

Alleviating Extreme Poverty Through Community Empowerment Programs

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Abstract

Extreme poverty remains a persistent issue in Indonesia, particularly in Central Buton Regency, despite numerous government initiatives. Efforts to alleviate poverty have yet to yield substantial results, with significant disparities between rural and urban areas. This study aims to assess the impact of community empowerment programs on reducing extreme poverty in Central Buton Regency, Indonesia. Using a qualitative descriptive design, data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation involving individuals living in extreme poverty and government officials managing poverty alleviation programs. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis, with findings validated through data source triangulation. The results indicate that community empowerment programs play a crucial role in reducing extreme poverty, though there are discrepancies between expected and actual outcomes. Further research is needed to explore the long-term impact of these programs on poverty reduction in the region.

Keywords: Empowerment, Poverty, Community.

Introduction

The problem of extreme poverty in Indonesia has been an ongoing problem for decades. The government has made various efforts to overcome poverty, but these efforts have not resulted in significant changes. Poverty still stands at millions of people living in inadequate conditions to obtain a decent standard of living. Poverty is widening, starting from the national capital, provinces, districts/cities, and urban villages or villages. On the other hand, the government has planned 0% extreme poverty in 2024, but in fact, in the period September 2022-March 2023, the Poverty Depth Index (P1) and Poverty Severity Index (P2) have decreased. The Poverty Depth Index in March 2023 was 1,528, down from 1,562 in September 2022. Meanwhile, the Poverty Severity Index in March 2023 was 0.377, down from 0.379 in September 2022.

When compared by region, the values of the rural Poverty Depth Index (P1) and Poverty Severity Index (P2) are higher than those of the urban ones. In March 2023, the Poverty Depth Index (P1) value for urban areas was 1.163, while in rural areas, it is higher, reaching 2.035. Similarly, for the Poverty Severity Index (P2) value, in urban areas, the value is 0.281, while in rural areas, it is higher, reaching 0.511. This figure shows that the state has been unable to reduce extreme poverty to 0% as per the 2019-

2024 RPJMN (Peraturan Presiden Nomor 18 Tahun 2020 Tentang Rencana Pembangunan Jangka Menengah Nasional Tahun 2020-2024, 2020).

Currently, five districts in Southeast Sulawesi are included in the priority districts for extreme poverty reduction in 2022, including Konawe, Wakatobi, North Konawe, North Kolaka, and East Kolaka. Wakatobi Regency is the district that has the highest percentage of extreme poverty at 8.76 percent, then North Konawe with a poverty rate percentage of 7.98 percent, East Kolaka Regency in third place with a poverty percentage of 6.74 percent, North Kolaka at 6.53 percent and finally in fifth place namely Konawe Regency at 5.85 percent. However, when viewed based on the number of extremely poor people who must be alleviated, the most poverty is actually in Konawe Regency with the number of extremely poor people of 15,150 people. Then East Kolaka had as many as 13,180 thousand people, North Kolaka as many as 9,990 people, Wakatobi as many as 8,420 people, and finally North Konawe as many as 5,180 people. Meanwhile, in the aggregate, in Southeast Sulawesi Province, poverty must be alleviated by 4.8 percent, or around 131,590 people, who are in the poverty category.

Central Buton Regency is another district in Southeast Sulawesi with a high poverty rate. In the Regional Development Plan 2023-2026. The percentage of poor people in Central Buton Regency fluctuated from 2017 to 2020. In 2018, the poverty rate of the population of Central Buton Regency was recorded at 14.88 percent or 13.72 thousand poor people in Central Buton Regency. This number decreased compared to the previous year, which was recorded at 18.35 percent or reduced by 3.01 thousand people who were below the poverty line. Then, in 2019, the number rose and then decreased slightly in 2020 to 14.40 thousand people, or around 15.32 percent of the poor population of the entire population in Central Buton. The extreme poverty rate reached 4% of the population in 2021 (Central Buton RPD 2023-2026).

Although the rate of extreme poverty is lower than in other areas above, compared to Southeast Sulawesi Province, the percentage of poor people in Central Buton Regency is still higher than from 2017 to 2020. In 2020, the percentage of poor people in Southeast Sulawesi was 11 percent, a decrease compared to 2019, which was 11.24 percent. The pattern of increasing and decreasing the percentage of poor people in Central Buton and Sulawesi Tenggara is going in the same direction from 2017 to 2020. The poverty depth index measures the average expenditure gap of each poor person against the poverty line. In 2020, the P1 value of Central Buton Regency was 1.91. This value is expected to decrease even more. The lower P1 value shows that the average expenditure of the poor against the poverty line is approaching. A smaller P1 value shows that the burden of lifting poor people from poverty is getting easier (Central Buton Regency Regional Development Plan 2023-2026).

The poor people in Central Buton still experience limited access to basic services, including education, health, clean water, decent housing, and food. In addition, the development of sustainable economic life is still very low, evidenced by the low opportunity to try and work due to the level of education that does not qualify for decent work and the same opportunity to get a job. Limited access to capital for micro and small

enterprises coupled with marketing access is still felt among the poor whose production is not yet suitable for the market, so as a result, poor households are unable to generate income to meet their basic needs. Other factors of poor people's helplessness are caused by physical conditions, psychology, isolated environments, cultures that must be followed as a particular community, and poverty reduction policies that are not right on target or even for certain interests by utilizing the helplessness of the poor.

The Central Buton RPD 2023-2026 explains that one of the main missions is to develop a people's economy based on agrarian and maritime potential. The goals to be achieved are to reduce poverty, inequality between income groups, and unemployment. The target is to reduce poverty rates and gaps between income groups, increase services for People with Social Welfare Problems (PMKS), and deploy Potential Social Welfare Resources (PSKS).

Previous research has identified a range of factors contributing to extreme poverty in Indonesia, including limited access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities. Findings (Habibullah, 2024) show that extreme poverty can lead to homelessness, and conversely, homelessness exacerbates conditions of extreme poverty. The findings (Siéwé et al., 2024) of poverty are due to low agricultural productivity, inadequate infrastructure, and insecurity. Poverty is inseparable from social inequality (Rambotti & Breiger, 2020).

Despite existing knowledge about extreme poverty in Indonesia, there is still a lack of research on the effectiveness of community empowerment programs in addressing this problem. Previous studies have identified various factors contributing to extreme poverty, such as limited access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities, as well as low agricultural productivity and inadequate infrastructure. However, these studies often focus on identifying the causes and consequences of poverty rather than evaluating the impact of specific interventions aimed at alleviating it (Min et al., 2024).

This study aims to fill this gap by assessing the effectiveness of community empowerment programs in Central Buton Regency. Unlike prior research, which generally examines poverty through broad socio-economic lenses or focuses on urban settings, this study specifically investigates rural poverty and the role of community empowerment in mitigating it. It provides a detailed analysis of how these programs function in practice and their actual outcomes compared to expected results. By focusing on a rural context and employing a qualitative descriptive design, this research adds to existing knowledge by offering insights into community empowerment programs' practical challenges and successes. It highlights the discrepancies between program goals and actual outcomes, suggesting areas for improvement and further study.

Extreme poverty can be addressed directly by the international community through the design of strong pro-poverty policies that work better for the very poor and are easy to implement through coordination and monitoring (Amofa et al., 2022). While (Yap & McFarlane, 2020) argues that extreme urban poverty has long been considered a vital challenge, tackling it can be done through epistemic approaches: political economy, political ecology, feminist urbanism, and post-colonial urbanism. (TNP2K, 2022) Poverty

alleviation in Indonesia is carried out by strengthening the implementation of burden reduction programs, promoting community economic empowerment, and improving targeting performance through data improvement, including social development. Next (Development Committee, 2023), it is said that comprehensive efforts in the areas of global health, education, and climate change are key factors in reducing extreme poverty. In principle, community empowerment programs can effectively reduce extreme poverty in Indonesia, particularly among vulnerable populations, by providing access to education, health care, and employment opportunities. Empowerment is an important indicator of successful social transformation, and it has the potential to improve local resource and livelihood management outcomes (Petriello et al., 2021). In this context, the position of society is the subject and object of empowerment.

Departing from the context of the research above, this study aims to determine the impact of community empowerment programs on reducing extreme poverty in Central Buton, Indonesia.

Research Methods

This study employs a qualitative descriptive design to assess the impact of community empowerment programs in Central Buton Regency, Indonesia. The research was conducted from June to December 2023 in rural areas with high poverty indices. The research stages include preparation, data collection, and data analysis. During the preparation stage, research objectives were defined, and necessary permissions were obtained. Data collection involved in-depth interviews, participant observations, and analysis of relevant documents. Informants included individuals living in extreme poverty and government officials involved in poverty alleviation programs. Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, identifying key themes and patterns related to the effectiveness of community empowerment programs. Triangulation was applied to ensure consistency and validity by comparing data from interviews, observations, and documentation. This approach allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the impact of these programs and addressed discrepancies between expected and actual outcomes.

Results and Discussion

Poverty alleviation is one of the basic services that the government is concerned about. Poverty is important to both the government and the private sector because of the rights and obligations of citizens who obtain a decent livelihood for humanity. The government's efforts are carried out through community empowerment programs, where the government provides assistance to citizens in need in the hope that the poor will be free from the shackles of extreme poverty.

Some information obtained from various sources explains that the Central Buton Regency Government always strives to collect data through related agencies so that assistance that descends to the community is right on target, social assistance of many kinds, such as PKH, Fisherman Infrastructure assistance, and agricultural infrastructure assistance.

In addition, there is social assistance from the Central Buton Regency Government in the form of fertilizers and agricultural equipment, but it has not been maximized. For the village government, 40% of the village fund budget is used for assistance such as BLT, well assistance, reservoirs, toilets, and others according to the needs of the community. While the Family Hope Program (PKH) provided by the central government amounted to Nine Hundred Seventy-Five Thousand Rupiah (RP. 975,000,-). The assistance by the beneficiary community is considered insufficient to support the family due to the high price of nine basic materials.

The community empowerment program through the PKH program is carried out not comprehensively but partially from all stages of community empowerment so that the PKH program does not affect the improvement of welfare but only maintains survival.

Table. 1 Community empowerment programs

Beneficiaries	Types of Help	Problem
PKH recipient farmers	• fertilizer • Agricultural Equipment	Plant pests (Wild Boar)/ (unproductive)
PKH Fisherman	Assistance of fishing facilities	The catch is unstable and outcompeted
Family Hope Program	Cash RP. 975.000	Just to survive (unproductive)
Direct Cash Transfer	Cash RP. 300,000/month	Just to survive (unproductive)
Other social assistance	1. Sumur Bor 2. Tandon 3. Toilet 4. Elderly	Assistance is in the form of projects, but it is not able to empower communities independently and sustainably

Extreme poverty alleviation program assistance has positively impacted farming and fishing communities, but other problems cause agricultural products and catches to be unsuccessful. For the elderly and physically disabled communities, it is necessary to carry out special empowerment that involves families and is carried out in a sustainable manner. This condition is a challenge in the implementation of the poor community empowerment program. Good intentions are not enough if they are not done by involving the parties concerned. Especially for the elderly and people with physical disabilities, empowerment programs require intensity and behavior with special needs. So that 0% of people living in extreme poverty until 2024 can be successful.

Table. 2 Distribution of poverty by age level

No.	District	Sum	Age < 45	Ages 45-59	Age ≥ 60
		1,583	423	553	607
1	Lakudo	387	95	158	134

2	Mawasangka Timur	165	31	47	87
3	Mawasangka Tengah	121	43	42	36
4	Mawasangka	334	111	118	105
5	Talaga Raya	125	38	44	43
6	Gu	350	83	114	153
7	Sangia Wambulu	101	22	30	49

The results show that extreme poverty reduction can be achieved with a community empowerment approach but must be achieved by providing access, having an intense and sustainable role in government, and having the poor participate intensely. Through the assistance of PKH, BLT, and other social assistance programs, empowerment programs can be carried out, but they need to be carried out professionally and sustainably so that extreme poverty reduction can be achieved.

Discussion

Research findings show that extreme poverty alleviation is carried out by empowering the community through PKH, BLT, and other social assistance programs. However, empowerment programs are not carried out in stages and continuously. As a result, the poor cannot escape extreme poverty other than to survive.

The studies reviewed show that community empowerment programs are an important strategy to overcome extreme poverty. It aims to increase the ability and participation of the community in the development process, thus encouraging sustainable poverty alleviation.

As a result, these programs tend to have a temporary impact and do not significantly change the way people overcome poverty. In addition, these programs also tend not to address the root causes of poverty. To tackle poverty effectively, poverty reduction needs to be done with a more comprehensive and sustainable approach. One approach that can be taken is to empower the community by improving education, skills, and access to decent work.

In addition, there is also a need for programs that encourage investment in areas with high poverty rates to create new jobs and improve the region's economy. Local economic empowerment also needs to be considered so that people can access markets and increase their income. The government needs to carry out empowerment programs in a tiered manner, starting from acute poverty alleviation to structural poverty. In this case, the government needs to have a clear and measurable plan for implementing empowerment programs, as well as involving various relevant stakeholders, including local communities.

The studies reviewed show that community empowerment programs are an important strategy to overcome extreme poverty (Jimenez-Ayora et al., 2024); this is also said by ; (Kurniawan et al., 2023; Salam, 2021). This is related to the purpose of empowerment, namely a prosperous independent community, increasing the ability and participation of the community in the development process, thus encouraging sustainable poverty alleviation (Hashmi et al., 2023). However, there are contradictions and

interesting facts to consider. While some programs have shown effectiveness in urban areas (Desarno et al., 2021), others have been criticized for lack of adherence to empowerment principles and failure to impact lives positively (Salameh et al., 2023). In addition, the role of local wisdom and the "bottom-up" approach is emphasized as the key to sustainable empowerment, and the importance of aligning poverty alleviation strategies with Islamic teachings is noted in the Indonesian context (Fuad, 2022).

In short, community empowerment programs are a vital component of extreme poverty alleviation efforts. The success of these programs depends on true empowerment, adherence to principles, and the incorporation of local wisdom and context-specific strategies. To achieve sustainable outcomes, it is important to redefine and redesign poverty alleviation policies to effectively utilize community resources and ensure community involvement in decision-making processes, (Kurniawan et al., 2023).

In addition, the empowerment of the poor starts from the policies and implementation of the central and local governments through related agencies to develop various infrastructure facilities, which include: 1) educational facilities; 2) health facilities; 3) transportation; 4) economic facilities and 5) settlement facilities, which begin with the process of identifying problems, community needs, supporting local natural conditions, feasibility assessments, and finally development actions, then monitoring and maintaining infrastructure facilities together with the community and village officials and building sustainability, (Palutturi et al., 2021).

Empowerment strategies are an integral part of poverty reduction efforts, as they involve increasing the capacity of individuals and communities to improve their socioeconomic conditions (Herath et al., 2021). Interestingly, while some studies report positive results from empowerment-focused programs, such as the National Program for Community Empowerment (PNPM), in urban areas (Cai et al., 2024), others suggest that such programs have not significantly reduced poverty rates in certain areas, such as the Sleman district (Yao et al., 2023). In addition, introducing innovative models such as Sharia-based microfinance models and information and communication technology (SIMM) suggests that empowerment can be associated with aspirational expectations and significant poverty alleviation in rural communities (Khalequzzaman et al., 2023). In short, empowerment is an important component of extreme poverty alleviation strategies. While findings suggest empowerment can lead to positive outcomes, its effectiveness can vary based on implementation, local context, and other factors. Studies collectively underscore the importance of empowerment in poverty alleviation, whether through community self-organization, technology adoption, or collaborative governance (Herath et al., 2021; Khasanah et al., 2021). However, mixed outcomes require a deeper understanding of the conditions under which empowerment strategies can be most effective in reducing extreme poverty.

To ensure access for the poor to escape extreme poverty, some important steps that can be taken are as follows:

1. Quality education: It is important to provide access to quality education for the poor, so that they have the necessary abilities and skills in finding jobs

and developing their own businesses. This can be done by establishing schools in poor areas, providing educational scholarships, and training qualified teachers unless the elderly and physically disabled need another approach. This means that comprehensiveness in empowerment activities needs to be done.

2. Training and skills development: The poor need to be given training and skills development in order to get better jobs or start their own businesses. Skills training programs can provide them with relevant skills and take into account the demands of the local job market.
3. Access to Health Services: The poor need good and affordable access to basic health services. This includes access to quality health facilities, medicines, and advanced health care. Government or non-government programs that provide health assistance, especially for the elderly, are very popular.
5. Providing access to capital for poor people: poor people often do not have access to the capital needed to start or develop their businesses. Providing access to the extremely poor can help them to start small businesses and increase their incomes,
6. Adequate infrastructure: Development of adequate infrastructure such as roads, clean water, sanitation, and electricity in poor areas is essential. Good infrastructure can facilitate poor people's access to better economic services and opportunities.
7. Social protection: Effective social protection systems, such as social assistance programs and social safety nets, need to be implemented to provide economic protection for the poor. This can include cash transfers, food assistance, or social insurance programs.

Conclusion

The study's results suggest that alleviating extreme poverty through community empowerment programs requires a structured and sustainable approach. Measures such as skills development, training, and regular monitoring and evaluation of programs are important components in improving the effectiveness of empowerment programs. In addition, the role of local wisdom and the "bottom-up" approach is also a key factor in the success of community empowerment programs. The synergy between the government, non-governmental organizations, families of the elderly, and the private sector is needed to create a significant positive impact in overcoming extreme poverty. In this regard, poverty alleviation policies need to be restructured to effectively utilize community resources and ensure active community participation in decision-making processes. With the implementation of the measures mentioned, it is hoped that community empowerment programs can make a significant contribution to alleviating extreme poverty in Indonesia and provide a real opportunity for people to get out of the cycle of poverty.

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