

Empowerment process in government initiated groups: a case study in coastal areas of Lombok

Proses pemberdayaan dalam kelompok yang dibentuk pemerintah: studi kasus di daerah pesisir Lombok

I Wayan Suadnya

Faculty of Agriculture, University of Mataram, Indonesia

Abstrak

Kelompok secara meluas telah digunakan dalam masyarakat dalam memecahkan masalah sosial dan khususnya dalam melaksanakan program pemerintah. Tetapi sampai saat ini belum ada penelitian tentang proses pemberdayaan pada kelompok yang dibentuk oleh pemerintah. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui proses pemberdayaan pada kelompok-kelompok yang dibentuk oleh pemerintah. Sepuluh kelompok pemberdayaan yang dibentuk pemerintah diteliti dengan fokus kajian pada aspek pembentukan kelompok, formulasi tujuan kelompok, struktur kelompok dan pengambilan keputusan. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam terhadap sekitar 60 orang responden. Data kemudian dianalisis dengan analisis kualitatif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa proses pembentukan kelompok, penyusunan pengurus, perumusan tujuan dan pengambilan keputusan tidak memberdayakan kelompok.

Kata kunci: Pemberdayaan, proses, pemerintah, kelompok

Abstract

Groups are used extensively by the community as the traditional way of solving social problems, and the government in implementation of development programs. However, empowerment process in government initiated group was not yet studied. The objective of this study was to examine the process of empowerment in government initiated groups. Ten empowerment groups established by government were studied, focusing on group establishment process, structure, goal setting and decision making process. Data was collected through in-depth interview with 60 respondents. Qualitative data analysis was used. The results indicated that group establishment, group structure development, goals formulation and decision making process were not empowering.

Key words: Empowerment, process, government, group

Introduction

According to Rouse (1995) the use of group approaches to deliver development services provided by government, private sector and NGOs to farmers and the poor has proven to be effective and efficient. The group as an institutional device has been proven to involve more people and reduce costs with the same result in the same time. Furthermore, Baas (1997) claims that the group approach could increase effectiveness and efficiency for both service providers and clientele. Small groups were also found to be a useful organization for mobilizing individual group members to a collective self-help action that aimed at improving the economic and social wellbeing of the group and even the community.

Group approaches were introduced in Indonesia in the 1960s by the Department of Information through the introduction of listener groups. However, the group approach started to capture more attention in the 1970s after the implementation of the "training and visit system" (T&V) in agricultural extension (Ministry of Agriculture, 1992).

Despite its wide adoption, the advantages and the usefulness of such an approach, the group approach in Indonesian community development and, particularly, in Lombok remains problematic. Suadnya (1998) found that the government agencies very often imposed a group approach on the communities to implement their projects. For instance, in the case of Water User Associations, the traditional "subak" was replaced by a newly imposed water user association called "Perkumpulan Petani Pemakai Air" (P3A). This newly introduced group failed to manage water distribution. A similar case also happened in coastal areas of Lombok where the existing fishery groups were divided into smaller groups by the government to meet the requirements of the newly introduced group through the project called "Pemberdayaan Ekonomi Masyarakat Pesisir (PEMP)" (Economic Empowerment for Coastal Community). These phenomena are interesting to be studied.

Since groups are used extensively by the community as the traditional way of solving social problems and the government in implementation of development programs, it is essential to study the group as a social innovation to understand empowerment processes in group level.

Group approach has been introduced and imposed to be used in many government development programs. It is expected that through participation in a group, individuals are empowered. The studies by Muktasam (2000) and Suadnya (1998) found that in inland agricultural sectors some groups were functioning but some were not functioning and/or ceased after the projects finished. These findings left a room to intensively examine whether empowerment process took place in groups level during the implementation of government development program or not. The objective of the study is to examine empowerment process of government initiated groups in coastal area of Lombok. Examining the empowerment process of government initiated groups will provide understanding of the process that lead to success and

sustainable groups. This understanding will help readers to develop strategy in designing group development program.

In the next sections literatures review, methodology used, results and discussion and the conclusion will be presented.

Group Empowerment: a review of literature

Empowerment is a process through which individuals, groups and communities gain control over their lives. To become empowered, individuals not only acquire new skills, they need to internalize – to form a deeply ingrained personal system of social relations, reorienting and reconstructing these for further actions. Some authors perceive this as a developmental process (Kieffer, 1984; Lord and Hutchison, 1993; Staples, 1990).

Conger and Kanungo (1988) define empowerment as a “process of enhancing feelings of self-efficacy among organizational members through the identification of conditions that foster powerlessness and through their removal both by formal organizational practices and informal techniques of providing self-efficacy information”. Accordingly they developed a five step model of the empowerment process in an organization, which includes: diagnosis of conditions that cause the feeling of powerlessness; managers’ use of techniques and behaviour to remove some of the conditions that lead to powerlessness; providing subordinates with self-efficacy information from four sources (enactive attainment, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion and emotional arousal); the subordinates feel empowered by strengthening of effort, performance expectancy or belief in personal efficacy; finally, the behavioural effects are noticed by demonstration of initiation and persistence of behaviour to accomplish task objectives.

On the basis of Conger and Kanungo’s model (1988), Thomas and Velthouse (1990) developed a cognitive model of empowerment. Their model reflects the process through which employees arrive at task assessments, which lead to satisfaction and eventually guide behaviour. Their model starts with environmental events, global assessment, interpretative styles, task assessments, intervention and behaviour. The first three elements of this model will affect and shape the task assessments relative to psychological domains of empowerment, impact, competence, meaningfulness and choice of the individuals. Finally, intervention can be initiated to empower the employees. These two models of the process of empowerment were basically developed for workplace empowerment in organisations.

Another example of the empowerment process can be seen in the nursing sector. Brown (2002) introduces the powering process in nursing organisations. Her model consists of two mirror-image dialectical processes: empowering and overpowering. Each side of the mirror consists of four steps: communicating, relating, fitting and being. The inner cycle of this process is the intra personal process composed of three steps: imaging, defining and allowing. The empowering and overpowering processes occur at the same time during the process as two sides of a coin (see Figure 1).

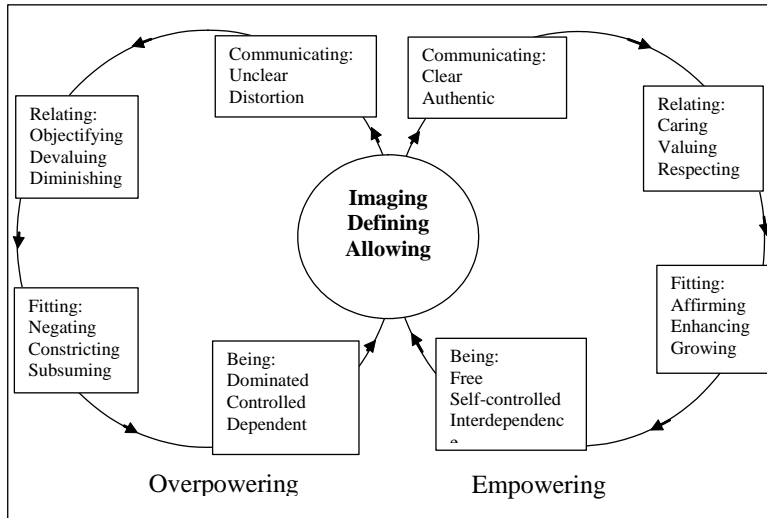


Figure 1. The Powering process (Adapted from Brown, 2002)

The model starts with the reflection of the relationship among people in an organization. From this reflection people form an image of what will happen in the relationship. Based on this imagination people define the situation and make a judgment. From this judgment people will allow what happens in future interaction. According to Brown (2002) the stage is set for either empowering or overpowering. The process then goes through the four steps mentioned previously.

Kieffer (1984) provided four steps in the empowerment process namely entry, advancement, incorporation and commitment. He believes that the process will take four years with the duration of one year for each step. He also suggests that it is not just an issue of time, but more importantly the time used in practice and action.

Powerlessness is an individual or group expectancy of having no power, of being incapable of influencing desired outcomes (Seeman, 1959). The powerlessness is fostered by conditions where people perceive that change to betterment will not happen in their life (Rappaport, 1984). They cannot influence the outcome of life events (Kieffer, 1984), have no opportunities and no life choice, are poor with no access to information, support and resources. This powerlessness is situational and contextual. The empowerment process therefore seeks to reduce powerlessness by the acquisition of self-awareness, self-competence, self-confidence, self-determination and perceived access to information, support and resources

through learning, capacity building and participation in group and community activities.

When individuals or groups are empowered psychologically, they should be able to actualise the empowerment in their lives through better access to information, support services and resources and creating a policy conducive for them to exercise their potential power. People or groups feel empowered when balanced power relations are in place.

At the group level, empowerment can be a process for gaining some control of events, resources and outcomes that are importance to individual or group lives (Fawcett et al. 1994). Feeling empowered occurs when people or groups have room to influence planning processes, implementation, evaluation and outcomes of activities that directly or indirectly affect their lives. Group empowerment therefore should provide an environment conducive to individual group members to interact to pursue personal goals and group objectives.

Group empowerment aims at changing the power structures of society as they are expressed in a group or a finite community setting (Rappaport, 1981). Within groups, new structures, values and interaction mechanisms can be created on the basis of group member's agreement. By sharing control and allowing broad participation in group decision making, members are given value, respect and power in the group. This will create a sense of belonging (sense of group) which in turn will empower them to participate in larger collective activities such as at the societal level.

Collective actions also promote greater potential to succeed in accomplishing individual goals within a collective objective. Group experience allows the personal awareness of power and its demonstration in the lives of the individuals (Geller, 1995; Staples, 1990). The group can carry out projects unable to be carried out by individuals. The group can increase access to resources and overcome dependence. Bembridge (1991) suggests that groups promote learning and share costs and benefits. It is clear that groups can work to develop skills and confidence of their members with potential for other changes. When the group becomes independent and succeeds in attaining the group's goals, it increases the status of the group and level of control and social status of the members.

A group that fosters mutual help is expected to be more empowering (Blasé and Blasé, 1994). Participation in a peer group is a cultivating factor to increase political skills (Maton and Rappaport, 1984). Hall (1992) found that group membership provides an experience of supportive environment and mutually supportive problem solving. He also suggests that for many people, their relationship with friends, neighbours and group members provides not only support but also genuine niches and opportunities for personal development. Thus groups can be expected to empower individuals.

A crucial goal of group empowerment is to increase members' levels of participation in decision making, the freedom to express opinions and critiques and the feeling of control in the organization.

Methodology

The study was conducted in seven villages as a representative of coastal villages in Lombok. Ten empowerment groups consist of two fish farming, two fish processing, two community and two regional empowerment to combat economic crisis (PDMDKE), and eight non empowerment groups includes two fishery/farmer income generating (P4K), 2 farmer, family saving and credit (*Takesra*) and two cattle fattening groups were studied. In-depth interview with group leaders and members were carried out to gain information regarding empowerment process in their groups. About 60 respondents were interviewed. Questions were focused on four areas that were consider as key factors in empowerment process at group level. Those areas include group establishment process, structure, goal setting and decision making process. Participant observation methodology was also implemented in the second phase to observe the dynamic of group processes. Qualitative data were collected and qualitative data analysis were used to examine empowerment process at group level

Results and discussions

As it has been mentioned in the introduction, the adoption of group approach in development in Indonesia has started in 1970s when the training and visit system was introduced in agricultural extension program. Since then other government agencies widely use group as the vehicle to deliver their programs to the rural communities around the country.

As a result of the government policy to use group approach in rural development implementation, many groups that belong to different government agencies were found in the village. These groups were formed to deliver a specific program intended to help the rural poor in coping the problems in their life.

Since 1999, the government policy regarding development approach has changed from top down to participatory and empowerment approach. Some groups in coastal villages were formed under the empowerment programs. Thus the groups established by the government can be classified into two major groups. The first category is the groups under empowerment program that referred to hereafter as empowerment group consist of fishery, fish farming, fish processing, community group (*pokmas*) and regional empowerment to combat economic crisis (PDMDKE) group. The second type of group is the groups formed under the programs that is not using empowerment approach, here it termed as non-empowerment group includes fishery/farmer income generating (P4K), farmer, family saving and credit (*Takesra*) and cattle fattening groups.

The fishery group, fish farming group, fish processing group are classified as "empowerment group" as these groups are formed for the implementation of economic empowerment for coastal community (PEMP) program carried out by the Department of Marine and Coastal Affairs. Similarly the community group (*pokmas*) is to implement community

empowerment program by the West Nusa Tenggara Empowerment Bureau and PDMDKE to carry out regional empowerment program to combat the impact of economic crisis in 1998/1999 by West Nusa Tenggara Planning Bureau. Meanwhile the P4K groups, farmer groups and cattle fattening groups, are formed to implement subsidised credit to the farmer by the department of Agriculture, and family saving and credit (*takesra*) to carry out revolving fund provided by the Family Planning Bureau to increase the welfare of the poor family. These outsider formed groups are mainly formed by different government agencies to deliver their program and has no linkage with the traditional groups. How these group were established, the structure of the groups developed, the development of group's goals and decision making process carried out in these groups will be discussed to perform the objectives of the study.

Group establishment process

As mentioned in the methodology section, government initiated groups consist of empowerment and non-empowerment groups. The findings indicate that all **groups established** by government agencies were through similar processes. The groups were created in a hurry, within six months period. This was an unavoidable time pressure for the fieldworkers. Consequently the process of group development was top down and the fieldworkers exercised their "power over" - the power of domination to control the head of sub-villages and the poor in the villages. The word "order" was used to describe the commanding of the heads of sub-villages to do a certain job to meet their demand. The participatory approach suggested for the empowerment program was not implemented. Theoretically, the exercise of "power over" creates resistance and non cooperative behaviours (Lasswell and Kaplan, 1950, Rogers, 1975, Parenti, 1978), which occurred here.

This group's establishment process in some cases resulted in missed targets and unfair selection of beneficiaries. For example in community groups (*Pokmas*), the heads of villages selected beneficiaries or participants based on their support during the previous election. This created unfairness and exclusion of eligible people while the inclusion of relatives and friends caused jealousy and friction. Fair selection of beneficiaries in development programs is one of the principles of the economic empowerment for the coastal community empowerment program. Empowerment requires inclusion and participation, not exclusion, as suggested by the PEMP guidelines. Kieffer (1984) claims that empowerment is not successful if it fails to involve the poor.

The implication of this approach in group establishment was that many poor people did not gain services and support from the government development programs and were left behind. The poor will still be poor. In addition, the process created prejudice toward the fieldworkers and heads of sub-villages, leading to distrust. Trust is essential for empowerment (Menike, 1993). He stated that in empowering the poor, fieldworkers must be trusted so that mutual and equal relationships are developed.

Group goal setting

The lack of an empowerment process can also be seen from group **goal setting**. Locke and Latham (2002) suggest that goal setting influences the commitment of members to attain their goals. In this study the objectives of group establishment clearly explained in the program implementation guidelines were set by outsiders, and were not explained properly to the group members. Information given was inaccurate as fieldworkers focused on the distribution of revolving funds or subsidized credit and support. As a result group members' understanding of group goals was to obtain revolving funds, subsidized credit or other support from the government. Many group members did not know the objectives of the group establishment. Their only purpose was to obtain revolving funds or subsidized credit thus their commitment was to obtain such support. Distortion of information according to Brown (2002) is an indication of an overpowering process.

Lewin (1958) claims that commitment of group members to attain group goals is enhanced when goals are set by the members. Group members within government initiated groups did not set group goals, they were assigned by the government. This could lessen group members' commitment to attain them and they are unlikely to put necessary effort. Group goals decided through discussion to analyse the viability of the ideas and the volition of group members, can lead to group members more being committed to achieve group goals (McCaul *et al*, 1987).

If goals are created to match intentions and group members have more commitment to perform the goals, they have more positive attitudes toward attaining the goals (Tubbs and Ekeberg, 1991). The theory of reasoned action suggests that attitudes toward an action play important roles in determining intention toward that action (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980). If groups are performing then group members may have better feeling toward the groups. In the same way a group may feel empowered as it is involved in group goal setting and decision making. In fact the members of government initiated groups were not part of the goal setting process. As a result they did not experience commitment to the development process that leads to participation and empowerment.

Meanwhile group members' perception of the purpose of being group members was to obtain revolving funds, subsidised credit or supports. Once these objectives were achieved, and group members received the funds or supports, they felt that they had already achieved their goals and the groups were no longer needed. They perceived their participation in the group was no longer required and so the group then ceased to exist. Thus the group was used as a distribution mechanism for financial resources but not for the members to work together towards other benefits of their own choosing.

Group structure

Another feature of group processes that foster empowerment is the development of group structure and appointment of leaders. The findings

show that group structure and its personnel were assigned by the fieldworkers. Here the fieldworkers seemed to control the decision to develop group structure and they appointed leaders. Group members did not have power to make their own decision to select their leaders. They had no choice but to accept the decision made by the fieldworkers as they feared not getting the revolving fund. They were threatened by the fieldworkers who argued that the revolving fund, subsidised credit or support may not be distributed if the fieldworker was unable to submit report on time to the donor. As a result of their fear the group members let the decision be made by the fieldworkers. In their words the group members said "*kami pasrah*" which literally translated in English means "we put our faith to them".

The findings in the second phase show that some of the appointed group leaders disagreed with their appointment as group leaders. However, they did not protest or reject the appointment because they feared not receiving funding or support. As a result they pretended to accept the appointment until the fund was distributed, but did not carry out their roles thereafter.

This way of structuring a group is termed "pre-determined structure" by Cathcart et al. (1996). This structure is being established by the government and its fieldworkers with norms and rules based on the fieldworkers intentions. It is formal and obligatory to the group to implement it in group processes. This normative prescription often does not match the needs and expectations of the group members, and as a result they do not participate in group activities, as demonstrated by some group leaders in this study.

This assignment of group structure had some implications in implementing empowerment programs. First, the process had created fear and lessened the opportunities of the people. This was one of the indicators of disempowering process (Brown, 2002). Second, it led the appointed leaders to play a game, to pretend to be group leaders but they did not perform their tasks. They tried to fit the conditions set up by fieldworkers by demonstrating pseudo participation. Most importantly, the leaders did not have legitimacy from the members to manage the group. According to Heap (1977) leaders require legitimate power to manage and control groups and their members. Without legitimate power from the members, they could not manage and control them. Illegitimate leaders are less respected and may be ignored and as a result the group may be unable to perform or may cease to exist.

Group decision process

A key issue in empowerment programs is the nature of decision making process created within the group or organisation (Margulies and Kleiner, 1995). Fisch and Beck (2000) claim the most important activity in a group or organisation is decision making. It implies agreement to courses of action to achieve group goals and it affects group life. Its purpose is to produce decisions that are realistic and meet the individual group members' knowledge, skills and capabilities to achieve group goals. The best possible way for this is through group discussion to analyse strengths, problems,

opportunities and threats within the group (Beach, 1997). In a discussion process, the social, cognitive and emotional processes are blended in individual and group levels of interaction to get more understanding on the process and discover higher quality decisions (Hulbert et al, 2005).

Observation and participation in the second phase provided evidence that the core of group processes, which is the decision making process, within the government initiated groups was not made by group members but was carried out by fieldworkers. Decisions were not discussed and developed in the group meetings.

According to Caldwell (1976), Rapoport (1974) and van de Kragt (1986) when the group members are given the opportunity to discuss a social problem before making a decision, they show a high level of cooperation compared to those not given this opportunity. Social identity theory (Dawes *et al*, 1977) explains that group discussion enhances social identity within groups. Enhanced social identity is presumed to increase the value placed on the welfare of others in the group and in this manner people will be more cooperative in the group.

Given the decision making process in the government initiated groups, where group members are not given an opportunity to discuss the decision made this may promote non-cooperative behaviour among them. According to Johnson and Johnson (1994), a decision by the authority and experts without discussion, even though it is seen as an efficient method and takes a short time to execute, is not necessarily effective. Group members may not be committed to implement decisions due to less understanding and ownership of the decision. If members disagree with the decision they may not implement it, and might cause sabotage and, most importantly, members are not utilized.

In farmer groups in Tanjung village for instance, all group decision making and some activities such as distribution of farming inputs and collection of credit repayment were carried out by agricultural fieldworkers. Group members waited for the agriculture extension fieldworkers to do something for their groups. As a result, they become passive participants and less cooperative in repaying the credit, which led to the groups' demise.

According to Zimmerman and Rappaport (1988), Kieffer (1984), and Freire (1970) an individual is empowered through participation in group or organisation activities. Through participation, group members build relationships, discuss issues and problems and challenge each other for solutions. In these ways individuals develop trust, expectations and interpersonal ties that empower them. Rocha (1997) suggests that participation in an organisation is a proxy of empowerment that takes two forms, membership and decision making. Moreover Gruber and Trickett (1987) claim that participation of members in influencing decisions made in a group promotes motivation and reduces resistance to change, that empowers the members.

If they did not participate in group decision making and activities they would not be empowered because they were not experienced with building

relationships, discuss issues and problems and challenging each other for solutions, to lead to trust development and interpersonal ties that empower them. Margulies and Kleiner (1995) suggest that in the empowerment process groups should make process related decisions and members have input into strategic directions because they are directly involved with what the group is going to carry out and produce.

It is interesting to note that on one side the fieldworkers claimed that group development, group structure, group plan and other decisions were made by them because they perceived group members were incapable of such activities, but on the other side, group members were not trained to participate in such activities. According to Perkins *et al.* (1990) and Prestby *et al.* (1990) success of the empowerment process is facilitated by catalysts including acquisition of knowledge, skills, experience and self-efficacy which can be gained through training and capacity building. These facilitation processes did not happen in the government initiated groups. As a result members were not given a chance to participate in decision making as they were perceived incapable. Riger (1984) and Gruber and Trickett (1987) point out that inequality in roles and responsibilities is a barrier to participation. In this case, the fieldworkers had placed a barrier to empowerment with their perception that the farmers were incapable of participating in decision making.

These situations applied to both empowerment groups and non-empowerment groups initiated by government to implement development programs. Although some of the groups were established under the empowerment programs, the result of empowerment processes on feeling of being empowered was similar to that in groups established within non-empowerment programs because both programs were carried out in the same way - top down with focus on quantitative targets.

Conclusion

Group development process was not empowering as the group was formed in hurry with top down mode. The word order and the exercise of power over have led to miss target and unfair selection of beneficiaries that created distrust and non empowering atmosphere in the communities. Group goal setting was also not empowering in its process due to the group's goals were set by government. Outsider decided goals did not match the needs and aspirations of groups' members which led to less commitment to attain group's goals. Assigned group structure processes have led to non empowering process. It created fear and powerlessness which led to pseudo participation of group members. Finally, the decision making process in government initiated groups was not empowering. Most group decision were made by the fieldworkers that created domination feeling which led to non cooperation behaviour and group members did not committed to the decision made.

Recommendation

Regarding group processes that did not empowering, it is recommended to provide more time to implement the empowerment program so that all stakeholders in group establishment, structure design, group goals setting and decision making process can actively contribute with genuine participation. Provide more room for participation will lead to trust, cooperation and commitment to perform group goals which is expected to be more empowering.

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