

PRESS RELEASE

**Policy Makers Need to Listen to Children’s Perspectives
to Improve Child Well-being**

Bandung, 10 August 2023 — Policymaking relies upon credible data to enable policymakers to identify issues with greater precision and conceive more precisely targeted solutions. Under the coordination of the Ministry of National Development Planning/Bappenas, The SMERU Research Institute (SMERU) and Universitas Islam Bandung (Unisba) have undertaken a series of studies centered around children and grounded in their perspectives in the West Java Province. The findings of these studies offer pivotal insights to policymakers in creating policies or initiatives pertinent to children, especially those aimed at advancing the well-being of children. The imperative of prioritizing children's perspectives in policymaking is the central theme of the **Launch of Study Results on Child Protection: “Central Government’s Attention and West Java Government’s Commitment to Enhancing Child Well-being Holistically”** held in a hybrid format, jointly organized by the Ministry of National Development Planning/Bappenas, the West Java Provincial Government, SMERU, and UNICEF.

Child Participation: A Key to Enhancing Child Well-being

Programs and policies designed to fulfill and protect children’s rights will only succeed if they are supported by credible data and evidence, including those that incorporate the voices or viewpoints of children. The collaborative research by UNICEF, SMERU, and Unisba represents an effort to amplify children’s voices through more scientific, representative, and participatory methods, aimed at providing recommendations to refine programs and policies related to child well-being.

SMERU has conducted several studies on children using children’s points of view throughout 2022–2023. The findings of these studies indicate that the voices of children, especially those from vulnerable groups, often go unnoticed in the government policy landscape. Unfortunately, despite policies’ intent to cater to children, their perspectives on essential needs and aspirations for augmenting their happiness are often overlooked. Ulfah Alifia, the Head SMERU Research Department, underscored the significance of incorporating children’s perspectives when developing policies concerning child welfare. Ulfah elucidated, "By actively attending to children’s voices, governmental authorities can construct policies that respect children’s rights to holistic growth and development, enabling them to mature into quality individuals."

The leader of the research team who measured child well-being through children’s perspective, Ihsana Sabriani Borualogo from Unisba, explained, "Child well-being frequently hinges upon adult perspectives, employing observable, objective indicators. Such data is commonly garnered via household-oriented surveys targeting family heads or adult participants." The significance of revisiting this methodology is undeniable, and one integral component involves engaging children in research efforts to capture their viewpoints accurately.

Meanwhile, UNICEF's Representative, Maniza Zaman, underscored the significance of research of this nature, as it directly engages children, ensuring that the resultant recommendations authentically mirror the requisites and aspirations of children. "UNICEF acknowledges the proactive stance taken by West Java Province, exemplified by their initiative to elicit children’s perspectives about their well-being through their direct involvement in the process," stated Maniza. "This approach commendably recognizes the insights and potential of children, subsequently spurring the government to effect policy changes pertinent to children. It simultaneously offers assurance to children that their contributions are aptly mirrored in the recommendations they yield. It is our

aspiration that this model can serve as a beacon, inspiring other provinces in Indonesia to fortify their advocacy to safeguard children's rights," Maniza added.

The Key Role of Central and Regional Authorities in Listening to Children's Voices

In his remarks, the Deputy for Human, Community, and Cultural Development at Bappenas, Amich Alhumami, said that the Indonesian Government, under the framework of the National Medium Term Development Plan (RPJMN) 2020–2024, has demonstrated a distinct commitment to upholding children's rights and ensuring child protection. This is evident through the elevation of enhancing children's well-being as a paramount national priority in development planning. Amich greatly appreciates the West Java Provincial Government for supporting and facilitating the launch of the results of this study on children. "I also thank UNICEF, SMERU, and Unisba for compiling research results related to holistic child well-being, which focuses on assessing children's well-being and happiness. This initiative is commendable and has the potential to provide a foundation and point of reference for both the Central Government and local administrations when strategizing forthcoming undertakings. This, in turn, facilitates the integration of a more child-centric perspective, especially among policymakers. It is imperative for policymakers to take into account the aspirations and rights of children within the overarching framework of planning and development. We hope the West Java Provincial Government can become a pioneer in increasing regional commitment to child welfare," said Amich.

Secretary of the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (Kementerian PPPA), Pribudiarta Nur Sitepu, also called for similar support. Kementerian PPPA always tries to ensure that child protection policies reflect children's aspirations and subjective needs. Incorporating children's viewpoints in policy formulation represents one of the strategies to achieve this objective. Pribudiarta emphasized, "Kementerian PPPA established a platform called the Children's Forum a decade ago to facilitate the expression of children's aspirations. We concur that this children-led forum must be established by local governments, enhancing children's engagement in the planning and oversight of regional development."

Meanwhile, in his address, the Governor of West Java, Ridwan Kamil, reaffirmed his commitment to ensuring the comprehensive growth and development of children. This encompasses their spiritual, physical, and social needs, achieved through a range of holistic programs. These programs, he emphasized, address not only material aspects but also physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual dimensions. "West Java has what we call the Masagi program, which embodies the cultural character education of *Niti Surti* (learning to feel), *Niti Harti* (learning to understand), *Niti Bukti* (learning to perform), and *Niti Bakti* (learning to live together). Hopefully, this will pave the way for a future generation that is devout, morally upright, intellectually astute, and attains holistic well-being," stated Ridwan.

These studies mark a crucial step forward in providing the essential evidence to support and implement more efficient and responsive policies and programs designed for children. The findings from this research will be instrumental in ensuring that each child in West Java can attain an enhanced state of well-being.

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Speakers' presentation materials and recordings of the event are available for download here: <https://smeru.or.id/id/event-id/peluncuran-hasil-studi-terkait-perlindungan-anak-di-jawa-barat>

Eight SMERU studies centered on children's perspectives in Indonesia have been distilled into a series of eight informative posters and three digital infographics, all of which are available for download here: <https://smeru.or.id/studianak-jabar/webstories/>

Watch the video "Have We Ever Listened to Children's Voices in Decision-Making?" here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yrCuDztDsyc>

About The SMERU Research Institute (SMERU)

The SMERU Research Institute is an independent institution for research and public policy studies. Since its establishment in 2001, SMERU has been a leader in poverty and inequality research in Indonesia. SMERU also has a wealth of experience in social and economic policy research, including studies on ecosystems for technology-based startups in Indonesia and the digital economy. For further information about SMERU, visit our website at <https://smeru.or.id/>

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