Community Development: The Role of Religious Leaders in Community Empowerment

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Abstract

This research is a conceptual research with the background of a supporting role as a government partner in community development in community empowerment. The religious leaders are non-formal leaders who have strong credibility in the community because they are considered capable, highly knowledgeable, have noble character, have expertise in the field of religion, both religious rituals and religious insights that can be used as role models by the community. This study aims to increase references and produce a proposition with the topic of research on the role of religious leaders in community empowerment. Based on the previous literature review, it was concluded that the role of religious leaders in community empowerment had an effect on the motivation to participate actively and sustainably in the development, implementation and evaluation interventions according to its capacity and capability. The community empowerment provides opportunities for the community's members to develop and build their own capacities. The community empowerment applies if there is a delivered-information by disseminating various policies and empowerment program activities. This research can be used as a study in deepening the further research.

I. BACKGROUND OF STUDY

Community development is seen as something that has the center of attention to help people at various levels so that they can grow and develop by utilizing all existing means and facilities both in acting, planning, managing and developing human resources and their physical environment so that social welfare can be achieved. Community development can be described in a system perspective and community can be approached, analyzed, and understood through a systems perspective. The system is a system of personal, organizational, and community interacting and influencing each other constantly (Nel, 2018). Despite of the complexity of community development and the variety of frameworks applied, community development can mainly be approached from two different paradigms (Pretorious & Nel, 2012). The traditional way of working with communities is to identify problems and needs in the community, and an alternative approach is to focus on strengths, assets and capabilities. Second, to improve the quality of life of community members to be sustainable, but the assumptions, attitudes, motivations, methods and techniques of the underlying approach are different (Arcand & Wagner, 2016). One of the strategies and approaches that are widely used in community development is through community empowerment to achieve independence (Christens, 2012).

Empowerment is carried out in an effort to increase the capacity of the community to make decisions that give an effect in life. The focus of community empowerment is to restore or improve the community's ability to act with dignity in carrying out their rights and obligations as community's members (Badaruddin et al., 2020). Community empowerment and education are closely related to advancing the community because empowerment occupies a central position in community-based education efforts (Damen et al., 2017). Currently, community empowerment is also being developed in Islamic boarding schools. *Pesantren* is one of the non-formal education units with religious education as its main foundation (Shofwan et al., 2019). In general, this *pesantren* has 3 functions including centers for cadre of religious thinkers, institutions that develop human resources, and institutions that have the power to empower the community (Rusmini, 2019). The several studies reveal that community empowerment needs to be introduced through authentic community leaders, including community leaders, religious leaders, political leaders, traditional leaders, and youth leaders (Fawcett et al., 2010).

The religious leaders are non-formal leaders who have strong credibility in the community because they are considered capable, highly knowledgeable, have noble character, have expertise in the field of religion, both religious rituals and religious insights that can be used as role models by the surrounding community (Torabi & Noori, 2019). In addition, religious leaders act as community leaders for priests in religious and social issues as well as state issues in order to succeed in government programs and fostering harmonization of community life (Schaefer, 2016) so that the role of religious leaders is indispensable in development. The role of religious leaders is expected to be able to cut and solve problems related to development through empowerment (Rozi, 2020).

The community empowerment cadres should be people who have influence and are respected in community; it can be a religious leader, traditional leader because of their strategic role in the success of the mentoring and empowerment program (Sudiapermana & Muslikhah, 2020). This study aims to explore conceptually the role of religious leaders in community empowerment as an approach in community development. The role of religious leaders is seen as being able to influence the community in an effort to make the community independent in the right way and direction or the use of natural and human resources can be realized properly.

II. METHOD

This study uses a conceptual study to explore research related to community development using a community empowerment approach to analyze the elements of community empowerment and its implications (Stoecker, 2012). This research has used some of theoretical papers and previous research related to empowerment to explore the important elements needed to map the strategic steps of religious leaders in empowering the community. The exploration of theoretical reviews and previous research analyzed through Google Scholar related to religious leaders in empowering the community. The steps taken were by exploring keywords related to religious leaders (Torabi & Noori, 2019) and focusing on community empowerment (Damen et al., 2017) to obtain sufficient data. If you have found previous research studies, the findings are arranged to be a summary and it concludes the results of the research that to be combined with the results of other studies.

III. RESULTS

The notion of community development becomes relevant when community members gain control over interventions in that community. The steps of community development make community empowerment as one of the elements that can influence various aspects of development itself. Empowerment as a product, process and outcome is a collective action process in which individuals are placed in a position where they can develop social capital and carry out their roles as members of society. The result of the process is the ability to voice concerns and represent the interests of individuals who can influence the situation of the community, making it possible to expand the capabilities and commodities of the community. The abilities can be divided into human abilities (education and good health) and social abilities (having social skills and a sense of identity) (Gohori & van der Merwe, 2021). Empowerment also needs to provide access rights to the community which allows the community to have power in decision making (Das & Chatterjee, 2015). The role of religious leaders in empowerment in community development is not a central figure in development because the central figure in development is a member of the community who is given the trust to occupy positions in the government environment. The religious figures are complementary roles that determine success indirectly in community development because they have an influence based on psychological ties to community members. The contribution of religious leaders in development by providing a religious foundation that community development and community empowerment is worship, religious leaders can also invite the community to support and participate in development, and the religious leaders can play a role and socialize various government policies (Islam, 2014). The community leaders in development have had a significant impact (Muslim et al., 2017). The role of religious leaders in motivating their members or the community, in this case motivating means encouraging or encouraging their followers to actively participate in development. The community participation is seen as an indicator of community involvement both in decision making in a project or its implementation in one of which is a community empowerment program (Isti, 2016). Participation is in the form of voluntary contributions to support the work plan and the submission of ideas or suggestions related to what is desired to be made into a plan that will be implemented. In addition, community members will also provide evaluations when plans do not meet expectations. However, this participation can be hampered because people with low education find it difficult for community members to understand the importance of the plans to be implemented due to ignorance (Anggraheni et al., 2018) so that the lack of community participation in management must be increased so that participation involves the whole community to carry out activities together so that the goals to be achieved can be realized. The previous research has shown that community participation increases the overall effectiveness of the project especially in developing individual capacities in

the community. The success of community empowerment is significantly determined by the active participation of the community to be directly involved in community development. The religious leaders who are elements of the community contribute to invite, provide instructions, and motivate the community to support and participate in development through community empowerment activities (Heryani, 2018).

Proposition 1: The role of religious leaders in community empowerment is effective if there is motivation to actively and sustainably participate in the development, implementation and evaluation of interventions according to capacity and capability.

The construction of community capacity building is closely related to community empowerment. The concept of community empowerment is multi-dimensional, and includes economical, social, political and psychological empowerment (Nyaupane & Poudel, 2011). Building an empowered community means that there is capacity building as an increase in the community's ability to address, define, assess and act on issues related to change in society. Community capacity is also described as the combined effect of community commitment, resources, and skills that can be used to increase community strength and overcome problems that occur in the community (Noe & Kangalawe, 2015). Increased community capacity is a source of increasing social capital among the community. The presence of religious leaders in the community makes it possible to support individuals in vulnerable communities who are not involved in development. The role of leaders and government take the benefit each other by giving a positive impact in community development (Butler, 2017).

The role of religious leaders refers to the capacity of the community to build and develop a common vision and common goals for progress. The capacity to increase skills, knowledge, and awareness to stimulate the learning process is called knowledge building (Chan et al., 2016). The strategic contribution of religious leaders in community empowerment for capacity building by increasing knowledge through *da'wah*, inculcating attitudes through religious character direction, and increasing technical skills to master certain skills (Raharjo et al., 2019). Community capacity development is an idea based on increasing people's knowledge and skills needed to sustain the benefits of community empowerment in the long term. The religious leaders in the process of strengthen knowledge, skills and competencies are cumulative together so that they can collectively attain the community problems in the existing socio-political (Sulaiman et al., 2019). The religious leaders are one of the determinants in building community capacity for empowered communities.

Proposition 2: Community empowerment provides opportunities for community members to develop and build their own capacities.

Social interaction through community groups increases community participation and community capacity; hence, it encourages development at the local level. Such social networks become a supportive source for the transfer of information between community members (Cole, 2006) and people tend to trust information that comes from reliable sources (Boley & McGehee, 2014). To be able to make success in the development program, besides the support and participation of the community, it is also necessary to have leaders who are willing to appear in every development. The religious leaders have a pioneering attitude, are brave, provide good examples and their examples and are willing to sacrifice personal interests for the benefit of the community so that the information conveyed by religious leaders is trusted and followed. Providing information to the public not only increases community participation in sustainability, but also increases social control (Stone, 2015). People have a higher tendency to worry about what is happening on; or for the community this is a reaction to contributing as dynamic, active and caring citizens (Sutawa, 2012). In addition, the role of religious leaders in individuals by building a sense of community in society tends to gain an understanding that their participation can increase social power and can change the situation and can gain greater control over their lives together. The religious leaders as communication liaisons between the village government and the community are carried out through a persuasive approach in the form of coaching and providing direction to the community as well as advice on development through religious activities such as *tahlil* and recitation.

Proposition 3: Community empowerment applies if there is delivered-information by disseminating various policies and activities of empowerment programs.

IV.   CONCLUSION

To sum up this discussion, this study summarizes the role of religious leaders in community empowerment as an effort in community development. The religious leaders have a strong role in society because they are considered capable, highly knowledgeable, have noble character, and have expertise in the field of religion, both religious rituals and religious insights that can be used as role models by the surrounding community. The religious leaders contribute to invite, provide guidance, and motivate the community to support

and participate in development through community empowerment activities. The role of religious leaders in community empowerment affects the motivation to participate actively and sustainably in the development, implementation and evaluation interventions according to their capacities and capabilities. As the role of religious leaders in community empowerment to strengthen knowledge, skills and competencies cumulative together so that the community can master community problems collectively. The success of community empowerment if there is the delivery of information in disseminating various policies and activities of empowerment programs by non-formal figures, one of which is religious leaders.

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