

FACTORS AFFECTING GROUP EFFECTIVENESS IN INDONESIAN RURAL DEVELOPMENT: STAKEHOLDERS' CRITICAL SELF-REFLECTION

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ABSTRACT

Group has been used as one major approach to promote community learning and community participation in Indonesian rural development. For these reasons, many types of groups have been established in especially rural areas such as Water User Associations, Cattle Fattening Groups, Farmer Groups, Mass Media Study Groups and Poverty Groups. Through these groups rural development programs are promoted, e.g., agricultural development and poverty alleviation. However, researchers on rural community development are more interested in evaluating program effectiveness while little attention given to group effectiveness. As a social innovation, group may also be seen within the context of innovation decision process, especially those groups introduced by development agencies, either government or non-governmental agencies. The focus of this paper is to discuss factors affecting group effectiveness based on group members and other stakeholders' critical self-reflection. By using Modified Participatory Action Research (MPAR) three phases fieldwork were conducted in West Lombok district West Nusa Tenggara province Indonesia. Several factors associated with group effectiveness were identified through this longitudinal study. These factors are agency approaches to the group (establishment and action) group leadership, members' knowledge, and participation. This study suggests that the approach to the groups and the community's perception of issues and needs are considered as the key components to promote effective groups for effective and sustainable rural development.

INTRODUCTION

Analysis of rural development practices experienced by developing countries indicates that in some cases they succeed while in the others they fail. Furthermore, rural development success and failures often identified to be associated with several common issues such as approaches to development (top-down, bottom-up or combination of both), participation (high or low), dependency and sustainability. Some authors identified that the success of rural development programs were associated with high level of community participation within the development process, from program initiation to profit sharing. Level of community participation would be further dependent on the existence of opportunity, structure and 'vehicle' to participate. Top-down approach has been blamed to be responsible for the lack of community participation, where most development agencies tried to impose their programs to achieve predetermined objectives and target without the involvement of their local field agents, and particularly 'the poor'. (Harrison, *et. al.*, 1995; Hammer, 1994; Burkey, 1993).

Key Words: Affecting, Group and Rural Development

To show how participation become a key element to rural program successfulness, Burkey (1993) stated:

As the change agent trainees said to me in Uganda 'Please take this training back to the people in our home office, so that they too begin to understand what are we trying to do, and stop setting targets for our work based on their own priorities, instead of the priorities of the people (p.vii)

Group (this may also refers to 'team' in formal development agencies) as a social innovation has been seen and used as an effective vehicle of community participation (Rouse, 1994: Hammer, 1994: Liebercier and Schneider, 1995: Chamala, 1995b), community learning (Salazar, 1995: Chamala, 1999) and community empowerment. Because of these reasons Indonesian Rural Development programs have placed the groups in a strategic position as it is reflected by the following policies.

Poverty Alleviation Program:

At village level, the program is implemented by poverty groups through which participation, learning and empowerment could be promoted... (summarised from Presidential Instruction no.5, 27th December 1993, p.2).

Agricultural Development Program:

Through group, farmers are encouraged to work together - in the mode of teaching and learning process - to improve their knowledge and skills, achieve economic of scale, and for better farm management" (Agricultural Extension Centre, 1996. Guidelines of Farmer Group Supervision. Department of Agriculture, Jakarta).

Irrigation Development Program:

To increase community participation in irrigation channel management through the formation, development, and supervision of Water User Associations (The Sixth Five Year Plan of West Nusa Tenggara Province, 1994/1995 - 1998/1999, Book III, p. 95).

Data released by the West Nusa Tenggara Statistical Bureau – Indonesia - indicate that many community groups have been established in West Nusa Tenggara. Until April 1996, for instance, there was about 9629 Farmer Groups, 536 Mass Media Study Groups, 727 Water User Associations, and 1279 Poverty Groups. Knowing high enthusiasm of the government in promoting groups for rural development, our longitudinal study focused on

identifying group roles and group effectiveness. However, this paper is focused on *the factors associated with group effectiveness*.

Group effectiveness in rural development: some early studies

Group's role performance may reflect group's effectiveness. The better the role performance, the more effective the group would be. By contrast, the less effective group would be indicated by its poor performance and even the group is inaction.

In the last one-decade, some writers have studied and analysed factors associated with group effectiveness (Hackman, 1987: Johnson and Johnson, 1997: Curtis, *et.al.*,1993, 1999: Campbell, 1991: Chamala, 1995a). Their ideas and findings on these factors are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Factors associated with group effectiveness identified by some writers/researchers

Writers	Identified factors
Hackman (1987): "Normative model of group effectiveness"	<i>Five factors associated with group effectiveness:</i> organisational context (reward, education and information system), group design (structure of group task, group composition and norms), group synergy (reduce process losses & creating synergistic process gains), group process (level of effort brought to bear on the group task – knowledge and skills, appropriate strategies applied), and material resources (sufficiency of material resources required to accomplish the task well and on time)
Campbell (1991) – based on studies on Landcare groups	<i>Effective groups are characterised by their:</i> clearly defined problems, good leaders, clear objective & plan, enjoy partnership with other stakeholders, use local resources, perform interesting meeting, doing something on ground, have credibility, and have appropriate boundaries. <i>Ineffective groups are characterised by</i> too big in size, unclear problems, no common understanding, lack of support and leadership, lack of members' cooperation, unclear goal & achievable plan, do not do anything on ground
Curtis, Tracey, and De Lacy (1993) – based on studies on Landcare groups	Age of group, size, members' participation, number of other groups assisting, amount of (non-government & government) funding received, value of member contribution, attendance of government contact officer, contact officers influence on group decision, plan, group composition (female & male members), numbers of visitors helping the group, and annual priorities
Chamala (1995a) – based on studies on	<i>Group Internal Factors (GIF)</i> such as group size, structure, leadership, cohesion, rules/norms, composition,

Landcare groups	atmosphere, culture, development phase, group think, and balance between need: <i>Agency Factors (AF)</i> – technical capability, attitudes and commitment to groups, support for field extension officers, planning methods used, means/ends distinction, skills: <i>Community Factors (CF)</i> - availability of commercial service agencies, attitudes/awareness of problems, experience in working together, support for field extension officers, and structure: and <i>Other External Factors (OEF)</i> – media exposure, political vested interests, legislation, science & technology, pressure groups, market prices for inputs/products. Group processes are also included (energy draining and energy gaining processes)
Johnson and Johnson (1997)	Five basic elements of group effectiveness: Group process, positive interdependency, individual accountability, promotive (face to face) interaction, social skill – high cohesion, problem solving strategies, active participation and distribution of leadership, interpersonal effectiveness, commitment to goals, communication of ideas and feelings.
Curtis, Nouhuys and Robinson (1999) - based on studies on Landcare groups	Having clear goals, objectives & plan, resource availability, facilitation by an outside agency, access to a funded group coordinator, and communication between stakeholders

These studies indicate some common factors contributed to group effectiveness that Chamala (1995a) has classified into group's internal factors (GIF), agency's factors (AF), community factors (CF) and other external factors (OEF). In addition to these factors, group 'process' has been identified to play crucial roles in promoting effective groups. To some extent – more than strategies used for process gains - this may refer also to the approaches used by development agencies in promoting group establishment and group action (e.g., imposing, facilitating, teaching, learning and empowering) that within the context of rural development effectiveness plays strategic roles.

METHODOLOGY

A Modified Participatory Action Research (MPAR) method was used in this study where three phases of fieldwork were conducted in West Lombok district West Nusa Tenggara province Indonesia (Figure 1). The first phase of fieldwork was carried out to collect data from nine community groups, 332 group members, 42 field agents, and other government staff, while the second phase of fieldwork was carried out to bring the tentative results to the groups and stakeholders. The aims of the second phase were also to confirm and to gain further insights on various issues. Six workshops were carried out in this phase. Another objective of this phase was to use the research

findings for helping groups and development agencies through action learning processes.

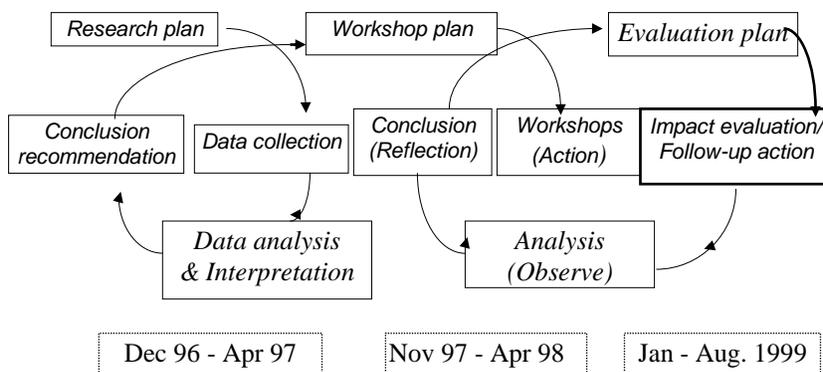


Figure 1. A Modified Participatory Action Research

Participatory workshops were used to achieve these objectives. Participants were encouraged to perform critical self-reflect on factors associated with group failure, find solutions, and develop realistic action plans. Brainstorming, SWOT analysis, small group and plenary discussions were used to facilitate the workshops. The researchers took facilitation role and bridged the different level workshops to promote information flow from groups to field extension staff and to policy makers – from village to provincial level.

Group workshop results were presented at the field agent workshop, and these workshop results were presented at the district and provincial level workshop involving policy makers and other stakeholders from related agencies. This research methodology indirectly stimulated the action learning process at group and agency levels.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Factors associated with group effectiveness

Factors associated with group role performance identified in the first and the second phase of the study are presented in Table 2. Factors such as

approaches to groups, knowledge and group leadership are consistently perceived as the major factors associated with group effectiveness. The second phase of the study also provided additional factors and explanations of why groups failed to perform their expected roles such lack of participation, skills, supervision and inter-agency coordination.

Table 2. Factors Associated with Group Role Performance

Associated factors	1st phase findings	2nd phase findings		
		Groups	Field Agents	Policy Makers
1. Group size		x	x	
2. Leadership	x (x ² : s)	x	x	x
3. <i>Low participation</i>		x	x	x
4. Rules		x		
5. Structure				
6. Knowledge	x	x	x	x
7. Communication		x	x	
8. Member distribution		x	x	
9. <i>Skills (e.g. in choosing feasible project)</i>		x	x	x
10. Groups for project			x	x
11. Institutional overlapping			x	x
12. Approach to the group (e.g. group formation)	x (x ² : s)	x	x	x
13. Lack of technical help	x	x		
14. Unqualified field agent		x		
15. Lack of supervision (contact with field agent)	x	x		
16. Inter-group cooperation				x
17. <i>Resource availability</i>	x (x ² : s)			
18. <i>Group composition</i>	x (rho: 0.931)			
19. <i>Group cohesion</i>	x (rho: 0.83)			
20. <i>Access to mass media</i>	x (x ² : s)			

Notes:

For the first phase findings, quantitative (Inferential statistic test was applied to some variables) and qualitative (based on group profile investigation) data analysis were applied. X²: S - significant

Agency Factors (AF): Agency approaches to group establishment and action

Top - Down and lack of community participation: Most groups (7 out of 9 groups) were established by the government based on government interests. Mass media study groups (Group 5 and group 9) were established for the village and group competitions respectively, while the poverty groups were established by the village leaders. Similarly, the top-down approach was taken to establish the water user associations.

The top-down approach occurs not only in the establishment of groups, but also in their rule development such as in the case of the water user associations. In both water user associations, government staff introduced the *standardised rule format*, and then in a one-day meeting they modified this and produced the groups' rules. Then the rules took more than two years to be legalise by the head of the district and the district court. The leaders of the water user associations stated that they could not socialise the rules and as a result they could not implement them. Erawan (1998, p. 187) states that the key factor for the effective implementation of group rules is that the rules are developed by the groups themselves.

Table 3. Factors associated with lack of group supervision – *workshop learning outcomes*

Factors	Field Agents	Policy Makers
1. Group leadership (ability and skills)	x	x
2. Participation	x	x
3. Too many groups to supervise	x	
4. Too many works (duty overloaded)	x	
5. Lost of credibility	x	
6. Budget & facility	x	x
7. Lack of skills in technical & group	x	x
8. Much focus on <i>program or project</i> & not on <i>people and process</i>	x	x
9. Commitment of local formal leader		x
10. Difficult to sustain group performance		x
11. Coordination among the stakeholders	x	x

One reason for the dominant top-down approach to establish and work with groups is related predetermined government targets. In the poverty alleviation program for example, the government decided that in every less progressive village the groups should have been established by April 1994. This finding is supported by the experiences of rural development in some other developing countries which indicate that rural development is more often decided to achieve certain government objectives without the involvement of local field agents, and particularly “the poor” (Burkey, 1993; Hammer, 1994; Harrison *et al.*, 1995).

As a result of this approach, critical self-reflections carried out through the workshops highlighted lack of participation as another factors affecting the group effectiveness. This factor was perceived by the field agents and the policy makers also as one of the constraints to ‘supervise’ the groups regularly (Table 3).

Group Formation: More than 50 percent members of the groups under this study stated that their groups were externally driven. Even, both mass media study groups all members claimed the groups were formed for *group* and *village competition* purposes. They were appointed to be members of the groups. The members of water user associations, poverty group and the farmer group (Group 6) also provided similar responses. None members of these groups perceived internal initiative for group establishment. Interestingly, high proportion members of the groups (more than 60 percent members of water user associations) did not know the driving forces the group establishment.

On the contrary, over 80 percent members of cattle fattening groups stated that their real needs for cattle security and better environment motivated them to form the groups. In Group 8 for example, more incidences of cattle stolen before 1990 had triggered community cohesion and the needs for the group.

Targeting Approach: The target approach in this study refers to the government or *agency decision to determine what should be achieved by its agent in a given time*. The Indonesian Poverty Alleviation Program provides an illustration of how the targeting approach affects group failure. The government decided that every village under the poverty alleviation program should have established their poverty groups before the 1st of April 1994. As a result, in one village investigated in this study, 27 poverty groups were established. Negative impacts identified through this study are (1) several group members have not met the poverty criteria, (2) nepotism, and (3) lack of people’s knowledge about the group roles and objectives.

The second phase of the study also confirms the negative impacts of the approach. Mubyarto (1995) and Pribadi (1995) also report that some

government staff was included in the poverty groups. Masiki (1998) suggests that the government take more time for better socialisation (introducing the concept) of the program before it is implemented, not only to the poor community, but also to government staff.

This targeting approach to group establishment is contrary to Chamala's theory of group development (Chamala, 1995b) which indicates that to establish a sustainable group requires at least one, to one-and-a-half years. FAO experiences in working with groups for rural development demonstrated that effective groups required three to four years (Rouse, 1994, 1995).

Harrison, *et al.* (1995, p.154) found some negative impacts of the targeting approach as they stated:

“workers or volunteers may have no sense of ownership of them (groups, programs) and may quickly learn to play the game of meeting targets rather than developing a coherent equality strategy”.

The same impacts were also stated by Oakley (1994, p.18):

“Government or donors like to see physical targets and deadlines in project documents. This doesn't fit well with participatory approaches in which people themselves should be deciding what should be done, how and when”.

Incentive Approach for Group Establishment and Action: Most groups in this study were promoted under the incentive approach. Both mass media study groups were formed due to the group and village competitions. The water user associations were also promoted to fulfil the loan requirements of the Asian Development Bank for irrigation development projects. Poverty groups were established for the poverty alleviation program where every target village got 20 million rupiah.

During the data collection it was observed that the government staff should allocate some money to attract group leaders and group members to attend the meetings (27,000 rupiah per participant in water user association meeting, and 5000 rupiah in the poverty group meeting). According to the field extension agents *“it was very difficult to have a group meeting without money to compensate people for their time to attend the meeting”.*

Parallel approach and lack of agency coordination: Effective rural development required effective interagency coordination rather than parallels approach (no links and relationships among the agencies in programs implementation). In the water user association, for example, some departments, such as the Department of Agriculture, Irrigation section in the

Department of Public Works, and the Regional Planning Board (provincial as well as district level), should develop an effective team-work to help the association. This study found that it is very difficult to develop effective irrigation teams. They said that “*coordination is an easy word to say, but very hard to put into practice*”.

Several factors related to this issue are, (1) lack of commitment from vertical departments (parent office of the team members) for team sustainability (case of internal replacement of staff), (2) unclear roles and responsibilities of each team member, and (3) lack of knowledge and understanding of the program and project coordination.

Government policy for the poverty alleviation program stated that to help poverty groups all departments should involve and provide technical assistance. Evidence show that the poverty group never got any technical help from technical departments. The field extension agents stated that the poverty alleviation program is the project of the Rural Development office. The same issues were also reported in the North Sumatra province (Tarigan, 1998) and other developing countries (Madeley, 1991; Lauer, 1993).

Group Internal factors (GIF)

Group Cohesion: Cattle fattening groups are the most cohesive groups identified in this study. Test of association between members' state of cohesiveness and their perception of group role performance indicates the existence of association between the two variables. The members of the cohesive groups (Group 2 and 8) tended to express that their groups performed strategic roles, while the less and non cohesive groups (mass media study groups and water user associations) expressed that their groups had not performed effective downward roles.

Group Composition: Based on the group members' personal characteristics and social economic status, three groups were identified as the most homogen groups in this study, namely farmer group (Group 1) and cattle fattening groups (Group 2 and 8), while Group 4 and group 9 were identified as the least homogen groups. Members of the more homogenous groups were likely to express better role performance of their groups. Study conducted by Rouse (1994) and Esman and Uphoff (1984) supported this finding.

Group Leadership: Almost 42.82 percent members of non-active groups (mass media study groups and water user associations) expressed their unfavorable attitudes toward their leaders. Main argument raised by these respondents about their group leadership was related to the leaders' activity and ability to manage and run the their groups.

On the contrary, members of Group 1, 2 and 8 expressed their favorable attitudes toward their groups' leadership performance. The leaders of

these groups were perceived to have more ability to run the groups, where the groups performed some beneficial roles. Further investigation on the characteristics of the leaders of these groups indicates that all leaders (group heads) were also hold several other leadership positions in the other groups. The head of farmer group (Group 1) was also identified as a religion leader at the village, representative of contact farmer in the sub-district, and he was the former head of cattle fattening group (Group 2). The head of Group 2 was also leading Group 3, however the leadership position in the Group 2 was based on the members consensus while in the Group 3 was appointed by the village elite.

There is enough evidence to conclude that member' attitude to the group leadership is associated with their perception of group role performance. Members who expressed their favorable attitudes to their group leadership tended to perceive they favorable group role performance. So, group leadership is associated with group role performance.

Group Rules: Only in water user associations written rules were found, while both cattle-fattening groups developed unwritten rules. The other groups such as farmer groups, poverty group and mass media study groups had no rules.

Even though they had rules (mater user associations and poverty group), the groups could not implement their rules properly. For instance, more than 70 percent group members had not paid group fees while group leaders could not get any monetary compensation as they were stated by the rules. Similarly, in the poverty group about 45 percent members used their credit for buying rice. By March 1997, only 24,7 percent of the group members could repay their credit more than 50 percent from the total credit they got. The leaders stated that the group could not force its members to meet the rules due to the fact of no income generation, and some group members had no job.

Further investigation indicates that: (1) the rule was formally developed under a top-down approach where the government staff brought a standardised rule format and let the group leaders to modify it based on the local condition; (2) Related to these issues, at both water user associations it was identified that rules socialisation had not been done properly.

An effective unwritten rule was identified in the cattle-fattening groups. The groups developed routine night inspection schedules and they were implemented well. Two arguments related to effective implementation of the rules are: (1) the rules were developed by the members themselves; and (2) Issues raised in the rules are related to the group members' needs.

Group Size: Groups under this study are varies in their size, ranged from 13 (Group 4) to 500 members (Group 7). Both water user associations were identified to have a very large size (more than 300 farmers). The relatively small groups were mass media study groups, poverty group and cattle fattening groups where their members less than 30 villagers.

Group size and groups' role performance relationship could not be drawn clearly in this study due to the affect of other factors such as group formation process, group development, and group orientation. For example, the size of mass media study groups, cattle fattening groups, and farmer groups were relatively equal, but in terms of group performance, cattle fattening groups were more effective than the others. Compared to water user associations (Group 5 and 7), mass media study groups (Group 4 and Group 9) and farmer group (Group 6) were smaller enough to promote intensive interaction, however it was not existed. Large size of water user associations was also claimed as one source of difficulties in identifying their members. The groups had no records on their members and led to difficulties in implementing group rules (stated by 100 percent of water user association leaders).

Absence of Issues/Opportunity: The success or failure of a group is linked to the relationship between group formation and particular issues of concern to members or opportunity to achieve something. For example, the cattle-fattening groups were established by the people themselves based on their issues of cattle security. Cases of cattle lost which occurred before the group's establishment stimulated the cattle owners to work together to solve the problem and resulted in the establishment of the group.

Conversely, nearly 90 percent farmers involved with the water user associations stated that they did not have any problems with water supply as they could get water for irrigation whenever they wanted. The sub-district irrigation agents provided the same reason for the difficulties they had experienced when trying to promote an effective water user association.

Group 1 also provides another example of the connection between issues and group activity. As a result of the absence of a service provider at the village level, the group could perform as a service provider, not only to its members, but also to the members of non-active farmer groups and to the community.

Clark, Meyers, and Coutts (1997) stressed that the ability to identify a relevant issue is an important factor in successful group formation.

Lack of Knowledge and Perception of Group and Development Program:

Lack of knowledge on groups' role and the development program lead to unfavourable approaches to groups. This investigation demonstrated that government staff considered Rural Development Program as a process of Transfer of Technology (TOT). As a result, they used the groups as the medium to disseminate technologies and other development projects to the rural people. This finding is supported by Adisoewignyo (1998) claiming that in the poverty alleviation program, the credit was perceived as a *government charity*. Consequently, group members reluctant to repay the credit.

Other Factors (Community and other external factors)

In addition to groups' internal factors, economic crisis and major political events such as two general elections faced by the whole nation to some extent had influenced groups and service agencies' activities, including the implementation of action plans developed in the workshops. Group 3 for example, found difficult to force members to repay their credit, while 'felt need' for action was not found in the other less successful groups. On the other hand, lack of priority and budget were claimed by the policy makers as few of the factors hindering them to help field agents and groups to solve the problems.

In summary, our findings indicate some specific characteristics of the successful groups compared to the less successful groups as they are presented in the group profiles (Table 4).

Table 4. Characteristics of The Success and Less Successful Groups

Characteristics	Successful groups (Represented by G1, G2 and G8)	Less successful groups (represented by G3, G4, G5, G6, G7 and G8)
1. Group formation and action	Triggered by members' felt needs (to fulfill group members' needs for agricultural inputs, cattle security)	By and dependent on outsiders' initiative (group for project or program, group for 'competition')
2. Group size	Identifiable and small	Could not be identified and big
3. Group boundaries	Clear	Mostly unclear (may refer to village or farm block boundaries)
4. Leadership	Effective function of leadership (associated with spiritual leadership with high social commitment)	Ineffective function of leadership ('one-man show')
5. Group action learning	Practicing less formal type of action learning (e.g. G1 performed annual general meeting to evaluate group's achievement such as group's profits and plan)	No self action learning process taking place
6. Group members' participation	Higher	Lower
7. Group objectives	Clear	Unclear and even are not exist
8. Group meeting	Have regular meeting (may formal or less formal)	Have no self-initiated meeting

9. Action on the ground	Sustaining and expanding actions – identified during the three years of the study	Lack of action and dependency behavior
10. Group cohesion	Higher	Lower

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

The results of the study indicate that groups' internal as well as external factors were perceived to be associated with group effectiveness. These factors are government approaches to the group establishment and action (inappropriate used of top-down, targeting, incentive approaches, lack of interagency coordination, parallel approach), lack of group members' knowledge and skills, lack of participation, and other groups' internal factors (group cohesion, size, rules, composition, and group leadership).

Participatory approach to group establishment is more likely to promote more effective groups. This study also reveals that there is a relationship between group role performance with group members' perceptions of problems and felt needs – cases of the cattle fattening groups and water user associations. The successful groups were established based on the members' common problems, felt needs and objectives, while the less successful groups were mostly established based on the outsiders' interest and needs, e.g. for group and village competition, programs and projects such as in case of water user association and poverty groups.

This study suggests that community perception of issues and needs is considered as the key components to promote effective groups. To help the groups, a systematic approach should be taken to develop a better understanding about the ideal roles of groups and agents in rural development. The agents should have a political will to take normative approaches in establishing and working with groups.

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