Community Empowerment in Alleviating Poverty During the Covid 19 Pandemic in Bener Meriah Regency

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ABSTRACT

Empowerment in Poverty Alleviation During the Covid 19 Pandemic in Bener Meriah Regency is the subject of this research. The goal of this study is to learn more about the role of community empowerment in alleviating poverty during the COVID-19 epidemic in Bener Meriah Regency, as well as the challenges to community empowerment during the pandemic. The policy makers, stakeholders, and connected agencies involved with empowerment efforts in Bener Meriah Regency, such as the social service, UMKM service, and the Covid task force, were interviewed for this research. According to the findings of this study, during Covid 19, there were various obstacles from relevant agencies in carrying out various empowerment activities, which are usually on the agenda every year, in addition to the availability of costs and programs carried out by the district office due to limited funds due to refocusing Budget. So many community development activities that were planned never got off the ground. However, there are several independent programs that can be carried out by the community as a form of empowerment through the implementation of assistance for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (UMKM), the Family Hope Program (PKH) and Direct Cash Assistance (BLT) during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although not all people take advantage of these activities funds.

Keywords : Community Empowerment, Poverty, Covid 19 Pandemic

1. INTRODUCTION

In early 2020, the world was shocked by the presence of the Sars Cov virus in Wuhan, China. The virus has caused Corona Virus Disease Covis 19, which can be transmitted between humans. WHO on March 11, 2020 announced Covid 19 as a global pandemic because cases and their spread were increasing rapidly throughout the world, including Indonesia [1]. Based on data from the Covid 19 Task Force in December 2021, the number of Covid cases in Indonesia was 4.26 million and 144,000 died.

Poverty is a challenge that practically all developing countries experience, particularly those with dense populations, such as Indonesia. That is why poverty alleviation has always been a program of the ruling regime. Indonesia's Progress Towards the Millennium Development Goals (MGD) Report, 2019. According to [2], high economic growth fails to reduce or even eliminate absolute poverty in developing

countries. Residents individually and in groups want a better, prosperous and happy life. To establish a sense of security and prosperity, all people strive for a flourishing society. A sense of security reflects a state of mind that is no longer disturbed by threats both socially and economically. Prosperous means always being at the level of being affluent, no longer feeling deprived. Prosperity also means that each individual has the power and ability in addition to fulfilling his own needs as well as meeting the expectations or needs of other communities.

Empowerment of rural communities is increasing the ability and independence of the community and increasing their standard of living. Empowerment itself is a process that runs continuously. Community empowerment is carried out, among others, through community performance. According to [3] the performance of the community in the implementation of regional autonomy has a very close relationship with each other. The success of village autonomy on the one hand requires high community performance, on the other hand, the autonomy process can provide an opportunity to place strengths and resources into a better position. closer, and clearer, so that it is easily regulated by the village government. in an environment where the culture of society is very low, autonomy can be the first step in creating regular and regular opportunities for community interaction.

Government efforts in the process of reducing poverty and unemployment through empowerment require appropriate models and strategies according to the character of the region and society, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. As an area that has the characteristics of a multicultural society, Bener Meriah Regency requires good empowerment models and strategies in every move. development. According to legend, empowerment is a function of giving services to the community that is influenced by the people's participation or lack thereof. The smooth connection with the community has a significant impact on the Bener Meriah Regency government's ability to combat poverty and unemployment through village community empowerment projects.

Apart from reorienting the role of the central government during the civid 19 epidemic, empowering rural communities also systematically and consistently develops awareness of village communities through local concerns that are in line with the requirements and interests of the people of Bener Meriah Regency. The efforts are more participatory in character, requiring the ability of local communities to participate. Another tactic is to put political pressure on local institutions like the administration, legislature, and judiciary, particularly when it comes to their operational performance. This pressure is applied to stimulate changes in the performance of these formal institutions in responding to, planning, and implementing community objectives.

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2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study was carried out in the Bener Meriah Regency. Because the poverty rate in the Bener Meriah community grew during the covid 19 pandemic, this location was chosen. The writers employed qualitative methods to obtain data. Descriptive qualitative research aimed at naturally exploring a socio-cultural reality [4]. Participant observation, in-depth interviews with informants for the purpose of validating data, documents, and literature studies were employed as data gathering approaches in this study. The live-in approach with stakeholder informants and stakeholders

participating in poverty alleviation and community empowerment, however, is the focus. The data analysis process is built on ongoing analysis.

3. PERSPECTIVE OF COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

Because it refers to overlapping meanings in its use in society, it might be difficult to discern between community empowerment and community development. In this study, community empowerment and community development are defined as government-led efforts to assist local communities in planning, deciding, and managing their resources so that they can achieve economic, ecological, and economic independence. socially responsible. As a result, community empowerment is inextricably linked to sustainable development, which necessitates the constant development of the prerequisites for long-term community economic, ecological, and social independence [5].

Using the definition of empowerment in terms of goals, procedures, and techniques of empowerment, according to numerous experts in Edi Suharto's book. According to Jim Ife, empowerment attempts to improve the power of the weak or disadvantaged in developing a Community Empowering the People. Person continues in the book by stating that empowerment is a process by which people gain the ability to manage and influence events and institutions that affect their lives. People who are empowered have the skills, knowledge, and power to change their own lives and the lives of those they care about [6].

4. DISCUSSION
4.1 Bener Meriah's empowerment model

Researchers presented the empowerment program as a follow-up to the difficulties and possible successful measures for UMKM actors dealing with the Covid-19 epidemic. In the midst of a pandemic, UMKM companies feel that digital marketing can help enhance traditional market sales turnover. The majority of them agree that an empowerment method can be used to boost marketing capabilities. They are empowered as a result of the empowerment process to always fight and survive in the conditions they are currently experiencing or will face in the future. They decided to empower the community with a digital marketing empowerment model based on the characteristics of the problems, needs, and solutions offered.

The UMKM actors in Bener Meriah Regency use a variety of strategies to deal with the quiet conventional market environment, which is accompanied by a drop in sales turnover. Some claim to sell door to door, while others rely on physical store sales in certain locations, while others employ open agents, leave things in markets, and even try their hand at selling on social media. The vast majority of samples expressed a desire in attempting to sell online as well as at a physical location. This demonstrates that the UMKM actors in the Bener Meriah neighborhood are committed to surviving the Covid-19 pandemic. Each UMKM actor weighs in on two possibilities. The first alternative is to remain with the products that have been used so far, employing the digital market and supplementing with traditional sales. The second approach is to continue developing existing items while also developing new products that will be in high demand during the pandemic, such as masks and hand sanitizers.

Each UMKM actor weighs in on one of two options. The first alternative is to remain with the products that have been used thus far, employing the digital market and supplementing with traditional sales. The second approach is to continue developing existing items while also developing new products that will be most needed by the market during the pandemic, like as masks and hand sanitizers. They admit that the two choices have different impacts with equal opportunities. The first alternative enables UMKM to master digital marketing in order to learn and plan how to boost sales over time. This provides long-term benefits for UMKM actors because the digital marketing needs of UMKM products is very promising. However, there is intense business competition, especially the decision to make a new product also requires a large amount of capital. When asked whether they favored the first or second choice strategy, the majority chose the first. They admit that the first option does not pose a big risk, such as no additional business capital and product competition, so that with this choice, UMKM actors prove their seriousness to learn product marketing digitally instead of using products that are receptive while.

Conditions that obstruct the production of capital formation are the source of this vicious cycle of poverty. The production of capital, on the other hand, is determined by the degree of savings. Poverty trap circles can be seen on both the supply and demand sides of the capital market. First, there's the capital

offer. Low community income is a result of low productivity, which limits the community's ability to save. In the end, the level of capital formation is also low. The effect of low capital formation is that the country faces a shortage of capital goods, the implication being that productivity levels remain low. Second, the demand for capital.

The desire to invest in underdeveloped countries is low. Due to the limited market space for diverse types of commodities, this is the case. Meanwhile, poverty is concentrated in rural areas in Bener Meriah Regency, where the number of impoverished people is expected to reach 28.54 thousand in 2021. When compared to the agricultural business fields in Bener Meriah, this figure is quite high. As a result, the rapid growth of the agriculture sector in Bener Meriah over the previous decade has greatly influenced the perspectives of experts, bureaucracy, and agribusiness practitioners on how to carry out empowerment targeted at poverty reduction.

Figure. 1. Kadis Sosial Bener Meriah

As an important part of the province of Aceh, the Bener Meriah Regency region, which has been granted special autonomous authority, generates work possibilities and raises farmer income, resulting in improved community welfare. This is reflected in the vision and mission of Bener Meriah Regency, which is to develop a people's economy based on local resources with a focus on agribusiness, agroindustry, and tourism, as well as to encourage integrated and related investment on a local, national, regional, and international scale between the private sector, community, and government. Its evolution demonstrates that agriculture has struggled to fully realize its powers and roles in the regional and national economy. The amount of talent, skill, expertise, management, entrepreneurship, marketing, and financing all play a role in the success of agribusiness firms. In response to the foregoing facts, the Bener Meriah Regency administration allocated development funds for revolving fund operations through the district development fund in the 2018 fiscal year. A revolving loan is a type of investment loan or working capital provided to underserved communities by the Bener Meriah Regency Government. However, due to restrictions and the refocusing policy, this was not possible during the Covid 19 pandemic. (Interview with Mahmudin, 28 October 2021).

4.2 Community Empowerment in Poverty Reduction

Empowerment is a process that is carried out with full awareness and participation from all parties in order to increase the community's capacity and capability as development resources, allowing them to recognize the problems they face in developing and assisting themselves in moving towards a better state, as well as to explore and utilize the available resources for development. self-interest and group, and the ability to clearly exist through profiting from it Empowerment is a "state of being," not a "one-time event." Empowerment is divided into three stages: awareness, capacity, and empowerment. The poor, who are the target audience, are taught that they have the right to be present at the awareness stage. Furthermore, they are made aware that they have the power to escape poverty. At this point, the poor are taught that the process of empowerment must begin with them. In addition, efforts are made to keep this community updated. A natural awareness process emerges as a result of true and accurate information. The existence of mentoring activities can speed up this process and rationalize the outcomes.

The process of enabling includes not only enabling the poor, both individually and in groups, but also organization and value systems. Value system capacity is tied to the "rules of the game" that will be utilized in managing opportunities, whereas organizational capacity is related to the restructuring of implementing organizations. At the empowerment stage, the poor are provided with opportunities that are tailored to their abilities through active and sustainable participation, which is achieved by gradually giving them a larger role based on their capacity and capability, accommodating their aspirations, and guiding them to conduct self-evaluation of their choices and the outcomes of those choices.

Community empowerment can be defined as a bottom-up planning and development method that involves community engagement in a variety of planning and development activities. As a result, poverty reduction programs are structured to meet the needs of the community, which means that

priorities are established in the preparation of poverty reduction programs based on the level of priority, ensuring that program implementation is carried out successfully and efficiently.

The community will be able to assess its socioeconomic situation and identify opportunities for improvement as a result of empowerment. The next step in empowering is to establish a self-sustaining community. Independence is a sensible step in the direction of a flourishing society [7]. The term "independent" implies that one is making an attempt to meet one's own requirements without relying on others. In order to be self-sufficient, the poor should not overlook their own and their communities' remaining potential and capacity, and reject a culture of complacency and contentment. The impoverished are encouraged to build communication networks so that they can contribute insight, and they are constantly reminded to have forward-thinking minds in order to achieve improved conditions.

4.3. Utilization of UMKM Funds, PKH and BLT for Community Business Continuity

The Covid-19 pandemic has wreaked havoc on budgets across the country, notably in Bener Meriah Regency. The impact of the regional administration of Aceh province's budget refocusing policy has resulted in a variety of social issues, including the suspension of community empowerment initiatives that may be mobilized to assist reduce poverty in Bener Meriah Regency.

So far, we've employed direct cash assistance, PKH, and MSME funds as capital in agricultural business and farming for farmers in Bener Meriah Regency to enhance economic activity and community resilience in the face of the pandemic (Rizki Interview, 11 November 2021).

5. CONCLUSION

The study's conclusion is that it is a kind of community empowerment in decreasing poverty in Bener Meriah Regency during the Covid 19 pandemic. These aid monies are frequently used by the community to carry out commercial activities, for example, by leveraging the support of UMKM, PKH, and BLT as communities whose majority of the population lives as farmers and planters. In the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic in Bener Meriah Regency, the farmer empowerment program is the choice of empowerment approach through promoting UMKM

products, coffee, souvenirs, and other items. Farmers are empowered by providing chances for UMKM players to start enterprises using an online system that includes trade apps like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and WA Group.

Meanwhile, the government has a number of challenges in empowering UMKM actors in Bener Meriah Regency, including a constrained government budget as a result of Aceh province's budget refocusing. Furthermore, the process of marketing handicraft products necessitates the empowerment of online product marketing through digital market platforms, which can be accomplished through a strategy of empowering UMKM product innovations for the long-term sustainability of poverty alleviation programs in Bener Meriah Regency.

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