



SMERU RESEARCH REPORT

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A significant part of the research in this publication uses interviews and focus group discussions. All relevant information is recorded and stored at the SMERU office.

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Executive Summary

Youth involvement in public issues can potentially increase their awareness of the public issues and develop motivation, leadership, and capacity to overcome these problems, as well as build social capital. The BASAibu, BASAbali, and BASAsulsel Wiki Marathon (Wikithon) program seeks to facilitate the process of youth involvement in public issues by holding opinion competitions using regional language, with topics related to public issues. This process is supported by workshops to increase youths' comprehension regarding public issues and basic skills for civic participation. Wikithon's activities also include voting and commenting on the competition entries which youth participants submitted. The Wikithon program has been running in two provinces, Bali and South Sulawesi. There are 15 Wikithon series in each region which have been running from 2021 to 2023. The main source of funding for the Wikithon program is from Fondation Botnar.

This study explores the experiences of youths who have participated in Wikithon, changes that occur in the youths and their participation ecosystem as a result of Wikithon. It also identifies opportunities and challenges for program management and development. The study uses an analytical framework comprising four elements to realize civic participation—namely space-voice-audience-influence—to record the experience of youth participation in Wikithon and its effect on knowledge, attitudes, and behavior of youth civic participation, as well as the youth civic participation ecosystem. Data and information collection was carried out through in-depth interviews with youths who had been Wikithon participants, external parties involved in the Wikithon program (teachers, academics, community members, regional governments), the program management team, and decision-makers in the youth environment (Bappeda¹, school principals, village/customary leaders). The study locations are Bali and South Sulawesi.

In total, 6,577 competition entries have been submitted since the start of Wikithon competitions. However, the trend of youth participation in Wikithon has fluctuated from time to time. The format of the competition, topic, and the time of the competition are factors that cause differences in young people's interest to submit competition entries in each Wikithon series. Other factors that determine youth participation in Wikithon are the availability of time, mastery of skills for preparing entries, interest in the Wikithon competition topic (including personal experience related to the topic), and concern for the preservation of regional languages. Encouragement from various parties around youths (friends, family, teachers/lecturers) also influences youth participation in Wikithon. Several aspects of the program design that motivated youth to take part in the Wikithon were prizes for competition winners, no fees charged to participants, and interesting competition topics. The perception that Wikithon is a forum that could be used to channel aspirations also motivated young people to take part.

This study found that so far, Wikithon has had a positive impact on improving the ability of youth to express opinions through both oral and written media, including the use of regional

¹ regional planning agency

languages. It also enhances awareness of public issues and trains youth's critical and analytical thinking skills.

Wikithon is recognized as a space that facilitates youth to develop their voice and express it creatively. Wikithon fills the gap between space for participation and youth voice by carrying out training, increasing capacity, and giving recognition (in the form of awards or acknowledgment) to youths who have voiced their views on public issues. Wikithon creates a platform for dialogue among youth, society, and policymakers on public issues. Indeed, Wikithon is considered by the youths as a comfortable and safe space for speaking out about civic issues.

The endline study identifies the potential influence of youth voices (delivered through Wikithon entries) on policymaking. Besides increasing regional governments' knowledge and understanding regarding public issues from a youth perspective, Wikithon also raises awareness regarding the need for specific policy interventions inspired by the competition entries of the youths. However, further discussions with relevant agencies have not been carried out to follow up on these matters. Furthermore, the involvement of the central government in the process of selecting winners has the potential to bring the influence of Wikithon to the national level. In the future, Wikithon has the potential to change stakeholders' paradigm regarding youth civic participation, possibly through advocacy which starts in the cultural sector.

To further optimize the impact of the Wikithon program on increasing youth civic participation, future implementation of the program needs to address the challenges youth face to participate in it. The development of the program in the future should pay attention to several aspects, including selection of topics, timeline (competition deadlines) and venue for the activities, the scope of competition dissemination, and program partnership. To strengthen the positive experience of public participation through Wikithon, optimizing the performance of the website, reviewing the guidelines for submitting entries, and continuing to conduct workshops with topics responsive to the needs of young participants should be a future focus.

The opportunity for the continuation of the Wikithon program with or without main funding from Fondation Botnar depends on the community's (including the government, youths, and various stakeholders) acceptance of the importance of holding Wikithon in the future, budget availability, and the commitment of program organizers to continue the program. In terms of public acceptance, Wikithon has become a space for the aspirations of young people. Wikithon is an effort to realize the community's right to actively contribute to development. Government entities directly involved with the program have acknowledged that Wikithon increased their knowledge and understanding of public issues from a youth perspective.

Wikithon funding opportunities from the private sector need to be optimized in the form of sponsorship, corporate social responsibility (CSR) funds from various companies, and the government by including a specific budget to support the Wikithon program which is determined from the start of the policy planning process. The program management team can also modify the program design by turning it into a paid program or by organizing a program with minimal cost requirements (replacing cash prizes with other forms of prizes that are low

cost but still motivates young people to take part) or by optimizing the usage of their website's What's Up feature that has been running free of charge.

Program replication in other regions needs to take into account several important aspects. Activities to raise awareness of the importance of regional language preservation need to be carried out before and during the series of Wikithon activities. Good practices in implementing the Wikithon program in Bali and South Sulawesi need to be replicated in other regions (for example, dissemination activities to senior high schools carried out in collaboration with the provincial education agency). Flexibility in organizing the Wikithon program in South Sulawesi needs to be maintained when the program is replicated in other regions. It is also necessary to build knowledge regarding the characteristics of youth (including gathering spaces commonly used by youth), the presence of stakeholders in program replication areas, and stakeholders' perception of youth civic participation as basic information for designing the program. Organizing a Wikithon competition in a province with many regional languages can be conducted by starting with a particular language and then gradually expanding to the use of other regional languages or by holding a Wikithon competition not at the provincial but at the *kabupaten/kota* level.

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