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Community Empowerment in Villages of Lamandau Regency, Central Kalimantan Province, Indonesia

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Abstract

Community empowerment should emphasize community independence. However, many community empowerment activities do not follow the public administration concept in practice, emphasizing village community independence. This research aimed to examine the implementation of village community empowerment programs in three villages of Lamandau Regency. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and observations, then analyzed using a qualitative descriptive approach with an interactive model. The results showed that village community empowerment in the selected areas was not following the new public service paradigm. Services to the community did not take into account local values and local wisdom. The community was not given the power or authority to make decisions autonomously. In addition, community participation did not come from the awareness of the village community. Thus, in the future, it is hoped that the implementation of village community empowerment can be based on local wisdom following the socio-cultural characteristics of the local village community.

Keywords

Village community empowerment, local wisdom, local value

Introduction

Village communities have an association-based (paguyuban) lifestyle that upholds the value of togetherness and harmony. Village community empowerment is an effort to develop community independence and welfare by increasing knowledge, attitudes, skills, behavior, abilities, and awareness by utilizing existing resources owned by village communities. The establishment of policies, programs, and assistance according to the problems and needs of village communities, as regulated in Law Number 06 of 2014 concerning Villages, has placed villages as the spearhead of development and improvement of community welfare. It is in line with the community empowerment-based development concept. Villages are given authority and funds to manage their potentials for improving the community economy and welfare.

Lamandau Regency is geographically dominated by hills where a shifting cultivation pattern is still widely used by the people. The agricultural patterns and cultivation techniques are still highly adherent to traditional ways, guided by customs, norms, and values rooted and believed from generation to generation by the village community as the best ways for the community. In this regard, local wisdom is needed in the implementation of village community empowerment programs.

The concept of Self-Governance and local development, which is more likely to grow from the grassroots, becomes relevant and urgent in the practice of community empowerment, including the village community. Local knowledge and modern scientific knowledge are two different types of knowledge in the lives of village communities. They differ in three aspects: substance (content and characteristics), the generation and regeneration of knowledge, and, contextually, their interrelation with the surrounding environment (Schafft & Brown, 2000). Modern scientific knowledge is oriented to develop science and technology that cannot be used immediately. Meanwhile, local knowledge is oriented to meet the immediate needs of life and overcome the real problems of local people's lives. Limited time, space, infrastructure, and resources, including production factors, can encourage people to be creative, innovative, and intelligent to use what are present in their environment effectively and efficiently by relying on local advantages and strengths. Local strengths, such as local wisdom, can be implemented in empowering and using resources for harmonious, dynamic, and sustainable development towards an independent and prosperous community.

Lamandau Regency can develop its local wisdom as social capital and a solution to the limited financial capital and limited knowledge about the use of technology-based and modern infrastructure. In dealing with and developing community livelihood, the values in local wisdom, such as social capital, will motivate the local people. The local wisdom, such as kinship and communal work

principles, can be found in babuhung¹, barinjam², bahaum bakuba³, babantam laman dan basolisih⁴, huma betang⁵, and the leadership guidance "Adil Kata Lino bacuramin ke suruga basengat ka Jubata⁶"(Sabian et al., 2019). Based on the above background, the purpose of this research was to describe and analyze the implementation of village community empowerment programs.

Literature Review

The Concept, Philosophy, and Principles of Village Community Empowerment

Empowerment is an effort to increase the dignity of the people currently unable to avoid poverty and underdevelopment pitfalls (Irwan et al., 2021). In this concept, the process of urban community empowerment can have primary and secondary tendencies. In the primary tendency, empowerment emphasizes the process of giving or transferring some strength, power, or ability to the community, which according to Keth (1996) in Fursova (2018) is delegation. In the second tendency, empowerment emphasizes the process of stimulating, encouraging or motivating individuals to have the ability or power to determine the rights of their life choices through a dialogue process. Linear to the concepts of New Public Services, self-governance, public service, and public value, the concept of village community empowerment highly emphasizes autonomous democracy. The basic concept of self-governance is empowerment under the liberalization movement or social transformation movement full of civic revolution. Historically, self-governance is relevant to the humanitarian emancipation movement as confirmed by Mindarti (2016) in Ayodele and Bolaji (2007), democracy in public services, and professional implementation of democracy as explained by Åström (2001). In this context, village community empowerment is closely related to local wisdom existing within. It demands more struggle for equal rights and principles of social justice and efforts to make the poor have greater strength and power, including political, cultural and economic fields.

In line with the empowerment philosophy of "helping the community to help themselves" as stated by Abou Elnaga and Imran (2014); Amalia et al. (2020), empowerment programs should hold the following principles: (1) working based on needs; (2) working based on the assumption that people want to be freed from suffering and poverty; (3) taking into account the belief that people want freedom both in determining and choosing their life paths to improve their quality of life; (4) taking into account the values in the community; (5) self-helping; (6) knowing

¹ Planting or harvesting rice

² Communal work for right purposes

³ Deliberation

⁴ Quarrel or disagreement

⁵ Putting forward deliberation, equality, honesty and loyalty

⁶ Being fair and honest, and treating fellow human beings equally by prioritizing good deeds based on God's teachings

that community is the biggest resource; and (7) programs including changes in attitudes, habits, and mindsets.

In addition to being guided by the philosophy of empowerment, village community empowerment must adhere to wise approach (wisdom) principles to not make empowered communities surprised and suspected (Pradipta & Suryono, 2017). The principles include (1) coming to and approaching the people that will be empowered, (2) knowing their interests and needs well, (3) learning and understanding what is in their minds and what potential they have, (4) inviting and involving them in planning, (5) inviting and involving them in implementing the plans, (6) starting with what the people know, (7) building on what the people have, (8) teaching the people by showing and by doing, (9) not showing them something dazzling (something that will do nothing), but give them a realistic pattern (not a showcase, but a pattern), (10) not showing them something pessimistic as the final results, but give them an optimistic, good, and correct system (not odds and ends, but a system), (11) not using a piecemeal approach (partial) but a comprehensive and integrated approach, (12) not adjusting to the ways, models, or forms, but the transformation of the ways, models, or forms, and (13) not giving them the final solution but give them the freedom to solve their own problems (not relief, but release).

Objectives, Targets, and Scope of Village Community Empowerment

The basic philosophy of community empowerment is to place the community as the subject of development. Community empowerment includes 4 (four) siding strategies as its objectives, namely (1) steering partiality to the weak; (2) enabling a developing atmosphere or climate; (3) empowering the economic potential of the community; and (4) protecting vulnerable community groups to prevent unbalanced competition and avoid exploitation of the strong against the weak.

The targets of village community empowerment, according to the regulation of the Minister of Villages, Development of Disadvantaged Regions, and Transmigration of the Republic of Indonesia Number 23 of 2020 concerning Priorities in the Use of Village Funds in 2020 as a change for the same regulation Number 11 of 2019, are to develop the independence and welfare of village communities by increasing knowledge, attitudes, skills, behavior, abilities, and awareness, and to utilize resources through policies, programs, and assistance according to the problems and needs of the village community.

Consistent with the targets of community empowerment, activities of village community empowerment include the creation of comprehensive village community access. Empowerment is an effort to create access to essential resources—the social, economic, and political resources (Friedmann, 1992).

Local Wisdom-Based Village Community Empowerment

In localizing development, Sulaiman et al. (2019) confirmed that World Bank funds had invested millions of dollars (US\$85 million) in encouraging empowerment efforts. However, some observers have argued that policy-making in the regions is still weak—most of the programs are superficial without careful

analysis. Local policy-making should consider local values and wisdom. Local wisdom has several meanings: a) a truth that has been a tradition in an area; (b) a combination of the sacred values of God's words and various existing values; (c) formed as cultural and geographical advantages of the local community; and (d) a product of the past culture that should continuously guide the community's life Pradipta and Suryono (2017),. The functions of local wisdom include: (1) to conserve and preserve natural resources; (2) to develop human resources; (3) to develop culture and knowledge; (4) to serve as advice, literary beliefs, and taboos; (5) to create social meanings, for example, in communal and/or kinship ceremonies and agricultural ceremonies; (6) to create ethical and moral meanings, for example, in Lamandau Regency, manifested in a tiwah⁷ ceremony, and (7) to create political meanings or power relations (patron-client).

Research Method

This research was conducted in three villages in Lamandau Regency, Central Kalimantan. Based on the village typology and development, three samples were selected, namely Panyomba Village categorized as an underdeveloped village, Batu Hambawang Village categorized as a developing village, and Bukit Raya Village categorized as a developed village.

This research used a qualitative descriptive method to examine village community empowerment from 2015 to 2019. Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews with key informants. Four key informants were selected from each village, namely the village head, the chairperson of the Village Deliberation Agency (Badan Permusyawaratan Desa -- BPD), a traditional leader, and a community leader. These informants were considered to know a lot about village community empowerment and directly interact with the village community. Besides, the traditional leader and community leader could be sources of information about the values, norms, and wisdom used as the guideline for the people's lives. Furthermore, secondary data were taken from documentation and official reports to support findings.

The data were analyzed using the technique adopted from Miles & Huberman (2014), which consists of the following steps:

- 1) Data Reduction. In this process, data are sorted and simplified. The unnecessary data are excluded for a more straightforward data display before drawing temporary conclusions. In practice, we grouped the data according to the research focus.

- 2) Data Display. Data sorted and set aside were arranged according to groups and similar categories to be displayed with the framework used, including temporary conclusions drawn during data reduction.

⁷ A typical funeral ceremony of Dayak tribe aimed to delivering spirits to the place of origin (*lewu tatau*)

3) Verification. In this process, we compiled an in-depth description of the reduced data categories. Then conclusions were drawn to answer the research problems.

Results and Discussion

Lamandau Regency was a division of West Kotawaringin Regency in 2002. The area of Lamandau Regency is 6,414 km² consisting of eight districts, namely Bulik, East Bulik, Menthobi Raya, Sematu Jaya, Lamandau, Belantikan Raya, Batangkawa, and Delang. Lamandau Regency is geographically adjacent to (a) West Kotawaringin Regency due east; (b) West Kalimantan Province due west; (c) West Kalimantan Province and partly West Kotawaringin Regency due north; and (d) Sukamara Regency and West Kotawaringin Regency due south.

The Regent of Lamandau has initiated the village community empowerment program as stated in the Regional Medium-Term Development Planning for 2018-2023, especially in the fourth mission, namely "improving the quality of community using cultural values and wisdom". This program is followed up with activity programs at the Regional Personnel Organization (Organisasi Perangkat Daerah – OPD) and related agencies to realize village community empowerment.

The Current Implementation of Village Community Empowerment Programs

The limited ability of human resources to use modern tools (adjust to technological advances) triggered problems in the village community empowerment program in Lamandau Regency. The assistance for rice field management tools (tractors) in Penyombaan Village, Batu Hambawang Village, and Bukit Raya Village was suboptimal. The interviews showed that government assistance, such as rice field management tools, could not function well because few people had rice fields with a limited area.

From the findings above, two problems were identified, namely: 1) the assistance to the community in the form of modern tools became a new burden in terms of maintenance and operational costs, and 2) the government emphasized budget-based bureaucratic performance. On another side, the community had neither knowledge nor skills to deal with such problems. The government did not consider the community's values prior to the assistance. Planning tended to be similar for all regions and did not take into account local need assessment.

Another form of government assistance was the house renovation program for poor people. However, pros and cons existed. Some people thought that the program was useless because it would make the poor even lazier since they only expected help from the government. Similarly, the average level of community participation in program activities requiring direct community involvement, such as socialization (for example, the socialization of business counseling for low-income families), reached below 60%. Meanwhile, the average level of community participation in project-based assistance program activities reached above 90%. Agricultural infrastructure assistance, such as pesticides, fertilizers, agricultural land management tools, and seed assistance, had been realized well. However, the

almost perfectly realized assistance had not yet brought significant changes in society. For example, the assistance for jengkol (*Archidendron pauciflorum*) harvesting tools and pesticides were not effective. The type of seeds provided was not suitable for the target village. It is supported by the results of interviews with the BPD chairperson—the community requested ginger seeds (roots), but they received coffee seeds. The stages of implementing the village community empowerment program are as follows:

Planning

The planning stage in Lamandau Regency, according to the data and information in the field, was almost the same as the proposal made by the community through BPD to be forwarded to the Village Development Planning Meeting (*Musyawarah Rencana Pembangunan Desa -- Musrenbangdes*), which resulted in deliberation and decisions necessary for the community. However, in reality, the program was not following the proposal. For example, Penyombaan Village asked for ginger roots, but they received coffee seeds. Likewise, Batu Hambawang Village needed vegetable fertilizers, but they received vegetable seeds. Interviews showed that planning was guided by customs and culture existing in the community. Informants from the three villages confirmed that the planning of village community empowerment programs did not consider local wisdom and social capital. Everything was top-down. The stages carried out in the village, such as *Musrenbang*, are taken simply as routine activities and not accommodated to the level of implementation.

Implementation

Village communities in Lamandau Regency have received various types of government assistance, including seed assistance, agricultural equipment assistance, livestock assistance, and social assistance in the form of house renovation and funds. If women or mothers received the fund, they would use the money for daily life needs. It was challenging for them to save money. The government made many efforts to direct the lives of village communities in Lamandau Regency, such as providing seed assistance for the development of the community's coffee plantation and harvesting tool assistance for helping the community harvest their jengkol plants in a modern way. The Department of Village Community Empowerment conducted training to teach the community to become entrepreneurs by starting home industries, such as making cassava chips and other snacks—their slogan is bringing the market closer to home. Additionally, the Department of Tourism also provides training to young villagers to become tour guides. It is easy to mobilize the village communities in Lamandau Regency to involve in various development activities, such as building village roads, building houses, or managing land for agriculture—they practice the culture of collaborative work (*gotong royong*). It is consistent with the local wisdom. The role of traditional

leaders is crucial in directing village community empowerment programs—the community respects and follows the traditional leaders. In other words, community empowerment programs in villages must be bottom-up.

Monitoring

The people assume that it is the responsibility of the government to carry out empowerment programs. It is because the people feel that they have not received significant benefits from the programs. It means that public trust is still low. Village communities are mostly not aware of the importance of participating in the development because they do not understand the objectives of empowerment programs.

Conclusion

From the research results, we concluded that:

1. Village community empowerment programs have not provided significant benefits to the village community. Planning is more budget-based, and its implementation does not use networks and partnerships optimally.
2. Village community empowerment programs must be supported by policies effectively applied in the short and long term. The programs must consider the capacity of local wisdom: leadership guided by justice and truth, natural resource management upholding preservation and sustainability principles integrated with the design of policies and programs of village community empowerment nationally.

Based on the conclusions, the following suggestions are given. First, the planning stage should be carried out carefully and analyzed according to the community's needs by considering local diversity. Second, as the agent of change, the local government should consider the values and local wisdom as input in the formulation of village community empowerment policies integrated with regional and national development policies.

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