



The Strategic Contribution of Community Empowerment Institutions in Formulating Participatory Inclusive and Responsive Development Policies

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A B S T R A C T

Participatory, inclusive, and responsive development policies are essential principles in achieving democratic governance that reflects the actual needs of the community. However, efforts to implement such policies often face challenges at the local planning level. This study aims to analyze the strategic contribution of Community Empowerment Institutions (LPM) in the formulation of development policies through the mechanism of development planning deliberations in Molosifat U Village, Sipatana District, Gorontalo City. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed, using observation, interviews, and documentation as data collection techniques. The findings indicate that LPM plays a role as a facilitator, mediator, and motivator in encouraging community participation. Nevertheless, its contribution remains suboptimal due to low public involvement, limited evaluative capacity in assessing development proposals, and the influence of particular interests in the policy formulation process. On the other hand, advances in information technology serve as a supporting factor in enhancing participation and transparency. The study concludes that strengthening institutional capacity and increasing citizen engagement are crucial for enabling LPM to perform its strategic role more effectively in realizing participatory, inclusive, and responsive development policies.

INTRODUCTION

The implementation of village and sub-district community empowerment in Indonesia has been strengthened after the issuance of Law No. 6 of 2014 concerning Villages. Through this law, village governments are given greater authority in development planning, especially in the aspect of community empowerment based on community initiatives, ancestral rights and customs. Empowerment as a form of alternative development has indeed opened up space for increasing community participation in development by strengthening local values that can be used as development resources (Mujahiddin et al., 2023). Development as an integral part of national development has a very strategic meaning. It is said so because village and sub-district development is the backbone of national resilience and food security. Therefore, village and sub-district development is a very important part of various activities/programs that can be implemented by the government and the community (Kimbal, 2018).

Normatively, based on the Regulation of the Minister of Home Affairs No. 18 of 2018, it clearly shows that the Community Empowerment Institution (LPM) is one of the village community institutions which is a forum for community participation, as a partner of the village government, and participates in planning, implementing and supervising development, as well as improving community services (Permendagri No 18, 2018). The Community Empowerment Institution (LPM) is tasked with assisting in absorbing community aspirations regarding development planning and mobilizing the community in implementing village development through mutual cooperation (Minarni, 2014). Community Empowerment Institutions (LPM) focus on efforts to improve community skills to participate in development. Village communities are considered necessary to be empowered

within the framework of village development participation considering the lack of human resources in the village scope who are able to actively participate in development. This active participation can be through various activities that touch on aspects of social and economic development of village communities. As an effort to overcome poverty, the village government has made various efforts to empower the community. Community empowerment is understood as a strategy to achieve the goal of increasing community welfare. Through the participatory development process, critical awareness and independence of the community, especially the poor, can be developed, so that they are not only objects but also subjects in efforts to overcome poverty (Dahyar Daraba, 2017).

Village and sub-district development planning is a very important thing, because from this development planning the direction of village development is determined. Community aspirations in village and sub-district development planning are important, therefore it is the obligation of the village and sub-district government to accommodate community aspirations in development planning (Wiguna et al., 2019). Without involving the community in the development process, development will not be possible and will not meet the targets achieved because the policies issued by leaders are very far from the aspirations, interests and needs of the people (Putri, 2015). The loss of community participation results in the fading of people's control and as a result there are many denials of the people's mandate which ends in the process of abuse of power. Village and sub-district governments are expected to be more democratic, effective in carrying out public service functions. Good village and sub-district leadership in driving the government will also improve the performance of the government and this will have a

positive impact on the public services provided (Ibad & Djafar, 2023).

Community participation has a very important position in development planning, because basically the community is the party that knows the most about its own problems and needs. In order to achieve the success of the development, all planning, implementation and evaluation programs of development must involve the community, because they are the ones who know the problems and needs in order to develop their region and they are also the ones who will later utilize and assess the success or failure of development in their region (Henry et al., 2014). The development planning process is an important public event to bring stakeholders to understand regional issues and problems, reach agreement on development priorities, and consensus to solve various regional development problems. In the preparation of village and sub-district development plans, the Top-down or Bottom-Up collaboration scheme dominates. In this case, community control and participation in the implementation of village and sub-district government affairs must be direct and real. Community control over village and sub-district officials can only be effective if village and sub-district officials can present their programs and policies in a transparent and accountable manner (Prianto, 2018).

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative research type with a descriptive approach. In this study, researchers use open interviews to examine and understand the attitudes, views, feelings, and behavior of individuals or groups of people that occur. By using qualitative descriptive analysis, the study intends to obtain a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the existence of Community Empowerment Institutions in absorbing community proposals for development programs in the Molosifat U sub-district, Gorontalo City. This research was conducted over a period of 2 months, starting from October to November 2021.

Data collection techniques in qualitative research are independent of all data collection techniques: interviews, observation, and documentation. These techniques are:

1. Interview.

The interviews conducted with informants in this study used interview guidelines or interview guides in the form of a list of questions that had been prepared by the researcher according to the focus of the study. The informants to be interviewed were:

- a. Head of Molosifat U Village
- b. Planning staff of Molosifat U Village
- c. Head of the Community Empowerment Institution of Molosifat U Village
- d. 5 community leaders

2. Observation

The observation used was unstructured observation because the observation was carried out when finding the data in the field that was needed (without being determined in advance). In this study, the observation carried out was to observe and analyze how the pattern of contribution of the Community Empowerment Institution in absorbing community proposals for development programs in Molosifat U Village.

The data analysis technique used in this study is qualitative data analysis with an interactive model of analysis with the following procedure:

1. Data Collection

Data collection from the methods used are interviews and observations. All types of data have one key aspect in common, the analysis depends mainly on the integrative and interpretive skills of the researcher. Interpretation is needed because the data collected is rarely in the form of numbers, data and arguments.

2. Data Condensation

In data condensation refers to the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting and transforming data contained in field notes and transcripts in this study is carried out as follows: a. Selection (Selecting) b. Focusing c. Summarizing (Abstracting), d. Simplifying and Transforming (Data Simplifying and Transforming)

3. Data Presentation

Data presentation is interpreted as a collection of structured information that allows for drawing conclusions and taking action. By observing the presentation of the data, researchers will find it easier to understand what is happening and what to do. This means whether the researcher continues his analysis or tries to take action by deepening the findings.

4. Conclusion drawing (conclusion drawing/verification).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The role of Community Empowerment Institutions (LPM)

a. Community Empowerment Institutions as Facilitators

The Community Empowerment Institution (LPM) in Molosifat U Village plays a strategic role as a facilitator in supporting the implementation of development programs formulated jointly with the community. In carrying out this role, the LPM not only proposes development activities but also plays an active role in providing assistance to other community elements, such as the neighborhood association (RT) and community association (RW) to enhance their involvement in the planning and implementation process.

As a facilitator, the LPM plays a role in bridging communication between the community and the village government through participatory activities. One concrete manifestation of this role is the holding of deliberation forums between village officials and community representatives to convey aspirations and formulate development proposals. The LPM also encourages active community participation in planning, as part of a collective effort to improve the quality of development, both physical and economic, including proposing business capital assistance programs.

An interview with the Head of Neighborhood Association (RT) 2, Mr. DA, revealed that the development planning process in this area generally begins at the lowest level, namely through deliberation forums at the RT/RW level, and then continues up to the village level. This demonstrates that the planning mechanism is participatory and allows for the systematic channeling of community aspirations.

However, an interview with a community leader, Mr. SN, revealed a decline in community participation in LPM programs. The primary contributing factors are a declining spirit of mutual cooperation and increased individual busyness, leading to low community involvement. This situation has resulted in limited support for LPM-initiated activities.

Based on these observations and interviews, it can be concluded that the LPM's role as a facilitator in development planning in Molosifat U Village is still suboptimal. This low level of community participation reflects a lack of collective awareness in responding to proposed development programs. Therefore, strategies are needed to strengthen LPM institutional capacity, including more innovative approaches to encouraging community active participation in the planning and implementation of development at the local level.

The role of the community empowerment institution referred to as a facilitator in the sub-district is that the LPM itself facilitates and builds synergy with other elements of village community institutions. (Dwinugraha, 2017) stated that the village government in its implementation cannot carry out development alone, but also needs to be assisted by other stakeholders, although LPM and other community institutions are the main actors who determine whether the synergy with other stakeholders runs well or not. These actors consist of community groups including farmer groups, fishermen groups, poor community groups, women's groups. Community leaders, religious leaders, traditional leaders are also stakeholders who influence village development towards a better direction. In addition, village and sub-district institutions include the Community Empowerment Institution (LPM) and the Village Consultative Body (BPD).

All of these stakeholders are an integral part and synergize to organize village and sub-district government with the aim of improving community welfare. (Milhorance et al., 2022) states that integration and adoption of policies from all parties is a key concept in highlighting the goal of more rational policy design by eliminating inconsistencies from various interests in society. Policy integration as a result of a strategy in which the constitutive elements of policy are collected and exposed according to one conception.

b. Community Empowerment Institution of the Village as Mediator

As a mediator in the development process, the Community Empowerment Institution (LPM) in Molosifat U is responsible for disseminating the outcomes of development planning that have been formulated and incorporated into the Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJM) and the Integrated Village Development Plan (RKP). This dissemination is carried out to ensure that all elements of the community are informed and can engage with the direction of local development.

In practice, LPM Molosifat U undertakes this task through various methods, such as visiting residents' homes and issuing formal invitations to attend development meetings. These efforts aim to reach as many community members as possible and encourage their involvement. However, the effectiveness of such activities is heavily dependent on community participation. Without active public engagement, LPM initiatives tend to face obstacles, as many residents are reluctant to attend meetings unless motivated by trusted community figures.

The implementation of government policy through LPM is intended to enhance local empowerment by ensuring that residents are not merely recipients but also contributors to development in their area. Observations suggest that some neighborhood leaders (RT heads) have taken an active role in mobilizing their communities and participating in LPM activities, recognizing that such meetings are vital for the progress and development of their village.

This pattern of participation indicates an awareness among certain segments of the community regarding the significance of LPM's function as a mediator. The presence and engagement of community members in these meetings reflect not only institutional outreach but also a growing consciousness of the importance of participatory development.

Community participation in providing input for the implementation of development programs is essentially a voluntary act, driven by individual awareness and concern. In the context of Kelurahan Molosifat U, only residents who are informed and personally interested in the activities of the Community Empowerment Institution (LPM) tend to participate actively. In

contrast, those who are indifferent or unaware of the LPM's initiatives often remain excluded from the flow of information and engagement opportunities.

Field observations show that community participation in LPM meetings remains limited, largely involving individuals who are already active within local governance structures or who have a strong personal interest in development issues. Many community members, constrained by work and daily routines, are unable or unwilling to attend development forums, which points to the need for more inclusive and accessible communication strategies.

This condition highlights a gap in the performance of LPM as a mediator. Ideally, LPM should serve as a conduit that ensures all layers of the community are informed and have the opportunity to participate in development planning. However, the current outreach remains narrow, with socialization efforts insufficiently targeting all residents across the sub-district. This limits the potential for inclusive decision-making and weakens the representativeness of development proposals.

In broader terms, the role of intermediary institutions like LPM becomes increasingly important amid concerns about governance practices that tend to sideline public interests, especially those of marginalized groups. As noted by Legrand (2022), the rise of populist governance globally has often resulted in policies that marginalize minorities and undermine democratic participation. Within this context, the LPM is expected to play a strategic role in mediating diverse community interests, ensuring that development initiatives reflect collective aspirations rather than selective agendas.

Wibowo Sumarsono et al. (2022) emphasize that considering the variations in village potential, government capacity, and the maturity of community mindsets, effective synchronization and collaboration are essential in the implementation of development policy. The LPM, therefore, holds a vital function in bridging these diverse elements and aligning them within an integrated development framework. To fulfill this role effectively, LPM must strengthen its mediating function by expanding community outreach, fostering inclusive dialogue, and building institutional capacity that reflects democratic values in local development governance.

c. Community Empowerment Institutions in the Village as Motivators

Motivators are often considered as key drivers in encouraging community involvement in development. In this context, forming effective community empowerment motivators is essential. These motivators can come from local community leaders or government officials at the sub-district level. To carry out this role effectively, they need to possess several important qualities, such as personal resilience, understanding of the local environment and social dynamics, communication skills, and the ability to inspire participation. The role of a motivator is crucial in building awareness and enthusiasm for development initiatives.

In Molosifat U Village, Sipatana District, development programs cannot succeed without community participation, which must be supported and encouraged by the LPM as a motivating institution. The involvement of the community is needed in both physical and economic development activities. However, observations show that participation levels remain relatively low. Many residents are not actively involved unless they are encouraged directly. This shows that the role of LPM in motivating the community is not yet optimal and needs to be strengthened.

Even so, some development activities have already been implemented and are now being used by the community. These include road improvements, the construction of public wells, health posts, and

house renovation programs. The community has begun to benefit from these facilities, showing that development can be successful when properly implemented and supported.

Village and sub-district development is an integral part of national development. It aims not only to improve infrastructure but also to enhance the quality of human resources and the well-being of society. As stated by [Zulfida et al. \(2015\)](#), development should be participatory, involving residents in all stages—from planning to implementation, monitoring, and utilization. In this regard, LPM has a strategic role in building motivation and collaboration between government and the community to ensure the success of development programs.

To achieve this, LPM needs to strengthen its capacity as a motivator through more inclusive approaches, better communication, and stronger cooperation with all elements of society.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in the Ability of Community Empowerment Institutions to Absorb Community Aspirations.

a. Supporting Factors

1. Authority to coordinate with stakeholders in preparing program plans.

The Community Empowerment Institution (Lembaga Pemberdayaan Masyarakat, or LPM) in Molosifat U Urban Village plays a vital role in bridging the communication between the local government and the community, especially in the formulation of participatory development policies. One of its key contributions is seen in how LPM facilitates coordination and inclusive involvement of community members in development planning processes, particularly through the Musyawarah Perencanaan Pembangunan (Musrenbang) or development deliberation forums.

As a facilitator, LPM collects, filters, and channels public aspirations to be used as a foundation for policy formulation. The coordination it carries out is not merely administrative, but also focuses on capturing local ideas, needs, and potential. This strengthens the alignment between government planning and grassroots interests.

According to the Chairperson of LPM, Mr. ZP, “in holding coordination meetings on development planning, we always follow the regulations stated in the legal framework, ensuring that the resulting policies are based on real community needs and procedural legitimacy” (Interview, November 4, 2021).

LPM also initiates pre-Musrenbang meetings to anticipate and gather public aspirations more broadly. These forums serve as a platform to discuss infrastructure needs, social services, and economic empowerment efforts, which are later presented in formal village-level policy discussions. Mr. ZP further explained, “through coordination meetings, we aim to unite perceptions early on and develop strategic, structured plans so that development in all sectors can run effectively and equitably”

Field observations support the active role of LPM, with routine and well-structured coordination meetings attended by village officials, community leaders, and local political stakeholders. These meetings allow for dynamic interaction among stakeholders, resulting in policies that reflect collective community interests. The village secretary, Mr. HK, confirmed that “the coordination led by LPM has helped ensure the implementation of programs stays on target; any problems that arise are usually technical in nature.

In conclusion, LPM's contribution extends beyond implementation to the most strategic phase of development—policy formulation. Its presence ensures that development policies are participatory, accountable, and grounded in the real needs of the residents of Molosifat U. By functioning effectively as a coordinating and facilitating institution, LPM strengthens democratic practices in

local governance and contributes meaningfully to sustainable community development.

2. Availability of Information Technology

The integration of information technology has strengthened the role of the Community Empowerment Institution (LPM) in facilitating participatory development planning. Through digital platforms such as e-Planning and community aspiration reporting applications, LPM is able to collect, document, and respond to public input more effectively and systematically. These applications serve as important tools for aligning community needs with development priorities at the village level.

In practice, the use of such digital services allows the public to submit proposals and complaints easily, without going through complicated procedures. This ease of access enhances transparency and accelerates feedback loops between citizens and local government actors. For LPM, the digital documentation of aspirations enables better evaluation, tracking, and integration of community proposals into planning documents.

Observations in the field show that information systems also improve coordination among stakeholders. Digital meetings, data-driven planning tools, and centralized proposal tracking have allowed LPM to act more efficiently in aligning different sectoral interests and consolidating them into collective development agendas. Despite these advantages, disparities in access to information technology still pose challenges. Studies by [Claffy & Clark \(2022\)](#) and [Hollman et al. \(2020\)](#) highlight that rural communities often experience digital inequality—ranging from weak infrastructure to limited digital literacy. These limitations hinder the full realization of participatory development, especially where technological access is inconsistent.

Nonetheless, the adoption of digital systems by LPM in urban villages like Molosifat U demonstrates that, when well-facilitated, information technology can significantly support inclusive, responsive, and accountable local governance. The strategic use of such tools contributes to the realization of participatory development policies rooted in real community needs.

b. Inhibiting Factors

1. Low ability of LPM members to identify quality proposals.

The quality of community proposals remains a significant determinant in the success or failure of public aspirations being absorbed into local development agendas. In Kelurahan Molosifat U, the Community Empowerment Institution (LPM) is often constrained by the low capacity of its members to identify and select development proposals that are truly aligned with the real needs of the population. This limitation has led to the implementation of programs that do not reflect the principle of urgency or relevance, thus failing to solve substantive community problems.

One of the persistent challenges faced by LPM is the inability to distinguish between proposals that represent actual community needs, mere desires, or specific political interests. As a result, many proposed programs end up being symbolic or politically motivated rather than developmental in nature. The absence of a clear prioritization mechanism often causes proposals to pile up without a strategic selection process, making it difficult to determine which programs truly deserve to be included in the planning agenda.

The findings show that this issue is closely linked to the lack of technical competencies among LPM members. Many of them have not received adequate planning-related training and continue to rely on past experiences without systematic analytical tools. The imbalance in human resources, both in terms of expertise and distribution, further exacerbates the inability of LPM to perform effective proposal curation.

In addition, the absence of firm proposal evaluation criteria has resulted in an influx of recommendations from various parties—some of which are based more on individual or group interests than collective community needs. These conditions have blurred the LPM's role as a rational mediator in participatory development policy formulation. The consequence is a weakened institutional capacity to facilitate effective, inclusive, and evidence-based planning.

The need for LPM to demonstrate professional standards in planning practices is more urgent than ever. As a frontline institution in capturing grassroots aspirations, LPM must be able to perform its duties with responsiveness, analytical precision, and impartiality. This includes possessing the ability to recognize the nature of public needs, prioritize services, and design service programs based on participatory inputs.

According to Rangel & Rowe (2024), leadership within public organizations must focus on understanding the dynamics of organizational behavior and the psychological ties that influence performance. Effective leaders are those who can stimulate constructive behavior and suppress counterproductive tendencies, thereby fostering a responsive and accountable working environment.

In summary, improving the institutional and technical capacity of LPM members is crucial to ensure that development proposals submitted truly represent the aspirations and needs of the people. Without such improvements, LPM's contribution to participatory development planning will remain suboptimal and prone to the distortion of public priorities.

2. Strong Interest in Determining Development Programs

The determination of development programs often turns into a power struggle between executive and legislative elites. These two powerful institutions tend to dominate the musrenbang (development planning forum), sidelining the voices of local communities. The Community Empowerment Institution (LPM), which is supposed to act as a bridge between community aspirations and government planning, frequently finds itself in a weak position. As a result, community-submitted proposals are often not prioritized.

Based on field observations, during musrenbang forums, stakeholders are formally invited to discuss priority programs for the following year. After deliberation, selected programs are finalized and submitted for follow-up. However, in practice, government representatives often prioritize their own proposals. These are directly inserted into planning documents, taking advantage of their authority to control budget decisions. Legislative members from specific electoral districts may also intervene under the guise of public interest, pushing their own agendas. As a result, community-proposed programs frequently disappear from the final budget draft.

LPM, although tasked with aligning public aspirations, cannot resist this top-down pressure. Its role is limited, mainly because its structure and workflow still fall under the government's influence. Mr. UN, Head of Development Planning and Evaluation, shared that while efforts are made to categorize proposals based on the musrenbang outcomes, the dominance of bureaucratic and political elites often overrides these efforts. Consequently, some proposals must be sacrificed to accommodate political suggestions.

Such interventions have become common under the justification of serving the public interest. Yet, they weaken LPM's position and often lead to dissatisfaction among residents whose proposals are repeatedly ignored. This is because public involvement typically ends at the planning stage; the approval process is entirely controlled by government authorities.

The strong influence of certain stakeholders in program determination creates a challenge for LPM. Some council members prioritize personal or group interests, often using their political influence to secure these in village-level development plans. This concentration of power tends to reflect personal gains—status, recognition, or control—rather than the public good. In settings with social and economic inequality, such dominance undermines fair and transparent public administration (Chies et al., 2024).

To overcome this, collaborative governance must be strengthened. Genuine collaboration—both formal and informal—between government (including LPM) and community leaders is essential. According to Kolmodin (2023), collaboration should aim for consensus-driven decisions focused on public welfare. If power is only used to promote individual interests, it can lead to social conflict and public resistance to certain programs.

In essence, while stakeholder influence in planning is not inherently negative, it must serve public interests rather than private gain. Decision-making should reflect democratic values, involving the community not just in discussions but in the final determination. Democracy can serve as a mechanism to balance power, allowing communities to influence policies that affect their lives and ensuring development programs truly respond to public needs.

CONCLUSION

The Community Empowerment Institution (LPM) serves as a strategic village-level institution with the mandate to act as a facilitator, mediator, and motivator in the formulation of development policies. The findings of this study reveal that LPM has made concrete contributions as a government partner in promoting participatory development processes. However, the effectiveness of LPM remains limited due to several challenges.

While LPM has carried out efforts to encourage community involvement through mechanisms such as musrenbang and direct aspiration gathering, these efforts have not yet resulted in optimal outcomes. The participatory process is often hindered by low levels of citizen engagement, the limited technical capacity of LPM members to evaluate development proposals, and the strong influence of political and bureaucratic interests that often override grassroots inputs.

On the other hand, this study also identifies key supporting factors, such as LPM's formal authority in coordinating stakeholders and the availability of digital tools that facilitate more inclusive and responsive planning. These elements highlight the institution's potential to evolve into a more effective and accountable actor in participatory local governance.

In conclusion, to strengthen the strategic contribution of LPM in formulating participatory, inclusive, and responsive development policies, it is essential to enhance its institutional capacity, foster broader citizen participation, and reduce elite domination in the planning process. Only through these improvements can LPM truly fulfill its role in realizing democratic and community-oriented development.

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