ASSUMPTIONS OF EMPOWERMENT AT WORKPLACE IN RURAL INDONESIA

By Ir. Ivanovich Agusta, MSi

ABSTRACT

Since the last seven years, includes the time of the national crisis since 1997, empowerment programs has been becoming a prime mover on rural Indonesia. The programs, however, still have not able to empower villagers sustainably, especially for controlling accesses of political and economical power. It indicates that the programs need a more systematic approach or more theoretical approach, especially to explain or clear “a Marxian spirit” on “a-modernization-based-of-government’s-policy”. The study constructs five assumptions of empowerment programs for villagers. First, a motive of an individual action is empowering him/her-self, by changing the social structure or finding another empowering way within actual social structure. Second, participation is a voluntary action. Third, participation directs to a rational choice. Fourth, a program or a project are scarce resources. Fifth, an empowering group is viewed from individual actions that make a consensus.

Keywords: people empowerment, rural area

INTRODUCTION

Background and Rationale

For the last seven years, includes the time of the national crisis since 1997, empowerment programs became a prime mover on rural Indonesia. It is different from top-down pattern on development programs in previous years, because empowerment programs stress beneficiaries participation at all stages of the programs operation (bottom-up pattern). For example, Program Inpres Desa Tertinggal/IDT (Less Developed Village Program) has introduced into about 20.000 village or about 30 percent of nation’s villages (Bappenas, 1995; Mubyarto, 1997; Sajogyo, 1997; Sarman, 1997; Soeradji and Mubyarto, eds., 1998; Sumodiningrat, 1996; Supriatna, 1997). The program involved

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2 Lecturer of Department of Agricultural Sosio-Economics, Faculty of Agriculture, Bogor Agricultural University, Indonesia. Postal address: Perumahan Ciampea Asri, Jl. Kladion A6/18, Warung Borong, Ciampea, Bogor, Indonesia 16620. Phone: +62-251-628288. E-mail: iagusta@hotmail.com
block transfers of 20 to 60 million rupiahs per village. These funds were to be used to promote income-generating activities through labor intensive public works that involved the poor.

Another example is Program Pengembangan Kecamatan/PPK (Sub-district Development Project). The program has brought development funds into 501 sub-district in 50 districts and 20 provinces during first budget year 1998/1999 (Agusta, et.al., 2000; National Management Consultant and Sekretariat Nasional PPK, 2000; Soeradji and Mubyarto eds., 1998). In second budget year 1999/2000 there are additional area on 269 sub-district. The program further develops on the IDT in increasing people's participation and people's empowerment.

The empowerment programs, however, still have not able to empower villagers sustainably, especially for controlling accesses of political and economical power. There are only about 30 percent of beneficiaries groups of IDT Program, that are ready to create linkage with banks and develop capital of the groups (Sajogyo, ed., 1997). Each social context or area have typical problems, for instance remote villages need physical projects rather than income-generating project like in urban-village (Sarman and Sajogyo, 2000). In common, local officers and facilitators dominate social processes within the groups, and tend to lead the group just as an institution to accept program's fund. Possibly their actions are directed by indicators of succeed within the program, i.e. ensure repaying and revolving fund of the program.

Possibly we understand their action through find out national political and economical context. At national level, politically, the "top-down" command structure of the Indonesian government during the last twenty years is less well suited to provide more differentiated and higher quality services for the poor (Kleiden, 2001; Luluhima, 2001; Manning, 1999). The political structure is matched with a paternalistic pattern in local culture (Mulder, 2000, 2001). Meanwhile, corruption in the government is widespread permeating throughout the cultural fabric (Filmer and Lindauer, 2001; Hamilton-Hart, 2001; Onghokham, 1983, 1986), as bureaucrats are tightly linked to the capitalists or better known as conglomerates (Robison, 1988). As the result, after stable economic growth and investment of considerable resources in rural areas and agriculture are key factors in declining poverty during the past twenty years (Collier, et.al., 1996; Manning, 1999; Sajogyo, 1997), Indonesia's fortunes reversed in 1997 with the onset of the financial and banking sector crisis, which was preceded by the Él Nino draught disrupting harvests and causing disruption of supplies of basic foods. The financial crisis quickly spilled over into the real sector. The consequences of the economic crisis on the incidence of poverty have been rather severe in Indonesia, a shock after a steady decline for the preceding two decades. The head-count index, or the percentage of poor people living below the poverty
line initially declined from 40 percent in 1976 to 11 percent in 1996, and in terms of absolute numbers there occurred a decline from 54 million to 23 million people. Hence the incidence of poverty rose from 11 percent in February 1996 to 24 percent in December 1998, and the number of poor rose to 49.5 million people. Poverty rate in rural areas increased by 30 percent. Since then, the poverty incidence has declined somewhat that by August 1999 about 18 percent, where estimated to live below the poverty line representing some 37.5 million people. (BPS, 1999a, 1999b, 2001; Pradhan, et.al., 2000; Pritchett, Suryahadi, Sumarto, 2000; Skoufias, Suryahadi, Sumarto, 1999; Suryahadi, et.al., 2000; Suryahadi, Sumarto, 2001).

Phenomenon of unsucceed programs in empowering the villagers sustainably indicates that the programs need a more systematic approach or more theoretical approach, especially to explain or clear “a Marxian spirit” on “a-modernization-based-of-government’s-policy”. Eventhough there is a rigid border between Marxist tradition and Modernist tradition at analytical level, actually at empirical level—at least as long as experiences during empowering Indonesian villagers—contradiction between each tradition can be solved. Empowerment movement at this level contains both action and reflection, so that it is the radical and also dialogical movement (Freire, 1973; Heron, 1996; Sudiarja, 2001). The border is also blurred when we step to morally level, i.e. moral to empower the poor and women (Friedmann, 1992). It implicates on humanistic action and reflection, such as people compete each other at one side but also works together, need friendship and chances to express themselves. These facts and analyses suggest possibility to empower the poor and women in rural area radically and dialogically (“a Marxian spirit”), although within developmentalist/modernist regime.

**Objective Arrangement**

If we agree that there are two paradigms in development theories, i.e. modernization and dependency (Elguea, 1985), we will see that Indonesian government take modernization paradigm in developing rural area. Operating in an improvement approach or without transforming social organization and agrarian structure (Long, 1977), such paradigm emerges economic and social gap. In the modernization perspective, the problem is on the poor: their incapability and their bad attitude on creating modern organization and accumulating capital. This point of view is not matched with empowerment programs. In the last program, the poor is viewed as having potential power to help themselves. There are efforts to revive their social capital such as creating groups, using local norms to move the groups and the community, creating social movement to save some of their income, etc. In modernization paradigm of development, radical social movement or any revolution cannot be created, as a usual way in Marxist
tradition to transform community. It is more common to empower the poor and women on previous social structure.

Frequently intervention of empowerment programs into rural area in Indonesia, but only little beneficiaries group that succeed to empower themselves, and only few and common analysis on that, indicate need to construct theoretical framework on people empowerment. As based on each social context, the framework should be created based on local history. A framework of people empowerment should not be neutral, but it is led to open participation of the poor to develop their villages. A first step to do that is constructing assumptions, based on an actual empowerment programs’ implementation in rural Indonesia. The assumptions can be used to view, read and evaluate Indonesian’s people empowerment.

**EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMS**

Empowerment is able to be defined as equal participation of government, private and public sectors. People empowerment in development process transforms more detail allocation of economic resource, distribution of program’s benefit, and capital accumulation, so that increase production, income and welfare of the poor and women (Agusta, 2000; Suryochondro, 1995).

Empowerment’s core in community may be hidden. At this situation, an important role of empowerment programs is as “a catalyst” of the empowerment capacity, rather than “a compeler” (Sajogyo, *et. al.*, 1999). The process is created by participatory methods (Agusta, 1999; Chambers, 1996; Heron, 1996).

Empowerment programs are different fundamentally from *top-down* programs. In top-down programs there is an assumption that government give a positively help, but it is too powerful and it cannot be controlled (Agusta, 1999; Bryant and White, 1982; Darmawati, 2002). During implementation of the *top-down* programs, social stratification becomes rigid, so that it is difficult to create dialogue among each social strata, women and men, and to create a social mobility process.

Eventhough have a similar objective to alleviate poverty, social safety net programs are different from empowerment programs. The social safety net programs are *ad-hoc* and short term crash programs to deal with poverty alleviation (Bappenas, 2001; Mubyarto, 2000; Candrakirana, 1999; Suryahadi, Suharso, Sumarto, 1999). These are usually poorly designed with minimum consideration for long-term effects, often dominated by the government apparatus or the local elites. This usually causes failure of such programs.

Empowerment programs, properly planned programs which include medium- and long-term plans, are more likely to involve the community. Such programs are more likely
to succeed. The programs stress on social processes rather than results of that processes like *top-down* programs (Agusta and Tetiani, 2000; Bappenas, 2001). The processes occure participatory decision making among development agents, the poor and women about some projects of the programs. There are public debates among villagers, include lower social status and women (Chambers, 1988; Rahnema, 1992; Sajogyo, *et al.*, 1999; Saragih, *ed.*, 1996).

The programs need villagers’ participation, especially of the poor and women. (Agusta, 1999; Sumodiningrat, 2001). Goverment programs are not considered as given things, but lead to independent community/social movements to maintain and even develop projects. Such movements, particularly among the poor, suggest that there is sphere for overcoming poverty. Empowerment programs include *Program Pengembangan Wilayah/PPW* (Area Development Program), *Pembangunan Kawasan Terpadu/PKT* (Integrated Area Development), *Inpres Desa Tertinggal/IDT* (Presidential Decree for Underdeveloped Village), *Program Pengembangan Kecamatan/PPK* (Sub-District Development Project), *Kampong Improvement Project*, *Program Peningkatan Pendapatan Petani/Nelayan Kecil/P4K* (Income Generating Program for Peasants and Fisher), *Program Pengembangan Hubungan Bank dan Kelompok Swadaya Masyarakat/PHBK* (Program for Developing Linkage between Bank and People’s Group), *Progam Pembangunan Prasarana Desa Tertinggal/P3DT* (Underdeveloped Village Infrastructure Development Program), etc.

**FIVE ASSUMPTIONS**

The study constructs five assumptions of empowerment programs for villagers. The assumptions are constructed especially from my study on program’s documents and my field study results of empowerment programs. Of course I use other results on evaluation of empowerment programs. Explanation of the assumptions includes implications theoretically and practically in Indonesia.

**First Assumption: Empowering**

The empowerment programs assume, that a motive of an individual action is empowering him/her-self, by changing the social structure or finding another empowering way within actual social structure. The programs consider stake holders as individual, especially in empirical (implementation) stage. In practice, empowerment programs choose beneficiaries as individuals, not as a group or organization. In designs of development program, empowerment is considered as individual capacity to use his/her...
potencial access of politics, social organization, economics and culture, for instance succeed in attacking his/her poverty. Even within a discourse of good self-help groups, analyses focus on members as individual. For instance, when a villager is succeed, then he/she needs not his/her group anymore. He/she is able to stand and to invest capital by him/her-self, or creates a linkage individually with banks (Sajogyo, 1997).

At one side, the programs believe that individual highly power is able to reform previous social structure and construct a new one. We have known that a necessity to reform social structure is stressed dominantly by Marxist tradition on revolution. Even though Marxist tradition focuses especially on abstract macro-structure (Ritzer, 1975), when it is used to create social action of lowest social stratum on creating class solidarity, the Marxist tradition turns its analysis unit into real people. Actually Marxist tradition is practiced by advocacy NGO on empowering villagers.\textsuperscript{4} Sphere for doing such advocacy increases on recent village autonomous period (Agusta, 2001).

Actually the programs consider local elites who have individual highly power as individual agent to reform social structure—it is matched with modernization paradigm. For example village head, opinion leader, hamlet head. etc. There are several facts that they reformed their social structure, but the reform is bias on elite’s interest and endless allocate project’s benefit to them (PP3R, 2000).

Meanwhile, like the previous top-down domination era, modernist tradition believes that there are opportunities on empowering villagers through individual actions without changing previous social structure, or at least it will not reform social structure radically and immediately. Eventhough there are general critique on incapability of modernization approach to create social change, because of antipaty of elites that refuse to change themselves, actually on the field lower stratum is able to move into their self-help capability (Agusta, \textit{et.al.}, 2000). It can be interpreted, that in a rigid social structure there is still sphere for villagers to reflect and create a distance from the structure, so that they are able to make (a little) reform to themselves and their environment. The modernist tradition is dominantly used by officers in creating villagers’ empowerment.

This assumption on empowering can be explained more clearly by comparing bottom-up with top-down programs types. Top-down programs have an assumption that social structure contain power to persuade or to press villagers during implementing planned social change. The structure is broken-down into rules, law, etc. The villager is weak, so that he/she is only able to fit his/her mind, attitude and action into exist social system. It is too hard for him/her, however, to reform the system.

\textsuperscript{4} It should be noted that there many types of NGOs, and not all of them hold Marxist ideology (NGOs built by government hold modernist perspective) or have business on advocacy (another business is research, education, training, etc). For example, see Kartjono (1988).
Although stressing on individual action, it cannot be considered that empowerment programs avoid social structure. It is better understood, that the programs stress on quality of individual action more than social structure. Individual action and social structure cannot be understood as a dualism, but as dualistic entities, where each entities have roles dominantly in different situation (Giddens, 1984). When the villagers acts, he/she does not firstly think about his/her social structure, but calculate responses opportunities of others towards his/her actions. I think, individual actions can be created on limited social context, which is limited by quantity of people and duration of impact. Through this simple way, the villagers is able to reform themselves, or, actually, reform their view on their environment.

In sum, the first assumption on empowering suggests individual tendency in viewing, analysing, and empowering the community. On one side, this assumption opens view and practice on capability of the poor and women. On the other side, this assumption can be manipulated to put empowerment movement on local elites or officers.

Second Assumption: Voluntary Action

The empowerment programs also assume, that participation is a voluntary action. This assumption has a relation with autonomous individual action of the villagers to create their social change, that has been discussed above. Value of empowerment action emerges when villagers prepare by themselves their perception, mind and attitude. Internalization of this value makes their actions worthy for themselves, so that it is hard to wipe out from their “inner heart”. At least participatory actions that occure from this value indicate self-help and capacity to make a decision as well as capacity to get a risk.

Empowerment by movement of beneficiaries (the poor and women) needs their participation, especially when the programs had been terminated (Mubyarto, 1996; Setiawan, 1990). Unfortunately, it is difficult to create social movement during a short period of the programs. A pseudo social movement within new institution opens local elite to lead the people traditionally. When development agents dominantly use existent local institution to deliver the programs, a pseudo social movement forms a patron-client mobilization (Agusta, et.al., 2000; Bappenas, 2000a, 2000b; Jaringan Kerja Pemberdayaan Masyarakat, 1999).

It is also harder to develop such truth participation by social engineering or planned social change. Probably needs, poverty, etc. increase participation voluntarily, because the villagers have an interest to alleviate poverty. However it cannot become a useful pattern. Needs can be holded on by villagers, in order to reach another objective. For example, during protest movement, to express little legitimation of a village leader, several villagers refuse official credit, though they need it. Poverty forms lack of
economical, political, social and cultural power, so that the poor has only limited chance to participate within local development. According to these facts, it maybe right to accept a proposition that participation depends on local culture (Mosher in Sajogyo, 1994), though, I think, it implicates on a relative point of participatory action.

Beside difficulties on developing such truth participation, another difficulty occurs on distinguishing participation from mobilization. Recent facts indicate that a border between mobilization and participation is blurred. Programs’ messages to be disseminated are very soft, so that low level development agents and beneficiaries cannot be aware of ideology and instruction nuances of it. A concept of hegemony may be able to explain how villagers adopt infrastructure development voluntarily suggested by officers, rather than credit program (Jaringan Kerja Pemberdayaan Masyarakat, 1999). They believe that the officer (government) is always right and has not a motive to exploit the villagers.

The concept of hegemony, unfortunately, cannot explain a fact that villagers chose to domesticate hens voluntarily, but then they were not able to maintain the hens anymore (Agusta, et.al., 2000). In this fact, dissemination stage creates perception that the villagers need the hens. Without any experience in domesticating hens, and a market is too far from the village, actually the villagers needs not the hens. The empowerment program, in this fact, create a new (pseudo) need of the villagers. Lesson learned from this fact is importance of villagers’ control on reflecting their need and deciding the project.

In sum, the second assumption on voluntary action opens possibility of people participation. Unfortunately participation maybe not at maximum level, as results of short period of program implementation and rigid social engineering or vague hegemony.

**Third Assumption: Rational Choice**

As a voluntary action, it is assumed that participation directs to a rational choice. A participatory action indicates a resultant of decision making process among limited opportunities. The rational action is defined as deciding a best choice among tools to reach an objective. Rationality does not relate only with tools on one side or the objective on the other side, but actually relate to actions to link the tools with the objective (Polanyi, et.al., 1957). To reach a certain objective, it is more rational to choose a better (more effective and more efficient) tool. It implicates, I think, that rationality is limited by a context or situation of individual action, i.e. a context where beneficiaries are able to use tools to reach their objective. Limited tools implicates on action to choose, if, first, uses of the tools are not only one; second, many objectives are ranked according to preferential row.

By this argument, it is easy to evaluate that top-down programs do not give sphere to choose several sub projects, but limit rational actions of beneficiaries, where officers
choose needs for them. On the contrary, empowerment programs contain several choices of sub projects and bargaining sphere to decide those choices (Basri, 2002; Dreze and Sen, 1989; Sen, 1999). There are even empowerment programs that require competition process, which can be considered as a chance to choose and to decide rationally among proposals of villagers, for example in Sub-District Development Project (Agusta, et.al., 2000; Mustopadidjaja, 1997).

Note that this argument may create relativity of rationality, because a different objective of action may create a different actual rational action. For example, a purpose to live without having big debt limits the villagers to accept a credit scheme of empowerment programs. It indicates that similar context of objectives between the program and the beneficiaries become important, so that rationality can be valued or operated on a similar foundation.

In sum, the third assumption on rational choice is a good step of empowerment programs. It gives right for the poor and women to construct needs or objectives and to decide tools (projects to programs) to reach them. Furthermore, the poor and women may have a good (or better) bargaining position towards development agents and local elites.

**Fourth Assumption: Scarce Resource**

The fourth assumption is, that programs or projects are scarce resources. A process to reform communities, includes empowerment of the villagers, has been affected by many factors that link each other. The social change also run in a long time. According to this complexity of rural change, a program alone cannot construct an argument about its capacity to develop a village. Nevertheless, programs are important phenomenon in Indonesian villages, because many programs have been introduced into villages (Agusta and Tetiani, 2000; Cernea, 1985). The main problem is not how to deliver the programs, but actually how the villagers can catch benefits of the programs (Bappenas, 1999).

Programs themselves have a flashy attitude, so that only villagers who are ready to accept the program (because they recognize capitalistic economy, can manage finance, have accesses of economic and physical resources) are able to take benefits of the programs (Agusta and Tetiani, 2000; Bappenas, 2000a, 2000b). Empowerment programs, that aim to extend local economy, have a bigger chance to be succeed in a community that has a context of a highly performance in economics. This context reflects a highly capacity to accumulate capital. In one side, this context is matched with the programs’ objectives. In other side, however, this context makes bias to allocate the programs to rural elites.

If villagers have no sufficient context to take benefits of empowerment programs, it
is important to prepare the villagers to increase their capability to catch the benefits, usually include a dissemination stage and a facilitation process (Bappenas, 1999). Unfortunately there is only short period for dissemination and facilitation (approximately one year only) (Agusta and Tetiani, 2000). Again, unfortunately, this short period fit only for developed villages or elites.

Underdeveloped villagers need more time, maybe about 5-10 years, to construct dialogue and create truth needs, which will be accommodated by the programs. Emergence of the truth needs is an effective way for development agents to facilitate the community into empowerment stage. On the contrary, precipitate dissemination only creates pseudo needs, so that villagers are not able to catch benefits from the program, even they neglect the programs. It also tends to direct local officers and facilitators to press beneficiaries, in order—from the point of view of local officers and facilitators—to maintain effectiveness of the programs. It hampers beneficiaries’ participation.

Another better alternative strategy to alleviate the flashy attitude of programs is to integrate programs that introduced in a similar village at similar period. The strategy is also justified by many facts, in which physical program affects socio-economic dimension of community (Uphoff, 1986). Sectors within programs’ integration includes production technology, production research, political economy of price, education, service distribution, workplace program, and access towards land resource (Borton, ed., 1966; Johnston dan Clark, 1982). Development integration among villages in a sub-district opens a chance to decrease socio-economic discrepancy among them (Agusta, et.al., 2000). In this situation, a sub-district level of officers, elites, or representative of the villagers are able to pull late-developed villages in the area by using economical, political, social and cultural linkages with other villages.

In sum, the fourth assumption of scarce empowerment programs implicate on negative effects on bias allocation of program to developed village and elite. This problem maybe solved by good dissemination, facilitation process, and integrating either several programs and villages.

**Fifth Assumption: Individual Action**

The last assumption is, that an empowering group is viewed from individual actions that make a consensus. This assumption is contrary with a normative objective to construct a beneficiaries group.

In empowerment programs, beneficiaries group or organization are created in order to control members’ actions, so that the actions emerge sense of belonging to the group or organization. This is such a conducive condition for villagers to participate within rural development (Mas'oed, 1984). Existence of the group by compiling funds from
members can be interpreted also by government and international donors (within modernization perspective), that the poor has reached an economic-of-scale to work (Agusta, et. al., 2000).

Actually, the group or organization reflect structure to direct individual actions. Unfortunately dominant tendency to lead individual action implicates on valuing performance of group or organization as a consensus of individual members, not as an empowered rule that ties its members’ interest. Success or fail of the group or organization depend on performance of board individually, not the members, especially when the board is chosen arbitrarily by local government officers or their facilitator (PP3R, 2000; Sajogyo, et.al., 1999). Traditional leadership –not democratic leadership—may emerge within the group.

The individualistic side can be found more significantly, when every members has their individually enterprises (PP3R, 2000). They need the group just to create a relation with the banks –to justify the economic of scale of “group enterprise”—but not to create the in-group relation. Several members are able to be succeed to accumulate capital, but not the group. The capital is belong to the members, not the group. Once the enterprise is mature, the member has not need the group anymore. Possibly the member needs another greater group (where sum of members’ enterprises assets are much more than the previous group).

In sum, the fifth assumption of individual action on empowerment programs implicates on negative effect on empowering groups of the poor and women. The negative effect is caused by officers’ and facilitators’ intervention as well as partially members’ enterprises.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

As a summary, the five assumptions of empowerment at workplace in rural indonesia include, first, a motive of an individual action is empowering himself, by changing the social structure or finding another empowering way within actual social structure. Second, participation is a voluntary action. Third, participation directs to a rational choice. Fourth, a program or a project are scarce resources. Fifth, an empowering group is viewed from individual actions that make a consensus.

Lessons learned from the assumptions are, first, there is a possibility of elite’s bias on designing and implementing empowerment programs. The first assumption on empowering individually can be manipulated to put empowerment movement on local elites or officers. Local officers and facilitators may react the fourth assumption of scarce empowerment programs by creating “effectiveness orientation” that tends to allocate the programs to local elites.
Second, there is incapability of the poor and women to bargain and to create a dialogue with upper social strata. The fifth assumption of individual action even on beneficiaries group hampers the poor and women to unify their power facing local elites’ and officers’ interests.

Third, empowerment programs are still able to facilitate the poor and women to aim at empowerment. The first assumption on individual empowering opens view and practice on capability of the poor and women. The second assumption on voluntary action opens possibility of people participation. The third assumption on rational choice gives right for the poor and women to construct needs or objectives and decide to choose tools (projects to programs) to reach them. Good dissemination, facilitation process, and integrating either programs and villages may solve the problem of elite’s bias.

After the discussion above, a hypothetical theoretical framework can be proposed to analyze recent rural development in Indonesia. Within authoritarian regime, an empowerment programs are constructed at individual level for the poor and women. A strategy of empowerment at individual level opens possibilities to empower the poor and women without changing fondament of social structure. This situation extends freedom sphere of the poor and women to participate in deciding their needs and their duty by themselves. When the local community system can back up their local freedom, the empowerment process can be valued worthy and be practiced voluntarily by the poor and women.

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