

Improving the Effectiveness of Community Participation in Village Fund Program

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Abstract

After four years of implementation of the Village Fund Program, although there were concrete results from the implementation of programs such as the establishment of various basic infrastructures in many villages, the number of cases of misuse of village funds by village heads showed that there were still serious problems in the governance of program implementation and accountability. In many cases, this is due to the ineffective participation of the village community in implementing the program. There is no community participation at all, or even if the community participate, their inability to support the weak village governments in managing village funds properly has resulted in the ineffective implementation of programs and uncontrolled corruption. In this regard, there is a strong correlation of the level of competence and public education with the effectiveness of community participation. A better level of community knowledge will not only increase the level of community participation in the process of policymaking and the implementation of the program but also the quality of the policies made and the results of programs that affect the community. To implement the Village Fund Program effectively and to derive better results through more effective community participation, the Indonesian Government must focus its efforts on increasing community's capacity to participate in program implementation both through formal and informal education or enhance the role of Non-Governmental Organizations in community empowerment.

Keywords: village fund, community participation, community capacity

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I. Introduction

Village fund program is one of the leading programs implemented by the Government of Indonesia in order to accelerate poverty alleviation in the country. Through the program that has been implemented since 2015, the Indonesian government specifically allocates some funds to all villages in Indonesia. The fund is to be managed by each village in the framework of village development. As mandated by Law number 6 of 2016 concerning Village, villages have the authority to manage their own resources for village development.

After four years of the implementation of the program, in general, there is a noticeable improvement in the implementation of the program. There have been basic infrastructures created in many villages, such as roads, bridges, school buildings, and health facilities. The disbursement of village funds has also increased from year to year. However, the arrest of many village heads in recent years for misuse of village funds indicates that corruption remains a serious threat to the program. As regards this issue, in many cases, complete lack of involvement of the villagers, or even if they participate, their inability to contribute in supporting the village governments' capacity wherever it is weak in managing village funds properly, has resulted in less effective implementation of the program and the corruption going out of control.

In general, there are some major reasons for the shortcoming of villagers' participation in the implementation of the village fund program in many villages. The first reason is the confusing overlap of regulations at the level of program implementation. This condition created by the lack of coordination and cooperation amongst the central agencies that are involved in this program, particularly where there are political aspect closely related to the program. Secondly, the low competence of human resources in the program, such as the village heads, village government staff, villagers, and facilitators. Most of these people are not adequately educated. In many places, the lack of adequate education deters the villagers from participating in the program even though they have the right to participate.

Regarding the lack of community involvement in the village fund program, firstly, this article will discuss the importance of effective public participation for improving governance. Further, this article will explore more specifically the link between human resources competencies and effective public participation. It can be argued that higher competence of the community is needed, not only to increase the output legitimacy but also to enhance the input legitimacy. In this regard, the Indonesian government must pay more attention to improving the capacities of the actors in the program, mainly by making efforts to improve their level of education. This will improve the governance of implementation of the program.

II. Overview of Relevant Theoretical Approach

According to Konisky and Beierle (2001), the discussion about public participation is no longer about whether community involvement is required at all. The discussion now is about the best type of public engagement process. Public

participation in development process is now common in many democratic countries. In fact, according to Michels (2011), public engagement is an essential element for democratic communities. Public participation is defined by World Health Organisation as:

A process by which people are enabled to become actively and genuinely involved in defining the issues of concern to them, in making decisions about factors that affect their lives, in formulating and implementing policies, in planning, developing and delivering services and in taking action to achieve change (World Health Organisation, 2002, p. 10).

Moreover, Irvin and Stansbury (2004) state that, through citizens contribution, the formulated policies will become more realistic as they appropriate the needs of the society. By generating the proposed development that fits its needs, as well as for the sake of the future generations, arguably community involvement is a key process towards sustainable development (Marzuki 2015). Furthermore, with their local knowledge, the community can often provide innovative solutions that would lead to better policies (Fung 2008). Hence, it can be argued that public engagement in the development and policy-making process is necessary for a democratic society to make appropriate development policies for the public.

As regards governance, a better community involvement will also improve governance. According to the World Bank (2016), there are six dimensions of governance, namely, voice accountability, political stability and absence of violence, regulatory quality, government effectiveness, the rule of law, and control of corruption. For instance, by its active participation the public will be able to decide the use of the budget and also carry out the scrutiny of the government's use of the budget in a development project. If such participation is achieved, then the use of the budget can be more efficient, and the chances of corruption can be minimized. In addition, all would agree that good quality community participation in the policy-making process will improve the quality of the policies or regulations as the output of the process.

Nevertheless, involving the community in the decision-making process is not without its cost (Irvin & Stansbury 2004). Therefore, it must be ensured that community involvement is not merely an empty ritual but delivers an excellent outcome (Arnstein 1969). Moreover, according to Fung (2006), there are three prominent dimensions of community participation, namely, who participate, how participants exchange information and make decisions, and the dimension that illustrates the relationship between the discussion and the policy or the actions taken by the society. In this regard, the government has an enormous role as the facilitator of effective community participation in a decision-making process. The government must know precisely and also determine who will be involved in the process, how the process of information exchange and decision-making will be undertaken, and how the government will facilitate it.

Furthermore, in terms of the relation between community involvement and legitimacy, according to Fung (2006), 'a public policy or action is legitimate when citizens have good reasons to support or obey it'. To obtain both input and output legitimacy, there should be an equal opportunity to participate and a high level of competence is expected from the participants (Boedeltje & Cornips 2004). In this regards, as stated by Marzuki (2015), an equal representation is refers to the same level of understanding of the problem by participants. Also, a public participation process is not possible if the participants do not have a high level of education and

sufficient information about the problem (Stinghe 2002). Therefore, it can be argued that the community's education level has a strong correlation with the achievement of the legitimacies. In this regard, the level of education of the society is a critical factor to determine success or failure in achieving legitimacy in a public participation process.

III. Analysis of Insights/Lessons from Selected Literature

Regarding input and output legitimacy, Irvin and Stansbury (2004) state that community involvement in the decision-making process will generate the credibility of the process and better decision as the output. Boedeltje and Cornips (2004) also emphasise that community engagement is needed primarily to achieve the output legitimacy; in consequence, the form of public participation should focus on the criterion of competency. In other words, the aim of increasing the community's capabilities is to achieve the output legitimacy. However, Hendriks (2008) argues that instead focusing only on the output legitimacy, a good network governance should be given greater attention to improve the input legitimacy, specifically regarding who will be involved in the process. In this context, governments must understand the capacity and the preferences of the community if they want to engage public and gain their contribution (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development 2009). Although people are basically eager to be involved when their direct interests are at stake, often their low skills and abilities keep them from participating (Yang & Callahan 2007).

It can be clearly seen that there are two different approaches, one that focuses more on the input and the other that focuses on the output. Basically, these two approaches to legitimization of the outcomes are complementary and cannot be achieved in isolation from each other. For instance, regarding achieving the legitimacy of output, when the participants in a policy-making process have met the necessary high standard of competence in order to generate a good policy, but if most people are not involved or not represented sufficiently, they will not support or implement the policy. In this case, the legitimacy of output is not achieved. Similarly, when the community has been well involved, but due to the low level of competency of the participants, the resulting policy will not be suitable. In this case, the legitimacy of output is not achieved as well. Therefore, ideally, we can ensure at the input level that the participants are representing the entire community and they are competent. Based on these two different ideas, it can be argued that the focus must be given equally to both input and output legitimacy.

Furthermore, in terms of the input legitimacy, from the government's point of view, Timothy (1999) argues based on his study in Yogyakarta that there are several reasons why sometimes the government does not involve the local community. The reasons are the lack of people's understanding of public participation process, deficiency of resources for managing the staff and information within the government, and budget constraints. The thought that society does not need to be involved shows that such a government still has an old governance notion. Such, according to Kjær (2004) is a government that seeks to control with a top-down approach. Governments with such reasoning can be assumed to be suffering from a drawback of knowledge. On the other hand, according to OECD (2009), from the community's perspective, people can be divided into two groups based on their reason for choosing not to participate in the policy-making process, namely, people who are willing but incapable and people who are capable but unwilling. In this context, there is a possibility that their reason not to be involved

is caused by the community's lack of capability or knowledge. In this regards, Marzuki (2015) argues that lack of information about public engagement and low levels of education in a society cause a low level of participation from the community.

To overcome above issues, the government should take proper steps to ensure that there will be an improvement in the community's capability. To support this argument, as stated by Hendriks (2008), a proactive action from the government is required to increase community participation in order to enhance the inclusivity network governance. For instance, OECD (2009) suggests the government lower the barriers to participation for the people who are willing but incapable and give more incentives to those who are capable but unwilling. However, in order to take appropriate and effective actions, the government must have a comprehensive understanding of the community, including what is the impact of the action to be undertaken to the society. In the matter of the impact of conducting capacity building for the community, basically, as expressed by Fung and Wright (2001), people will have the benefit of their better competencies and have sufficient information to participate in the decision-making process because they are the ones who will, in the end, have to deal with the consequences of a bad decision.

Furthermore, the government should also realise that not only the community will get the benefit of increased competence, the government also will benefit from the improvement. According to OECD (2009), broader public inputs in policy making and service delivery, will help the government win greater public trust, achieve better outcome with less cost, higher public compliance with the decision, ensure equity of access for the public to policy making and services, and leveraging the public's knowledge and resources and innovative solutions. It is obvious that increasing community capacity will benefit both sides. Dong (2008) provides another viewpoint by stating that increasing the capacity of people should be the primary concern of the government regardless of the benefits that can be derived from it by both the government and the community. Capabilities theorists claim that by working to strengthen people's capacity will also enhance governance (Dong 2008).

However, from what Timothy and OECD state as previously explained, it can be seen that the problem of lack of competence or low level of education can occur both in society and government. Therefore, efforts should be made to improve competence of both parties. It would be easier if the low capacity only exists in the community. Under these circumstances, the government will most likely be able to take decisions and appropriate actions as necessary to strengthen the capacity of the community. But, if there is a lack of competence in the government as well, it requires the involvement of another actor, such as non-profit organisations, to overcome the problem. As stated by Yang and Callahan (2007), many non-profit organisations' activities not only facilitate the community but also stimulate government action to seek input from the community. Moreover, the involvement of the Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) will be able to act as the bridge and facilitate better communication between the local community and the government, as well as the implementation and management of the program (Constantino et al. 2012).

In relation to the implementation of village fund program in Indonesia, the un-optimal community participation on the input side is not only caused by the low capacity of the community but in many cases also caused by the low level of competency of the local governments. In this context, the local governments still

use a top-down approach and they do not try to approach the communities because they assume that most of the people in the communities are incompetent. The incompetent communities are not proactively encourage and empowered to become competent communities. NGOs can assist the government to empower the communities and communicate with them. However, the role of NGOs is not optimal yet because there is an existence of antipathy in the government towards the aid that NGOs, especially the foreign NGOs, give. Also, the number of NGOs in Indonesia is too small to reach approximately 75,000 villages in Indonesia. In addition, there are facilitators assigned by the central government to provide assistance in implementing the village fund program. However, similar to NGOs, the number of facilitators is not commensurate with the number of villages in Indonesia.

IV. Merits of Different Solutions

Based on the above discussion, it can be argued that community capacity building is one of the best option, not only for improving the quality of decision-making process, which would lead to better outcomes (output-oriented legitimacy), but also to increase public participation (input-oriented legitimacy). The community capacity building is needed because of the lack of knowledge and competence in the local community. Most of the people in the society do not know their right to participate in decision-making process. The people do not have the confidence to be involved in the process of decision-making nor in making good decisions. In this context, ideally, the government (local government) should proactively involve the local community in capacity building.

Empowering the local community is one proactive action of the government that will involve the people in the community. As stated by Eyben, Harris and Pettit (2006), empowerment at the community level is the process that makes the community gain their power and to improve their well-being. Moreover, the wide range of strategies to empower the people to intensify their involvement in local participation, linking the people to the local education, and feeding more information to the communities has four dimensions, namely, psychological, social, economic and political (Constantino et al. 2012). In this regard, the government can use the NGOs as the bridge between the government and the community. On the other hand, education and social learning are also the tools for empowerment (Diduck 1999). The integration of the education program, continuity of training and monitoring will bring into a broader perceptive into education. Therefore, as one of the empowerment tools, education will help the community to gain more knowledge and develop the awareness of their rights as the citizen to involve more in any aspect of their lives, including in the political aspect by participating to give good inputs and outputs for better running of the government's programs.

V. Conclusion

To sum up, it can be argued that there is a strong correlation between the level of competence and community education and the effectiveness of public participation in a process to achieve legitimacy of both the inputs and outputs. The level of public knowledge not only influences the level of peoples' participation in the policy-making process but also the quality of the decision or the resultant policy from a policy-making process in which the community is involved. The objective of community capacity building should be to strike a balance between the two legitimacies, that of the inputs and the output.

To improve the capacity of the community, the government must take proactive action based on a comprehensive understanding of the condition of the community. The government must realise that greater capacity of the community benefits not only the community and government, but also to improve the quality of governance. Furthermore, the government can also utilise the NGOs to improve the capacity of the community (community empowerment). The NGOs can be the media or a bridge of communication between the government and the society. In Indonesia, the central government assigns facilitators to complement and work together with the NGOs in assisting the implementation of the village fund program.

VI. References

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