



How does community education encourage sustainable development? A comprehensive strategy strengthens the role of community facilitators

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ABSTRACT

The primary objective of this study was to enhance the proficiency of professional community assistants to promote the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) within rural communities in Indonesia. Utilizing qualitative methodologies encompassing observational techniques, interviews, document analysis, and focus group discussions (FGDs), the research formulated a comprehensive approach. The suggested methodology promotes self-directed learning, active involvement in professional communities, participation in training initiatives, structured communication with supervisors, attentiveness to community development matters, cooperation with local authorities, and the development of comprehensive planning materials. These tactics enable community facilitators to enhance the alignment of their duties with the objectives of the SDGs. Nevertheless, the study admits several inherent limits that arise from the intricate nature of varied community contexts, restrictions on resources, and the varying levels of engagement from local leadership. To tackle these challenges, it is imperative for future research to prioritize long-term impact assessments, thoroughly examine contextual factors that influence the effectiveness of strategies, and endeavor to quantify the influence of these strategies on the achievement of the SDGs. By doing so, research can establish a more robust basis for policy recommendations and initiatives aimed at community development.

Keywords: strategy, competence, facilitator, sustainability, community education

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INTRODUCTION

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), launched in 2015 as the successor to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), have profoundly impacted the global development arena. The MDGs have had a major impact on global development during the past 15 years, and this impact has extended inside Indonesia's large and diverse archipelago. These projects represent a significant advancement in tackling urgent global concerns and promoting development, ultimately enhancing billions of individuals' well-being.

The SDGs signify a transformative change in development strategies, redirecting efforts towards a sustainable trajectory. These goals are grounded in human rights and equality values, with a determined objective to enhance social, economic, and environmental progress. Significantly, this initiative investigates unexplored domains by advocating for their execution at the local level, specifically inside the smallest administrative entity, namely the village. The Minister of Villages for the Development of Culturally Disadvantaged Regions and Transmigration in the Republic of Indonesia initiated this ambitious initiative. In a pioneering

action, the minister introduced the notion of village SDGs in the year 2020. The village SDGs, as outlined in Regulation No. 13 of 2020, represent a comprehensive endeavor aimed at revitalizing villages into thriving centers that serve as strongholds against poverty and hunger, equitable drivers of economic progress, diligent guardians of public health, proponents of environmental preservation, exemplars of education, proponents of gender parity, interconnected communities, and advocates for cultural safeguarding. This significant endeavor seeks to expedite the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals, signifying an unparalleled advancement in research.

Throughout history, villages have played a pivotal role in establishing political communities and governments, with their importance deeply embedded in the historical records of Indonesia's pre-nation-state development. However, the current state of development at the village level presents a bleak depiction that is significantly different from our optimistic aspirations (Almasri & Deswimar, 2014). Rural management currently still faces many challenges in its management, such as health handling, food independence, education, and diversification of employment in villages (Anderson et al., 2015; Cromartie et al., 2011). The rate of development within these rural enclaves is comparatively slower, which undermines the potential for advancement. Therefore, community empowerment programs still need to be carried out to improve the Indonesian people's standard of living (Dadi, 2021).

To stimulate rural communities and facilitate their progress towards sustainable, integrated, and constructive development, the involvement of mobilizers, community organizers, or more appropriately, community facilitators, is crucial (Basir et al., 2021; Ishom et al., 2021, 2023; Schwarz, 2005). The individuals in question are anticipated to serve as crucial components in leading communities through complex development initiatives. This role requires diverse skills, including strong academic abilities, technological proficiency, and a deep understanding of social dynamics. Village aid is a comprehensive approach aimed at cultivating and leveraging these communities' various resources and capabilities.

However, it is evident that the utilization of these facilitators is well below its maximum capacity. Prior studies have shown numerous challenges impeding the provision of aid to rural communities, including a significant disparity between the assigned responsibilities of aid workers and their actual accomplishments (Alam et al., 2020; Rivaldi, 2021; Susanti, 2017; Suswanto et al., 2019). The issues are particularly notable in relation to their active engagement in the development and implementation of empowerment initiatives, as well as the comprehensive assessment and evaluation of their efficacy. Further complicating the situation are concerns related to the recruitment, quality, and proficiency of support staff and the ambiguous nature of the facilitator's responsibilities, as indicated by a wide range of research studies (Yuslaini & Juliana, 2019).

This study examines a crucial point by presenting new approaches to reconcile the gap between the theoretical responsibilities of community facilitators and their actual implementation. This research uses qualitative research methodologies, including observation, interviews, and documentation studies, to explore the intricacies associated with implementing the SDGs. This study provides insight into significant barriers and presents a comprehensive approach to improving the skills of community helpers. Suggested strategies involve promoting independent learning by utilizing related resources, actively participating in professional association discussions, enrolling in governmental and non-governmental training initiatives, fostering effective communication with supervisors, and demonstrating a proactive approach to addressing community development issues by involving local leaders and influential individuals. This study provides bold initiatives to enhance the transformative capacity of community facilitators and magnify their contribution to achieving the SDGs through community learning approaches in diverse village structures in Indonesia.

METHOD

This study was conducted using qualitative research methods. This study collected data using observation techniques, interviews, document analysis, and focus group discussions

(FGDs). Researchers collect data from actual conditions that occur in the field. Researchers become the main data collectors in carrying out data collection with the main data collection techniques as explained in the previous paragraph. Qualitative research is used to understand the underlying meanings of participant behavior, describe participants' backgrounds and interactions, explore to identify new information, understand limited circumstances, and want to know in depth and detail, and describe phenomena to create new theories (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Wiyono, 2007).

This research is expected to increase the understanding and competence of village assistants in assisting the community to continue learning from various sectors. It also encourages village assistants to initiate community organizing based on local assets owned by collecting objective data and information with various participatory techniques. That way, the entire community can contribute to development, and the village companion serves as more than just an administrative companion for the village community.

There are two types of data in this study: primary data and secondary data. Primary data were obtained from observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis that produced narratives and images related to community mentoring activities that were carried out (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Flick, 2017). Meanwhile, secondary data was collected from supporting documents that can complement primary data, including news from trusted media, documents owned by facilitators, and documents issued by the Ministry of Villages, Development of Disadvantaged Regions, and Transmigration of the Republic of Indonesia. The data source in this study is facilitators, who are members of the professional assistance staff consisting of district community empowerment experts, village assistants, and local village assistants. The researcher, together with the research team members, acts as the main instrument of the study. Data collection techniques include interviews, participatory observation, document analysis, and FGD. Interviews were conducted to collect data on community learning in the community mentoring process. Observations were made to collect comprehensive data on the work done to support learning efforts and mentor rural communities. The document analysis was used to collect supporting data published in various places. FGDs are used to collect aggregate data and confirm data that has been found with previous techniques.

The selection of informants is carried out purposefully. Purposive sampling was selected by assigning informants based on criteria that suited the data needs. The informant element is determined by the profession practiced, i.e., the community empowerment facilitator, and the parties who support informants, i.e., those engaged in the community empowerment process within the research area. Data collection is carried out in several villages located in one sub-district in Malang Regency. The selection of respondents in each cluster is carried out based on criteria set by researchers, including having worked as facilitators or professional assistants for more than two years.

Six respondents participated in the study, with two representing each degree of professional assistance (facilitator). They were facilitators from the village, sub-district, and district levels, as shown in Table 1. The respondents are those who work in village community assistance, since the interview aims to learn about the facilitation process used by the facilitators. Moreover, the Miles & Huberman model is used for data analysis, including data collection, display, coding, conclusion, drawing, and verifications (Miles et al., 2018).

Table 1. Respondents' profile

Code	Position interviewed	Length of work
N1	District Coordinator Professional Assistance	8 years
N2	District Community Empowerment Experts	7 years
N3	Village Assitance	7 years
N4	Village Assitance	7 years
N5	Local Village Assitance	3 years
N6	Local Village Assitance	4 years

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Finding

One of the objectives of establishing Law Number 6 of 2014 concerning villages is to encourage village communities' initiative, movement, and participation to develop village potential and assets for the common welfare. This law states that mentoring activities are one of the methods of community empowerment. Mentoring activities are carried out by providing human resources and management in planning, implementing, and monitoring the development of villages and rural areas.

Village assistance is directed to develop community independence and welfare by improving knowledge, attitudes, skills, behaviors, abilities, awareness, and resource utilization through the establishment of policies, programs, activities, and assistance in accordance with the essence of the rural communities' problems and priority needs.

"TPP has the task of accompanying the stages and processes of building community capacity through various activities to increase knowledge, attitudes, and skills organized both top-down and bottom-up." (N1)

This community assistance activity is one of the responsibilities of the government, local government, and village government. However, in its implementation, the government cannot carry out community empowerment activities independently. The presence of facilitators is needed to assist in the implementation of government duties. The following interview excerpts support the research findings, namely:

"TPP acts as an extension of the central and local governments to accelerate the development process in villages to realize government targets in developing villages and village development goals according to the authority of the local scale of the village." (N2)

In addition, other parties or third parties are also needed, which can help accelerate and reach all elements of community development. The following resource person's expression supports the research findings, namely:

"The community development process cannot be done alone; it requires the presence of third parties to accelerate the process of developing rural communities, such as non-government institutions, community organizations, private sectors, universities, and other parties concerned about the community development process. This concept is also known as the Penta helix, which involves multi-stakeholders for community development." (N3)

Village democratization puts forward the principle of recognition and suffrage as the spirit of Law Number 6 of 2014 concerning villages. Village democratization guarantees the uniqueness of the village and is implemented and developed in the spirit of recognition of the uniqueness and peculiarities of village traditions. Therefore, village development must be guided by the democratic value of "from the village, by the village, towards the village." Excerpts of interviews with sources provide reinforcement for the findings, stating that:

"The concept of village development that emerged after the law on villages emphasizes efforts to manage villages autonomously by encouraging the realization of village sovereignty according to the rights of origin and potential of the area, meaning that rural communities have a great opportunity to take a role in participating in and contributing to the development of rural areas." (N4)

Village development must adhere to the No One Left Behind principle, which means no residents are missed and cannot enjoy the results of village development. Therefore, village development must be directed as an effort to accelerate the achievement of sustainable development goals, as stipulated in Presidential Regulation Number 59 of 2017 concerning the implementation of the achievement of the SDGs. Thus, the direction of village development is the achievement of the goals of the village SDGs. As revealed by the following research sources:

"Village SDGs are an integrated effort of economic, social, environmental, community governance, and legal development at the village level as a derivative of the National SDGs. While the global and national SDGs have 17 goals, the village

SDGs have one additional goal, namely goal 18: dynamic village institutions and adaptive village culture as a manifestation of strong institutions and sustainable culture as the foundation for sustainable development in rural areas.” (N5)

The village SDGs are an integrated effort to strengthen the role of villages and accelerate the achievement of the SDGs. Village SDGs have 18 goals, with 222 indicators of meeting the needs of residents and developing village areas. Eighteen (18) goals of the Village SDGs are villages without poverty; villages without hunger; a healthy and prosperous village; quality village education; the involvement of village women; suitability for clean water and sanitation; clean and renewable energy; the equally economic growth; necessary infrastructure and innovation; villages without gaps; safe and comfortable area; environmentally conscious village consumption and production; climate change response villages; the village cares about the marine environment; the village cares about the land environment; the village of peace of justice; partnerships for village development; and dynamic village institutions and adaptive village culture. With these 18 village SDGs, village development, whether carried out by the government, village government, or village development partners, will be more focused and have clear directions and targets in accordance with the real conditions of the village based on village microdata.

To achieve all these goals, the government and rural communities need facilitators, or *Tenaga Pendamping Profesional* (TPP), in the official language of the Government of the Republic of Indonesia. TPPs are expected to help rural communities achieve economic, social, cultural, and political empowerment. The Ministry of Villages, Development of Disadvantaged Regions, and Transmigration presents TPPs as an extension of the government at the village level to facilitate the process of accountable village development and good governance.

The data collection results show indications that the mentoring activities carried out by professional assistants to date are considered not so optimal. Their presence in the village community is sometimes just a formality to report their daily activities on the Daily Report Facilitators (DRP) application provided by the Ministry of Villages and PDTT of the Republic of Indonesia.

The low role of village assistants is caused by many things, including those related to competence, integrity, and paradigms. Quite a few village assistants do not yet have this certificate of competence. Regulation of the Minister of Villages, Development of Disadvantaged Regions, and Transmigration Number 3 of 2015 concerning Village Assistants in Article 27 states that professional assistants must have competency certification issued by professional certification bodies. Therefore, it should be made clear when hiring new staff that having a certificate of competence as a facilitator of community empowerment is one of the requirements for their acceptance. With the possession of a certificate of competence, it has become proof that the new staff already have the knowledge, ability, and expertise in the field of community empowerment. However, the fact that this hasn't been done shows that possessing a competency certification isn't now a must in the hiring process for facilitator staff for village community empowerment. This leaves the government with a task to finish in the future: conducting competency exams on facilitators who have been identified but do not yet hold a certification of competency. The lack of TPPs that have competency certification is due to the small number of TPPs interested in conducting competency tests in community empowerment. This is a logical consequence of the non-implementation of the regulatory mandate on village assistance that requires competency certification from professional certification bodies. This situation is certainly counterproductive to efforts to improve the professionalism of the TPPs, one of which is competency certification.

“There is a plan for the overall competency test to be carried out on TPPs. The implementation will gradually start with PLD first, and after PLD is completed, move on to the next level. PLD is a priority because the position is the closest to the community, so it needs technical competence to be able to work optimally in the community.” (NI)

In carrying out their functions, facilitators can carry out the stages of community assistance. Starting from awareness in the community to comprehensively identify assets and potentials owned, both natural and human resources, to managing these assets and potentials in a sustainable

manner. For this reason, facilitators must possess the necessary skills to complete all these tasks. Figure 1 illustrates the primary skills facilitators should ideally have to mentor and empower rural communities.

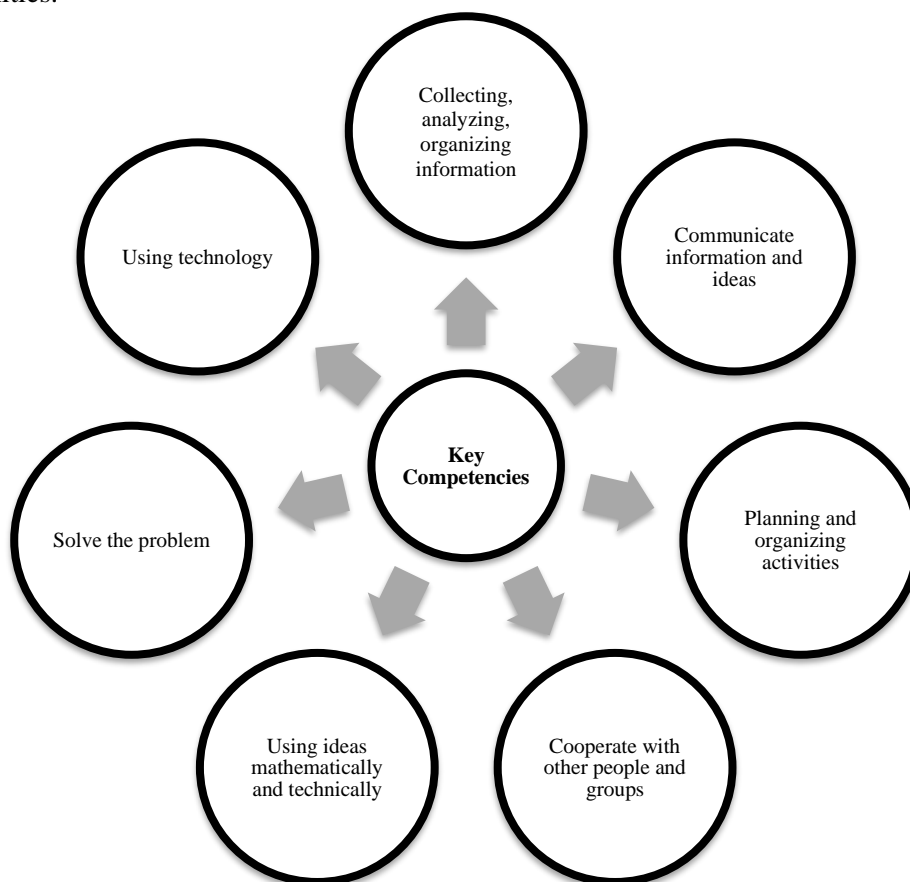


Figure 1. Key Competencies of Community Empowerment Facilitators

The facilitator must have key competencies: (1) *collecting, analyzing, and organizing information*. A facilitator must be able to collect comprehensive data, analyze it carefully and precisely, and then organize information to become the basic capital in the development process of rural communities (2) *communicating information and ideas*. Facilitators are expected to be able to build good communication with the community in their work area. By having good communication, information can quickly and precisely reach the community. In addition to information, other things that must be communicated to the community are new ideas related to the development and empowerment of rural communities to be able to manage their assets and potential into values that can be enjoyed by the local community; (3) *planning and organizing activities*. Planning is one of the most important aspects for a facilitator. The planning that is carried out should also not be done by the facilitator alone. Yet, it is better to invite the local community to be involved in planning the activities to be carried out. This activity is called participatory planning. Participatory activities with the community are not only carried out at the time of planning but also further on in the organizing activities. Thus, people are not just spectators; they are the main actors in development; (4) *cooperating with others and groups*. To accelerate the achievement of development programs and community access, a facilitator must have the ability to cooperate between individuals and groups. Being present as a facilitator means being present in the community to encourage and motivate the community to achieve sustainable development goals collectively, strengthen group institutions, and build cooperation between groups; (5) *using mathematically and technically ideas*. Mathematical communication for facilitators is the ability to convey and explain mathematical ideas to the public through concepts, formulas, drawings, diagrams, graphs, and others carefully, analytically, critically, and

evaluatively, both orally and in writing. Good mathematical communication can help people learn concepts so that they can understand, play roles, explain concepts, and apply them technically to community empowerment programs; (6) *solving problems*. The presence of a facilitator is considered a solution to community problems, so this is what then becomes one of the competencies that must be mastered by the facilitators. But furthermore, the presence of the facilitators as a solution must explain its position, not take over the portion of society to determine for itself the resolution decisions of the problems at hand. The solution given means that the facilitator provides references and options that can be taken by the community to solve the problems they are facing individually or in groups; (7) *using technology*. In this context, the presence of facilitators can be interpreted as being able to use technology to help the community accelerate finding solutions to various problems that are being faced. The novelty of technology, if it can be used optimally, can help people find new ways to solve problems, such as economic problems, knowledge, and others. Of all the competencies that have been explained, not all of them are owned by the facilitator, so the community assistance process has not been carried out optimally.

The problem of community assistance that is currently of concern to the government of the Republic of Indonesia is the competence of village assistants. Regarding the competence of facilitators that needs to be improved, there are alternatives that can be done, namely by organizing peer learning forums and training facilitators according to their needs. Interviews with sources mentioned support for it, stating that:

"We have initiated a peer learning forum to strengthen each other's facilitators' abilities in carrying out community assistance work. When collecting monthly reports, we design them so that they can exchange information, experiences, and obstacles faced in carrying out community assistance work while waiting for their turn to report performance to the District Coordinator. Our training activities are held periodically and thematically through professional associations according to the needs of the facilitators." (N1)

Then, related to the competency test of the village assistant, this is too late to do. The facilitator's competency problem must be solved at the time of recruitment. In selection cases, participants or prospective facilitators must have a competency certificate as proof that they have the ability and expertise in the field of community empowerment. However, as time goes on, this issue persists and needs to be addressed immediately because an increasing number of facilitators lack the necessary skills to provide village assistance, which hastens development and promotes community empowerment. To elaborate on these obstacles, our research informants mentioned the following statements.

"To overcome this obstacle, we are encouraged by the district coordinator to continue to learn independently to improve knowledge of technical skills in managing village community assistance tasks through technical guidance and to engage in online discussion forums conducted via Zoom, YouTube, and WhatsApp groups while waiting for their turn to take the competency test." (N6)

The role of the facilitator is to make group success easier by using effective group processes. The facilitator ensures that group members use the most effective methods to solve community problems efficiently and profitably, with sufficient time to consider ideas and alternatives to problem-solving. In helping the community, facilitators have four functions to encourage the increasing knowledge of rural communities to participate in development. The process series chart can be seen in Figure 2.

To be able to carry out these functions optimally, facilitators must have adequate competence. With sufficient competence, they can carry out their main duties and functions as community companions according to the context of local needs through effective work activities. To improve the facilitators' skills, knowledge, abilities, and competencies, a comprehensive strategy is needed to encourage the achievement of holistic, participatory, and people-centred sustainable development goals. Facilitator competency improvement strategies can be done through self-study, as presented in Table 2.

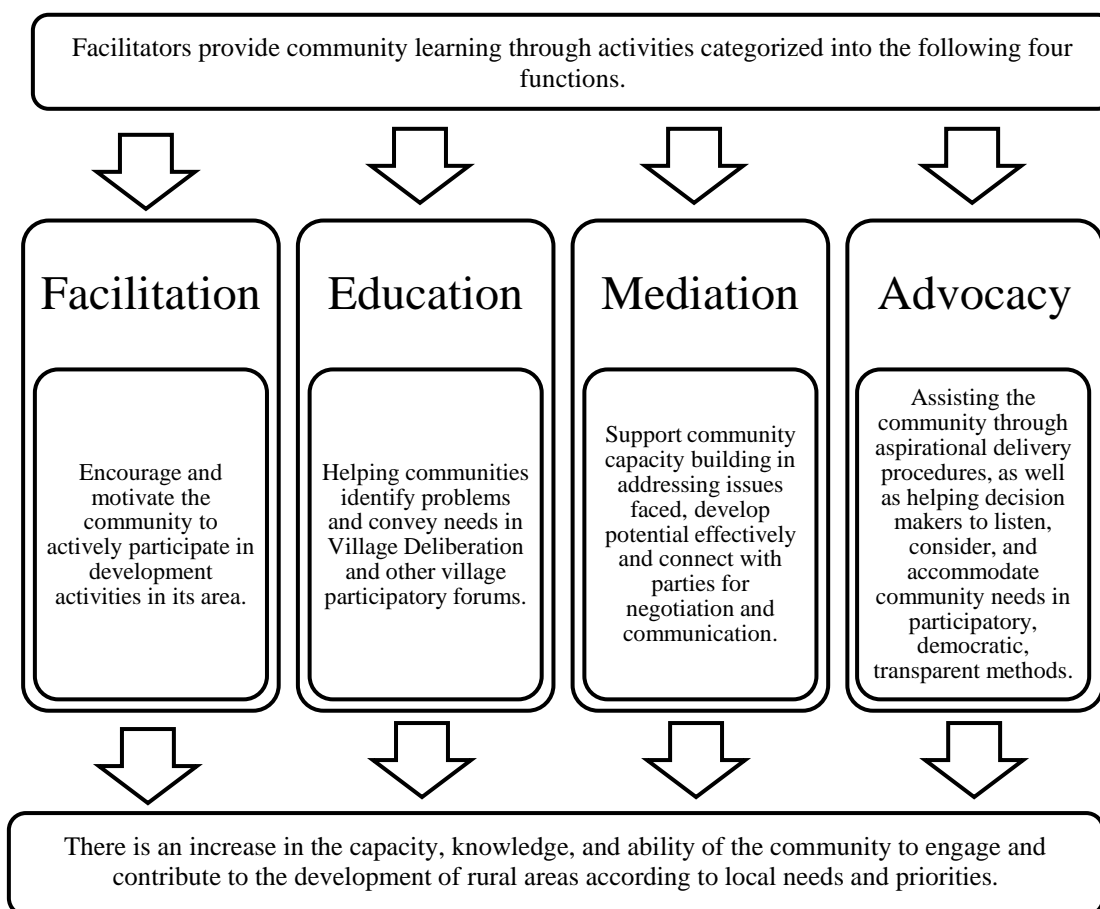


Figure 2. Chart of Facilitator Functions in Providing Learning to the Community

Table 2. Strategies for improving the competence of community assistants

Strategies
1. Self-study by looking for references relevant to community empowerment, mentoring, and facilitation of rural communities
2. Study together in professional association forums
3. Attend training packages organized by the government and non-governmental organizations
4. Discuss and learn structurally from the supervisor
5. Responsive to community development issues and approach local leaders and elites
6. Prepare a comprehensive planning document as a guide for the implementation of mentoring work in the community

A detailed explanation of facilitator competency improvement strategies includes *independent learning by looking for references and learning resources* relevant to community empowerment, mentoring, and facilitation of village communities. Facilitators can be more proactive by looking for the latest references related to community assistance and empowerment to increase knowledge and current issues about sustainable development goals, variables, and indicators. Facilitators can also *learn together in professional association forums*. The facilitators in this program are members of a professional association, namely the Indonesian Village Assistants Association. The presence of this forum is certainly a positive forum for facilitators to be able to exchange ideas to increase their capacity. Besides, facilitators can *participate in training packages organized by the government and non-governmental institutions*. Training

packages are currently provided by various institutions; village assistants can be proactive by looking for where these activities are held. This is certainly very important for increasing the capacity of village assistants (facilitators) to support their professionalism and performance as village assistants.

The next strategy that can be used is to *discuss and learn structurally with supervisors*. Structurally, facilitators have supervisors, that is, facilitators who are at a higher level. PLD performance is supervised by PD; PD performance is supervised by District Community Empowerment Experts (TAPM); District TAPM performance is supervised by Provincial TAPM; and Provincial TAPM performance is supervised by Central TAPM. With this structure, there is an opportunity for village assistants (facilitators) at various levels to be able to discuss and learn from each other from supervisors who certainly have a lot of experience and higher capacity. Then, facilitators must *be responsive to community development issues and approach local leaders and elites*. To be able to find out the latest issues related to the development and empowerment of rural communities, they must have sufficient references and be responsive to developments, both technological developments, national development, and global economic development trends. Finally, the facilitators can *prepare comprehensive planning documents* as a guide for the implementation of mentoring work in the community. As a facilitator, this has become an absolute thing. However, not many of the facilitators have done this, so they do not yet have a clear planning document. If there is a clear planning document, the facilitator can ask for input from various parties to improve the community assistance plan to be implemented.

The process of community development is stronger if it is carried out from the bottom up. Through this approach, the role of local communities becomes stronger because they are clearly involved at each stage. The role of society is not only as an object of development but must turn into a major actor. Therefore, the position of local communities becomes very clear. They are actors in community development and empowerment activities. This bottom-up paradigm is called a new paradigm in development by prioritizing people-centered, participatory, empowerment, and sustainability. An illustration of the paradigm can be seen in Figure 3.

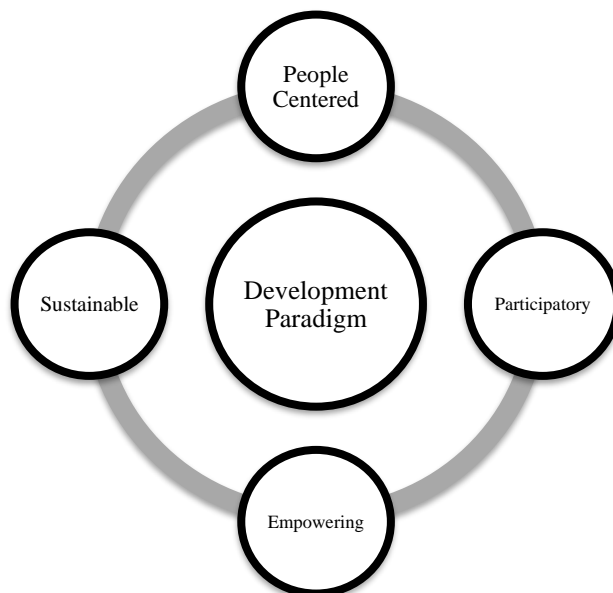


Figure 3. An Illustration of the Bottom-Up Paradigm

Community empowerment activities that are carried out must not cause dependence on facilitators but must create independence and sustainability for local communities. For this reason, the development process must focus on local people, invite them to be involved physically and with ideas, and be involved in every stage of completion, from planning to evaluation and reassessment. Through this involvement, the community will have enough knowledge to be involved in the next program and activities; even program initiation can come from them, and the

role of the facilitator is only as an advisor and consideration. Thus, the community's dependence on outsiders can be suppressed, and they can continue development programs without intimidation from other parties. The relationship between these aspects strengthens society's position as an actor in economic development by summarizing social values.

The development process and its impacts must involve all parties in a participatory and collaborative manner between village communities, village governments, and facilitators. This is due to the complex role that facilitators play in community development. They act as agents of change, stakeholders, actors, facilitators, mediators, sources of information, counselors, and partners for the community and village governments to realize institutional development and enhance the community's welfare and economic, social, and political independence.

Discussion

The concept of village assistance arises from the conception of empowering village communities to encourage all the village's potential in the form of institutions, natural resources, and human resources to be optimized (Muhlin, 2019). Community assistance is one method that can be used to implement community empowerment. Community empowerment has four methods: mentoring, training, monitoring, and evaluation (Suhartini et al., 2005). Community assistance is an activity to facilitate the community in solving problems and increasing human resource capacity. The mentoring process is carried out to encourage change and improve thinking and behavioral skills (Ife, 2016). Community assistance is done to help provide community resources, opportunities, knowledge, and skills to increase their capacity to determine their own future and to participate in and influence the lives of their communities. It can be interpreted that community empowerment is to prepare the community in the form of resources, opportunities, knowledge, and expertise to increase the capacity of the community to determine its future and participate in and influence the community's life. Therefore, mentoring is part of empowerment.

The main objective of community empowerment is to strengthen the empowerment of poor and weak groups (Sarjiyanto et al., 2022). Basically, empowerment is the creation of an atmosphere that allows the development of community potential, which can be done through education and training as part of an empowerment strategy to build high-quality individuals who have skills and work abilities (Isnaini et al., 2022; Mulyono et al., 2023; Van Hoof et al., 2021). To encourage capacity building and build awareness, the presence of external parties is needed to act as facilitators (Firman, 2021). The presence of facilitators can help accelerate the community development process by presenting equitable social infrastructure and well-functioning social networks as a comprehensive approach (Browne, 2024). The presence of trained facilitators will provide opportunities to learn, develop, and make decisions to encourage non-formal education to improve community welfare (Maikowati, 2019). However, it should be noted that excessive dependence on outsiders makes people feel comfortable and needs to continue to be helped. To overcome this, it is necessary to involve local communities as actors in development; thus, all parties are preparing future knowledge for a better life for the community (Murniati et al., 2024). The community learning process carried out through direct experience can be more easily accepted because it is based on real-life (Nasih et al., 2020).

To be an effective facilitator, a community advocate must have seriousness, perseverance, and sufficient knowledge of social issues. Basically, the task of mentoring is closely related to encouraging and motivating the community to take actions that are considered important in solving problems by developing their potential independently (Sumpeno, 2009). This effort must begin with building community awareness through activities to improve the ability to face various fundamental problems and improve living conditions through a process of transformation, participation, and sustainability by involving them in education and training programs that are planned and carried out together through strengthening *local community participation* programs as learning resources based on local (Maisyaroh et al., 2019; Singh et al., 2017).

In fact, the community learning process faces substantial challenges in achieving good public participation. SDG-based assessment frameworks such as regular, democratic, responsive, and social learning are issues that need follow-up efforts (Akbar et al., 2020). Facilitators have an important role in encouraging the community to continue to learn and think critically to overcome

various problems. The presence of TPP is not a helping angel that makes the community dependent on it; it is better if its presence is only to stimulate villagers to be able to carry out various empowered community development activities (Gai et al., 2020; Ramli et al., 2018). Facilitators provide methods and structures so that groups can focus their energy and creativity on a specific task, topic, or project. Facilitators serve as guides, servants, and catalysts to help the group do its job. The facilitator's main task is to help the group increase its effectiveness by improving its processes and structure. Facilitators are expected to receive various inputs and ideas so that mentoring methods can be developed objectively (Alam et al., 2020).

The facilitation function of village assistants can be described in the following aspects of activities: exploring potential and needs, solving problems, positioning roles and actions, inviting the community to think, providing trust, independence, decision-making, and building networks (Sumpeno, 2009). The educational function is carried out through social interaction, which identifies problems and possibilities that exist in society in each situation; decision-making or solution of problems; making efforts to address the problem; and assessing changes that occur through participation forums, process engagement, and the availability of equitable access (Darin et al., 2022; Firmansyah et al., 2023). The mediation function is carried out to help village communities connect with resources that can help accelerate development in the village. This effort is certainly related to Havelock's paradigm of social change (Havelock, 1973). In this context, social change agents provide community learning related to efforts to solve problems or solutions needed to problems that occur in society. This effort needs to be made to unravel the problem so that it does not drag on and cause negative impacts on life. The role that can be played is being a mediator to accelerate development, unravel problems, help the community process connect to the parties, and be able to become a source liaison for community programs (Prayogi et al., 2024; Yang, 2022). This mediation is also related to resolving various conflicts that arise in communities, groups, and organizations when community mentoring activities are carried out (Pratama et al., 2023). The advocacy function is carried out through policy advocacy carried out by groups, organizations, or individuals who work together to achieve changes in the context of policies or programs to resolve issues or problems, with the main aim of making changes from various aspects such as political attitudes and behavior and decision-making processes (Anggraeni et al., 2022; Effendy, 2017).

If the community assistance process is carried out optimally, the community will have a direct impact, and village community development activities will run properly according to their respective needs to achieve community empowerment and independence. Community independence is a condition experienced by the community that is characterized by the ability to think, decide, and do something that is considered appropriate to achieve solutions to the problems faced using their abilities (Fitriana, 2020). Community assistance strategies can also be carried out by facilitators in three stages: the first stage is carried out by providing education, the second stage is carried out by acting with the community, and the third stage is carried out by assisting policy advocacy in accordance with the needs and rights of the community that need to be obtained (Fatihin et al., 2021).

Community involvement in development requires good methods and strategies to make development results more effective and efficient. The preparation and use of development methods and strategies will determine the role of each stakeholder, whether the community or the government, in planning and implementing development results; therefore, both parties are able to play an optimal and synergistic role (Bahua, 2018). Community involvement in national development will produce communities that are independent and tested for their capacity as users and development planners. For this reason, the facilitator's paradigm must also be updated so that the concept of village development is no longer top-down but must be changed to bottom-up along with its changing authority (Almasri & Deswimar, 2014; Chambers, 1983, 1995; Eko, 2014; Susanto, 2010). The bottom-up approach in village development planning is carried out by making the community the main actor (Handayani et al., 2024).

In this regard, community development and empowerment activities must be directed at creating community independence and program sustainability with participatory and community-centred principles. The role of facilitators in community empowerment is not only at the

mentoring stage, which can help create programs but also in the implementation and evaluation of programs (Sopandi, 2010; Suswanto et al., 2019; Suswanto & Sulistyoningsih, 2018). Villages face many problems in their management, such as food security, education, employment, the economy, and health services (Anderson et al., 2015; Cromartie et al., 2011). Facilitators' ability to assess local assets and potentials plays an important role in helping rural communities increase knowledge towards improving the quality of life, including social capital, to encourage the economic performance of village-owned enterprises (BUMDes) (Aritenang, 2021).

Village community empowerment activities experience obstacles in their implementation, starting with low resources and a lack of knowledge of the village government to run empowerment programs using village funds or village fund allocations, including government assistance in carrying out village community empowerment. The process of empowering rural communities needs to be strengthened by the presence of third parties as supporters of development in the village; this concept is called the pentahelix, which includes the government, academics, business entities or actors, the community, and the media (Chamidah et al., 2021; Yudha et al., 2019). One of the non-formal educational institutions that can contribute to efforts to achieve development is the Community Learning Center (CLC) through life skill and community empowerment programs (Rahma et al., 2019; Sucipto et al., 2021). Another aspect is that the tendency of the allocation of village funds is more in the physical development sector, while for the aspects of community empowerment and development, the portion is less so the empowerment of rural communities has not been optimally implemented (Widiyanto et al., 2021). In addition, the optimization of local assets in an emancipatory manner has also not been carried out properly due to the incomprehension of village assistants on how to carry out village assistance that can optimize local assets in an emancipatory manner (Larisu et al., 2022; Yuslaini & Juliana, 2019).

Facilitators have a strategic role to motivate, build awareness, ideas, and active participation of the community in the village to realize an independent village or as a development actor, starting with planning, implementing, and evaluating, which is carried out in a participatory, transparent, and accountable manner. Village facilitators or assistants are tasked with finding and developing potential and capacity and assisting renewal drivers to carry out community empowerment as a process of social transformation carried out by village communities as agents of renewal (Ghozali, 2015; Susanti, 2017). For this reason, a comprehensive strategy is needed to develop the capacity of facilitators to provide community assistance and community learning to strengthen community knowledge in conducting bottom-up development. This whole series of activities involves educational, explicit non-formal education in the form of training and short courses to encourage the achievement of sustainable development goals.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it can be inferred that the significance of professional assistants in empowering and supporting rural communities in achieving the SDGs cannot be emphasized enough. The solutions proposed for augmenting individuals' competence provide a comprehensive framework for strengthening their talents and fostering sustained, integrated, and constructive development within these communities. The roadmap for success encompasses various elements, including independent learning, collaboration facilitated through professional association forums, structured training programs, continual direction from supervisors, responsiveness to community needs, interaction with local leaders, and detailed planning papers.

Nevertheless, it is crucial to recognize that these solutions, although showing potential, are not devoid of constraints. The efficacy of these methodologies may differ based on the circumstances, available resources, and dedication of professional aides. Limitations can also emerge due to the accessibility of training programs and the extent of involvement exhibited by local leaders and elites. Furthermore, the task of evaluating the effectiveness of these tactics in a quantifiable manner continues to pose a substantial limitation.

To further research, it is recommended that scholars prioritize undertaking comprehensive assessments to examine the effects of various techniques on the outcomes of community development. Longitudinal studies offer valuable insights into the long-term effectiveness of

various techniques. Furthermore, there is a need to do research on the impact of contextual factors and changes in local leadership dynamics on the effectiveness of these techniques. This is an area that offers significant potential for further investigation. In general, research efforts that expand upon these tactics can enhance our comprehension of how professional assistants might be empowered to facilitate transformative change in rural communities, thereby promoting sustainable development.

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