging data in the form of descriptive narratives, tables, or matrices to make it easier to understand.
3. Conclusion Drawing/Verification: drawing meaning from the data presented and verifying findings by comparing across sources.

Data Validity Test

To ensure data validity, this study uses triangulation techniques, namely:

1. Source Triangulation: comparing information from forum administrators, residents, and government officials.
2. Triangulation Technique: using interviews, observations, and documentation simultaneously.
3. Time Triangulation: checking data at different times to see the consistency of the information.

With this research method, it is hoped that a comprehensive picture will be obtained regarding how citizen forums play a role in monitoring public services, supporting and inhibiting factors, and their implications for improving the quality of public services.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Public service is one of the state's obligations to fulfill the basic rights of its citizens. However, in practice, public services often face various problems, ranging from a lack of transparency and slow service processes to the emergence of maladministration practices such as extortion, discrimination, and abuse of authority. Therefore, an oversight mechanism is needed that is not only carried out internally by government institutions but also directly involves the community. One participatory mechanism that is developing in various regions is the establishment of citizen forums.

Citizens' Forum as an Instrument of Public Participation

Citizen forums serve as a platform for the public to voice their aspirations, complaints, and ideas regarding public services. Their existence provides an alternative channel for citizens who have previously had difficulty accessing formal oversight processes. The existence of forums increases public participation because they feel involved in decision-making and service evaluation. This aligns with the principle of participatory democracy, where citizens are not merely recipients of services but rather active actors in ensuring service quality.

Interview Results: Citizens' Forums as an Instrument for Public Participation

Citizens Forum Administrators

"This forum was created so that citizens can participate in monitoring public services. We hold regular monthly meetings to discuss complaints and propose improvements. With this forum, citizens are not just recipients of services but also involved in designing solutions."

The management emphasized that the forum functions to encourage active citizen involvement from the problem identification stage to the preparation of solution recommendations.

Citizens' Forums and Social Control Functions

The role of citizen forums in overseeing public services is clearly evident in their function as a social control mechanism. Through forums, citizens can directly monitor the performance of government officials, assess the extent to which service standards are being implemented, and provide input on procedures deemed ineffective. This social control is not confrontational in nature, but rather an effort to build two-way communication between the government and the public. Thus, citizen forums contribute to creating a more responsive and accountable service system.

Interview Results: Citizen Forums and the Function of Social Control

Citizens Forum Administrators

"Through this forum, residents can directly monitor services at sub-district offices and community health centers. If there are illegal levies or slow service, residents report it in the forum, and we then follow up with an official report. So, this forum is essentially a public oversight tool."

The administrators emphasized that the forum functions as a collective oversight tool that makes officers more careful in providing services.

Citizens/Community

"I once complained about the incredibly slow KK (family card) processing service. After discussing it in the forum, the service became faster. The officers became more disciplined, perhaps because they felt they were being watched."

Citizens see forums as an effective social control mechanism that makes government more responsive and improves the quality of services.

Government Apparatus

"Honestly, at first we felt like this forum was being overly strict. But as it got going, we realized this oversight was positive. The forum has allowed us to be more transparent and careful in serving the public."

The apparatus acknowledged that the citizen forum acts as an external supervisor, while also helping to improve the performance of public services.

Partner Institutions (NGOs/Ombudsman)

"Citizen forums are a form of social control from below. Officials will be more accountable if citizens actively monitor them. This function complements formal oversight from government institutions and the Ombudsman."

Partner institutions consider citizen forums to be an important pillar in the social control system, because they are closer to the community and can quickly address problems.

Citizens' Forum as a Bridge for Dialogue and Collaboration

The existence of citizen forums also creates a more equal dialogue between the government and the public. Forums serve not only to air complaints but also as a collaborative space to formulate joint

solutions. This approach allows oversight not to stop at criticism but to develop recommendations and corrective actions that the government can implement. This collaboration fosters trust between the government and the public, which has often been eroded by poor service quality.

Interview Results: Citizens' Forum as a Bridge for Dialogue and Collaboration

Citizens Forum Administrators

"We position this forum not only to accommodate complaints, but also to foster dialogue. Therefore, at every meeting, there is always a government representative. Residents convey their problems and then work together to find solutions. This way, the forum becomes not just a space for protest, but also a platform for collaboration."

The management emphasized that the forum acts as a two-way communication link between citizens and the government, and produces mutually agreed solutions.

Citizens/Community

"I'm happy because this forum brings us together directly with village officials. If there's a problem, for example, regarding health services, we can discuss it directly and get follow-up action. It feels more open, there's not the distance like before."

Residents perceive the forum as a means of reducing social distance with officials, while also opening up space for collaboration in resolving service issues.

Government Apparatus

"Citizen forums help us understand community needs directly. The discussions not only address problems but also offer alternative solutions. This makes it easier for us to adapt policies to citizen aspirations."

The apparatus views the citizen forum as a bridge for constructive dialogue, because it encourages the emergence of joint solutions, not just one-sided criticism.

Partner Institutions (NGOs/Ombudsman)

"The advantage of a citizen forum is its collaborative nature. It's not a platform for confrontation, but rather a space for dialogue. The public can express their aspirations, the government can explain policies, and then common ground can be found. This is the essence of collaboration in public service governance."

Partner institutions see citizen forums as a mechanism that builds synergy between communities, government, and other supporting parties.

Impact on Transparency and Accountability

Citizen forums significantly increase transparency in public service delivery. Every decision, policy, and service standard can be openly criticized by the public. Public officials are also encouraged to be more accountable because they recognize the direct oversight mechanism provided by citizens. Thus, citizen forums serve as a tool to prevent irregularities and as a means of educating the public about their rights as service recipients.

Challenges and Obstacles of Citizens Forums

Despite their important roles, citizen forums also face a number of challenges. First, limited human resource capacity, as not all citizens understand oversight mechanisms or are knowledgeable about public service standards. Second, limited resources, both in terms of funding and supporting facilities for the forums. Third, resistance from some government officials who feel citizen forums threaten their authority. Fourth, low public participation in some areas, especially when the forums have not yet demonstrated tangible results (Effendy et al., 2020).

Implications for Public Service Improvement

The role of citizen forums has important implications for the realization of good governance. Through forums, the principles of transparency, accountability, participation, and responsiveness can be more effectively implemented. Citizen forums help reduce maladministration, expedite the resolution of public complaints, and encourage the government to improve the quality of services. Furthermore, citizen forums can also serve as a liaison between the public and official oversight institutions, such as the Ombudsman, allowing public complaints to be handled more systematically (Maritza & Taufiqurokhman, 2024).

CONCLUSION

Research has found that citizen forums play a strategic role in public service oversight, serving as a platform for public participation, a mechanism for social control, a medium for dialogue and collaboration, and a driver of transparency and accountability. However, the success of citizen forums depends heavily on citizen capacity, support for government policies, and the political will of officials to be open to public criticism and input. With institutional strengthening and better collaboration, citizen forums can become a crucial instrument in improving the quality of public services in Indonesia.

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