

# Collaborative Community Empowerment Model to Improve the Living Quality of Poor People

## Case Study on “Down-Syndrome Village” in Ponorogo Regency

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**Abstract:** Collaborative Community Empowerment is an empowerment strategy by collaborating various actors and stakeholders in empowerment programs. Implementation of the empowerment program is still sectorally and separately, especially in rural areas with centre of poverty. The case in this research is improving the quality of life of people with mental retardation. Thus, a comprehensive approach is needed to collaborate on these sectors. The purpose of this study is to develop a community empowerment model based on Collaborative Community Empowerment. In order to find the right model for collaboration in rural and poor people specially to improve the quality of life of people with mental retardation, this study deepens and understands the empirical pattern of empowerment that has implemented, and analyzed using the Collaborative Community Empowerment theory to create an appropriate collaborative model. The result of this study is the creation of a collaborative model for the society to improve the quality of life the community that gives beneficial impact on increasing quality of life of people with mental retardation and the society.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Poverty alleviation has become the main agenda in Indonesia development activities. The existing development strategies which focused on economic growth had not yet significantly contribute to decreasing the number of poverty in Indonesia. Various studies revealed that economic growth in Indonesia is still lacking quality because the community welfare improvement is not included in the economic growth process (Prasetyo and Maisaroh, 2009). Even though Indonesian economic development rate is actually increasing from 4.88% in 2015 to 5.02% in 2016, the number of people who live in poverty remain the same, amounted to 62.24% in the rural areas. The lack of community participation in the development process was assumed as the main reason for the ineffectiveness of development programs in Indonesia. The situation worsened because most of the poverty alleviation programs in Indonesia is hierarchy-oriented and governmental-centric (Hadna, 2016).

In the discourse of development, community empowerment is regarded as an antithesis of a top-down approach in development strategy, which still relevant to overcome problems of poverty (Hatu,

2010; Widayanti, 2012). Empowerment requires active participation from the society level (Kufuor and Koomson, 2014). Effective society participation could lead to personal and social empowerment, economic growth, and social transformation. However, the initiation of empowerment and participation from the vulnerable group in the society is low. The implementation of the program is focused on mobilization, while in theory, participation is the key to empowerment. Civil participation in empowerment program is not only as the program consumer but also as the producer who actively contribute and responsible for the process and outcomes of the program. Civil participation is also expected to motivate society to reach the next level of the program (Soetomo, 2006). In the development context, empowerment is not merely a structural activity, it is a psychological process. Therefore, an authority to society to determine the development orientation could be designed. It could further integrate individual value and communal belief toward independent and potential community (Gkorezis and Petridou, 2011).

Low initiative and participation in poor society cannot motivate the community to be independent. It also hinders empowerment activities, especially when assistance from another party is not present. Thus, the

presence of enabler, whether in the form of group or institution, is required (Wijaya, 2010). Many parties are actually capable to be an enabler, such as government, private sectors, higher education institutions, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) and others. Unfortunately, they worked individually with their interest and perspective to solve community problems where each party did not work in integrated activities.

Relations between empowerment actors were limited in agent-client relation, which the agenda orientation is focused on program implementation without substantial impact (Tobirin, 2013). Consequently, empowerment program transforms to be a charity program which only has a temporary impact. Ineffective empowerment programs can change the social behavior of the society and reduce social capital which is an important thing to empower society to be independent (Sopandi, 2010). In many cases, empowerment program for poor people has many obstacles such as community capacity, institutional capacity, organizational culture and regulatory framework (Adamson, 2010). Therefore, empowerment program needs a collaborative approach to facilitate multiple actors' coordination and community participation.

Collaborative approach also used in social service practice. Research from Arthur Turovh Himmelman in 1992 argued that collaborative approach can change the paradigm in social service by transforming power relation and focus on integrating social service to improve its cost-effectiveness (Himmelman, 1996). Collaboration is about collecting required knowledge, skill, value and motivation through participation based on effective action (Whittington, 2003). A collaborative approach is different with a partnership. Partnership emphasizes the legal-formal activity of a program while collaboration provides more flexible space to collaborate with many actors.

A collaborative approach is a mutual action of exchanging information, activities alteration, resources sharing and enhancing the capacity of other for mutual benefit and a common purpose (Himmelman, 2001). Collaborative Community empowerment was introduced by Seunghyun Yoo, and Nathan E Weed through their research in the public health field. They created a strategic model to support health promotion for the community that involved multiple mediators such as university and public group with a collaborative approach. This model combines social ecology with participation from the society to analyze the interaction between human and environment, human, and group in the environment, and the interaction between cause and effect in the community environment (Yoo and Nathan, 2004).

Collaborative community empowerment based on the previous study is merely a technical illustration

form one perspective. In this model, the involvement of government, the private sector, and the institutional actor is not fully addressed. In the context of community empowerment which oriented to community capacity development, there is an urgency to highlight studies about the inter-agency relation. This paper tries to develop collaborative community empowerment model focusing on participation, capacity building, multi-actor relation, and sustainability.

This paper shows a developing collaborative community empowerment that is more flexible and appropriate to use with empowerment program for poor people or vulnerable society. In this model, each actor has important role and participation is a key factor that determines the effectiveness of this model.

## 2 METHODS

This research applies qualitative method with a phenomenological approach. The research conducted by investigating a social phenomenon by differentiating, duplicating, cataloging and clarifying the object of research (Creswell, 2009). Phenomenological research captures closely the phenomenon to find a meaning contained in the phenomenon through investigation or analysis of the problem (Smith, 2009).

The focus of the investigation is community empowerment in Sidoharjo Village, Ponorogo Regency, about obstacles and inter-actor collaboration pattern in empowering the society. Data gathered through observation, in-depth interview, and desk study from various scientific and empiric documents. The key informants for this research are Head of Community Empowerment Department and Local Government, Head of Health Department, Head of the Development Planning Agency at Sub-National Level, Head of Sidoharjo Village, Public figures in Sidoharjo, Non-Governmental Organization and other related stakeholders.

Data were analyzed by data reduction from the research field for categorization by researcher's interpretation. Data was further analyzed and elaborated into a theoretical discussion. The result of theoretical analysis and the research outcomes from the field were elaborated by researcher's perspective for mapping the collaboration pattern and the obstacles experienced by the residents. Then, the collaborative empowerment model is developed based on research findings in the field which has elaborated with the theory. The final step is to determine the conclusion and formulating policy implication.

### 3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section will discuss findings in the field and theoretical discussion to develop collaborative empowerment model. The focus of the discussion in this research is inter-actor relations, the classification of obstacles and collaboration pattern, and the development of collaborative empowerment model.

#### 3.1 Empowerment and Collaboration Pattern

Sidoharjo is a village located in Ponorogo regency, east java. It recorded the highest number of resident who suffers physical and mental illness in Ponorogo, which make the village known as "down syndrome village". The village is densely populated with people living in poverty. Sidoharjo is officially registered as a village in 2007, located on a mountain slope with extremely slow infrastructure development. It has 6.376 residents with 1.668 head of the family. The education level of Sidoharjo residents is very low. 51.4% of them had never experienced formal education and 33.25% are elementary school graduates. Therefore, the poverty level in Sidoharjo is substantial. 996 households received rice assistance for the vulnerable group and temporary direct assistance and recorded the highest number of rice for vulnerable group assistance receiver in Ponorogo.

Not only heavily affected by poverty, Sidoharjo also recorded the highest number of resident who suffers from physical and mental disability in Ponorogo. The number of mental disability sufferer is 210 people or 3.29% from total population.

The existing development program is still physical oriented. Sidoharjo Village recorded the highest number of the resident with the mental disability, which attracts sympathy from many people. Direct assistance was annually delivered to the village. However, according to the informant, the assistance only lasted temporarily which makes them dependent on the assistance. Even though many programs had implemented before, the programs did not give a significant contribution to the improvement of live quality, especially for people with mental disability.

The main executor of empowerment collaboration is the government. A government with its inherent task as a formal institution have the power to organize society for empowerment in long term. The society also has the bigger access to government compared to other actors. The government actually had initiated to open the participation access to other actors, but the integration never realized. The basic challenge from empowerment program is sustainability. Most programs had failed to maintain

its continuity even they have a well-planned agenda. Dependency to government fund and formal rules creates an impression that government empowerment program implementation is merely a formality (see table 1).

Table 1: Collaborative empowerment pattern in Sidoharjo Village.

Collaboration Patterns	Activity	Role of the Actor				
		Government	NGO	Private Sector	University	Foundation/others
Collaborative Betterment	Internalization into the Society	Internalization of government into the community due to its duties and functions as a public servant				
	Action for community	The internalization from empowerment actors occurs naturally due to the issue of "down syndrome village", not on community initiatives as part of the community empowerment process				
Collaborative Empowerment	Organizing Community	Conducting empowerment and direct aids programs	Direct aids and supports programs	Direct aids and supports programs	Direct aids and supports programs and empowerment by Kuliiah Kerja Nyata Program (KKN)	Direct aids and supports programs
	Facilitate for networking	Organize and manage empowerment programs			Empowering independently through KKN program	
		Open access to establish networking with others formally or informally				

Sidoharjo people performed collaborative effort through groups in the community to help disable group in the area. In Sidowayah sub-area, the community established "sidowayah bangkit" (Rising Sidowayah) forum to mediate empowerment actors with people with disability. Parties who participated in the forum have active duties to serve and supervise disable people in the empowerment program by coordinating the distribution of direct assistance, due to the inability of disabled people to receive the aid. Even though Sidowayah Bangkit performed an important role as mediator, but this forum does not have the power to initiate and organize the program. In addition, work coverage of this forum is limited inside the sub-area. They are not able to build relations with related stakeholders or to advocate the people.

Specifically, the collaboration between government and society is still on the passive level where the community merely plays a role as program recipient. Communication and coordination from the government are not reaching the substance of empowerment. For instances, feed seed planting program and goat breeding are considered subjective which often neglect society needs because the seed is not suitable for Sidoharjo people needs. Furthermore, the economic value of the program comes in long term. Thus, without proper guidance, the program is very prone to failure. The Same condition applies to assistance in the form of capital for small enterprises. Business in the rural area generally does not have a significant impact like the business does in the urban community. The situation gets more severe because of the low level of education which suppressed the effectiveness of empowerment program.

### 3.2 Development of Collaborative Community Empowerment Model

Collaborative empowerment approach used social ecology analysis which divided into 4 levels: policy, organizational, community, and family/individual. Data gathered in the field shows that the community empowerment pattern is proceeded in individual level and shows no integration indicator. Each actor gives the contribution to the empowerment process but without clear direction. People capacity is low and unable to deliver a clear description of what they had in mind. In another word, the actors' movement is only based on their own interest.

The key factor in empowerment is participation from the community, organization, and community in order to achieve the development agenda. Collaboration between those three social ecologies is the success key of development. Empowerment for poor people has special characterization, particularly from the capacity aspect. Community capacity is one obstacle in empowerment (Adamson, 2010). Therefore, capacity development is an important factor to support the empowerment of poor people.

The development of collaborative community empowerment model based on social ecology perspective, with the basis of internal actor-relation, is improving. The collaboration model to empower poor people was developed through three important factors: 1) capacity development; 2) inter-actor relations, and 3) sustainability (see figure 1).

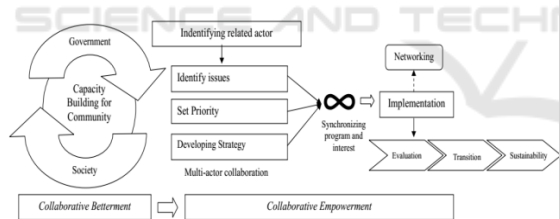


Figure 1: Development collaborative community empowerment model.

Collaborative community empowerment model is divided into two sub-activities, namely collaborative betterment and collaborative empowerment. Collaborative betterment focused on capacity planning and actor internalization. Collaborative empowerment is the core of empowerment activities to ensure its sustainability.

#### 3.2.1 Capacity Development

Capacity development in societal level is an initial action for poor people empowerment process. This process attempted to prepare the targeted group to receive the empowerment program. The government

has the power to interfere in capacity development through the power of regulation approach and intensive socialization. In the capacity development process, government and society should identify the related actors of empowerment program and provide space for their activities.

#### 3.2.2 Inter-actor Relations

Actor internalization process in empowerment program is conducted by identifying the role and the involvement of the actors. Thereafter, all actors formulate strategic issues to be accomplished by empowerment program. The actor will share the roles and decide priority program. Strategic programs offered by each actor will be adjusted according to community capacity to formulate development strategies. The activities in inter-actor relations are communication before empowerment and program integration to support program realization. Program integration could improve the effectiveness of expenses management, effort, and other resources in a directed agenda for a long term. In addition, actors play a crucial role to open the networking access as an attempt to gain support for development program sustainability.

#### 3.2.3 Sustainability

Sustainability is one major problem that always occurred in empowerment program. The unity of empowerment direction provides a clear description of the empowerment activities. This systematic effort is the one used as social capital for program sustainability. Program integration to solve a problem will be measured and evaluated by a systemic measurement tool to create a clear outcome. The evaluation result will be used as an asset in societal transition. The shift in the society will be accurately measured as guidance for the further step that should be taken. In the context of sustainability, the meaning of the concept is to maintain the program until the goals are accomplished.

Social setting in the collaborative empowerment model involves poor people with low capacity in knowledge, skill, infrastructure, social capital, and networking. Actor's involvement in empowerment is a supporting factor to achieve independence in society. Each actor has advantages and drawbacks. By collaboration, the drawbacks could be outweighed by another actor's advantages. In this context, empowerment model applies for one long-term strategy. Given the background of poor society, empowerment program is expected not only to improve the short-term life quality for society but also to create a better dependent community.

## 4 CONCLUSIONS

Empowerment in Sidoharjo Village is not significantly improved the living standard of people in the area. Empowerment actors are dominated by government, while non-government actors provide direct assistance without empowerment. The existing empowerment program from the government is not yet effective in providing short-term aid, yet creating dependency for Sidoharjo people. Given the fact, it is apparent that empowerment is still performed one-sided without inter-actor collaboration.

The development of collaboration model to empower poor people is developed through three main factors, 1) capacity development; 2) inter-actor relations, and 3). sustainability. Collaborative betterment process focused on community capacity planning and actor-internalization. Collaborative empowerment contains inter-actor relations mechanism in various empowerment processes management, ranging from issues identification to sustainability. The collaboration model could enhance the effectiveness of each sector's role in one empowerment agenda. The unity of process and role collaboration could create a social capital for society in order to prepare the following empowerment agenda or sustainability program.

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