



Increasing Taba Terunjam Village Community Participation in Village Development Meeting Activities

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Published online: 5 July 2021

ABSTRACT

Village development deliberations are ideally participatory forums that involve all community elements in the planning process. However, in Taba Terunjam Village, community participation remains low, both in terms of attendance and active involvement in expressing aspirations. Through this Community Service Program (PKM), lecturers and students from the Public Administration Study Program at Universitas Dehasen Bengkulu aim to raise awareness and encourage active civic engagement through educational and dialogical approaches. The activity was conducted through socialization and counseling sessions that encouraged residents to take a more active role in village development meetings. The results showed a significant increase in citizen attendance, willingness to voice opinions, and the establishment of more open two-way communication between the community and village officials. This activity proves that with the right strategies, a participatory culture at the village level can be fostered and become a strong foundation for democratic and sustainable development.

Keywords: Community Participation, Village Deliberation, Participatory Development, Community Service, Local Governance Communication

INTRODUCTION

Taba Terunjam Village is an administrative area located in Karang Tinggi Sub-district, Bengkulu Tengah Regency, with a population of approximately 1,022 people. Most of the community relies on the agricultural sector, particularly agriculture and plantations. Despite the potential of its natural resources, community involvement in village development decision-making, particularly through the Village Development Consultative Forum (Musrenbangdes), still shows a low level of participation. Field data shows that the attendance rate of residents in the deliberation activities does not exceed 30% of the total invitations, and active involvement in development discussions is still dominated by village elites, such as village officials and local community leaders (Mustanir, 2017).

This low participation is not merely a quantitative problem, but reflects more complex structural and cultural issues. Lack of access to information, low political literacy, and a culture of one-way communication from the village government to the community are the main factors that weaken the participatory basis of development. As noted by Dewi (2024), community participation in Musrenbangdes is often symbolic and ceremonial without resulting in substantive involvement in the formulation of village development policies. As a result, development tends not to be aligned with the real needs of the community and risks creating social

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inequality and non-inclusive policy-making. A number of community service activities conducted in various regions have shown that participatory education-based interventions can increase the level of attendance and involvement of citizens in village forums. Firman Perdana, Laksmono, Harto, and Ismandianto (2019) pointed out that a personal approach by activating community leaders as dialogue partners can increase the legitimacy of Musrenbangdes forums at the local level. However, strengthening the substance of community participation has not been touched upon, especially in relation to the courage of citizens in submitting proposals, the ability to articulate needs systematically, and the sustainability of post-deliberation involvement.

Furthermore, Tahulending, Kaunang, and Sumampouw (2018) in their study in Sonsilo Village, West Likupang Sub-district, showed that involving youth groups in village meetings can be a strategic entry point in creating a more democratic dialogue space. However, these activities have not yet touched on social engineering and the application of appropriate technology that can be an instrument in organising and facilitating public discourse in a systematic and sustainable manner. Here lies an important gap that has not been responded to much in previous community service activities. Poespitoahadi (2020) asserts that the importance of recontextualising village deliberation methods to be more adaptive to the development of information technology and contemporary social dynamics. However, this approach is still normative and has not been widely tested in community-based service practices. In other words, a strategy is needed that not only enhances the informative and educative aspects, but also transformative, encouraging changes in the mindset and behaviour of residents to become active actors in village development.

In line with this need, this Community Service activity (PKM) is designed as a participation- and education-based intervention that aims to increase the awareness, understanding, and capacity of the Taba Terunjam Village community in expressing their aspirations actively and constructively in the Musrenbangdes forum. The approach used prioritises interactive socialisation methods, focus group discussions, and the empowerment of local actors as facilitators of social change. This activity aims not only to increase the quantity of community attendance, but also to strengthen the quality of their involvement in a democratic, participatory and sustainable development planning process. Through this activity, it is hoped that a new, more dialogic relationship between the village government and the community can be established, as well as a deliberative culture that makes village meetings a representative and transformative space in determining the direction of development based on authentic local needs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Community participation is a key element in sustainable rural development. Cohen and Uphoff (1980) classify participation into four stages: decision-making, implementation, benefit utilization, and evaluation. In Indonesia, Law No. 6 of 2014 on Villages mandates active citizen involvement in development planning, particularly through Musrenbangdes (Village Development Planning Meetings). Several factors influence participation, including education level, access to information, leadership transparency, and trust in local government (Suharto, 2005; Putnam, 1993). Communities with better access to information and strong local leadership are more likely to engage in development processes.

To increase participation, a participatory approach is essential. Chambers (1997) emphasized community-based development where locals are treated as key actors. Providing education, accessible information, and inclusive forums also helps empower marginalized groups, including women and youth (Sutrisno, 2018). Ultimately, successful village meetings depend not only on citizen willingness but also on how well village leaders facilitate inclusive and transparent discussions that lead to real follow-up actions.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The method of implementing this Community Service activity is systematically designed to answer the problem of low participation of the Taba Terunjam Village community in the Village Development Consultation (Musrenbangdes) activities. This activity is carried out with an educative-participatory approach based on the principle of community empowerment through dialogue and active involvement, and is structured into four main stages: preparation stage, observation and situation analysis, implementation of core activities, and evaluation and follow-up.

The first stage is activity preparation, which includes internal coordination of the service team, preparation of work plans, and preparation of logistical equipment and communication media such as projectors, visual materials, and extension modules. At this stage, initial communication was also carried out with the village government as an implementation partner, as well as sending official invitations to activities. The purpose of this stage is to ensure that all technical and substantial needs of the activity are met so that the implementation can run effectively and on schedule.

Furthermore, the observation and situation analysis stage was carried out to obtain a more contextual understanding of the social conditions of the community and the practice of village deliberation that had been taking place. In this stage, the service team conducted informal interviews with several community leaders, village officials, and residents from groups that had been less involved, such as women and youth. The team also collected secondary data on the level of community attendance at previous Musrenbang and evaluated the communication structure and decision-making flow at the village level. This data is crucial for developing an approach to activities that is based on real local needs and challenges.

The third stage is the implementation of core activities through a series of activities such as interactive socialisation, focus group discussions (FGDs), and simulations of the Musrenbangdes implementation. In the socialisation, villagers are given an understanding of their rights and roles in the village development process, the importance of deliberation, and examples of good practices from other villages. Group discussions were used as a safe space for residents to express their aspirations, criticisms, and inputs openly, without pressure from officials or dominant figures. In addition, a simulation training was conducted to simulate the Musrenbang forum, with the aim of providing direct experience for residents in expressing opinions, formulating proposals, and making decisions together. The role of local community leaders was also strengthened by using them as dialogue facilitators to improve message acceptance and ensure post-activity sustainability. The fourth stage is evaluation and follow-up, which aims to measure the achievements of the activities and design sustainability strategies.

The evaluation was conducted through distributing questionnaires to participants, reflective discussions with village officials, and collecting feedback on the effectiveness of the methods used. The results of the evaluation were then formulated in the form of practical recommendations submitted to the village government to serve as a basis for improving the quality of village deliberations in the future. At this stage, a comprehensive activity report is also prepared as a form of academic and institutional accountability. The four stages are arranged in an integrated and interrelated manner, so that each activity carried out has a direct contribution to the achievement of the main objective of the activity, namely increasing the active participation of the Taba Terunjam Village community in the Musrenbangdes forum, both in terms of attendance and the quality of aspiration delivery and involvement in the village development decision-making process.

RESULTS

Community Service activities (PKM) with the theme ‘Increasing Community Participation in Taba Terunjam Village in Village Development Deliberations’ have been carried out in a structured

and participatory manner on 2 June 2022 at the Taba Terunjam Village Office, Karang Tinggi District, Central Bengkulu Regency. This activity was initiated by a team of lecturers and students from the Public Administration Study Programme, Dehasen University Bengkulu, with the main objective of increasing active community involvement in the development planning process through the Musrenbangdes forum, which has tended to be dominated by structural village actors.

The implementation of the activity was preceded by field observations and initial coordination with the village government and local community leaders. From the initial observation, it was found that community participation in the previous Musrenbang tended to be low both quantitatively and qualitatively. The attendance rate was only around 20-30% of the total number of invitations, and most participants only attended symbolically without actively contributing to the forum. This indicates a limited understanding of participatory rights and the lack of a truly inclusive space for ordinary citizens to express their aspirations.

The response to the PKM activities showed positive and transformative developments. Quantitatively, there was a significant spike in attendance: more than 60% of the invited residents attended the activities, indicating that the communication strategies used were able to mobilise wider community involvement. Information about the activities was conveyed not only through formal village government channels, but also through personal approaches by local community leaders, as well as oral information dissemination from house to house, which proved effective in reaching the elderly, women, and other marginalised groups.

Qualitatively, this activity resulted in a more important improvement, namely a shift in the pattern of interaction between residents and the village government. Through interactive socialisation, residents were given an understanding of their rights and obligations in the village deliberation forum, as well as the importance of deliberation as an instrument of local democracy. The focus group discussion sessions facilitated in this activity also succeeded in revealing various issues that had not previously surfaced in official forums, such as the lack of access to development information, inequality in the distribution of village assistance, and the absence of youth groups in decision-making structures.

In addition, the village deliberation simulation activities carried out in this forum provided a direct training space for residents to be able to express their opinions systematically, openly, and courageously in front of village authorities. Many participants, who were initially passive, began to actively voice their ideas when they felt that the forum atmosphere was supportive and not intimidating. This shows the importance of an approach that empowers rather than merely educates, where residents are placed as subjects of development, not objects that receive decisions from above.

This activity also gave rise to new community leaders who were previously invisible in the formal village structure. Some participants, especially youth and women, demonstrated good facilitative capacity and issue articulation skills. This potential was then recommended by the PKM team to be developed as local facilitators in subsequent deliberation forums. The village government expressed its willingness to open a more formal space for the involvement of these groups as part of the internal reform of village deliberation governance.

One other important outcome is the growing collective awareness among residents about the importance of overseeing the development process from inception to implementation. The proposal to establish a horizontal inter-dusun communication forum emerged from the villagers' own initiative as a post-activity sustainability mechanism. The forum was designed as a means of exchanging information, coordinating between hamlet representatives, and monitoring the implementation of village programmes.

From an institutional perspective, this activity made a positive contribution in changing the village government's perspective on the ideal deliberation mechanism. In a reflective evaluation session conducted together, the village officials admitted that so far the implementation of deliberation tends to be purely procedural and has not fully presented authentic community participation. The PKM

team provided a number of recommendations, such as revisions to the format of deliberation invitations, agenda development based on community aspirations, and the implementation of participatory documentation aimed at minimising the dominance of elite groups. These recommendations were well received and became references in improving the deliberation process in the future.

In general, the implementation of this PKM activity was not only able to fulfil the success indicators in terms of attendance and direct community involvement, but also succeeded in laying a strong foundation for the transformation of residents' participation patterns in village development. This activity proves that meaningful participation is not only measured by physical presence, but also by the extent to which residents are encouraged to engage reflectively, critically, and collaboratively in every stage of inclusive and equitable development.

DISCUSSIONS

The results of the Community Service (PKM) activities carried out in Taba Terunjam Village show that the problem of low community participation in the Village Development Meeting (Musrenbangdes) can be overcome gradually through educational, participatory, and communicative approaches. Indicators of successful problem-solving can be seen in the increase in community participation, both quantitatively—that is, a jump in community attendance in the deliberation forum from a previous average of below 30% to more than 60%—as well as qualitatively, marked by an increase in the number of residents who expressed opinions, proposed programmes, and were actively involved in group discussions and plenary sessions.

The resolution of this problem is inseparable from the internal strength of the PKM team consisting of lecturers and students with a background in public administration, who have conceptual understanding and practical experience in community facilitation and development communication. This academic capacity became the basis for developing educational materials and designing extension methods that were not one-way, but emphasised interaction and empowerment. In addition, the active involvement of students in the communication process with residents proved effective in bridging the psychological distance between activity participants and programme implementers, thus creating an open and non-hierarchical forum atmosphere.

In terms of external opportunities, the full support of the Taba Terunjam Village Government was a determining factor in the smooth running of the activities. The village head and village officials showed a commitment to being active partners in every stage of the activities, from planning, implementation, to evaluation. The villagers' high enthusiasm for the discussion forum and their willingness to attend and express their views also created a social momentum that encouraged a collective problem-solving process. A local context that is beginning to open up to socio-political change is a strategic opportunity to build a more inclusive participation system in the future.

However, this activity was also faced with several internal weaknesses. One of them is the limited time for implementation, which only takes place in one day of the main activity, so that the intensity of deepening the material and practice of participatory deliberation cannot be carried out thoroughly. In addition, there are still limitations in supporting facilities such as optimal presentation media and adequate documentation tools to record all the dynamics of the activity systematically.

On the other hand, external obstacles also arise in the form of a local political culture that is still patronising and dominative. Some residents stated that they were previously reluctant to get involved because they felt that their voices were not considered in official forums. This perception poses a challenge in building new trust in the village deliberation process. In addition, the busy schedules of residents, the majority of whom work in the agricultural sector, mean that they have limited time to engage in village activities, especially when activities are not organised at flexible times.

Nevertheless, the success of this activity in triggering initial changes is evidence that the problem of low community participation is not a stagnant condition, but can be changed through the right approach strategy, strengthening the role of local facilitators, and creating safe and inclusive participatory spaces. With the strengthening of post-activity sustainability through inter-village community communication forums and the involvement of local participation cadres, the solutions offered in this PKM are expected to continue and develop into empowered village democracy practices rooted in the community itself.

CONCLUSIONS

The Community Service Activity (PKM) themed ‘Increasing Taba Terunjam Village Community Participation in Village Development Consultation’ has successfully addressed the problem of low community involvement in the Musrenbangdes forum through an educational, participatory, and contextual approach. A significant increase in the attendance rate of the community as well as their active involvement in the discussion process and aspiration submission are the main indicators of the success of this activity. Participation is no longer understood simply as physical presence, but has evolved into a form of reflective and collaborative engagement that contributes directly to the direction of village development policies.

This activity also opened up a more balanced dialogue space between residents and the village government, and succeeded in raising potential local figures who could become facilitators of participatory deliberations in the future. The village government responded positively by expressing commitment to changing the format and mechanism of the deliberation to be more open and inclusive. Overall, this PKM activity not only solved the technical problem of low participation, but also became the initial foundation for a paradigm shift in village development governance that is more democratic and based on community needs.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to the Head of Taba Terunjam Village and all village officials for their support and cooperation during the implementation of this study. Special thanks are also extended to the community members who actively participated and contributed valuable insights during the village development meetings. We are also deeply grateful to Universitas Dehasen Bengkulu for providing the support and resources necessary for the successful completion of this research and community service activity. Lastly, our appreciation goes to colleagues and partners whose guidance and encouragement helped enrich the process and outcomes of this initiative.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declared that no potential conflicts of interests with respect to the authorship and publication of this article.

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