

Community Empowerment Concept Based on Community Needs and Local Resources

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Abstract

The community empowerment approach in development positions people centrally as both actors and beneficiaries, requiring active involvement in identifying needs, formulating strategies, and implementing solutions tailored to local conditions. By placing the community as the main actor, this approach aims to create a sustainable development process where individuals gain not only the results but also an understanding of the process itself, fostering long-term capacity for addressing challenges. Efforts to empower communities also focus on enhancing human resource quality and promoting behavioral changes across various dimensions, such as economic, social, and environmental aspects. This study aims to analyze the effectiveness of community empowerment as a strategy to achieve a more independent and sustainable quality of life. This study employs a qualitative approach to deeply explore community empowerment strategies as a critical component of sustainable development. This research then found that community empowerment should focus on building an economic base rooted in reliable local needs and resources, not just on increasing income. Successful empowerment is evident through creating strategic organizations and networks that enhance access to market information and technology. Furthermore, strengthening technical and managerial skills within the community, as well as the competencies of facilitators is essential to achieving sustainable independence and prosperity.

Keywords: Community, Empowerment, Local Resources.

A. INTRODUCTION

The community empowerment approach in development places humans in a central position as both actors and beneficiaries of the solution-finding process and the achievement of development results. This approach does not only involve the community passively, but demands active involvement where they have a determining role in formulating needs, developing strategies, and implementing solutions that best suit local conditions and challenges faced (Tantoush et al., 2024). By placing the community as the main actor, this empowerment is expected to create a sustainable development process, where the community not only receives the final results but also understands and learns from the process. This allows the community to continue to develop their abilities in dealing with problems and achieving prosperity with a more independent and sustainable approach (Muhamad Khair et al., 2020).

Community empowerment efforts also aim to improve the quality of human resources (HR), especially in the aspect of forming and changing behavior to create a better and more sustainable standard of living. This formation and change of behavior covers various dimensions, such as the sectoral dimension that embraces all sectors of human life, be it the economy, health, education, or the environment. In addition, in

the societal dimension, community empowerment seeks to embrace welfare as a whole, covering material to non-material aspects such as a sense of security, social ties, and quality of social life (Piwowar-Sulej, 2021). The time dimension is also considered, with a focus on short-term changes that have an immediate impact and long-term improvements that ensure resilience and quality of life in the future. In the target dimension, this empowerment seeks to reach all levels of society without discrimination, so that all social strata can feel the positive impact evenly (Finucane et al., 2020).

Community empowerment, in essence, aims to provide motivation and encouragement to the community to be able to explore their potential and dare to act to improve the quality of life. One way is through education that is directed at self-awareness and development of abilities so that the community can understand and optimize the potential that exists within them (Ramadani et al., 2022). This education is not only formal education but also includes non-formal education that is more practical and follows the daily needs of the community. That way, the community can identify problems, design solutions, and be actively involved in implementing these solutions, so that this empowerment is truly able to create a more independent, creative, and empowered community in achieving a better quality of life (Essomba et al., 2022).

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the literature, there are various definitions of empowerment. One definition of empowerment is conveyed by Depaa Narayan as follows: "Empowerment is the expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control, and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives?" (Tanima et al., 2020).

There are at least three important things embedded in this definition. First, empowerment emphasizes the expansion of assets and capabilities of poor groups. Poor groups are believed not to be forever poor, have nothing, or are always weak and helpless, but they have assets and capabilities, although of course not as many as those owned by the rich. It is believed that assets and capabilities are still embedded within them. Empowerment activities seek to expand or carry out the expansion of these assets and capabilities (Widayati, 2020). Second, the expansion of these assets and capabilities is driven and facilitated in ways that prioritize participation, accountability negotiation, and risk-sharing. In other words, the process of expanding these assets and capabilities is carried out through mechanisms or constructive delivery systems (building), not destructive (damaging) interests. Such methods are very important because various experiences show that interventions against poor groups carried out by external parties (government, private sector, non-governmental organizations, and donor agencies) often show a creative but destructive face (Erdem Türkelli, 2021). Third, the focus of empowerment is the poor. This group has limited access to economic and political resources. They live in conditions of loss of access to basic needs (Wei et al., 2021).

Empowerment activities pay attention to or prioritize the issue of power. Conceptually, power is different from authority, because in authority, only a mandate is given. The party receiving the mandate can be revoked or requested back at any time by the party giving the mandate. In conditions like this, it is not easy to express one's identity because they are only in a position below the position of the one giving the authority. In conditions like this, there are also very strong relationships that develop super-ordination and subordination relations (asymmetric relationships), which are hierarchical, and exploitative (Dunn Cavelty & Smeets, 2023).

Conceptually, the nature of power is also different from a license, because in a license the party concerned only gains trust, even if that trust is often only for certain (limited) activities. Of course, the party giving the license is in a stronger position compared to the party receiving the license, therefore, as in relationships that emphasize authority, relationships that emphasize licenses are also thick with super-ordination and subordination relations or those that emphasize exploitative relationships. If the party that obtains the license is deemed to no longer be trustworthy (commits deviations from the agreed provisions), then the license can be revoked (Muller et al., 2021).

The main elements of the community empowerment process are the granting of authority and the development of community capacity. These two elements cannot be separated, therefore if the community has obtained authority but does not or cannot yet exercise that authority, the results will also not be optimal (Coy et al., 2022). The community is in a marginal position because it lacks both elements, namely authority and capacity. This condition is often also called a powerless community so it does not have the opportunity to manage its future. That is what is considered the main cause of its poor living conditions (Surya et al., 2020).

To obtain authority and capacity in managing development, the community needs to be empowered through the empowerment process. According to Korten, understanding power is not enough from the distributive dimension but also from the generative dimension. In distributive, based on personal distribution, power can be interpreted as a person's ability to influence others. The definition of power in the generative dimension is even more important. A group will only gain additional or increased power by reducing the power of another group. A powerless group will gain additional power or empowerment, only by reducing the power that exists in the powerholders group (Tian et al., 2023).

Assuming that the community is powerless because the state has taken authority in decision-making and development management, then to increase power for the community through empowerment must reduce the power held by the state. Through the empowerment process, the state must give some of its authority or some of its power to the community (Tchida & Stout, 2024).

Marginalized communities and local communities cannot always rely on intermediary assistance to provide advocacy. Therefore, local communities also need to independently increase their capacity to encourage change including in the allocation of power, resources, and especially their bargaining position. Of course,

because of the conditions, if done individually their bargaining position will be very low. Therefore, a collective attitude and action are needed to improve this bargaining position. The most strategic media for this is the existence of local institutions that are not only organizations but also social institutions. In various local institutions that are divided into public, private, and voluntary sectors, voluntary institutions are more appropriate to be used as a medium for community empowerment. This is because these institutions grow and develop so that they are not too controlled by external penetration including by the state (McDonough & Rodríguez, 2020).

C. METHOD

This research will be conducted using a qualitative approach, which allows data collection from various relevant sources, including previous research and related studies. With this approach, the research aims to understand and explore community empowerment strategies as an important element in sustainable development. The data obtained will be analyzed in depth to produce accurate insights into the active role of the community in formulating needs, developing strategies, and implementing solutions that are following local challenges. This empowerment process is expected to not only create better development outcomes but also equip the community with the knowledge and skills to improve welfare independently and sustainably.

D. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Strengthening Community Participation

Community empowerment activities must be able to develop certain imaginative educational techniques to raise public awareness. According to Sikhondze, the orientation of community empowerment must help the community to be able to develop themselves based on existing innovations, determined in a participatory manner, whose method approach is oriented towards the needs of the target community and practical matters, both in the form of individual and group services.

To carry out community empowerment, in general, can be realized by applying the following basic principles of community assistance:

a. Learning from the Community

The most basic principle is that community empowerment is a process that comes from, by, and for the community. This means that empowerment is built on the recognition and trust of the value and relevance of traditional community knowledge and the community's ability to solve its problems.

b. Companions as Facilitators, Community as Actors

The consequence of the first principle is the need for companions to realize their role as facilitators and not as actors or teachers. For this reason, a humble attitude and willingness to learn from the community and place community members as the main resource in understanding the state of the community are needed. Even in its implementation, the community is allowed to dominate activities. Even if initially the role of the facilitator is greater, efforts must be

made to gradually reduce this role by shifting the initiative of activities to the community members.

c. Mutual Learning, Mutual Sharing of Experiences

One of the basic principles of facilitation for community empowerment is the recognition of the community's traditional experience and knowledge. This does not mean that the community is always right and must be left unchanged. Objective reality has proven that in many cases the development of the community's traditional experience and knowledge has not had time to catch up with the changes that have occurred and can no longer solve the problems that have developed. On the contrary, it has also been proven that modern knowledge and innovation from outside introduced by outsiders have not solved their problems. In many cases, they even create even bigger problems. Therefore, community knowledge and external knowledge or innovation must be chosen wisely and/or complement each other.

The application of the principles of mentoring into the methodological steps of the mentoring program, in brief, is as follows:

- a. Recognition of problems/needs and potentials and awareness at this initial stage, information is extracted that reveals the existence of the environment and its community in general, and analysis and reflection on that existence are carried out (Bokun & Nazarko, 2023).
- b. Formulation of problems and determination of priorities. Based on the results of the collection and assessment of the information, notes are obtained containing various problems and potentials (local) (Cinelli et al., 2022).
- c. Identification of alternative solutions to problems/development of ideas. From the priority of the problems that have been set, various possible solutions to these problems can then be discussed through brainstorming and the development of ideas by the target/community (Albahri et al., 2020).
- d. Selection of the most appropriate alternative solution to the problem. In addition to the general appropriateness of the solution, an important consideration in this case is the ability of the target/community and the resources available to be able to implement the solution independently. For this reason, part of finding this alternative is the introduction of these resources (Stević et al., 2020).
- e. Activity planning is then poured into a concrete activity plan. The plan needs to clearly state what will be done, who will do it, and when it will be implemented. The more concrete and clear the plan produced, the greater the possibility that the plan will be implemented. To obtain input for its improvement, the results will then be presented through a discussion between the facilitator and the target/community (Love et al., 2024).
- f. Implementation/Operation. No matter how sophisticated a plan is, it will only be meaningful if it is then actually implemented. The organization can be concrete and simple or it can be sophisticated and basic to the point of leading to institutional development (Ahmed et al., 2023).

- g. Monitoring and directing activities. All activities that are then implemented need to be continuously monitored by the facilitator together with the target/community to see if they are following the plan that has been prepared. If there is a deviation, of course, appropriate actions need to be taken to redirect it (Khair et al., 2021).
- h. Evaluation and follow-up plans. After a stage of work is completed, the results are evaluated, whether they are following what is expected (Duncan et al., 2021).

2. Empowerment Towards an Independent Society

The concept of community empowerment means placing the community and its institutions as the basic force for economic, political, social, and cultural development. In this regard, reviving various community economic institutions to be collected and strengthened so that they can act as locomotives for economic progress is a must. The people's economy will be built if the synergistic relationship of various social and economic institutions in the community is developed towards the formation of a people's economic network.

In order to find solutions to the economic, political, and cultural problems currently faced by the Indonesian nation, all parties have provided guidelines not to get caught up in making 'new packaging but old content'. From various alternative offers of community empowerment models, the 'people's economic model' has theoretically developed into an interesting discourse.

The paradigm of people's economic empowerment is not only a demand for a fair distribution of economic assets, but also an ideological necessity with the spirit of destroying bureaucratic dominations in regulating and determining various areas of people's lives. Community economic empowerment is thus directed at the formation of community independence, namely behaving efficiently, modernly, and highly competitively. Efficient behavior means thinking and acting and using production facilities appropriately or effectively. Behaving modernly means following and being open to existing developments, innovations, and changes. Being highly competitive means being able to think and act and use production facilities based on paying attention to the quality of the results of their work and the satisfaction of the consumers they serve.

The idea of community economic empowerment according to Mahmudi is an effort to encourage and protect the growth and development of local economic strength and mastery of science and technology (Iptek) by the community based on community strength. The content of this idea is not only required to be able to utilize and produce the potential of local resources for the benefit of people's welfare but also to protect the rights of the community in managing local resources following their economic and social interests.

Several approaches and strategies in community empowerment toward community independence can be taken through various efforts:

- a. Starting with micro and local actions. The process of community learning must begin with micro and local actions but have a macro and global context. Micro-macro dialogue must continue to be part of community learning so that various micro experiences can become policy input and policy reform so that they have a wider impact. Community empowerment officers/facilitators should be given the freedom to develop approaches and methods that are following the formulation and demands of local/local needs in their respective areas of duty.
- b. Development of strategic economic sectors following local (regional) conditions. Given that each region has different potential, the policies that will be implemented in each region will also be different. The implementation of policies uniformly for all regions must be abandoned.
- c. Replacing the administrative-territorial approach with the regional approach. Community empowerment cannot be based on administrative territoriality. The administrative-territorial approach is a bureaucratic/power approach. The regional approach means placing more emphasis on the similarities and differences in the potential possessed by a particular region. With this approach, it will allow for large-scale community empowerment and will allow for more productive inter-regional cooperation.
- d. Rebuilding community institutions. Community participation is a necessity for all community empowerment efforts if accompanied by the emergence of social, economic, and cultural institutions that are truly created by the community itself. For example, village granaries and other local organizations are allowed to remain alive.
- e. Developing mastery of technical knowledge. It must be understood together that the pressure of modernization has displaced local science and technology, creating local community dependence on external input and a very serious loss of self-confidence. Local findings by local communities must receive equal recognition and be free to compete with innovations from outside. Empowerment patterns that are centralistic, top-down, and linear need to be changed to a more dialogical approach.
- f. Developing awareness of economic actors. Given that economic events are essentially also politics better known as political economy, actions that are only oriented toward providing technical assistance are inadequate. The empowerment that is needed is action based on community awareness to free themselves from the shackles of economic and political power that hinder the process of economic democratization. In this regard, the commitment of community empowerment officers and related institutions to the development of community independence is very necessary.
- g. Building a strategic economic network. The strategic network will function to develop cooperation in overcoming the limitations of one economic group with another; both in the fields of production, marketing, technology, and capital. One of the things that must be developed is the telecommunications infrastructure network and its supporting information system, namely the use

of the internet to open the gates as wide as possible for the community for the information needed for the development of their businesses.

- h. Policy control. In order for government policies to truly support community empowerment efforts, government power must be controlled. For example, community organizations are included in the decision-making process on policies that are directly related to the implementation of businesses and activities at the community level.
- i. Implementing a sustainable development model. Every development event must be able to continuously conserve environmental carrying capacity. Thus, environmental carrying capacity can be maintained to support development.

E. CONCLUSION

Community empowerment needs to be directed not only at increasing income but also at building an economic base based on reliable local needs and resources. The success of this empowerment is reflected in the development of strategic organizations and networks between community groups, the ability to access external sources such as market information and technology, and the application of a network economy that brings together economic actors through various platforms that support synergy and collaboration. In addition, improving the technical and managerial capabilities of the community is very important, including for assistants who also need to improve their competence to be effective in supporting target groups to achieve independence and sustainable prosperity.

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