

Optimizing The Role Of Social Assistants In Community Empowerment Programs

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Abstract. Community empowerment is a form of poverty management program that aims to make the intervened community independent in improving their quality of life. The role of social assistants includes various roles, such as planner, mediator, facilitator, advocator, motivator, and evaluator. However, internal barriers and external barriers can hinder the performance of social assistants. To optimize the role of social assistants, measures such as training and skills development, increased allocation of resources and personnel, and collaboration with non-governmental organizations and private institutions can be implemented. By overcoming barriers and maximizing available resources, social assistants can provide more effective support in the implementation of community empowerment programs. Optimizing the role of social assistants is an important step towards achieving the success of community empowerment programs and helping communities become more independent and empowered.

Keywords: Facilitator Role, Community Empowerment, Optimization of Facilitator Role

1 Introduction

According to [1] Community Empowerment is a development process that makes people take the initiative to start a process of social activities in improving their own situation and conditions. Meanwhile, according to Suhartini in [2] Community empowerment can only occur if the community itself participates. Community empowerment can provide access to the community, institutions and community organizations by obtaining and utilizing community rights to improve their quality of life, because the causes of community powerlessness are caused by limited access, lack of knowledge and skills and the existence of poverty conditions experienced by some people.

"The framework for empowering communities is carried out through 1. Enabling, namely, creating an atmosphere that enables the potential of the community to develop; 2. Empowering, namely, strengthening the potential of the community through concrete steps that involve providing various inputs and opening up in various opportunities that will make the community increasingly empowered; 3. Protecting which is protecting and defending the interests of the weak community" [3].

Through this community empowerment activity, the target group of beneficiaries can improve their standard of living and welfare by providing them with counseling, coaching training and other forms of activities, all of which are intended to release them from helplessness, isolation and backwardness.

In the empowerment process, the role of social assistants is needed. A social assistant is

someone who has experience and knows the characteristics of the community at the locus of empowerment, and meets certain qualifications and has the capacity, who is appointed and assigned to provide social assistance in social welfare programs.

Social assistants have an important and decisive position in the implementation of social welfare, therefore the performance of social assistants is an important and fundamental element. The role of assistants is indispensable because what is touched in community empowerment programs is community groups that cannot be empowered and independent by relying on their own knowledge and skills.

According to the Minister of Social Affairs Regulation Number 16 of 2017 concerning National Standards for Human Resources for Social Welfare Implementation, social assistants include: a. social assistants of joint business groups; b. social assistants of the family of hope program; c. social assistants of elderly assistance; d. social assistants of children; e. social assistants of people with *human immunodeficiency virus / acquired immuno deficiency syndrome*; f. social assistance for victims of trafficking in persons; g. social assistance for people with severe disabilities; h. social assistance for narcotics, psychotropic drugs and other addictive substances; i. social assistance for remote indigenous communities; j. social assistance for professional remote indigenous communities; k. social assistance for ex-convicts; l. social assistance for former prostitutes; m. social assistance for environmental facilities and infrastructure and uninhabitable houses; or n. social assistance for productive economic enterprises.

Community development assistants are people who are categorized as agents of change, both those within the social system of the community (insider change agents) and those outside the social system of the community concerned (outsider change agents) [4]. These two types of change agents consist of individuals classified as formal, extension workers from various government agencies, non-formal extension workers, members of certain NGOs and volunteers, including Extension Workers (Skilled and Expert) from various Government Offices, Self-Initiated Extension Workers, and others.

The role of social workers is often realized in the capacity as social assistants who seek to develop, maintain and strengthen the social welfare system, so as to meet basic human needs. In addition, social workers act as liaisons, provide convenience, and provide encouragement to beneficiaries to have a positive attitude, so that they can develop their potential. Social workers in carrying out social assistance to improve the social functioning of individuals, families, communities, so as to improve social welfare.

However, in the implementation of assistance in community empowerment, the role of assistants is not only as assistants but also as planners, mentors, information providers, facilitators, mediators and evaluators as well as partners for the communities they assist. Social assistants have complex and dynamic tasks. Complex because it is in direct contact with the lower community, facing unique and diverse citizens. Dynamic because it is required to always keep up with current developments and be ready to implement government policies anytime and anywhere [5]. A social assistant is also required to have three basic elements, namely knowledge, skills and values.

Therefore, many community empowerment programs are not successful in achieving their goals, and one of the causes is non-optimal assistance. Social assistants can be considered unsuccessful if a companion cannot communicate well with beneficiaries and cannot advocate for beneficiaries. One example of a community empowerment program with a very low success rate is the Joint Business Group (KUBE) program in West Java province where the success rate of KUBE in West Java is only 29%. The role of facilitators in the KUBE program is very fundamental and crucial, the facilitators are required to work from the formation of KUBE,

facilitating the application for assistance, and facilitating after the assistance is distributed and facilitating business operations. With so many and complex demands, many of the mandates given to a facilitator cannot be carried out optimally so that the community empowerment program is less successful.

There are many previous studies on social assistants, but previous studies only examined the obstacles and constraints of social assistants and the role of social assistants in community empowerment programs. This article tries to identify what factors can optimize the role of social assistants in community empowerment programs. Therefore, the discussion related to optimizing the role of assistants in community empowerment programs is very interesting to do so that it can be useful information in enriching the science of public administration, especially in public policy strategies through community empowerment programs.

2 Result and Discussion

2.1 The Role of Facilitators in Community Empowerment

As a social assistant, a person is required to carry out many roles that require knowledge, experience and skills. The mandatory roles that social assistants must perform in community empowerment programs are as follows:

2.1.1 Facilitator as Planner

The role of social assistants is not only to assist beneficiaries in implementing empowerment but long before empowerment is carried out. Social workers as assistants have the task of analyzing which empowerment is approximately suitable for the characteristics, potential and capacity of the community to be empowered. Assistants can help individuals to formulate realistic goals and their responsibilities in achieving these goals. Creating a concrete and measurable action plan is an important first step.

2.1.2 Facilitator as Mediator

Social workers often perform the role of mediator in their various helping activities. This role is particularly important in the generalist paradigm. The role of mediator is needed especially when there are stark differences that lead to conflict between various parties. Activities that can be carried out in performing the role of mediator include behavioral contracting, negotiation, third-party conciliators, and various kinds of conflict resolution. In mediation, the efforts made are essentially directed at achieving a "win-win solution".

2.1.3 Mentor as Facilitator

In the process of social assistance, there are three main principles in performing the role of a broker, being able to identify and localize appropriate community resources. Able to connect consumers or clients with sources consistently able to evaluate the effectiveness of sources in

relation to client needs. Furthermore, in carrying out the role of facilitator, there are two knowledge and skills that social workers must have: 1) Knowledge and skills to conduct a community needs assessment, which includes: (a) types and types of needs, (b) distribution of needs, (c) needs for services, (d) patterns of service use, and (e) barriers to reaching services. 2) Knowledge and skills to build consortiums and inter-organizational networks. This activity aims to (a) clarify the policies of each agency, (b) define the role of agencies, (c) define the potential and constraints of each agency, (d) select methods to determine the participation of each agency in solving community social problems, (e) develop procedures to avoid duplication of services, and (f) develop procedures to identify and fulfill social service shortages [2].

2.2.4 Companion as Advocate

Based on experience in the field, social assistance activities are often carried out or involve two main strategies, namely training and advocacy or community defense. Training is conducted mainly to increase the knowledge, awareness, and ability of the community regarding their rights and obligations as well as to improve the family's skills in overcoming problems and meeting their needs. Meanwhile, advocacy is a form of social assistance's partiality towards people's lives that is expressed through a series of concrete actions.

2.2.5 Companion as Motivator

Advocates as motivators can help individuals develop the personal skills they need to achieve their goals, such as communication, time management, or problem-solving skills. Advocates can help individuals to build their self-confidence, which is a key factor in achieving their goals.

2.2.6 Mentor as Evaluator

A caseworker is more than just a companion; they are also a careful evaluator. The role of evaluator allows them to monitor, measure, and evaluate the impact of the services they provide to their clients. This is an important part of ensuring that the social interventions provided match the goals that have been set, and that clients receive optimal support.

A social worker is responsible for developing clear and relevant evaluation standards in their role as evaluator. They create performance measurements, such as changes in behavior, improvements in quality of life, or achievement of specific goals. The caseworker works with the client to discover the goals they have achieved and the obstacles they have encountered during the evaluation process. Social assistants conduct evaluations through observations, interviews, and written assessments. They often monitor clients' progress and provide useful feedback. Evaluations are conducted objectively, neutrally, and carefully without bias.

Recommendations and adjustments to services are made based on the results of this evaluation. Evaluations help improve the quality of services and result in continuous improvement as caseworkers discover what has worked and what needs to be improved. Evaluations also help record client successes. Evaluation results can be used as evidence to

support funding applications, strengthen successful programs, and build a stronger basis for social policy.

As evaluators, social workers have a great deal of responsibility for the health and progress of their clients. By using an evidence-based approach and working closely with clients, they ensure that the social services provided can provide maximum benefit and help individuals reach their full potential. As evaluators, they play an important role in improving society and offering better support to the disadvantaged.

2.3` Barriers and Constraints of Social Assistance

In carrying out their duties, social assistants deal directly with beneficiaries, most of whom are people with limited capacity, capability and knowledge and are powerless. Therefore, many assistants' tasks are considered unsuccessful in assisting the community, due to the many obstacles and constraints that exist in the field, but the obstacles and constraints that exist are not only from external factors but not infrequently the obstacles arise from within themselves or internal factors.

2.3.1 Internal Barriers

Internal barriers are very likely to occur in a social assistant, internal barriers are more difficult to handle than external barriers. The following are the types of internal barriers of a social assistant:

2.3.1.1 Social Assistance Commitment

Lack of commitment on the part of the social worker can also be a serious problem. Social welfare policies, especially those related to individual and community empowerment, require a high level of commitment to provide effective support. Low commitment results in low quality of service to the communities they are supposed to assist and mediate so that the attention clients receive is not optimal. The impact of a lack of commitment also makes them unmotivated to continue learning, which can hinder them from providing better support. Furthermore, a social worker with a low level of commitment will definitely not be able to deal with complex and complicated challenges well, even though a social worker is very likely to face such situations.

2.3.1.2 Low Level of Knowledge and Skills

One of the major problems for social assistants is the lack of knowledge and skills as they need an in- depth understanding of various aspects of social problems, welfare, and the skills needed to properly support clients. This will result in several problems, i.e. untrained caseworkers may not understand the issues their clients face well, which may lead to inadequate or even detrimental services to clients.

2.3.1.3 Communication

Lack of communication skills can be a barrier for those working as social workers. Social assistants may find it difficult to understand the needs of clients if they do not know social issues or cannot communicate well. They may not listen well or ask the right questions to get the necessary information. It is very important for social assistants to be able to communicate well to understand clients' needs, build strong relationships, and provide support. For mentoring to work well there must be effective communication, as effective communication is key in building strong relationships with clients. A lack of communication skills can hinder a caseworker's ability to establish a trusting and empathy-based relationship.

2.3.2 External Barriers

The main task of social assistants is to assist communities in rural and urban areas with various characteristics and different situations and conditions. Social assistants also always coordinate with diverse stakeholders, therefore, many external obstacles are found or arise when the assistants work. The following are the types of external barriers to social assistance:

2.3.2.1 Resources

The limited intensive provided by the government to social assistants indirectly affects performance and outreach. In addition, limited personnel make the work of assistants not optimal because there are many clients and the number of assistants is not ideal.

The absence of facilities that support the work of a mentor can also be a major obstacle in providing adequate services. This limitation can limit the ability of social assistants to achieve optimal assistance.

2.3.2.2 Social Capital

Community empowerment can only happen if the community itself also participates. So in essence, the keywords of empowerment include: development process, community initiative, self-improvement. One form of mirroring social capital in an empowered person or community group is the attitude of wanting to change and change themselves. A facilitator will not optimize his role if the community he is assisting does not have social capital.

2.3.2.3 Government Commitment

The government's commitment is crucial to running social assistance programs and services well. The government has a major role in setting policies, providing resources, and creating a supportive environment for social assistance efforts. Strong and sustained government commitment can help communities and individuals in need of social support.

2.4 Optimizing the Role of Social Assistance

As explained earlier, the goal of empowerment is to transform communities into empowered people so that they can improve their quality of life and welfare. Empowerment focuses on both outcomes and processes through increased participation that is based on the needs and potential of the local community. Empowerment social assistants can utilize a *bottom-up* approach to achieve that success by learning about the potential, problems, and needs of the community. Even within the same community, these potentials or needs are of course very diverse. In this situation, the empowerment social assistant can determine the priority level that is considered very important to be developed.

From the description of the strategic role of social assistants in implementing community empowerment programs. So the next interesting thing is how to optimize the role of social assistants in community empowerment, because in fact, assistance that is carried out optimally can be assessed as a form of success for community empowerment programs.

Optimizing the role of social assistants can be done after we analyze the roles and obstacles of social assistants. The results of the author's analysis are the most urgent thing to do first in an effort to optimize the role of assistants is Training and Skills Development, social assistants need to take part in ongoing training to improve their knowledge and skills. This includes improvements in communication, counseling skills, problem analysis, and conflict management skills. By improving their skills, social assistants can provide more effective support.

Then increase the allocation of resources and personnel for community empowerment programs, namely by providing incentives in accordance with the workload and increasing the number of personnel so that social assistants focus on providing assistance. So that the development of a more efficient workload management strategy for social assistants can be realized. If some of these things are done by the central government and local governments, then the government's commitment to the issue of assistance is truly visible and will have a positive impact on community empowerment programs issued by the government itself, meaning that the goal of the poor will be independent and empowered to get out of poverty will occur.

However, if government commitment is lacking or even non-existent, involving non-governmental organizations and private institutions in supporting community empowerment programs, social assistants can double their efforts and gain additional resources by working with non-governmental organizations, private institutions, and community institutions. Collaboration with these organizations can help fill the gap left by the lack of government commitment without compromising the integrity of the helper. While government commitment may be limited, caseworkers can try to maximize existing resources. They should work effectively and look for innovative ways to help their clients with the existing resources they have.

3 Conclusions

In community empowerment, community participation is very important to achieve the desired goals because the role of the community to empower themselves or their groups is an obligation. Not only that, optimizing the role of social assistants in community empowerment programs is very important to improve service quality and achieve the desired goals. The

optimal role of assistants is crucial for community empowerment to achieve goals, By carrying out community empowerment activities, it is expected to improve the standard of living and welfare of the targeted beneficiaries. To achieve these goals, social assistants must have adequate knowledge and skills and be able to build consortia and networks between organizations. Evaluation is also very important to help improve the quality of services and produce continuous improvement.

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