THE STRATEGIES FOR RURAL COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT ACCORDING TO LAW NO. 6/2014: A CASE STUDY OF KUAKEN VILLAGE, *TIMOR TENGAH UTARA* DISTRICT, INDONESIA

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore the strategies used for rural community empowerment in Kuaken Village, *Timor Tengah Utara* (TTU) district, according to Law No. 6/2014 about village. A qualitative inquiry using in-depth interviews was used to collect the data from the study participants. They (n=12) were recruited using purposive sampling technique. Data were analysed using a qualitative data analysis framework. Results of this study indicated that rural community members were actively involved in formulating policies and regulations, supervising and monitoring program implementations, and in the development of the quality of human resources through various trainings. Transparency and accountability in the implementation of programs, and involvement of community and customary institutions in program implementation were also reported as the main supporting factors for rural community empowerment in Kuaken village. This study also reported lack of sustainable community assistances provided by program providers for beneficiaries in the village. Findings of the current study indicate the needs for improvement of community assistance in the village to provide them with guidance for program implementation. Coverage of more program beneficiaries in Kuaken village and other village in the district are also recommended.

Key words: Strategies, rural community empowerment, Kuaken Village, TTU, Indonesia

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of community empowerment emerges as a reaction to the imbalanced structural conditions in terms of power and access to resources (1). Community empowerment is therefore seen as a development alternative through which community members are provided with opportunities to get involved in programs, activities and trainings for quality development (1, 2). In the era of Susilo Bambang Yudhyono – Jusuf Kala, the essence of development is empowerment, hence the National Program for Rural Community Empowerment was initiated. Through this program, people were provided with opportunities to decide development program in their village, including in terms of education, health, infrastructure, and productive economy (3).

In East Nusa Tenggara province there is also a community development program called *Program Desa / Kelurahan Mandiri Anggur Merah*. This is a priority program initiated by the provincial government to provide opportunities for all villages in the province to decide on development programs and activities they would like to do. The provincial government provides villages with fund to support their programs and activities. The main aim of the program is to accelerate community empowerment (4, 5). Similarly, at district level, there is also a program provided by Timor Tengah Utara (TTU) district, called *Program Desa Mandiri Cinta Petani (Sari Tani)*. This program is designed to provide rural communities with opportunities to design their programs and activities they would like to develop. Sari Tani program provides fund to support all community development programs designed by people in rural communities. It also aims to empower rural communities in the district including in Kuaken village.

Community participations in the formulation of government policies and regulations, design of programs and activities, supervision and monitoring of the implementation of programs at the village level, and human resource quality development activities have been the main concerns of the Indonesian government at national, provincial, district and village level (6). All the above programs and activities have been carried out with the same ultimate goal which is to empower community especially rural communities in Indonesia. Therefore, the aim of this qualitative inquiry was to explore the strategies used for community empowerment in Kuaken village, a rural village in TTU district, Indonesia.

METHODS

Study Setting

The study was conducted in TTU district which is one of the 23 districts in East Nusa Tenggara Province, Indonesia. It covers the area of 2,669.7 km^2, with 229,803 total populations. It has 24 sub-districts and 193 villages. Geographically, it is located at coordinate of 12400421 ~ 12404601 East Longitude and 902481 ~ 9037361 South latitude. It shares the border with: Savu Sea and Republic Democratic Timor Leste (North), Belu District (East), Timor Tengah Selatan District (South), and Kupang District (West) (7).

Keuken village where the current study was carried out is located in East Noemuti Sub-district. It covers the area of 0.85 Ha and has the total population of 615 people. It consists of 166 households, of which 65 households were classified as poor households. It shares the border with Nibaaf village (North), Naiola village (South), Naob village (East), and Manikin village (West) (7).

Study Design and Recruitment

A qualitative inquiry employing one-to-one in-depth interviews and focus group discussion was carried out in Kuaken village, TTU district in 2017. Participants (n=12) were recruited using purposive sampling technique (8, 9). They included the Chief of the village, village government staff, staff of Village Deliberation Body, staff of Family Welfare Program, *Karang Taruna* Board, and poor people, people with disabilities, women, children and marginalised people.

Interviews were conducted at time and place convenient to each participant. The participants were informed about the aim of the study prior to the interviews. They were also informed that there will be no benefits and consequences if they decide to participate or not to continue their participation during the interview, and that their participation in this study is voluntary allowing them to withdraw their participation during the interviews if they do not feel comfortable. They were also told that data or information they provide during the interview will be confidential and anonymous. They were advised that a study identification letter and number (e.g. R1, R2....) will be assigned for each of them to prevent the possibility to link back the data to any individual in the future. Participants were also informed that ethics approval for this study was obtained from

Nusa Cendana University, Kupang, Indonesia. They signed and returned a written informed consent at the interview day.

Data Analysis

All the data from the tape recorder were transcribed verbatim into coding sheets and translated into English for further analysis. A thematic analysis was conducted and guided by framework analysis by Ritchie and Spencer (10) which consists of five steps. They were (1) familiarisation with the data by reading them line by line and making comments, (2) identification of emerging themes, (3) indexation to the entire data, (4) charting the data, and (5) mapping and interpretation of the data (10, 11). The framework analysis is a valid data process and provides a systematic approach to data management and enhances rigour, transparency, consistency and structure of the data (10).

RESULTS

The government of Indonesia has stipulated several strategies for rural community empowerment. Government Regulation, No. 43/2014, Article 127, Paragraph 2, contains 10 strategies for rural community empowerment, including (1) Supporting community participation in planning and development of village community carried out independently by each village; (2) Developing sustainable activities and programs using available human resources and natural resources at each village; (3) Formulating village development planning based on priority, potential and local wisdom; (4) Formulating planning and finance to support poor people, disabilities, women, children and marginal groups; (5) Developing transparent and accountable system in running the government and development of the village; (6) Utilizing village community institutions and customary institutions; (7) Supporting community participation in formulating village policy through village forum; (8) Improving the quality and capacity of human resources of the villagers; (9) Providing sustainable village community assistance; and (10) Supervising and monitoring the implementation of Village Governance and Village Development undertaken in a participatory manner by villagers.

(1) Supporting Community Participation in Planning and Development Of Village Community Carried Out Independently By Kuaken Village

Community participation was identified as a strong supporting factor for community empowerment and development in Kuaken village, TTU district, Indonesia. Participants interviewed acknowledged that villagers were enthusiastic and actively involved in community development activities and programs implemented in the village. They took part in activities and program planning to make sure that the activities and programs were designed to meet their needs. This was an indication that the participants were aware of the aim and importance of the programs for their development:

"People are aware that the development programs implemented every year in our village are to meet their needs. They articulate their needs which should be answered through the programs carried out in this village. They are enthusiastic and involved in planning the activities and providing suggestions to be accommodated in the programs" (Participant 1).

"I feel that the programs for community development in our village are important for us so I actively get involved in all the activities. As one of the beneficiaries of the programs I am thankful for being a part of the programs" (Participants 7).

(2) Developing Sustainable Activities and Program Using Available Human Resources and Natural Resources at Kuaken Village

Sustainable programs have been the main concerns of program providers such as governmental and non-governmental organisations. It is due to sustainable programs have been proven as an effective strategy for community empowerment or development. Several participants commented that programs delivered for communities in the village took into account sustainability aspect. The programs tried to set up activities that were sustainable and have long-term impact:

"Human resources and natural resources in Kuaken village are still very limited and there have not been significant changes because we just started. We are trying to utilize all the limitations we have. We motivate the young generation to increase their capacities through education because we think this will bring long-term positive impacts especially on processing natural resources in our village" (Participant 2).

Furthermore, the programs implemented in the village prioritize important aspect supportive of community empowerment. Participants interviewed articulated that a very important program they prioritised in the village was health program. Health program was prioritised because people in the village lacked basic knowledge and information on health and were unaware of factors supportive of ill-health:

"One of the programs prioritized in Kuaken village is health program. This is considered important because villagers do not have much knowledge on health. Village government is committed to supporting health program by conducting health supporting activities for the villagers" (Participant 4).

(3) Formulating Village Development Planning Based On Priority, Potential and Local Wisdom

Bottom-up approach applied in the development programs has been reported to be effective in bringing positive impacts on community development. It starts with the identification of values and local wisdom which can be utilized to support the implementation of community development programs. The study participants commented that one of the local wisdoms they tried to develop to support program implementation in the village is collaboration:
"Values and local wisdoms are important aspects of a community. Therefore, they have to be taken care of and passed to young generation so that they are aware of all cultural-related activities or events" (Participant 9).

(4) Formulating Planning and Finance Oriented To Support Poor People, Disabilities, Women, Children and Marginal Groups

Program planning and finance targeting people in need are very important because these will lead to proper implementation and reaching the target groups. The target groups of the programs implemented in Kuaken village included poor people, people with disabilities, women, children, and marginalised people. The study participants commented that community development programs started by identifying the target groups in the village so that the programs can reach the right targets:

"The target groups that have been identified are listed and informed about the programs and the benefits they will get. They are informed about these through village forum where the head of each group informs the names of the people who are eligible to be the beneficiaries of the programs. This is done to avoid the possibility of recruiting wrong beneficiaries" (Participant 12).

(5) Developing transparent and accountable system in running the government and development of the village

Other strategies for the successful community development are transparency and accountability of programs providers. The implementation of programs which is transparent and accountable can lead to successful implementation of community development programs. Participants expressed that they wanted transparency and accountability in the implementation of the programs so that they are aware of the progress of program implementation, and the benefits they can get at the end:

"In relation to transparency and accountability of the implementation of the programs in Kuaken village, the village government is open and keeps people [villagers] informed about the recruitment process of the beneficiaries, implementation process of the programs, and the progress experienced by the beneficiaries in the village" (Participant 12).

(6) Utilizing Village Community Institutions and Customary Institutions
Community institutions and customary institutions in the village were also reported to be the supporting factors for the successful implementation of community development programs. This was due to socio-cultural practices in the village play a role in supporting people to get involved in program activities carried out within communities in the Kuaken village. Participants of this study put forward that collaboration as a common practice within communities in the village was an instrument that facilitated them to work together to succeed community development programs in the village:

"Collaboration is a common practice within communities in this [Kuaken] village. It is easier for communities in this village to collaborate with each other. This is very important aspect for the successful implementation of the community development programs provided for them" (Participant 11).

(7) Supporting Community Participation in Formulating Village Policy through Village Forum

Community participation in policy formulation in Kuaken village was reported to be another strategy used to support the implementation of community development programs. Some participant stated that there had been several policies made in collaboration with community institutions in the village. As the consequence, people in the village were well informed about the policies and regulations and committed to obeying those regulations:

"The village government collaborates with community institutions to formulate several village policies about phenomenon or situation in Kuaken village. The aim of involving community members or villagers in the formulation of village policies is to ensure that what has been agreed on and stipulated is obeyed by the villagers and that they are aware of sanctions" (Participants 5).

(8) Improving the Quality and Capacity of Human Resources of the Villagers

The quality of human resources in Kuaken village was reported to be very low since many of the villagers had low level of education. This condition had led to several weaknesses in the government village, including: weak internal consolidation within the village government, low competency of the village government staff, low quality of administration at the village government, low capacity in processing the village finance, and lack of innovation in the village. The study participants commented that there had been several programs and activities initiated to improve the quality of human resources in the village, including trainings for the village government staff, socialization about village finance administration, trainings on how to make fertilizer, trainings on stock raising, etc.

We are trying to increase human resource capacity in our village through training, education, financial administration trainings because we realize that human resource capacity in our village is still very limited. We support our young generation in this village to increase their capacities for better development of their future and the future of our village

(9) Providing Sustainable Village Community Assistance

Sustainable community assistance was also indicated to be a main supporting factor for rural community empowerment. Data from the fieldwork indicated that assistances were provided for the villagers who were involved in various programs implemented in the village, called *Reboisasi, Anggur Merah, Sari Tani, GSC and KRPH*. However, the study participants put forward that assistances provided were not sustainable, leading to lack of guidance and monitoring towards the implementation of the programs. This was seen as the factor influencing the successful implementation of these programs for community empowerment:

"Programs for rural community development provided by the district, provincial and national government are very much helpful particularly for the people in Kuaken village. However, lack of sustainable assistances is a main hindering factor that influences the successful implementation of the programs. These programs are for community empowerment, which means people need to be assisted and guided so that they implement the programs as planned by the providers" (Participant 7).

(10) Supervising and Monitoring the Implementation of Village Governance and Community Development Programs

Active supervision and monitoring by community members towards the programs implemented in Kuaken village were indicated to be other important factors supportive of rural community empowerment in the village. Several informants stated that the involvement of the villagers in supervising and monitoring program implementation and the village government seemed to be a positive sign towards rural community empowerment. Actively getting involved in the programs indicated that they were ready to be empowered:

"People in Kuaken village actively take part in supervising and monitoring programs being implemented in the village. This is very much helpful because they can also see the implementation process and the village government is not working alone in effort towards community empowerment in the village" (Participants 10).

DISCUSSION

Community participation is a key strategy and crucial supporting factor for community empowerment or community development. Consistent with the results of previous studies (12, 13), the current study suggests that communities in Kuaken village were enthusiastic and actively involved in activities and programs implemented in the village. Findings of the current study indicate that sustainable program that prioritizes the important aspect needed by communities is a key strategy supportive of community empowerment. These findings are in line with the results of previous studies reported elsewhere (14, 15), indicating that community development or community empowerment can be achieved through programs that are sustainable and answering people's needs. Bottom-up approach is also reported in the findings of the current study as an important strategy to support community development programs carried out in Kuaken village. The related findings of previous studies (3, 16) have also reported that utilizing local wisdoms and values lived by people within communities can lead to great success of program implementation.

Supporting the previous findings reported elsewhere (17), the present study confirms that identification of the right beneficiaries is a key strategy for the successful implementation of community development programs to empower community members. Programs targeting and reaching the right groups in need can lead to greater success. Successful implementation of community empowerment programs is also determined by transparency and accountability of program implementation. The current study reports that the village government is very much transparent and accountable with the implementation of community development programs for its people. Similarly, the previous findings (18, 19) have also reported that transparency and accountability are crucial aspects that can lead to the successful implementation of a program. Besides, the current study also reports that collaboration as a common socio-cultural practice within communities in this village was used as a strategy to get villagers working together in the implementation of community development programs provided for them. Several study have also reported that recognizing and utilizing socio-cultural values, norms and practices can help implementers to successfully implement their programs (20).

Furthermore, community participation in formulating policies and regulations in the village is reported in the current study as an important aspect that helped the successful implementation of community development programs in Kuaken village. This is in line with the findings of previous studies (19, 21), showing that people's involvement in the formulation of policies and regulations will lead to increasing awareness and successful implementation of those policies and regulations. Results of this study also report that increasing the quality of human resources through various trainings was the main strategy for rural community empowerment which could also lead to successful implementation on community development programs. These results support the previous findings (22), indicating that capacity building is a sustainable process through which individuals, groups, organizations, and communities improve their capacity to carry out their main duties and solve problems. Lack of assistance provided to help the program beneficiaries was also reported in the current study as a hindering factor for community empowerment and successful implementation of community development programs. The study by Kurniawan (19) has reported that successful community empowerment carried out through community development programs is also determined by the assistances provided to assist and guide the beneficiaries during the implementation of the programs. Likewise, supervision and monitoring performed by community members towards the implementation of village governance and community development programs are key factors that can help to achieve rural community empowerment.

CONCLUSIONS

The current study reports ten strategies used to support rural community empowerment in Kuaken village, Timor Tengah Utara district, Indonesia. It suggests that active community participations in formulating policies and regulation, supervising and monitoring program implementation, and in the development of the quality of human resources through various trainings, are the main strategy applied for rural community empowerment in Kuaken village. It also reports transparency and accountability in the implementation of programs, and involvement of community and customary institutions in program implementation as the main supporting factors for rural community empowerment in the village. This study also reports lack of sustainable community assistances provided by program providers for beneficiaries in the village. Findings of the current study indicate the need for improvement of the assistance for

program participants in the village to provide them with guidance for program implementation. Coverage of more program beneficiaries in Kuaken village and other villages in the district is also recommended.

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